

Teaching IR Theory to Teenagers (First Year IR Students), Paper presented at APSA Teaching and Learning Conference, Charlotte, NC, Feb. 9-11, 2007

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Conventional wisdom argues that first year undergraduates, who are mostly teenagers, are not interested in or able to understand theory when studying world affairs. In fact, teenagers can be taught theory and actually like it. This paper examines a sequence of steps that makes theory accessible and relevant to core International Relations (IR) courses. We argue that the explicit use of theoretical “perspectives” – ideal type explanations that abstract and emphasize certain primary causes of events (i.e. power, institution, ideas) over others – is not only possible but necessary in core IR courses.

Why is it necessary to teach theories?

Many graduate students and even established IR scholars wrestle with and disagree about IR theories. Hence, many instructors decide that first year college students should not be burdened with too much theory. But if we are honest, theory guides what we know and teach, and we should not teach at all if we are unwilling to teach theory.

First, the world is too big to teach everything. Thus any course selects teaches theory either explicitly or implicitly by covering or emphasizing some facts (topics) and not others. As any instructor who has looked at multiple syllabi knows, the content of introductory courses varies widely. Some instructors teach about conflict and war; others focus on development and human rights; still others emphasize international institutions. What guides these choices? For both instructors and students, the point is to make this selection and the theory behind it explicit.

Second, teaching theory is necessary to educate. Critical thinking is the objective of liberal arts education, and critical thinking is possible only if students are capable of seeing alternative ways of evaluating and weighing facts. Theory is the gateway to criticism. Without it, teaching is indoctrination, not education.

Third, although theories can become very complex, we do not have to teach them that way. Even the term theory, which excites professors and graduate students, might be exchanged for friendlier terms when we address undergraduates. Terms like perspective, outlook, orientation, and point of view are more student-friendly and simpler than theories. They extract only what is essential from more sophisticated theories. Thus we can differentiate realist from liberal perspectives by observing that, when realist perspectives explain world events, they ultimately weigh material power factors more heavily than institutional (which liberal perspectives emphasize) or ideational (which constructivist or identity perspectives emphasize). For example,

when Colin Powell told students at George Washington University in 2003 that "there need be no poles among nations that share basic values", he was suggesting that ideas (shared values) matter more than the distribution of material power (multiple poles).¹ Henry Kissinger, on the other hand, once wrote that "there can be no peace without equilibrium and no justice without restraint."² He was emphasizing relative power (equilibrium) over shared ideas (justice). Students can understand these differences in terms of alternative realist and ideational theories of international relations.

Fourth, without theory, textbooks often emphasize world events from a particular theoretical perspective that is popular at the time. They do so without being explicit about which theoretical perspectives they privilege and which they discount. For example, after World War II, textbooks emphasized realist approaches to understanding world affairs.³ Starting in the 1970s, with the growth of economic interdependence, the emphasis shifted to liberal theories such as "complex interdependence."⁴ More recently, after the end of the Cold War, constructivist approaches have become popular, reintroducing the importance of ideas such as norms, discourse and identities. Teaching alternative theoretical perspectives avoids falling into the trap of emphasizing only what is popular. In today's world of complex globalization, it is tempting to stress interdependence and institutional factors. But, since globalization could also be a product of the dominance of American power (realist) or western ideas (constructivist), it is probably more useful to teach this topic from the standpoint of all three principal causes of world events – power (realist), institutions (liberal), and ideas (constructivist or identity).

Fifth, theory actually makes it easier to understand policymaking or the practice of international affairs. Policymaking is not just a bureaucratic exercise. It is a debate among agencies and elites with different theoretical perspectives, even if the individuals and agencies involved are not always aware of the theories they propound. For example, the US State and Defense Departments disagree about many issues regardless of who the President is because they are charged to think about the world from different theoretical perspectives. The State Department emphasizes the diplomatic and institutional aspects of international affairs (liberal), while the Defense Department stresses relative military capabilities and strategic conflict (realist). Often the Office of the Presidency emphasizes ideas (constructivist) because it has the responsibility to integrate policy and make it more comprehensible and appealing to a wider political audience.

