

NATIONAL MISPERCEPTION AND THE CAUSES OF WAR

I. HOW COMMON IS MISPERCEPTION? HOW DANGEROUS? IS IT ALWAYS DANGEROUS WHEN IT APPEARS?

Sometimes misperceptions prevent war, e.g., if states are insecure but don't know it they may refrain from wars they might start if they knew the truth. However, it's often true that misperceptions on either side of the reality baseline raise the risk of war, e.g.:

- Exaggerating or underestimating others' hostility can cause war.
- False optimism or false pessimism can cause war.

II. THREE PARADIGMS OF NATIONAL MISPERCEPTION: PSYCHOLOGY, OPACITY, COZENOLOGY

III. HYPOTHESES FROM PSYCHOLOGY (from Jervis 1968, Jervis 1976, in course notes)

- A. "Attribution theory"--states tend to attribute their own aggressive behavior to their situation, while attributing others' aggressive behavior to their innate disposition. States therefore see their own nasty conduct as excused by necessity, while others' nasty conduct is unprovoked and unjustified.
- B. 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 disposition. (Jervis 1968, hypo #11.)
- C. Belief perseverance--states are slow to absorb new facts & realities that clash with their elite's existing beliefs. (Jervis 1968, hypos #1, #2.)
- D. States tend to exaggerate the shared character of information, hence to exaggerate the effectiveness of communication. Hence they are unaware of their own and others' misperceptions. (Jervis 1968, hypos #5, #6, #12.)
- E. States tend to infer too much from isolated or unique events, and to mis-apply domestic analogies to international politics.
- F. States tend to exaggerate the centralized/disciplined/coordinated character of others' behavior. (Jervis 1968, hypo #9.)

Question: can you think of competing non-psychological explanations for any of these misperceptions (e.g., misperceptions B or C?)

IV. HYPOTHESES FROM ORGANIZATION THEORY #1: GOVT. BUREAUCRACIES AND PRIVATE ORGANIZATIONS AS THE SOURCES OF ELITE AND PUBLIC MISPERCEPTION

A. "Militarism."

1. Two militarism theories:

- a. "Militaries live by war so they cause war." Joseph Schumpeter, Alexis de Tocqueville, and others. Historical facts give this version little support.
- b. "Militaries infuse civilian society with organizationally self-serving ideas that leads civilians to start wars. Militaries do this to preserve/protect their organizational interests." The professional military and

- associated agencies and industries as causes of misperception. See Jack Snyder, Myths of Empire.
- i. Germany before 1914 and Japan in the 1930s and 1940s seem to be clear examples.
  - ii. This theory clearly does **not** cover many, even most, militaries. Can it still be useful?
2. What organizations want: size and wealth, conservation of "essence," autonomy, minimal uncertainty.
  3. Why **some** militaries are willful and powerful actors--why they want to shape national perceptions, and why they can.
    - a. Professional militaries are willful because:
      - military officers have only one potential employer, hence they are especially concerned about its welfare.
      - militaries demand a lot from society--lots of money, plus draftees' time--and must constantly justify these demands.
      - militaries have natural political enemies, e.g., peace groups, pacific religious organizations, etc., who dislike the military's task, and must be countered.
    - b. Professional militaries have persuasive power because they possess:
      - a monopoly of information and expertise.
      - a monolithic internal character, a hierarchic internal structure, and high esprit de corps.
      - a vast workforce.
      - great prestige.
 See S.E. Finer, Man on Horseback, for more discussion of this.
  3. What perceptions do militaries **sometimes** purvey? The web of military misperceptions. (Debating this: Samuel Huntington and Richard Betts vs. Bernard Brodie, Martin Kitchen.)
    - a. "Others are hostile"--others' hostility is exaggerated. See for example the German and Russian militaries before 1914, the Soviet Cold War military, today's Chinese military.
    - b. "Bandwagoning is common, threats make others more compliant." Cf. Germany's Admiral Tirpitz's risk theory, Gen. LeMay, Ariel Sharon.
    - c. "Conquest is Easy." Cf. European armies, 1914; European air forces, 1930s; US Strategic Air Command & the Soviet Strategic Rocket Forces, 1950-1980s.
 

Two arguments are made:

      - a. "Conquest is easy."
      - b. "Offensive force postures and doctrines are better than defensive postures and doctrines."
    - d. "Striking first pays off." Cf. Russian army, 1914; Japanese military, 1941.
    - e. "Windows are common and large." Cf. German and Austrian armies, 1914; British Navy 1898; French & Prussian armies, 1867; U.S. Generals Power and Twining, 1950s.
    - f. "Empires are valuable, resources are cumulative." Cf. U.S. Admiral A.T. Mahan; Prussian army, 1871.
    - g. "War is cheap, healthy, beneficial." Cf. European militaries, 1914; Gen. Daniel Graham 1979.
    - h. Optimism in wartime--cf. U.S. military in Indochina;

- Japanese military in WWII--but not peacetime.
      - i. "Escalation is the answer" in wartime. Cf. German military 1917; US military in Korea, Vietnam.
    - 4. What states are prone to "militarism?" (Big states; isolated states; insecure states; states whose militaries form a separate society.)
    - 5. How could the militarism hypothesis be tested? What predictions does it make? Does history seem to confirm or infirm them?
  - B. Other domestic organizations: the foreign policy bureaucracy; foreign lobbies (the China Lobby, the Egestaens); businesses (United Fruit Company, Gov. Dinwiddie); etc.

