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Cognitive Theory

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Bargaining and negotiation are subclasses of social communication. Fisher and Ury (1981, p. xi), for instance, define negotiation as “back-and-forth communication designed to reach an agreement when you and the other side have some interests that are shared and others that are opposed” and argue that “without communication there is no negotiation.” Stein (1988) agrees that international negotiation is largely about communication. Yet little systematic analysis has been done on the communication aspects of international bargaining and negotiation (compare Tedeschi and Rosenfeld, 1980; Weiss-Wik, 1983; Stein, 1988).

Once we focus on the communicative aspects of negotiation, cognitive factors come to the fore. The very word *communication* stems from the Latin verb *communicare*, which means “to make common or shared.” Shared meaning is contingent on shared cognitive capacities. *Signification*—how messages, verbal as well as nonverbal, acquire meaning—is thus an active and problematic process on which cognitive theory may shed some light. Cognitive theory proceeds from the assumption of regularities in cognitive operations across individuals and cultures—not in terms of substantive content but in the way information is processed and messages are interpreted in reference to existing beliefs (compare Steinbruner, 1974).

THE EVOLUTION OF COGNITIVE THEORY

A "cognitive revolution" took place in psychology around the mid-1950s (Bruner, 1985). Psychological research then threw off the yoke of "motivational imperialism" (Nisbett and Ross, 1980). Whereas the major schools in early-twentieth-century psychology—psychoanalytical and behavioral—featured primarily motivational theories, cognitive and "intellectual" factors now became central. In the Freudian perspective, it was *irrational* behavior that needed explanation. With the cognitive revolution, rational problem solving came to be seen as something to be explained psychologically rather than simply to be evaluated logically (Bruner, 1985).

The conception of the human being as a passive agent who merely responds to environmental stimuli gave way to a conception of the human being as selectively responding to and actively shaping his or her environment. Within the conceptualization of humans as active agents, the center of gravity has gradually shifted from cognitive balance theories, viewing humans merely as "consistency seekers," to attribution theories, viewing them as "problem solvers" or "intuitive scientists" (George, 1980).

Whereas cognitive consistency theorists assume that people see what they expect to see by assimilating incoming information to preexisting images and interpreting new information in such a way as to maintain or increase balance, attribution theorists have been concerned with the individual's attempts to comprehend the causes of behavior and assume that spontaneous thought follows a systematic course that is roughly congruent with scientific inquiry. Ross (1977, p. 174) notes: "No longer the stimulus-response (S-R) automaton of radical behaviorism, promoted beyond the rank of information processor and cognitive consistency seeker, psychological man has at last been awarded a status equal to that of the scientist who investigates him. For man, in the perspective of attribution theory, is an intuitive psychologist who seeks to explain behavior and to draw inferences about actors and their environments."

Attribution theorists have put varying emphasis on the "scientist" and the "intuitive" components of the basic notion of the human being as an intuitive scientist. Ross (1977, p. 177) further states, "Contemporary attribution theory has pursued two distinct but complementary goals. One goal has been the demonstration that, by and large, social perceivers follow the dictates of logical or rational models in assessing causes, making inferences about actors and situations, and forming expectations and predictions. The other goal has been the illustration and explication of the sources of imperfection, bias, or error that distort these judgments."

The former approach, which brings the similarities between scientific and commonsense inferences to the fore, found an influential expression in Kelley's early work (1967, 1971, 1973). In Kelley's model, covariation is the principle underlying causal inferences made by laypersons and scientists alike. By noting the covariation between particular effects and potential causes, the layperson arrives at roughly the same conclusions that the trained social scientist would reach by applying more formal statistical analyses and logical principles.

Whereas subsequent studies have lent moderate empirical support to Kelley's model, this support has been tempered by cumulative evidence of people's departure from scientific standards of inference in many circumstances. A number of studies have revealed profound, systematic, and fundamental errors or biases in layperson inferences (Nisbett and Ross, 1980; Sillars, 1982). Hence another research tradition has evolved. Sometimes called the "judgment" school, this tradition assumes less causal sophistication and brings biases in people's judgments into focus. Rather than "What do people do?" its guiding question has been "What do people do wrong?"

The differences between the attribution and judgment schools do not seem to be as sharp today. On the one hand, proponents of the layperson-scientist analogy have modified their initial confidence in the covariation principle. On the other hand, representatives of the judgment school have tended to conclude that judgment biases do not necessarily imply irrationality.

To summarize, attribution theory, which deals with the perception of causation—especially the causal inferences that people make about social behavior—seems of special relevance to the study of communication in international negotiations. Negotiators constantly face the problem of looking beyond manifest signals and trying to draw inferences about their adversaries. Why did they make this concession? Was it meant as a genuinely conciliatory gesture or merely as a trap to make us lower our guard? Did they make that hostile move to intimidate us, or were they compelled to take a tough stance to satisfy a vociferous public opinion and powerful pressure groups? Communication in a negotiatory setting inevitably entails attribution. To interpret signals, the actors must search for causes and motives. Only by assessing the motives underlying the adversary's proposal can the actor judge whether it represents a concession or a retraction and decide on a response.

