



## A Critical Analysis Of Mearsheimer's "Offensive Realism": The Rights And Wrongs

Mearsheimer'in "Saldırgan Realizm"İnin Eleştirel Bir Analizi: Doğrular Ve Yanlıklar

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### ABSTRACT

John J. Mearsheimer is known as one of the most important theoretician and contributor of contemporary realist understanding of international relations discipline who provides crucial information over the theory of "offensive realism". Along with his other related works, basic tenets of Mearsheimer's offensive realism were researched by particularly focusing on his groundbreaking work "The Tragedy of Great Power Politics" in this study. On the other end; analyses of Mearsheimer's opponents published in "History and Neorealism" was also examined to obtain more consistent results. Thus, the fundamental concepts of Mearsheimer's theory like anarchy, state behavior, power maximizing, offshore-balancing strategy in line with buck-passing strategy, and stopping power of water were dealt with critically and comparatively. Among many, the most salient contradiction with this theory is that on the one hand Mearsheimer disregards clear impact of domestic politics and internal factors on foreign policy formulations and state behavior in international arena; on the other hand he strictly emphasizes the lobbies' excessive effect on the United States' foreign policy formulations. Furthermore, Mearsheimer's some core concepts exhibit serious controversy so much so that weakens the consistency of offensive realism significantly.

**Key Words:** offensive realism, anarchy, offshore-balancing strategy, buck-passing strategy, the lobbies

### ÖZET

John J. Mearsheimer; "saldırgan realizm" konusunda çok önemli bilgiler sağlayan ve uluslararası ilişkiler disiplininde çağdaş realist anlayış için önemli katkılarda bulunan en önemli teorisyenlerden birisi olarak kabul edilir. Bu çalışmada, Mearsheimer'in saldırgan realizmi, konuyla ilgili diğer çalışmaları ile beraber, özellikle onun çığır açıcı eseri olan "The Tragedy of Great Power Politics" üzerine odaklanarak araştırılmıştır. Diğer taraftan, daha tutarlı sonuçlar elde etmek amacıyla, özellikle onun karşıtlarının ortaya koydukları temel çalışma olan "History and Neorealism" ve diğer karşıt araştırmalar da incelenmiştir. Böylece Mearsheimer'in teorisinin temellerini oluşturan; anarşi, devlet davranışı, güç maksimizasyonu, uzak kıyı-dengeleme stratejisi, sorumluluk-atma stratejisi, suyun durdurucu gücü gibi kavramlar karşılaştırmalı ve eleştirel bir şekilde ele alınmıştır. Mearsheimer teorisinin en göze batan çelişkisi; onun bir taraftan ülke içi faktörlerin uluslararası ilişkilerde devlet davranışına etkisini göz ardı etmesine rağmen, diğer çalışmalarında Amerika Birleşik Devletleri'ndeki lobilerin dış politika üzerine etkilerini abartılı bir şekilde vurgulaması olarak tespit edilmiştir. Bunu ötesinde, Mearsheimer'in bazı temel kavramlarının saldırgan realizm teorisini önemli derecede zayıflatacak kadar ciddi çelişkiler sergilediği ortaya konmuştur.

**Anahtar Kelimeler:** saldırgan realizm, anarşi, uzak kıyı – dengeleme, sorumluluk - atma stratejisi, lobiler

### 1. INTRODUCTION:

Mearsheimer is undoubtedly one of the most ambitious scientists in the international relations field and important contributor of contemporary realist understanding. As founder father of the offensive realism, he presented basic principles of the theory in his pathbreaking work "The Tragedy of Great Power Politics" (hereafter the Tragedy). As soon as the Tragedy was published in 2001, a hard and long-standing debate has broken out. Since Mearsheimer not only proposed new concepts to explain offensive realist stance, but also harshly criticized liberal democratic peace theory<sup>1</sup> and Kenneth Waltz's so-called defensive realist theory<sup>2</sup>. On the one hand, Mearsheimer

<sup>1</sup> The theory is rooted in the works of Immanuel Kant, and contemporary explanation was provided Michael W. Doyle in the 1980s. For more information see Doyle, "Kant, Liberal Legacies, and Foreign Affairs", *Philosophy and Public Affairs* (12) 3: 205–35, 1983.

