

The Success of the Belt and Road Initiative from the Limitations of Offensive Realism Theory

Yuxue Wang

*Beijing International Studies University, Beijing, 100010, China
18646428537@163.com*

Keywords: Offensive realism, "Belt and Road" initiative, interdependence

Abstract: Offensive realism believes that countries are bound to absorb more relative power in the anarchy international system than other countries. The regional congress competes with the surrounding countries for regional supremacy and then wins the region's dominant position. The regional congresses compete with the surrounding countries for regional supremacy and then win the dominant position of global hegemony. However, in today's world, where globalization and anti-globalization coexist, global conflicts are intensifying, and it is impossible to achieve national economic development and prosperity solely by relying on military forces. The interaction between countries is more interdependent. Moreover, big countries may only sometimes compete with other countries for the position of regional hegemon. China's "Belt and Road" initiative in 2013 aims to develop economic development with neighbouring countries and contribute to world economic prosperity rather than competing for the world's economic prosperity. China's "Belt and Road" initiative in 2013 aims to develop economic development with neighbouring countries and contribute to world economic prosperity rather than competing for economic supremacy.

Mearsheimer proposed the theory of Offensive realism in his book *The Tragedy of Great Power Politics*. Offensive realism is based on security and power and proposes that the state's primary goal is survival. For a state to survive, it has to continuously expand its power, i.e., gain relatively more power than other states, as a guarantee of its security and survival. When a state maximizes its power, it will attempt hegemony. But this time, hegemony is equally important for survival.

1. Introduction to Offensive Realism

Mearsheimer divides Offensive realism into five assumptions: (1) The international system is in anarchy. Without central authority, states must gain the most power in the world to survive. Therefore, there is a risk of interaction between state actors. Therefore, every state is trying to cope with the risk, i.e., expanding its power. Power here refers to relative power, and a state can be considered secure by pursuing relatively more power than other states. Such a power struggle will inevitably lead to games and conflicts. Great powers tend to zero-sum game in the competition, chasing the hegemony so that it will produce conflict, war and other problems. (2) The great powers themselves have Offensive power. Mearsheimer attaches great importance to the military power of the state. He thinks that every country has more or less Offensive military power. Mearsheimer

states, "Whenever a state is dissatisfied with the status quo, it will try to find ways to change it. This usually means that the state will seek to use force to change the status quo. States dissatisfied with the status quo tend to resort to force because there is no higher authority in the international system to which they can turn to address their grievances. As long as the international system remains anarchic, states will be inclined to use force to change the unacceptable status quo." ^[6] (John J. Mearsheimer, 2018). Therefore, great powers are more likely to use forceful means to change the status quo than effects. (3) States can never keep track of other states' intentions. The inaccuracy and asymmetry of information lead to states' inability to grasp other states' true intentions accurately. Offensive realism emphasizes the effect of the uncertainty of state intentions on international politics. Due to the uncertainty of state intentions, no state can be sure that other states will not attack it; at the same time, not all states have hostile intentions toward other states, but because states cannot grasp the intentions of other states and, they cannot believe that other states may not have hostile intentions; moreover, a state's motives for waging war are varied, and no state can be fully informed of all the reasons why other states go to war, nor can it be sure that other states will not suffer any consequences. There is no way to be sure whether the other country will be driven by any other reasons to start a war; finally, the intention of a country is unpredictable; even if a country's intention towards other countries is inevitable today, there is no way to be sure of that country's intention in the future; even if a country does not have the idea of starting a war against another country now, there is no guarantee that it will not have the idea of launching an attack on the other country in the future. ^[2] (Qin Ying, 2021) (4) Survival is the primary goal of a great power. Survival is the primary goal of a state, which is to ensure territorial integrity and sovereignty autonomy. Based on this, the state has the energy to seek national rejuvenation and prosperity. Offensive realism holds that an anarchic international system does not guarantee national security. Therefore, state actors behave in such a way that the state can continue to survive. (5) Great powers are rational actors. States are rational and set survival as a long-term strategic goal when formulating state policies. After understanding the international system and the surrounding environment, the state should consider that other countries' policies will have a short-term or long-term impact on the state. Therefore, the state, as a rational actor, should make the decision that is most beneficial to itself, i.e., to maximize its power.

