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Routledge Handbook of Foreign Policy Analysis Methods

Edited by Patrick A. Mello and Falk Ostermann



Routledge Handbook of Foreign Policy Analysis Methods

The disintegration and questioning of global governance structures and a re-orientation toward national politics combined with the spread of technological innovations such as big data, social media, and phenomena like fake news, populism, or questions of global health policies make it necessary for the introduction of new methods of inquiry and the adaptation of established methods in Foreign Policy Analysis (FPA). This accessible handbook offers concise chapters from expert international contributors covering a diverse range of new and established FPA methods. Embracing methodological pluralism and a belief in the value of an open discussion about methods' assumptions and diverging positions, it provides new, state-of-the-art research approaches, as well as introductions to a range of established methods. Each chapter follows the same approach, introducing the method and its development, discussing strengths, requirements, limitations, and potential pitfalls while illustrating the method's application using examples from empirical research. Embracing methodological pluralism and problem-oriented research that engages with real-world questions, the authors examine quantitative and qualitative traditions, rationalist and interpretivist perspectives, as well as different substantive backgrounds. The book will be of interest to a wide range of scholars and students in global politics, foreign policy, and methods-related classes across the social sciences.

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Foreword

The Conduct of Inquiry in Foreign Policy Analysis

Patrick Thaddeus Jackson

Foreign Policy Analysis, or FPA, has a long and distinguished history as a component part of academic international studies. Despite the classic efforts of scholars like J. David Singer and Kenneth Waltz to separate “international politics” from “foreign policy” in order to enable a more purely structural account of international affairs, the nearness between international studies scholarship and international-political practice—and the fact that many students in international studies aim to become international affairs practitioners themselves!—keeps blurring that boundary-line again and again. And since the day-to-day material of international affairs involves people doing stuff, acting either in their private capacities or as public representatives, the core FPA commitment to centering individual human beings and their decisions is perennially and perpetually held to be in order. So the tussle between individualist and holist modes of analysis continues, and likely will keep doing so unless and until the field collectively transcends the agent-structure problem in favor of some radical alternative.

The challenge, of course, is that simply saying that individuals and their decisions *matter* in international affairs doesn’t tell us enough to go on with the conduct of actual scholarly research. For one thing, a focus on individuals and their decisions doesn’t tell us what an “individual” is, or what a “decision” is. For that, we need a more refined scientific ontology, or a theory: are individuals rational actors? Bundles of psychological drives and desires? Meaning-makers or utility-maximizers? Expressers of established codes or problem-solving innovators? Do decisions arise from cognitive, emotional, sociological, or environmental sources? Do individuals *decide*, or is a “decision” an emergent product of events, yoked into a narrative form? All of those flavors and variants are compatible with a broad commitment to

center individual human beings and their decisions, and thus in principle any or all of them could be part of FPA.

Theory alone, of course, does not make for a practical research strategy. At a minimum, a researcher also needs a methodological commitment, a broad sensibility about how knowledge is to be produced and what kind of knowledge counts as valid (and by what criteria knowledge-claims ought to be evaluated). There is certainly a well-established neopositivist methodological sensibility in the field, emphasizing nomothetic generalizations and transferable metrics, but there are (in my view) at least three others: a scientific realist sensibility (not to be confused with “realism” as an IR theory!) emphasizing unobservable dispositional properties and causal mechanisms rather than general laws; an analyticist sensibility focusing on developing abstract models and using them in the singular causal analysis of how particular cases play out; and a critical or reflexive sensibility emphasizing the positionality of the researcher and the possibilities for progress engendered by a systematic reflection on the status and character of knowledge—both scholarly knowledge and the often-tacit knowledge informing expert professional practice.

But theory and methodology *still* aren’t enough for an actual research strategy. That takes a third component, which we might call “method”: specific procedures for turning observations into data and data into valid claims. In a broadly social-scientific context, many of those claims are explanatory claims, whether causal claims about why a certain outcome occurs rather than some other outcome, or interpretive claims about how to “go on” in some socially meaningful context. That said, we should also appreciate the value of a good descriptive claim, not just as a way-station on the road to explanation, but as a valuable good in itself: sometimes we simply want to know what something is, and to have a solid basis in evidence for that determination. Methods are the concrete steps that take a researcher up that ladder toward valid claims, and in doing so, interact and intersect with theory and methodology in a variety of ways.

So the basic equation might be something like

research strategy = theory + methodology + method

except that this is entirely too simplistic. For one thing, it assumes that the various commitments that a researcher might make on any of the three registers are always clearly defined in advance, or that it is always apparent just what commitments of theory, methodology, and method a given researcher is in fact making. But there are as many ways of sketching the possible commitments in theory, methodology, and method as there are people characterizing them. Indeed, the perennial debates about whether a particular scholar or piece of scholarship belongs in one or another category within each of these three registers should quickly indicate that this issue is far from being settled.

In addition, it assumes that theory, methodology, and method are hermetically sealed boxes, when in actuality, commitments on each register bleed into one another, displaying a variety of elective affinities and family resemblances. Rationalist theory is usually combined with a neopositivist or an analyticist methodology and quantitative methods; constructivist theory is frequently combined with a critical methodological sensibility and qualitative methods. That said, there is no categorically compelling reason why these combinations *have to exist*; instead, theory, methodology, and method can in principle be combined in a number of different ways, even if in practice we only find certain combinations as actually existing lines of scholarship. The reasons for the existence of certain combinations rather than others are *sociological* and *historical* rather than conceptual or philosophical: the scholarly field that we have did not have to look the way that it does, and how things presently stand does not exhaust all possible options.

To put this another way: the combinations of theory, methodology, and method that we have in the field at any given moment are better thought of as active, living *research traditions* than as a priori absolutes. These research traditions provide scholars with ways of orienting themselves, both in the course of a specific research project and vis-à-vis other scholars and scholarship. It is almost certainly the case that whenever we engage in discussions about exactly what “ethnography” or “liberalism” or whatever else “really are,” we are doing both of these things at once, providing ourselves and others with a way of locating our work as we justify the choices and commitments we are making.

This brings us to a handbook like this one. The editors and contributors could have set out to define FPA as a single research tradition, and established parameters and signposts that would clearly indicate whether something was or was not part of FPA. After all, one reaction to the diversity of work that people call FPA would be to reject some of that work and police a boundary defined by theory, methodology, or method—or some combination thereof. That would have been a *canonical* approach, intended to produce a fixed canon for the future. But the editors and contributors adopted a *pluralist* approach instead, eschewing any firm definition of FPA in favor of a showcase of the variety of research traditions aiming to center individual human beings and their decisions in international studies. Instead of a canon, we get a compendium: a cookbook of thriving options which scholars can use to formulate their own tasty recipes and dishes. This makes for a book that is extremely useful for the practicing researcher, even as it is frustrating for the would-be canonizer of any One True Approach to FPA.

While in some ways it might be a useful hermeneutic exercise to spell out the specific commitments in theory, methodology, and method that are on display in this handbook, I am going to leave that as an exercise for the reader. The chapters themselves do an admirable job explicating their ways of producing knowledge, so the clues are there for anyone who wants to follow up on them. But if you do so, bear in mind that what is on offer here is not an exhaustive compilation of every possible flavor of FPA that there might ever be. Combinations of theory, methodology, and method—as well as the various commitments on each of those registers—are in important ways always unstable and incomplete, and scholarly innovation in international studies comes from precisely this incompleteness and instability. After all, the task of the practicing scholarly researcher is not to mechanically reproduce firmly established doctrine, but to produce new knowledge. The pluralist, compendium-oriented ethos of this handbook is a positive contribution to that ongoing endeavor.



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Acknowledgments

This handbook has come a long way since our original idea to develop a concise edited volume on methods in Foreign Policy Analysis (FPA). We are grateful to the colleagues who encouraged us to pursue a more far-reaching publication project, which looked like a Sisyphean task initially (in addition to being like “herding cats,” as one of our contributors cautioned us). Special thanks go to our editor Rob Sorsby at Routledge for embracing the idea of a handbook from the get-go and for putting the trust in us to develop this volume. Moreover, the three anonymous reviewers chosen by Routledge have been incredibly helpful for improving the structure of the handbook and pointing us at additional chapters and experts that we had not thought of ourselves. We are also grateful for initial institutional support and funding from the University of Erfurt, the Willy Brandt School of Public Policy—thanks to Achim Kemmerling, Heike Grimm, and Lena Kiesewetter—and the Foreign and Security Policy Group of the German Association of Political Science (DVPW), which facilitated the organization of a workshop in Erfurt in September 2019. Furthermore, we would like to express our gratitude to Eugénia da Conceição-Heldt and Helmut Breitmeier for their support while we have been working on this project at the Technical University of Munich and the Justus Liebig University Giessen, respectively.

