

# Perspectives on Structural Realism

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## Perspectives on Structural Realism

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Edited by

*Andrew K. Hanami*

*With a Foreword by Stephen M. Walt*

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PERSPECTIVES ON STRUCTURAL REALISM

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*To  
Kenneth N. Waltz  
Scholar, Teacher, Friend*

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## Foreword

**K**enneth N. Waltz is the preeminent international relations theorist of the postwar era. His work has been read and pondered by several generations of scholars, and even those who ultimately disagree with his arguments must confront his ideas and come to terms with them.

Three features of his work explain his unique standing in our field. First, in a field where it is difficult to write a single important work, Waltz has made at least four seminal contributions. His first book, *Man, the State and War*, organized several centuries of writing about the causes of war into three distinct “images,” creating an enduring typology and providing penetrating evaluations of these different perspectives. One also finds in this work the seeds of what would become the central preoccupation of Waltz’ later work; namely, the impact of the *structure* of the international system on the behavior of states. His second book, *Foreign Policy and Democratic Politics*, provided an elegant and powerful analysis of how that *domestic* structures affect the way democratic leaders conduct foreign policy. His third book, *Theory of International Politics*, has probably been the most influential work in the field since its publication in 1979. Scholars of every theoretical persuasion have taken this work as their principal point of departure (or their principal target) for over two decades, and it remains a landmark in the field even today. Lastly, Waltz’ famous 1981 monograph, *The Spread of Nuclear Weapons: More May Be Better*, offered a powerful challenge to the conventional wisdom about nuclear proliferation and remains a focal point in this important policy area.

A second feature of Waltz’ scholarship is its remarkable staying power. *Man, the State and War* is 42 years old; *Theory of International Politics* was published over two decades ago; and his monograph on proliferation is nearly as venerable. Yet each of these works remains a staple in the field: read, reread and debated by students and scholars alike. In an enterprise where fads are endemic and where most works fade into obscurity within a year, the

durability of Waltz' insights and the importance of his arguments are remarkable. As Thomas Schelling once remarked of Waltz, "it takes him a long time to write, because everything he does is read for a long time" (quoted in Robert Jervis, "The Contributions of President Kenneth N. Waltz," *PS: Political Science and Politics* (Fall 1987): 857).

Third, Waltz' own career is a model of sustained productivity and quality control. Not only has Waltz written several genuinely seminal works, but he has produced outstanding scholarship in each of the past *five* decades. In the 1950s, it was *Man, the State, and War*. In the 1960s, it was *Foreign Policy and Democratic Politics* and his controversial essay on "The Stability of a Bipolar World." In the 1970s, his works included the important essay "The Myth of National Interdependence," and in 1979, *Theory of International Politics*. In the 1980s, he published "The Spread of Nuclear Weapons" along with several provocative essays on different aspects of U.S. defense policy. But he did not stop there. Waltz has continued to produce work of very high quality throughout the 1990s and remains a vital force in the field today. His essay "Nuclear Myths and Political Realities" received the Heinz Eulau Prize of the American Political Science Association in 1990 (awarded annually for the best article published in the *American Political Science Review*), and his recent writings on the emerging international system have made important contributions as well. Just last year, Waltz' spirited defense of realism was the lead article in the Summer 2000 issue of *International Security*, and a typically trenchant critique of recent writings on "globalization" graced the Spring 2000 issue of *The National Interest*.

This is a record of achievement that all might envy but few will approach. Among political scientists, perhaps only Samuel P. Huntington of Harvard University and Robert Dahl of Yale have amassed a similar record of scholarly distinction and achievement. It is hardly surprising, therefore, that Waltz has received a number of professional accolades, serving as President of the American Political Science Association in 1988 and receiving the James Madison Prize of the American Political Science Association in 1999. This award, given biannually to the political scientist whose work has made a "lasting contribution" to the discipline, is eloquent testimony to his standing in our field.

This volume, which features essays by a number of Waltz' students, is an honor of a different sort. It is our testament to the "lasting contribution" that Waltz has made to those of us who had the good fortune to study with him. Although Waltz' primary contribution to the study of politics is his own scholarship, his influence also extends to the many students he has taught and inspired at Columbia, Swarthmore, Brandeis and Berkeley. In addition

to the contributors to this book, the ranks of Waltz' students include James Fearon, Shai Feldman, Joseph Joffe, Christopher Layne and William Rose, to name but a few. There are also countless undergraduates at Columbia, Swarthmore, Brandeis and Berkeley who have received the benefits of Waltz' teaching.

