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AKO JE MOŽNÉ, ŽE EŠTE NEDOŠLO K TRETEJ SVETOVEJ VOJNE?

WHY IS THERE NO THIRD WORLD WAR YET?

*Atahan Demirkol*¹

Štúdia si kladie otázku, ako je možné, že nedošlo k tretej svetovej vojne, keď uplynulo viac ako 75 rokov od druhej svetovej vojny. Prvá a aj druhá svetová vojna patrili z politického, ekonomického a vojenského hľadiska medzi najvýznamnejšie udalosti 20. storočia. Proces, ktorý sa skončil prvou a druhou svetovou vojnou, sa však začal už v 19. storočí. Nerovnováha v medzinárodnom priestore, nerovnomerné vyzbrojovanie, neexistencia globálneho ekonomického trhu a neexistencia medzinárodných organizácií vyústili do prvej a druhej svetovej vojny. Vzájomná ekonomická závislosť a vznik globálneho trhu z perspektívy liberalizmu, ako aj z hľadiska medzinárodného práva, medzinárodných organizácií a zvyšujúce sa vyzbrojovanie a „vyváženie“ teroru boli použité na pochopenie, prečo ešte neprišlo k tretej svetovej vojne.²

Kľúčové slová: medzinárodné vzťahy, teórie medzinárodných vzťahov, tretia svetová vojna, liberalizmus, realizmus

This study questions why World War III (WWIII) has not happened in more than 75 years since World War II (WWII). World War I (WWI) and WWII were among the most significant events of the 20th century in political and military terms. However, the process that ended with WWI and WWII had started at least in the 19th century. The imbalance in the international area, uneven armament, lack of the global economic market, and non-existence of international organizations triggered WWI and WWII. In this regard, this study analyzes the lack of WWIII through two main theories of International

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Relations (IR). The economic interdependence and the emergence of the global market from the liberal perspective as well as the international law and organizations and increasing armament and balance of terror through realism have been used to understand why there is no WWIII yet.

Key words: international relations, world war III, international relations theories, liberalism, realism

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1 INTRODUCTION

World Wars are the most devastating events in the human history. Each World War had its consequences, and they were only able to analyze over years. As Freedman notes, The Great War took the name of WWI after WWII as there had been no expectation for another World War (Freedman, 2001). In this respect, expecting WWIII is more than waiting for the new episode of the series. WWI and WWII occurred under certain economic, political, social, and military conditions. Therefore, it is possible to say that the pre-war system prepared the suitable conditions for war (Eralp et al. 2019, p. 64).

There were various reasons for WWI (Gillette 2006, p. 45). Indeed, a comprehensive system leads to war, and when the pieces of the puzzle merge, the war begins. Among the other ones, economic reasons for war, especially through a Marxist reading, have been highlighted by scholars (Hewitson 2014, p. 21). According to the Marxist view, wars are inevitable due to capitalism, which can only ended after demolishing the capitalist economy (Joll and Martel 2013, p. 185). Hence, Marxism interprets WWI through the lens of wild capitalism (Joll and Martel 2013, p. 185). The wild capitalism that led to WWI was built upon searching for new resources, gaining more profits, finding a cheap labor force, and access to raw materials (Joll and Martel 2013, p. 214). Thus, the special conditions before WWI were essential in economic terms.

Germany's increasing economic and military power over the European continent was another reason for the conditions that ended with war as it unbalanced the military capacity among countries (Hewitson 2014, p. 35). The visible reason behind the outbreak of WWI, the murder of Franz Ferdinand by a Serbian on June 28, 1914, is not just enough to understand the incidents that led to WWI. When the murder happened, it was not perceived as an extraordinary issue that could cause the war. Rather, it was expected that other states would solve the problem through interventions (Howard 2002, p. 19). Besides that, Germany had been preparing for a war for a long time as it was increasing its military capacity. The armament of Germany was higher than other European countries (Howard 2002, p. 23). As Roberts (2003, p. 193) put it, Germany had been psychologically ready for war even the trigger was not pulled by her. Shortly, these were the other causes for WWI.

