

Jervis, R. (1976). Perception and Misperception in International Politics. Princeton, Princeton University Press.

I. Chapter 1: Perception and the Level of Analysis Problem

Psychological milieu= the world as actors see it

Operational milieu= the world in which the policy will be carried out

If analysis of decision-making is important in international relations, thus requiring exploration of the intervening variables between the psychological and operational milieus (statesmen's goals, calculations and perceptions), then it has to be (empirically) the case that:

- (1) important differences in policy preferences are traceable to differences in decision makers perception of their environments
- (2) there are differences between reality and shared or common perceptions

4 levels of analysis:

- (1) decision-making
- (2) bureaucracy
- (3) nature of the state and the workings of domestic politics
- (4) international environment

No need to consider decision-making if all leaders would make the same decision in the same objective situation, or if state behavior is determined by bureaucratic routines and interests. Three non-decision-making levels say that if we know enough about the actor's objective situation we can predict the decision.

Best argument for homogeneity of behavior put forth by Wolfers on decision-making under distress: if the house is burning down and people run for the exits do we really need to study their decision to run for the exits? Jervis responds: not so simple in international relations. We usually don't even agree that the house is burning down (Hitler and WWII for example) and then there may be multiple exits (extent of involvement on European front, unconditional surrender requirement, etc.). Thus even in the extreme case the objective situation does not determine all aspects of the state's response. Jervis also tackles the other levels of analysis arguing that they are insufficient to explain variation in decisions (domestic politics felled by internal elite disagreement over correct policy and bureaucracy felled by fact that where you sit does not seem to determine where you stand on the non-routine, major policy decisions).

Decision-making is thus important to consider since we cannot necessarily predict an actor's behavior from the objective situation. But even if every actor would act the same in a particular situation, it is still important to study decision-making if their choice was self-defeating, irrational, or puzzling (which it often is).

Two-Step Model of Important Decision-Making: (step 1) perceptions, beliefs, images of other actors; (step 2) relationship between information available to the actor and step 1 variables

II. Chapter 3: Deterrence, the Spiral Model, and Intentions of the Adversary

Deterrence Theory:

Central Argument according to Jervis: if aggressor believes that status quo powers are weak in capability or resolve great dangers arise. Thus, aggressor will test others, usually starting with small and unimportant matters. Status quo powers must check aggressor or face further aggression and greater difficulty in the future of convincing aggressor of their resolve.

The Spiral Model:

World anarchic without a global sovereign. Thus each state can only protect itself with its own strength. Moreover, even if others have no aggressive designs now, there is nothing to guarantee that they won't have them in the future. So states must arm themselves for protection. Yet, most means of self-protection simultaneously menace others. By procuring modes of defense, then, one creates insecurity in others and causes them to build up arms thus undermining one's own security. Tragedy! But it gets worse—states tend to see others' behavior as aggressive and their own as defensive. They then think that only aggressors would take issue with their own efforts at self-protection (since they obviously harbor no ill intentions) and thus infer objections to their own armament (or counter-armament) as evidence of others' aggressive intentions (who else would object to defensive armament?). Thus the basic security dilemma gets overlaid by reinforcing misunderstandings wherein each believes the other not only to be a potential menace, but an active enemy: "The inability to recognize that one's own actions could be seen as menacing and the concomitant belief that the other's hostility can only be explained by its aggressiveness help explain how conflicts can easily expand beyond that which an analysis of the objective situation would indicate is necessary (75)."

Implications:

Spiral and deterrence theories contradict each other. "Policies that flow from deterrence theory (e.g. development of potent and flexible armed forces; a willingness to fight for issues of low intrinsic value; avoidance of any appearance of weakness) are just those that, according to the spiral model, are most apt to heighten tensions and create illusory incompatibility. And the behavior advocated by the spiral theorists (attempts to reassure the other side of one's nonaggressiveness, the avoidance of provocations, the undertaking of unilateral initiatives) would, according to deterrence theory, be likely to lead an aggressor to doubt the state's willingness to resist (84)."

What is to be done?

Jervis provides evidence for and against each model. Thus the decision-maker must decide in his particular context which model applies best and here the intentions of the adversary are critical. Yet Jervis also critiques theorists of both models for underestimating how hard it is to cast an accurate image of one's intentions to other states. So what are the final recommendations? **Policy-makers should develop policies that have high payoffs if their assumptions about the adversary are correct and yet still have tolerable costs if their assumptions are wrong since there is really no way to verify that one's perceptions are correct and thus to determine which model (deterrence or spiral) to operate under.**

Jervis – Perceptions and Misperceptions in International Politics Chapters 4 and 6

1. Chapter 4 – Cognitive Consistency and the Interaction between Theory and Data

In this Chapter, Jervis discusses two kinds of cognitive consistency: rational and irrational. He also discusses different sources of cognitive biases. Cognitive consistency itself generally refers to how people view the world and themselves; they like to view their world, the players in it, and their own personal actions as consistent, and biases influence these perceptions of consistency.

