UNIVERSITY OF LONDON | INTERNATIONAL PROGRAMMES

Foreign policy analysis

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Undergraduate study in
**Economics, Management,
Finance and the Social Sciences**

LSE THE LONDON SCHOOL OF ECONOMICS AND POLITICAL SCIENCE ■

Contents

Introduction

This subject guide provides an introduction to the field of foreign policy analysis. Foreign policy is, to use Christopher Hill's definition, 'purposive action with the view towards promoting the interests of a single political community or state'.[1] The study of foreign policy is referred to as foreign policy analysis, and its focus is the intentions and actions of (primarily) states aimed at the external world and the response of other actors (again, primarily states) to these actions. This course is not designed to give you detailed exposure to the changing foreign policies of any particular country, though of course you will have many opportunities to learn about the foreign policies of major, middle and small powers through the reading material. It is aimed at giving you the tools to analyse, interpret and, ultimately, understand the dynamics of foreign policy generally so that you might apply these to your study of the role of states in international affairs.

[1] Hill, C. The changing politics of foreign policy. (Basingstoke: Palgrave, 2003) [ISBN 0333754239] p.285

Aims of the course

The aims of this course are to:

- introduce you to the central concepts in foreign policy analysis
- develop your comparative skills of analysis of differing foreign policies in practice
- promote critical engagement with the foreign policy analysis literature and enable you to display this engagement by developing an ability to present, substantiate and defend complex arguments.

Learning outcomes

By the end of this course, and having completed the Essential readings and activities, you should be able to:

- identify and assess the processes involved in foreign policy decision making
- discuss the contexts, pressures and constraints with which foreign policy makers have to deal
- conduct comparative analysis of foreign policy without losing sense of historical context.

The structure of this guide

This subject guide consists of 10 chapters and a concluding chapter which provides a summary perspective on the issues covered in the course. Chapter 1 is an overview of the field of foreign policy analysis and its relationship to International Relations, while subsequent chapters are grouped into three parts:

- Part 1 focuses on the decision-making process in foreign policy.
- Part 2 focuses on the actors and structures involved in foreign policy.
- Part 3 examines the role and impact of rapid globalisation on the foreign policy process.

Following the overview on foreign policy analysis, **Part 1** introduces you to the state and the setting of foreign policy, including the role of power,

rationality and psychological approaches to understanding the dynamics involved in individual and group decision making. It concludes with an analysis of the part played by bureaucracies in shaping foreign policy.

Part 2 provides you with an introduction to the key actors in foreign policy, namely states, and assesses their foreign policy orientation in terms of a hierarchy of power and capability. This is followed by an examination of the differing impacts of the external or material environment and the domestic environment on foreign policy.

Part 3 looks at the changing international system and how the overall rise of transnationalism, which has fostered a growth in linkages between states, intergovernmental organisations and non-state actors, has challenged the state's pre-eminence in international affairs. This is followed by an examination of the onset of democratic transitions within many states in the contemporary era and how this has affected foreign policy making in these states.

Finally, the conclusion summarises the main themes in the subject guide and discusses the relationship between foreign policy analysis and International Relations.

How to use this guide

For some courses that you study, you are directed to read your essential textbooks after you have worked through the chapter in the guide. For this course, the best thing to do is skim-read through the chapter in the guide to give you an idea of what the chapter is about, then familiarise yourself with the assigned readings in your textbooks. Then work slowly and carefully through the chapters, and take note of the learning outcomes.

When you have finished the chapter make sure that you can 'tick off' all of the points you should have covered. If you can't, go back and read again carefully. Recommended and Further Readings may be useful to consult as well, both for pursuing a topic in depth and for additional clarity around a particular idea or event.

Hours of study

If you are studying for this course over the course of a standard academic year we would suggest that you study for no less than six hours each week and preferably more if you are to do all the reading and thinking required to gain higher marks. If you are taking more time to prepare for the examination, adjust this figure. The course is equivalent to one LSE course and full-time students study four courses in a year.

The syllabus

If taken as part of a BSc degree, **11 Introduction to international relations** must be passed before this course may be attempted.

This course examines the key concepts and schools of thought in foreign policy analysis, concentrating particularly on the process of decision making, the internal and external factors which influence foreign policy decisions, the instruments available to foreign policy decision makers and the effect of changes in the international system on foreign policy. The course combines a discussion of these theories with their application to selected countries in the north, the south, international organisations and transnational actors.

The principal themes to be addressed by the course are:

- the role and relevance of foreign policy in the era of globalisation
- how different theoretical approaches to foreign policy analysis shape our understanding of foreign policy
- the role of leadership, the bureaucracy and interest groups in setting the state's foreign policy agenda
- what challenges face states in constructing a new foreign policy
- the scope for affecting change in the international system by non-state actors.

Reading

The reading for this course is divided into three categories: Essential, Recommended and Further.

You are advised to purchase or have regular access to the textbooks listed as Essential reading. You are not required to read either the Recommended or Further reading, but they should be considered in that order of preference.

Essential reading

Alden, C. and A. Aran *Foreign policy analysis – new approaches*. (London: Routledge, 2011) [ISBN 9780415427999].

Clarke, M. and B. White (eds) *Understanding foreign policy: the foreign policy systems approach*. (Aldershot: Edward Elgar, 1989) [ISBN 9781852781255].

Hermann, C. 'Changing course: when governments choose to redirect foreign policy', *International Studies Quarterly* 34(1) 1990, pp.3–22.

Hill, C. *The changing politics of foreign policy*. (Basingstoke: Palgrave, 2003) [ISBN 9780333754238].

Lobell, S., N. Prisman, J. Taliaferro (eds) *Neoclassical realism, the state and foreign policy* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009) [ISBN 9780521731928]

Neack, L., J. Hey and P. Heaney (eds) *Foreign policy analysis: continuity and change in its second generation*. (Englewood Cliffs, New Jersey: Prentice Hall, 1995) [ISBN 9780130605757]. Alternatively, if you are having difficulty obtaining a copy of this textbook there is a suitable alternative by the same author:

Neack, L. *The New Foreign Policy: US and Comparative Foreign Policy in the 21st Century*. (Rowman & Littlefield Publishers Inc., 2002) [ISBN 9780742501478].

Smith, S., A. Hadfield and T. Dunne (eds) *Foreign policy: theories, actors, cases*. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008) [ISBN 9780199215294].

Webber, M. and M. Smith *Foreign policy in a transformed world*. (Harlow: Prentice Hall, 2002) [ISBN 9780139087578].

Detailed reading references in this subject guide refer to the editions of the set textbooks listed above. New editions of one or more of these textbooks may have been published by the time you study this course. You can use a more recent edition of any of the books; use the detailed chapter and section headings and the index to identify relevant readings. Also check the virtual learning environment (VLE) regularly for updated guidance on readings.

Further and recommended reading

Please note that as long as you read the Essential reading you are then free to read around the subject area in any text, paper or online resource. You

will need to support your learning by reading as widely as possible and by thinking about how these principles apply in the real world. To help you read extensively, you have free access to the VLE and University of London Online Library (see below).

Other useful texts for this course include:

Alden, C. *China in Africa* (London: Zed 2007).

Alden, C. and M. Vieira 'The new diplomacy of the South: South Africa, Brazil and India and trilateralism', *Third World Quarterly* 26(7) 2005, pp.1077–096.