1919 Versailles Treaty clearly pointed out that Germany was responsible for WWI (Winter and Prost 2005, p. 34). The provisions of the Treaty, which was named as Versailles Dictate by Germany, also prepared the conditions for WWII. Although the end of WWI, 1919 Peace, and Wilson Principles created a sense of peace around the world, the efforts for prevailing the peace on the earth did not last long. The attempt for liberal institutionalism by the United States of America (USA) through the League of Nations was failed because of the non-participation of the USA in the organization after a referendum, and the impact of the League of Nations weakened (Demirkol 2021, p. 3). The organization's main goal was to maintain international peace and prevent a possible WWII. 26 out of 42 members of the organization were outside of Europe; thus, we can conclude that it did not only aim to European peace (Roberts 2003, p. 254). However, the retaliation of Germany after the Versailles Dictate failed the efforts for liberalism, and the capitalist crises after such as the Great Depression of 1929 and the economic imbalance subsequent to WWI led to another war – WWII.

In short, WWI and WWII had their own reasons and factors that led to war. Among them, we could count economic conditions, military conditions, and lack of proper international organization and law. However, after WWI and WWII, IR scholars began to deal with international peace, international organizations, the nature of IR, and the relationship between states. Namely, liberalism and realism were introduced to the IR field to study these concepts. In this paper, we aim that the lack of WWIII could be analyzed through the two main problem-solving theories, liberalism and realism. Therefore, we employed these two theories to understand why WWIII has not happened yet. Accordingly, the first section will look upon the liberal theory and its perspectives to prevent a world war. Then, the second section will focus on the realist theory and Mutually Assured Destruction (MAD) and balance of terror in terms of realist mechanisms that prevent a possible WWIII. The readers should be aware of that; this paper does not propose that there will not be a WWIII at any time. Rather, this paper attempts to draw a framework to understand why it has not happened since WWII and why it is not really possible in the near future.

2 LITERATURE REVIEW AND METHODOLOGY

The possibility of emergence of WWIII has always been a catchy topic for IR scholars. Yet, the existing literature regarding WWIII, its possibility, causes, implications, and emergence is scarce. There are several studies, which debate about WWIII. This section will provide a brief information about limited existing literature on WWIII.

Freedman (2001) has argued whether the war against al-Qaeda after September 9, 2001 could be perceived as WWIII. He concluded that the attempts to call this campaign as WWIII would be the view of al-Qaeda as they put themselves into

a position where the world politics regarding Muslim people occur around them. Sabin (1986) published his book to discuss the fear of WWIII in Britain. He highlighted that there has been an anxiety about possible WWIII. Marcos (1997) has, on the other hand, called Cold War as the Third World War and discussed the Fourth World War. He (1997) claimed that Fourth World War has begun. Scholars such as Marshall (1999) have attempted to approach the WWIII issue from a different angle. Marshall (1999) concludes that WWIII is Third World's war against Euro-centric colonial global system. Indeed, generally speaking, WWIII has been understood as Third World's war against First World countries in respect to colonialism, exploitation, and use of international law as a hegemonic tool especially by Third World Approach to International Law scholars (TWAILers).³

The originality and unique value of this study derives from the scarcity of above-cited literature regarding the WWIII. There are few studies solely focusing on WWIII, therefore this paper attempts to fill this gap in the existing literature to provide insights about WWIII through the lens of realism and liberalism as the mainstream theories of IR.

This study follows a literature review and theoretical discussion as the methodology. Therefore, naturally it is qualitative. Secondary sources as scientific articles and books have been used to further evaluate the issue of WWIII. To comprehend the issue in detail, this paper has utilized two mainstream IR theories: liberalism and realism. On the one hand, liberal school of IR is generally employed through the ideas of Moravcsik (1992) regarding liberalism and international law nexus. On the other hand, we have used Carr (2016) as the main source of realist IR theory. Various scholars and debates have been added to the study to elaborate the liberalism and realism nexus regarding why there is no WWIII yet.