While this handbook has grown in scope throughout the editorial process, we are aware that further additions could have been made and hence we look forward to suggestions for future editions. It was certainly challenging to work on this handbook and with our international group of 44 authors during a pandemic that prohibited personal meetings and the organization of a workshop with all contributors. Behind this handbook, too, there are stories of overburdened colleagues thrown back on extensive care responsibilities because of interrupted childcare during pandemic lockdowns, separations from family and friends, nerve-wracking online/hybrid teaching creating further workload, Covid-19 infections—all of which, as far as we know, have been cured without lasting disabilities – and even some surgeries, all gone well—all along the usual pandemic stress that all of us faced anyway. That said, we are extremely happy about the quality of our contributors’ chapters and the way the handbook has come together as a coherent volume despite the challenging circumstances.

Therefore, our greatest thanks go to our amazing flock of authors from all over the world who continued to work on their chapters nevertheless. You had to live through three cycles of revisions with at times detailed comments and suggestions for improvement from either one or both of us, while tailoring chapter structures (and therefore, your arguments) and style to our suggestions and the necessity of having some cohesion in a common handbook project. We truly appreciate the professional attitude and kindness you all kept during this process, contributing to our common goal of putting together this volume. Thank you! You

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all were—and are—a real academic *community* during this journey, and we look forward to meeting up as a group on some future occasion.

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Patrick A. Mello & Falk Ostermann
Amsterdam and Kiel, October 2022

Part I

Introduction



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Methods of Foreign Policy Analysis

Charting Ground, Engaging Traditions, and Opening Up Boundaries

Falk Ostermann and Patrick A. Mello

Introduction

Contemporary politics faces a disintegration and questioning of global governance structures and a re-orientation toward national politics (Zürn 2014; Hooghe, Lenz, and Marks 2019). At the same time, geopolitics is on the rise again, certainly since Russia's war of aggression against Ukraine, but the re-emergence of geopolitical thinking can indeed be traced back to the end of the Cold War (Guzzini 2012, 2017; Mérand 2020). The liberal international order, which had never been universal and uncontested but nevertheless structured global politics for the past seven decades, has come under pressure not only from its main stakeholders, the U.S. and Western democracies, but also from autocratic challenger states (Mead 2017; Cooley and Nexon 2020; Adler-Nissen and Zarakol 2021; Börzel and Zürn 2021). Political decision-makers and institutions are forced to accommodate these shifts, either on their own or in cooperation with others, and to scale down or reform global governance and the policies that shape it (Fioretos and Heldt 2019; Debre and Dijkstra 2021).

While foreign policy analysts, in a conscious departure from systemic theories of world politics, have always highlighted the considerable variation in national foreign policies and pointed at the relevance of domestic-level variables for explaining this behavior (Legro 1996; Elman 2000; Beasley et al. 2013; Kaarbo 2015), the current level of domestic and transnational politicization of world politics in areas as broad as trade, climate change, or security, and the resulting contestation of policies seems unprecedented. Exploring some of these dimensions, recent work has begun to examine the shifting context of foreign policy decision-making (Aran, Brummer, and Smith 2021), the influence of multi-party cabinet dynamics (Kesgin and Kaarbo 2010; Kaarbo and Kenealy 2016; Vignoli 2020; Oktay 2022), the party-political contestation of foreign policy (Wagner et al. 2017; Haesebrouck and Mello 2020; Raunio and Wagner 2020), the role of leaders, their reputations, and personal characteristics (Brummer et al. 2020; Lupton 2020), the rise of populist parties and their impact on foreign policy (Chrysosgelos 2017; Verbeek and Zaslove 2017; Plagemann and Destradi 2019; Jenne 2021; Ostermann and Stahl 2022), the involvement, politicization, and influence of parliaments in security policy (Raunio and Wagner 2017; Mello and Peters 2018; Oktay 2018; Strong 2018), and the role of emotions for foreign policy-making (Eberle 2019; Koschut 2020; Ghalehdar 2021).

Yet, it is not only the increasing amount of pressure from below that is challenging foreign policy-making, but it has also become harder to forge and implement coherent national foreign policy agendas given the multitude of partially conflicting demands – i.e., between economic, climate, and welfare policies –, leading to increased volatility and instability. Adding to this, on a societal level, increased digitalization and technological innovations such as big data, social media, and related phenomena like fake news and outside interference in domestic affairs further complicate foreign policy-making (Schneiker et al. 2018; Fisher 2020). Clearly, this goes beyond established conceptions of two-level games or multilevel interactions in foreign policy (Putnam 1988; Oppermann 2008; Strong 2017; Conceição-Heldt and Mello 2018; Friedrichs 2022). Consequently, these phenomena make it necessary to direct analytical attention toward new arenas for understanding the making of foreign policy, while impelling traditional methods and approaches to analyzing foreign policy to address increasing complexity and, if necessary, to adapt their methods. This handbook is committed to providing space for this two-fold endeavor while also catering to those readers that are interested in learning substantially about a certain method for its prospective use.

Disciplinary Development of Foreign Policy Analysis

During the past two decades, Foreign Policy Analysis (FPA) has developed into a thriving sub-discipline of International Relations (IR). If that were any measure for its existence or, if you wish, success, since 2005, FPA has had its own disciplinary journal – *Foreign Policy Analysis* –, and at the time of writing, the FPA section is the second largest sub-unit of the International Studies Association (ISA), with more than 1,000 members in 2022.¹ Recent years have also seen a host of seminal publications, including the magisterial *Oxford Encyclopedia of Foreign Policy Analysis* (Thies 2018), new FPA textbooks (Morin and Paquin 2018; Beach and Pedersen 2020), and new editions that have added to a growing canon of established FPA textbooks (Breuning 2007; Hill 2016; Smith, Hadfield, and Dunne 2016; Alden and Aran 2017; Brummer and Oppermann 2019; Hudson and Day 2019). Just to highlight two of these, *Foreign Policy: Theories, Actors, Cases* (Smith, Hadfield, and Dunne 2016) and *Foreign Policy Analysis: Classic and Contemporary Theory* (Hudson and Day 2019) have both already been published in their third editions. There have also been new handbooks focusing on the foreign policies of single countries, like Austria, Japan, and Russia, among others (McCarthy 2018; Tsygankov 2018; Senn, Eder, and Kornprobst 2022). Moreover, there have been recent initiatives to foster connections between FPA and other strands of research, including bridges toward *ethnography* (Hopf 2002; Neumann 2002, 2011; Kuus 2013, 2014; MacKay and Levin 2015; Cornut 2018), *feminist theory* (Hudson et al. 2008; Aggestam and True 2020; Okundaye and Breuning 2021), *public policy* (Oppermann and Spencer 2016; Brummer et al. 2019; Haar and Pierce 2021) and *history* (Brummer and Kießling 2019), as much as there has been new work on enduring topics such as *foreign policy change* (da Vinha 2017; Chrysosgelos 2021; Joly and Haesebrouck 2021).

When looking at publication trends, it is apparent that the number of FPA-related books has been following an upward trajectory since the year 2008 (Google Books Ngram data).² Similar trends can be gleaned from journal-based data. During the first ten years since its formation, *Foreign Policy Analysis* published on average 21 articles per year. Since then, the number of articles in *FPA* increased substantially to an average of 35 articles per year (2015 to 2021). At the time of writing, *FPA* had published 471 articles in its lifetime. Data from Google Scholar (GS) and the Web of Science yield similar trends, as summarized in Figure 1.1. On GS, we conducted yearly searches for “Foreign Policy Analysis” (excluding citations). The results show a clear upward trend, from about 500 yearly publications in 2005 to nearly

3,000 publications in 2021. While GS is fairly inclusive in its count of publications and should thus be taken with a grain of salt, the Web of Science database only lists publication outlets that are included in the Social Sciences Citation Index (SSCI). Here, we searched for journal articles related to “Foreign Policy”. The results show that the number of journal articles has been growing at a steady pace between the years 2005 and 2019, from about 329 articles to a peak of 1,085 articles. Notably, there has been a dip in the numbers since then, which is also reflected in the total number of articles published in IR journals that are covered in the Web of Science (these reach their highest value in the year 2019, at 9,864 articles, and have dropped to 8,853 and 5,411 articles in the years 2020 and 2021, respectively). It is apparent that the observed decrease in the years 2020–2021 coincides with the coronavirus pandemic. Hence, this may be an indication of the pandemic’s impact on academic publishing, especially the increased burdens on authors, editors, and reviewers. Notably, this trend is not visible from the GS data, possibly because GS also includes conference papers and other types of unpublished manuscripts that have not gone through peer review and the editorial process.