Allison, G. and P. Zelikow *The essence of decision*. (New York: Longman, 1999) second edition [ISBN 0321013492].

Bendor, J. and T. Hammond, 'Rethinking Allison's models', *American Political Science Review* 86(2) 1992, pp.301–22.

Bennet, L. and D. Paletz (eds) *Taken by storm: the media, public opinion and US foreign policy in the Gulf War*. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1994) [ISBN 0226042596].

Brown, C. 'Ethics, interests and foreign policy', in K. Smith and M. Light (eds) *Ethics and foreign policy* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001).

Byman, D. and K. Pollack, 'Let us now praise great men: bringing the statesman back in', *International Security* 25(4) 2001, pp.107–46.

Carlnaes, W. 'The agency-structure problem in foreign policy analysis', *International Studies Quarterly* 36, 1992, pp.245–70.

Chan, S. and W. Safran 'Public opinion as a constraint against war: democracies' response to Operation Iraqi Freedom', *Foreign Policy Analysis* 2(2) 2006, pp.137–56.

Cooper, A., R. Higgot and K. Nossal *Relocating middle powers: Australia and Canada in a changing world order*. (Vancouver, BC: University of British Columbia, 1993) [ISBN 0774804505].

Finnemore, M. and K. Sikkink 'International norm dynamics and political change', *International Organization* 52(4) 1998.

Fearon, J. 'Rationalist explanations for war', *International Organization* 49(3) 1995.

Foyle, D. 'Foreign policy analysis and globalization: public opinion, world opinion and the individual', *International Studies Review* 5(2) 2003, pp.155–202.

Foyle, D. 'Public opinion and foreign policy: elite beliefs as a mediating variable', *International Studies Quarterly* 41(1) 1997, pp.141–70.

Garrison, J. (ed.), 'Foreign Policy Analysis in 20/20', *International Studies Review* June 5, pp.153–63.

Gelpi, C. 'Democratic diversions: governmental structure and the externalization of domestic conflict', *Journal of Conflict Resolution* 41(2) 1997, pp.255–82.

George, A. *Bridging the gap: theory and practice in foreign policy* (Washington, DC: US Institute of Peace 1993) Chapter 1.

Gordao, P. 'Regime change and foreign policy: Portugal, Indonesia and the self-determination of East Timor', *Democratization* 9(4) 2002, pp.142–58.

Handel, M. *Weak states in the international system*. (London: Frank Cass, 1990) [ISBN 0714633852].

Hermann, M., T. Preston, B. Korany and T Shaw 'Who leads matters: the effect of powerful individuals', *International Studies Review* 3(2) 2001, pp.83–132.

Hermann, M. 'Explaining foreign policy behaviour using the personal characteristics of political leaders', *International Studies Quarterly* 24(7) 1980, pp.7–46.

Hill, C. *The changing politics of foreign policy*. (Basingstoke: Palgrave, 2003) [ISBN 0333754239].

Holsti, O. 'Public opinion and foreign policy: the challenge to the Almond-Lippman consensus', *International Studies Quarterly* 36(4) 1992, pp.439–66.

Hook, S. (ed.) *Comparative foreign policy: adaptive strategies of the great and emerging powers*. (New Jersey: Prentice Hall, 2002) [ISBN 0130887897].

Hudson, V. *Culture and foreign policy*. (Boulder, CO: Lynne Rienner 1995).

Hudson, V. 'Foreign policy analysis: actor-specific theory and the ground of international relations', *Foreign policy analysis* 1(1) 2005, pp.1–30.

Hudson, V. and E. Singer *Political psychology and foreign policy*. (Boulder: Westview 1992).

Ikenberry, J. 'The rise of China and the future of the west', *Foreign Affairs* January/February 2008.

James, P. and E. Zhang 'Chinese choices: a polyheuristic analysis of foreign policy crises, 1950–1996', *Foreign Policy Analysis* 1(1) 2005, pp.31–54.

Jervis, R. 'Perception and misperception in international politics', in J. Ikenberry (ed.), *American foreign policy: theoretical essays*. (New York: Longman, 2005), pp.462–83.

Jervis, R. *Perception and misperception in international politics*. (New York: Columbia University Press, 1976) [ISBN 0691056560].

Johnston, A. 'Is China a status quo power?', *International Security* 27(4) 2003, pp.5–56.

Josselin, D. and W. Wallace (eds) *Non-state actors in world politics*. (Basingstoke: Palgrave 2001).

Kahler, M. (ed.) *Liberalization and foreign policy*. (New York: Columbia University Press, 1997) [ISBN 0231109431] Introduction.

Keohane, R. and J. Nye, *Power and interdependence*. (Glenville, Ill: Scott, Foresman 1989) second edition.

Lenin, V. *Imperialism, the highest stage of capitalism*. Lenin Internet Archive, www.marxists.org/archive/lenin/works/1916/imp-hsc/index.htm

Light, M. 'Foreign policy analysis' in Light, M. and A.J.R. Groom (eds) *Contemporary international relations: a guide to theory*. (London: Pinter, 1994) [ISBN 185567128X].

Mansfield, E. and J. Snyder 'Democratic transitions, institutional strength and war', *International Organization* 56(2) 2002, pp.297–337.

Martin, L. 'Interests, power and multilateralism', *International Organization* 46(4) 1992, pp.756–92.

Mercer, J. 'Rationality and psychology in international politics', *International Organization* 59 2005, pp.77–106.

Mintz, A. 'How do leaders make decisions? A poliheuristic perspective', *Journal of Conflict Resolution* 48(1) 2004, pp.3–13.

Mintz, A. (ed.) *Integrating cognitive and rational theories of foreign policy making: the polyheuristic theory of decision*. (Basingstoke: Palgrave, 2003) [ISBN 0312294093].

Morgenthau, H. *Politics among nations: the struggle for power and peace*. (New York: Alfred Knopf, 1950).

Nincic, M. *Democracy and foreign policy*. (New York: Columbia University Press, 1992) [ISBN 023107669X].

Parker, G. *Geopolitics: past, present and future*. (London: Pinter, 1998) [ISBN 1855673975].

Putnam, R. 'Diplomacy and domestic politics: the logic of the two-level game', *International Organization* 42(3) 1988, pp.427–60.

Rose, G. 'Neoclassical realism and the theories of foreign policy', *World Politics* 51(1) pp.144–72.

Shain, Y. and J. Linz (eds) *Between states: interim governments and democratic transitions*. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995) [ISBN 0521484987].

Smith, S. 'Allison and the Cuban missile crisis: a review of the bureaucratic politics model for foreign policy decision making', *Millennium* 9(1) 1980, pp.21–40.

Snidal, D. 'The game theory of international politics', *World Politics* 38(1) 1985, pp.25–57.

Snyder, G. 'The security dilemma in alliance politics', *World Politics* 36(4) 1984.

Snyder, J. 'One world, rival theories' *Foreign Policy*, November/December 2004, pp.52–63.

Snyder, R., H.W. Bruck, B. Sapin and V. Hudson *Foreign policy decision making (revisited)*. (Basingstoke: Palgrave, 2002) [ISBN 1403960763].