The basic story (very simplified): subliminal, preexisting context-dependent or cognitive biases **SHAPE** a decision-maker's perspective on any issue which **LIMITS** the options the decision-maker or policy-maker believes are available and also **PUSHES** decision-makers towards a specific perspective and assessed **OUTCOME** of different options. The more **AMBIGUOUS** a situation is, the more likely **COGNITIVE BIASES AND CONSISTENCY** will impact a decision-maker's **PERSPECTIVE, OPTIONS, AND ASSESSMENT OF THE OUTCOME**.

Rational Consistency: People interpret evidence in a manner that is rational; that is, they make inferences about the evidence that aren't really biased. For example, people expect that people with whom they are friends will like each other, and people supportive of their adversaries will not like their friends.

Irrational Consistency: Subconscious biases impact how people view the world and their decisions; were they aware of these subconscious biases, people would reject them. For example, a person's propensity towards people he views as friendly causes him to attribute values and motivations to that person aligned with "friendly" characteristics, when this may, in fact, not be the case.

Examples of "Irrational Consistency"

- **Cognitive-Affective Consistency:** Favorable characteristics are attributed to liked nations, and unfavorable characteristics are attributed to disliked nations.
- **Source-Message Interaction:** This deals with source credibility. Source reliability and past performance are inherently linked; a source that has been accurate in the past is considered accurate in the present, and sources that are wrong on one issue can be judged more severely on others (whether or not they are incorrect on those other issues).
- **Wishful Thinking (also known as "Avoidance of Value Trade-offs").** When people favor a policy, they believe that it is supported by many logically independent reasons (WMD in Iraq as a good example). Results in policy belief overkill. There is also an *inverse relationship* between the importance of a goal and the expected cost of reaching it. As a result, there are circumstances in which a decision-maker fails to recognize the trade-offs between advancing their own personal interests and harming those of others; as such, he underestimates opposition and views resistance as "unprovoked hostility that indicates aggressive intentions."

- **Assimilation of Information Into Pre-Existing Beliefs / Biases.** 1) People are predisposed to see what they expect to see. 2) People fail to notice or otherwise dismiss information that is contrary to what they expect to see. 3) As such, evidence to the contrary is ignored, misremembered, or twisted to preserve old ideas. Sources of these pre-existing beliefs include historical analogies, particularly those most recent in memory or particularly poignant experiences,
- **Excessive and Premature Cognitive Closure.** Once there exists a prevailing view or opinion, contrary information is deliberately suppressed. If options are on the table, some options that are not in-line with the prevailing view will be ignored altogether – not even considered in the decision-making process. On the other hand...if someone forms a hypothesis about a situation prematurely, any small tidbit of information that supports that hypothesis will become accepted as fact, and contrary evidence from that point will be ignored.

Chapter 6: How Decision-Makers Learn from History

This is a smaller-scale look at one specific source of cognitive biases – historical analogies—and how it frames the options decision-makers believe are available. Basically, decision-makers seek familiar frameworks to understand new and challenging situations. Historical analogies, particularly those with related policy decisions or crises are used by decision-makers to make sense out of new and challenging situations (whether or not there is actual linkage between the two becomes irrelevant). As a result, decision-makers may be subconsciously forcing the proverbial square peg into a round hole and, as such, tend to lean towards certain policy options (those used previously typically) and away from others. This particular cognitive bias prevents decision-makers from seeing the whole picture when analyzing a policy problem and may cause them to 1) implement a sub-optimal policy because the policy was successful previously and / or 2) ignore the optimal policy because that policy failed or would have failed in a historical situation.

Jervis's Story: events → lessons learned → useful behavior: What a person learns at time t is influenced, sometimes decisively, by his outlook and policy options exercised in time $t-1$. These assessments vary from person to person based on individual experiences.

Other tenets:

- People pay more attention to *what* happened than in assessing *why* things happened as they did. Rather than spending time analyzing each situation, the search for causes becomes quick and oversimplified.
- People often mistake things that are highly specific to the new situation for more general characteristics because they assume that the most salient aspects of the results were caused by the most salient aspects of the preceding situation.
- In evaluating history, successful outcomes in the past are not analyzed in terms of their costs in the present. Failed policies, on the other hand, are not analyzed in terms of their

benefits in the present. This is called *inappropriate learning*. As a result, policies that were successful in the past tend to be applied to current situations, even though they may not work and exact substantial costs.

- People learn most from
 - 1) **Events they experienced firsthand.** In this case, people who experienced events first hand are insensitive not only to changes in circumstances and actors over time but also to variables that change from one situation to another. In addition, playing a large role in one situation will lead the person to see other cases as similar.
 - 2) **Events that influenced their Careers.** Self-explanatory.
 - 3) **Events that had significant consequences for the nation.** A good example of this is the strategy of appeasement used in WWII; because that strategy had very negative consequences during its time, actors post-WWII were reluctant to use that strategy against the Soviets or related adversaries. A nation's "last war" is of particular note – the last war in a nation's history tends to have a magnified impact on decision-makers in the present. Revolutions are another example of this. The more recent an event is, the more likely it is to have an impact on decision-making in the present.
 - 4) **Personal or state-to-state experience with another actor.** An actor's contact with another on an important issue can establish so firm an image of him that it will be very difficult to dislodge.