

IR field seminar Week 1  
1999/9/26 Kosuke Imai

Michael Walzer. *Just and Unjust Wars: A Moral Argument with Historical Illustrations*.  
Chapter 5: Anticipations

Supersummary:

Walzer presents the conditions under which a defensive initial attack against aggression, defined as imminent violence, can be morally justified. Whereas a classical argument gives a justification to preventive war, Walzer has a more restrictive view. He argues that first attacks should be limited to preemptive strikes against a present threat, and does not consider future threat as sufficient justification.

Question:

*When can States rightfully defend themselves against violence that is imminent but not actual?*

Framework:

Think in terms of “a spectrum of anticipation” : at one end is preemptive attack (a necessity of self-defense...instant, overwhelming, leaving no choice of means, and no moment for deliberation) and at the other end is preventive war, “a war fought to maintain the balance [of power], to stop what is thought to be an even distribution of power from shifting into a relation of dominance and inferiority.” (p.76)

Classic Argument:

The preventive war is justified for the following “utilitarian” reasons:

- (1) the balance of power actually does preserve the liberties of Europe and is therefore worth defending even at some cost.
- (2) to fight early, before the balance tips in any decisive way, greatly reduces the cost of defense, while waiting merely means fighting on a larger scale and at worse odds.

According to this argument, war is justified by fear alone not by anything other states actually do or any signs they give of their malign intentions. (The War of the Spanish Succession as an example)

Walzer’s Critique against the Classic Argument:

- (1) it is possible that preventive war leads to innumerable and fruitless wars whenever shifts in power relations occur.
  - (2) given the radical uncertainties of power politics, there is no practical way of deciding when to fight and when not to fight.
- One should not assume the malign intent of one’s neighbors, and therefore we need to make judgments about their intentions.

Walzer’s Argument:

Walzer argues that preemptive attacks should be justified only when states are “threatened,” a concept different from “fear.” So, what is the objective standard for “being threatened”? Walzer suggests the following criterion:

- (1) a manifest intent to injure (not previous signs of rapacity).
  - (2) a degree of active preparation that makes that intent a positive danger (not an augmentation of power)
  - (3) a general situation in which waiting, or doing anything other than fighting, greatly magnifies the risk (not refusal of future securities).
- Walzer’s argument focuses on the present threat while preventive war looks to the past and future. Also, for Walzer, preemptive attack is a measure you take only when waiting or other measures increase the risk (read the example of the Six Day War in the chapter).