<sup>2</sup> See Kenneth N. Waltz "Theory of International Politics" (1979), for further information on the theory.

claims that democratic Egypt would be more threatening for the United States than authoritarian one; on the other hand, he strictly argues that power maximizing strategy for great powers is preferable and beneficial rather than power maintaining as defensive realists proposed. Even in his recent works, he repeats the argument that liberal hegemony may only work in a unipolar international system in which there were no challenge to the sole great power reign in the system (Mearsheimer, 2019). These are the crucial points caused powerful reaction in the field. Concisely; Mearsheimer, particularly in the Tragedy, strictly argues that the great powers were inherently offensive realists who have pursued/should pursue the *offshore-balancing strategy* which built upon the concepts of the *stopping-power of water* and *buck-passing strategy* in the course of history. These are very key concepts for him and should be understood thoroughly to assess his theory. To prove his assertions, he often refers to historical records and tries to justify his claims likewise the critical.

To contribute above mentioned great debate, in this study, basic arguments of the both sides were questioned critically and comparatively, so, in the light of the findings an overarching analysis was reached and presented. In order to grasp Mearsheimer's ideas exactly in line with his other works related to the issue, "*the Israel Lobby and US Foreign Policy*" (hereafter the Lobby) was also be scrutinized carefully as a complementary study to the Tragedy as Kaplan suggested (2012). The critical, on the other side, published a book named "*History and Neorealism*" in 2010 for the purpose of refuting Mearsheimer's arguments by applying in-depth historical analyses. For the sake of objectivity; firstly, whether Mearsheimer is right or wrong on the issues regarding fundamental canons of offensive realism were discussed by checking them against dissenters' claims. In the light of these assertions from both sides, next step was to either corroborate or refute by critically comparing and criticizing them. As was briefly exemplified, there is a hard debate on whether offensive realism has a powerful explanation over great power politics in the international relations field. To specify this discussion, respectively; the concepts of anarchy, state behavior, power maximizing strategy, offshore-balancing strategy, buck-passing strategy, stopping power of water, engagement versus containment which were put forwarded by Mearsheimer were dealt with critically and comparatively.

Findings show that it may comfortably be said that some fundamental concepts of Mearsheimer's theory exhibit crucial weakness so much so that may refute offensive realist understanding considerably in the face of the real world. Among many, the most salient contradiction with this theory is that even though Mearsheimer disregards clear impact of domestic politics and internal factors on foreign policy formulations and state behavior in international arena in the Tragedy, he also emphasizes the lobbies' *excessive* effect on the United States' foreign policy in the Lobby.

## 2. DISCUSSING MEARSHEIMER'S OFFENSIVE REALISM:

In the Tragedy, Mearsheimer constructs his offensive realism upon a specific idea that China is a good offensive realist and her rise will not be peaceful; ultimately, she will try to dominate the eastern hemisphere as the United States did in the western hemisphere (2001). Before examining his basic concepts, it should be noted importantly that one of the major drawbacks of his approach is to disregard inevitable effect of domestic politics and internal factors on foreign policy formulations and state behavior in international arena for dissenters. It is noteworthy that Mearsheimer, with co-writer Stephen Walt, has also triggered a hot dispute on the Israel Lobby's effect on the US foreign policy formulations which seems clearly incompatible with the offensive realist stance. Based on these fundamentals, four basic canons of the Tragedy will be investigated: anarchy, state behavior, preventing any regional power, lobbies' effect on the United States foreign policy formulations.