How to simplify theories for instructional purposes?

A significant challenge to using theories in introductory IR courses is that there are complex variations within each of the three major theories of IR. Not all analysts of the realist tradition subscribe to structural realism. Some adhere to classical realism or versions of offensive and defensive realism. Likewise, scholars who employ liberal theories differ among classical liberals, sociological approaches, and neo-liberal institutionalists. And analysts who emphasize ideas in their explanations of international affairs vary among idealists, social constructivists, soft power

¹ Colin Powell, "Remarks at the Elliott School of International Affairs," U.S. Department of State, September 5, 2003; <http://www.state.gov/secretary/former/powell/remarks/2003/23836.htm>.

² Quoted in John Lewis Gaddis, *Strategies of Containment* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005), 340.

³ The most widely used text was Hans Morgenthau, *Politics Among Nations*, first published in 1948.

⁴ Robert Keohane and Joseph S. Nye, *Power and Interdependence* (Boston: Little, Brown and Company, 1977).

advocates, and some who employ psychology to understand the motivations of decision-makers. In addition, theories differ in terms of levels of analysis. Some theories focus on domestic power struggles (e.g., realist interest group theories), institutions (liberal studies of nation-building), and identities (constructivist studies of national memory); others on systemic structures and processes; and still others on individual or decision-making processes.

Given the complexity of the theoretical landscape, it would be a tremendous challenge to expect first year undergraduate students, most of whom have never been exposed to IR theories before, to fully grasp the many variations. Instead, what is most useful at the outset is to present them with highly simplified versions of these theories that capture the essential underlying feature of each theoretical approach. The essential feature of theory is what causes something to happen. What is the principal independent variable that accounts for the outcome or dependent variable? For realism the primary cause of events is relative power. For liberal approaches, it is the rules and roles that influence interactions and institutional processes. And for ideational theories, it is ideas, values, norms, identities and substantive discourse.

In our approach, we label these simplified versions of theory "perspectives". This term is more student-friendly. It suggests a point of view or angle for looking at something rather than an abstract model that seems only distantly related to real events. Policymakers and politicians talk about perspectives and indeed use them all the time to discuss different points of view on policy issues. Thus, for students, the link between theory and practice becomes more evident and easier to identify. Let's first define the perspectives and then apply them to understanding some contemporary and historical policy issues.

Defining the "perspectives"

The realist perspective contends that people and states worry most about their survival and seek sufficient material power and wealth to protect themselves against would-be adversaries. Because people live in separate communities, today separate nation-states, they do not recognize a single centralized authority or center of legitimate power in the world. The United Nations, for example, is not considered a world government in the same sense as a government in domestic affairs. A domestic government has a monopoly on the legitimate use of force. No domestic group has the right to take up arms against another domestic group or the domestic government. By contrast, the United Nations has no such monopoly. It can use force only with the consent of the great powers on the Security Council, and Article 51 of the UN Charter gives all states the right to use force to defend themselves whether or not the United Nations approves. The world from the realist perspective, therefore, works through a contest and balancing of military and economic power to protect national security (or survival). From this perspective, the attacks of September 11, 2001 revealed "a war in which the weak turned the guns of the strong against them ...showing ... that in the end there is no such thing as a universal civilization of which we all too easily assume we are the rightful leaders."⁵ Notice how the realist perspective interprets this event as a contest between the weak and the strong in which there is no rightful universal authority except that which each state decides.

⁵ Ronald Steel, "The Weak at War with the Strong", New York Times, September 14, 2001, A27.