3 TO THE INTERDEPENDENT ECONOMIES, INTERNATIONAL LAW, AND ORGANIZATIONS: LIBERALISM

Liberalism is mainly founded on the grounds of building and keeping peace through international law, international organizations, and economic interdependence. It provisions a world system that interconnects countries. In that interconnected system, the belief is that declaring war would be harder than before as it will harshly affect each party of the system. Therefore, the increasing costs of the war because of globalization will be a buffer mechanism at the brink of war (Rowe 2005, p. 407).

In the field of IR, liberalism is mostly associated with utopianism as a criticism against it (Özpek 2021, p. 128). The utopian understanding or labeling of liberalism comes from its views on peacebuilding and maintaining it through international law, international organizations, and cooperation. Yet, its roots could be found in the 18th

³ More on TWAIL see Chimni (2006), Mutua (2000), Kırdım (2021).

century in the studies of Bernard Mandeville and Adam Smith (Booth and Erskine, 2016). According to Burchill, liberalism has affected almost all modern industrial societies due to the European Enlightenment (Burchill 2005, p. 55). There is also a distinction between liberalism and idealism (Gözen 2021, p. 80), but we will use them interchangeably in the limitations of that study. Liberalism generally refers to the rights to life, freedom, and property for individuals, and it is a moral proposition (Meiser 2017, p. 22). In this regard, liberalism is related to Immanuel Kant, John Stuart Mill, Woodrow Wilson, Hugo Grotius, and John Locke (Moravcsik 1992, p. 1; Russett 2013, p. 95).

The philosophical grounds of liberalism assume that human nature is good (Eralp 2019, p. 62). Thus, humans have habitual moral values (Moravcsik, 1992, p. 5). Because of that, democracy, international trade, and international organizations are the preventive factors for conflicts (Russett 2013, pp. 101-102). This argument is also highlighted in the study of Kant, *Perpetual Peace* (1795) (Kant, 1983). According to him, democratic republics avoid war with each other. The proliferation of democratic republics, thus, will prevail the universal peace. Democratic republics are expected to abide by international law and participate in international organizations. Hence, Kantian liberalism suggests that increasing democracy will promote international law and organizations so that peace will be sustained. In his perspective, there are three conditions for international peace: the proliferation of republican governments, international law, and universal hospitality (Özpek 2021, p. 140). These arguments provide the basis that international law will be the guardian for international peace and non-conflict. Although the IR system is defined as anarchic by realism, liberalism proposes that international law will be regulating and maintaining the hierarchical structure in IR to keep the system under control. Yet, these arguments were falsified after the emergence of WWII; though, there had been League of Nations as an international organization to prevent any conflict. Therefore, the criticisms of liberalism began after WWII (Özpek 2021, p. 143).

The most significant figure for IR in terms of liberalism is Woodrow Wilson, who opened the way for a liberal IR system through his fourteen principles. Accordingly, the emergence of IR as an independent field of study occurred after Woodrow Wilson School in Aberystwyth in 1919 (Smith 2015, p. 14). WWI led to some efforts for preventing any other conflict because of the devastating effects of the war. Despotic states, non-responsibility of leaders to the citizens, and lack of international mechanism were counted in the reasons for WWI (Eralp 2019, p. 61). During WWI, Wilson had always highlighted a common gain for all humanity in regard to the end of the war and focused on the collective security perspective after WWI (Fleming 1956, p. 612). The collective security concept was offered by regular people instead of diplomats as a response of humanity to the wars (Stromberg 1956, p. 250). On January 8, 1918, Woodrow Wilson announced his fourteen principles

prioritizing the prohibition of secret agreements, freedom of the seas, equal trade opportunities, and the establishment of the League of Nations (Snell, 1954). Therefore, Wilson proposed the main arguments and ideas for liberal IR theory: A new world order should be founded upon the principles of international law and international organizations with respect to open diplomacy. Yet, the failed efforts of the League of Nations to prevent the emergence of WWII have been criticized among IR scholars. Though there have been criticisms, Stromberg noted that the failed efforts were not a result of the failed liberal system per se. The reason was the disbelief of the big countries to the system and principles of the liberal IR theory (Stromberg 1956, p. 253).