**Firstly;** as an offensive realist and like many realists, Mearsheimer defines *anarchy* as "no centralized authority above states" in international politics and places the concept as one of the

bedrock assumptions of the Tragedy stemming basically from the notion that “there is no government over governments” (2001, p. 39). Then, he claims that anarchic nature of international arena brings uncertainty of intentions which inevitably engender self-help and security dilemma. To him, “fear” constitutes the tragic essence of international politics because of anarchy, self-help, and security dilemma, so, cooperation is too difficult to be achieved, and thus result will be inevitable conflict and even war. In such a case, for Mearsheimer, survival and security can only be obtained by power *maximizing* rather than power *maintaining*<sup>3</sup> in an anarchical international arena. To eradicate anarchy, the great power (the US) must aim to be “hegemonic power of the world” and must prevent any hegemonic candidate accordingly. On the other hand, although liberals accept the existence of anarchy, they assume that it does not necessarily bring conflict or war, moreover, it is still possible to set cooperation even among the great powers. In a similar vein, liberal institutionalists; like Keohane and Martin, argue that even though there is no higher authority above states, anyhow, “cooperation under anarchy” can be achieved (2010). Social constructivists, particularly Alexander Wendt, view anarchy as “what states make of it” (1992)<sup>4</sup>. That is to say; anarchy is a social construct existing in different forms in the course of history and a changeable concept. In his groundbreaking article, Wendt briefly explains his thought as “self-help and power politics are institutions, not essential features of anarchy. Anarchy is what states make of it” (1992, pp. 394-395). In accordance with Wendt, many constructivists point out that today’s world has not a Hobbesian culture of “enmity”, rather a Lockean culture of “rivalry” (Viotti & Kauppi, 2010), therefore, rivalry does not bring necessarily enmity among the great powers as was onetime occurred. In this regard, constructivism seems to have more powerful explanation about the concept of anarchy. “Changeability” of perceptions over the concept of anarchy becomes very important clue in assessing Mearsheimer’s offensive realism. Given mutual economic and political relations of today’s great powers, like the US, Russia, China, the EU, it is far-fetched to argue that international arena has a Hobbesian culture of enmity and all fight all. The word “rivalry”, indeed, seems much more suitable to describe today’s world. Even if the great powers become rival or enemy, cooperation is also possible at least for some specific issues. The US and Russia, for example, cooperated for terrorist threat in Syria and at the same time they confronted during the conflict in Ukraine in 2010s. From this point of view, liberal understanding of anarchy also seems more consistent. Therefore, Mearsheimer seems to be wrong in that he by no means give a chance for cooperation among great powers which saliently contradicts the reality out there.

**Secondly;** for the sake of simplifying theory, Mearsheimer argues that only the nature of system shapes *state behavior* (2001). Namely, sole determinant for explanation of states’ act bounds permanently to whether international system is bipolar or multipolar. This argument, indeed, constitutes the weakest point of his offensive realism. Mearsheimer clearly ignores the very impact of domestic factors on foreign policy formulations and state behavior in international arena. In the same vein, he persistently claims that either China is democratic or authoritarian does not matter for the US foreign policy, since China’s behavior in international arena does not change at all. Moreover, Mearsheimer abandonedly claims that democratic Egypt would be “more threatening” to the US interests (2001). This point certainly merits questioning. Indeed, it is too difficult to imagine that democratic China or democratic Egypt would bring more hostility rather than peace for the United States. This assertion by no means meets the actual world and constitutes a clear controversy within Mearsheimer’s core claims. As Jonathan Haslam importantly mentions; given the ideas in his another important work (with Stephen Walt) “*The Israeli Lobby in U.S. Foreign Policy*” provide a clear example for vital contradiction about importance of internal factors on foreign policy formulations (2010). In the Lobby, Mearsheimer seems as if he were vigorously espoused the notion that importance of internal nature of states and domestic issues affect behavior of states in international arena strongly. This point has been criticized by many thinkers. For example, the

<sup>3</sup> It is a *defensive realist* (Kenneth Waltz’s) concern which Mearsheimer criticizes.