The liberal perspective sees the world in terms of institutional order and cooperation, not material threat and balancing. It asks why international life cannot be similar to domestic life in which a single authority does exist and enforces common rules and law. After all, the scope of governmental authority has expanded since the beginning of time. Villages became towns, towns merged into cities, cities formed leagues and states, and today states constitute nations and unions such as the European Union. Why can't society eventually become global and common institutions and laws prevail at the international level just as they do today at the domestic level? From the liberal perspective, the facts of technology and interdependence are more important than the existence of separate communities or the distribution of material power. Technological change knits the world closer together through communications (diplomacy), transportation (trade), professional societies (epistemic communities), urbanization and industrialization (bureaucracies), common problem solving (law), and environmental protection (planet earth). From this perspective, states are less concerned with survival than wealth. Growth and interdependence build a more integrated global society with participation and fairness for all peoples. Thus, the attacks of 9/11 represented not another cycle in the struggle between the weak and strong but a failure to end unresolved grievances and poverty. As Caryle Murphy commented about 9/11, "if we want to avoid creating more terrorists, we must end the Israeli-Palestine conflict in a way both sides see as fair."⁶ Ignoring grievances and marginalizing people create conflict. What deters threat is not balancing forces but removing the alienation that prompts the use of force.

The identity perspective sees the world mostly in terms of values, norms and the substance or language of discourse. How groups and states envision and talk about themselves and others determines how they deploy their power and behave in common institutions, trade and problem solving activities. People are not just interested in survival but survival as a particular society or identity – for example, as a democratic or a theocratic society. And they are influenced by institutions only when they are tolerant enough of one another to work together through common practices. From this perspective, ideas shape power and institutions, not the reverse. Now the attacks of September 11 are the product of neither a power struggle nor unresolved grievances but of incompatible or insufficiently shared identities. As Jim Hoagland wrote a year after the 9/11 attacks, "The removal of Saddam Hussein and Yasser Arafat are necessary but not sufficient conditions [to resolve the Middle East conflict]... [and] the administration cannot rely ... on a now discredited peace process ... Only a level and clarity of American commitment to democratic change ... will calm an ever more deadly conflict."⁷ Notice how this argument deemphasizes the use of force – the removal of certain leaders by force is not enough – and does not expect much from negotiations or diplomacy – the administration cannot rely on the discredited peace process. Only a change in the identity of regimes in the Middle East that creates a more common dialogue can discipline the use of force and reignite the promise of diplomacy.

Teaching the perspectives

When teaching the perspectives, it is important to emphasize that they are analytical tools. By emphasizing certain causes of international affairs, each perspective simplifies a complex world.

⁶ Caryle Murphy, "A Hatred Rooted in Failings", Washington Post, September 16, 2001, B1.

⁷ Jim Hoagland, "The Mideast's Political Pygmies", Washington Post, August 1, 2002, A27.

In a complex world, all perspectives, that is, all the facts they emphasize, are present continuously. A single perspective merely helps us judge which facts someone may be emphasizing. Further, students should not mistake the perspectives for political labels. Liberal political parties, for example, do not necessarily adopt liberal perspectives and conservative political parties necessarily realist ones. Nor should the perspectives be confused with adjectives or adverbs, such as the "real" world, "realistic" outcomes, or China behaves "realistically". All the perspectives are "realistic". They speak to "real" world factors – power, institutions, and ideas – that influence international affairs. They differ, however, in terms of which "real" factors they relatively emphasize as causes.

It is also important to point out that all students and practitioners of international affairs apply all perspectives in gathering and understanding facts. The perspectives are not exclusive. But since we can never consider everything or conclude that everything matters, we make judgments in the end that privilege one perspective over another. We decide that one set of causes is weightier than another. Colin Powell's and Henry Kissinger's remarks noted above are illustrations. Even sophisticated scholars make such judgments. After a whole book analyzing all the factors involved in international economic policy coordination, Robert Putnam and Nicholas Baynes conclude that "if our conclusions on the role of interests, power and regimes in explaining summit cooperation must be cautionary, our verdict on the role of ideas is more positive ..."⁸ After looking at what evidence they could from all three perspective (obviously not all the evidence there is), they conclude that ideas matter more than power or regimes (institutions) in explaining economic summitry. They relatively emphasize identity factors.

It is true that some perspectives may be better than others in certain situations. For example, the realist perspective may have advantages over the other two perspectives in explaining situations of serious threat. When directly confronted by a serious threat (someone pulls a gun on you), one's immediate response is usually to duck or fight back, not to try to ascertain and mollify the beliefs of the threatening party or to refer the dispute to a court. However, often a threat is not obvious. Therefore the realist perspective may exaggerate threat.