V. HYPOTHESES FROM ORGANIZATION THEORY #2: STATES & SOCIETIES AS ORGANIZATIONS

- A. National Mythmaking: self-glorifying, self-whitewashing & other-maligning myths.
  - 1. Nationalism and nationalist mythmaking in education--"value infusion" and the "non-guilt complex"--Philip Selznick, Carleton Hayes. "Elites' desire to persuade publics to support the regime, pay taxes & join the army causes them to purvey myths that glorify state & national institutions."
    - a. Three types of myth:
      - i. Self-glorifying myths--"we're brilliant, ingenious, chosen by god. We invented all the world's better mousetraps!" The Soviet government claimed that Soviets invented the lightbulb, airplane, and railroad.
      - ii. Self-whitewashing myths--"we've started no wars, committed no crimes!" E.g., Germans in 1920s ("we didn't start WWI--Britain did!"); Turkish denial of Turkish murder of Armenians; Soviet denial of responsibility for Cuban Missile Crisis (they called it "The Caribbean Crisis"); Croatian denial of Croat mass murders during WWII; Arab & Israeli mutual myths of innocence.
      - iii. Other-maligning myths--"our neighbors are culturally inferior/aggressive/dangerous." Israelis and Arabs both blame the other for a conflict caused by the West.
    - b. Why are myths purveyed? They make citizens contribute more to the nation--pay taxes, join the army, etc. They also bolster the political power of illegitimate elites.
    - c. A short history of mythmaking. Chauvinist mythmaking peaked in Europe during 1870-1945; it then diminished. Why?
  - 2. "Orwellian" myths, "social imperial" myths, & "diversionary war" myths--"our neighbors are out to get us, so you better back the government!"
  - 3. Can nationalist myths be cured? If so, how? (Start "Amnesia International"?)
- B. "Non-self-evaluation" by states and societies: "the wish of the powerful to stifle criticism leads societies to punish those who evaluate dominant policies and ideas; hence evaluation is scarce and inferior." ("National Auto-lobotomization"? :) Relevant works: Irving Janis, Groupthink; Aaron Wildavsky, "The Self-Evaluating

Organization."

1. Non-evaluation in government bureaucracy
  - a. Punishment of "whistle blowers"--Robert Fitzgerald and the C5A, Billy Mitchell, the U.S. "China hands" were fired in the U.S. in the late 1940s and early 1950s for speaking truths about China's Chiang Kai Shek regime, Saddam Hussein murdered anyone who brought him bad news, etc.
  - b. Motives for expunging evaluators; the clash between requirements of sound policy formulation and sound policy implementation. Dissenters make policy implementation difficult, so they are purged in advance--which injures policy formulation.
2. Non-evaluation in the press and academe. See, e.g., Robert Lynd, Knowledge for What? German scholars were "fleet professors" before 1914; honest historians (Hermann Kantorowicz and Eckert Kehr) were hounded out of Germany after 1918; Fritz Fischer was attacked in 1960s for truth-telling about World War I;

Results: consider the many follies and folly-makers lionized by their peoples: Napoleon, Ludendorff, the Schlieffen plan (not even assessed until 1956).

- C. "Non-strategy": "States tend to leave national grand strategy & basic foreign policy vague, or fail to frame it at all." Results:
  - Less learning. E.g., U.S. policy in Asia didn't learn & adjust following the Sino-Soviet split in the 1960s.
  - Less storing of knowledge. E.g., by 1965 the U.S. forgot what it learned about Vietnam in 1954.
  - Explaining is more difficult. E.g., Britain failed to explain its policy to Germany before 1939, hence Hitler miscalculated.

VI. THE "SPIRAL MODEL" VERSUS "DETERRENCE" (OR THE "DETERRENCE MODEL," OR THE "MUNICH MODEL"): CHOOSING BETWEEN HARD-LINE POLICIES AND APPEASEMENT, AND THE DANGERS THAT FOLLOW FROM WRONG CHOICES

- A. Defining the spiral model and the deterrence model. What are they?
- B. Explaining spirals:
  1. Can psychological dynamics explain spirals? (See IIIA, IIIB above).
  2. Can nationalist mythmaking explain spirals?
- C. What conditions determine whether carrots or sticks work better?
  1. Is the other an aggressor state or a status quo power? (And: does it see itself as the aggressor or not?)
  2. Are the other's claims legitimate or illegitimate? (And: does it see its claims as legitimate or not?)
  3. Is the other weak or strong?
  4. Will the concessions demanded by the other strengthen its ability to commit further aggression?