A Basic Guide to ***Bilateral Interstate Relations*** for Chinese EFL Learners

Actions and relationships in international politics maybe divided by how many states are involved, whether one (unilateral), two (bilateral), or three or more (multilateral). For example, a state leader may unilaterally decide to withdraw from a bilateral alliance or multilateral organization or treaty. Power itself is often defined bilaterally, as in "A has power over B when A can make B do something B would not otherwise do." This handout seeks to clarify how any two nation-states may relate to one another, especially between "self" and "other" in "alterity", but it can also apply less formally to other types of actors (units of analysis). Many of these terms are the instructor's own opinion, so be careful in formal situations not to assume everyone agrees on what they mean! Also note that most "games" in Game Theory are for two "players":

Friendship to Enmity What are the basic ways to describe how nice two states are to one another? Any two states' relations may be...

1. Friendly: As when two states are joined in a formal security alliance. Note that a general goal of diplomacy is usually to achieve friendly relations. Such states are called "strategic partners". The USA gives states with which it is on friendly terms "most favored nation (MFN)" status for trade (though with free-trade agreements, FTAs, becoming more and more widespread, MFN status is becoming less and less of a distinguishment). WTO membership requires MFN status between all members. Other synonyms include "cordial, allied, warm"
2. Competitive: Generally focused on economic rather than security competition, two states compete when they don't have particularly warm feelings for each other but also lack severe conflict. Competing for soft power (i.e. for the most attractive model of development) is often emblematic of a competitive relationship. For example, George W. Bush is largely seen as responsible for declaring China to be a "strategic competitor" of the USA, and sometimes the Washington Consensus and Beijing Consensus are proposed as competing models for developing countries to follow. One way to rationalize this still being basically a kind of warmer relationship is to keep in mind the logic of the market that "a little friendly competition" is likely to make everybody better.

Anywhere in the middle between **2.** & **3.**, bilateral "games" may cease to be "positive-sum", making "win-win" agreements less likely. Such relationships maybe be said to be "muddled, awkward, strained, suspicious, decaying, neglected, deteriorating" or any number of other words which informally suggest conflict.

3. Adversarial: Two states whose global strategies and "core interests" greatly conflict may be said to have an adversarial relationship in which each "rival" may be a "strategic opponent" or even a "strategic saboteur" who wants the other to fail to achieve its goals. As for the majority of the 20th century, the U.S. and Soviet Union were locked in a cold war of adversarial relations, briefly lightened for the 1990s and 2000s but again turning sour with Russia's more recent actions in Georgia and the Ukraine. Pakistan and India are another longstanding example. Such relationships are characterized by strong distrust, even fear, and are often modeled as "zero-sum" two-player games.
4. Enemies at War: Two states in a declared or "hot" war are enemies, seen to have few or no shared interests and to have taken their zero-sum game out of diplomacy and onto the battlefield. One goal of this relationship may be to completely eliminate the other. In rare cases of imperial conquest, the struggle may be precisely to keep the bilateral relationship from becoming unilateral, or internal to a single state.

The Roles of Rationality in PTT Policies: Distrust, Fear, & the Thucydides Trap

Under the Security Dilemma, ***distrust*** may lead to a bilateral arms race, as neither side can be sure that the other is, as it is likely to claim, building its military "only for self-defense" rather than for offensive purposes. A less rational component of Power Transition Theory (PTT), ***fear*** of a rising power may lead both the current hegemon and the rising power to be caught in the ***Thucydides Trap***, in which catastrophic, hegemonic war may be all but inevitable and dramatically alter the polarity of the international system. Fear of another state's intentions is also likely to produce imagined threats (i.e. imposing malign intent on neutral capabilities or exaggerating the capabilities of those with malign intent) where there are none. Finally, fear may exist in any of relationships **1-4**, with the potential to raise the # away from friendly relations. A good example is 1980s Japan: despite an ongoing and very close security alliance, many Americans feared Japan's quickly growing economic prowess, threatening to make U.S.-Japan relations competitive instead of friendly. Building on John Mearshimer's claims, a hegemon needn't fear its survival but is always afraid of losing its hegemony.

In terms of openness or closure, PTT makes several predictions and prescriptions for a rational hegemon and rising power. Full ***accommodation*** of the rising power's interests is very unlikely, as it would likely require deeply or completely sacrificing many of the standing hegemon's interests, which are likely to conflict with that of a revisionist challenger. ***Engagement*** is a middle ground in which trade and economic competition are likely embraced and maintained, while holding firm where security interests (i.e. core interests) conflict. Engagement with an adversary or, for liberals, an illiberal regime, is often subject to harsh criticism as accommodating a rival or abetting "evil". A rising power might well accuse the hegemon of the least friendly relations short of war, or ***containment***, despite an actual policy of engagement. Chinese nationalists are especially prone to deny that U.S. policy towards China at least since President Clinton has been one of consistent engagement, without which China's rise may have been impossible, or certainly much slower. Though disengagement in favor of containment of China has frequently been proposed, no such change has been formally adopted. Containment is a policy directed at a feared adversary, in which the interests of the adversary are actively opposed, even where cooperation or otherwise engagements would provide absolute gains. PTT and other realist theories both predict and prescribe containment against rising powers, as it is assumed to be irrational for a hegemon to aid the rise of one which might eventually usurp its hegemony. A policy of containment is also likely to include organizing other countries to attempt ***encirclement***—alliances with all neighboring countries which encourage each to practice containment with the hegemon. Short of the relationship between South Africa and Lesotho, however, encirclement may *not* be practiced unilaterally and only bilaterally when a state has international borders with only two other states, as in the case of Mongolia.

Dependence to Independence How can we describe unequal relationships where one state dominates or impinges on the independence of another?

In Chinese history, smaller states in the region may have been "tributaries," meaning they paid tribute to the greatness and power of the larger state with "tributary missions". A much stronger sense of dominance in which the state loses its political independence (i.e. is ruled by a foreign imperialist regime) is a colonized state or "colony". Two imperial states may also sign a mutual "non-aggression pact" as that between Germany & the USSR in WWII. Most historians consider China to have been only "semi-colonized", as multiple states had colonies in China, and the majority of Chinese territory remained under some kind of Chinese control. A state propped up as a guise for an imperial power, such as Manchukuo in the early 20th century, is considered a "puppet state".

Today, dominance of such a level is becoming rare, if not fully illegal. More often, a state may not exist at the pleasure of another but be almost fully dependent on a larger state for economic and military resources. Such states are "clients" or "client states". Additionally, great powers may, quite controversially, be accused of "neo-colonialism" by dominating another state's economy (whether with its MNCs or other means) as an acknowledgement that regular colonialism is outlawed (or at least strongly disparaged) by the principle of self-determination.

Useful Prefixes to Describe Bilateral Relations Some countries', groups', and other organizations' names change when paired with another (especially when named first), such as... China → Sino- ; European → Euro- ; French → Franco- ; Russia → Russo- ; Turkey → Turko-
Thus, we can either say Sino-American relations *OR* American-Chinese relations. We would *not* say American-Sino relations. When naming a country first, we may have a slight (not strong) assumption that the relationship is considered from the perspective of the first state, though not necessarily so.

Vocabulary "in-group" Vs. "out-group" mutual 共有的，共同的 Occidentalism Orientalism东方语风格 protagonist (hero) VS. antagonist (anti-hero) reciprocal 相互的，相助的 reciprocity 相互关系 The Self VS. The Other

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