

sie gestürzt waren. Eine solide zeithistorische Bilanz der Clinton-Administration muss wohl erst noch geschrieben werden.

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**JOHN J. MEARSHEIMER:**

**Why Leaders Lie. The Truth about Lying in International Politics**

New York 2011

Oxford University Press, 160 p

**G**eorge W. Bush is lying!« This thought surely crossed former Chancellor Schröder's mind when reading particular passages of the former US President's memoir *Decision Points*, detailing conversations in the run-up to the Iraq War. But Schröder carefully refrained from publicly referring to Bush as a »liar,« instead phrasing his accusation as »not telling the truth.«<sup>1</sup> This is perfectly understandable according to international relations theorist John Mearsheimer who, in his latest book *Why Leaders Lie*, analyzes different forms of lying in international politics. Accusing someone of lying, according to Mearsheimer, »is such a serious charge« that even if it applies people often »employ softer language« (viii).

In the past few years, Mearsheimer, Professor of Political Science at the University of Chicago, has systematically researched cases of lying in international politics covering a spectrum from the Ems Dispatch in the nineteenth century to present-day controversies about the Iraq War or the Iranian nuclear program. Cataloguing these examples, Mearsheimer distinguishes between selfish lies, which »aim to protect their own personal interests,« and strategic lies that leaders tell in the national interest (p. 11). He focuses exclusively on the latter, the strategic lies, which – being a »card-carrying realist« (ix) – he sees as legitimate: »Lying is sometimes a useful instrument of statecraft in a dangerous world« (p. 12). Mearsheimer divides the generic term »deception« – that is, the deliberate prevention of others from knowing the full truth – into three categories:

- (i) Lying: Making a statement that the author »knows or suspects to be false in the hope that others will think it is true« (p. 16).
- (ii) Spinning: Exaggerating or distorting facts in order to more favorably represent one's own position.
- (iii) Concealment: »Withholding information that might undermine or weaken one's position« (p. 17).

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1. Charles Hawley: »The Legacy Battle: Bush–Schröder Enmity Continues in Memoirs.« Spiegel Online, November 10, 2010; available at: [www.spiegel.de/international/world/0,1518,728336,00.html](http://www.spiegel.de/international/world/0,1518,728336,00.html)

Although Mearsheimer admits that the boundaries are often blurred, the book's main focus is on lying. In his »inventory of international lies« Mearsheimer identifies seven different forms to be found in the foreign policy realm:

- (a) Inter-state lies: False statements, usually aimed at rival states in order to »gain a strategic advantage over them.« Often in this process, leaders »end up deceiving their own people, although they are not the intended audience« (p. 21).
- (b) Fearmongering: The inflation of a foreign-policy threat, which the leader deems not fully recognized by his own people, with the intention of promoting public motivation for the necessary sacrifices.
- (c) Strategic cover-ups: The disguising of failed or controversial policies in order to prevent unfavorable consequences for the country.
- (d) Nationalist mythmaking: The invention or modification of narratives regarding a country's past targeted on creating »a powerful sense of group identity [...] necessary for building and maintaining a viable nation-state, and for motivating people to fight wars for their homeland.« (p. 22)
- (e) Liberal lies: Falsehoods intended to obscure the fact that a country's behavior constitutes a breach of international law.
- (f) Social imperialism: The spreading of falsehoods about another country by a leader for his own economic or political benefit: that is, with the aim of deflecting public focus from domestic challenges or controversies.
- (g) Ignoble cover-ups: The disguising of failed or controversial policies for self-serving reasons, such as escaping prosecution.

In his subsequent analysis Mearsheimer leaves out social imperialism and ignoble cover-ups since they have »no redeeming social value« and focuses on the first five forms, which »aim to facilitate the general welfare« (p. 24). He goes on to analyze the context in which each category is most commonly used, weighing the motives behind each and presenting the benefits and costs thereof.

»Niemand hat die Absicht, eine Mauer zu errichten.« These famous words spoken by Walter Ulbricht at a press conference in June 1961, three months before the Berlin Wall was built, fit neatly into the category of inter-state lies – a rare kind, as Mearsheimer discovered to his own surprise. Contrary to common belief, statesmen and diplomats do not lie to each other very often and historical, as well as contemporary examples are thus quite scarce (though admittedly depending on how narrow or broad a definition one applies). In fact, Mearsheimer concludes that, when it comes to foreign policy, leaders »are more likely to lie to their own people than to rival states« (p. 13).

