

Jonathan Mercer, *Reputation and International Politics* (Cornell, 1996), pp. 14-73

Two strands of deterrence theory: the traditional literature on deterrence theory, and a more recent theory using an explicit rational-choice approach.

The centrality of reputation to deterrence theory

Deterrence is a theory of influence, causing others to behave according to what we think they should behave by threats or promise. The central problem is making such threats or promises credible. A threat may be regarded as incredible because the state is not considered to have enough power or interest for its enforcement, or because the observers may think that the state lack “resolve” to make good on its threat. “Resolve” is the extent to which a state will risk war to uphold its threats or to keep its promises.

--Capability: situational attribution

Resolve: character, or disposition— The same difference between resolve and interest.

If resolve is dependent on capability and interest, maintaining capability and establishing interest are required. Also, reputation for resolve cannot then form because resolve would vary from situation to situation following capability and interest. Situationally induced behavior cannot generate a reputation.

Deterrence means preventing certain events from happening; interdependent commitments are ideal for deterrence theory because they allow for predicting future according to the present.

The strength of the influence of concern about reputation on US decisionmaking

--one explanation is that this is due to the selfdoubt not a belief in interdependence as either a fact or a tool.

But Mercer believes while some states may be concerned about their reputation more than others, all states worry about their reputation for resolve to some degree.

The dearth of research on deterrence theory interdependence assumption is due to:

- It may seem that since reputation matters in domestic politics it should matter in international politics as well.
- Since deterrence theory developed deductively, its assumptions were posited rather than tested.
- The absence of psychological theories made it more difficult to test reputation.

Despite positing a psychological relationship, deterrence theory remains firmly embedded in realist assumptions emphasizing on power and rational actors.

Reputation is not a “property” concept, but a “relational” one.

Some pairs of property and relational concepts: foreign policy and international politics, lever and leverage, policy and power, intention and capabilities. “Credibility” is a relational concept. Reputation is a “relational concept as well and thus self-perception of one’s capabilities is irrelevant. Although reputation cannot be indeed a property concept –because it would require a credit institution to establish it—it is sometimes erroneously regarded as a property concept.

Assumptions of existing formal work on reputation:

Assumption i: Behavior is self-evident: Existing models assume that an actor knows its type – honest or dishonest, resolute or irresolute, strong or weak – but others do not.

Thus, since this information is incomplete, in some circumstances an irresolute actor can pretend resolute and fool observers to think of it of a reputation of being resolute and act as deterrent.

Assumption ii: Reputation is a property concept. Two disadvantages for that:

-we would tend to think that by changing (manipulating) our behavior we could create the desired reputation. But this is true only if we assume that perceptions of reputation are formed rationally and thus predictable.

-it is a bad empirical fit because we know that people often explain the same behavior differently, we also know that reputation cannot be a property concept. There is not a simple correlation between behavior and reputation. Shifting attention from property to relational concept shifts emphasis from how a target behaves to how observers interpret that behavior and thus makes it possible for observers to hold up opposite views of another's reputation for resolve.

Assumption iii: Commitments are interdependent. Three reasons that game theories who apply their model of reputation to international politics must change the interdependence assumption:

-international politics rarely resembles an iterated game

-there are two different types of reputation: general (enduring character trait that appears in different types of situations –a disposition with cross-situational validity) and specific (character applying only to specific situations or specific regions)

-indeterminate outcomes

A reputation for resolve forms if two conditions are met:

-the observer explains the behavior of the function of the target as the function of its character (or disposition)

-the observer must use this explanation to predict the target's future behavior

A dispositional behavior is different from reputation; a reputation forms only if a dispositional attribute is used to explain or predict future behavior.