

The Great Delusion: Liberal Dreams and International Realities

(2018) by John J. Mearsheimer. Published by Yale University Press,
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“The people who have paid the greatest cost for Washington’s failed policies in the post-Cold War period are foreigners who had the misfortune of living in countries that American policy makers targeted for regime change. Just look at the greater Middle East today, which the United States, pursuing liberal hegemony, has helped turn into a giant disaster zone” — *The Great Delusion*, page, 233.

Pioneer of offensive realism, Professor John Mearsheimer, argues that the post-Cold War approach of the United States to international politics has failed miserably. The proponent of structural realism in his new book contends that the ‘Great Delusion’ in spreading liberal values will generate peaceful world has proved fateful. America in its holiday from realism engaged itself in unnecessary wars, killed millions of people in the Middle Eastern conundrum, and militarized its own country. The seeds of such harmful policy lie in the liberal orientation of the American foreign policy that damages kissing cousins—realism and nationalism. Mearsheimer believes that these two powerful isms, together, will always trump liberalism in international politics (pp.3, 229). While liberalism is a productive arrangement for domestic order, it is a poor force to confront international realities. This latest forceful book by an offensive-realist, titles *The Great Delusion: Liberal Dreams and International Realities*, is a compelling

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case against liberal theories of international politics in general and liberal thinkers of Washington in particular.

Mearsheimer is skeptical about the ambitious policy of liberal hegemony that the United States has adopted since Cold-war which ended three decades ago. The said policy demands to turn as many states as possible to democracy, building international institutions and promotion of free trade (p.1). For the success of such ambitious policy, United States considers its civilizational duty to intervene in 'evil states' for social engineering and regime change (p.2). Consequently, in its unipolar moment, Washington invaded several states to turn autocratic regimes into its own image. The rationale behind such approach was that spreading of liberal democracies coupled with the promotion of free trade and institutionalism will result in a peaceful world. However, to offensive-realist, Mearsheimer, this ostensible productive approach in theory proved counterproductive in three-decades of practice (p.153). The reason is that liberalism undermines sovereignty and consequently, those who pursue such policy become warlike (p.158).

The long-awaited book is written in a usual Mearsheimer's style; introducing concepts in a lucid manner first and then followed by criticism. The first near-quarter of the book reasons philosophically about the limitations of reason. The author believes that 'at its deepest level, politics is a conflict over first principles.' Is that what constitutes a good life? (pp. 16-39). This conflict is due to the fact that our critical faculties are inadequate to lead us to agreement over first principles. As a result, there would always be a disagreement within and among social groups that sometimes lead them to duel on extensive level. Now if some people believe though they do not acknowledge it, universal truth about first

principles exists and they have found it, only makes the situation worse (p.42).

The author throughout the book introduces verities of liberalisms and deconstructs their prescriptive antidotes about the faults of international politics. He specifically contests the democratic peace theory as a central tenet of liberalism. The author argues that there are certain cases of democratic states fighting wars with each other. And even if democracies do not fight with each other, they are the sources of armament and militarization of the world. After the Cold War, United States initiated seven wars all against minor states. The author argues that America is addicted to war (p.179) as a superpower. Moreover, it was America, the champion of democracy, who toppled four democratically elected governments during Cold War, when its interests demanded; Iran in 1953, Guatemala in 1954, Brazil in 1964, and Chile in 1973(p.202). In sum, liberalism is a false hope nurtured by the American polity. Instead of promoting peace, it causes endless troubles. It has not proved itself as a force of peace logically or empirically either.

Author expresses his disappointment in the last pages of the book about America's abandoning policy of liberal hegemony. Selling realism in the liberal market is a daunting task. He however, maintains that the situations might change for the United States by the rise of China (pp. 233,234).

Undoubtedly, the book provides a keen analysis of American post-Cold War approach and possesses an intelligent criticism of liberal theories. The book is still not free of weaknesses. First, there is a noticeable repetition of arguments and concepts. Secondly, much of criticism against liberal theories of peace are not new, rather, they are borrowed. Hence, it makes very little contribution to the already existing literature. The author also does

not offer anything new in his critique against liberal tenets. Third, Mearsheimer considers liberalism as the main cause of failure behind American foreign policy after 1990's, however; such reductionist approach misses and neglects variety of other factors that contribute to the failure of America's post-Cold War approach. He failed to analyze the politics of Middle East that has contributed its own share to the current quagmire. And finally, the critique missed to raise the basic question; whether American policy makers are liberals at all or they are just failed realists in liberal cloaks?