

## **IR Field Seminar Summary**

### **Kosuke Imai**

#### **Jonathan Mercer. Reputation and International Politics. Chapters 1&2.**

##### Definition

A reputation is a judgment of someone's character or disposition that is then used to predict or explain future behavior. Note that a reputation is dispositional and not situational.

##### Reputation and Rational Deterrence Theory

The central problem in deterrence theory is making threats and promises credible. Credibility rests on resolve, capability and interests. Mercer argues that capability and interests are situational attributions, and therefore he focuses only on resolve, as a way to define a reputation.

##### Three false assumptions of Rational Deterrence Theory

- (1) observed behavior is self-evident (everyone must know how the target behaved and must draw the same inference from that behavior, inferring weakness from weak behavior and strength from strong behavior).
- (2) reputation is a property concept and not a relational concept (since how to interpret a certain behavior is common knowledge, one can strategically manipulate the perceptions of others and therefore reputation).
- (3) commitments are interdependent (it is assumed that past behavior is always used to predict future behavior and that future situations are similar to previous ones).

-Mercer contends that these assumptions neglect the fact that reputation is a relational concept. People interpret a certain observation in many different ways. As for the first two assumptions, you cannot possibly assume that the others interpret a certain behavior in the same way you think they will. Therefore, one cannot manipulate or control a reputation. As for the third assumption, international politics rarely resembles an iterated game because the same situation is not going to be repeated and because the actor's type is not perfectly correlated across games. Also, whether people use the past to predict the future behavior should be a question to be examined not an assumption.

##### Reputation and Social Psychology

-Drawing on social psychology theories, Mercer argues that decision-makers tend to use situational attributions for desirable behavior, whereas they tend to use character-based attributions for undesirable behaviors.

-The desirability of a state's actions rather than expectations plays an important role in determining how a country's behavior will shape its reputation. There is a potential endogeneity problem in theories which say expectations shape reputation.

-Therefore, we have the following hypotheses: situational explanations will be used to describe desirable behaviors (ally stands firm and adversary backs down), dispositional explanations will be used to describe undesirable behaviors (ally backs down and adversary stands firm). See table 3.

-Finally, four propositions are noted: allies rarely gain reputations for resolve whereas adversaries rarely gain reputations for irresolution.