WHY A COGNITIVE APPROACH TO INTERNATIONAL NEGOTIATION?

Many negotiation theories have a common game-theoretical heritage. Game theorists, however, regard communication as neither central nor problematic. To use their jargon, negotiation might be characterized as communication super-

imposed on a game or a new "transcended" game where communicative acts are moves of the game (Midgaard, 1965; Rapoport, 1960, 1964b). The human capacity to acquire, reveal, and conceal information then becomes crucial and creates the problem of interpretation associated with communication moves (Goffman, 1969; Rapoport, 1964b; Shubik, 1967).

This is where cognitive theory comes into the picture. Scholars who have applied cognitive theory to international relations (Holsti, 1976; Jönsson, 1982) generally posit that cognitive processes among decision makers assume special significance when the choice situation is characterized by "structural uncertainty." This is the case, for example, when the situation is (1) new, without familiar clues; (2) complex, with many clues to be taken into account; or (3) contradictory, with different elements suggesting different interpretations. International negotiations seem to provide eminent examples of structural uncertainty.

If we adopt a cognitive focus, the problems raised by selective attention and interpretation, rather than being shunned, as in game theory, become analytical points of departure. Wilder and Cooper (1981, p. 247) point out, "Perception is an active process by which we structure the array of stimuli confronting us. We make use of this structure to generate expectations about the probable qualities and actions of entities in the organized array. Presumably, processes of organization and inference are part of a more basic need or desire to understand our environment."

A cognitive approach entails a different view of the negotiation process than the concession-convergence focus of most rational-choice approaches. In comparison with those models, which depict negotiations as a streamlined process from the initial bids via mutual concessions to the final outcome, a cognitive approach tends to emphasize *resistance to change* among negotiating actors. The human tendency to adhere to preconceived beliefs in the face of contradictory evidence is well documented. "Belief perseverance" may be the result of "motivational bias," or emotional commitment to certain beliefs. But it is likely to occur even in the absence of such commitment, "because (a) people tend to seek out, recall, and interpret evidence in a manner that sustains beliefs, (b) they readily invent causal explanations of initial evidence in which they then place too much confidence, and (c) they act upon their beliefs in a way that makes them self-confirming" (Nisbett and Ross, 1980, p. 192).

ATTRIBUTIONAL PREMISES: KNOWLEDGE STRUCTURES AND JUDGMENTAL HEURISTICS

Cognitive scientists emphasize the theory-driven nature of perception. Individuals process information through preexisting "knowledge structures" (systems of schematized and abstracted knowledge, which scientists tend to label "belief

systems" or "schemata" when referring to people that they study, "theories" when referring to their own scientific activity, and "prejudices" when referring to their rivals and enemies). The main difference between scientific and intuitive theories is that the former studies are formalized and available for public scrutiny, whereas the latter concepts are implicit and used below the level of awareness (Hewes and Planalp, 1982). "Without these structures stored in memory, life would be a buzzing confusion"; at the same time, "a price is paid for this mental economy"—knowledge structures "are not infallible guides to the nature of physical or social reality" (Nisbett and Ross, 1980, p. 7). Our preconceptions help us structure—but may also distort—what we see, understand, and remember.

The theory-driven nature of perception has obvious implications for communication in international negotiation. "The fact that perceptions are strongly influenced by predispositions means that it is very difficult to convey messages that are inconsistent with what the other already believes. And the act that statesmen do not understand this influence reduces their ability to predict how others will react" (Jervis, 1983, p. 28).

The interpretation of communication in negotiations involves a temporal aspect. One may distinguish between premessage and postmessage cognitive processes. Recipients typically use the information available prior to the communication to generate an expectation about what position the opponent will take. These expectations are then either confirmed or disconfirmed by the signals received from the opponent (compare Eagly, Chaiken, and Wood, 1981). In their postmessage processing, recipients infer the causes of the opponent's position, guided by their premessage expectations.

When applying cognitive theory to communication in negotiations, we should keep in mind that each actor's judgments concern not only the opponent's signaling but also the opponent's reaction to one's own signaling. In the premessage stage, each actor takes the opponent into account when producing a signal, anticipating possible responses. These predictions affect his or her own signaling behavior (compare Roloff and Berger, 1982). In the postmessage stage, it is a question of interpreting the opponent's observable reactions (for example, agreement-disagreement) to his or her own signaling.

To interpret the behavior of others, people tend to rely on *judgmental heuristics*, or rules of thumb, which reduce complex inferential tasks to simple judgmental operations (Nisbett and Ross, 1980). Such heuristics deviate markedly from the dictates of statistical or logical models, and their utilization "is generally automatic and nonreflective and notably free of any conscious consideration of appropriateness" (p. 18). Though primitive and simplistic, judgmental heuristics are not irrational or even nonrational: "They probably produce vastly more correct or partially correct inferences than erroneous ones, and they do so with great speed and little effort" (p. 18). Among these simplified cognitive strategies, the "representativeness" and "availability" heuristics have attracted

considerable attention and are of obvious relevance to communication in international negotiation.

