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The tragedy of great power politics summary

On the day after Halloween, in the year 1327, four children slip away from the cathedral city of Kingsbridge. They are a thief, a bully, a boy genius, and a girl who wants to be a doctor. In the forest they see two men killed. As adults, their lives will be braided together by ambition, love, greed and revenge. They will see prosperity and famine, plague and war. 5 out of 5 stars By bex4ad on 15-03-11 © 1996-2014, Amazon.com, Inc. or its affiliates Preview textMearsheimer, J. (2001), 'Great Power Politics in the Twenty-First Century', Ch. 10 of The Tragedy of Great Power Politics, New York and London: Norton, pp. 360-402. Tradition: Offensive Realism Main Thesis: Argues that '[t]he optimists' claim that security competition and war among the great powers has been burned out of the system is wrong. In fact, all of the major states around the globe still care deeply about the balance of power and are destined to compete for power among themselves for the foreseeable future'. '[T]he real world remains a realist world'. 'States still driving force behind great power behaviour – did not change at the end of the Cold War. States remain the principle actors in world politics and there is still no night watchman standing above them' (p.361). Summary: The central aim of American foreign policy is to be the hegemon in the Western Hemisphere and have no rival hegemon in either Europe or Northeast Asia. The US does not want a peer competitor. Argues that there is potential for intense security competition among the great powers that might lead to a major war. US maintains 100,000 troops in Europe and Northeast Asia to keep the peace. Europe remains great power balanced bipolar (Russia and US), stable power structure. Northeast Asia is great power balanced multipolar (China, Russia, and the US), a configuration more prone to instability (unbalanced multipolar power distribution is the most unstable). US does not want a potential hegemon emerging in either region and relies on regional nations to prevent this from happening: in the event that hey are overwhelmed, as an 'offshore balancer', the US will step in to help them. Author argues that although the situation is relatively stable at the moment (important variable is overall distribution of power; but also introduced Joseph Nye's "pacifier" argument, US presence in Europe (i.e. NATO) and Northeast Asia is a force for stability). Thinks that the power structures in Europe and Northeast Asia are likely to change over the next to decades, leading to intensified security competition and possibly war. Author believes that as no emerging hegemon in either region US is likely to bring its troops home, however, this will create unbalanced multipolarity in Europe, as the likes of France and Great Britain become great powers in rearming to contain Germany as a potential emerging hegemon, but thinks Europe should be able to contain it. Argues that a rising China, with its population size and the potential of its economy, is the most dangerous potential threat to the United States in the early twenty-first century. Criticisms: State-centric, state as only actor: does not acknowledge importance of macro forces above the state level of analysis, i.e. capitalism; or beneath it, i.e. individual agency in the form of the capitalist interests of US elites; nor the roles institutions play in shaping decision making and outcomes Looks at hegemony in territorial terms, argues US is not a global hegemon; states US has no territorial ambitions; does not consider a neo-hegemony beyond territory, i.e. controlling economic flows within a US created and dominated capitalist world order. Argues that currently great powers are stably balanced within Europe and Northeast Asia, but seems not to consider the possibility that two great powers could collide outside these main regions, i.e. over resources in Africa, causing instability for US capitalist elite's interests. Argues that no great hegemony likely to control Europe or Northeast Asia, US will probably withdraw troops, even though will unsettle region and raise chance of conflict argument is that as long as not a hegemonic conflict, does not matter as unlikely to hurt US economy or to drag it into war – would argue that any conflict would be very disruptive to US economy; capitalist elites demand stability and unlikely to allow any withdrawal of troops that may unsettle their reproduction. Disagree that US withdrawal could lead to an unbalanced multi-polar Europe, which could descend into conflict with rise of Germany as a hegemon; EU institutions perhaps too well established to allow this? Talks of US profound interest in seeing Chinese economy slow to prevent its rise – disagree, US capital needs China for US goods, to diminish its trade deficit and substitute for crippled US labour whose wages have remained stagnant versus productivity increases for decades and thus destroyed domestic demand, needs external demand, wants China to buy more US goods. Mearsheimer boldly states that great-power rivalry is not over. The major powers still fear each other, and dangerous security competition lurks. This view is built on an "offensive realist" theory of world politics: the deep insecurity generated by the anarchic (hence "tragic") international system leads great powers to act aggressively toward each other, thwarting rivals from gaining power even if such moves risk war. Moreover, great powers are rarely satisfied with the status quo and instead seek hegemony. Mearsheimer tests his theory across the last two centuries, citing the territorial conquests of Japan and Germany before 1945 and Soviet policies after 1917 as evidence. The United States and the United Kingdom do not fit as well into Mearsheimer's framework, but he argues that the "offshore balancing" strategies of these maritime states are just more sophisticated versions of calculated aggression. As a result, Mearsheimer predicts, the post-Cold War peace among great powers will soon end: without a peer competitor in Europe or Asia, the United States will retract its security commitments there and great-power security competition will return. But he does not make clear why the United States would act in this way -- even if it is a sophisticated power maximizer. 