Sprecher, C. and K. DeRouen 'The domestic determinants of foreign policy behaviour in Middle Eastern enduring rivals, 1948–1998', *Foreign Policy Analysis* 1(1) pp.121–42.

't Hart, P., E. Stern and B. Sundelius (eds) *Beyond groupthink.* (Ann Arbor, MI: University of Michigan Press, 1997).

Tetlock, P. and C. McGuire 'Cognitive perspectives on foreign policy', in J. Ikenberry (ed.) *American foreign policy: theoretical essays.* (New York: Longman, 2005), pp.462–83.

Wallace, W. and D. Josselin (eds) *Non state actors in world politics*. (Basingstoke: Palgrave, 2001) [ISBN 033396814X].

Welch, D. *Painful choices: a theory of foreign policy change.* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2005).

Zakaria, F. *The Post-American world* (Norton, 2008).

Additional resources

Foreign policy analysis website: www.uwm.edu/~ebenc.fpa/

Online study resources

In addition to the subject guide and the Essential reading, it is crucial that you take advantage of the study resources that are available online for this course, including the VLE and the Online Library.

You can access the VLE, the Online Library and your University of London email account via the Student Portal at: http://my.londoninternational.ac.uk

You should have received your login details for the Student Portal with your official offer, which was emailed to the address that you gave on your application form. You have probably already logged in to the Student Portal in order to register! As soon as you registered, you will automatically have been granted access to the VLE, Online Library and your fully functional University of London email account.

If you forget your login details at any point, please click on the 'Forgotten your password' link on the login page.

The VLE

The VLE, which complements this subject guide, has been designed to enhance your learning experience, providing additional support and a sense of community. It forms an important part of your study experience with the University of London and you should access it regularly.

The VLE provides a range of resources for EMFSS courses:

- Self-testing activities: Doing these allows you to test your own understanding of subject material.

- Electronic study materials: The printed materials that you receive from the University of London are available to download, including updated reading lists and references.

- Past examination papers and *Examiners' commentaries*: These provide advice on how each examination question might best be answered.

- A student discussion forum: This is an open space for you to discuss interests and experiences, seek support from your peers, work collaboratively to solve problems and discuss subject material.

- Videos: There are recorded academic introductions to the subject, interviews and debates and, for some courses, audio-visual tutorials and conclusions.

- Recorded lectures: For some courses, where appropriate, the sessions from previous years' Study Weekends have been recorded and made available.

- Study skills: Expert advice on preparing for examinations and developing your digital literacy skills.

- Feedback forms.

Some of these resources are available for certain courses only, but we are expanding our provision all the time and you should check the VLE regularly for updates.

Making use of the Online Library

The Online Library contains a huge array of journal articles and other resources to help you read widely and extensively.

To access the majority of resources via the Online Library you will either need to use your University of London Student Portal login details, or you will be required to register and use an Athens login: http://tinyurl.com/ollathens

The easiest way to locate relevant content and journal articles in the Online Library is to use the **Summon** search engine.

If you are having trouble finding an article listed in a reading list, try removing any punctuation from the title, such as single quotation marks, question marks and colons.

For further advice, please see the online help pages: www.external.shl.lon.ac.uk/help/index.php

The examination

Important: the information and advice given in the following section is based on the examination structure used at the time this guide was written. Please note that subject guides may be used for several years. Because of this we strongly advise you to check both the current *Regulations* for relevant information about the examination, and the VLE where you should be advised of any forthcoming changes. You should also carefully check the rubric/instructions on the paper you actually sit and follow those instructions.

This course is assessed by a three-hour unseen written exam. You must answer **four** from a total of **twelve** questions. A sample examination paper is provided at the end of the subject guide and there is a sample *Examiners' commentary* that shows the sorts of things Examiners are looking for in your answers. There are also additional questions at the end of each chapter.

In preparing for the examination you need to bear a number of things in mind. You must attempt four questions and try and share your time equally between them. Even if you write two excellent answers, but fail to attempt any other questions, it will be very difficult to pass. Most students who fail a course do so because they fail to complete the examination!

Remember that you are being asked to answer a question. The questions are often permissive, in that they allow you to answer them from more than one perspective – you might for example endorse or criticise an

argument. However, remember that you are being asked to answer a question and **not** merely being invited to write all you can remember about a particular topic. Your answer should have a clear structure – a beginning, a middle and an end. In your introductory paragraph spell out what you take the question to mean and outline briefly how you propose to answer the question. The main body of the answer should demonstrate your understanding. Where relevant, you should include illustrative examples. Make your points clearly and concisely.

We are often asked how to refer to texts or quotations. Here are some guidelines:

- Do not waste time on irrelevant or contextual material. A question will rarely ask you to write all you know about the detailed events surrounding a particular foreign policy crisis or the life and times of a foreign policy decision maker. You can of course use background material to illustrate a point, but make sure it is clear why this is relevant in your answer.

- Refer to texts using author surname and short title, such as Hill, Changing foreign policy. Do not give additional references unless they are correct!

- You are not expected to memorise quotations, but if you have a good memory and can do so accurately then do so. No one will be penalised for not quoting passages from the authors discussed.

One of the skills the Examiners will be looking for is the ability to paraphrase an argument. This ability will illustrate how well you have understood it and your judgements about relevance and irrelevance. In introducing an example to highlight a particular point, always make sure your illustration is clear, well focused and relevant. Always be guided by relevance – if you are not sure, leave it out – you have very little time and space. Finally, your conclusion should sum up your argument and your answer. However brief, a conclusion indicates that you have finished and have not merely run out of time.

The Sample examination paper contains four questions. Most questions are aimed at drawing upon a particular component of the course (e.g. bureaucratic politics) and, therefore, can be answered without reference to other components. At the same time, you may find it useful or relevant to contrast one approach to foreign policy analysis with another one. Whatever you do, it is not advisable to repeat any portion of a previous answer in another response. And, most importantly, be sure to **read the question thoroughly.**

When you begin to answer the exam paper take time to read it through carefully. Sketch out your answer in rough notes as this will help you to structure it. Notes will not be accepted as an answer. Give yourself time to re-read your answer in the final minutes of the exam.

Finally, although you will not normally be penalised for poor spelling, grammar and punctuation, you should still aim to maintain a high standard in each.

Remember, it is important to check the VLE for:

- up-to-date information on examination and assessment arrangements for this course

- where available, past examination papers and *Examiners' commentaries* for the course which give advice on how each question might best be answered.

Chapter 1: Foreign policy analysis: an overview

Essential reading

Hill, C. *The changing politics of foreign policy*. (Basingstoke: Palgrave, 2003) Chapters 1 and 2.

Smith, S., A. Hadfield and T. Dunne (eds) *Foreign policy: theories, actors, cases.* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008) Introduction and Chapter 1.

Recommended reading

Hudson, V. 'Foreign Policy Analysis: actor-specific theory and the ground of international relations', *Foreign Policy Analysis* 1(1) March 2005, pp.1–30.

Webber, M. and M. Smith *Foreign policy in a transformed world*. (Harlow: Prentice Hall, 2000) Chapter 1.

Further reading

Carlnaes, W. 'The agency-structure problem in Foreign Policy Analysis', *International Studies Quarterly* 36 1992, pp.245–70.

Garrison, J. (ed.), 'Foreign Policy Analysis in 20/20', *International Studies Review* 5 June 2003, pp.153–63.