Similarly, the liberal perspective may be more appropriate at explaining and predicting how cooperation can be achieved. However, it may underestimate the risks of cooperation by ignoring the possibility that the other party may be motivated more by beliefs (identity) and power (realist) than by the rules and institutions of trade or diplomacy. European states, for example, underestimated the threat that Adolf Hitler posed in the 1930s. The identity perspective may be most useful in anticipating situations of conflicts or cooperation. If someone pulls a gun on you and he is your brother, you might be more inclined to ask him why and try to start a conversation even before you duck. Similarly, the more identities are shared, the less likely conflict may be, as studies of the democratic peace suggest. Nevertheless, an identity approach may be too rigid. What if someone you consider a friend betrays you, or someone you consider an enemy tells you the truth. You may not believe them. Stalin thought Britain and France were capitalist enemies and did not believe them when they warned him that Hitler was about to attack the Soviet Union.

⁸ Robert D. Putnam and Nicholas Bayne, Hanging Together: Cooperation and Conflict in the Seven Power Summits, revised and enlarges edition (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1987), 275.

In fact, we emphasize to the students that each perspective is in effect critiques of the other(s). What the realist perspective relatively deemphasizes, such as institutions and trade, the liberal perspective emphasizes. What the liberal perspective relatively deemphasizes, such as armaments and war, the realist perspective highlights. And so on. Teaching the three perspectives together covers the range of factors that policymakers and scholars dispute. Thus the student learns not only how theory illuminates contemporary policy debates but why scholars still disagree about historical events, such as World War I, even though most if not all the facts are available about World War I.

Teaching perspectives with levels of analysis

Many introductory IR textbooks use the analytical tool of levels of analysis to differentiate world events and causes.⁹ Teaching perspectives complements and is fully compatible with levels of analysis. We show students how each perspective can operate at any level of analysis. For our purposes, we define four levels of analysis – systemic structure (relative distribution of state power), systemic process (interactions among states), domestic, and individual. The different perspectives may explain events from any one or combination of these levels. As two examples, let's look at various explanations of World War I and contemporary globalization.

Analysts who adopt the realist perspective in explaining World War I privilege causes dealing with material power and interests. At the systemic structure level of analysis, they emphasize the rise of Germany power, the relative decline of Britain, the rigidity of competing alliances, and a power vacuum in Europe due to the disintegration of the Austro-Hungarian and Ottoman Empires. At the domestic level of analysis, realist explanations focus on Germany's domestic politics and the logrolling of interests among landowners, industrialists, and military elites that generated an expansionist foreign policy. At the individual level of analysis, realist explanations stress the presence of weak leaders, especially in Russia and Austria-Hungary, who were unable to prevent the outbreak of war.

By contrast, analysts who adopt the liberal perspective highlight, at the systemic structure level of analysis, the absence of common European institutions that might have resolved state conflicts. They ask counterfactuals such as what if the Concert of Europe had still existed or the Hague Conference system had developed into an earlier and stronger version of the League of Nations. At the systemic process level, liberal explanations point to Germany's inept diplomacy and the German misperception that Britain would not intervene if Austria attacked Serbia in retaliation for the assassination of Archduke Franz Ferdinand. At the domestic level of analysis, liberal accounts emphasize the lack of coordination between the political and military bureaucracies in Germany or the disintegration of political institutions within the Ottoman and Austro-Hungarian Empires.

Analysts who adopt the identity perspective stress ideational causes. At the systemic structural level of analysis, they emphasize the system-wide prevalence of "social Darwinism" that

⁹ Joseph Nye, for example, analyzes the causes of major wars in terms of deep, intermediate and precipitating causes. He does not distinguish between realist, liberal and ideational causes at each level of analysis. See *Understanding International Conflicts*, 5th edition (New York: Pearson/Longman, 2005), see, for an illustration, 75-76.

fomented a competitive struggle for survival. At the systemic process level, they highlight "the cult of the offensive" that led countries to develop interactive military mobilization and war plans. At the domestic level, they point to Germany's hypernationalism – a combination of racism and xenophobia. At the individual level, some accounts stress the paranoia of the German Kaiser.