The *representativeness heuristic* implies "the application of relatively simple resemblance or 'goodness of fit' criteria to problems of categorization" (Nisbett and Ross, 1980, p. 22). The *availability heuristic* means that categorization is likely to be based on objects or events that are readily "available" in memory (p. 7). Translated to international negotiations, the representativeness and availability heuristics point to the common tendency to rely on *historical analogies* and *national stereotypes*.

The use of historical analogies normally implies categorizing new events in terms of historical events ("another Vietnam," "another Munich") without spelling out the similarities and differences in detail (representativeness heuristic). Historical analogies normally involve salient and traumatic events (availability heuristic). "Historical events, in which the decision maker participated or observed first-hand involving his nation, have much stronger and [more] lasting effects than other types of historically based data. Consequently, these are more likely to become sources of hot cognitions, are more available, are recognized early as candidates for analogy, and will be used by the decision maker more often for this purpose—which in turn will further increase their availability" (Vertzberger, 1986, p. 237).

Use of historical analogies often involves the "base rate fallacy," that is, the tendency to underutilize frequencies and probabilities in favor of singular or individuating information (Borgida and Brekke, 1981). Historical analogies focus on *typical* cases rather than statistical frequencies. Certain historical events become *prototypes*.

National stereotypes represent another kind of categorization, or relevance to international negotiation that entails encounters between "ingroups" and "outgroups." In such intergroup settings, outgroup members tend to be viewed in a relatively "deindividuating" manner, greater homogeneity is attributed to the outgroup than to the ingroup, and information that enhances the dissimilarity of the outgroup is preferred (Wilder and Cooper, 1981). Like historical analogies, national stereotypes rest on the representativeness (all representatives of a given nation have similar traits) and availability heuristics (in international relations, participants tend to use nationality as the guiding criterion for storage and access in memory). Also, reliance on national stereotypes is associated with the base-rate fallacy. For instance, many psychological studies have shown that in judging why a particular actor behaved as he or she did, observers were less influenced by information about how many or how few actors had behaved similarly in the same situation than by "goodness of fit" with social stereotypes of the particular actor (see Nisbett and Ross, 1980).

U.S.-Soviet negotiations have experienced their share of historical analogies and national stereotypes. To the postwar generation of U.S. decision makers, the Munich analogy has had a profound impact. The obvious lesson of the

1930s was that aggressors could not be appeased, that concessions to totalitarian dictators were counterproductive. After World War II, these lessons blended with stereotypes of an invariable Soviet negotiating behavior. When expectations of continued U.S.-Soviet cooperation were shattered in the late 1970s, U.S. negotiators "converted" to a belief in the intransigency of the Soviet Union (compare de Rivera, 1968; De Santis, 1983). Stereotypes of Soviet inflexibility and dishonesty have proved to be long-lived (compare Jönsson, 1979).

While the tendency to think in terms of historical analogies and national stereotypes can be derived from cognitive theory, the *contents* of such categorizations are culture-bound. In other words, reliance on analogies and stereotypes usually renders international—and thus intercultural—communication more difficult.

COGNITIVE DYNAMICS: THE PERSEVERANCE OR MODIFICATION OF PERCEIVED CONFLICT

A bargaining situation is characterized by the coincidence of cooperative and conflictual elements. A prerequisite for successful negotiations is that the common interests of the parties ultimately outweigh their divergent interests. However, as we know all too well, the conflictual elements frequently take the upper hand in international negotiations. Cognitive theory may contribute to a better understanding of this phenomenon by explaining why negative images of the adversary and perceptions of conflict persist, even in the face of conciliatory behavior by the other side. By uncovering underlying psychological mechanisms, cognitive theory may also suggest how conflictual perceptions can eventually be modified.

The following inventory of insights and hypotheses from cognitive theory of relevance to international negotiation is thus guided by three main questions: Why do bargaining situations tend to evoke negative images of the adversary? Why do negative images persist in the face of conciliatory behavior by the adversary? How can negative images be overcome?

The Formation of Negative Images

Attribution theorists have pointed to a common tendency to overemphasize *dispositional* factors (stable personal traits) when explaining or interpreting the behavior of others while stressing *situational* factors to account for one's own behavior. This double standard, commonly labeled the "fundamental error of attribution," reflects a "dispositional metatheory" that is commonly shared: "the false idea of the invariance of the behavior of the other person" (Nisbett and Ross, 1980, p. 175).

