

Neo-realism of Kenneth Waltz.

As interest has risen in the study of foreign policy since the end of the cold war, many scholars have grappled with the relevance of theories of international politics for examining the foreign policies—or, more appropriately, the external behavior—of states. Realism, in all its variants, having been the dominant theory of world politics in the United States for half a century, has become a fashionable target of students of foreign policy. Even more so, many adherents of the realist school have sought to differentiate themselves from other realists. One may thus find classical realism, neorealism, neoclassical realism, and even defensive and offensive realism, among others. 'The debates thus far have suffered from the shortcomings of earlier debates: a misconception of the relation between realism, especially neorealism, and foreign policy. Ultimately, recent works in these areas (Christensen, Rose, Schweller, and Zakaria) constitute neither alternative theories of international politics, nor refinements of

neorealism. Indeed, in many cases they present little conflict with neorealism.!

Although Kenneth Waltz has been clear that his neorealist theory is not a theory of foreign policy, others continued to dispute him on this issue.? Some realists have certainly contributed to the impression that realism, if not neorealism, explains foreign policy by seeming to suggest that internal factors mattered little in the conduct of foreign policy. In one of the earlier debates with the “radical left,” Robert Tucker, for example, suggested that a socialist America would not behave significantly differently from a capitalist America. As for Waltz, however, his longest book was dedicated to second-image analysis comparing British and American foreign policies.

To say that neorealism is not, or does not provide, a theory of foreign policy does not mean that insights derived from it have no consequence for the study of foreign policy. To say that relative power alone, or the drive for self

preservation alone, does not shape the foreign policies of states is not to say that a theory of foreign policy can ignore these factors. Even as a theory of international politics, neorealism is by no means comprehensive. 'This, Waltz intended even in his earlier work: "The third image described the framework of world politics, but without the first and second images there can be no knowledge of the forces that determine policy; the first and second images describe the forces in world politics, but without the third image it is impossible to assess their importance or predict their results." Neorealism is thus best conceived as a framework for further inquiry, not as the end of inquiry.

The question is thus this: How does neorealism inform the study of foreign policy, even if it does not provide a theory of foreign policy? I will begin by analyzing what may be inferred from structural realism about state behavior, and proceed to evaluate some of the recent attempts to restate, or complement, structural realism's assumptions and

propositions.

Although structural realism is first and foremost a theory about outcomes of international interaction, one can infer some propositions about expected state behavior. Here are essentially two arenas of relevance: opportunity and preferences. Neorealism says much about opportunity, and something, although less, about state preferences.

The one explicit assumption that neorealism makes about states' preferences is that, above all, they seek self preservation—an assumption that has little to do with “defense” or “offense.” This is not to say that all states merely seek survival, or that some states are not offensively minded. It is simply a minimalist assumption about the preferences of all states, no matter what else they seek to attain. This minimal assumption contrasts with Hans Morgenthau's assumption that all states are power maximizers, and Waltz argued that balances of power, as recurring outcomes of international

relations, could be derived without assuming that all states seek to maximize material power. Although ultimately material power matters, it is not an end in itself, but an instrument. As Fareed Zakaria notes, states seek to maximize influence, not power; or, to put it differently, states seek to maximize opportunities for implementing their preferences (whatever these preferences may be). For neorealism, however, material power remains the most effective measure, over time, of the degree of influence and opportunity that states have.