What about globalization? At the systemic structure level of analysis, realist accounts emphasize the unprecedented U.S. military and economic dominance after the Cold War that permitted global markets to expand and deepen across former communist and developing regions. At the domestic level, realist explanations stress U.S. and British domestic policies that strengthened free markets and rebuilt military defenses and "defeated" the Soviet Union. In a related fashion, at the individual level, realist accounts highlight the influences of Western leaders like President Ronald Reagan and Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher.

Liberal accounts see the sources of globalization very differently. At the systemic structure level of analysis, liberal accounts stress the role of the information revolution and technological change that devalued the use of military force and encouraged the Soviet Union to open its closed economy. They observe how trade relations, through an interactive process, eventually spilled over to create highly integrated global financial markets. At the domestic level of analysis, such accounts stress the proliferation of sub-national actors, notably human rights NGOs and multinational corporations, which increasingly constrain and transform traditional state policies.

Finally, at the systemic structural level of analysis, some identity accounts stress the global triumph of democracy and market-oriented ideas, while others highlight the spread of new concepts of common and human (rather than national) security emphasizing human rights, emancipation of women and environmental protection. At the domestic level of analysis, identity explanations focus on the competition between free market ideas and state interventionist policies. And, at the individual level of analysis, identity explanations point to the "new thinking" of leaders such as President Mikhail Gorbachev in the former Soviet Union.

Teaching Perspectives with history

Just as undergraduate students can be allergic to theories, they can also find history to be daunting with all the names, places, and dates to remember. We believe that it is important for students to understand the development of world history because past events not only offer lessons from which future generations can learn, they also offer fertile grounds from which theorists locate cases to substantiate their claims. By combining the teaching of perspectives with the teaching of history, we aim to show the students that not only is history relevant, it can also be understood in a manner that is not overwhelming.

We do so by asking students to identify the significance of key historical events and concepts primarily in terms of their relations with the perspectives. For example, on an examination, the student may be asked to identify the term "Enlightenment." How might she do that? In addition to noting that it occurred in the eighteenth century in Europe, and that it involved a flowering of scientific and secular thought that emphasized classical liberal themes such as individual liberty, free markets and scientific inquiry, the student may state that the term is associated with the

identity perspective because it exemplifies the impact of ideational changes on European institutions and capabilities at the time.

How about the League of Nations? The student may respond that it is an international institution founded after World War I at the Paris Peace conference in 1919, and that it embodied the collective security approach to the use of military power. The League tried to create a preponderance, rather than a balancing, of military power to deter an aggressor, defining the aggressor as any country that breaks the common rules for settling disputes peacefully. Finally, the student may answer that this concept is emphasized by the liberal perspective because it highlights the role that institutions play in shaping power relationships and identifying aggressor nations.

In a similar fashion, we might ask students to identify the significance of the Triple Alliance. The student may point out that the Triple Alliance was one of two major alliances leading into World War I. The alliance included Imperial Germany, the Austro-Hungarian Empire (which joined in 1879), and Italy (which joined in 1882). Lastly, the student might note that this alliance would be emphasized by the realist perspective because it was formed to counterbalance the Triple Entente (which it did almost perfectly in terms of wealth and military manpower).

In this manner, we show students that history is not simply a set of endless and unrelated facts. Instead, historical events often reflect certain perspectives and causes of world affairs. Students become aware that history offers comparisons and maybe even lessons for the present. For example, what if the League of Nations had functioned in the 1930s the way the United Nations did in 1990-91 during the first Gulf War? What was done differently in the 1990s and why did the success of the United Nations not persist?

Applying the perspectives in everyday debates

Most students are unlikely to pursue careers as scholars in the field of international relations in particular or political science in general. Nonetheless, training in theoretical perspectives generates skills that can be applied in almost any career in the public or private sector. In the real world, people engage in debates with implicit perspectives or worldviews. Being able to identify these implicit perspectives helps students become better citizens and consumers of information. They are better equipped to detect opposing arguments and formulate their own positions.

Let's take a brief look at two recent op ed articles and apply our perspectives approach to read between the lines of the contemporary debate about international affairs.