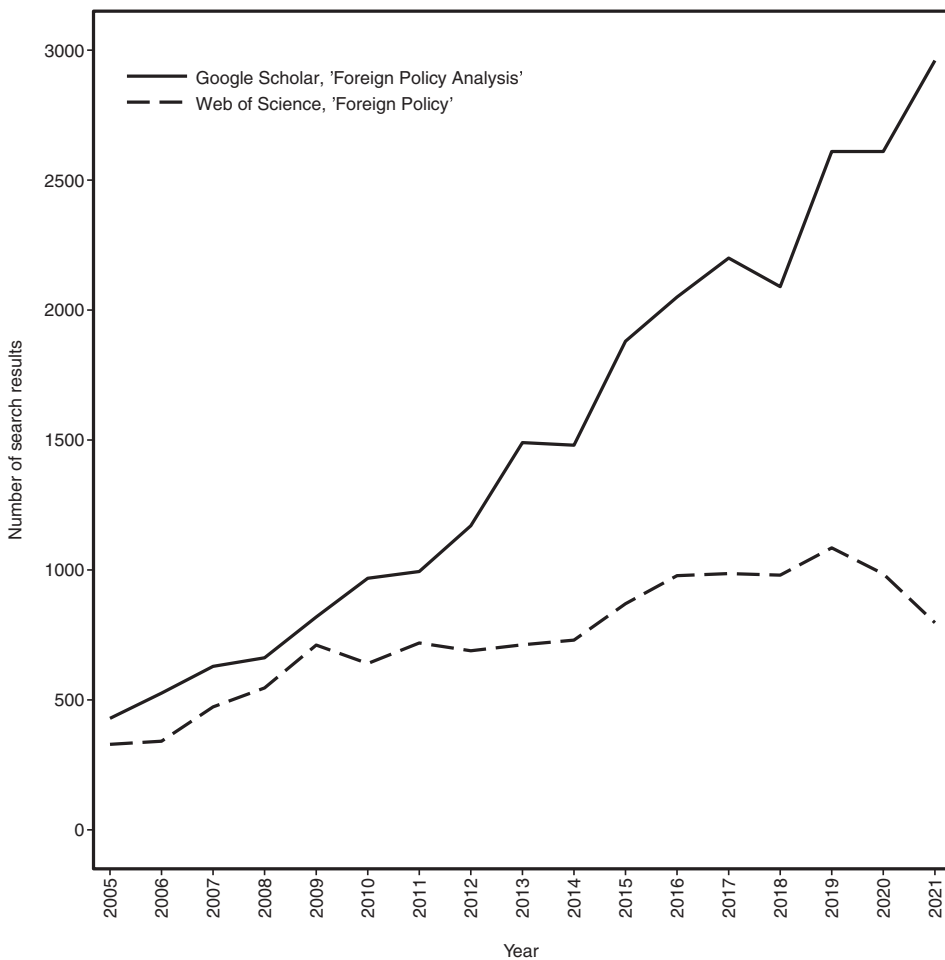


Figure 1.1 Publication trends (Google Scholar and Web of Science).

The situation within the past two years notwithstanding, FPA-related scholarly output has increased considerably since 2005.

Despite its relative youth, the birth of FPA is usually attributed to the 1950s and 1960s when work on public policy, decision-making, and on sub-state aspects of world politics emerged (Hudson 2005, 5ff.; Carlsnaes 2013, 300ff.; Hudson 2016, 13ff.). Starting from both individualist and group-based theories on organizational behavior (March and Olsen 1998), bureaucratic politics (Allison 1971), decision-making and political psychology in general (Snyder, Bruck, and Sapin 1962; Jervis 1976, 1978; Kahneman and Tversky 1979; Jervis, Lebow, and Welch Larson 1985; Welch Larson 1985), or leadership in particular (Leites 1951; Sprout and Sprout 1957; George 1969; Walker 1977; Hermann 1980), since the 1980s, FPA scholars have invested considerable efforts into developing foreign policy applications of major IR theories and approaches like constructivism (Risse-Kappen 1994; Buzan, Waever, and Wilde 1998; Finnemore and Sikkink 1998; Risse and Wiener 1999; Acharya 2004), feminism (Hudson et al. 2008; D'Aoust 2017), institutionalism (Putnam 1988; Holsti 2004), liberalism (Doyle 1986; Moravcsik 1997; Beasley et al. 2013; Kaarbo 2015), post-colonialism (Barkawi and Laffey 2006), neorealism (Grieco 1995; Elman 1996), or neoclassical realism (Rose 1998; Schweller 2003; Lobell, Ripsman, and Taliaferro 2009; Meibauer et al. 2021). These efforts had considerable impact on both IR and FPA scholarship because on the one hand, they stirred debate on theoretical underspecification, omitted variables, and problems of grand theories (Guzzini 1993; Vasquez 1997; Elman and Elman 2003), while on the other hand, they provided the “microfoundations” (Moravcsik 1997) for many IR theories’ grander interpretive schemes of world politics, like patterns of cooperation and conflict, the occurrence of balancing and bandwagoning behavior, the impact of democracy and liberalism on peace and conflict, or the role of identity in foreign policy.

Today, FPA theories, approaches, and scholarship can be found across the globe, albeit to varying degrees and building on different traditions (Brummer and Hudson 2015). FPA’s strongest institutional footing can still be found *in* the U.S. and academic systems that are close to the Anglo-Saxon tradition,³ in the same way as its empirical scholarship often focuses *on* the U.S. (Brummer and Hudson 2015), similar to what has been observed for IR at large (Waever 1998; Schmidt 2002). Nonetheless, despite a continuing need for theoretical, methodological, and regional diversification, FPA as a field has become more pluralist during the last decades, acknowledging an increasing number of different approaches as valid means for the analysis of foreign policy. While there are still differences in the pervasiveness of certain methods or methodologies among regions – with, for instance, interpretive and small-N qualitative (“understanding” in the nomenclature of Hollis and Smith 1990)⁴ approaches having a stronger footing outside the U.S. with its comparative, large-N “explaining” (*ibid.*) tradition (see the various contributions in Brummer and Hudson 2015; also Hudson 2016, 28f.) –, scholarly debate, conferences, journals, and other publications have become more multi-faceted or are in the process of becoming so.

To be sure, one may question whether a differentiation between *qualitative* and *quantitative* approaches does justice to the existing plurality of methods and approaches in the social sciences more broadly, but also within FPA. The idea of “two cultures” gained currency not least because it can be a useful shorthand to distinguish research traditions that are predominantly oriented toward the quantitative template from those that are not (Mahoney and Goertz 2006; Goertz and Mahoney 2012). Yet, this binary distinction also prompted pushback and initiatives to move “beyond” the qualitative-quantitative divide (Tarrow 1995; Rihoux and Grimm 2006; Prakash and Klotz 2007; Collier, Brady, and Seawright 2010; Cooper et al. 2012). Moreover, recent empirical research confirms what “qualitative”

researchers have often highlighted, namely that there is much more diversity under the qualitative tent than the common label suggests (Kuehn and Rohlfsing 2022). In light of these debates, as editors of this handbook, we firmly embrace the value of *methodological pluralism* rather than privileging certain methods and approaches over others. We side with Patrick Thaddeus Jackson who called for a “pluralist science of IR” and urged us to “stop worrying so much about the ultimate status of our knowledge—claims and get on with our primary task of producing knowledge about world politics” (Jackson 2011, 189). The contributions collected in this handbook differ in their methodological assumptions and their understandings of the scientific endeavor and the study of foreign policy. To the extent feasible in concise handbook chapters, we have pushed our contributors to make these assumptions explicit. Depending on their research aims and substantive interests, readers may find certain methods and approaches more suitable than others. Indeed, it was our aim to give readers a wide-ranging selection of contributions, all of which engage with foreign policy and international politics, but often from very different angles and with strikingly different tools. Therefore, this handbook is also a contribution to unite methods and perspectives whose use varies across world regions because of different institutional and scholarly traditions and historically developed research agendas (for an overview see Brummer and Hudson 2015). We are convinced that such pluralism promises to further both a methodically sound analysis of foreign policy across various fields, topics, and regions, on the one hand, and disciplinary exchange and understanding, on the other. In doing so, it is a contribution to providing the “nuts and bolts” (Elster 1989) for a methodically informed analysis of foreign policy.

That said, we are aware that our volume is not comprehensive in the sense that every existing perspective and method is equally represented. While it was our aim to cover the diversity of FPA in the 34 chapters that make up this handbook – rather than privileging one conception of FPA over another – we are aware that any such compilation has to remain selective. Future efforts should aim to further enhance diversity along several dimensions – topical, methods-wise, regional, and gender-related.

From Theoretical Diversity to Methods

Reflecting its behavioralist heritage (Stuart 2008; Carlsnaes 2013), FPA maintains a strong comparative component (Kaarbo 2003; Hudson 2005; Beasley et al. 2013), but methodological approaches are far more diverse today and draw on academic disciplines as varied as ethnography, geography, history, linguistics and semiotics, (social) psychology, or feminism. FPA at present-day can be strongly individualist and “actor-specific” (Hudson 2005, 1), as in leadership trait analysis (Brummer, Chapter 15) and operational code analysis (Schafer and Walker, Chapter 16); it can be group-focused as in groupthink approaches (Barr and Mintz, Chapter 17), intersubjective as in discourse analysis (Ostermann and Sjöstedt, Chapter 7) or research on emotions (Koschut, Chapter 11); and it can be comparative in a small-*N* sense (Feng and He, Chapter 18), in medium to large-*N* settings (Mello, Chapter 24), as well as case and process-oriented (van Meegdenburg, Chapter 25). Approaches and methods relying on other sciences such as ethnography (Neumann, Chapter 3), geography (da Vinha, Chapter 6), and political psychology (Stein, Chapter 13; Chaban, Kenix, Belyukova, and Fox, Chapter 14) further complement and complete this picture of an analytically rich subfield of IR. All these approaches and methods contribute to understanding challenges to global governance and world politics from the bottom-up agency of national foreign policy actors and institutions, often starting with a specific case but also investigating domestic politics’ impact on world politics comparatively, across time and space.