Hudson, V. *Culture and foreign policy*. (Boulder, CO: Lynne Rienner 1995) Chapter 1.

Neack, L. *The new foreign policy: US and comparative foreign policy in the 21st century*. (Rowman and Littlefield 2002) Chapter 1 and pp.1–35.

Neack, L., J. Hey and P. Haney (eds) *Foreign policy analysis: continuity and change in its second generation*. (Englewood Cliffs, New Jersey, Prentice Hall, 1995) Chapters 1 and 2.

Snyder, J. 'One world, rival theories', *Foreign Policy* November/December 2004, pp.52–63.

Additional resources

Foreign policy analysis website: www.uwm.edu/~ebenc/fpa/

Aims and learning objectives

The aim of this chapter is to introduce you to the basic concepts and key debates that constitute foreign policy analysis (FPA) as well as provide an overview of the evolution of the field and its relationship to International Relations more generally.

Learning outcomes

By the end of this chapter and the Essential readings, you should be able to:

- identify and apply the key concepts of FPA

- describe and evaluate the realist assumption of the centrality of the state and national interest to FPA

- discuss the challenges that behaviourism and pluralism introduced to traditional realist approaches to the study of foreign policy

- discuss the relationship between FPA and the discipline of International Relations.

Introduction

Foreign policy analysis is the study of the conduct and practice of relations between different actors, primarily states, in the international system. Diplomacy, intelligence, trade negotiations and cultural exchanges all form part of the substance of foreign policy analysis. At the heart of the field is an investigation into decision making, the individual decision-makers, processes and conditions that affect foreign policy and the outcomes of these decisions. By virtue of this approach, foreign policy analysis is necessarily concerned with the boundaries between the external environment outside of the nation state and the internal or domestic environment, with its variety of sub-national sources of influence.

FPA developed as a separate area of enquiry within the discipline of International Relations, both because of its initially exclusive focus on the actual conduct of interstate relations and due to its normative impulse. While International Relations scholars understood their role to be to interpret the broad features of the international system, FPA specialists took as their mandate a concentration on actual state conduct and the sources of decisions themselves. Moreover, scholars working within FPA saw their task to be normative, that is to say, as one aimed at improving foreign policy decision making so that states could achieve better outcomes and, in some instances, even enhance the possibility of peaceful relations between states.

To put this in the context of David Singer's well-known schema of International Relations, he says that in grappling with world politics, one necessarily focuses on either the study of phenomena at the international system level, the state (or national) level or the individual level. FPA has traditionally emphasised the state and individual levels to be the key areas for understanding the nature of the international system. At the same time, as globalisation has transformed the international system, making interconnectivity outside of traditional state-to-state conduct more likely, FPA has had to expand its own outlook to account for an increasingly diverse range of non-state actors such as global environmental activists or multinational corporations. An underlying theme within the study of FPA is the 'structure–agency' debate. Like the other branches of the social sciences, FPA scholars are divided as to the amount of influence to accord to structural factors (the constraints imposed by the international system) or human agency (the role of individual choice in shaping the international system) in analysing foreign policy decisions and decision-making environments. FPA's focus on the process of foreign policy formulation, the role of decision-makers and the nature of foreign policy choice, however, has tended to produce a stronger emphasis on agency in its work than is found in International Relations (at least until the advent of the 'constructivism turn' in the 1990s). Indeed, in many respects as we shall see, FPA anticipates key insights and concerns found in the constructivist tradition.

FPA shares much with other policy-oriented fields that seek to employ scientific means to understand phenomena. Debate within FPA over the utility of different methodological approaches, including rational choice, human psychology and organisational studies, has encouraged the development of a diversity of material and outlooks on foreign policy. At the same time, there remains a significant strand of FPA that, like diplomatic studies, owes a great debt to historical method.

Realism: the state, national interest and foreign policy

FPA's starting point is the state and its interactions with other states, be this through direct bilateral relations or through multilateral institutions such as the United Nations. In keeping with the realist paradigm, FPA understood the state to be a unitary actor, that is to say, one in which it is not necessary to analyse the role of the discrete components of government (be it the executive or the legislature) in order to assess a state's foreign policy. In this context, a key concept in FPA is that of the 'national interest'. A much disputed term, the national interest nonetheless remains a central preoccupation of foreign policy decision-makers and a reference point for interpreting state action. Hans Morgenthau defines national interest as synonymous with power and, as such, both the proper object of a state's foreign policy and the best measure of its capacity to achieve its aims.

What constitutes national interest, how it is determined and ultimately implemented are crucial to understanding the choices and responses pursued by states in international affairs. Realists assert that the character of the international system, that is to say its fundamentally anarchic nature, is the most important guide to interpreting foreign policy. The pursuit of security and efforts to enhance material wealth place states in competition with other states, limiting the scope for cooperation to a series of selective, self-interested strategies. In this setting, the centrality of power – especially manifested as military power – is seen to be the key determinant of a state's ability to sustain a successful foreign policy. Geographic position, material resources and demography are other important features in this equation as well.

Realists believe that all states' foreign policies conform to these basic parameters and that, above all, scholars need to investigate the influences of the structure of the international system and the relative power of states in order to understand the outcomes of foreign policy decisions. Calculations of national interest are self-evident and can be rationally arrived at through a careful analysis of material conditions of states as well as the particulars of a given foreign policy dilemma confronting states.

Behaviourism: the 'minds of men' and foreign policy decision making

The original studies of foreign policy in the 1950s and 1960s were explicitly aimed at challenging the realist assumptions that were the dominant approach to International Relations at the time. Rather than examine the outcomes of foreign policy decisions, behaviourists sought to understand the **process** of foreign policy decision making itself. In particular, scholars like Robert Jervis, Harold and Margaret Sprout investigated the role of the individual decision-maker and the accompanying influences on foreign policy choice.

This emphasis on the individual decision-maker led to a focus on psychological and cognitive factors as explanatory sources of foreign policy choice. For instance, Jervis asserted that the psychological disposition of a leader, the cognitive limits imposed by the sheer volume of information available to decision-makers and the inclination to select policy options that were patently second-best all contributed to imperfect foreign policy outcomes. In addition, other scholars pointed out that the decision-making process was itself subject to the vagaries of group dynamics, while the constraints imposed by crises introduced further distortions to foreign policy choice. The result was a comprehensive critique of many of the key findings on foreign policy found in the traditional realist perspective.

Bureaucratic politics and foreign policy

The focus on individual decision-makers, despite its insights, was seen by some scholars to be excessively narrow. Even within states, the conflicting outlooks and demands of foreign policy bureaucracies such as the Ministry of Trade and the Ministry of Defence clearly influence foreign policy decisions in ways that reflect parochial concerns first over considerations of national interest. While the executive decision-maker was clearly a key component of the foreign policy decision-making process, it had to be recognised that any decisions made took place within the context of institutions specifically charged with interpreting and implementing foreign and security policy for the state. The role and contribution of specialised ministries, departments and agencies – supplemented by ad hoc working groups tasked with a particular foreign policy mandate – needed to be accounted for in FPA.

Activity

With a group of friends compare and contrast the soft power and hard power capabilities of the United States, China and the European Union. Does soft power ultimately depend upon having hard power?

