

## Gov 50.08: Misperceptions... and overcoming misperceptions?

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### Learning Objectives

- Define misperception. Explain, in general, why misperceptions are important for understanding strategic interactions.
- Explain how misperceptions by a) Iraq and b) the U.S. contributed to the 1990-91 Gulf War & 2003 war.
- Analyze a foreign policy event using concepts related to perceptions & misperceptions (e.g., rational choice, prospect theory frames, analogies, images).
- Draw on course theory & concepts to make an argument about how to avoid misperceptions.
- Define empathy.
- Explain how empathy and relational empathy can shape the outcome of peace negotiations, using the two Camp David meetings as examples.

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### Perceptions & Misperceptions

- Strategic interactions between foreign policy leaders involve signals. Sometimes this signals are received as they are intended. Sometimes they are not.
- **"Misperception"** can be defined as the gap between the world as it actually exists and the world as it exists in the mind of the perceiver." (Duelfer and Dyson p. 75).

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## Perceptions & Misperceptions

- Objective situation in 1991:
  - End of Cold War frees up U.S. military resources
  - U.S. defined balance of power in the Gulf as a vital interest
  - Iraq had suffered economically and otherwise during the Iran-Iraq war
  - Both the U.S. and Iraq had interests in curbing Iranian power
  - The U.S. had provided support to Iraq during the war (intelligence)
  - The U.S. had not used force to prevent WMD in India, Pakistan, or Israel

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## Perceptions & Misperceptions

- Objective situation in 2003:
  - Iraq had discontinued its WMD program
  - Iraq stopped allowing UN inspectors
  - U.S. had suffered recent attack on home soil, declared war on terror
  - U.S. intelligence is good, but not perfect
  - Iraq had expressed interest in countering "Islamic extremists"

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## Perceptions & Misperceptions

- What went wrong in 1990 & 2003?
  - What was the Iraqi image of the U.S.?
    - Saddam "perceived a logical congruence of interests between the U.S. and Iraq, and so he explained away hostile U.S. actions as the result of policy being captured by Zionists" (Duelfer & Dyson p. 83).
  - The U.S. image of Iraq?
    - "I think he in his own mind demonized Saddam Hussein... It took on a good versus evil kind of quality to it." (Brent Snowcroft qtd in Duelfer & Dyson p. 97).
  - What was Saddam's image of himself/Iraq?
    - "Rare indeed is the leader of the state who believes that he is following illegitimate or unjust policies" (Duelfer & Dyson 2011, p. 85).

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## Perceptions & Misperceptions

- How did these misperceptions – on both sides – contribute to the conflicts?
- 1990-1991 Gulf War:
  - April Glaspie in Iraqi transcript: "We have no opinion on your Arab-Arab conflicts, such as your dispute with Kuwait."



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## Perceptions & Misperceptions

- How did these misperceptions – on both sides – contribute to the conflicts?
- 1990-1991 Gulf War:
  - April Glaspie in her own transcript: "We have no opinion on your Arab-Arab conflicts, such as your dispute with Kuwait... **but we insist that you settle your disputes with Kuwait nonviolently.**"
  - Would Saddam have invaded Kuwait if he knew that the U.S. would become involved?
- 2003 Iraq War:
  - "There is an Arabic saying which means 'you overlook many truths from a liar'" (Amer al-Saadi, qtd. in Duelfer & Dyson p. 97).

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## Duelfer & Dyson

- Evaluate the argument. Is this sufficient evidence that misperceptions *caused* the conflicts? Did the authors adequately advance their claims?
- In other words, would Saddam Hussein have invaded Kuwait in 1990 if he knew the U.S. would become involved? Would the U.S. have changed their strategy with accurate information?
- Can prospect theory inform our understanding of this conflict? How?



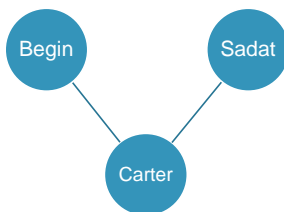
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## Overcoming misperceptions

- If misperceptions cause conflict – or impede negotiations – we want to know how to overcome them.
- **Empathy**: "the ability to understand the cognitive and affective states of others without necessarily sympathizing with them." (Holmes & Yarhi-Milo 2017, p. 107)
  - How does empathy relate to signaling problems & misperceptions?
  - What is the primary argument advanced by Holmes & Yarhi-Milo?

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## Relational Empathy



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## Empathy in International Negotiations

- A Tale of Two Camp David meetings...
- What was the outcome of Camp David I? Why?



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## Empathy in International Negotiations

- A Tale of Two Camp David meetings...
- What was the outcome of Camp David I? Why?
- What was the outcome of Camp David II? Why?



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## Empathy in International Negotiations

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- What was the outcome of Camp David II? Why?



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## Discussion: Empathy & Biases

- What does this research imply about overcoming the challenges related to prospect theory, analogical reasoning, and negative images?
- Should all diplomacy be face to face? Why or why not?

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## Fin.

Next time: Leaders & their Friends

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