The economic situation after WWI is an essential topic to analyze regarding the results of the war and the conditions that led to WWII. WWI caused an economic boom among the non-European countries, whereas it destroyed the European economies (Roberts 2003, p. 256). Notably, Germany was affected by the economic sanctions of the Versailles Treaty (Broadberry and Harrison 2005, p. 539). Because of the Treaty, Germany was under a heavy economic burden as a part of the strategy to weaken their economy and military. The country, whose economy was crushed due to the war compensations and whose military capacity was limited, became an uprising problem in Europe in 1935 (Roberts 2003, p. 348). Hitler, as a charismatic leader, got to the stage in 1921 as the pioneer of Nazis. Hitler's charisma triggered the nationalism in Germany against the Versailles Dictate and sparked the national identity consciousness (Roberts 2003, p. 350).

Although Altman suggests that the territorial conquests have been decreasing since 1945 due to the territorial integrity norm, he also provides the data for increasing small-size conquests around the world (Altman, 2020). This is an important point that readers should focus on. Liberalism, through international norms such as territorial integrity and prohibition of the act of aggression, prevents a total war between states. Yet, there are still attempts to outbreak wars in terms of conquering relatively small parts of independent countries. As in the case of South Ossetia, Crimea, and the recent Russian invasion of Ukraine, the readers should still remind that these events were not and have not been evolved to WWII because of the international mechanisms.

The first attempt after WWI to limit the act of aggression was the Kellogg-Briand Pact -or the Pact of Paris-, which was signed in 1928, explicitly outlawed war. It introduced the collective security perspective in a legal document. The two provisions of the Pact were renouncing the war and finding peaceful solutions to disputes among states in Article 1 and Article 2 (Josephson, 1979). Yet, the Pact has greatly been criticized for not being effective as such it could not prevent WWII. Nevertheless, the second attempt to outlaw the act of aggression among states has been successful so far; even there have been some events. The United Nations (UN) Charter of 1945, Article 2 clearly recognized the territorial integrity norm and prohibited the

act of aggression. According to Article 2 of the UN Charter, “*All Members shall settle their international disputes by peaceful means in such a manner that international peace and security...*” and “*All Members shall refrain in their international relations from the threat or use of force against the territorial integrity or political independence of any state... .*”

The binding rules of international law and agreements that have been signed and ratified by states are obstacles to abusing territorial integrity norms, which means threatening a state’s independence or using force against it. On the other hand, Altman notes that false optimism might be a cause of war (Altman, 2015). The strategist sometimes falsely be optimistic about the possible outcomes and the result of the war, that is, self-esteem about winning the war. In such psychology, the countries may get to the brink of war. However, the strategists also should think about the possible sanctions caused by international law, organizations, and the global economic system.

Although the world has witnessed civil wars, annexations, and invasions, there has not been WWII yet. The question of this section is how one could explain this through liberalism, although there have been several acts of aggression since 1945. There are basically three factors here: international law, international organizations, and economic globalization or global market.

From the UN and collective security perspective, one can claim that international law and organizations have become a buffer mechanism for outbreaking a war. The provisions of the agreements legally bound the parties to the international agreements. Therefore, their capacity to act independently and make decisions about the act of aggression is limited. The countries are aware that if they do not abide by the rules, they will face international criticisms, which will result in sanctions both economically and politically.

Economic sanctions are vital for a country that is planning an unlawful military action. Thanks to the interdependent global economic system and globalization, all of the banks and individuals’ transactions are connected. Using global systems such as SWIFT and payment intermediaries such as VISA are limiting the options of an aggressor state for taking action. Because of the possible sanctions on transaction and payment systems, a country’s economy could shrink. Therefore, globalization erodes the independence of a state as it has been criticized, yet in a better way when it comes to international security.

