

Foreign Policy Analysis: perception, cognition & personality

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Aims & Learning Objectives

- Identify the key concepts of perception, cognition and personality and their influence on FP
- Describe the process of FP decision making in group settings
- Describe and discuss the impact that the psychological approach has on rational accounts of FP

The Role of Perception

Misperception & Images

- Jervis says FP actors make decisions on the basis of their perceptions rather than objective reality (operational environment)
- Boulding says FP actors employ 'images' (stereotypes, biases) to make decisions



The Role of Perception

- Builds on 'operational/psychological' environment insight
- Focuses on individual decision maker
- Introduces notion of perception & distortions to 'definition of the situation'
- Product of FP decision makers unconscious, media bias & societal prejudices
- Inherently dangerous and destabilising to int'l system

The Role of Cognition

- Cognition, the process by which humans select & process information from world around them, introduces further distortions
- Volume of information too much for one individual to process
- Incomplete (and possibly inaccurate) information
- Time-limits/pressures

A Morning in the Life of President Obama

MSNBC 3 June 2009

- 6:30 am see kids off to school
- 7-8 read nat'l security briefings & '4 or 5 newspapers'
- 8-8:30 answers 10 letters from US citizens
- 8:30-11 senior staff meetings (topics for 3/6/09)
 - Nat'l security briefing; Nat'l Economic Council for update on bail out of auto industry; meeting w/ congressional liaison officer on status of legislation health, budget, and WH initiative banning tobacco ads for kids
- 11-11:30 public function to discuss network security
- 11:30-12 public function to discuss hurricane preparedness across town
- 12-12:30 lunch at hamburger stand & return to WH
- 13-13:30 interview with media

The Role of Cognition

- FP decision makers seek ‘cognitive consistency’ and, in filtering out contrary data, experience ‘cognitive dissonance’ between their images and reality
- ‘Satisficing’ (Simon) and ‘muddling through’ (Lindblom)
- Sub-optimal decision making is the outcome

The Role of Cognition

- FP decision makers have a 'cognitive map' that combines perception, biases, understanding of 'historical lessons' which they apply to task of decision making (Axelrod)
- 'Operational code' set of prior rules & perceptions used to assess situations & make decisions (George)

The Role of Personality

- Individual leaders' personalities differ in response to FP challenges & choices
- Leaders are emotional beings who seek to resolve internal decision making conflicts (Janis & Mann)
- Role of emotions in crises, stress, inability to abstract or tolerate ambiguity
- 'Tunnel vision', a fixation on single solutions

The Role of Personality

- Psychological profiling of leaders, analysing the origins of their behaviour as clues to their actions, becomes a necessity
- 'Operational code'/cognitive map applicable to study of leaders
- Role of history



Bundesarchiv, Bild 183-1906-1126-307
Foto: o. Ang. 126. November



The Role of the Group

- FP decision making environment is not solely individual but takes place in a group context
- Group decision making overcomes some cognitive concerns (volume of information, tunnel vision)
- However, Janis's studies show problem of 'Group think' – tendency of individuals to seek consensus when operating in a group even at the expense of own particular view
- Optimal solution diluted to maintain group consensus

The Role of the Group

- Overcoming 'Group Think'
 - Review decisions
 - Change leaders of working groups
 - 'Devil's Advocate'
- Beyond Groupthink (t Hart et al)
 - Groups can act as think tank (info/problem solver), command centre (central policy coordinator), arena (bureau., cabinet, party politics), sorter (organising work/outcomes), smokescreen (concealing informal groups), ideologue (representing org. or community values)

The Role of the Group

- Patterns of group decision making determined by nature of group. These are (Stern/Sundelius)
 - Conformity
 - Conflictual
 - Hybrids

Critique of Psychological Approach

- Strong critique of individual & group decision making but overemphasises 'psychological' environment at expense of 'operational environment'
- Other levels of analysis important to decision making than individual & group, e.g., bureaucracy, institutions, external
- Social construction of 'images' & perceptions means focus on individual misguided

Critique of Psychological Approach

- Cognitive consistency versus belief system stability
 - Schema theory – cognitive structures with the minds of individuals are complex and beliefs less coherent than 'cognitive consistency' idea suggests (Rosati)
 - While key beliefs may hold, change may result due to learning, role change, traumatic events
 - FW de Klerk and ending apartheid in South Africa

Critique of Psychological Approach

- 'Role' more important than personality in decision making ('office makes the man')
- Difficult to assess the actual impact of personal history on a contemporary decision

Conclusion

Foreign Policy Analysis:

Role of Culture in Diplomacy

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The Role of Culture in Diplomacy

Problems of negotiation are cross-cultural

- Cultural meanings are subjective meanings shared by members of cultural group: confusion therefore liable between these groups
- How to bridge cultural gaps in handling sensitive foreign policy issues?

Ting-Toomey 'Face Negotiation Theory'

- Communication in all cultures is based on maintaining and negotiating face.
- Differences in individualistic vs. collectivistic and small vs. large power distance cultures profoundly shape face management.
- People from large power distance cultures accept unequal power distributions, are reliant on established hierarchy, and understand that rewards and sanctions are based on social position (hierarchical)
- People from small power distance cultures value equal power distributions, symmetric relations, and rewards and sanctions based on performance (equality).
- Behavior is also influenced by cultural variances, individual, relational, and situational factors.
- Competence in intercultural communication is a culmination of knowledge and mindfulness.

The Role of Culture in Diplomacy

High context cultures: communicates allusively rather than directly, hierarchical

- as important as explicit content of message is the context in which it occurs, surrounding non-verbal cues and hinted at nuances of meaning.
- language is social instrument and used carefully
- most powerful sanction is disapproval 'loss of face'

The Role of Culture in Diplomacy

Low context cultures: little implicit meaning is given to context of articulation, content is explicit

- indirection is disliked, values 'straight talk'/'get to the point'
- distinction between social context and work/professional context
- non-verbal meaningless
- most powerful sanction is guilt

The Role of Culture in Diplomacy

Culture – real differences or ‘red herring’?

- 18th/19th century European elites managed through language, social background
 - Same could be said of relative close cultural convergence in Arab world, Sinosphere etc
 - Notably did not halt warfare, trade disputes

Conclusion