2. Limitations of Offensive Realism

Mearsheimer is very concerned about the military power of the state. He believes that military power dominates in a power struggle between states. Especially under the anarchic international system, the state must gain more power if it wants to survive, i.e., the international system determines the behaviour of the state. However, in reality, with the advancement of globalization, in today's international society, the economic and political ties between states are closer than before, military power can no longer be the dominant force, and the relationship between states manifests itself in interdependence. The survival or demise of countries may not necessarily be aimed at pursuing regional hegemony. There is more than just war as the only path for less developed countries to develop and gain a foothold around powerful countries. ^[4] (Hanlin Zhang, 2021)

Offensive realism emphasizes the dominance of military power in interstate interactions. Mearsheimer depicts a Hobbesian international society in *The Tragedy of Great Power Politics*. International interactions are fraught with uncertain risks, so military power is the most effective and direct means of securing security and expanding power. This assertion that conflict inevitably leads to war does not apply to the twenty-first century. With the diversification of the functions of international public goods, the connotation and sources of power have been greatly enriched, which has led to a deepening interdependence among countries. In today's world, the world economy and

international social factors driven by the world market have gradually grown and expanded, from the development of economic interdependence to the in-depth development of the globalization process in various fields from the beginning of the communication technology revolution to the full emergence of the information society, all parts of the world have become increasingly linked, and the wholeness of the international community has gradually increased. The objective basis of the politics of the great powers has undergone a profound change. ^[3] (Yang Fei, 2012) This makes the policies of one country affect the short-term or long-term development goals of another country or even trigger a chain reaction of other cascades. However, when a state is unsatisfied with the status quo and seeks change, the state will not put force in the first place.

Offensive realism assumes that regional powers will inevitably pursue global hegemony. As states gain more power in anarchy, they try to pursue from regional hegemony to global hegemony. Becoming a hegemonic state means gaining more power than any other state in the world and, then, safer. There would be no country in the international community that could compete with it. However, regional powers only sometimes aim to become global hegemony. Take the "One Belt, One Road" construction initiated by China as an example; China has not pursued the status of regional or global hegemony while developing its own economy but has actively led its neighbouring countries to develop their economies together, making efforts and contributions to the world's economic prosperity. China adheres to the Five Principles of Peaceful Coexistence, follows the road of socialism with Chinese characteristics, and advocates building a community of human destiny. Under the guidance of Marxism, it has not only achieved greatness in nation-building and economic leaps but also accomplished a comprehensive victory in poverty alleviation. China's peaceful development has driven the economic development of neighbouring countries and promoted the stability and progress of the world order. China does not seek regional hegemony, not to mention the pursuit of global hegemony, but also attempts to "Belt and Road" initiative to promote the economic development of countries along the route, enough to prove that Mearsheimer's Offensive realism does not apply to today's international society.

3. Limitations of Offensive Realism and the "Belt and Road" Initiative

"The Belt and Road Initiative is essentially an international public product that is built and shared by all parties, characterized by non-competitiveness, non-exclusivity, and non-zero-sum, and can be participated in by any country willing to do so, regardless of whether it belongs to the countries that build the Belt and Road Initiative. It is an open community of interests, destiny and responsibility; as an international public product, "Belt and Road" is built on the theoretical basis of consensus-driven, multi-party crowdfunding, responsibility and power, composite representation and openness and inclusiveness.^[5] (Zhao Kejin, 2023) The Belt and Road seeks to broaden and deepen cooperation based on policy consensus with the co-builders. It leads the co-built countries to actively participate in resolving key global issues, provides an exchange platform for the discussion of international issues, and explores new paths and mechanisms for resolution.

3.1 The Proposal of the "Belt and Road" Initiative

In 2013, China put forward the "Belt and Road" Initiative, aiming to promote the construction of high-quality development and high-level opening up to the outside world. It aims to cooperate with countries along the road based on the principle of "common business, common construction and sharing". The third Belt and Road Forum for International Cooperation put forward the original intention of the initiative, which is to draw on the ancient Silk Road, with connectivity as the main thread, and strengthen policy communication, facility connectivity, trade facilitation and people-to-people exchanges with other countries. To provide new impetus for the growth of the world

economy, open up a new space for global development and create a new platform for international economic cooperation, the main line of this initiative is to draw on the ancient Silk Road, strengthen policy communication, facility connectivity, trade connectivity, financial connectivity and people-to-people communication with other countries.

Under a great change that has not been seen in a century, the Party Central Committee has comprehensively examined the new changes and trends in international and domestic situations and made a brand-new strategic plan for opening up to the outside world at a high level. China has permanently attached great importance to cooperation with other countries, and the cooperation under the "Belt and Road" has been extended from Asia and Europe to Africa and Latin America, with more than 150 countries and 30 international organizations signing the cooperation documents, resulting in a large number of projects benefiting the people's livelihood. In promoting inter-country cooperation and interaction, the "Belt and Road" cooperation projects have always adhered to the guiding principles of common development and sharing, openness, greenness and cleanliness, as well as high standards and sustainability for the benefit of the people. It has transcended the differences in civilizations, cultures, water capitals and stages of development, opened up new paths of interaction among countries, built a new framework for international cooperation, and brought together the largest common denominator for the common development of humanity. "The success of the Belt and Road Initiative is based on considering the new international order, where relations between countries are interdependent as globalization continues to deepen. Although conflicts and contradictions still exist, war is no longer the preferred option, and the emergence of nuclear weapons has made many countries afraid to use them. Therefore, the theory of Offensive realism, in which large countries would seek regional and global hegemony by continually acquiring more power through war, did not correspond to the realities of the international community today.