2001 book by John Mearsheimer The Tragedy of Great Power Politics AuthorJohn MearsheimerCountryUnited StatesSubjectPoliticsPublished2001Media typePrint (Hardback) The Tragedy of Great Power Politics[1] is a book by the American scholar John Mearsheimer on the subject of international relations theory published by W.W. Norton & Company in 2001. Mearsheimer explains and argues for his theory of "offensive realism" by stating its key assumptions, evolution from early realist theory, and its predictive capability. He readily acknowledges the inherent pessimism of offensive realism and its predictions because his world is one in which conflict between great powers will never see an end. An article adapted from the book had previously been published by Foreign Affairs.[2] Main arguments Primacy of land power A state's power in international politics, Mearsheimer argues, derives from the strength of its military for two reasons: because land force is the dominant military power in the modern era, and because large bodies of water limit the power projection capabilities of land armies. The stopping power of water Mearsheimer argues that the presence of oceans in the world prevents any state from reaching world hegemony. He posits that large bodies of water limit the power projection abilities of militaries and thus naturally divide up powers in the globe. He uses the example of the isolation provided to Britain by the English Channel, which allowed it to act as an offshore balancer on mainland Europe. Britain, he argues, never had ambitions to control or dominate continental Europe. Instead it aimed only to maintain the balance of power and ensure that no state could become so powerful as to achieve regional hegemony on the continent. For much of the 19th century, Britain had an industrial capacity that would have allowed it to easily invade and dominate much of Europe. However, Britain chose not to attempt domination of the continent, in part because it calculated that its aims of achieving security could be more cheaply achieved if the European powers could be played off against each other. By doing so, the European powers would be occupied on the European continent and unable to challenge Britain across the English Channel or interfere with Britain's economic interests in Asia and Africa. Therefore, the central aim of American foreign policy is to be the hegemon in the Western Hemisphere only, and to prevent the rise of a similar hegemon in the Eastern Hemisphere. In turn, the proper role for the United States is as an offshore balancer, balancing against the rise of a Eurasian hegemon and going to war only as a last resort to thwart it. State strategies for survival Objective 1 – Regional hegemony In addition to their principal goal, which is survival, great powers seek to achieve three main objectives. Their highest aim is to achieve regional hegemony. Mearsheimer argues although achieving global hegemony would provide maximum security to a state, it is not feasible because the world has too many oceans which inhibit the projection of military power. Thus, the difficulty of projecting military power across large bodies of water makes it impossible for great powers to dominate the world. Regional hegemons try strongly to prevent other states from achieving regional hegemony. Instead, they try to maintain an even balance among of power in regions and act to ensure the existence of multiple powers so as to keep those multiple powers occupied among themselves rather than being able to challenge the regional hegemon's interests, which they would be free to do if they were not occupied by their neighboring competitors. Mearsheimer uses the example of the United States, which achieved regional hegemony in the late 1800s and then sought to intervene wherever it looked as though another state might achieve hegemony in a region: Imperial Germany during World War I Nazi Germany during World War II Imperial Japan during World War II Soviet Union during the Cold War Objective 2 – Maximum wealth Great powers seek to maximize their share of the world's wealth because economic strength is the foundation of military strength. Great powers seek to prevent rival powers from dominating wealth-producing regions of the world. The United States, for example, sought to prevent the Soviet Union from dominating Western Europe and the Middle East. Had the Soviets gained control of these areas, the balance of power would have been altered significantly against the United States. Objective 3 – Nuclear superiority Mearsheimer asserts that great powers seek nuclear superiority over their rivals. Great powers exist in a world of multiple nuclear powers with the assured capacity to destroy their enemies called mutually assured destruction (MAD). Mearsheimer disagrees with the assertions that states are content to live in a MAD