Take a look at Appendix A and read Sebastian Mallaby's column, "Rice's Blind Spot" in the Washington Post on January 2006.¹⁰ He begins by observing that in 2000 Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice "laid out the classic 'realist' position: American diplomacy should 'focus on power relationships and great power politics' rather than other countries' internal affairs." Students recognize this point of view easily enough as the realist perspective and the systemic structural level of analysis. By 2006, however, as Mallaby notes later in the column, Rice turned toward giving more emphasis to the internal affairs of other countries. She now says that "the

¹⁰ Sebastian Mallaby, "Rice's Blind Spot", Washington Post, January 23, 2006, A15.

fundamental character of regimes matter more than the international distribution of power." The political ideas of democracy vs. autocracy drive politics more than power. Students see this point of view as an identity perspective, and the domestic level of analysis becomes more important. At this point, having blocked out the last third of the column, I ask students what Mallaby is likely to identify as "Rice's Blind Spot." What perspective is missing? The liberal perspective, of course. And this is exactly the perspective from which Mallaby criticizes Rice. He faults her for not paying enough attention to the institutional capabilities to transform societies: "to build nations you must first build institutions". Institutions come before ideas, and no amount of power may suffice because "nobody knows how to [build institutions]." Mallaby might have also criticized Rice, from this liberal perspective, for relatively neglecting international institutions and not being aggressive enough on the diplomatic front. Students thus learn not only how to analyze what is written but also to anticipate what is not written. They become true critical thinkers and not just idle consumers of the opinions they read.

David Brooks offers a second example. Read his column in Appendix B on globalization, "The Jagged World", New York Times, September 3, 2006, 10. He begins by saying that he "used to see the world as a landscape of rolling hills ... Globalization seemed to be driving events, the integration of markets, communications and people." He used to see the world, in other words from a liberal perspective. Now, he says, "my mental image of the landscape of humanity is not made up of rolling hills. It's filled with chasms, crevices, jagged cliffs and dark forests." People everywhere, he says, "want to satisfy their desires". Presumably he means for material things, a hint at realist motivations or the realist perspective. But, more importantly, he adds, "they also require moral systems ... respect and recognition ... [and] identity." "The chief driver of events right now", he concludes, "is not only globalization ... It's also the contest among cultures over the power ... to define what is right and wrong." This contest drives people into tribes and creates chasms between them. Will globalization be able to surmount this tribalism? Brooks bets on ideas rather than wealth. "Only democratic habits will prevent the inevitable clash of the tribes from turning into a war of nuclear annihilation". He finally opts for identity over liberal or realist factors.

We could give many more examples, and the textbook from which this essay draws does so.¹¹ The perspectives approach illuminates big as well as small issues. Take the current terrorist conflict. Realist perspectives tend to see it as "a global war on terror" to be settled by a struggle for power. They emphasize the possibility that terrorists might acquire weapons of mass destruction and focus on military means to preempt or contain this threat. Liberal perspectives tend to see terrorist attacks more as "international criminal acts" violating international law and expressing the social and political grievances of marginalized and alienated peoples. They emphasize diplomatic solutions to ameliorate grievances and international courts to try and punish offenders. Identity perspectives tend to see terrorism as a "clash of civilizations" or, alternatively, as a constructed dialogue that exaggerates religious differences and overlooks human commonalities. They emphasize the war of ideas or, alternatively, a global dialogue to bridge cultural and religious differences. These three positions drawn from the different perspectives line up with the major arguments in the contemporary debate about terrorism. The issues are much more complex than that, of course, but students get a pretty good initial handle

¹¹ Henry R. Nau, Perspectives on International Relations: Power, Institutions, and Ideas (Washington, D.C.: CQ Press, 2006).

on the complexity of contemporary international affairs by learning and applying the perspectives approach.

Conclusion

Perspective or orientation is not the end but the beginning of discussions and understanding. Students learn to formulate alternative hypotheses contingent on assumptions and circumstances and collect new facts to test these hypotheses. They draw conclusions with caveats aware that they cannot consider all the facts. In the end they speak cautiously about truth, knowing how contingent knowledge is.