<sup>4</sup> See Wendt “*Social Theory of International Politics*” (1999), for more information.

writers of *History and Neorealism* fairly stress that; “we conclude that domestic factors and leadership, ideology, along with systemic considerations, institutional, economic, and technological, affect the behavior of states” (May et al., 2010, p. 4). For instance; Hitler’s Germany and Mussolini’s Italy and also Japan waged war stemmed from “their fanaticism and excessive nationalist ideologies which espoused broadly by their citizens” (May et al., 2010), and domestic regime or constitution, leaders, the degree of national unity, perceptions, interpretations and biases, foreigners’ reactions, and international institutions “do indeed affect state behaviors” (Owen, 2010). Considering all, Mearsheimer’s denial of domestic factors’ effect in the history and contemporary world, perhaps, constitutes the most vulnerable and the weakest point of his so-called offensive realism. The history shows that either democratic or authoritarian, in case any government fails to convince the people, any policy cannot be sustained, at least, powerfully.

**Thirdly;** to Mearsheimer, the aim of any great power alongside becoming a regional hegemon is to *prevent* any regional power on the globe. He strictly prescribes that in the event a region has two great powers away from a regional power (like the United States), it is the best preferable situation since both would contend incessantly in which the US can maintain her survival with ease due to her distance (2001). In case one of both overweighs and emerges as sole great power in that region, the US must take into effect some effective measures for the purpose of preventing new hegemonic candidate (2001). This is *offshore-balancing strategy* for Mearsheimer. In this circumstance, the process of waiting new great power’s containment is translated as *buck-passing strategy* by Mearsheimer. Additionally, for survival to succeed easily, the concept of *stopping- power of water* should be taken into consideration because of which it makes difficult the US to be conquered by any distant regional power<sup>5</sup>. In accordance with the concepts summarized above, Mearsheimer claims that China is a “good offensive realist” who has been trying to be hegemon in the eastern hemisphere which is the best way to survive. In such a case, the United States must inhibit China’s growth as far as she can do so that she would not be able to contain the US (Mearsheimer, 2001). Moreover, China’s rise also threatens other countries in the region (Mearsheimer, 2010), because China would be aggressive to secure her oil lanes from the Middle East, therefore, her rise would not be peaceful at all (Mearsheimer, 2006). Taking account of these ideas, one may easily conclude that Mearsheimer’s world very much resembles Hobbes’ pessimistic world view in which “all against all”. Regarding China’s rising power, there are two competing approaches in the field of international relations: *containment* versus *engagement*. For Jonathan Kirshner, the competition may also be defined as realist containers vs. liberal engagers (2010). He signifies that the concept of containment was a very product of realist approach whereas engagement espoused basically by the liberals both of which are harshly criticized by Mearsheimer. Because Mearsheimer’s theory necessitates not only a simple containment but also to *prevent* China’s accelerating power (Kirshner, 2010). Strict adherence to the concept of prevention in place of contention may be taken as separating line between mainstream realism and the offensive realism. For Kirshner, this proposition constitutes “the fatal flaw” of Mearsheimer’s theory (2010). The world history underlines disastrous destruction of competitive great powers like Wilhelmine Germany, Napoleonic France, Nazi Germany, Imperial Japan except the United States (2010, pp. 61-62). Given one of the basic realist conceptions of rationality, and the historical fact that “if the bid is unsuccessful, it will almost certainly end in their destruction” (Kirshner, 2010, p. 63), it should be questioned which way China would follow as a rational actor; Napoleonic France, Nazi Germany, Imperial Japan or the United States (2010, pp. 61-62). Kirshner rightly concludes that; there is no good reason to believe that rational China would embark on a bid for hegemony given China’s economic potential, to prevent her is not increase the United States’ national interests other than causing economic major crisis as well as creating hostile and dangerous enemy (2010, pp. 59,64,71). This is the effect of *economic interdependence* which Mearsheimer inflexibly ignored.