What was Ken like as a teacher? Although all of his students remember specific bits of advice, Ken taught primarily by example. Both in the classroom and in his office, Ken spent relatively little time *telling* us what to do. Instead, he concentrated on showing us, by his own powers of analysis and his own conduct, exactly *how* to do it. Each of his students undoubtedly learned different lessons from their interactions with Ken, but I suspect most of us would agree that the following features of his teaching were especially significant.

The first lesson was the importance of asking a big question. Much of contemporary political science examines issues of trivial importance, as a brief perusal of any APSA convention program will reveal. By contrast, Waltz' research agenda never lacked ambition, whatever one ultimately thinks of his conclusions. *Man, the State and War* organizes, synthesizes and critiques nearly four centuries of writing on the causes of war, and *Theory of International Politics* offers a general theory that explains the conduct of self-regarding actors in any anarchic realm. The essays on proliferation and nuclear strategy explain how mankind should deal with issues that could affect the fate of entire societies. Other writings investigate the impact of economic interdependence, the nature of the post-Cold War international system or the continued relevance of realism in the face of recent empirical developments and theoretical challenges. By asking big questions and offering powerful answers, Waltz ensured that his scholarship would be of central importance to our collective endeavor. Although it was daunting to ponder that Ken's own dissertation was an instant classic, his example reminded us that scholars should aim high.

Second, Ken taught his students to be fearless in challenging the prevailing orthodoxy. This trait is partly due to his position as a "realist"—a body of thought that has never been all that popular in liberal America—but also due to his basic independence of mind. Thus, when most scholars—including the other eminent postwar realist, Hans Morgenthau—were extolling the virtues of multipolarity, Waltz was arguing that *bipolarity* was in fact a more stable structure. When most academics were still silent about Vietnam, Waltz was an early critic (and like Morgenthau, for essentially realist reasons). When "interdependence" became the buzzword *du jour* in the early 1970s, Waltz was there to challenge both the empirical claim that interdependence

was high and the theoretical claim that it would inevitably foster peace and cooperation. Waltz was also a persistent critic of the defense excesses of the Reagan administration in the 1980s, in part because he recognized the weaknesses of the Soviet Union far earlier than most others did.

This independence of mind was not due to simple contrarianism—Ken does not court controversy merely for its own sake. Rather, Ken’s ability to spot what others were missing flowed directly from his theoretical vision. Because realists understand that power is central to politics, Ken could see that the stakes in Vietnam were not worth the resources the U.S. was pouring into that unfortunate country. Because realists know that states guard their autonomy jealously, he recognized that interdependence was often a source of conflict rather than an inducement to cooperate. Because he recognized the power of nuclear deterrence and the ways that structural forces help constrain even unreliable leaders, he could identify the weaknesses in much of the conventional wisdom on proliferation and argue that the measured spread of nuclear weaponry might not be as destabilizing as many others feared.

For his students, Ken’s willingness to take positions outside the mainstream taught us to follow our thoughts wherever they led, even if the conclusions seemed at odds with the conventional “wisdom.” Academics like to think of themselves as independent thinkers, but pressures to conform are in fact quite powerful. By refusing to “cut his convictions to fit this year’s fashions,” Waltz taught us to follow our thoughts wherever they led, even if it took us outside the mainstream and beyond the popular consensus.

Third, Ken also gave us the freedom to disagree with him. He conveyed his own views forcefully—especially in his own seminars—but when it was time for us to set out on our own, he did not insist that we follow the theoretical path he had set. Many scholars seem to think that advising is a synonym for “cloning” and refuse to let their students undertake work (or worse still, reach conclusions) that might challenge their own positions. To his credit and our benefit, Ken knew that young scholars cannot simply follow in their advisor’s footsteps; sooner or later, they have to blaze a trail on their own. And while Ken’s influence on his students is often easy to discern, it is also worth noting that many of his students have taken issue with his own work and with each other’s work as well. Ken likes independent thinkers rather than sycophants, and he never tried to force us into his mold.

Last but of course not least, we all profited from Ken’s high standards. Anyone familiar with Ken’s critical talents can imagine what it was like to give him chapters of a dissertation, and it is fair to say that he expected as much from our work as he did from that of any established scholar. In my

own case, I can still recite large chunks of a letter he wrote commenting on several draft chapters of my own dissertation, chapters that were clearly not ready for prime time. Ken began by declaring that he had read the first 25 pages with “increasing dismay.” Pulling no punches, he then informed me what I should have already known: “They are terrible.” And then the crucial question: “Ask yourself why this is so. Were you trying to write too fast, or did you just not know what you wanted to say?”