Following his realist logic, the author has little trouble supplying a plausible explanation for this: Since there is a general lack of trust between states in the anarchic international order, lying is unlikely to work. Statesmen are unlikely to believe a statement by a foreign leader unless they can verify it. The public, on the other hand, is generally predisposed to trust their leadership – and can thus more easily be lied to. When recently asked to comment on the WikiLeaks scandal,

Mearsheimer happily stated that most of the released documents provided further proof for his argument since they had uncovered lies by leaders to their own citizens, not to other states.<sup>2</sup>

Astoundingly, Mearsheimer's analysis shows that lying about foreign policy is much more prevalent in democracies than in autocracies. Because they are subject to regular elections, democratic leaders need to focus on public opinion. The absence of transparent and controversial public debate in non-democracies »makes it easier for leaders to hide potentially divisive policies without having to lie about them« (p. 70). In fact, Mearsheimer claims that in the US, »it is widely believed that democracies are at a disadvantage when they compete against nondemocracies, because the broader public is an obstacle to developing a smart and bold foreign policy« (p. 60). Referring to the US and its military record, Mearsheimer argues that »the leaders who are most likely to lie to their publics are those who head democracies bent on fighting wars of choice in distant places« (p. 102).

The treatise by no means propagates lying when it comes to foreign policy decisions. Mearsheimer devotes an extensive chapter to its downsides and cautions against its promiscuous and imprudent use. As the most dangerous he identifies those lies that leaders tell to their own citizens, especially in the form of fearmongering and strategic cover-ups. Besides the risk of backfiring and creating »a poisonous culture of dishonesty« (p. 83), they can spill over into the domestic realm and are prone to disrupt the opinion-making process, reduce trust in democratic institutions, and jeopardize the rule of law. However, negative consequences and public condemnation of an exposed lie strongly depend on the success of the policy behind it. Mearsheimer draws on the example of the Iraq War and suggests that, had the war been successful – in other words, had led to democracy and stability in Iraq – the American public would not have minded having been lied to at the beginning of the war.

Mearsheimer had already finished writing his book when the WikiLeaks scandal boiled up in fall of 2010. The released documents surely provide a rich source of further study on this subject. But WikiLeaks is just another indication of the fact that, with the advances in communications and internet technology which we have been witnessing in recent years, it will become increasingly hard for leaders to lie effectively to their people about foreign as well as domestic policy decisions or to conceal or spin the truth. The current developments in the Middle East clearly illustrate this.

This notwithstanding, Mearsheimer deserves high praise for having identified this noteworthy topic and carrying out pioneering work on it. He has managed

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2. National Public Radio: »Why Leaders Lie,« Whether You Believe It or Not,« January 22, 2011; available at: <http://m.npr.org/news/Arts+%26+Life/133092510?singlePage=true>

to present the results of his continuous research in a remarkably clear and concise manner. The depth and variety of the examples frequently referred to, as well as the clarity of the book's language make for a very entertaining, informative and highly recommendable read.

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## **ROBERT SKIDELSKY:**

### **Die Rückkehr des Meisters. Keynes für das 21. Jahrhundert**

München 2010

Verlag Antje Kunstmann, 304 S.

**W**ie es dem Vorwort des Verfassers zu entnehmen ist, hat das Buch sein Entstehen der 2008 ausgelösten weltweiten Finanzkrise zu verdanken. Im ersten Teil »Die Krise« wird die weltweite Finanzkrise in ihrem Entstehungs- und Wirkungszusammenhang dargelegt. Im zweiten Teil widmet sich Skidelsky dem Thema »Aufstieg und Fall des Keynesianismus«. Der dritte Teil mit dem Titel »Die Rückkehr von Keynes« beinhaltet die Meinungen und Thesen des Autors über die Notwendigkeit der Wiedereinführung der wirtschaftspolitischen Ideen von Keynes.

Skidelsky beschreibt in seinem Werk ausführlich die Entstehung der internationalen Finanzkrise in einem auf die Kritik der neoliberalen Wirtschaftspolitik fokussierten Ursachen-Wirkungs-Zusammenhang. Die Darstellung der volkswirtschaftlichen Fakten bezieht sich zunächst auf die Entwicklungen der Immobilien- und Kreditmärkte in den USA und die zunehmende Rolle der Privatbanken, die in den 1990er Jahren auch vom Staat (US-Regierung und Fed) großzügig unterstützt wurden. Skidelskys Beitrag untersucht auch die Einflüsse der globalen Faktoren (Rohstoffmärkte, globale Finanzströme etc.) auf die Finanzkrise. Sein Fazit ist, dass sich die Finanzkrise schon vor 2007/2008 abzeichnete, von den Regierungen und Ökonomen jedoch nicht frühzeitig erkannt wurde.

Bei der Ursachenanalyse geht Skidelsky kurz auf die unterschiedlichen Erklärungsmuster der »Geldschwemme-Theorie« der »Konservativen-Ökonomen« und der »Ersparnisschwemme-Theorie« der Keynesianer ein. Nach Skidelsky sieht erstere den Grund in der »lockeren Geld- und Haushaltspolitik«, während die »Ersparnisschwemme-Theorie« das Augenmerk auf die Politik des billigen Geldes in den USA als Reaktion auf die »globale Ersparnisschwemme« richtet, die von Ostasien und dem Nahen Osten ausging.

Den Ausführungen von Skidelsky zufolge konnte die aktuelle Finanzkrise durch zwei Maßnahmen in Grenzen gehalten werden. Zum einen nennt er die staatlichen Eingriffe wie Finanz- und Konjunkturprogramme der einzelnen Re-