<sup>5</sup> See Mearsheimer “*The Tragedy of Great Power Politics*” (2001), for more information.

Brzezinski, an ardent realist, also signifies that “China is clearly assimilating into the international system” (Brzezinski & Mearsheimer, 2005). With respect to prevention of rising hegemonic candidate, Rosecrance and Steiner exemplify the Marshall Plan and mention that “the United States acted below its power line, helping possible rivals to recover financially, cutting back its military power, and refusing to intervene abroad” (2010, p. 348). Indeed, even though the US did not behave as an offensive realist, anyhow she sustained hegemonic position in the world system. Moreover; when China feels threatened by the US, most probably the *balance of threat theory* will work (Walt, 1985), so, China will pose a greater threat to the US than expected. In the same vein, Mearsheimer not only praises China as a good offensive realist but also criticizes Liddel Hart’s indirect approach (appeasement policy)<sup>6</sup> towards fascist Germany. Regarding this issue; Zara Steiner importantly stresses the weakness of Britain’s defense in 1939 and mentions that at least six to twelve months were needed for direct confrontation (2010). Steiner adds that; “the British treasury warned the government that Britain would not win the war of attrition unless the United States came to help for allies” (2010, p. 133). Hence, Mearsheimer analysis seems superficial regarding Hart’s indirect strategy. Perhaps, it may be a delusion in that nobody can sure whether Liddell Hart acted as an indirect strategist or as an offshore-balancer towards Nazi Germany. Even though Mearsheimer accepts that “relatively weak states may defeat more powerful ones by using proper strategies” (2001, p. 42), he clearly disregards the fact that military history is laden with not only brilliant offensive victories but also defensive ones infused with patience. Sometimes, waiting for better conditions and choosing indirect course of action, as Liddel Hart did, may be the best way to avoid disastrous results. Moreover, international conjecture or internal factors may also cause a state postpones fighting at the inception of crisis.

**Fourthly;** in the Lobby, Mearsheimer once again imposes offshore-balancing strategy and applies to the case of Middle East. For Mearsheimer and his colleague Stephen Walt, the Israel Lobby is an obstacle in realizing American interests in the Middle East as well as in the world. They particularly criticize this strong support’s “unconditional” aspect (Mearsheimer & Walt, 2007). Invading Iraq in 2003, for example, is viewed as a perfect manifestation of the fact that two countries’ national interests did not always converge (2007). Israel lobby, for them, not only leaves the US in a quagmire and shackles her foreign policy formulations, but also diverts the efforts for preventing Chinese threat (2007). On the other side, Mark J. Lacy asserts that the lobby’s effect is overstated during the Second Gulf War because the other possible factors were disregarded by the Lobby’s authors (2008). Similarly, Robert C. Lieberman claims that; “the case for the Israel lobby as the primary cause of American support for Israel is at best a weak one...” (2009, p. 235). Beyond the effect of Israeli lobby over the US foreign policy formulations, regarding basic tenets of offensive realism, what is more important is that Mearsheimer seems tacitly to be accepted domestic factors’ importance and *great effects* on foreign policy formulations. Taking account of internal factors’ effect on foreign policy making process explicitly contradicts with Mearsheimer’s conception of state behavior, moreover, may seriously refutes the whole theory of offensive realism.

So far, this section has focused on Mearsheimer’s basic tenets of offensive realism in line with important critics of the opponents. Mearsheimer seems mostly wrong regarding concept of anarchy and state behavior, power maximizing and offshore balancing strategies, whereas he seems to be right over the Lobby. Hence, the following section will present a critical analysis of offensive realism in the light of above-detailed hard debate.