I cannot say I was grateful for these comments when I read them, but I have come to appreciate the wisdom of his response. Ken understood that second-rate work should have no place in our business, and he taught us to raise our standards by refusing to accept less. I do not know if all of his students had similar experiences, but I do know that mine was not unique.

Ken once wrote that “a theory is never finished,” and our collective effort to understand the behavior of states and systems continues. The path to theory is endless, but understanding the world as it is remains an indispensable part of any serious attempt to build a better one. We remain grateful to Ken for showing us the way.

*Stephen M. Walt*



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## CHAPTER 1

# Introduction

*Andrew K. Hanami*

This book demonstrates the continuing, as well as broadening, deepening and even proliferation of structural realist theory. While most of us apply, amend or extend neorealist theory, two of our authors find significant exceptions with some of the precepts of neorealism as developed or left unexamined by Kenneth N. Waltz, challenging future research. Professors Robert Powell and Stephen Van Evera show us how structure seems not to have dissuaded states from pursuing foreign policies that stem more from internal motives rather than external structural or systemic constraints. Nonetheless, having been influenced by neorealism, it is interesting to see how we have each attempted to articulate refinement and clarity in explaining both the theory and its application in ways and contexts not previously attempted.

Most of us try to grapple with the basic tenets of neorealist thought and attempt to sweep aside some of the unnecessary confusion that has become attached to it over the years. Balance of power is particularly singled out, as is the function of power, anarchy, self-help, security and how they continue to advance understanding and explain recent political events.

Attempting to add precision, Dr. Susan Martin focuses on balance of power analyses. She believes that much misunderstanding has come from a derived interpretation of neorealism as also a theory of domestic-oriented foreign policy theory. She identifies two traditions within the balance of power approach, systemic balances among states and any given state's behavior toward structure. Dr. Martin warns us not to confuse or combine the two. Balances of power between states, she tells us, are conditioned by anarchy

and the desire of states to hold onto their relative ranking. State behavior in the context of structure, by contrast, is funded by the statesmen's selection of optimal foreign policy from their empirical observations—successes and failures of other states.

Dr. Martin contends that many leading scholars, including Vasquez, have blended the two and that has not helped to preserve theoretical clarity. She believes that we are better off understanding that while structure strongly influences balancing behavior of states, structure itself is only one variable that statesmen take into account when formulating their foreign policies. What is needed, instead, as Dr. Martin offers, is a new and simplified adjusted theory of balancing behavior that searches to identify a state's survival motive as a cause to counter an external threat. By her explicit definition, she attempts to organize the plethora of balance, bandwagoning alliance theory into more testable hypotheses. Her insightful treatment of a large debate concludes that neorealist theory is not inadequately explaining foreign policy behavior. Rather, it is the widespread and explicit mix of vague intimations made by some realist theorizing that has led to the perception that neorealism offers only convoluted, if contradictory edicts of international behavior. She returns us to a point from which fruitful research may continue across all fronts.

Professor Benny Miller introduces an innovative four-part typology, premised on realism, that explains the varied intensity of U.S. hegemonic use of force over a range of trouble spots around the globe. He argues that there is a "clear logic" to the degree of recent U.S. military intervention, which is based on costs and benefits that take into consideration regional "incentives and constraints," again illustrating the effects of structure. Professor Miller integrates classical realist theory with its emphasis on state interests with structural realism's constraint on state action to produce a model that renders U.S. military intervention from Bosnia to the Gulf War, and others, comprehensible. As the unipolar power, the U.S. tailors its response region-by-region, based on its degree of interest and the size of its likely opposition. Such a strategy does not endanger U.S. security. In countries still close to Russia, like Central Asia or the Caucasus, the U.S. will not intervene because the gains are problematic while sensitivities from the Kremlin remain a concern. This goes to the heart of balancing concerns, and illustrates how power and structure still shape U.S. policy toward a weakened but still nuclear-capable Russia. Professor Miller concludes that military intervention will occur only sparingly.

Blending structure and internal impulse, in the subfield of foreign policy studies, Professor Shibley Telhami says that neorealism has been generally

neglected as an explanatory framework of state behavior. He specifies that the foreign policy choices of states can be delineated into two modes of general causation: opportunity and preferences. Neorealism, reminds Professor Telhami, is quite important in shaping a state's reaction to opportunity, but is relevant in shaping a state's preferences, as well. This is because a state's number one preference will always be self-preservation, echoing the centrality of security concerns. Though Hans J. Morgenthau believed that all states maximize power, Professor Telhami posits that neorealists since the time of Morgenthau merely believe that states actually maximize their opportunities to realize their foreign policy preferences. Here, Professor Telhami invokes the work of Fareed Zakaria, who says that states try to maximize their influence. Thus, structure is decisive here, because international structure, or the distribution of power across the system, delineates what states may do. In attempting to bridge the gap between structural opportunity and state preferences, Professor Telhami astutely suggests that variances in opportunity will determine the range of realizable preferences that any state can have at any given time, but that they are subject to change over time.

