

THEORIES OF INTERNATIONAL POLITICS
AND THEORIES OF U.S. FOREIGN POLICY

I. 14 GENERAL THEORIES OR FAMILIES OF THEORIES RELEVANT TO US
FOREIGN POLICY

- A. Offense-defense theory (Robert Jervis). This theory has two variants:
1. Variant #1 (Threat variant): The greater the security threat states face, the more aggressive they become. "States seek security, and clash because their efforts to secure themselves threaten others' security." The search for security causes wars; empires and interventions; and arms races.
Corollary: "War is more likely when conquest is easy, less likely when conquest is hard."
Two sub-variants: (a) "States fear conquest and aggress to avert it." (b) States fear violence against their citizens and aggress to avert it."
 2. Variant #2 (Opportunity variant): The more easily states can conquer, the more aggressive they become. "States seize what their power allows; empires grow and contract as the metropole's power rises and falls."
- A related idea: the "security dilemma." "The means states use to increase their security decrease the security of others."
- B. Theories of Alliances (Kenneth Waltz, Stephen Walt).
1. "Balance of Threat": "States align against the most threatening power in the neighborhood," with threat a function of strength, aggressiveness, and proximity. Vs. "Bandwagoning": "States align with threats"--the theory that intimidation makes friends. Some argue that this theory explains why the U.S. had far more allies than the Soviet Union during the Cold War (1947-89). The U.S. was stronger but the Soviets were more threatening to their neighbors.
 2. "Birds of a Feather Fly Together" (vs. "Birds of a Feather Fly Apart"): "Common ideology ---> alliance" vs. "Common ideology ---> conflict for leadership of the brotherhood." Some argue that both American and Soviet leaders put false faith in "Birds of a feather fly together" during the Cold War. The G.W. Bush administration made the opposite error in 2003 regarding Saddam Hussein and Osama Bin Laden, wrongly dismissing the importance of their clashing ideologies.
- C. Nationalism (Carleton Hayes, Louis Snyder): "Nationalism makes imperialism very difficult; and nationalism is omnipresent and omnipotent; hence the age of empire is over."
- D. Collective goods: the "tragedy of the commons" and the "free rider" problem, outlined by Garret Hardin and Mancur Olson. "Collective goods are under-provided; collective bads are over-provided." Implication: we tend to trash the environment.
- E. Marxist theories:
1. Rosa Luxemburg: "Capitalist states seek empires to serve as markets for excess production, & thus cure depression." Explains U.S. entry into WWI?
 2. Harry Magdoff: "Capitalist states intervene abroad to protect their multinational corporations." Explains the 1954 CIA-sponsored coup in Guatemala?