For Graham Allison and others, an analysis of foreign policy decision making had to start with these bureaucracies and the various factors that caused them to play what was, in their view, the determining role in shaping foreign policy outcomes. This approach to understanding foreign policy therefore emphasises the interplay between leaders, bureaucratic actors, organisational culture and, to an extent, political actors outside of the formal apparatus of the state. Broader than the behaviourists' singular focus on the individual decision-maker, advocates of the bureaucratic politics approach to FPA began a process of investigation into sources of influence on foreign policy beyond the state that was to culminate in a radical rethinking of the importance of the state itself in International Relations.

Pluralism: linkage politics and foreign policy

While the previous approaches sought to understand FPA through, respectively, recourse to the structure of the international system and the decision-making process within states, a third approach introduced a new means of interpreting foreign policy. Pluralists disputed the belief that states formed the only significant actors in international politics and asserted that, at least since the 1970s (if not earlier), increased linkages between a variety of state, sub-state and non-state actors were eroding the traditional primacy of the state in foreign policy. Indeed, the possibility of multinational companies exercising de facto foreign policy through their financial resources or non-governmental organisations through their ability to mobilise votes was recognised as a central feature of the globalising world. Thus for pluralists, an analysis of the influences upon foreign policy which are derived from domestic and transnational sources – and which were not necessarily tied to the state – is crucial to understanding foreign policy outcomes. This environment of complex interdependency effectively diminishes the scope of state action in foreign policy making to that of a manager of a diversity of forces inside the domestic sphere, including government, and outside the boundaries of the state.

Robert Putnam's 'two-level game' attempts to capture the challenges imposed by complex interdependency on foreign policy decision-makers. He

suggests that the decision-making process involves both a domestic arena, where one set of rules and interests govern, as well as an international arena, where a different set of rules and interests prevail. Balancing the logic and demands of the two arenas, which are often in conflict, forms the central dilemma of foreign policy making as seen by pluralists.

FPA and the study of International Relations

As can be seen from this brief overview of the field, FPA provides many different ways of understanding the conduct and significance of state, sub-state and non-state actors in foreign policy making. Though there is no consensus among these approaches, each is seen to contribute to a fuller picture of the workings of states and ultimately the international system. Indeed, FPA illuminates much that is otherwise left obscure in the study of International Relations. While International Relations emphasises the role and influence of structural constraints on the international system, FPA focuses on the inherent possibilities of human agency to affect and even change the international system. In short, as Valerie Hudson says:

> 'The single most important contribution of FPA to IR theory is to identify the point of theoretical intersection between the primary determinants of state behaviour: material and conceptual factors. The point of intersection is not the state, it is human decision-makers. If our IR theories contain no human beings, they will erroneously paint for us a world of no change, no creativity, no persuasion, no accountability.' (Hudson, 2005, p.3)

In the chapters that follow, we will develop the themes introduced above, providing further analysis and examples that illustrate the key concerns of FPA.

Activity

Make a list of all the different approaches (realism, behaviourism, bureaucratic politics and pluralism) to understanding the importance of the state, the individual and international organisations to foreign policy making.

A reminder of your learning outcomes

Having completed this chapter and the Essential readings you should be able to:

- identify and apply the key concepts of FPA
- describe and evaluate the realist assumption of the centrality of the state and national interest to FPA
- discuss the challenges that behaviourism and pluralism introduced to traditional realist approaches to the study of foreign policy
- discuss the relationship between FPA and the discipline of International Relations.

Sample examination questions

1. What is foreign policy analysis?
2. How do different approaches in FPA contribute to our understanding of International Relations?

Notes

Part 1: Decision making

Notes

Chapter 2: Power, capability and instruments

Essential reading

Hill, C. *The changing politics of foreign policy*. (Basingstoke: Palgrave, 2003) Chapter 6.

Smith, S., A. Hadfield and T. Dunne (eds) *Foreign policy: theories, actors, cases* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008) Chapters 2 and 7.

Recommended reading

Clarke, M. and B. White *Understanding foreign policy: the foreign policy systems approach*. (Aldershot: Edward Elgar, 1989) Chapter 7.

Neack, L., J. Hey and P. Haney, (eds) *Foreign policy analysis: continuity and change in its second generation* (Englewood Cliffs, New Jersey: Prentice Hall, 1995) Chapter 11.

Smith, S., A. Hadfield and T. Dunne (eds) *Foreign Policy: theories, actors, cases*. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008) Chapters 9 and 10

Further reading

Brown, C. 'Ethics, interests and foreign policy', in K. Smith and M. Light (eds) *Ethics and foreign policy* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001).

Hermann, M., T. Preston, B. Korany and T. Shaw, 'Who leads matters: the effect of powerful individuals', *International Studies Review* 3(2) 2001, pp.83–132.

Lobell, S., N. Prisman, J. Taliaferro (eds) *Neoclassical realism, the state and foreign policy* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009).

Morgenthau, H. *Politics among nations: the struggle for power and peace* (New York: Alfred Knopf, 1950).

Rose, G. 'Neoclassical realism and the theories of foreign policy', *World Politics* 51(1) pp.144–72.

Additional resources

Foreign policy analysis website: www.uwm.edu/~ebenc/fpa/

Aims and learning objectives

The aim of this chapter is to introduce the student to the relationship between foreign policy and power, the formulation of 'national interest' and the different means available to states to achieve their foreign policy objectives.

Learning outcomes

By the end of this chapter and the Essential readings, you should be able to:

• discuss and evaluate the key concepts of power and national interest

• assess the impact of the international system in defining the tasks of foreign policy for states

• evaluate the utility of different foreign policy instruments in achieving foreign policy goals.

Introduction

A successful foreign policy is measured in terms of a state's ability to assert itself and promote its interests with consistency within the international system. Crucial to this success is an understanding of power, its sources and an assessment of the means needed to achieve state aims. Equally important is an ability to forge these dimensions into a coherent foreign policy appropriate to the state in question, its particular material conditions as well as its position within the international system. In this chapter we will examine the relationship between foreign policy and power, the formulation of 'national interest' and the different means available to states to achieve their foreign policy objectives.

Foreign policy and power

Traditionally, foreign policy makers have assumed that it is the very nature of the international system itself – being anarchic, that is without any recognised central authority – which compels states to pursue a relentless quest for security and wealth. With states in direct competition with one another to achieve security and wealth needs, cooperation between them is ultimately tactical and limited to a series of selective, self-interested alliances. A 'security dilemma' prevails, whereby efforts by one state to increase its sense of security through arms acquisition or other defensive measures merely inspire other states to adopt similar strategies, and ironically perpetuates a general sense of insecurity among all states.