### 3. ANALYZING MEARSHEIMER’S OFFENSIVE REALISM:

Before proceeding to analyze the theory, it is crucial to stress the fact that Mearsheimer’s offensive realism relies too heavily on the aim of preventing China to be hegemon in the international system by the United States. Thus, basic elements of his theory were set forth to

<sup>6</sup> See May et al. “*History and Neorealism*” (2010), for more information



achieve this fundamental goal ultimately. In this section, critical analyses of the Tragedy's four canons will be presented in the light of the findings gathered from the previous section.

**First;** Mearsheimer's conception of anarchy, like many realists, does not meet the actual world at all. He persistently conceptualizes anarchy based on the perception that "there is no government above governments". This argument, perhaps, may have been valid in 18<sup>th</sup> - 19<sup>th</sup> century Europe, and in the first half of 20<sup>th</sup> century world. But after the Second World War there has been an absolute "*hierarchy*" rather than anarchy in the international arena. Hierarchy became visible clearly during the Cold-War Era (1945-1990) in a bipolar world system so much so that almost any state could behave independent from the two great powers of the period; the United States and the Soviet Union. Nobody could imagine that, for example, even France developed, let alone military or political, deep trade relations with communist Hungary or Czechoslovakia or vice versa. What changed in the post-cold war period is the number of actors and their relative impact. Even if the great powers' effects are loosened anyhow, today's world also exhibits hierarchical features consisting of permanent members of the UN Security Council and the others. In terms of the great powers, there is also hierarchy, less or more, may be arrayed as the US, Russia, China, the UK, and France. Moreover, it is also possible to place some supranational actors like NATO, the EU, and the UN on the top of hierarchy. Mearsheimer's proposes that offensive realism focuses basically on the great powers since their behaviors, in general, determine acts of the rest (2001). He certainly right at that point, and this argument also empowers the idea that contemporary international arena demonstrates largely "hierarchic" feature rather than anarchic. Even if anarchy exists, as Keohane and Martin mentioned, uncertainty does not necessarily incorporate with enmity and worst-case analysis, moreover cooperation under anarchy can still be achieved like in the cases of Bosnia-Herzegovina and Kosovo Crises (2010). In order *not* to survive, offshore balancing or any other realist reason, but to prevent the Serbs from genocide and sustain peace *for the sake of* values, norms, and law were the reasons for the operations. Even though Mearsheimer accepts the possibility of cooperation among the great powers, he still insists its "temporary" nature stemming from relative gain concerns and probability of cheating in the Tragedy (2001). There is a striking shortcoming with this claim given the facts that like the information era, satellites, internet, and eroded state boundaries in which virtually nothing to be secret for particularly the great powers. Therefore, Mearsheimer seems wrong with this argument which professes cheating concerns prevent cooperation among great powers.

**Second;** Mearsheimer unbendingly asserts that China has either democratic or authoritarian regime by no means affect the US – China relations. Furthermore, for him, democratic Egypt would be more threatening to the US interest. Both arguments may be taken as Achille's heel for the theory of offensive realism in that never get on well with the reality out there. Particularly the *Democratic Peace Theory* provides excessive evidence for refuting Mearsheimer's propositions by means of empirically powerful arguments. In case, for example, the UK, Germany, or Canada were authoritarian states; it would almost impossible to develop, let alone military, commercial relations each other. The fact that a communist Germany or a fascist England could by no means become together in the same alliance is the case. What the basic factor binding them under the NATO umbrella, for instance, was their democratic regimes. Then, internal factors namely governing system, way of life, values, and even ideological tendencies of citizens, affect not only domestic policy but also state behavior in the international arena. That democratic Egypt would be more threatening to the US interests is really a far-fetched argument which seems almost impossible to be endorsed by most of the political scientist. A full-fledged democratic Egypt, undoubtedly, might have been changed all the foreign policy calculations of the United States. With respect to a democratic China, as Alexander Wendt rightly proposes, would bring most probably "rivalry" rather than "enmity" to the US - China relations (Viotti & Kauppi, 2010). It should also be noted the fact that an increasing economic interdependency brings prudence rather than war or armed

conflicts. For the sake of becoming a hegemonic power, it is not “rational” taking serious risks instead of sustaining prosperity. In this regard, when one examines China’s behavior *before* espousal of *statist-liberalism* in the late 1970s, it is possible to find sufficient traces of more aggressive foreign policy towards the US like Korean War in 1950 or Tibetan Uprising in 1959. And yet, Mearsheimer cannot see an opportunity for collaboration and recommends competition instead. Considering all; that whether China is democratic or autocratic would have “*great effect*” on state behavior without doubt.