- F. Peaceful democracies: "Democracies seldom fight each other; hence a world of democracies would be peaceful." And a related idea ...
- G. Wimpy democracies: "Selfish democratic publics won't pay to maintain adequate armed forces; liberal societies have no stomach for war's injuries to individual rights."
- H. Dingbat democracies (Michael Beschloss, assigned): "During political campaigns U.S. politicians pander to U.S. voters by framing dangerous foreign policy positions that they cannot abandon once in office. The country is thereby led into folly."
- I. Organization theory (Morton Halperin, Graham Allison, Aaron Wildavsky):
1. "Organizations seek size, wealth, autonomy, and conservation of their 'essence' (i.e., no change in their mission)." Example: Soviet military forces in the 1950s, which preserved their essence while leaving the USSR unprotected.
 2. "Organizations follow standard operating procedures." Example: Soviet missile installations in Cuba in 1962, easily detected by the U.S. as they were identical in style to other Soviet installations.
 3. "Organizations cannot self-evaluate." An example: the "intelligence to please" syndrome--intelligence agencies don't evaluate, they kiss up to power, some argue. See Kristof, "Save our Spooks" (assigned).
- J. Psychological theories (Robert Jervis):
1. "Attribution theory"--states tend to attribute their own behavior to their circumstances, while attributing others' behavior to their innate character. (Hence they see their own nasty conduct as excused by necessity, while others' nasty conduct is unprovoked and unjustified.)
 2. A related syndrome: states tend to ascribe others' good behavior to their own efforts to make the other behave well; and to blame others' bad conduct on the other's innate character. Hence they underestimate their own role in causing others' hostility; hence they exaggerate the immutability of that hostility.
 3. Belief perseverance--states are slow to absorb new facts and realities that clash with their elite's existing beliefs.
 4. States tend to exaggerate the shared character of information, hence they are often unaware when others' perceptions diverge from their own.
 5. States tend to exaggerate the centralized, disciplined, and coordinated character of others' behavior.
- K. "Spiral Model" vs. "Deterrence" (Robert Jervis):
1. Spiral model: "Wars arise when states punish others expecting compliance; but punishment only provokes retaliation, sparking a conflict-spiral."
 2. Deterrence: "Wars arise when states appease aggressors; this leads the aggressor to expect further appeasement, and to ignore warnings when appeasement ends."
- L. Gender theories: "Men are more aggressive than women; foreign policies made by men reflect male attributes."
- M. Credibility theory ("deterrence theory"--Thomas Schelling): "The credibility of commitments is interconnected; the abandonment of one commitment destroys the credibility of others."
- N. Domino theory: "An aggressor's conquest of one state eases its conquest of nearby states."

II. 11 THEORIES/THEORY FAMILIES OF AMERICAN FOREIGN POLICY (& DERIVED EXPLANATIONS)

- A. General theories applied to the United States:
1. Security dilemma/geopolitics: the waxing and waning of security threats and military opportunities explain past American conduct.
 2. Alliance theories: American alliance-making has reflected (1) threat-balancing and/or (2) making common cause with domestically similar powers.
 3. Misperceived structure: some claim that belief in false facts and theories have fuelled American misperceptions of its environment.
 - a. Exaggerated security dilemma: Doves argue that the US sometimes exaggerated its insecurity and responded to false threats.
 - b. Alliance theories: Doves say that the US exaggerates bandwagoning tendencies and the tendency of birds of a feather to fly together; both misperceptions fuelled false fears. Some hawks say the opposite--the U.S. has exaggerated balancing and so used threat of force too seldom.
 - c. Nationalism: doves claim the US overlooked its omnipresence and omnipotence.
 - d. Spiral vs. deterrence: hawks and doves respectively claim the US misapplied the prescriptions of each model to situations governed by the other.
 - e. Domino theory, Credibility theory: doves claim the US lent these theories too much credence in the Cold War.
 4. Collective goods: in the past the USA free-rode when it could; it was often free-ridden-upon; it now must protect or lose a "global commons." Two key concerns: potentially catastrophic global climate change; and common action to prevent the global spread of emerging diseases. Can the world cooperate to address these dangers?
 5. Marxist theories: can they explain US behavior in 1898? In the Cold War?
 6. Organizational Process/Bureaucratic Politics: US foreign policy reflects the interest and neuroses of the government's component bureaucracies, not the rational pursuit of national interest. The US also underestimates these dynamics in other countries.
 7. Psychological theories: elites suffer Jervis' cognitive syndromes.
- B. Theories specific to United States foreign policy:
1. Elite Culture: the role of:
 - a. Prep school/big business culture in foreign policy making--Princeton grads run US foreign policy ---> USFP favors US business, is cool toward democracy overseas (note clash with hypothesis B2e).
 - b. The national security establishment and the role of military worldviews. Some argue that professional militaries are prone to exaggerate the hostility of other states and the effectiveness of using force in their presentations to civilians. Some claim that the U.S. military does this. Others counter that the U.S. military has been markedly more dovish than U.S. civilian leaders since about 1980.
 - c. Men and their testosterone ---> macho foreign

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17.40 American Foreign Policy: Past, Present, Future
Fall 2010

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