Jones and Nisbett (1971, p. 80) have brought the difference between *actors* and *observers* to the fore, pointing to "a pervasive tendency for actors to attribute their actions to situational requirements, whereas observers tend to attribute the same action to stable personal dispositions." There are several reasons for this bias. There are important differences in the information available to an actor and that available to an observer. Unlike the actor, an observer has to rely on "effect data" and has little access to "cause data." Moreover, actors and observers process information differently: "The action itself—its topography, rhythm, style, and content—is more salient to the observer than to the actor," whereas the actor "is less likely to focus his attention on his behavior than on the environmental cues that evoke and shape it" (p. 85). For the observer, the actor and his or her actions are "figured" against the "ground" of the situation; for the actor, it is the situation that normally will be figured (Nisbett and Ross, 1980).

This kind of bias is not confined to passive observers. On the contrary, "the tendency for the observer to attribute action to the actor is probably increased to the extent that the observer is also an actor and to the extent that both the observing and the observed actor are tied together in a mutually contingent interaction" (Jones and Nisbett, 1971, p. 88). Experimental evidence suggests that when bargaining actors allocate responsibility for the conflict they experience, "they underestimate the contribution of the common external situation (the bargaining problem) and overestimate the contribution of the other party" (Kelley and others, 1970, p. 435). In other words, the actor-observer bias is assumed to apply, *a fortiori*, to bargaining situations.

The actor-observer bias is often reinforced by a "self-serving bias," the tendency to take credit for success and deny responsibility for failure (compare Stein, 1988). Good things are attributed to one's own basic nature, whereas bad things are attributed to unfortunate circumstances or someone else's basic nature. Related to the self-serving bias is the "false consensus proposition": people tend to "see their own behavioral choices and judgments as relatively common and appropriate to existing circumstances while viewing alternative responses as uncommon, deviant, and inappropriate" (Ross, 1977, p. 188). One consequence of the propensity to assume that others generally share our reactions is "a tendency to attribute differing views to the personal characteristics of their holders" (Kelley and Michela, 1980, p. 464).

In a negotiatory setting, these biases combine to create perceptions that the conflictual element of a bargaining situation is caused primarily by the other side, to a lesser extent by situational factors, and least of all by one's own behavior. These biases also contribute to a phenomenon labeled "punctuation." The term refers to "instances where two people have different perceptions regarding which act in a sequence is stimulus and which is response" (Sillars, 1981, p. 280). It is a matter of assessing not only sequence but also causation. The term *punctuation* is used in analogy with writing symbols that mark

beginnings and endings and that give structure to otherwise fluid processes (Condon and Yousef, 1975).

Garthoff (1978) points to processes of punctuation resulting from the tendency among U.S. decision makers to overestimate Soviet capabilities: "Knowing rather well his own strengths (and weaknesses), and the limits on his intentions to act on the basis of his own capabilities, he may well be led by gross overestimates on our part to conclude that *we* have hostile intentions which we seek to buttress by falsely inflating estimates of his strength and intentions to use it" (p. 23). One example concerns the differing U.S. and Soviet accounts of the sequence of events that led to the decline of superpower détente in the 1970s. Soviet punctuation emphasized the Jackson-Vanick Amendment, the U.S. collusion with China in supporting one side in the Angolan civil war, and the encouragement of Somalia's irredentist aims in Ethiopia. In the American view, the decline of détente began as early as the October 1973 Middle East war, exacerbated by Soviet assistance to Cuban forces in Angola and Ethiopia, coups in South Yemen, and the invasion of Afghanistan (Larson, 1988).

In short, actor-observer and self-serving biases frequently entail punctuation, that is, divergent perceptions of cause-and-effect patterns in bargaining situations. The result is a tendency to put the blame for the conflict on the other side.

The Persistence of Negative Images

As negotiations begin, each actor is in a position to test his or her initial expectations. If the adversary's behavior contradicts these expectations, the actor should ideally adjust his or her expectations. Often, however, negative images remain unchanged even in the face of conciliatory behavior by the other side. Cognitive theory offers several possible explanations of this commonly observed phenomenon.

First, positive actions are harder to interpret than negative ones. Attribution theorists have observed that "beneficial actions tend to be much more ambiguous than harmful actions when it comes to deciding on the actor's true intention or his ultimate objectives in the situation. The ambiguity of beneficial actions centers around the extent to which ulterior, manipulative purposes may be served by them" (Jones and Davis, 1965, p. 259). Especially in negotiations between adversaries, concessions are frequently interpreted as tactical tricks, designed to lessen one's vigilance. "It is difficult to find an action in international politics that incontrovertibly conveys a peaceful or conciliatory intent. A negotiating proposal that may superficially seem accommodative is actually aggressive if the underlying motive is to drive a wedge into the target's alliance system, undermine its domestic support for defense spending, or lull the other state before an attack" (Larson, 1988, pp. 286-287).

