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## An Unwritten Future: Realism and Uncertainty in World Politics

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The congruent return of de Gaulle to power in 1958 and the true coming of age of nuclear weapons again served French purposes. Although French colonies were all but gone, and with them any need for a global supporting fleet, de Gaulle demanded that France acquire an independent and capable nuclear deterrent, largely in the form of nuclear-powered French ballistic-missile submarines. With a strategic purpose and secure funding lines, the French navy at last reapproached the power it had wielded in 1939. Although there would be conflicts and periods of tension with the West, France was viewed as a valuable, if sometimes prickly, ally and partner with a capable navy that again needed to be taken into consideration.

While Canuel provides excellent charts and orders of battle that showcase how French building and acquisition programs affected the French navy over these three decades, he stays focused on platforms and world politics. He identifies several French admirals who were instrumental in moving French policy and programs—if not always in the same direction—and they played important roles in rejuvenating French sea power, including naval aviation and submarines. However, Canuel does not delve into their personalities or their lives; readers will know no more about them as individuals when they finish the book.

In addition to providing an excellent history of the French navy, Canuel also has penned an exceptional cautionary tale regarding maritime forces in general. His work points out how surprisingly fragile navies can be. Maintaining a strong and capable naval force requires strategic direction and a deep understanding of the international geopolitical environment, as well as a certain amount of agility to anticipate,

seize, and counter emerging technologies and threats. When shipbuilding plans need to be projected decades into the future, the lack of coherent direction and dependable budget lines can cripple a force. The national leaders of maritime states who forget or fail to recognize these realities may lead their navies into a condition similar to that of the French fleet in 1940–42.

RICHARD NORTON



*An Unwritten Future: Realism and Uncertainty in World Politics*, by Jonathan Kirshner. Princeton, NJ: Princeton Univ. Press, 2022. 336 pages. \$39.95.

In this sharply written, well-researched, and persuasive book, Jonathan Kirshner gleefully eviscerates some of the most prominent contributions to international relations theory of recent decades. The target of the book is twofold, encompassing “structural realism and hyper-rationality” in the study of international relations (p. 1). Kirshner’s background in economics shines as he dismantles the hyperrationalist position: trying to turn politics into economics is not only bad politics but bad economics. Treating international politics as if it could be modeled according to macroeconomics makes the basic error of equating population-level analysis with the behavior of individual state-actors (pp. 71–73). Similarly, structural realism is overly narrow and deterministic, equating the international sphere to an idealized market in which states’ behavior is dictated by the structural variables and constraints. Such an assumption fundamentally misunderstands how powerful state-actors act as oligopolies; they actively

shape pressures and define interests in idiosyncratic ways (pp. 45–48).

In contrast with these modern, overly deterministic iterations of realism, Kirshner turns to classical realism for a broader view of human motivations and a humbler view of what we can know. Combining a reading of Thucydides with perspectives ranging from John Maynard Keynes and Frank Knight to Raymond Aron and Reinhold Niebuhr, Kirshner offers an explanation and defense of classical realism in its broadest sense. Classical realism is not a theory but a “disposition” informed by a set of assumptions: often-irrational passions drive human acquisitiveness; domestic politics and history define a nation’s distinctive purpose and pursuit of power; permanent peace is impossible (and dangerous to pursue); and, perhaps most fundamentally, uncertainty is ineradicable (pp. 13–18, 142). Classical realism rejects inevitabilities. Choices matter.

The book is perhaps most satisfying in its engagements with the structuralist arguments of John Mearsheimer and Graham Allison. Kirshner critiques Mearsheimer’s “offensive realism” for a “specious determinism” in asserting that the logic of self-preservation must lead a great power such as China to risk everything in a bid for regional hegemony, and for a reckless overconfidence in urging a “strategy of obstinate confrontation” (pp. 185–93, 201, 203). Allison receives criticism for his use and abuse of Thucydides, particularly the notion that Athens and Sparta unwittingly were pulled into conflict by their relative power, and that the United States and China today similarly are driven by a “Thucydides Trap” of structural forces (p. 197).

