

Jack Snyder and the *Myths of Empire*: a Final Wrap-up

I **Strategic Policy and International Overexpansion**

- A. All of the industrial states Snyder considers used a recurring set of justifications for security through expansion: namely, the Domino Theory, Paper Tiger image of the enemy (where an enemy is viewed as weak now but potentially dangerous), bandwagon theories of alliance formation, the belief in offensive advantages, and El Dorado images about the benefits of conquest.
- B. The very basis of these arguments suggests that they were part of wider strategic ideology, rather than credible beliefs: they were often self-contradictory.
- C. Changes in a State's international position often correlated with its tendency to overexpand:
 - Germany and Japan turned toward expansionism in the midst of world depression
 - America and the Soviet Union used the "Cold War Consensus" to invoke fears of the domino effect with relation to the revolutionary movements in Asia, etc.
 - The larger the state's security dilemma, the more likely it was to adopt a strategy of expansion. The more vulnerable it was economically, the greater was its urge to run risks to achieve autarky. The more fluid the power situation it faced, the more it acted on the assumption of falling dominoes and military first-strike advantages.

II **Explanations**

- A. Cognitive: Snyder tests whether "strategic ideas are rooted in intellectually formative lessons." He finds little support for this explanation. Although he does not discount their explanatory power in a limited degree, he argues that such explanations should be approached critically.
- B. Domestic Coalition Politics:
 - this theory passes both cross-sectional and time series tests.
 - cartelized political systems like Germany and Japan were the most overexpansionist; democracies and unitary oligarchies were less likely to overexpand (except during times of increased cartelization due to security threats from abroad and reduced public information domestically about the nature of these threats; *exempli gratia*, America justified overexpansion while the logrolled Cold War elite consensus persisted).
 - we cannot view nations as strictly cartelized, unitary, or democratic; most political systems are hybrids. For example:
 1. when cartels are weak but unitary and democratic forces are strong, overexpansion should be minimal
 2. when strong cartels are COMBINED with strong unitary forces, overexpansion may occur, but it should be tempered by the restraining effect of the unitary elements (which can control logrolling).

3. when strong cartels combine with strong democratic pressures, the result is less clear
4. the outcome depends on the balance of power between cartelized and democratic forces.

--simple logrolling does not explain most cases without a resort to ideology.

--the character of the industrialization process was the single most important factor determining cartelization in the majority of cases BUT international influences and domestic social change DID affect the degree to which cartelization was successful (*exempli gratia*, greater public information in America and defeats in Vietnam led to the demise of the elite Cold War consensus).

III **So, What Now? Where should theory take us?**

A. The Dimensions

--a Realist balance of power theory, since balancing against aggressors is dominant.

--a rejection, however, of the Realist assertion that international competitive pressures necessarily override pressures from domestic interests and coalitions.

--a major role for ideology when uncertainty and asymmetry of information are present.

--the need for a theory of I.R. based on competition and alliances among conflict groups, where national states play a vital, but not exclusive, role.

--the State must be seen as a pivot between domestic interest groups and international exigencies and competition.

B. The Nature of the State:

--can it be considered a Realist paradigm of hierarchical organization whose strategies rest upon international competition or a "captive" of domestic interests, carrying on the policies of elites with secondary regard to rational international strategy?

The Answer Depends

--This remains an empirical question to be tested: bottom line, it is by no means obvious that international threats are more worrisome than domestic and internally-ideologically ones. In this light, we CANNOT appeal to Realist assumptions but must empirically test the nature of individual political systems during discreet historical periods.

1. States in cartelized systems MAY be more responsive to interest group pressures at the expense of nonsensical international behavior.
2. States dominated by unitary oligarchies MAY be more responsive to international pressures, since no domestic groups are threatening the State.
3. Democratic systems MAY be highly responsive to the electorate, though voter behavior SHOULD drive the State to act rationally with regard to I.R.