Although some publications, such as the aforementioned *Oxford Encyclopedia of Foreign Policy Analysis* edited by Cameron Thies (2018), contain dedicated methods chapters, most textbooks do not place special emphasis on questions of method and methodology. Exceptions are Jean-Frédéric Morin and Jonathan Paquin's (2018) *Foreign Policy Analysis. A Toolbox*, the French language *La politique étrangère. Théories, méthodes et références* by Morin (2013), or the German-language volume *Methoden der sicherheitspolitischen Analyse* (Methods for Analyzing Security Policy), edited by Alexander Siedschlag (2014). Most of these books or collections, however, adopt a two-fold approach by debating substantial theoretical concepts – such as the role of culture, rationalism, or bureaucracies – and how to analyze them jointly. While these are valuable contributions that foster debate and application, we believe that a dedicated methods volume can make an important contribution in its own right.⁵ This is the approach we take in this handbook.

As editors of this handbook, it was our intent to reflect the field's diversity by proposing a wide, yet, in all honesty, still incomplete guide to methods of FPA. One challenge that may be particularly pronounced in FPA is the linkage between certain approaches (such as large-*N* research), their preferred methods (statistical analysis), and shared theoretical assumptions within certain research traditions (i.e., rationalism). Our emphasis in this handbook lies on *methods* but we adopt a broad conception that includes approaches that could rather be seen as *perspectives* than genuine methods in a narrow sense of the term. Hence, Part II of the handbook contains several contributions that evolve around certain perspectives on foreign policy and international politics (such as the chapters on *ideas and identity* by Stefano Guzzini and on *norms and norm contestation* by Phil Orchard and Antje Wiener). While one may object that these contributions stray from what a methods handbook should be expected to focus on – and some of our colleagues may also regard it as a mischaracterization if we labeled their contributions “methods chapters” – we believe it is vital to delineate a variety of foundational perspectives before diving deeper into specific methods of inquiry.

Outline of the Handbook

The handbook's chapters are divided into seven parts that loosely group methods by research traditions. To further the goals of both disciplinary discussion and practical orientation for prospective users of certain methods, where feasible and reasonable, the chapters follow the same structure. After introducing the respective method or approach in relation to foreign policy puzzles, the chapters engage in a literature review to familiarize readers with the empirical application and development of a method. The chapters proceed by discussing key terms and concepts that are central to a method's analytical endeavor while often presenting strategies and advice for implementation and broader questions of methodology. We encouraged our contributors to make the discussion of the method in question more palatable by either including a dedicated section that shows concrete empirical applications on real-world foreign policy puzzles or illustrating the method's key terms and proceedings with concrete analytical examples *en passant*. The chapters close by examining the assets and pitfalls in a method's application – the *dos and don'ts* –, giving practical advice, and reflecting on the past, present, and future use of an approach.

Following this introduction, Part II contains what we have referred to above as broader perspectives on foreign policy. To start with, in Chapter 2, Stefano Guzzini discusses one of the central debates of FPA when engaging with the role of *ideas and identity* in foreign policy and, *ex negativo*, rationalism. Among others, Guzzini uses great power confrontation, concepts of self and otherness, and ontological security to demonstrate the value of

constructivism for FPA. Continuing the bottom-up perspective of constructivists, Chapter 3 by Iver B. Neumann presents *ethnography* as an interactive approach to analyzing diplomacy, based on participatory observation. Neumann centrally discusses the perspective's focus on observing, doing, and talking, while also debating issues of field access, cultural competence, and situatedness that are key for conducting ethnographically inspired FPA. Chapter 4, by Phil Orchard and Antje Wiener, introduces one of the major research programs of IR during the past decades – research on *norms and norm contestation* – and lays out its relevance for FPA. Orchard and Wiener argue that the turn toward studies of norm contestation and norm conflicts provides a useful entry point for understanding agency in the domestic politics of foreign policy. Chapter 5 on *feminism* by Alexis Henshaw presents the methodologically pluralist tradition of feminist, gender, and intersectional analysis in IR and FPA. Henshaw covers quantitative, qualitative, and mixed-methods approaches while examining central aspects like gendered power relations, meaning-making, patriarchy, and resulting gendered practices that impact on the conduct of foreign policy and international politics. The final contribution of Part II, Chapter 6, deals with another science that has been put into the service of FPA, *political geography*. Luis da Vinha discusses various traditions of political geography, including critical geopolitics. He demonstrates how concepts of space (like distance) and place (socially constructed locations) and leaders' resulting mental maps have important consequences for foreign policy-making.

Part III consists of five chapters that evolve around language and interpretive methods. Chapter 7 by Falk Ostermann and Roxanna Sjöstedt provides an introduction to *discourse analysis and discourse theories*. Ostermann and Sjöstedt discuss both key concepts that are central to all discursive approaches (like productive power) and a range of interpretive micro-methods, while they also present dedicated schools that provide more encompassing frameworks for the analysis of meaning-making in politics. In Chapter 8, Kai Oppermann and Alexander Spencer introduce *narrative analysis* to the study of foreign policy. Using congressional debates on the Iran nuclear deal as empirical example, Oppermann and Spencer demonstrate narratives' quality as fundamental form of human expression and how they structure discourse in a way that contextualizes and justifies foreign policy decision-making socially and culturally. Chapter 9 by Sabine Mokry is about *frame analysis*. Adopting a cognitive approach to frames that emphasizes their quality of structuring reality, Mokry specifies both quantitative and qualitative perspectives on how to make use of frames for analyzing the politics of foreign policy. She explicates the usefulness of the method on a study looking at the Chinese and U.S. communication of foreign policy intentions. The part closes with two chapters on issues that have recently seen increased interest: images and emotions. Chapter 10 by Bernhard Stahl and Julian Ignatowitsch introduces *visual analysis* as method for making sense of visual representations of foreign policy. The authors discuss the particular way in which pictures code political messages between universalism and cultural particularities, how they structure perception of foreign policy issues, and how they try to persuade. Their chapter analyzes various cover images of the German weekly political magazine *Der Spiegel* and its coverage of the Afghanistan deployments of the *Bundeswehr*. Finally, Chapter 11 by Simon Koschut presents *emotion discourse analysis* as an approach to shed light on the emotive side of foreign policy-making. He examines the methodological challenges when analyzing subjective emotions with an interest in group-based processes like foreign policy-making and turns toward a specific form of discourse analysis of social representations of emotions to make this work. Koschut illustrates this framework on the Russian invasion of Crimea and NATO's discursive reaction to it.

Part IV focuses on psychology, roles, and leaders. Chapter 12 by Marijke Breuning introduces *role theory* as one of the definitive approaches of FPA. Debating both the historical development of role-theoretical analysis and newer approaches, more structuralist and more agent-centered, individualist and interactive ones, the chapter delves into role patterns, national role conceptions, the importance of socialization, role contestation, and expectations in order to understand leaders' constructions and perceptions of foreign policy challenges. Breuning also discusses various methods to go about implementing a role-theoretical research agenda. Chapter 13 by Janice Gross Stein engages with the *political psychology of threat assessment*. From an intelligence studies perspective, Stein's contribution centrally considers how to assess actors' capabilities and the probabilities of certain foreign policy behaviors under conditions of uncertainty. Tapping into various psychological approaches like prospect theory or cognitive heuristics like representativeness and anchoring, and using the example of Saddam Hussein's weapons of mass destruction programs, she discusses how assessments made at the time of the threat, afterward, and by academics differed from each other and how assessment failures occurred. In Chapter 14, Natalia Chaban, Linda Jean Kenix, Svetlana Belyukova, and Christine Fox deal with *measuring perceptions*. Specifically, their approach focuses on combining low inference (observational) and high inference (interpretive) approaches to data analysis in the context of international political communication. They show how various methods like the Rasch Measurement Model or frame analysis can be employed to analyze international media communication about EU foreign policy. Chapter 15, by Klaus Brummer, introduces *leadership trait analysis* (LTA) as a systematic and software-driven, at-a-distance approach aimed at comprehending leaders' more stable psychologic traits and leadership styles that fundamentally inform their decision-making, substance, and the conduct of foreign policy. Brummer illustrates the usefulness of LTA focusing on women as foreign policy leaders and the importance of gender for leadership traits/styles, while also discussing new developments in LTA like the possibilities of non-English language analysis. The second contribution on leadership profiling is Chapter 16 on *operational code analysis* (OCA) by Mark Schafer and Stephen G. Walker. Focusing on the Verbs in Context System (VICS), Schafer and Walker demonstrate how instrumental and philosophical beliefs about cooperation and conflict can be studied comparatively and in a quantitative fashion to assess leaders' psychology. The authors' empirical cases shed light on how to compare two different leaders' operational codes, how to go about large-N statistical analysis, or how to integrate game theory into OCA. Finally, Chapter 17 by Kasey Barr and Alex Mintz focuses on *groupthink*, *polythink*, and *con-div* as patterns of group decision-making dynamics and their central problems of cohesion and divergence. Starting out from the long-established groupthink model that puts collective decision-making processes and its inter and intra-group dynamics into perspective, Barr and Mintz present various theoretical developments in the literature, and they illustrative each of them with an empirical foreign policy case: convergence-divergence with the killing of bin Laden; polythink with the Syrian war *red line* issue; and groupthink with the Iranian nuclear program negotiations.

