Theories of Domestic Politics

Two Examples:
Liberal Peace Theory
Diversionary Conflict Theory
Purpose of Lecture

• Helps to show complexities of foreign policy and how IR is affected by domestic factors.
• Helps to explain why Realism or other general or broad theories cannot explain some of what goes on.
• This lecture should inform your views and show in your final exam for this course.
Basic Themes of Studies of Domestic Politics

- **Domestic effects on Foreign Policy**
  - role of interest groups
  - public opinion
  - role of political parties (hawks vs. doves)

- **Intra-governmental actors**
  - Bureaucratic decision-making
  - Executive vs. Legislature
  - Military-Industrial Complex
Basic Themes continued

• **State Attributes**
  – Regime Type (democracy, autocracy)
  – Level of Development
  – Economic Performance
  – Domestic Stability (civil war, etc.)
  – Among others
Critique of Realism

• System level of analysis offers incomplete explanation of world politics

• States are not unitary or rational actors

• Not all states behave the same

• Excludes important actors such as interest groups and MNCs
Helms-Burton Act Example

This act would allow Americans that lost property during the Cuban Revolution (1959) to sue those (especially Europeans) that are using this property today.

Role of interest groups (attentive publics)

What would Realists and Liberals think?
The Liberal Peace

• Democracies rarely have violent disputes with each other

• Most conflicts, and all wars, are between dyads including non-democracies.

• This finding should affect foreign policy and the support of nondemocracies worldwide.
Why is the Liberal Peace Important?

• Shows that states don’t have same chance of fighting everyone – conflict is not random as Realists suggest.

• Indicates that Kant may be right – a world full of liberal republics may reduce war in international system (idealism/liberalism wins)

• Realists ignore domestic politics and state attributes (except state power)
Why are Liberal states peaceful with each other?

- Cooperative norms related to democratic political culture: contracts, compromise, institutions to help mollify conflict.

- Legislative Institutions influenced by public opinion against war – check on executive power

- Economic Interdependence
Any Alternative Explanations?

- Most democracies have only existed last 50 years – other factors such as Cold War (common enemy) or threat of nuclear war kept the peace.
- Most democracies are also rich – maybe not rocking the boat of prosperity
- Similar cultures or national affinity – If the UK became a dictatorship, would this influence chance of war?
Diversionary Conflict Theories

• Many scholars believe leaders will cause or join foreign conflicts to divert attention away from domestic problems.

• Is this story just popular myth, or does this behavior really exist?
This assumes the following:

• Leaders want to stay in office and manipulate policies towards this end.

• People are open to manipulation and public opinion can be swayed.

• Domestic political opposition is weak

• Need a legitimate enemy?
In particular, this strategy relies on the “Rally-around-the-Flag” effect, where leaders can expect a boost in popularity during foreign crisis.

Problem, this boost in popularity is usually short.

Some believe that leaders that face a high chance of removal may try this gambit feeling there is nothing to lose.

Implications for a state and its people?
What do you think, do leaders behave in this fashion?

Evidence seems to support the claim this occurs in the US, especially during times of high inflation or unemployment.

Also, some evidence of this in UK and Argentina (Falklands War)

However, is this generalizable to other countries?

My research shows it may not be generalizable.