Professor Telhami concludes that material power is the unifying and prime explanatory premise of neorealism, and that states therefore seek to balance power among competing rival states. Sensitivity to changes in the international power structure is important to a leading state like the U.S., but as Professor Telhami points out, is even more important to smaller states in the Middle East, as the 1991 Gulf War has altered the foreign policy of all the Middle Eastern states since. Because of U.S. intervention and presence, the distribution of power within the region has changed, and with it the foreign policies of those states. Iraq, Egypt and most of the other important, conventionally armed Middle East states have declined as Israel and Saudi Arabia have risen. Power shifts are at the center of explanations for the changes in behavior. Professor Telhami's chapter is important because he features the role of structural power and further sharpens both the differences and common ground between neorealists and domestic-oriented sources of foreign policy.

Professor Barry R. Posen takes a novel view of realist theory and the security dilemma. In the post-Cold War era as various Eurasian regimes have broken down, Professor Posen tests realist theory, in a sense, by placing it back downward into its more pure Hobbsian state: that is, as Hobbes has stated, violence is endemic in a state of nature, thus the need for authority. With the collapse of formal governments around the Balkans, for example, Professor Posen sees a return to the state of nature. The situation here is a more extreme case of Telhami's Middle East decline. In the Balkans, long-held ethnic grievances

break out, and each group must assess the war potential of each neighboring ethnic group, as though they were still nation-states. Power, security and anarchy are key to his explanations. Thus realist theory, applied generally to relations between states, now is applied to relations between ethnic groups within and between states. The security dilemma is reintroduced in this new context because as one ethnic group appears more capable and threatening, that is, they gain in power, the other must reciprocate, or face negative consequences. This introduces a zero-sum quality into the security equation and illustrates again the continuing importance of balance of power, even among post-state actors.

Professor Posen concludes that realist theory continues to have a powerful explanatory and predictive ability in understanding how shifting capabilities among rival ethnic or religious groups affect each of their calculations. He remarks that in a world absent of much superpower intervention, the world remains a self-help system, and ethnic groups realize they may not count on receiving much outside help. Only large commitments of outside troops could guarantee some peace among them, but outside states are not likely to extend such security guarantees for sustained periods of time. Diminished states or former states suffer the chaos from loss of power, the inability to balance at satisfying levels that provide sufficient self-help for their societies.

Focusing on a single large country, Professor Avery Goldstein demonstrates how structural realist theory can be applied in depth to explain and postdict Chinese foreign policy over five decades. While earlier Chalmers Johnson provided the China literature with a lucid way of seeing Chinese foreign policy behavior as always a blend of politics and personality, Professor Goldstein demonstrates that even the strong and often one-dimensional personality of Mao adapted to changing structural realities, as the Chinese leader learned the contours and dangers of the larger international structure. Here too, balance of power calculations influenced a cult-led state leader's behavior.

Professor Goldstein posits that despite the huge complexity of China's domestic complexion, the real question is not "whether" neorealism explains China's foreign policy, but rather "how much." He describes China's grand strategy during the early phase of the Cold War as "distinctly realist," because Mao always identified the main enemy and allied with others, principally Stalin, to balance against the U.S. By the 1970s, China observed the Soviet military buildup on its northern border and initiated an entente with the U.S. to balance a growing Soviet challenge. Even after Mao's death, China manifested its realist instincts, by further downgrading its ideological tilt in favor of its limited partnership with the U.S.. Though there have been significant departures, the international structure has constrained and

shaped China's foreign policy behavior despite its natural bandwagoning sentiments.

By the 1990s, China had even forged "strategic partnerships" with an economic theme that included doing business with Russia, Japan and the West. China sees this approach as building a relationship too costly, in the tradition of Richard Rosecrance, for other states to then act against China. This is particularly important, as the dominance of the U.S. is not all-directing. Though constrained by the structure of the system, in the post-Cold War era, China continues to seek policies not predictable by structural realism alone, because China seeks its own modernization, or self-help objectives, still possesses an insecure leadership and holds nuclear power. Professor Goldstein's chapter is invaluable because it is the only case study of a half-century's measure of the foreign policy behavior of an often called ideologically driven state in which, when carefully examined against structural realist theory, we find the elements of self-help, balance and power considerations often in command over ideology.