Theory is not a poison. It need not dampen or kill enthusiasm among first year IR students. In fact, it can do just the opposite, enliven a student's awareness of alternatives, help them distinguish between facts (events) and knowledge, and alert them to perspectives behind what they read on the Internet and see on television. They become independent thinkers about world affairs, the primary goal of undergraduate education.

Appendix A

Rice's Blind Spot

By Sebastian Mallaby
The Washington Post
Monday, January 23, 2006; A15

Nobody doubts her star power. She speaks Russian and talks football, wears dominatrix boots and plays Dvorak, weaves her segregated Alabama childhood into speeches about geopolitics. But the strange thing about Condoleezza Rice is that, when it comes to the stuff that a professor-politician should be really good at, she can be oddly flat-footed. This was true when she emerged as George W. Bush's fitness buddy and foreign policy tutor seven years ago. It is still true now.

In January 2000, as the Bush campaign got underway, Rice published a manifesto in Foreign Affairs that laid out the classic "realist" position: American diplomacy should "focus on power relationships and great-power politics" rather than on other countries' internal affairs. "Some worry that this view of the world ignores the role of values, particularly human rights and the promotion of democracy," she acknowledged. But the priority for U.S. foreign policy was to deal with powerful governments, whose "fits of anger or acts of beneficence affect hundreds of millions of people."

Even six years ago, this was an outdated position. The Clinton administration was certainly preoccupied with powers such as Russia and China, but it was also tracking Islamic terrorists who had already attacked the World Trade Center. The importance of other non-state actors, from rebels to environmentalists to bond traders, had become a cliché of globalization commentary; AIDS had been recognized as a security threat. The era of great-power politics was widely thought to have ended with the collapse of the Soviet Union. Rice seemed like a Sovietologist who hadn't quite caught up.

Even more curiously, Rice was leaning against the tide in her own party. Ever since the 1970s, the heyday of the ultra-realist Henry Kissinger, his followers had been retreating. The realists favored accommodation with pro-American autocrats, but then Iran's shah fell, followed by dictators in the Philippines and South Korea -- and the realists found themselves on the wrong side of history. Likewise, the realists favored detente with the Soviets, but Reagan's denunciations of the evil empire proved more effective. Time and again, the idea that diplomacy consisted mainly of relations with powerful governments proved wrong. As a rising cadre of neoconservative Republicans argued, diplomacy was often about judging the currents within countries -- and backing democratic ones.

Fast-forward to 2006. Rice gave two speeches last week calling for "transformational diplomacy," meaning diplomacy that will transform undemocratic societies: The internal affairs of other countries turn out to be important after all. "The greatest threats now emerge more within states than between them," she said Wednesday. "The fundamental character of regimes now matters more than the international distribution of power. In this world it is impossible to

draw neat, clear lines between our security interests, our development efforts and our democratic ideals."

Well, that's quite a turnaround. But it's not a completely satisfying one, because the debate has recently moved on. Rice has caught up with the 1990s consensus that powerful states may pose less of a problem than disintegrating weak ones and that the best hope for peace in the long term is a world of stable democracies. But she's only half-acknowledging the next question: Yes, weak and autocratic states are a problem, but can we do anything about them?

The best formulation of this new debate comes from Francis Fukuyama, who famously proclaimed the universality of the democratic urge in his 1989 essay on history's end. Fukuyama certainly believes in spreading U.S. values, but he has emerged as a critic of the Iraq war because he believes its ambitions were unrealizable. The United States lacks the instruments to transform other societies, Fukuyama argues; to build nations you must first build institutions, and nobody knows how to do that. Conservatives, who have long preached the limits to what government can achieve with domestic social policies, should wake up to government's limits in foreign policy as well.

Rice shows some signs of seeing this. She is not content with the instruments of foreign policy as they exist, and her speeches last week were about fostering new ones -- a strengthened office for post-conflict stabilization and a reconfigured foreign aid program. But this only begins to confront Fukuyama's worry, which is that no amount of tinkering with the apparatus of government will make nation-building possible. Creating a functional Iraq or Afghanistan requires creating norms of work and trust and honesty, and such norms can't be conjured by outsiders, no matter how well organized they are.