Thus the Soviets turned down the American offer of Marshall Plan aid because they saw it ultimately as an effort to militarily strengthen Western Europe

in preparation for an attack on the Soviet Union. Similarly, Eisenhower refused to reciprocate Khrushchev's April 1958 unilateral moratorium on nuclear testing, which was seen as an effort to lull the Americans into complacency, win a propaganda victory, or pressure the United States into nuclear disarmament. Late-1980s discussions in the West about the motives behind Gorbachev's conciliatory gestures illustrated anew the ambiguity of beneficial actions. Did they reflect a new cooperative strategy, or were they tactics designed to solve the acute economic crisis and rebuild Soviet military strength in the longer run? (Compare Larson, 1988.)

Selective perception and memory provide another explanation of the persistence of negative images. In particular, historical analogies and national stereotypes, when used in international negotiations, tend to be self-confirming and thus to give rise to vicious circles of self-fulfilling prophecies. Take, for instance, the reliance among British decision makers on analogies with the 1930s to interpret the unfolding events in the 1956 Suez crisis. Most members of the cabinet were of the prewar generation that had been scarred by Britain's initial efforts at "appeasing" Hitler. The Munich analogy permeated British thought about the Suez crisis, not only in the cabinet but in the opposition and the press as well. Their reliance on the "Munich syndrome" alerted British policymakers to behavior on Nasser's part that reminded them of the dictators of the 1930s while blinding them to other aspects of his conduct. Nasser's nationalization of the Suez Canal was likened to Hitler's occupation of the Rhineland, and subsequent actions by the Egyptian leader were seen as harbingers of sinister schemes. Even after the Suez crisis was over, Eden complained in a private letter to a close friend and supporter: "I find it strange that so few, if any, have compared these events to 1936—yet it is so like. Of course, Egypt is no Germany, but Russia is, and Egypt just her pawn. If we had let events drift until the spring I have little doubt that by then, or about then, Russia and Egypt would have been ready to pounce, with Israel as the apparent target and western interests as the real one. Yet so many seem to fail to see this and give Nasser almost as much trust as others gave Hitler years ago" (quoted in James, 1986, p. 593).

Third, attributional biases may preclude adjusted expectations. We have a tendency to attribute behavior that is consistent with our image of another person to dispositional causes but behavior that is discrepant with our image to situational causes (Pruitt and Rubin, 1986). Thus "the good behavior of a liked person and the bad of a disliked one are attributed to personal factors whereas inconsistent behavior is attributed to situational factors" (Kelley and Michela, 1980, p. 469). Combined with the self-serving bias, discussed earlier, this tendency results in attributions of the kind: "I am essentially good but am occasionally forced by circumstances to behave badly, whereas you are bad but are occasionally forced by circumstances to behave well." This means, for example, that statesmen tend to "explain their own competitive actions as a response

to compelling security needs or allied pressures, while attributing similar behavior to expansionist, aggressive tendencies if carried out by an adversary" (Larson, 1988, p. 290). Conversely, if the good behavior of the adversary is attributed to necessity, there is no need to ascribe it to virtue.

Such biases have been noticed, for example, in U.S.-Soviet bargaining over the years. Consider Blacker's verdict on U.S.-Soviet arms control negotiations: "*Each* superpower detects in the military activities of its rival a bid for superiority. *Each* believes the other to be of the opinion that a nuclear war can be fought and won. *Each* sees the arms control proposals of its adversary as insincere and calculated to produce one-sided military advantage. Moreover, there is *enough* evidence that can be mustered in support of these and related propositions to make it impossible for political leaders in either country to dismiss them out of hand" (1987, p. 164; emphasis in original).

The same kinds of biases recur at the postmessage stage. When our opponent in conflictual bargaining agrees with our proposal, we tend to see his or her position as heavily influenced by facets and circumstances. Disagreement, on the other hand, is attributed to the opponent's values and true nature (compare Goethals, 1976).

These attributional biases are often coupled with, and reinforced by, a common tendency to see the behavior of the adversary as more centralized, planned, and coordinated than it actually is (Jervis, 1976). Kissinger's observation on U.S.-Soviet perceptions provides a good illustration: "The superpowers often behave like two heavily armed blind men feeling their way around in a room, each believing himself in mortal peril from the other whom he assumes to have perfect vision. Each side should know that frequently uncertainty, compromise, and incoherence are the essence of policy-making. Yet each tends to ascribe to the other a consistency, foresight, and coherence that its own experience belies" (1979, p. 522).

Another factor working against perceptual change is the exaggerated confidence in one's inferential capability. Jervis (1985, p. 495) has argued that "since people often underestimate ambiguity and overestimate their cognitive abilities, it is likely that statesmen think that they can draw more accurate inferences from what the other state is doing than in fact they can." Others have commented on the tendency among decision makers to "perceive more order and certainty than exists in their uncertain, disorderly environments" (Kinder and Weiss, 1978, p. 723) and to make "unwarranted assumptions of certainty regarding opponents' intentions and the correctness of one's chosen policy" (Snyder, 1978, p. 358). This overconfidence may be a function not so much of the accuracy of decision makers' views as of their simplicity (Dawes, 1976).

