

REFLECTIONS ON THE WENDT'S "ANARCHY WHAT STATES MAKE OF IT"

Ibrokhimov Firdavs

Senior specialist at the Center for the Development of Higher Education and the Implementation of Advanced Technologies

The late 20th century was characterized by the significant geopolitical upheavals, such as the downfall of the USSR, the break-up of Yugoslavia and the rise of democracy in the former Eastern bloc members. Not any field of research was more affected by this turn of events than international relations theory, which ushered new interest in liberal and constructivist arguments of explaining how international relations had been unfolding into actual relationship between nation states. Perhaps, one of the significant contributions in this realm is "Anarchy – What the States Make of It" by Alexander Wendt. When I read "Anarchy – What the States Make of it" by Alexander Wendt, I was impressed by the way the author introduces novel insights into the realm of international relations theory. Nevertheless, I found writing down my own opinions about the central ideas that they author emphasizes quite useful, as a narrative of how the world may be functioning and the points that raise the shadows of skepticism regarding the theoretical backbone of the article.

It should be noted that every theory, be it realism, liberalism, or constructivism in the scope of internal relations, possesses certain flaws in interpreting the events. I assume it doesn't reflect the inherent weakness that a particular theory is plagued with, but, it may represent the complexities of international relations in changing historical circumstances. One of the central ideas that the author introduced is that he interprets international relations as a set of social constructs, not an inherently fixed system backed by material conditions. In other words, we are seeing the world the way we want to, shaped by our personal experiences. Partially agreeing with the point he makes, it should also be noted that there are limits to the application of this view to the actual relationship between governments. The nation-states still have concerns that represent their long-term economic, geopolitical and geo-economic interests, despite their collective memory. For instance, Azerbaijan and Armenia may never come to the table and reach a lasting compromise. For a constructivist, Karabakh may be merely a small territory, whose importance lies in nothing more than the conflicting self-perception of both governments and their self-claimed identities shaped by the traumatic past. As institutions intervene and the identities of both nation-states change (if their nationalism is gone for good), so does the conflict



over a tiny space of no real significance. It seems very sound, but, I should say that Karabakh is not merely a matter of identity. It seems rather to be a beginning of the geopolitical rivalry between Armenia and the Turkic world over conflicting geostrategic interests. The Turkic world has been doing its best to unify all Turkic countries in a single logistical network within new FTAs, while Armenia sees this as a threat to the survival of its statehood. I must be obvious to understand that this is not simply a matter of perception, but, more of conflict over resources. What I want to say is that international relations are not simply a social construct that reflects experiences but rather a representation of geographic, and geo-economic advantage, that translate into their long-term survival.

This also explains the potential fallacy in a view that the author proposes. According to the author, the interests of agents in international relations stem more from their shared norms and ideas than the material conditions at play. I am not a geographic determinist, but, here, I should admit that geography plays no more role than self-perceptions. The nation-states seek to protect territories that were historically proven to be vital for their survival. Shared values and norms and the role of institutions may lead to some reconciliation. But, it is naive to hope that such alterations could entail long-lasting peace. This is, I believe, what happened to Russian foreign policy. Not quite long after détente, during the 1980s, both US and USSR tried to understand each other, which was the reflection of changes in the view of the world through Russia's lenses. Russia withdrew from Eastern Europe and disbanded the Warsaw Pact and it seemed that the world was never ever a better and safer place. NATO assured Russia's access to the Black Sea and Kaliningrad. It should have been a historic success that ensured stability in Europe and guarantee of access to warm water ports to Russia – a prerequisite for the re-growth of its economy. But, during the 2000s, tensions began to increase in the region again in the form of aggressive Russian policy in Ukraine and Moldova. I don't think it is only because of the dictatorship in Russia. What it may reflect is that due to successive economic failure, Russia realized that sooner or later it may disband its empire (technically Russia is a federal government, but, practically, it is the last colonial empire). It decided to act to acquire new markets for relatively uncompetitive Russian products and new land as a buffer zone that distances it from Western expansion and may be so-called "colour revolutions" (the interests of the dictator may not reflect the interests of the nation-state). So no matter why there are material drivers i.e economic or political incentives that led to this turn of events. We can see similar instances in practically all flawed points – disputed areas in the world. Notwithstanding institutional



interventions, they are persisting, since there are material circumstances that are perpetuating them. Certainly, institutions achieve temporary ceasefires or some episodes of peace talks. But, these issues continue to recur despite the efforts. I agree that continuous negotiations may lead to the change of perception and identities of governments and lead to better terms of negotiations and even friendly relations. But, I don't think such a turn of events can be lasting.

Another argument the author puts forward is that international relations is not a structure, but continuous learning in the form of communication and exchange. Governments react to each other based on the flow of communications that make their mark on their self-perception and the perception of each other. Particularly it is relevant to the current age, which is characterized by the ever-increasing global interconnectivity, both at the individual and macro-political levels. Today, all nation-states understand and interact with each other way more effectively than their predecessors so that their relations may improve. Inter-Korean relations are a good testimony to the soundness of this view. Five decades ago, both Koreas saw the war against each other as nothing, but, imminent. Even after the civil war, both prepared for another war. However, in light of efforts made by the international community, an imminent was prevented (despite the fact that they are still technically at war). They have learned to deal with each other gradually. The interaction between both nation-states changed the way they see themselves and their rival. This learning process had a huge impact on the de-facto peace and existing, yet, fragile ties between both Koreas. The question, however, doesn't lie in the achievement of peace, but, in its longevity. Looking back at the history of the Korean Peninsula, it can be understood that Korean Peninsula has mostly consisted of two or three entities. Go-Joseon and Jin, Goguryeo and Silla, Balhae and Goryeo are some of the entities that have co-ruled over the Korean Peninsula and Manchuria for centuries. Given the fact that Korean Peninsula is a relatively small territory, it is hard to argue with the possibility that these entities did not have the episodes of learning each other. They even have established peaceful relations for a definite period of time, but not a lasting one. While there are still historical periods, in which the Peninsula is not unified politically, despite holding a single culture and ethnicity, the question arises about the potential existence of the lingering material conditions that have been encouraging the re-emergence of bi-cephalism in the region again and again, which makes conflicts in this region, nothing but imminent.

In conclusion, I think core ideas that put forward in "Anarchy – what the states make of it" is sound and relevant to the current context of international relations. But, the



approach of ignoring material factors the author has taken seems to be a fallacy that undermines the accuracy of the theory. Still, they are my own personal opinions that arose from my understanding of the key ideas that the author proposed in his work. I think constructivism still offers novel insights into current international affairs and the mitigation of some issues in international relations theory and diplomatic practice. Especially, mitigating conflicts between different cultures and religions or sects could be solved more efficiently if the author's ideas are put into active application.