Using a quantitative approach, Professor Robert Powell takes the predictive utility of structural realism and puts it to a rigorous test. In applying game theory to predictions or explanatory correctness of structural realism, he finds that structural realism fails to explain why states bandwagon a majority of times, especially when the use of force prevails. Structural realist theory predicts, as he points out, that states will tend to "balance" the behavior of other states, but in fact his findings show that generally states have chosen to bandwagon or ally with another in order to preserve their security. Under game theory conditions, states in fact balanced only in a very "narrow range of circumstances." Professor Powell also finds that in contrast to structural realist theory, bipolar states are not a more stable system, in part, because the peaceful desires of states often result in conflict. But he concludes that neorealist theory, led by Waltz, has provided a significant, disciplining advance in the field of international politics by introducing the concept of structure and the expected behavior of states that see it. But he adds that ordinary language arguments ultimately fail to define structure and interaction, and that game theory represents the next step in advancement of theory because of its formal precision in identifying or distinguishing political structures.

Another exception, despite structural determinism, Professor Stephen Van Evera describes the many foolish things that states do in foreign policy. Following the work of Karl Deutsch, Professor Van Evera points out that states are prone toward miscalculation. He says this applies equally well to structure. As with the earlier "inside-out" explanations of Rosecrance,

Keohane, Nye and others, Professor Van Evera's analysis illuminates how internal factors of a state are responsible, in the main, for foreign policy actions, even when the consequences prove to be negative to state interests, and by implication, to a state's power status. Statesmen may pursue unrewarding paths, he points out, simply because as an organization, a state's internal structure discourages both the retainment and encouragement of innovative, risk-taking corrective measures of its most intelligent people.

Professor Van Evera says that bureaucracies reward repetitive, inner drives of its personnel, and that even in critical foreign policy, bureaucracies such as a state's intelligence or security apparatus, also fall prey to internal codes of behavior. The organizational thrust, as Martin Landau in his earlier work suggests, tells us that organizations filter incoming data and are chiefly preoccupied with organizational survival, and less so with the effects on the state overall, concentrating mainly on actions taken by a single bureau.

Political psychologists like Ole Holsti long explained that bureaucracies tend to collapse inward under crisis, which causes its personnel to search for fewer answers, and worse still, to stereotype, simplify and selectively pick what incoming data is to be digested. Professor Van Evera shows that such inward-looking leadership inadvertently leads to the advocacy of mistaken foreign policy despite the pressures or external influences of international structure. Thus in the short run at least, states could jeopardize their relative ranking in the international system by poorly conceived policies that end up not in self-help, but in self-hurt.

Dean Robert Gallucci offers a Washington realist's view of U.S. policy toward North Korea, and the potential spread of nuclear weapons. He cautions that offering North Korea positive economic incentives alone does not necessarily serve U.S. security interests. He points out that North Korea is interested in balancing regional powers by acquiring nuclear power, and by implication, how the structure of the international system both encourages and limits the behavior of small states. Gallucci believes that ultimately the North Korean regime is more interested in pursuing its security objectives than in economic growth.

In chapter 10, I examine the intention and some of the tenets of the inside-out theory, a dominant theme of the past three decades, as formulated by Richard Rosecrance, Robert Keohane and others, evaluating it against structural realism. I attempt to point out new ways of seeing state behavior within a systemic context, and offer a new formulation on how to understand the behavior of states toward one another, and at differing levels. I call this interconnectivity, which focuses on the degree to which states are connected, or as Kenneth Jowitt has stated, "disconnected" from the main grid

of international power. Rather than simply relying on the question of whether states are interdependent, dependent or independent, I argue that such terms are too demanding of state relations, and opt for a more neutral conception to explain international relations.

Some states may be tightly interconnected, as with the U.S. and Japan, while most others are only somewhat connected across a few issues for finite periods of time. Others are considerably less connected. This has significant connotations for their foreign policy behaviors. Tightly connected states are both more cooperative and combative, at least in some ways, while unconnected states need not be as wary of each other. This means that states not on the radar screen of a major competitor may have greater freedom to maneuver through the international system, if they are capable and so inclined. This also includes non-state or near-state actors like Osama bin Laden whose actions on September 11 galvanized the White House's attention and led to the demise of his al Qaida organization in Afghanistan. Degrees of interconnectivity describes the general relations of states in a more descriptively accurate way than do the older terms, which after several decades, and under unipolarity, no longer fully explain the relations of states.



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