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Kenneth Waltz's theory of international relations focuses on third level (image) analysis and posits states as unitary actors that are functionally similar. The purpose of system level analysis is to explain "the results produced by the uncoordinated actions of states" as a phenomenon separate from foreign policy formulation (1979, 122). This third level analysis concerns itself with the system of the international sphere. What follows is the construction of a theory that seeks to explain the actions of the actors which comprise the system with respect to structural conditions. Waltz's theory of international politics is distinct from a theory of foreign policy specifically because the latter explains motives and desires while the former takes certain motives as fixed, thus they are assumed.

While Waltz's theory relies on a third image approach, it has been termed neo-realist for the following reasons: anarchy provides an environment of existential insecurity; the condition of anarchy prompts states to be self-preserving at minimum, and seekers of power and relative gains at maximum. What distinguishes Waltz's theory from classical realism primarily is the use of the concept of anarchy as an ordering principle. He characterizes anarchy simply as a condition in which the units are equal with "none entitled to command; none is required to obey" (*ibid.*, 88). Since there is no one force with legitimate coercive power, states are in a relation of coordination rather than super- and subordination. Based on the mechanics of microeconomic theory where the presumption is that the relevant actors are self-interested, with the resultant acts producing an order spontaneously, the theory should explain what the major concerns of states are, how and under what circumstances states pursue certain ends, and what the conditions for optimal stability are. A theory of foreign policy on the other hand is inherently a second image approach, and as such attempts to explain the following: the mechanics of decision making for an actor; motivations particular to decision

makers within the state; how a state perceives the international environment, and how this affects a decision making body.

Following Waltz's reasoning, a theory of international politics could never be founded on a theory of foreign policy because the construction of a theory must make certain assumptions in order to gain explanatory power for the phenomenon of concern. "In a microtheory...the motivation of actors is assumed rather than realistically described," and a theory of foreign policy among other things, seeks to provide an explanation of state motivation, and this is always particular to the character and temperament of particular individuals during a particular time (*ibid.*, 91). So one reason for the incompatibility seems to be that a theory of foreign policy is sensitive to temporality. The second reason is that all states are equal and functionally similar given the relationship of coordination under the condition of anarchy which is tantamount to a constant Hobbesian state of war, prompting states to make survival their paramount concern. If the ordering principle of anarchy has as its effect motivating all actors toward the same end, then a theory of foreign policy could in no way augment the explanatory power of a theory of international politics. Besides the redundancy, foreign policy is concerned with more than survival, but also with peripheral issues such as trade agreements and environmental pacts, and these do not always speak immediately to the concern of survival in the international system.

All theories that claim to be systematic with both explanatory power and the ability to support predictive models require identifiable independent variables. Two variables bear most of the weight in Waltz's theory - distribution of capabilities and number of great or major powers; both of these can be subsumed under the rubric of balance-of-power theory. Distribution of capabilities is itself a straightforward concept - at any given point in time, there

is a finite amount of power and power producing potential in the system, and these are spread over any given number of actors. Distribution of capabilities proves most useful to Waltz for two reasons. First, it is germane to his preoccupation with state survival. In a self-help system, only those states with means can pursue ends, and, controlling for egos and personalities, ends necessarily are to be brought in line with available means or capabilities. Also, understanding how capabilities are distributed gives us an abstract of which states are more likely to pursue ends autonomously. Maybe most importantly, it gives us the opportunity to make certain statements based on agent cognition given that the theory assigns states the concern of relative gains compared to absolute gains.

The variable, number of great powers, allows us to observe what percentage of capabilities are in how many states' hands. (It is important to note that on Waltz's account, what power is in *who's hands* is of little to no significance.) With this information, we should be able to put the theory's assumptions to work and make acceptable predictions about system stability. In brief, Waltz draws the conclusion that a system of two powers is most stable, because, among other maybe less important reasons, two powers are better able to observe each other's actions, play effective managerial roles, and are never hostage to an allies decision as seemed to have been the case in the 'timetable crisis' of World War I. In an alliance or bloc comprised of more than one significant power, fates become linked and the ability to make choices based solely on the assessment of capabilities declines significantly. Under these conditions stability is at risk simply due more to the number of powers involved rather than the postures of the powers.

Taken as a whole, Waltz's theory rightly stresses the main issues in international politics and their causes: security and anarchy. The framework he constructs to understand how

states act due to the organization of the system and distribution of capabilities allows us to make reasonable estimates at the system level. While he himself concedes certain factors must necessarily be omitted in the construction of the theory, one is left to wonder whether omissions such as how, when and why states utilize institutions leave the theory unnecessarily impoverished.