**Third;** provided that setting aside economic and political rationality, Mearsheimer seems largely right with “offshore-balancing strategy” in terms of military techniques. But as for “stopping-power of water”, there are some salient failures. Noteworthy that, the stopping power may have been valid in only 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> centuries’ world so did anarchy. Indeed, this understanding was falsified by numerous cases even in the first half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, let alone today’s world. For example, the Normandy and Sicily amphibious operations were conducted by Mearsheimer’s own country in 1940s; moreover, in 1974 even Turkey could conduct a smaller scale naval operation to Cyprus Island all of which undoubtedly prove that the water did not have a stopping power per se. It may comfortably be argued that given technological innovations especially long - range missiles, it is too easy for the great powers to conduct an overseas operation in today’s world stemming for the fact that water cannot prevent any great power from attacking another at all. As to “buck-passing strategy”, the concept clearly exhibits sharp contradiction with stopping power of water. However, if water has really a stopping-power in terms of military strategy, for example, to leave Europe and Northeast Asia in the name of buck-passing strategy and to wait until emergence of one great power in the region for the purpose of avoiding from more American bloodshed (Mearsheimer, 2010), “does not make a sense”. If stopping-power of water brings a certain difficulty in projecting power as Mearsheimer professed, therefore, it would cause more harm rather than less bloodshed. In this case, it should be more suitable to keep military presence in those regions in terms of military techniques. As shown, Mearsheimer himself refutes the theory by exhibiting clear contradiction between the two core concepts of offensive realism. Considering above discussed three core concepts, Mearsheimer briefly asserts that the best way to survive in the international system is to be hegemon, at least, being a regional hegemon. By doing so, he ignores that if any power tries to be a hegemon in the system, then it most likely will get new challenges and even confrontations by the others. As Stephen Walt rightly mentions, in terms of *the Balance of Threat Theory*, states balance not only powerful but also *threatening power* (1985). In case China feels threatening by the US, for example, she most probably either attempts to balance by joining Russian wagon or replies by reciprocity. So, conflict will be the result. Competition will give rise to arms race and even inevitable serious conflicts. Given the realist (also Mearsheimer’s) assumption that states are rational actors in the system, hegemonic ambitions neither increase the probability of the “survival” nor provide a secure environment in which developing national interests becomes easier. Whether so-called *offensive realists* in the history mentioned before have been successful, whether they still survive, and more importantly, what if the US followed the Napoleonic or Nazi Germany’s strategies must be seriously questioned by Mearsheimer. They all lost the game completely except for the United States. This exceptionality was very product of the US rationalism not a gain of offensive realism. As far as explanatory power is concerned, it seems that the “balance of threat theory” has much more than the theory offensive realism.

**Fourth;** one of the points Mearsheimer is right is that the faulty of sacrificing US foreign policy in the Middle East for the sake of securing Israel’s national interests as detailed in the Lobby. His claims in the Lobby do not represent an anti-Semite view, rather a rationalist one like many realists espoused. In accordance with the rationalist point of view, Mearsheimer ardently opposed to Iraq War of 2003 during which the US disregarded not only the United Nations Security Council’s opposition but also her allies’ (e.g. Germany, France) and went it alone. Consequently, the US

considerably reduced her credibility as evenhanded power in the conflicts and defender power of democratic values, not only in the Middle East even in the world stage. Most particularly, after the revelation of the fact that no chemical warfare existed in Iraq, legitimacy of the operation was gone away completely. Pressure of the Israel lobby by means of neoconservatives in the Congress engendered the war (Mearsheimer & Walt, 2007), and American blood was shed mostly for Israel's own interests, not the citizens of the US. It is noteworthy that Mearsheimer's longing for a new Eisenhower is a real need in the Middle East in view of the recent intransigently pro-Israel policies of the US administrations.