In this contentious setting, the centrality of power – especially manifested as military power – is seen to be the most important factor in determining a state's ability to sustain a successful foreign policy. Power is defined as the ability of a state to cause another state to take actions which are to the first state's advantage and which the latter state might not otherwise pursue. Christopher Hill suggests that there are three ways of interpreting the role of power in foreign policy: as an **end** in itself, as a **means** to an end and as a **context** within which states operate. There are two basic ways that this can be achieved: through direct action (force or coercion) or through indirect action (influence or persuasion). The coercion involves compelling the target state through overt threat or outright intervention into its vital affairs. This could include military demonstration, such as the mobilising of troops, or actual military strikes and even invasion. It may also involve vital economic targets, such as cutting off oil supplies or a trade embargo, which have the effect of strangling the target state's economy. Persuasion is more nuanced in that it involves compelling the target state through diplomatic means, appeals to rationality or universal principles and other sources of influence. These could include appeals to cultural affinity or historical partnerships, with the Anglo-American 'special relationship' being one of the most enduring. Joseph Nye characterises this ability of a state to induce others to adopt its own foreign policy preferences as 'soft power', while coercive means 'hard power'.[1]

The sources of a state's power can be found primarily in its military and economic capabilities which give it the means to exercise coercive and non-coercive influence. Other factors that influence a state's ability to pursue a successful foreign policy are its geographic position, the material resources available to it and the size of its population. The society's level of economic development and the pervasiveness of new technologies, especially as generated through local 'research and development' programmes, are additional indicators of power.

[1] 'Hard power is the ability to get others to do what they otherwise would not do through threat of punishment or promise of reward. Soft power is the ability to get desired outcomes because others want what you want.' Nye, J. 'Propaganda isn't the way: soft power', International Herald Tribune, 10 January 2003.

For neo-classical realists like Fareed Zakaria, it is the differing abilities of leaders to mobilise these resources – be they material or human – which explains some of the differences in the foreign policies of individual countries. For instance, the patent inability of the Japanese government to translate the enormous power resources of that country into equivalent foreign policy gains on the international stage can be ascribed to the perennial weaknesses of the leadership.

Formulating foreign policy: the national interest and the balance of power

Classic approaches to foreign policy focus on the formulation of aims and objectives based upon 'national interest'. An elusive concept, national interest is defined by the influential International Relations scholar Hans Morgenthau as synonymous with power and, as such, both the proper object of a state's foreign policy and the best measure of its capacity to achieve its aims. What constitutes national interest, how it is determined and ultimately implemented are crucial to understanding the foreign policy choices and responses pursued by states. For realists like Morgenthau, the fundamentally anarchic condition of the international system is the most important guide to decision making in foreign policy. Classic assumptions of rationality, which are founded on the belief that foreign policy aims ('preferences') of decision makers are self-evident, further reinforce the realist view (see Chapter 3). However, other scholars dispute the self-evident nature of national interest and see it as founded on a narrower societal basis, such as representing the influence of strong lobby groups or social class structures on foreign policy. According to this interpretation, just whose interests are being elevated to the status of 'national interest' and why they are adopted by the state, is a manifestation of the struggle between segments of the power elite that dominate society. The ability of conflicting interests within the domestic environment to mobilise resources, be it through financial incentives or populist claims, determines their success in construing their parochial concerns as worthy of state action (see Chapter 8).

In this context, the 'balance of power' can be seen as the primary mechanism for ordering the international system and keeping it in equilibrium. Simply put, states act to offset an accumulation of power by one or more states by joining up with like-minded states. This coalition strategy is both descriptive – it reflects the historical conduct of states in Europe – and normative – it can be taken as a foreign policy imperative for maintaining international peace. The idea of a balance of power has exercised considerable influence over foreign policy making though, due to its underlying assumptions of systemic anarchy, some have suggested that it fosters the very sense of instability which it purports to alleviate.

In spite of the problem of determining exactly the basis of national interest, it is clear that virtually all states subscribe by necessity to maintaining territorial integrity and economic prosperity as central preoccupations of the government of the day in their international dealings. Moreover, historically states have frequently used the balance of power approach to maintaining order and stability within the international system. What is open to dispute is whether these aims are best achieved through the pursuit of short-term strategies based on limited provisions for cooperation or whether states gain more through adopting long-term strategies that emphasise cooperative institution building. Britain's Foreign Secretary, Lord Palmerston, articulated the former posture in the mid-nineteenth century when he said that England had 'no permanent

friends or permanent enemies; only permanent interests'. Canada's Foreign Minister, Lloyd Axworthy, presented the latter position in the late twentieth century when he declared that it was in Canada's interests to use its resources to promote a permanent ban on landmines through the auspices of the United Nations.

Instruments of foreign policy

Of course, the best formulated foreign policy in the world is rendered irrelevant without a clear sense of the tools available to politicians and their respective utility. Traditionally, states have had recourse to diplomacy, economic, subversion and military instruments to achieve their respective aims. More recently, these 'hard power' instruments have been supplemented by a recognition of the importance of incorporating 'soft power' into a state's repertoire. The promotion of values through governmental and non-governmental actors is one of the 'soft power' tools which can help states shape a target country's foreign policy aims. Each of these has strengths and weaknesses in relation to a given foreign policy problem and it is a state's ability to capitalise on these diverse sets of instruments that determines whether it has a successful foreign policy or not.

Diplomacy is the prime currency of the international system and occupies the bulk of activity between states. It consists of formal and informal discussions aimed at resolving matters of mutual concern. These talks, negotiations or mediation can take place at a bilateral level (between two states) or multilateral level (involving a number of states). Usually, officially recognised diplomats trained in the intricacies of international protocol conduct such discussions. Alliances with like-minded states, or at least states that share a common perception of threat, and trade relations with preferred states are common topics in the diplomatic arena. More often than not, however, the work of diplomats is preoccupied with the mundane day-to-day tasks of maintaining positive relations between states, attending to the concerns of its citizens abroad and protocol-related issues. In those instances when one state's behaviour causes persistent concern or alarm, diplomatic actions – ranging from formal notes of protest to the application of diplomatic sanctions such as the withdrawal of official recognition of an offending government – can be utilised to express a state's rancour.

Contemporary diplomacy owes its formal practices and codes to the conventions developed in Europe during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. Secretive agreements tying states to the defence of one another formed the backbone of European diplomacy up to the First World War. In the twentieth century, the rise of democracies, the media and international institutions such as the League of Nations and its successor, the United Nations, has brought about a shift towards a more public form of diplomacy. International summitry, when states' leaders come together to discuss high-profile foreign policy issues, has played an increasing role from the mid-twentieth century onwards as well.

Economic instruments are used by states when standard diplomatic practices are seen to be insufficient in achieving their aims. They include: economic sanctions, such as imposing trade restrictions against a target state; and military sanctions, such as imposing restrictions on trade or manufacture of arms to a target state.

With few exceptions, sanctions are only really effective if implemented by a collectivity of states and rigorously enforced by all of them. For this reason, it is often said that the importance of sanctions lies more in its

symbolic value as a sign of displeasure with a particular state than its actual effect upon that state.

Subversion is an instrument favoured by leaders for its purported ability to offer a state a tactical advantage over other states. The gathering of intelligence and its analysis by specialists trained in assessing designs and capabilities of other states can provide insight into alternative courses of action to be pursued by an opponent and a willingness to pursue these actions. Less frequently – though certainly popularly associated with espionage – is the promulgation of covert operations aimed at destabilising an opponent in one way or another. Grey and black propaganda (the former partially based on truth, the latter an outright fabrication) against the target state or its leader, providing covert financial or military support to opposition movements, and even political assassinations, all form part of the arsenal utilised in this form of espionage. Debate within democratic states rages as to the morality of pursuing covert operations in times of (relative) peace, though historically these states have shown no compunction against their use when state security was believed to be threatened.