Part V entails seven contributions that examine foreign policy from a comparative and/or quantitative angle. In Chapter 18, Huiyun Feng and Kai He lay out the tradition of *comparative foreign policy*. From a critical review of early efforts at developing FPA grand theories from a comparative angle, Feng and He continue by introducing, on the one hand, three traditions of comparative FPA – geographic area studies, middle-range theories drawing on a variety of academic disciplines, and actor-specific studies focusing on decision-making properly – and three methodical approaches to implement comparative FPA – comparative cases, comparative theory, and comparative method (also known as mixed methods) – on the

other hand. Chapter 19, by Gordon Friedrichs, introduces an approach to *quantitative content analysis* (QuantCA), focusing on role theory. Discussing parallels with and advantages of combining QuantCA with qualitative approaches and mixed-methods designs, Friedrichs develops QuantCA as a tool to measure national identity and role conceptions and to compare them cross-case and within-case. He illustrates the argument on a study using human coding of leaders' national identity messages. Chapter 20, by Sibel Oktay, introduces *statistical analysis* in FPA. Oktay presents statistical approaches as bedrock tool for finding out about generalizable patterns of foreign policy-making, and as an opportunity to work creatively with datasets to generate new insights into patterns of foreign policy. She brings out main descriptive usages of statistical analysis and introduces various analytical models while going in-depth with regression models of various kind. She illuminates the workings of statistical analysis with a study on the attitudes toward international organizations among the U.S. foreign policy elite. In Chapter 21, Danielle Lupton and Clayton Webb introduce *experimental methods* and their methodology. They emphasize the controlled environment and random variation procedures that make experiments a great way to study microfoundational aspects of foreign policy decision-making and public opinion. At the same time, Lupton and Webb extensively discuss methodological issues related to the conduct of experiments, such as internal/external validity or sampling, while explaining these issues with two empirical examples on leaders' reputation for resolve, on the one hand, and public attitudes toward terrorism on the other. Chapter 22, by Scott Wolford presents a concise introduction to *game theory* and its application in FPA. He advances the approach as prime way of modeling strategic interaction between foreign policy agents under certain informational and decisional conditions. Wolford familiarizes the reader with the game-theoretical theory of choice, concepts of equilibrium and solution, and various models used to analyze strategic interaction, such as the famous prisoner's dilemma, games of limited information, or the deterrence game. Chapter 23 by Katja Kleinberg introduces the study of *public opinion surveys*. She lays out how individual attitudes measured in surveys are central to politics, what is characteristic about public opinion on foreign policy, and how it affects foreign policy outcomes. Kleinberg then exposes the various methodological choices involved in designing the survey instrument (question wording, response options, etc.), the overall survey design (cross-sectional, panel surveys, experiments), and issues of population choice or sampling. Finally, Chapter 24, by Patrick A. Mello introduces the set-theoretic method of *qualitative comparative analysis* (QCA) and its empirical application in FPA. He discusses the strengths of QCA in addressing causal complexity in medium-N settings, often combined with explanatory conditions being located at multiple levels. Mello also illustrates QCA's flexibility in tailoring the method to the specific needs of a given research design. He illustrates the method with examples from a study on coalition defection during the Iraq War.

Part VI comprises five chapters on qualitative methods and historical approaches. In Chapter 25, Hilde van Meegdenburg presents an analyticist approach to *process tracing*. Her chapter lays out the regularity understanding of process tracing and discusses its fit for the analysis of foreign policies. Van Meegdenburg then develops an interpretive version of process tracing based on explanatory mechanisms as analytical, Weberian, ideal-typical constructs that she uses to explain the Danish decision not to employ private military/security contractors in peace operations. Chapter 26 by Delphine Deschaux-Dutard focuses on *interviews* as an important methodological tool to gather information on foreign policy decisionmaking processes and elite attitudes. She presents the up and downsides of various interview strategies and reviews their useability in the context of own experiences when researching sensitive military and defense issues with their culture of secrecy. In this

context, Deschaux-Dutard also addresses the insider/outsider dilemma when engaging in interviews with policymakers, the social-interactionist aspects of the method, and gender issues. In Chapter 27, Payam Ghalehdar introduces *historical analysis* as a specific perspective on FPA. He deliberates on the role of history as data source, on the one hand, and as explanatory concept on the other (i.e., as in analogies, institutionalism, or learning). Ghalehdar then presents various ways of using historical data in case-oriented or theory-oriented research settings, engages in a debate about the usefulness and appropriateness of primary and secondary data sources, while providing concrete guidelines for either use. Similarly, Chapter 28 by Michal Onderco focuses on (critical) *oral history* as a specific form of practiced historicism that is focused on bringing out individual experiences of foreign policy agents, such as ambassadors, to reconstruct the unfolding of political events in the lack of otherwise recorded information or issues of secrecy. Onderco demonstrates the use, assets, and challenges of the method on two levels: individual interviews with foreign policy agents, and a conference project between practitioners and academics held to understand the accomplishment of the indeterminate extension of the Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT) in 1995. He also elaborates on practical and conceptual issues of this direct method of engagement with history and/or historical figures, reliability issues, and triangulation efforts. Finally, in Chapter 29, Anne Kerstin Friedrich introduces the basics of *archival research* and its use on foreign-policy related topics. Focusing on diplomatic archives and giving examples from several countries, Friedrich explains the particularities of different sorts of diplomatic documents and how they can be used for tracing decision-making processes in, for instance, government departments concerned with foreign policy. She also discusses how archival research can be combined with other methods such as content analysis and certain coding procedures to understand diplomatic practice.

The handbook is completed by five chapters on new technology, social media, and networks, which together constitute Part VII. Chapter 30, by Sebastian Cujai, presents an approach to *big data analysis* in foreign policy that takes advantage of the increase of availability of large amounts of electronic data as a remedy to the traditionally scarce informational environment in foreign policy processes. Cujai cuts through different characteristics of the big data phenomenon before turning toward a form of script-based network analysis that distills relationships out of large amounts of textual data. He exemplifies the method's workings with a salience analysis across many years (2004–2008) of the Russia–Georgia conflict. Chapter 31, by Andrea Schneiker, shifts emphasis to *social media* and specifically to Twitter as a platform that has arguably gained a reputation for discourse-forming exchanges on foreign policy. Schneiker discusses the challenge of analyzing the platform's enormous amounts of content and metadata with various text mining methods and whether social media exchanges can count as public opinion. She then provides guidance on how to make research design decisions on actors, data selection, and data access with a particular focus on sentiment analysis, which she illustrates with a variety of studies from the realm of security and conflict issues. Chapter 32 by Franz Eder complements our other chapters on textual analysis with a specific approach to *discourse network analysis*. The method combines a qualitative content analysis of agents' foreign policy preferences with a network analysis that is interested in change through time. Eder explains how discursive data are coded content-wise and further categorized to enable the construction of affiliation and congruence/conflict networks. He illustrates the method on UK House of Commons debates on Iraq war participation in 2003. Chapter 33 by Valerio Vignoli provides a concise introduction to *text as data*. He presents the development of automated text analysis methods and programs and gives an overview of the panoply of different approaches, such as qualitative, dictionary, (un)supervised classification

methods, or scaling while examining the methods' potentials and challenges for FPA. Finally, Chapter 34, by Clionadh Raleigh and Roudabeh Kishi, provides an introduction to *conflict event data* based on the Armed Conflict Location and Event Data (ACLED) project database. Raleigh and Kishi take stock of different machine-based and researcher-led datasets (ACLED being one of the latter) and present the construction of ACLED as real-time source on conflict data that can be used to investigate shifts in subnational conflicts, local conflict actors, or the effectiveness of conflict prevention policies. They illustrate their dataset's use in FPA with data from Syria and on conventional warfare. Raleigh and Kishi also present thoughts on current limitations of datasets and crucial aspects for their construction.

