

Gov. 2710 Notes, Wk. 5
Snyder, Chapters 1-2

Dep. V: Snyder wants to explain counterproductive aggressive behavior

Prospective Theories: Realist, Cognitive, Coalition Politics

Measuring Indep. Vs: 1. Report findings of economic historians regarding cartelization
2. Process trace to see whether political system is cartelized

Case Selection: Main contenders for international power in the industrial era

Kinds of Tests: 1. tests of covariation across countries
2. covariation over time within a country
3. tests of covariation across individuals and groups within cases

Ch.1 – The Myth of Security through Expansion

Snyder argues that imperial great powers (esp. 20th century Germany and Japan) have tended to overexpand because of the myth that expansion leads to security (expansion is not just offensive but defensive).

Rationales (part of the myth) for expansion include:

1. Domino Theory: Cumulative Gains and Losses: Conquest, especially in underdeveloped but resource-rich peripheries, increases power and also deprives other great powers of obtaining these resources (cumulative gains lead to security). Losses in the periphery could collapse the imperial core (dominoes or cumulative losses).
2. Offensive (incl. First Strike) Advantage: so preventive aggression is the best defense.
3. Paper Tigers and Bandwagons: Faith in Threats. Threats make other states compliant, and they will bandwagon with you rather than ally against you.
 - vs. – b.of p. logic: an overwhelming counter-coalition will form (self-encirclement)
 - rising costs of expansion: costs outstrip benefits at hinterland (overextension)

Ch. 2 – (Types of) Explanations for Overexpansion

1. Realist: ‘Aggressive defense’ is sometimes a valid strategy, not necessarily a myth
Problems: - Logical: Realist’s own b. of p. logic argues against aggressive defense
- Empirical: they accept decision-makers’ own superficial justifications for their choices, neglecting the presence of plausible alternatives at the time
Two more rationalist accounts include: (A) Overexpansion occurs due to cost-benefit miscalculations regarding aggressive defense strategies [Snyder: why do they always err toward overexpansion?] (B) Policy-makers rationally pursue perverse (non-security) preferences, acknowledging their security risks [Snyder: they rarely acknowledged these risks, and in fact argues that they were protecting security].

2. Cognitive: Myths of empire are purely intellectual biases (though they may be held by an entire nation and generation) – strategic ideas are beliefs derived from formative experience (ie. Munich for the US), which come to play as hardened axioms persisting even in the face of disconfirming evidence. [Snyder: such strong lessons are rarer than

myths of empire. Usually, statesmen present convenient historical analogies to justify policies chosen for other reasons.]

3.** Domestic Political Explanations: Coalition Logrolling and Coalition Ideology
Snyder argues that “myths of empire (or security through expansion) arise as rationalizations for the interests of groups that derive parochial benefits from expansion, from military preparations associated with expansion, or from the domestic political climate brought about by intense international competitions.” (Groups act rationally in their own self-interest to lead to irrational state strategies.)

The Mechanism:

- (A) Imperial groups generally enjoy political advantages, usually through
- a. Easy organization for collective action: The benefits of empire are more concentrated than their costs. Those few likely to benefit – militaries interested in growth, wealth, prestige, autonomy (if not war per se), as well some industrial groups – are more likely to overcome collective action than diffuse interests against expansion.
 - b. Monopolies on information: (i.) These groups exploit their reputation for expert knowledge to justify self-serving policies. (ii.) They have organizational and material resources for those politicians, journalists, foundations, etc. who support them.
 - c. Ties to the state: Parochial interest groups are often heavily represented in the highest organs holding legitimate state power. Also, the state itself arguably has an interest in war and empire, as it justifies state expansion.

NB. The extent of these advantages is determined by the type of political system. Ideal types include: (i) Democracies: Power is diffused and those opposed to expansion can check logrolling and mythmaking by state officials information monopolies are likely to be broken. (ii) Unitary systems: Power is concentrated in the hands of a dictator/oligarchy with broad economic and bureaucratic interest and concern. Such systems are likely to keep the overall national interest in mind, and so keep overexpansion in check.

(B) Of particular interest to Snyder are ‘Cartelized’ political systems, which enjoy these advantages to the largest extent. Power assets (material, organizational, informational) are held primarily by narrowly interested parochial groups, which form ruling coalitions by ‘logrolling’ their programs. Two forms of logrolled overexpansion include:.

- a. Multiple expansion: Pursuing several distinct imperial projects simultaneously. Individually each may carry relatively little risk, but when combined they produce overwhelming strategic overcommitment and self-encirclement.
- b. Offensive détente: offense on one or several fronts, and détente (and free trade) on another. This tricky strategy might satisfy everyone but is likely to fall apart.

NB. Often logrolled policies are disastrous even for the logrollers. Why not defect?

- a. collective action problems within the coalition: each logroller has stronger interest to pursue its parochial interest in expansion than collective (and LR) interest in restraint.
- b. pressure from above and below: top leaders in cartelized systems tend to be coalition managers whose position depends on maintaining the logroll. Mass publics are not informed citizens, but are mobilized through ideological appeals.

- c. Blowback: There is always the possibility of self-delusion from propaganda; the 'myth of empire' can over time become genuine belief rather than just tactical justification – in particular, successor elite generations may be socialized into the ideology. (Even if they are not, they may be politically trapped into carrying out its precepts.) The risk of blowback is especially high in cartelized systems, where propaganda is presented as 'objective,' and where (ideologically driven) mass backing is important for political position.
- d. Immobile interests and short time horizons. Cartels are usually tied into narrow economic sectors/bureaucratic skills that may become obsolete. Especially if a parochial group's power is in decline, it is more likely to act recklessly in a last-ditch attempt to retain its power (even risking LR societal and personal costs).

(C) The type of political system is partially explained by the timing and process of industrialization.

- a. Timing of industrialization: (i) Early industrialization, such as that of the US or Britain, tends to result in diffuse elite interests and mass democracy. (ii) Late industrialization, such as that of Germany or Japan, is associated with immobile, concentrated elite interests and cartelized politics. (iii) 'Late, late industrialization,' such as with the USSR, is associated with hypercentralized political and economic system, which produces a relatively unified elite with relatively encompassing interests.
- b. The process of industrialization itself (regardless of timing) tends to produce some cartelization: society at one time can include many groups that seem part of seemingly disparate eras (ie. Aristocracy, bourgeois, technocrats, working class). There is a sociopolitical stalemate when new groups have grown in strength but old groups are still present – in this case, ruling coalitions can sometimes only be formed by logrolling deeply opposed interests. This will exacerbate cartelized politics.