

Crisis Diplomacy

Deterrence Theory versus the Spiral Model

February 3, 2015

Today's Agenda

- 1. The spiral model and the security dilemma.**
- 2. Deciding which model is best.**

The **Spiral Model** and the security dilemma

Recap: Rational Deterrence Theory

- 1. States want more territory and influence,**
- 2. But territory and influence < being nuked.**
- 3. These preferences are common knowledge.**

Therefore, making a credible nuclear threat increases a state's security.

Yet Another Mugging Analogy

Walking down a dim alley, you see a stranger.

You say to him, "If you even think about mugging me, you'll regret it."

Are you now more or less safe?

The Spiral Model

Making a threat reduces a state's security by causing a spiral of hostility.

Premises of the Spiral Model

- 1. States differ in their intentions.**
 - Status quo**
 - Revisionist**
- 2. A state's intentions are private information.**
 - Not common knowledge**
- 3. A state's foreign policy is a signal of its intentions.**

Signaling

If your preferences are private information, we can infer them—at least partly—from your actions.

Foreign Policy as a Signal

Assume that:

- Revisionist states almost always make threats**
- Status quo states usually don't make threats**

What should the target of a threat infer?

How should the target respond?

Signaling

(mathematical aside for those who have taken stats)

Signaling is a conditional probability problem.

$\Pr(\text{revisionist} \mid \text{makes threat})$

$$= \frac{\Pr(\text{revisionist and makes threat})}{\Pr(\text{makes threat})}$$

$$= \frac{\Pr(\text{revisionist and makes threat})}{\Pr(\text{revisionist and makes threat}) + \Pr(\text{status quo and makes threat})}$$

Signaling and Spiraling

or: how believing in deterrence theory makes us less safe

We build capabilities, make threats

→ They infer we're revisionist

→ They build capabilities, make threats

→ We escalate our arms and threats

→ They escalate further

→ ...

Conclusions of the Spiral Model

The Security Dilemma

Actions a state takes to increase its security may have the opposite consequence.

Conclusions of the Spiral Model

Interdependence and Resolve

Deterrence theory:

If you give an inch, they'll take a mile.

Spiral model:

If you give an inch, you might stop the spiral.

Objections to the Spiral Model

- Why don't states apply their standards for others to themselves?
- Why would a state making a *deterrent* threat be perceived as revisionist?
- Hasn't appeasement failed?

Deciding

which model is best

Deterrence Theory versus the Spiral Model

How do we decide which is "better"?

- Evaluate logical consistency and parsimony**
- Derive empirical implications and compare to historical record**

Empirical Implications

What would count as evidence in favor of the spiral model?

- Arms races?**
- Unsuccessful threats?**
- Successful appeasement?**

The Implications Are Not Straightforward

The spiral model's predictions depend on factors that are difficult, if not impossible, to measure:

- how many states are revisionist**
- which particular states are revisionist**
- states' beliefs about other states**

The Real Question

Are the deterrence model and the spiral theory incompatible?

For Next Time

- **Read Jervis, "Cooperation under the Security Dilemma" (on JSTOR)**

Image Sources

— **Spiral staircase:** slightly-less-random, **via**
Flickr