Notes

- 1 Data communicated by the ISA's FPA Section leadership. Annual reports on the section's activities, financial status, and membership can be accessed at: <https://www.isanet.org/ISA/Sections/FPA/Reports>
- 2 The Google Books Ngram Viewer can be accessed at: <https://books.google.com/ngrams>
- 3 This academic tradition also finds an expression in the pervasiveness of distinct IR programs that are separate from, albeit still related to more generic political science curricula.
- 4 We deem this distinction problematic to the extent that it has been used to disqualify certain methods on scientific grounds.
- 5 Notably, the open access edited volume by Andreas Kruck and Andrea Schneiker (2017) provides introductions to a broad range of methods and approaches. However, the substantive emphasis of that volume lies on non-state actors in international security and is thus (mostly) outside the realm of FPA.

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Part II

Perspectives on Foreign Policy



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Ideas and Identity from Rationalism to Theories of Recognition

Stefano Guzzini

Introduction

Henry Kissinger once remarked that

An exact balance is [...] chimerical, above all, because while powers may appear to outsiders as factors in a security arrangement, they appear domestically as expressions of historical existence. No power will submit to a settlement, however well balanced and however “secure”, which seems totally to deny its vision of itself.

(Kissinger 1957, 146)

In his view, states have visions of themselves, and any security arrangement that does not sufficiently recognize them is bound to fail. The balance of power only works with a balance of identities.

Yet, for scholars of foreign policy, Kissinger’s practical lead of diplomatic experience was left unfollowed until the arrival of constructivism. ‘Vision of itself’ does not figure prominently in realist and liberal institutionalist Foreign Policy Analysis (FPA). In fact, it cannot. Integrating identity and our relational self, constituted in social recognition, asks for an ontology other than individualism and for a theory of action other than utilitarianism, both of which became prevalent for the two main paradigms. In contrast, Kissinger’s insight was explicitly taken up and further developed by both constructivist (Kratochwil 1978, 201) and poststructuralist scholars (Wæver 1995) working on identity and foreign policy. More generally, this scholarship understood identity as a process of identification in national biographies and also pointed to the phenomenon of *ontological security*, which refers to the idea that security is not only about defending oneself against different physical threats but also about defending a certain continuity of a self-understanding and self-esteem that provides an actor with an identity with which to be at ease.

As the chapter will show, the main issue is hence not that some theories deal with ideas and identity whereas others do not; the issue is *how* they do so. The underlying theory of action, from utilitarianism to discursive ontologies and theories of recognition, provides the methodological assumptions of their respective analyses. In the following, I will first show how

the methodology of utilitarian approaches like recent versions of realism and liberalism deals with ideas, norms, and identity, yet in a way that is unsatisfactory to account for Kissinger's insight. A second section will then show how identity has been more coherently applied in constructivist FPA, including in approaches to ontological security. They meet however a different set of problems, such as its often homeostatic assumptions, its more acute problem with anthropomorphization and not least the pathologies of turning an observational theory into a nationalist foreign policy apology.

Rationalist Analysis of Ideas and Identity and Its Limits

Among other pernicious effects of the underlying binary of realism–idealism in International Relations (IR), there is a persistent misunderstanding that ideas are the stuff of liberals, whereas realists are mainly focused on power. Putting it this way already makes clear how unfair this is for realists, even if some of them may use that very argument. Realists know the power of ideas perfectly well, being certainly aware of propaganda and indoctrination. No good realist foreign policy strategist would be foolish enough to leave the battle of hearts and minds to the other side. No good realist observer would exclude such ideational factors from an analysis of power. The issue is, rather, *how* to combine the ideational with other factors in an analysis. Here, the more open rationalist move of US IR in the 1980s has helped to clarify the theoretical positions – and their limits.

Rationalist Theories of Action

Rationalist explanations follow a triangle made powerful by the rationality assumption. Rational choice entails an individualist theory of action. It makes two main assumptions about human behavior. First, humans are self-interested utility maximizers; and second, humans choose rationally on the basis of a consistent (transitive) preference ranking. If A is preferred to B and B to C, A should be preferred to C. A straightforward and parsimonious theory of action derives from this basic depiction of self-interest and rationality. Once we know the desires of individuals (their preferences), as well as their beliefs about how to realize them, we can deduce their rational behavior. Indeed, as Keith Dowding (1991, 23) has succinctly put it:

The three go together in a triangle of explanation and given any two of the triumvirate the third may be predicted and explained [...] This is a behaviouralist theory of action, since it is studying the behaviour of individuals that allows us to understand their beliefs (by making assumptions about their desires) or their desires (by making assumptions about their beliefs). We may understand both by making assumptions about different aspects of each.

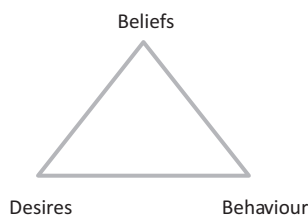


Figure 2.1 A rationalist theory of action.

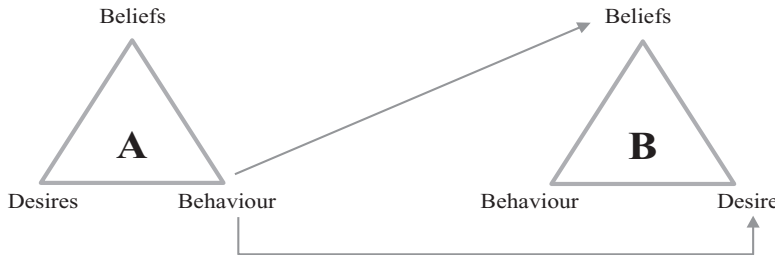


Figure 2.2 Influence attempts in a rationalist theory of action.

When information is limited, realist analysts (and others) will rely on an explanation that infers beliefs from the other two factors on the basis of the consistency between the three parts provided by rationality: behavior is the visible starting point and preferences are assumed to be known through realist theory, so the only variable to be inferred is (shifts in) beliefs (Figure 2.1).¹ In this way, the analysis is truly behavioralist, since it does away with any information on the *actual* process of how the decision and behavior have come about. It is a form of rationalism where foreign policy decision-making is left in an analytical black box, a mere conduit between an input (stimulus) and an output (response).

Accordingly, a rationalist foreign policy strategy can affect the behavior of other actors by trying to influence their beliefs, also by signaling a certain ‘image’ (Jervis 1970), or, and this is more complicated, their desires (preferences) (Figure 2.2).

Clearly, a black box model cannot really work; if anything, FPA became prominent for opening up that box. One path was adding more process factors. Over the years, and generally staying within a rationalist picture, it added factor after factor that would inform the national interest (preferences, desire): anything from individual psychology (operational code, see Schafer and Walker in this volume), public opinion (see Kleinberg in this volume), party preferences, to lobbies and bureaucracies, and more, would do. This led to fragmentation and increasing theoretical frustration, since comparative FPA became the analysis of ‘everything but the kitchen sink’ with little capacity to find more general regularities (see also Feng and He in this volume).

Another strategy therefore consisted in lifting the theoretical argument to a higher level of abstraction and inquiring into the origins of beliefs and desires more generally. Obviously, beliefs and preferences are neither idiosyncratic nor reducible to a single utilitarian calculation. But that does not mean they are arbitrary. Neoliberal institutionalists have oriented some of their research in FPA to the normative context and shared practices (*regimes*) within which actors form their beliefs, define their interests, and decide their action. Hence, rather than seeing this as influenced by another actor or domestic factors, the analysis moves to a higher level in which shared ideas are prime influencers. Although this sounds antithetical to realists, there is not much to oppose it once a rationalist setup is followed: ideas do not just fall from heaven, and they resonate because of a shared ideational and normative context (see also Orchard and Wiener in this volume). Hence, Stephen Krasner had no real choice but to admit the place of regimes as not only intervening but also as autonomous variables in structural explanations (see, respectively, Krasner 1982a, b), the ‘neo-neo synthesis’ of neorealism and neoliberalism (Wæver 1996).² All seems set. Having ideas and norms now as autonomous variables that influence beliefs, they may also influence preferences, since beliefs and preferences may not be independent of each other (Figure 2.3).

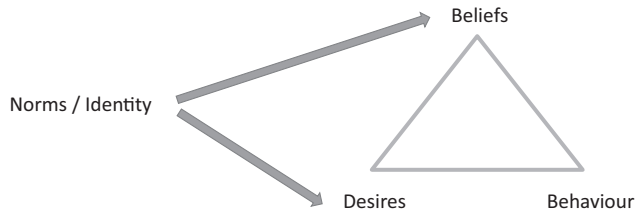


Figure 2.3 The endogenization of preference and interest formation.

But, as we will see, such moves would undermine the neopositivist methodologies and meta-theory on which established IR rationalism relies. In the end, the latter imposes a straitjacket on how to think beliefs and their effects: It narrows the ontology to individualism, conceives of ideas as objects, and imposes a vision of ideas as relevant only if causally efficient.