world and that they would avoid developing defenses against nuclear weapons. Instead, he argues that great powers would not be content to live in a MAD world and would try to search for ways to gain superiority over their nuclear rivals. Rise of American power; 1800–1900 The United States was a strongly expansionist power in the Americas. Mearsheimer points to the comment made by Henry Cabot Lodge that the United States had a "record of conquest, colonization and territorial expansion unequaled by any people in the 19th century." In the 1840s, Europeans began speaking about the need to preserve a balance of power in America and contain further American expansion. By 1900, however, the United States had achieved regional hegemony and in 1895 its Secretary of State Richard Olney told Britain's Lord Salisbury that "today the U.S. is practically sovereign on this continent and its fiat is law upon the subjects within its interposition...its infinite resources and isolated position render it master of the situation and practically invulnerable against all other powers." Future of American power On the penultimate page of Tragedy, Mearsheimer warns: Neither Wilhelmine Germany, nor imperial Japan, nor Nazi Germany, nor the Soviet Union had nearly as much latent power as the United States had during their confrontations ... But if China were to become a giant Hong Kong, it would probably have somewhere on the order of four times as much latent power as the United States does, allowing China to gain a decisive military advantage over the United States. Reception Charles Kupchan of the Council on Foreign Relations called it an "important and impressive book" in which Mearsheimer "elegantly lays out his theoretical approach to the study of international politics". However, he is very critical of the way Mearsheimer uses history to compound his theory. Furthermore, Kupchan decries Mearsheimer's conviction in his own theory and his inability to be "more open to eclecticism in explaining politics among the great power".[3] John A. Hall, of McGill University, found the book's arguments strengthened by "a tightness and coherence".[4] The Columbia University Professor Richard Betts called Tragedy one of the three great works of the post–Cold War era, along with Francis Fukuyama's The End of History and the Last Man (1992) and Samuel Huntington's The Clash of Civilizations and the Remaking of World Order (1996).[5] And, Betts suggested, "once China's power is full grown", Mearsheimer's book may pull ahead of the other two in terms of influence. Robert Kaplan outlines a similar prospect for Tragedy: If China implodes from a socioeconomic crisis, or evolves in some other way that eliminates its potential as a threat, Mearsheimer's theory will be in serious trouble because of its dismissal of domestic politics. But if China goes on to become a great military power, reshaping the balance of forces in Asia, then Mearsheimer's Tragedy will live on as a classic".[6] Criticism One review held that rapprochement between Britain and the United States at the end of the 20th century and the success of the European Union in transforming Europe's geopolitical landscape cast serious doubt on the notion that balancing and destructive rivalry are inescapable features of international system. If Mearsheimer had analyzed episodes of lasting peace that defy the predictions of balance-of-power theory, he would perhaps have been less convinced of the pervasive logic of offensive realism.[7] Another critique of Mearsheimer's views is that they ignore transnational superstructures, such as capitalism, non-state actors, and individual institutions within states. Mearsheimer asserts domestic politics to be irrelevant and states to be unable to provide one another with guarantees that they do not harbor hostile intentions. According to R. Harrison Wagner, Mearsheimer does not address whether democracy, trade, or another mechanism could prevent states from fighting, a view that is consistent with the broader perspective of the Kantian Peace Triangle.[8] Mearsheimer argues that polarity in the international system is the cause of war. That is especially true in unbalanced multipolarity in which there is a potential hegemon. Balanced multipolarity in which there is no potential hegemon has a less-asymmetrical distribution of power and so is less feared. The fear is the least in bipolarity in which there is usually a rough balance of power between the two major states. However, the bargaining model of war[9] disputes that claim on the grounds that war is costly. That and the fact that states are rational actors, requires some other cause that is more positive than polarity to drive nations to incur the cost of war.[10] A collection of his critics' academic essays[11] takes aim at Mearsheimer's theories in Tragedy: "Some of the criticism is scathing, proving that Mearsheimer is the political-science world's enfant terrible...."[12] See also Amity-enmity complex Anarchy (international relations) Balance of power (international relations) Ideocracy International law Man, the State, and War Offensive realism Political midlife crisis Power politics Power Politics (Wight book) Power projection Regional hegemony Societal collapse State collapse Further reading Elman, Colin. (2005). "Explanatory Typologies in Qualitative Studies of International Politics." International Organization, 59(2), 293-326. References ^ Mearsheimer, John J. (7 April 2014). Amazon.com: The Tragedy of Great Power Politics (Updated Edition) (9780393349276): John J. 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