3.2 Interaction between countries under non-military forces

The "One Belt, One Road" promotes interactions and exchanges between countries in a cooperative manner, which not only realizes mutual understanding in policy but also deepens civil communication and makes interdependence between each other in economic and political aspects. In an international society where globalization and anti-globalization coexist, many countries have chosen to implement trade protectionism in order to ensure their economic recovery, resulting in a heavy blow to the international economy and trade, which requires each country to establish a political, economic and foreign policy in line with its national conditions. Emphasizing strong military power will not lead to national economic growth and prosperity. "The success of the Belt and Road Initiative shows that regional powers will not pursue global hegemony and fight with other countries but will instead lead other countries to develop their economies and build a community of human destiny by creating public goods.

"The Belt and Road Initiative is centred on policy communication, facility connectivity, trade facilitation, financial integration and people-to-people exchanges. Policy communication is the foundation for better cooperation only if we understand the target countries' policy intentions and directions. Policy communication can eliminate or alleviate trade barriers, enhance the possibility of cooperation, and provide institutional guarantees for regional economic and trade cooperation. Facility connectivity breaks down geographical limitations and provides hardware guarantees for trade with countries along the route. "By focusing on infrastructure and connectivity, the Belt and Road Initiative has succeeded in allaying China's supply chain concerns by providing alternative trade channels, opening up market access and reducing its vulnerability to U.S. pressure.^[7] (Jamali, 2023) Trade smoothness can help countries along the route to optimize resource allocation. Through the reduction of trade barriers, simplification of trade processes, innovation of trade methods and

other liberalization and facilitation initiatives, trade facilitation can achieve cost reduction and efficiency enhancement, promote the free flow of goods and the optimal allocation of factor resources, and provide important support for the linked development of trade and investment in the Belt and Road region.

Capital financing provides financial security for participating countries. Capital financing is based on the premise of policy communication. As an extension of government funds, policy-based finance, for example, can effectively make up for the limitations of the "Belt and Road" such as large scale of investment in infrastructure, long cycle and slow payback, high financing conditions and risk-return mismatch, to provide financial support for the "Belt and Road" projects (especially the major ones) and to promote the free flow of goods and optimization of factor allocation. It can effectively compensate for the limitations of "Belt and Road" infrastructure investment, such as long cycle, slow payback, high financing conditions and risk-return matching, and provide financial support for "Belt and Road" projects, which are preeminent. People-to-people communication provides a social foundation for cooperation among countries along the route. Through cultural exchanges and scientific and technological cooperation, the concept of cooperation and the benefits of results will be conveyed to the participating countries. In terms of "heart-to-heart", during the ten years since the Belt and Road Initiative was proposed, there have been contradictions as well as successes in the process of cooperation among countries and the most effective and direct way to deal with and solve the contradictions is to strengthen the heart-to-heart relationship among the countries that are building the project; in the process of cooperation among different countries, is it possible to gain the support of the local people? In cooperation in different countries, obtaining the understanding and support of local people is crucial to whether the investment and cooperation projects can be carried out smoothly. ^[1] (Chen Wenling, 2023)

4. Conclusions

Offensive realism believes that the ultimate goal of a country's development is inevitably the pursuit of global hegemony. However, hegemonic countries face problems such as hegemonic decline, and realizing sustainable development is the primary goal. Especially in globalization, many development issues bind all humanity together, and non-traditional security issues, such as environmental problems and terrorism, are urgent problems that threaten global development.

References

- [1] Chen Wenling. "Promoting the Construction of a Community of Human Destinies: The 10th Anniversary of the Belt and Road Initiative" [J]. *Think Tank Theory and Practice*. 2023-05: 11-15.
- [2] Qin Ying. "The Constructive Logic of Offensive Realism Theory and Critique of It." [D]. Nanjing Normal University.2021.
- [3] Yang Fei. "A Critique of Mearsheimer's Theory of Offensive Realism." [D]. Party School of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of China.2012.
- [4] Zhang Hanlin. "On the Great Revival of the Chinese Nation from the Limitations of Offensive Realism Theory." [J]. *PR World*.2021-20: 173-174.
- [5] Zhao Kejin. "Toward a Community of Human Destinies: The Theoretical Basis and Practical Logic of Building One Belt and One Road Together." [J]. *Contemporary World*. 2023-10: 22-27.
- [6] John J. Mearsheimer, "Conventional Deterrence: An Interview with John [J]. Mearsheimer", *Strategic Studies Quarterly*, Vol. 12, No. 4, 2018, p. 7.
- [7] Jamali, Ahmed Bux, Stephen P. Westcott, and Abhishek Verma. "Belt and Road Initiative: The Intertwining of China's Foreign Policy and Economic Nationalism." [J]. *East Asia* (2023).