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THEORIES OF INTERNATIONAL POLITICS & THEORIES OF US FOREIGN POLICY

- I. 14 GENERAL THEORIES/FAMILIES OF THEORIES RELEVANT TO US FOREIGN POLICY
 - A. Offense-defense ("security dilemma") 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 conflict 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."
 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."
 - B. Theories of Alliances (Kenneth Waltz, Stephen Walt).
 1. "Balance of Threat" (vs. "bandwagoning"): "states align against the most threatening power," with threat a function of strength, aggressiveness, and proximity (vs. "states accommodate to threats").
 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. Collective goods: the "tragedy of the commons" & the "free rider" problem (Garret Hardin, Mancur Olson). "Collective goods are under - provided; collective bads are over-provided."
 - D. Nationalism (Carleton Hayes, Louis Snyder): "Nationalism precludes imperialism; and nationalism is omnipresent and omnipotent; hence the age of empires is over."
 - 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."

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. Security dilemma/geopolitics: the waxing and waning of security threats and military opportunities explain past American conduct.
- B. Alliance theories: American alliance-making has reflected (1) threat-balancing and/or (2) making common cause with domestically similar powers.
- C. 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."
- D. Misperceived structure: belief in false facts and theories have fuelled American misperceptions of its environment.
 1. Exaggerated security dilemma: the US exaggerated its insecurity and responded to false threats.
 2. Alliance theories: the US exaggerated bandwagoning tendencies and the tendency of birds of a feather to fly together; both misperceptions fuelled false fears.

3. Nationalism: the US overlooked its omnipresence and omnipotence.
 4. Spiral vs. deterrence: the US misapplied the prescriptions of each model to situations governed by the other.
 5. Domino theory, Credibility theory: the US lent these theories too much credence.
- E. Marxist theories: can they explain US behavior in 1898? In the Cold War?
- F. 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.
- G. Elite Culture: the role of:
1. 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 H5.)
 2. The national security establishment & the role of military worldviews.
 3. Men & their testosterone ---> macho foreign policy.
 4. 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.")
 5. Historical abuse: elites select and misapply prominent historical analogies.
 6. Elite ignorance of world affairs, 1900-1970. The USA as innocent abroad.
 7. "Groupthink"--the suppression of internal dissent & policy evaluation.
- H. Public Opinion, Popular Culture, Ideology:
1. Policy overselling ---> policies develop lives of their own.
 2. Public ignorance ---> policy blunders vs. Free marketplace of ideas ---> public enlightenment ---> wise policies. Which is true? Is the public ignorant or enlightened?
 3. Academic irresponsibility, the cult of irrelevance prevalent in academe ---> public is ignorant. American academe as cause of public ignorance.
 4. A manipulated press ---> tough questions aren't asked, key facts omitted ---> public is ignorant. Govt. dominion of press coverage as cause of pub. ignorance.
 5. US "liberal tradition" ---> US exports democracy (note clash with hypothesis G1.)
 6. Racism ---> US policies (from Hiroshima to Vietnam.)
- I. Lobbies, interests groups: foreign lobbies drive US foreign policy.
- J. Psychological theories: elites suffer Jervis' cognitive syndromes.
- K. 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 today.