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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," with threat a function of strength, aggressiveness, and proximity. Vs. "Bandwagoning": "States align with threats"--the theory that intimidation makes friends.
 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."
- 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, outline 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): "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): "Organizations seek size, wealth, autonomy, and conservation of their "essence" (i.e., no change in their mission); follow standard operating procedures; and cannot self-evaluate." An example: the "intelligence to please" syndrome--intelligence agencies don't evaluate, they kiss up to power, some argue. See Kristoff, "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.
 3. Belief perseverance--states are slow to absorb new facts & 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 policymaking--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 & the role of military worldviews.
 - c. Men and their testosterone ---> macho foreign policy.
 - d. Elite generational trauma (Roskin): "Isolationists and interventionists each emerge from disasters caused by the others' policies." (Santayana corollary: "Those who remember the past are condemned to make the opposite mistake.")
 - e. Historical abuse: elites select and misapply prominent historical analogies.
 - f. Elite ignorance of world affairs, 1900-1970. The USA as innocent abroad.
 - g. "Groupthink"--the suppression of internal dissent & policy evaluation.
 2. Public Opinion, Popular Culture, Ideology:
 - a. Policy overselling ---> policies develop lives of their own.
 - b. Public ignorance ---> policy blunders vs. Free marketplace of ideas ---> public enlightenment ---> wise policies. Which is true? Is the public ignorant or enlightened?
 - c. Academic irresponsibility, the cult of irrelevance prevalent in academe ---> public is ignorant. American academe as cause of public ignorance.
 - d. A manipulated or incompetent press.
 - i. U.S. government domination of the press ---> tough questions aren't asked, key facts omitted ---> public is ignorant. Official dominion of press coverage as cause of pub. ignorance.
 - ii. Foreign dictators' can intimidate the press ---> dictators decide

how the press covers them. See Eason Jordan, "The News We Kept To Ourselves" (assigned).

- iii. The U.S press has deteriorated in recent years with the rise of "infotainment" culture in mainstream media, propagandistic cable TV news (especially Fox News), and hate-spewing truth-challenged talk radio. A lousy press makes an ignorant public.
- e. US "liberal tradition" ---> US exports democracy (note clash with hypothesis B1a).
- f. Racism ---> US policies (from Hiroshima to Vietnam).
- 3. Lobbies, interests groups: foreign lobbies--China lobby, Greek lobby, Israel lobby--drive US foreign policy.
- 4. Technological theories: the camcorder and CNN drive the US foreign policy agenda, e.g. by raising popular human rights concern, e.g. in Somalia and Bosnia in 1990s.