The Contradictions of Rationalist Analysis

In their programmatic statement, Judith Goldstein and Robert Keohane (1993) establish the model for the rationalist analysis of ideas in foreign policy. They define ideas as beliefs, that is, mental states. And they see them as necessary to overcome problems that rational action may face:

Our argument is that ideas influence policy when the principled or causal beliefs they embody provide road maps that increase actors' clarity about goals or ends—means relationships, when they affect outcomes of strategic situations in which there is no unique equilibrium, and when they become embedded in political institutions.

(Goldstein and Keohane 1993, 3)

In other words, there is simply no rational action without beliefs, neither for the actors themselves, nor for their observers. Yet, in setting up the analysis, they insist that the null hypothesis is an interest-based explanation of action, which is defined as autonomous from any role of beliefs. This is meant to isolate the specific causal effect that beliefs can have. This constitutes a surely curious move when a pragmatic argument about operationalization is meant to prime a meta-theoretical one: while we know that beliefs can influence interests and that both are intrinsically connected, let's just test them against each other as if they were not. Also, despite writing that beliefs are mental states, we can then ascribe efficient causality to them, as if there were external factors, like billiard balls. Finally, although allowing for the social embeddedness of beliefs (and norms), their content is analyzed in an individualist setup as if that very social nature were of no relevance. All opening acknowledgments of the intrinsic problems of the rationalist model in dealing with beliefs are eventually taken back in the actual approach.

The inconsistency between meta-theory and methodology was already exposed for regime theory. Friedrich Kratochwil and John Ruggie (1986) had welcomed regime theory for its move to include normative factors into the more general structural understanding of international order and yet found it wanting in its attempt to reduce them to external objects. They saw this move as being prompted by a positivist understanding of reality where the analysis needs to be purely causal and not also constitutive, and where causality is understood

in the relation of mutually external units or factors. Mark Laffey and Jutta Weldes (1997) see this reinforced by the 'ideas as commodities' metaphor, in which ideas can be acquired, exchanged, and sold. An idea is just a different form of object or good, and hence subsumable under the external and causal analysis used for material factors.

But beliefs do not just hit actors and force them to do things. That type of causality simply does not work for this phenomenon. Beliefs are not external causes, but at best internal reasons for action. Those reasons may or may not be conscious to the actors; they are multiple, heterogeneous, and potentially conflicting. After all, it was exactly for these subjective effects that beliefs have been often reduced to material or objective needs, as proposed by both utilitarianism and (some form of) Marxism, which reduce actors to through-puts. Hence a dilemma: either they are important, but then not reducible, and so both theoretical and methodological consequences ensue; or they are reducible, but then, despite all statements to the contrary, they return to being only secondary for the analysis, playing the role of a residual or ad hoc variable to explain instrumentally unexplained outcomes. Rationalism needs to go the latter way: by trying to stick to a positivist and utilitarian setup, whether scholars acknowledge it or not, all openings are withdrawn again.

But, most importantly, beliefs are not just mental states. There is a significant difference between a belief that is understood as some individual mental state leading to action and beliefs that are social by definition since they are embedded in wider normative or other ideational systems to which actors attach meaning and act. Let me use both Max Weber and the rationalist idea of 'common knowledge' as ways to show that beliefs are not about subjectivity, but intersubjectivity, with both theoretical and methodological consequences.³

Weber famously distinguished between *instrumental rationality* and *value rationality* or rationality of ultimate ends. The former is the classical utilitarian understanding in which an actor tries to achieve a cost-efficient usage of means to reach an end, while comparing and choosing between alternative options. The latter refers to a different type of consistent, hence rational, behavior in which actors choose their action in terms of reaching certain values, potentially independent of any concerns of other consequences; the aim informs the choice of means, irrespective of costs (but not all means are necessarily justified; that depends on the end).

In the utilitarian setup, whenever the cost-benefit calculation goes wrong, besides incomplete information and other circumstances, one can refer to erroneous beliefs or ideologies that lead to 'irrational' action. Value rationality hence becomes the residual explanation when instrumental rationality does not work. But the underlying instrumental and utilitarian frame is preserved as the default explanation. In this way, the theory can never go wrong, since it can always be tweaked in this way to conform to the behavioral outcome (Allison 1971; Steinbruner 1974, 47; Pizzorno 2007, chapter 4).

But Weber would not have spent what feels like several thousands of pages on world religions and cosmologies were it not fundamental for his sociological theory. For him, the relationship is the other way round: value rationality is not the exception, but the default. Here, instrumental rationality is but the form value rationality takes in a specific cultural or social environment where utilitarian efficiency becomes the overarching value. It is a special case that cannot just be assumed, but needs to be justified through an analysis of the social and normative context.

This reversal can also be illustrated through the closest that rationalist theory gets to the idea of intersubjectivity, namely *common knowledge*. Game theorists have met the problem that some coordination problems, irresolvable by independent individual calculation in theory, are resolved in practice, namely through a kind of knowledge that A knows that B knows that A knows that B... (see also Wolford in this volume). Indeed, common knowledge is

based on a logically infinite regress of anticipation of the others' beliefs, where agent A in an interaction believes something that others believe, too, and that they believe A also believes, who, in turn, and so on. As Wendt puts it, 'Common knowledge requires "interlocking" beliefs, not just everyone having the same beliefs' (Wendt 1999, 160). Knowing that others know what you know, also about them, hence provides a common backdrop against which coordination can happen. Tom Schelling has given famous examples of this, including where to meet in a city without having given any previous information about it. When there is common knowledge, actors will coordinate blindly.

No doubt this scheme is a very helpful and welcome inclusion of wider ideational concerns. Yet, it is still severely limited for our concerns about Kissinger's 'vision of itself'. First, the setup remains one of strategic interaction, where all that is varied is the belief that then affects behavior. Interests or identities are untouched in this analysis. The amount of socialization into a set of ideas is hence purely limited to beliefs, not 'character', to use Kissinger's term.

Also, the origins of this background knowledge are not clear. Yet they may be the relevant issue. Take the following example. You are invited to a dinner and the host expresses the intention to serve fish. You know that the host assumes you know that this implies that you should bring the wine, white wine to boot. This is taken for granted, and goes without saying, as background knowledge does. Yet, recently, having met new friends, the host prefers different beer types to be paired with the food, preferably from some hip micro-brewery, and may have assumed you to know this. So, when you arrive with the wine, the coordination functioned, since there is wine for the food. But then, also it did not. One could now argue that the relevant common knowledge should have included the 'vision of itself', here informed by the host's identification with a certain social group with a distinctive taste. It cannot take for granted that we all share the same social environment with the same norms. What this amounts to, however, is that in this game of mutual anticipation, one needs to think about preferences and interests in terms of the 'circles of recognition', to use Alessandro Pizzorno's (1986, 367) term, that constitute (not cause) them in the first place. The analysis is only about beliefs – but those beliefs include a constitutive link between norms and/or identity and interests that the very approach neglects. Apparently, actors know more about the thicker social role of ideas than their rationalist observers.

Also, we can easily agree that reducing this encounter to a mere coordination game may miss that which is relevant for understanding the (future) social relation between those agents. Common meals are rituals. What if the host decides to go with the wine this time, rather than griggishly parading the fancy beer, hence humiliating the guest? What if the guest cannot be bothered, let alone humiliated, since she could not care less about the host and accepted the invitation only out of some form of politeness? We move from a theory of instrumental action to one of symbolic action and social recognition. Behavior is understood as a practice informed by the tacit, ritualized, and open rules of recognition in their respective spheres and social fields. Identity is always part of a relation, and that relation part of wider fields within which we learn to distinguish ourselves by constructing a biography of ourselves (the 'vision of itself') that narrates identity across time as well as identification with and difference to others.

Identity in Constructivist and Poststructuralist Foreign Policy Analysis

Constructivism is often amalgamated with the analysis of the role of norms. But for FPA, a second constructivist research program has also been important, one focusing on the link between identity and interests and behavior, which is central for thinking 'visions of itself'.

In the following section, an early study by Audie Klotz will serve as an initial background to provide a link between the two. After that, this section discusses a series of theoretical research programs that move from the external and domestic relations of identity formation to the study of national biographies, and finally to the poststructuralist reversal and studies of ontological security, where identity practices are to be understood as ways to see an always precarious identification (de)stabilized.⁴

Constructivist Takes on Foreign Policy Analysis

Why would a US right-wing government obsessed with the Cold War competition in all parts of the world decide to abandon a highly reliable Western ally? Why would the Reagan administration end up undermining the South African apartheid government? By putting the question in this manner, Klotz (1995) *de facto* follows the setup envisaged by Goldstein and Keohane: the interest explanation (Cold War competition) is the null hypothesis that defines the puzzle, and an ideational analysis is meant to fix it. Her explanation shows how anti-apartheid norms trumped strategic interests. But the analysis shows more. She insists that apartheid was a practice simply no longer acceptable within US domestic politics. It harked back to and justified racial discrimination when the US had moved on to a self-understanding in which this was no longer defensible. However racist parts of the US public and government may have been, apartheid was not just an informal, but a legal form of segregation, and such segregation was no longer publicly justifiable in race politics. It stood for the race politics of a US that the US had officially left behind. What the US *stood for* was driven by what the by now different US stood for.