Values promotion is an explicitly 'soft power' approach to foreign policy that is operationalised through a variety of means. Government agencies that promote the society's cultural values through, for example, educational exchanges and scholarships to élites or prospective élites, are ways of shaping the aims and choices pursued by foreign policy actors in another country. States can also fund non-governmental actors with an explicit values promotion agenda, such as human rights groups, trade union support or electoral assistance. The strength of this approach is that domestic actors within a particular target country embrace the underlying values of another country and then this becomes the basis for foreign policy choice that, perhaps unconsciously, conforms to the interests of the promoter state.

Military instruments remain the ultimate expression of a state's willingness to pursue its foreign policy. For the renowned strategist Karl von Clausewitz, the use of the military was 'politics pursued by other means'. States employ their military principally in times of crisis to defend their interests, be they territorial, resources or citizens, or in support of foreign policy aims such as acquiring new territory, gaining access to strategic resources or upholding international principle. The military, in the hands of an expert, can be a much more diversified foreign policy instrument than is immediately apparent. For instance, it can mark the strength of a state's commitment to a security alliance through the presence of permanent military bases or the sending of a naval fleet to a region in dispute. Equally, public displays of technological prowess such as the launching of ballistic missiles or the testing of nuclear weapons can be important signals to potential adversaries and friends alike. With modern military technology outside of the reach of most states, global force projection is increasingly limited to merely a handful of states, with the United States as the foremost military power today.

Until the end of the Cold War, the military was seen to be the most obvious measure of a state's power, but subsequently many International Relations scholars have argued that economic strengths or even cultural reach are equally significant indicators. This gave impetus to proponents of 'soft power' instruments, who argued that their approach was more suited to the changing international environment. More generally, the advent of total warfare in the twentieth century introduced to the world conflict on such a destructive scale that both the efficacy and the morality of the use

of force as an instrument of foreign policy has been called into question. Peacekeeping forces, usually under the auspices of an international organisation like the United Nations, are a more recent innovation of the classic military tool and some states include a specially trained battalion on hand for such missions.

Conclusion

As Winston Churchill famously said, 'it is better to jaw–jaw than it is to war–war'. Thus, despite the assumptions of anarchy and the accompanying 'security dilemma' facing states, the impulse towards diplomatic solutions in foreign policy remain paramount. Calibrated use of foreign policy instruments in the service of national interest is the most effective means of ensuring that a state's vital security and economic concerns are preserved. In this context, accurately assessing the capacity and will of other states becomes a crucial preoccupation of foreign policy makers as they seek to formulate and implement a successful foreign policy. The next chapter will examine in greater detail the actual process of devising a rational foreign policy.

Activity

Choose one of the powers in East Asia (China, Japan, South Korea or the United States) and outline the possible foreign policy instruments it can use in response to North Korea's determination to pursue its programme of nuclear proliferation. This activity can be done on one's own or with a group. For country information, see the BBC's website under regions in the news section of: http://news.bbc.co.uk. For information on North Korea's proliferation, see the International Crisis Group's website: www.crisisgroup.org

A reminder of your learning outcomes

Having completed this chapter and the Essential readings and activities, you should now be able to:

- discuss and evaluate the key concepts of power and national interest
- assess the impact of the international system in defining the tasks of foreign policy for states
- evaluate the utility of different foreign policy instruments in achieving foreign policy goals.

Sample examination questions

1. What is national interest and how is it determined?
2. How do states exercise their influence over other states?

Chapter 3: Rational decision making

Essential reading

Hill, C. *The changing politics of foreign policy*. (Basingstoke: Palgrave, 2003) Chapter 6.

Smith, S., A. Hadfield and T. Dunne (eds) *Foreign policy: theories, actors, cases.* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008) Chapter 3.

Recommended reading

Mintz, A. (ed.) *Intergrating cognitive and rational theories of foreign policy making: the polyheuristic theory of decision* (Basingstoke: Palgrave, 2003)

Snidal, D. 'The game theory of international politics', *World Politics* 38(1) 1985, pp.25–57.

Further reading

Byman, D. and K Pollack, 'Let us now praise great men: bringing the statesman back in', *International Security* 25(4) 2001, pp.107–46.

George, A. *Bridging the gap: theory and practice in foreign policy.* (Washington, DC: US Institute of Peace 1993) Chapter 1.

James, P. and E. Zhang, 'Chinese choices: a polyheuristic analysis of foreign policy crises, 1950-1996', *Foreign Policy Analysis* 1(1) 2005, pp.31–54.

Mercer, J. 'Rationality and psychology in international politics', *International Organization* 59 2005, pp.77–106.

Mintz, A. 'How do leaders make decisions? A polihueristic perspective', *Journal of Conflict Resolution* 48(1) 2004, pp.3–13.

Additional resources

Foreign policy analysis website: www.uwm.edu/~ebenc/fpa/

Aims and learning objectives

The aim of this chapter is to introduce you to rational decision making in foreign policy and the accompanying critiques of this approach as well as the efforts to reconcile rationalism with non-rational approaches.

Learning outcomes

By the end of this chapter and the relevant readings, you should be able to:

• discuss and critique the key concepts of rationality in foreign policy decision making

• discuss the difference between the operational and psychological environment for foreign policy decision making

• discuss and evaluate attempts to reconcile rationalism with the non-rational approaches to foreign policy decision making.

Introduction

Rationality and its application to foreign policy decision making is one of the most influential approaches to understanding contemporary international politics. Derived from public choice theory (which itself emerged out of the fields of economics and policy sciences), rational choice scholars have actively sought to utilise a well-established methodology of decision making to enhance and assess foreign policy decision making. At the same time, the use of rationalist approaches to foreign policy has inspired considerable commentary and criticism. Indeed, much of the work of FPA has been devoted to assessing the weaknesses of this school of thought and its links to the assumptions underlying realism.

Rationality and foreign policy

Realists believe that all states' foreign policies conform to basic parameters set by the anarchic international system and that, above all, scholars need to investigate the influences of the structure of the international system and the relative power of states in order to understand the outcomes of foreign policy decisions. Calculations of national interest are self-evident and can be rationally arrived at through a careful analysis of material conditions of states as well as the particulars of a given foreign policy dilemma confronting states.

The classical realism formulation of balance of power provides a crude but effective tool for analysing state action in international affairs (see Chapter 2). Rational choice theory (sometimes called public choice theory), as applied to international affairs, sought to introduce a more rigorous, methodologically sound approach that could use the basic laws of choice to assess the process and outcome of foreign policy decision making. From this perspective, the maximisation of utility by actors (in this case, states) is the ultimate aim of foreign policy decision-makers. By maximisation of utility, we mean a state first identifies and prioritises foreign policy goals; it then identifies and selects from the means available to it which fulfil its aims with the least cost. In this regard, the focus of this approach is traditionally on policy outcomes and therefore assumes a relatively undifferentiated decision-making body for foreign policy (a 'unitary actor'), rather than one composed of different decision-makers. However, some scholars have recognised that an assessment of national interest – defined as enhancing security and wealth maximisation (or, to use the public choice jargon, 'preference formation') – is crucial to determining policy choice. In any case, as all states reside within the same international setting in which the conditions of anarchy tend to structure the 'rules of the game' in a similar fashion for all states, coming to an interpretation of action and reaction should not be out of reach for foreign policy analysts.