In short, "negotiator overconfidence" (Neale and Bazerman, 1985) is common in international negotiations. It has even been suggested that the more uncertainty there is in the bargaining situation, the more overconfident deci-

sion makers will be about their judgments. Specifically, they tend to believe that they know what their opponents will think or do (Bazerman and Sondak, 1988). "Because statesmen believe that they understand the other side's view of the world, they usually assume that their messages have been received and interpreted as intended. If the other ignores a signal, statesmen often conclude that it has been rejected when in fact it may not have been received" (Jervis, 1985, p. 30).

All these cognitive factors—the ambiguity of positive actions, selective perception and memory, attributional biases, and negotiator overconfidence—contribute to cycles of punctuation. Frequently, the negotiating parties misinterpret the effect of their own actions on the opponent. "Interdependent persons often have occasion independently and simultaneously to plan and commit themselves to actions having mutual consequences. Failing to take account of these temporal patterns, persons may seriously misinterpret the effects their actions have on others" (Kelley, 1971, p. 8).

In negotiations, this means that each party "tends to attribute to himself those actions of the other person that are consistent with the attributor's own interest" (Kelley, 1971, p. 19). Conversely, actors "tend to underestimate the extent to which their own behavior causes the conflict style of their partner" (Sillars, 1981, p. 285). States in international negotiations are quick to attribute the other side's hostility to aggressive designs but less prone to see it as a reaction to the state's own behavior (Jervis, 1986). "In many of these cases further unfortunate consequences follow because the decision-maker fails to recognize the trade-offs between advancing his interests and harming those of others. Since he does not believe that his policy is creating legitimate grievances, he underestimates the opposition that arises and sees resistance to his actions are unprovoked hostility that indicates aggressive intentions" (Jervis, 1976, p. 141).

The Breakdown of Negative Images

The cognitive hypotheses discussed thus far convey a rather pessimistic picture of international negotiation. The conflictual aspects of bargaining situations tend to prevail, and negative images are resistant to change. Does cognitive theory provide any clues as to how negative images can be overcome? What kind of conciliatory behavior is likely to lead to perceptual change?

First, an element of *surprise* seems essential. Unexpected actions that cannot easily be accounted for in terms of the old images warrant explanation. For instance, Gorbachev's behavior at the Reykjavik summit in 1986, including his willingness to enter serious discussions on the elimination of strategic offensive nuclear weapons, was unforeseen. It did not square with Reagan's "evil empire" stereotype of the Soviet Union and appears to have triggered a gradual revision of his image of the adversary.

Furthermore, the negotiating state is more likely to infer that the other side's concession is sincere—and hence is more likely to reciprocate—if the concession is perceived to be *voluntary* and relatively *costly* to the other side. Conversely, to the extent that the concession is seen to be accidental, the result of domestic or external pressure, or something that the other side had a unilateral interest in doing anyway, it is less likely to be reciprocated (Larson, 1988; Pruitt, 1981).

For instance, Sadat's 1978 visit to Jerusalem was widely perceived as a genuine conciliatory gesture, since the Egyptian president's action was associated with high political costs yet did not appear to be the result of outside pressures (compare Pruitt, 1981). Another example concerns the Soviet decision to withdraw from and agree to the neutralization of Austria in 1955. This involved the risk of raising popular expectations in Eastern Europe that the Soviets might withdraw and condone neutrality. As noted by Larson (1987), U.S. policymakers were impressed by the Soviet willingness to incur such risks and felt compelled to reciprocate: "Allen Dulles, director of the Central Intelligence Agency, reported to the [National Security Council] that the Soviet move in Austria would 'entail very considerable risks for the Soviet positions in the European satellites.' Secretary of State Dulles agreed that 'by virtue of their action in Austria the Soviets may be losing forces in the satellite states which they would be unable to control. . . . We were now confronting a real opportunity,' Dulles said, 'for a rollback of Soviet power' which would leave the satellite states with a status similar to Finland's" (p. 48).

In contrast, other conciliatory gestures have been dismissed because the other side was perceived to have a unilateral interest in making them whether or not they were reciprocated. For example, Soviet conventional troop cuts in 1955, 1956, and 1958 were not viewed in Washington as indications of Soviet good intentions. Rather, they were assumed to be motivated by the urge to modernize Soviet forces and transfer much-needed manpower to industry and agriculture (Larson, 1988). Similar doubts were voiced in Washington concerning Gorbachev's unilateral troop reductions in the late 1980s.

Finally, conciliatory behavior is more likely to entail cognitive adjustment if it is *repeated despite lacking reciprocity*. This notion underlies Osgood's graduated reciprocation in tension reduction (GRIT) strategy (1962), designed to facilitate negotiation between bitter, long-term adversaries. Osgood recommends that the initiator of cooperation make a series of conciliatory actions spread over different issue areas or geographical areas, stating publicly that the moves are intended to reduce tension. Not assuming immediate reciprocation, GRIT prescribes continual incremental concessions over a period of time, even if the other side does not respond. This, presumably, will foster greater trust and convince the other side of one's good faith. A series of moderately risky concessions, not easily dismissed as the product of self-interest or hostility, would finally

succeed in persuading the adversary to reciprocate and thus set in motion a spiral of tension reduction.