4 BALANCE OF TERROR: A REALIST PLAYGROUND

The book written by E. H. Carr, *The Twenty Years’ Crisis: 1919-1939* has been attributed to be the beginning of realist IR theory (Carr, 2016). Carr opposes the idea of liberalism, which discusses the ideal order instead of real issues, and calls liberals as utopians. Instead, Carr proposes to discuss what is happening and what is there and builds the realist IR theory around the power and interest of states

(Eralp 2019, p. 71). As liberal theory has its philosophical grounds, so does realist theory (Donnelly, 2005). The philosophical foundations of realist theory come from Thucydides (2009), Hobbes (2011), and Machiavelli (2003).

Except for the philosophical background, realist IR theory was developed especially after WWI on the idea of League of Nations and international law could not prevent WWII as liberals had claimed. Therefore, according to realist theory, IR is anarchical, power-based, and interest-based. Moreover, it criticizes the perpetual peace or universal peace approach of liberal theory, referring to it as a utopia. In this regard, Morgenthau was affected by Hobbes while determining the main principles of realism and referring to the dark sides of human nature (Eralp 2019, p. 73). According to realism and specifically to Morgenthau, humans are selfish and driven by self-interest (Eralp 2019, p. 73). Hence, Morgenthau explained IR through national interest and international power. Power is the main factor for Morgenthau as he believes that nations can only defend their interests in accordance with their power (Eralp 2019, p. 74).

Realist scholars generally accept that IR has been founded on competition and struggle (Ersoy 2021, p. 167), and the IR system is also anarchic (Donnelly 2005, p. 31), which was embedded into the realist theory by Thomas Hobbes (Ersoy 2021, p. 167; Hobbes, 2011). From another aspect, the main actor in the field of IR and the international system is states. Therefore, realism is a state-centered approach to IR. From the realist perspective, states' ultimate goal is to survive (Antunes and Camisao 2017, p. 15; Ersoy 2021, p. 169). To achieve this end, the main tool is power (Ersoy 2021, p. 170). In short, one could say that realism supports the struggle in the anarchic IR system; it is state-centered and focused on survival, that is, prioritizing power.

The proliferation of MAD and nuclear proliferation has made the world more dangerous for some scholars. Yet, at the same time, MAD also create a safe environment as they provide the basis for the balance of terror. "*MAD is a product of the 1950s' US doctrine of massive retaliation, and ... it has remained the central theme of American defense planning for well over three decades*" (Parrington, 1997). The theory behind MAD is that there will be a balance between the military powers of the countries, and they will have to consider the destructive results of an attack on another country. There has been a belief from 1949 to so on that there will be no nuclear war because of the nuclear capacities of several parties around the world (Rowen 2004, p. 2).

The USA played the global security provider against the Soviet threat throughout the Cold War (Demirkol, 2021). To put it correctly, the European countries' wealth has been produced on the military expenditures of the USA (Kagan, 2004). Therefore, the bipolar world order was created between the USA and United Soviet Socialist Republics (USSR). In a bipolar world order, the balance of terror was the key to not having a total war or combat between the two parties. The balance of

terror, which could also be referred to as deterrence, has helped keep and maintain the peace since 1945, especially after the Cold War (Krepinevich 2019, p. 62). The term deterrence in IR can be defined as “*the use of threats by one party to convince another party to refrain from initiating some course of action*” (Huth 1999, p. 26).