#### 4. CONCLUDING REMARKS:

The main goal of the current study was to investigate consistency of offensive realism by dealing particularly with Mearsheimer's *the Tragedy of Great Power Politics* and his other related works. While doing so, critiques of opposition expressed in *History and Neorealism* were simultaneously scrutinized for the purpose of obtaining more objective results. The understanding of anarchy, state behavior, power maximizing, offshore-balancing strategy, buck-passing strategy, and stopping power of water were the basic elements of discussion.

The most obvious finding to emerge from this study is that understanding of anarchy (no centralized authority above states) shapes largely Mearsheimer's whole theory which causes great failure for explaining state behavior in international arena. Because Mearsheimer attempted to analyze state behavior within Hobbesian anarchical system; he views the great powers' rivalry as enmity, does not give a chance for cooperation, professes prevention of China's rise by any means necessary, therefore, embrace the idea that for survival to succeed only way is to be hegemon in the system. Reducing survival of the great powers to only one variable, hegemony, is fallacy in terms of the historical records. For example, even though The United States has not always behaved as an offensive realist, she has survived undoubtedly. The offensive realists Mearsheimer exemplified, as shown in the study, had lost the game completely and dramatically. If and only if, the US could sustain her survival as a great power by means of rationalism, not through offensive realism. Pertaining to nature of contemporary international system since particularly 1945, it may best be defined as *hierarchic* rather than anarchic contrary to Mearsheimer's conception of anarchy which reflects 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> centuries' world. In this regard, Wendt's constructivism seems to have more powerful explanation about the concept of anarchy because of manifesting the "changeability" of perceptions over time. Furthermore, Mearsheimer clearly ignores the fact that, as wisely proposed by Walt's "balance of threat theory", power maximizing is eventually bound to meet with balancing by the threatened others. As far as explanatory power is concerned, it seems that Walt's theory has much more than the theory of offensive realism. In the same vein, conception of Walt's power "maintaining" also seems much more plausible than Mearsheimer's maximalism.

One of the most important drawbacks with Mearsheimer's theory is to rule out the *great effects* of internal factors (e.g. regime) on foreign policy formulations as well as international institutions. Moreover, his two assertions regarding democratic China and democratic Egypt are indeed inconceivable in the face of scientific evidences provided by "the democratic peace theory". This point also signifies Mearsheimer's most salient controversy which seriously refutes the whole theory of offensive realism. On the one hand, he disregards domestic factors effect on foreign policy in the Tragedy; on the other hand, he strongly recognizes the impact of Israel Lobby over the US policy-making process in the Middle East in the Lobby. It may be claimed that offensive realism is falsified at the hands of Mearsheimer. In view of military techniques, "offshore-balancing strategy" seems reasonable. But in respect to "stopping-power of water" some shortcomings arise again. Like Mearsheimer's understanding of anarchy, the stopping power of water may have been valid in only 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> centuries, and, it is not even a matter of discussion today's advanced warfare capabilities of the great powers. That the cheating concerns inhibit mostly cooperation among the great powers is another fallacy of offensive realism given the fact that almost nothing



can be concealed by means of the great powers' sophisticated targeting systems. Findings clearly show that some fundamental concepts of Mearsheimer's theory, like offshore balancing and buck passing strategies, exhibit crucial weakness so much so that may refute offensive realist understanding considerably in the face of the real world. The fact that very nature of contemporary world is hierarchic and the domestic factors of states affect state behavior largely in the international field must be taken into consideration for theory building process.

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