Rational decision making's core assumptions, especially that of motivation (self-interest) and a single decision-maker (unitary actor), can produce some compelling explanations of the process and choices pursued in foreign policy. This general depiction of rationality is perhaps best captured through the application of game theory to foreign policy decision-making. Here scholars have isolated particular dilemmas of foreign policy and sought to frame them within a matrix of choice that illuminates the dilemmas facing decision-makers. For game theorists, the respective rules of different types of games frame the possibilities of choice undertaken by the participants and the accompanying strategies employed to achieve best possible outcomes. For instance, cooperative and non-

cooperative forms of the game produce strategies that range from 'zero-sum' wins by one participant over the other to trade-offs that secure 'win-sets', that is outcomes in which both parties are able to claim satisfactory – if often sub-optimal – outcomes.

Thomas Schelling's work on game theory and its application to nuclear strategy elaborates upon the classic prisoners' dilemma schema. Schelling uses the format of strategic bargaining with imperfect information in a non-cooperative game to adduce the conduct of participants facing decisions in a nuclear arms race. His insight is to analyse how deterrence, that is the promulgation of an arms build up and a concomitant agreement not to mobilise ('first strike' in nuclear parlance), operates as an imperfect restraint upon a state's move towards conflict. The incremental use of strategies of escalation to produce behaviour change in an aggressive opponent, or 'brinkmanship', is advocated by Schelling as a way of establishing and maintaining the credibility of the deterrent. A 'balance of terror' is the predicted foreign policy outcome in this approach and, indeed, served as the core nuclear doctrine for the United States for a number of years.

Activity

List the costs and benefits of pursuing a weapons modernisation programme versus an investment in improving infrastructure and social services. Then answer these questions – on what basis would you choose one approach over the other? Which is better at addressing the state's security concerns and which addresses welfare concerns? Are these long-term or short-term security and welfare concerns?

From this perspective, developing foreign policy goals and implementing them therefore involves a relatively straightforward assessment of the situation and other actors' potential actions based on their status and material endowment within the international system. Optimal outcomes, albeit within the framework of available choices, are both the goal and the guide for foreign policy choice. Good foreign policy is achievable and, presumably, a realistic source for ordering the international system through some form of balancing or trade-off mechanism.

A critique of rational decision making

Harold and Margaret Sprout introduced one of the most defining critiques of the rational approach to foreign policy. They examined the environment within which foreign policy decisions are taken, distinguishing between the 'operational environment' – which they posited as objective reality – and the 'psychological environment' – which they held to be subjective and under the influence of a myriad of perceptual biases and cognitive stimuli. Foreign policy decision-makers take decisions on the basis of their psychological environment, relying upon perceptions as a guide, rather than any cold weighing of objective facts. The Sprouts believed that the accompanying gap between the 'operational environment' and the 'psychological environment' within which decision-makers act introduced significant distortions to foreign policy making with important implications for foreign policy as a whole. Richard Snyder and his colleagues took this further and pointed out that it is a misnomer to ascribe decision making to the autonomous unitary entity known as the state. In their view, the 'black box of foreign policy decision making' needed to be opened up so that one could both recognise the actual complexity underlying decisions (which included individual biases and bureaucratic processes) and to develop a better analysis of foreign policy itself.

For these critics of rationality, foreign policy decision-makers do not act in a purely rational manner that conforms to the core assumptions of realism and public choice theory. At best, foreign policy decision-makers could be said to operate within the framework of the information available to them and make decisions on that limited basis. Moreover, decision-makers are also subject to other influences such as their perceptions, pre-existing beliefs or prejudices and cognitive limitations on handling information which introduce further distortions to the process. Much of the substance of this latter critique against rationality as a source for foreign policy decision making was made by the behaviourists in their work on individual decision-makers and is covered in Chapter 4. Critics of rationality believe that attempts at rational foreign policy decision making are misguided and even potentially dangerous for states.

Reconciling rational and non-rational approaches: bounded rationality, cybernetics and polyheuristics

Efforts to rehabilitate rationality as a source for foreign policy decision making resulted in a number of innovative approaches that attempted to incorporate the insights and criticisms levelled against it. Herbert Simon's work (though he himself is not an International Relations scholar but rather an economist) suggests that while decision-makers cannot achieve pure rationality, they nonetheless conduct themselves along the lines of 'procedural' rationality when faced with a particular policy dilemma. Foreign policy makers therefore operate within the framework of what Simon calls 'bounded rationality'; that is, they act rationally within the context of partial information and other limitations placed on decisions.

John Steinbruner, responding to the general critique on rationality, the problem of group decision making (see Chapter 4) and the issues raised by the bureaucratic politics model (see Chapter 5), introduced what he called a cybernetic processing approach to foreign policy. He posits that there are three paradigms of decision making – analytical (or rational), cybernetic and cognitive – and that the integration of the latter two paradigms more accurately captures the actual process of decision making and the foibles of individual and group actors.

More recently, Alex Mintz has proposed another way of reconciling the critique against rationality in foreign policy decision making while maintaining much of the substance of rational choice approaches. Called the 'polyheuristic method', Mintz declares that foreign policy decisions are best understood as a two-stage process. The first step is one in which the non-rational elements govern decision making, in particular considerations of what is politically possible by the leader of the state. Once courses of action which are not politically palatable or attainable, such as the surrendering of sovereign territory in response to a foreign ultimatum, are discarded, the second step of decision making occurs. In this latter stage, policy options are introduced and selected in a rational manner that conforms to the rules of public choice theory, namely that foreign policy decisions are driven primarily by a search for the maximisation of utility within a particular framework. The strength of Mintz's approach is that it attempts to account for the variants in outcome through the integration of the impact of cognition and other non-rational factors.

Conclusion

What is clear from the previous analysis is that a purely rational account of foreign policy decision making cannot hold up against the various criticisms, be they psychological or empirical in content. At the same time, the durability of rationality as a means of analysing foreign policy continues and, in part, reflects the willingness of FPA scholars to accept the basic tenets of criticism but their reluctance to abandon the methodology of public choice.

It should be pointed out that the influence of rationality is more widespread than in the realm of FPA theory debates alone. Rational analyses of foreign policy underlie much of our ordinary interpretation of international events, and we are making assumptions about the unitary nature of decision-makers when we talk about, for example, 'French foreign policy' without accounting for different influences on decision making within governments. Thus, while the criticisms of rationality remain both powerful and valid, its assumptions still play an important part in much of our day-to-day understanding of foreign policy. In the next chapter we will delve more deeply into one of the main critiques of rationality, which is the impact of the psychological assessment of foreign policy on our understanding of FPA.

Activity

With a group of friends, debate the question of whether foreign policy decisions are the product of rationality or are fundamentally irrational.

A reminder of your learning outcomes

Having completed this chapter, the Essential readings and activities, you should now be able to:

- discuss and critique the key concepts of rationality in foreign policy decision making

- discuss the difference between the operational and psychological environment for foreign policy decision making

- discuss and evaluate attempts to reconcile rationalism with the non-rational approaches to foreign policy decision making.

Sample examination questions

1. What is a rationalist approach to foreign policy decision making and how does it differ from other approaches?

2. Can foreign policy ever be considered rational?

Notes