The theory of deterrence was a perfect tool during the Cold War when the balance of terror was working between each party, namely the USA and the USSR (Kibaroglu 2006, p. 123). Indeed, deterrence is still a favorable policy for the USA and Russia. Furthermore, Iran has also joined the deterrence game through its nuclear power. Such a nuclear proliferation does not look good for world security at first sight. Yet, the balance of terror may be why the world has not witnessed WWIII since WWII. In this respect, the theory of deterrence has been a widely discussed issue among IR scholars (Huth 1999, p. 25). Deterrence is only useful for peacekeeping if there is a balance between the powers of the related parties. Such as in the case of the Cold War, both parties were almost equal in terms of their deterrence capacity, which is related to the other concept, balance of terror. It was believed that the theory of deterrence would have no more to do with the Post-Cold War era (Quackenbush 2011, p. 741), yet it still has a significant point for preventing the outbreak of WWIII. Equal nuclear proliferation or having almost equal nuclear powers limit states to act irresponsibly to world peace. Namely, the Nuclear Peace Hypothesis suggests the idea that nuclear proliferation will decrease the risk of conflicts among states. In his research, Rauchhaus has tested the hypothesis and found out that nuclear power promotes strategic stability, although it increases the risk of taking over low-level disputes (Rauchhaus, 2009). General deterrence might be defined as an everyday practice rather than a deterrence tactic over a crisis, and as Quackenbush suggests, “*if general deterrence succeeds, crises and wars do not occur*” (Quackenbush 2010, p. 61). His study also provided that perfect deterrence theory has empirical grounds (Quackenbush, 2010). Hence, we could conclude that deterrence still has to do with IR and conflict studies.

The reason for this section is to understand realist theory’s approach to possible WWIII. We could easily claim that world order is about power through a realist lens. In terms of military and economic power, power is the ultimate goal of states. By means of military power, we can utilize deterrence and balance of terror. When a country starts to increase its military capacity, that action should be understood as a threat from another country. Then, the other country also attempts to increase its military power. This situation basically creates a security dilemma in IR. The security dilemma is “*many of the means by which a state tries to increase its security decrease the security of others*” (Jervis 1978, p. 169). Defensive realism approaches security dilemma as a cooperative factor between states (Tang 2009, p. 588). The cooperation between states creates camps and leads to the balance of terror after a threshold for

armament. When the balance of terror is reached, it is then extremely hard to outbreak a war.

Shortly, the realist power relations, deterrence, nuclear peace hypothesis, and MAD could be useful to understand why WWII has not happened yet. Increasing military capacities of various countries around the world contributes to the balance of terror, therefore, maintaining international peace in terms of a total World War. Yet, the readers should be carefully approached to these arguments due to the fact that there will always be weak states. The states, which create and sustain the balance of terror, that is, the big countries, may have a try on the weak states to such an invasion or annexation. As the topic of this paper deals with WWII, we can conclude that the realist explanations contribute to the understanding of the lack of WWII, yet there are reservations for other conflicts between powerful and weak states.

5 CONCLUSIONS

It is not easy to answer why there is no WWII yet. However, this paper attempted to draw a framework through two mainstream IR theories, namely, liberalism and realism.

Liberalism is mostly cited in IR as the understanding that promotes international law, international organizations, cooperation, and the global economic market. The paper suggests that all of these means of liberalism could be useful for understanding the lack of WWII. The tendency around the world to join international cooperation organizations widen the global economic market and binding international law agreements and regulations do limit the states' use of force against other states. Therefore, the liberal limitations on states' decision-making process are essential to approaching the question of WWII. Organizations such UN promotes world peace through its Charter and mechanisms and strictly prohibit the use of force and act of aggression. These factors have contributed to the lack of WWII since 1945.

Against the liberal understanding of IR, realism criticizes the utopian approach to global international relations. Instead of liberal values, realism promotes the idea of power, the self-interest of states, and anarchical world order. Given that, military capacity is the vital concept for a realist understanding of IR. Increasing military power causes a security dilemma for other countries and provokes them to make investments in their militaries as well. The dilemma, at one point, creates a balance of terror among powers. When the level is reached, deterrence theory begins to be useful for preventing conflicts. As suggested in the nuclear peace hypothesis, imagining that the political camps around the world have almost equal nuclear power, who would start WWII? MAD comes to the stage at this point and highlights that such war could be the end for all of humanity as mutually destroying both parties.

This paper should be approached cautiously. This paper explicitly attempts to argue the lack of WWII through liberalism and realism. It does not consider interstate

conflicts. Our focus here was a total World War. Indeed, liberalism and realism have weak points to explain the causes of interstate conflicts or conflicts between weak states and powerful states. Yet, the paper provides the expectation of the lack of WWII in the near future because of the liberal institutions and realist security understandings.

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