The big question today in foreign policy is not whether you are a realist or an idealist. It's whether you are an optimist or a pessimist: whether you think that Iraq has gone badly merely because the Bush administration mishandled it, or whether you believe that no amount of skillful management could have achieved stability after three years. I've watched Rice handle squadrons of aggressive journalists, and there's no doubting her intellect. But her forays into grand theory are disappointing. Last week's call for "transformational diplomacy" merely slides past today's big question. It doesn't offer an answer.

Appendix B

The Jagged World

By David Brooks
The New York Times
Sunday, September 3, 2006; 10

I don't know about you, but while the events of the past five years haven't really changed the patterns of my everyday life, they've certainly transformed the way I see the world.

I used to see the world as a landscape of rolling hills. There were different nations, tribes and societies, but the slopes connecting those groups were gradual and hospitable. It seemed relatively easy to travel from society to society, to understand and commune with one another.

Globalization seemed to be driving events, the integration of markets, communications and people. It seemed to be creating, with fits and starts, globalized individuals, who had one foot in a particular culture and another foot in a shared flow of movies, music, products and ideas.

I spent much of the 1990's (that most deceptive decade) abroad -- in Europe, the former Soviet Union and the Middle East. People everywhere seemed to want the same things: to live in normal societies, to be free, to give their children better lives.

Now it seems that was an oversimplified view of human nature. It's true people everywhere want to satisfy their desires, but they also require moral systems that will restrain and give shape to their desires. It's true people everywhere love their children, but they also require respect and recognition and they will sacrifice their own lives, and even their children's lives, in wars for status. It's true people everywhere hate oppression, but they also require identity, and human beings build identities by collectively hating groups that represent what they are not.

All these other parts of human nature impel people to become tribal. People form groups to realize their need for status, moral order and identity. The differences between these groups can be vast and irreconcilable.

Now my mental image of the landscape of humanity is not made up of rolling hills. It's filled with chasms, crevices, jagged cliffs and dark forests. The wildernesses between groups seem stark and perilous.

People who live in societies where authority is united -- as under Islam -- are really different from people who live in societies where authority is divided. People in honor societies -- where someone will kill his sister because she has become polluted by rape -- are different from people in societies where people are judged by individual intentions. People who live in societies where the past dominates the present are different from people who live in societies where the future dominates the present.

Samuel Huntington once looked at the vast differences between groups and theorized that

humanity is riven into different civilizations. That's close but not quite right. Today's divisions aren't permanent. Instead, groups are constantly being formed and revised in a process of Schumpeterian creative destruction.

Yesterday's high-tech entrepreneurs look like pikers compared to the social entrepreneurs of today. Islamist entrepreneurs have quickly built the world's most vibrant and destructive movement by combining old teachings, invented traditions, imagined purities and new technologies. The five most important people in the Arab world, according to a recent survey, are the leaders of Hezbollah, Iran, Hamas, Al Qaeda and the Muslim Brotherhood. Microsoft's market conquest is nothing compared to that.

Other and more benign groups are being created as well: Pentecostal sects, MoveOn.org, Hugo Chavez populists and whatever groups are invisibly forming among left-behind peasants in India and China.

The chief driver of events right now is not only globalization -- the integration of economies and peoples. It's also the contest among cultures over the power of consecration -- the power to define what is right and wrong. Rising hegemony like Iran (and the U.S.) see themselves not only as nations but also as moral movements.

Since 9/11, the U.S. has had little success in influencing distant groups. Americans blew the postwar administration of Iraq because they assumed they were liberating a nation sort of like their own. And yet I can't seem to renounce my own group, which is America. It would feel like cultural suicide to repress the central truths of my society, that all human beings are endowed with inalienable rights and democracy is the most just and effective form of government.

The hard lesson of the last five years -- that we live in a jagged world filled with starkly different and contesting groups -- makes democracy promotion more difficult but more necessary. Only democratic habits will prevent the inevitable clash of the tribes from turning into a war of nuclear annihilation.