Soviet behavior prior to the signing of the Austrian State Treaty in 1955 has been cited as one example of the successful application of GRIT. The Soviet Union then made a series of unilateral concessions in various areas of East-West confrontation. As mentioned, Moscow in February 1955 abandoned its previous link to an Austrian settlement with the signing of a German peace treaty. In April, the Soviet Union signed a bilateral agreement with Austria for the withdrawal of Soviet troops and the elimination of Soviet economic enclaves. "By agreeing to sell former German assets back to Austria and to withdraw Soviet management and technical personnel, the Soviets diminished their ability to subvert Austrian independence and relieved Western anxieties" (Larson, 1987, p. 56). On the eve of the final four-power negotiations on Austria, Soviet negotiators tabled a disarmament proposal that moved toward the Western position in a number of important respects, and the Soviet government announced that a high-level mission would visit Yugoslavia. Consistent with GRIT, the Soviets explained publicly that their objective in signing the Austrian State Treaty was to reduce tensions.

Another example of the successful application of GRIT may have been the U.S.-Soviet détente accompanying the nuclear test ban treaty of 1963. There are claims that Kennedy was consciously using GRIT principles when making a series of conciliatory gestures, including his American University speech, in the face of apparent Soviet intransigence on the test ban issue (compare George, 1988).

To summarize, negative images can be eroded by conciliatory actions that (1) involve surprise, (2) are voluntary and costly and thus cannot be attributed to self-interests or ulterior motives, and (3) are repeated even if they are not immediately reciprocated.

CONCLUSIONS

Participants in a recent interdisciplinary colloquium on international negotiation agreed that "analyses that ignore the context in which negotiation takes place, the meaning of the language the negotiators use, and the impact of cultural, social, institutional, political, and psychological factors on processes of communication and choice, are inadequate as explanations of international negotiation" (Stein, 1988, p. 230). Cognitive theory may contribute to such a wider angle of vision. It can complement, but not replace, extant theories of negotiation.

Any theory or model highlights certain aspects of the studied phenomena while placing other aspects in the shade. Cognitive theory illuminates the problematic aspects of communication in international negotiation that have

remained in relative darkness in game-theoretically inspired approaches. By the same token, cognitive theory sheds little or no light on other important aspects of negotiation, such as power relations. In short, any given conceptual framework serves as a beacon that guides and sensitizes the researcher to some set of data and potential explanations as well as a blinder, desensitizing him or her to evidence that might support competing explanations.

Applying cognitive theory to the study of international negotiation entails methodological problems. How can we infer cognitive processes from verbal statements? The researcher faces the same validity problem as the adversary across the negotiating table: "Does he mean what he says, and does he say what he means?" There is no hard-and-fast answer to these questions. The only thing that can be said with certainty is that a cognitive approach requires contextual analysis (compare, for example, George, 1979).

Furthermore, a cognitive approach makes great demands on data and source availability. These demands are rarely met in contemporary international negotiations, which are typically surrounded by secrecy. A cognitive approach therefore seems particularly applicable either when the researcher has access to interviews with negotiators in contemporary talks or when a lot of archival material on historical cases is available and declassified.

By sensitizing negotiation participants to universal cognitive processes and biases that enter into their own and the other side's actions and reactions, cognitive theory may also make a positive contribution to the actual practice of international negotiation. "The ideal negotiator," it may be argued, "should have a high tolerance for ambiguity and uncertainty as well as the open-mindedness to test his own assumptions and the opponent's intentions" (Karrass, 1970, p. 37). Yet we often observe "negotiator overconfidence," as noted earlier. Knowledge of cognitive theory may provide a useful vaccine against that and other intellectual traps.

ADDENDUM

Cognitive variables and insights tend to be incorporated into most contemporary models of international negotiation. For instance, John Odell, in his seminal treatment of international economic negotiations (2000), assumes that actors use simplified rules of thumb and subjective heuristics rather than rational utility-probability calculi, as in most economic theories. Such commonly used concepts as BATNA (best alternative to a negotiated agreement) and resistance point, he argues, should be thought of "as cognitive variables (alternatives as perceived and judgments located in negotiators' minds (rather than relying exclusively on measures defined by the observer)" (p. 28). In the study of environmental negotiations, a burgeoning field, the role of social learning and

consensual knowledge (Haas, 1990), embodied by "epistemic communities," is typically emphasized. Epistemic communities are understood as knowledge-based networks of experts with shared normative and causal beliefs, shared notions of validity, and a common policy enterprise (Haas, 1992).

