

**Mearsheimer, John J. 2018. *The Great Delusion: Liberal Dreams and International Realities*. Yale University Press, 328 pp. \$ 30.00 (Hardcover)**

*The Great Delusion* is the latest book and a product of a decade-long research of the University of Chicago professor, John J. Mearsheimer. The book is firmly rooted in the realist tradition in International Relations, representing a continuum and further elaboration of Mearsheimer's existing viewpoints and conclusions about the nature of the international system. The key theoretical goal of this book is to investigate what happens when a world power tries to pursue liberal hegemony as a foreign policy. Mearsheimer's standpoint is that liberal foreign policies generate war because they reject power-balance principle, neglect the anarchical nature of the international system and do not understand nationalism.

The author devises his argument in eight well-structured chapters. Questions of human nature, relations between liberalism, realism and nationalism and differences between various strains of liberalism are discussed in chapters 2–4. Questions of foreign policy are discussed through explanations of connections between liberalism and realism, thorough analysis of domestic and global consequences of liberal hegemony and firm critique of liberal theories of peace in chapters 5–7. The concluding chapter concerns the future of the US foreign policy.

This book has both political and academic significance. The main political feature of this book is that it advocates against war-prone policy of liberal interventionism that intends to turn as many states as possible into liberal democracies. However, this book is not a complete anti-liberal manifesto, because the author praises liberalism in internal affairs as the best facilitator of democracy and transparency of government. Academically this book reflects author's deep knowledge of, both classical and contemporary, scholarly literature in social science. While discussing wide register of questions, from the abstractions of political ontology to the recent foreign policy history, Mearsheimer uses understandable and simple language.

The key methodological problem of this book is the treatment of ideologies. First, Mearsheimer reduces ideologies into core principles, not acknowledging their complexity and in the case of nationalism its contradictions on the level of ideas. Second, he tends

to treat practicing of an ideology as a consistent use of core principles, which seems independent of every historical and social contexts. Moreover, there is no possibility of ideology being a reflection of existing social practices. Third, liberalism and nationalism are not treated equally: liberalism is presented as authored by philosophers, disconnected from social movements or groups, while nationalism is acknowledged as a recent historical “bottom-up and top-down phenomenon” (p. 84) whose philosophical roots were omitted. This implies that nationalism is *naturae rerum* closer to fulfilling human psychological and social needs than liberal philosophical constructions.

According to Mearsheimer key components of liberalism are radical individualism and impossibility of reason to provide us with the key answers about what constitutes a good life. Such conflictual situation of individuals that have different views of life has three remedies: belief that every individual is endowed with certain inalienable rights, tolerance of others' rights to define their own good life and the state that can prevent conflicts and guard individual rights. Two main currents of liberalism have a dispute over the role of the state in promoting individual rights. “*Modus vivendi* liberals” (John Locke, Friedrich von Hayek, John Gray, Steven Holmes) believe that the state interference violates individual rights, while “progressive liberals” (Ronald Dworkin, Francis Fukuyama, Steven Pinker, John Rawls) believe that the state intervention is necessary to ensure certain individual rights.

In opposition to liberalism, according to Mearsheimer, stands nationalism. Key differences between liberalism and nationalism are nationalist rejection of individualism and emphasis of territorial sovereignty. Despite highlighting these differences, Mearsheimer postulates that “liberalism without nationalism is impossible” (p. 103), because liberal “soulless state” (p. 51) inspires no sense of community among scattered individuals. Nationalists and progressive liberals share strong beliefs in the success of the state intervention or social engineering.

The last key feature of nationalism is nation's self-determination which means that the nation has an impulse for running their own affairs in distinct state. This specificity differentiates nation from pre-modern collectives. Although Mearsheimer states that liberalism predates nationalism for almost a century, he omits to emphasize how the idea of equality in inalienable rights influenced the nationalist idea of “sense of oneness” (p. 85). The “sense of oneness” serves as a code of recognition which members of a nation, therefore individuals, construct themselves as equals. It is questionable how nation-states could be democratic (Mearsheimer insists on that) without equality in (inalienable) rights among the citizens. In the US and Britain liberal ideology served in this process of nation-state building. Still, self-determination means that nations can base their sense of oneness on different ideas, dependent upon their culture and history. This proves how both ideologies are complex on the level of ideas, historically interlinked and that none is closer to the human nature than the other.

In the case of foreign policy, a state pursuing liberal hegemony believes that it has an obligation to protect foreign citizens' inalienable rights from their own states. The aim of such intervention is to turn as many states as possible into liberal democracies, which would guarantee rights for their citizens and hence create a safer and more peaceful international system. The final aim is to secure the survival of liberal democracy in the hegemon state. Despite promised stability and peace, liberal hegemony only involved the US in the series of long, costly wars, that did not manage to protect individual rights and establish liberal democracies in targeted countries, but even contributed to erosion of democracy and civil liberties in the US.

The key question regarding Mearsheimer's idea about the liberal foreign policy is if there were such thing as a liberal hegemony? Consequently, is there any feature of liberalism that causes failure of military interventions to establish liberal democracies around the world? Mearsheimer claims that only with Clinton the US embraced the liberal hegemony in 1992 (p. 153), but provides no evidence why the US interventions started causing long and costly wars only after 9/11. Further insights into places where the US intervened presents major intervention in Iraq, Afghanistan and Syria that resulted in long and costly wars and only in Iraq, Afghanistan and Libya did the US try to establish liberal democracies. Therefore, it cannot be said that the US are trying to promote liberal democracy all around the world through military intervention, but it is better to think of that as a feature of the US Middle-Eastern policy. What caused the failure of this policy in the region is contextually and historically dependent question.

If there is any feature of liberalism alone that causes failure of the militant establishment of liberal democracies, Mearsheimer did not reveal it. The author himself answered to that question by simultaneously using examples of the US military interventions during the Cold War and in the period of liberal hegemony. Moreover, he does not provide any specific difference that separates these military interventions by their result (violation of human rights, civilian casualties and diminishing of transparency of government in the US), which are key for his dismissal of liberalism. The author even states how numerous Cold War military interventions only damaged American reputation and position in the world system (p. 226). If the US pursued interventionist policy that resulted in failure guided by both realism and liberalism, than liberal values are not the cause of that failure.

Even though this book had an intention to criticize liberalism, which it fulfilled, it elaborated that realism as a political standpoint is ready to re-invent itself as a guardian of democracy, but as an academic standpoint not ready to question its own basic epistemological principles.

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