For Kirshner, the outbreak of the Peloponnesian War was engineered by the singular leader Pericles, who exploited a diplomatic crisis and manufactured consent at home. The thrust of Thucydides’s narrative is not that structures of relative power make conflict inevitable but that great powers sometimes choose to seek out entirely avoidable conflict. The Peloponnesian War was not a “tragedy that both sides wished to avoid” but a story of Athenian power undone “not because of the merciless logic of power politics” but rather by “blunders of its own doing, fueled by unchecked, intoxicating hubris” (pp. 194, 197). Kirshner’s careful and well-supported reading of Thucydides highlights many of the nuances and key factors often overlooked by realists cherry-picking their favorite lines from the book. It is a rare example of a reading that simultaneously acknowledges the tragic arc of the narrative and finds productive lessons for contemporary international relations.

In addition to his reading of Thucydides, Kirshner looks at two historical events to show the inadequacy of rationalist and structuralist frameworks and the need for a classical-realist perspective: Britain’s failure to respond to Hitler’s menace in the 1930s and U.S. entanglement in Vietnam. Kirshner seems entirely correct in his argument that structural and rationalist analyses cannot explain these failures (pp. 82–95). But it is less clear that classical realism provides an adequate alternative. Arguably, Neville Chamberlain’s willingness to set aside his obligations to Czechoslovakia was precisely reflective of a realist respect for power over moral obligations to the weak. It seems important that—as Kirshner acknowledges—prominent classical realists, including E. H. Carr

and George Kennan, whiffed on the Nazi threat (pp. 98, 202).

Kirshner's emphasis on hubris—as on all the humanizing nuances that distinguish classical realism from its malformed offspring—is certainly a welcome corrective to the pseudoscientific view. It is hard to imagine that readers will not find it persuasive. Running through the book is the claim that a sound understanding of international relations is impossible without a prior grasp of history and economics. Much certainly depends on the historical literacy of the leaders of the People's Republic of China and the United States in coming years. Kirshner seems hopeful that Chinese leaders will see the foolishness of a military bid to establish regional hegemony if they look to the mostly disastrous attempts by other great powers to do so in the last two centuries, but he is less sanguine that the United States will have the social or political cohesion to maintain a coherent strategy. Any hope of that must rest on avoiding the trap of self-fulfilling prophecy. Nothing is as likely to bring about war as the assumption that it is inevitable. Few lessons could be timelier.

ROBERT L. STONE



*The Weaponisation of Everything: A Field Guide to the New Way of War*, by Mark Galeotti. New Haven, CT: Yale Univ. Press, 2022. 256 pages. \$26.

The nature of international competition and conflict has changed in recent years. The distinction between war and peace has become less clear and may no longer be useful as a construct. States and their populations increasingly perceive “traditional” warfare as a less viable

option, owing to the sheer associated costs in blood and treasure. While there is less propensity for states to engage in open combat, they nevertheless remain engaged permanently in nearly continuous low-level conflict across a variety of domains, using all instruments of national power. These are Mark Galeotti's observations at the beginning of his book *The Weaponisation of Everything*. In modern and future warfare, everything from culture to business to law is, can be, and will be weaponized in pursuit of national objectives. The author conveys that this book is not meant to be predictive; rather, it is a “cautionary tale” or introduction to this new way of “wars without warfare” (pp. 4, 20).

In each chapter, Galeotti concisely outlines these “new” domains and tools of warfare, including business, law, culture, crime, and the use of mercenaries, offering rich examples to illustrate how states now compete for advantage on the international stage. Many books, articles, and studies in recent years have documented this evolution of warfare, particularly as it has moved into the information and cyber domains. Galeotti even points the reader to many of these titles at the end of each chapter for further reading. That makes this book ideal for someone new to the topic and seeking to grasp the breadth of the changes and challenges rather than someone looking for depth of exploration in any one of these new warfare areas.

Although the title of the book indicates that this is all a “new way of war,” it is worthwhile to note that Galeotti draws significantly on historical examples to illustrate his points. For instance, in his explanation of how governments use criminal organizations to further their objectives, Galeotti provides examples