The evolution of the "ripeness" hypothesis—the notion that negotiation or mediation is most likely to bring results at a moment when the conflict or issue is ripe for solution (see Chapter Twenty in this volume)—is another case in point. Subsequent efforts to apply and specify ripeness have tended to emphasize the subjective aspects of a concept that may seem to connote an objective condition (see, for example, Stedman, 1991; Pruitt, 1997b; Mooradian and Druckman, 1999). A final example is provided by the effort of P. Terrence Hopmann (1996) to draw together major strands of negotiation theory and develop a comprehensive framework for the analysis of international negotiations, in which cognitive factors figure prominently.

Attribution theory, which is the main focus of this chapter, is of course not the only cognitive theory of potential use in the study of international negotiations. To mention but one prominent example, the usefulness of *prospect theory* has frequently been alluded to, if less systematically tested. Prospect theory, which was developed by cognitive psychologists in the late 1970s (Kahneman and Tversky, 1979), posits that the way people frame a problem affects their choices. Specifically, it claims that people overvalue losses relative to comparable gains (loss aversion) and that they tend to be risk-averse with respect to gains and risk-acceptant with respect to losses. Translated to negotiations, this implies that both sides have a tendency to treat their own concessions as losses and those of the other side as gains, thus overvaluing their own concessions relative to those of their negotiating partners (Stein, 1993; Levy, 1996). Hence actors may be more likely to risk the consequences of a deadlock, and the probability of a negotiated agreement may be lower than rational-choice theories predict.

The broader lesson of prospect theory—that framing makes a difference—resonates well with other branches of cognitive science as well as negotiation theory. Cognitive scientists have shown the contingent character of categorization, which is basic to human thought generally and constitutes an important aspect of the framing of problems. Categories do not exist "in the world," independently of who does the categorization (Lakoff, 1987). Similarly, the role of metaphors in social construction of reality generally, and of "generative metaphors" in problem formulations and preferred solutions, is well documented (see Schön and Rein, 1994). The significance of framing is recognized in the negotiation literature, most explicitly in the notion of *formula*, "a shared perception or definition of the conflict that establishes terms of trade, the cognitive structure of referents for a solution, or an applicable criterion of justice" (Zartman and Berman, 1982, p. 95).

The application of prospect theory to international negotiations confronts some of the same methodological problems as attribution theory. Both were developed for individual choice and tested on individuals, not on groups. Their generalizations emerge from experimental research in highly structured laboratory settings, with little resemblance to the complex realities of international negotiations. And the methodological challenge of determining how negotiating actors frame issues is as great as that of reconstructing their attributional biases. Cognitive mapping, a technique for portraying causal and quasi-causal thinking as reflected in texts, has shown some promise as a tool for analyzing knowledge structures, perceptions, and learning in international negotiations (see Bonham, Sergeev, and Parshin, 1997).

Studies of the communicative aspects of international negotiations have pointed to cultural aspects as important complements to cognitive factors, and negotiation analysts have increasingly turned to the literature on *intercultural communication*. Whereas attribution theory and prospect theory focus on shared human "hardware," intercultural approaches highlight differences in cultural "software." The notion that national cultures produce distinct negotiating styles has long been entertained by scholars and practitioners alike, and during the Cold War the negotiating styles of "difficult" opponents, such as the Soviet Union, China, and Japan, became popular objects of scrutiny in the West. The alternative intercultural communication approach, by contrast, highlights negotiation *encounters*. Instead of viewing culture as a simple determinant of behavior, it focuses on the meeting of different cultures in negotiations, which may create problems of relative, not absolute, values and meanings. While shared cultural background facilitates negotiations, intercultural dissonance renders verbal and nonverbal communication more difficult (Cohen, 1993).

In particular, students of international negotiations have pointed to the problematic encounters between "high-context" and "low-context" cultures. Representatives of high-context cultures communicate allusively rather than directly; they see language as a social instrument, dislike directness and contradiction, prefer approximation to painful precision, and are concerned with appearance and loss of face. In low-context cultures, by contrast, explicitness is the norm, language has an informational rather than socially lubricative function, contradiction is regarded as functional, and content takes precedence over outward appearance. Attentive to shades of meaning that the low-context negotiator would overlook, the high-context negotiator may detect nuances that were never intended. Subjective misapprehensions grounded in such cultural incompatibilities may prove disruptive, even when there is a mutual interest in accommodation. U.S.-Japanese and Israeli-Egyptian negotiations illustrate the problems associated with encounters between low-context and high-context cultures (see Cohen, 1990, 1997; Jönsson, 1990).

In sum, it would be an exaggeration to say that a comprehensive cognitive theory of negotiation has emerged. A more modest and realistic assessment is that cognitive variables loom large, and several insights from cognitive science have been incorporated, in our contemporary understanding of international negotiation processes. Despite undeniable theoretical and methodological advances, much remains to be done. International negotiations involve human beings. In these, what is "real" is what humans perceive to be real. Therefore, cognitive theories play an essential role in the quest for a better understanding of international negotiations.