

## War and the State

# War and the State

The Theory of International Politics

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*For Rosi*

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## Preface

The central question debated by students of international politics is the relation between organized violence and political order at the global level, and this book is mainly concerned with what political scientists in the United States have had to say about that subject. As current events remind us, however, this is a question that pertains to all politics and not just international politics, and therefore I believe that the distinction between international and domestic politics that underlies the division of intellectual labor among scholars who study them has interfered with our understanding of both and has left us poorly equipped to understand both interstate and intrastate conflicts since the end of the cold war. Thus, although the main focus of this book is the theory of international politics, I hope that it will be of interest to students of comparative politics, history, and political theory as well.

The most influential advocate of distinguishing between international and domestic politics has been Kenneth Waltz, and my objective in writing this book is perhaps most directly comparable to the objective he had in writing his well-known book *Theory of International Politics* (1979). In that book Waltz tried to identify what the subject of the study of international politics was, to state its main properties, and to indicate how our understanding of it could be improved. Those are also my goals.

A great deal has been learned about international politics since Waltz wrote his famous book, but there are still many disagreements about how to understand it. Anyone who wants to understand those disagreements must read widely across the journals and subdisciplines of the social sciences, and some of the relevant literature is inaccessible to people without training in formal modeling or unwilling to take formal models seriously. My goal is to make this material accessible to as broad an audience as possible.

Knowledge progresses by trial and error. Thus intellectual progress requires a common understanding of what counts as a mistake, scholars must make it easy for others to spot their mistakes, and they must be motivated to look for them and correct them. I believe that these conditions are only imperfectly satisfied among students of international politics in the United States. As a result, while there is widespread agreement that much that Waltz wrote must be revised, there is much less agreement about what

revisions should be made. This fact not only impedes intellectual progress but also diminishes the ability of scholars in the field to speak with authority to a broader audience. By clarifying many of the issues that divide students of international politics, I would like to foster a more productive dialogue among them.

Many political scientists believe that the answers to the questions that divide them are to be found in the philosophy of science. Unfortunately, philosophers of science disagree about many things, and thus attempts to settle disagreements among political scientists by appeals to the philosophy of science just make those disagreements more intractable. In chapter 1, I argue that this emphasis on the philosophy of science is misplaced and that the main problem is instead the willingness of political scientists to tolerate incomplete arguments. I then reconstruct and evaluate the main arguments offered by the competing schools of thought that have divided students of international politics in the United States.

The central figure in this story is Realism, which has dominated the study of international politics in the United States since World War II to such an extent that it has shaped the thinking even of those who disagree with it. Both Realists and many of their critics assume that the world consists of a collection of independent states, and their disagreements focus on whether and how wars among them might be prevented. Many people assume that, since domestic political institutions can prevent civil wars, interstate wars could only be prevented by political institutions at the global level, and debates between Realists and their critics often focus on whether that is a realistic prospect. One of the main messages of this book is that this framework of thought misleads us. Wars do not require states; they merely require armies. Armies can exist without states, and states are among the possible by-products of conflicts among armies. If states exist, wars can occur within them, between them, or across the boundaries that separate them, and the result can be more states, fewer states, or states with different boundaries. Thus a world of independent states is not a world without a global order—the independent states *are* the global order, and the most important question about war is how effective such an institutional structure can be expected to be as an alternative to violence.

To answer this question, we need to understand the relation between organized violence and political order of any sort. This is a much broader question than the one that has come to be the focus of contemporary Realism and its critics, and I will argue in chapter 2 that it is the central question raised by the intellectual tradition from which modern Realism was derived, which is often called *raison d'état*, or reason of state. To think productively about it, one must understand both violence and how people organize themselves to engage in it. That is the subject of chapter 3.

Organized violence makes predation profitable, which in turn leads to violent contests among competing predators. But contests among predators can increase the bargaining power of their prey and thus over time diminish the gains from predation. The European state system, I argue, was the product of such a process. Chapters 4 and 5 discuss why competing predators find it difficult to avoid violent conflicts, and chapter 6 discusses whether the states that emerge from recurring violent conflicts among predators could provide the basis for a peaceful political order at the global level.

Throughout the book I have tried to indicate not only what we know but also what we do not know, and therefore I have tried both to provide references for readers who want to pursue these topics further and to identify specific questions to which we currently do not have good answers. There are undoubtedly many errors of my own to be found in the following pages, and I can only hope they will be productive ones. Right or wrong, little if any of what follows is original, and the parts that are original, if any, are also the parts that are most likely to be wrong. If a mistake that I have made motivates a reader to figure out exactly what the mistake is and to correct it, then my purpose will have been served.

I have taken the ideas in this book from so many people that acknowledging them all poses a serious accounting problem, and I apologize if I have inadvertently omitted someone from the footnotes. But footnotes could not possibly convey the extent of my indebtedness to James Fearon and Robert Powell, whose writings have been the source of many of the ideas in this book and who have also repeatedly caused me to experience the bracing sensation of being unambiguously and embarrassingly wrong. Nor can footnotes adequately record my debt to Roy Licklider for inviting me to participate in a project on civil war termination, which first led me to appreciate the cost of separating the study of international politics from the study of domestic conflict.

I also owe a great deal to a number of remarkable scholars who, while they were my colleagues at the University of Texas, were also my teachers. If any of them should happen to read this book they will recognize their influence at many places in it, and though I will refrain from listing their names here, I would like to express my gratitude to all of them for their intellectual generosity.

I am also grateful for the comments and encouragement of a number of people who read part or all of the manuscript, and I would like especially to thank Michael Brenner, Scott Gartner, Hein Goemans, and Robert Rauchhaus for their extended comments. I thank also all the students who, over the years, have been involuntary audiences for previews of portions of this book.

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