

Review 3

Title: Roots of War. Wanting power, seeing threat, justifying force. By David G. Winter (2017). 419 p. Oxford University Press: New York. ISBN: 9780199355587

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In the field of international relations, the concept of power plays a central role in order to understand how, why and when war occurs. The post-World War II era is characterized by the attempt of scholars to answer the question ‘why war?’. The focus of the theoretical exploration in the book of David Winter is interdisciplinary and combines psychology, political science, history, sociology, gender studies, anthropology, economics, the humanities, biology and theology.

In his book *Roots of War*, Winter focusses on three aspects of power namely: motivation (wanting power), accentuation (distorted perception of another person’s desire for power) and mobilizing people to support and fight wars (justifying the use of aggressive power). The three aspects are abstract and Winter uses a statistical analysis in the light of two actual events, World War I and the Cuban Missile Crisis. The selection of the two cases is based on the difference in outcome and to provide context in the ‘real world’. In July 1914 the European peace was torn apart when the Sarajevo assassination quickly escalated to World War I. The Cuban Missile Crisis happened at the height of the Cold War and could have escalated into a thermonuclear world war. However, the crisis has been resolved. The question David Winter attempts to answer in his book is ‘why is there a difference in outcome?’.

The book consists of eight chapters and the first chapter of the book starts with the tale of the two crises. Firstly, the author provides historical and political background of the six-week period after the assassination in Sarajevo and the start of World War I. Winter tries to develop an understanding of the situation from the leaders’ perspective with particular attention towards the official words and informal remarks of the leaders. The political climate and perspective on international relations per country is extensive and well written. It is highly important in psychological analysis that attention is being paid towards the historical, social and political context of an event. This part is interesting for readers with little knowledge of history since it explains and provides context the two crises. On top of that, Winter discusses if the two events were really that crucial in themselves or merely symbols in stories that would have played out to the inevitable end themselves. Here Winter insists that it is highly important to research crises that do escalate towards war and crises that do not. Otherwise, the main explanation for the cause of war is elucidated to general concepts such ‘aggressive instinct’, ‘envy’ or ‘human nature’.

The book explores the existing theories of the causes of war and the actual motivation political leaders give as they declare war. Winter suggests that the main causal explanation of war is centred around the abstract theme and the concept of 'power'. The theories range from structural, to middle-range theories and the concerns of judgements individual leaders during a crises. Interestingly, the main conclusion of Winter is that we do not have to choose from the causal theories of war. Both structures of power and the issues of power are necessary for war and neither one of them is sufficient by itself. During the Cold War there were several long-term structural causes of a third World War present before the Cuban Missile crisis and afterwards. The peaceful resolution of this crises did not solve the long-term structural causes. Does this mean that the United States and Soviet Union had less immediate power concerns than the leaders involved in World War I? The next chapters try to answer the question by exploring methods to measure power and power concerns.

Winter defines power as 'the capacity to create effects, to convert one's desire that something happen into the fact of its happening or motion'. Also, criticism is expressed towards the highly popular definition of power by Robert Dahl which is frequently used in social sciences. According to Winter Dahl's definition of power: A has power over B to the extent that he can get B to do something that B would not do otherwise, lacks the sophisticated power tactic. Winter suggests that B's lack of prior intention does not mean that A has power over B. Winter claims that the core meaning of power is the ability or capacity of one person to produce intended effects on another person'. As followed Winter also describes and operationalizes the power motivation, with specific focus on implicit motives. On top of that, Winter discusses the link between war and sexuality, in particular the relationship between power-motivation in men and patterns of violent sexuality during war. Winter uses several crises that did or did not escalate in a war to study the causality. He relies on longitudinal studies and suggests that power motivation plays a strong role in the causes of a war. In addition, Winter presents four other psychological characteristics that were included in the content analysis. These factors are affiliation motives, achievement motives, responsibility, integrative complexity, optimism and risk.

The following chapters focus on perceiving and misperceiving power in the intentions of others, starting with an example of president Bush who ordered US forces in March 2003 to invade Iraq based on Saddam Hussein's possession of 'weapons of mass destruction'. However, president Bush had knowledge about the fact that Great-Brittain and France also possessed over 250 nuclear weapons. According to Bush this was not a threat since they did not have the intention to use them against the United States. This example is to clarify the distinction between capability and intention. The extensive research from this chapter demonstrates that the spiral can be run in either direction and that an escalation to war partially depends on the support of the political elite and the larger public opinion. Similarly, Winter expands on the topic justifying power and war. A war requires the support of several groups namely the political elite, soldiers and the general public. In order to explore a relation between power motivation and support from the public a survey research related to the Iraq War is being used. The results are interesting since the study shows that the group who supported the Iraq war were male, white ethnicity and had a US citizenship, with political party preference being the strongest individual predictor for the support of the Iraq. The participating students in the survey who identified

themselves as republican were more to support the Iraq War. The same accounts for the public that supported the 'fight against the communists' during the Cold War and hence also during the Cuban Missile crisis.

The concluding chapters discuss how the preceding findings could lead to constructive policies. According to Winter, power is inevitable and an essential feature of all human organizations. We are not able to eliminate conflict between nations, persons, interests and groups but the chance that conflict escalates in war can be diminished. The duality of power is highlighted since untamed power can bring oppression, aggression and tamed power can bring hope and energy. Winter considers whether power can be tamed by forming bonds of affiliation. The idea is supported by research of the psychologist David McClelland demonstrating that affiliative concerns can counteract the harmful health effects of stressed power drives. However, Winter criticizes the idea of emphasizing on affiliation since strong ties of affiliation within communities stimulates the power motivation of the group which causes intercommunal wars. Another suggestion Winter raises to tame power is to rely on the intellect. One of the dangers and criticisms Winter has on the suggestion is that this 'kingdom of the intellect' may lead to a meritocracy. In addition to these two suggestions to tame power Winter also suggests to introduce a sense of responsibility and reduce the attractiveness of power and the excessive optimism. The final chapter presents the long-term suggestions in order to prevent conflict escalation with a focus on power motives at a nation state level.

The idea of creating a theory which explains the occurrence of war happens presents a valuable contribution to academic literature. The theories explaining war are mostly derived from studies only exploring and researching cases in which war actually happened. The cases in which war did not happen are neglected but remain of high relevance since they can explain us in compared research why it happened. The weakness of the book ironically lies in the two chapters where Winter introduces several suggestions for different policies to tame power and diminish conflict from happening. The chapters are highly interesting; however, a general overview of the policies is missing. Also, the suggestions how to tame power are created for nations who have a Western democratic system. It would have been interesting if he included policy suggestion for countries in transition towards democracy since they are more likely to be the victim of a power motivated leader or institution.

In general, the book is well written and accessible for people with little prior knowledge in the field of international relations and political psychology. The book offers an extensive and critical discussion of different theories, longitudinal studies, survey studies and cases. It has a strong analytical element and contains broad and extensive historical, social and political elements. The book provides a broader understanding on power motivation but also gives a brief suggestion of hands on policies how to tame power. Furthermore, Winter's critical note concerning the longitudinal studies of war is especially noteworthy. It is highly important that in the future we will continue to collect and research new and historical data regarding crises, conflict and war. One should not underestimate the power of knowledge about the past in order to make the right choices in the future.