This is the main inspiration for constructivism-inspired FPA centering on identity: identity and norms are not independent of, if residual to, interests, but they inform and constitute the latter in the first place (Jepperson, Wendt, and Katzenstein 1996). Here, Goldstein and Keohane's point that the very counterposition of ideas and interests is ontologically untenable is not just acknowledged but also followed up. As a result, rationalism may well have a place in the explanation, but 'a core constructivist research concern is what happens *before* the neo-utilitarian model kicks in' (Ruggie 1998, 867, original emphasis). Norms and ideas are not

Just congealed rational responses to an objectively present material or organizational obstacle course. Thus the debate about the constitutive nature of norms, ideas, or identities is a debate not about static properties but about why people ended up with particular norms, ideas, or identities.

(Abdelal, Blyth, and Parsons 2010, 19)

As a result, the burden of justification is turned around: ideational factors are not only relevant when they provide residual explanatory power to utilitarianism. Instead, if one does start with utilitarianism, one needs to carefully justify why it can do without understanding ideas through their wider social context and without endogenizing identity formation in the explanation. That justification is, in turn, necessary to justify the selection of a rationalist theory as the general framework to start with. It is perhaps hardly surprising that some rationalists shy away from this implication of being a special case in need of constant justification. It is much nicer if rationalism provides the null hypothesis.

Jutta Weldes and Ted Hopf have provided the textbook research approaches of two complementary constructivist foreign policy traditions: one addressing more the practices of

identification with regard to the relational other abroad, and the other addressing them more through identification practices within a society. In an enviably clear approach, Weldes (1999) builds up her research puzzle. She shows how Cuban, Soviet, and US understandings of the Cuban missile crisis differ. This is not simply meant to show that all countries see the world through their lenses or how they deem fit, but to raise the issue why the Cuban interpretation was so easily dismissed. In the aftermath of the botched Bay of Pigs invasion, the Cuban justification for having Soviet missiles was that it was for sheer defense: not being able to trust the US to respect Cuba's sovereignty, given the US-supported invasion attempt to topple the regime, a credible deterrence was needed. A Soviet coupling and a nuclear deterrence was arguably the best strategy for this, if achieved as a *fait accompli*. In Weldes' close reading of the documents of the ExComm responsible for deciding the US response, that particular justification and rationale for the missile installation never seriously figures, however, even in a discussion which did not address a public audience. 'How come?' (her research question is not 'why?', since it refers to a process-focused version of causation).

Weldes uses discourse analysis (see also Ostermann and Sjöstedt in this volume) to reconstruct the foreign policy identity of the US as it appears in these documents and in the wider social context. According to her, that particular reading *could not* seriously figure in the discussion since it would have profoundly contradicted the US's vision of itself, to use Kissinger's term. Identity discourses hence inform what and how we understand. She argues, in her wording, how that particular understanding would have 'interpellated' a US identity as an imperialist power bound to invade smaller and relatively speaking defenseless countries when it saw fit. Accepting the Cuban justification of a necessary defense would portray the US in a manner that is excluded from the latter's self-identification, its identity discourses. That discourse has several scripts. It is not homogeneous. There are interventionists and isolationists, for instance, America First or the multilateral liberal order (much of this discussion is already foreshadowed in Hoffmann 1978). But the underlying implicit consensus or *doxa* is about a certain US exceptionalism.

Hence, discourse analysis cannot predict in a generic manner which script will become dominant and inform the understanding of world affairs. It is not deterministic in this sense. It answers *how possible?* questions, not *why?* questions, if by the latter we imply an efficient causal explanation (Doty 1993; Vennesson 2008). But, once fitted with the historical and empirical detail of the specific case, it can exclude certain understandings, since they would be outside the boundaries of existing identity discourses. These identity discourses can originate in three different environments. Critical geopolitics (see da Vinha in this volume) distinguishes between the formal, practical, and popular levels, i.e. the discursive fields of the observers, the practitioners, and civil society that inform the way state identity is conceived and through this also constituted and negotiated (Ó Tuathail and Dalby 1998).

Ted Hopf (2002), in particular, opened up this constructivist analysis by including societal discourses such as novels or movies. His approach also aimed to distinguish and compare the respective importance of (external) role recognition and (internal) self-identifications for informing the understanding of the leading decision-makers, showing that, for the majority of his cases, the domestic discourses prevailed, therefore prompting him to call his approach societal constructivism (for a similar design, see also Hopf 2012). This may not necessarily be persuasive, though, since role recognition is often included or anticipated in societal discourses and surely so when the analysis focuses on state decision-makers. In other words, although it makes sense to assume that such a relational practice as identity formation needs to be approached by analytically distinguishing the different spheres of relations and circles of recognition, in this case domestic and foreign relations, the very moment one moves to

the level of the actor exposed to these discursive fields, the multiple spheres are mediated and no longer separated. Still, the approach has the advantage of clearly showing that identity discourses are never homogeneous, nor do they have only one single script. It is within the identity discourse that the different specific identity scripts are related, and are often set against each other.

Identification or Identity as Process

From here, the analysis of identity in FPA made two significant steps forward. First, it specified identity in that all identity discourses are relational and are both national biographies that diachronically construct continuity over time and synchronically constitute distinctions that define the self with regard to an Other (Pizzorno 1986, 368).⁵ Second, the poststructuralist twist reversed the explanatory arrow: whereas constructivism tends to read from existing identity discourses to foreign policy behavior, poststructuralism takes the always precarious identity formation as its very core of analysis and looks into how foreign practices do not just express a certain identity, but actually intervene in its very constitution and (de)stabilization (for early interventions, see e.g. Doty 1993; 1996; for more recent ones, see e.g. Ostermann 2019).

Identity is constituted over time. Narratives are there to construct a continuity that can be called a self (see Oppermann and Spencer in this volume). In this way, a prominent way to understand identity discourses is to treat them as national biographies (Berenskoetter 2014b; for an analysis of Ricoeur's approach to memory and identity in IR, see Kopper 2012), constantly updated, if not rewritten, with multiple competing scripts. In this biographical practice, the self is re-constituted through that which it is not over time. Hence, any identity discourse is systematically connected to an Other (see e.g. Neumann 1996, 1999). This Other, however, does not need to be an enemy (Hansen 2006). Indeed, in an interesting twist, also friends are others who inform identity narratives in significant ways (Roshchin 2006; Berenskoetter 2007, 2014a).

Finally, such othering may not only be primarily geopolitical but can also be temporal. As Ole Wæver remarked, 'Europe's other is Europe's own past which should not be allowed to become its future' (Wæver 1998, 90), an identity discourse whose content closely overlaps with Germany's foreign policy identity. When then Secretary of Defense Rumsfeld tried to divide Europe, enlisting 'new' Europe for the Bush administration's war in Iraq, Germany was faced with a difficult choice: continue to be a friend of the US, also in recognition of the US effort for German security, or accept that this friend was undermining the EU, which is intrinsically related to German identity. Given the centrality of the EU in Germany's own temporal othering, it becomes more easily understandable why the Schröder government decided for the (old) EU and against the US (besides the strategic misconception of this war, lacking moreover legal and political (UNSC) legitimacy). Obviously, geopolitical and temporal othering cannot always be distinguished so clearly (Rumelili 2004; Prozorov 2010). But it is an interesting twist that othering in identity discourses can be self-reflexive (Diez 2004, 321), which produces, in particular for the EU, a very provisional sense of identity.

The other major research path consists in the poststructuralist reversal: rather than seeing identity discourses as informing certain understandings and hence predisposed to a limited set of foreign policy actions, it looks back on how these very understandings lead to actions which re-inscribe certain identity scripts. Or put more strongly, it looks at how action fixes (or not) an always precarious identity in search of recognition. Identity is not the start of an analysis of action, but the analysis of action (or practices) has the purpose of understanding identity processes.

The starting point is the ‘dangerous liaison’ between constructivist theorizing and the very nature of identity (Zehfuss 2001). Identity is always in the process of being re-inscribed. Hence, one cannot simply assume that in any given situation there is a stable identity from which the explanation originates. In contrast, the process in which the identity discourses are affected by events and actions may become the privileged focus for the analysis. This reversal, famously introduced by David Campbell (1990, 1992), starts the analysis from the practices that provide continuity to an ever-unaccomplished identity, and sees understandings and actions as potential ways to stabilize these processes. Jutta Weldes also sees the US reaction to the Cuban missile installations as an attempt to return credibility to a particular masculinist and macho US role in international affairs, trying not to appear ‘weak’ (see also Weldes 1996, 46). Rather than seeing the Cuban missile crisis as a (given) security crisis, she sees it primarily as an identity crisis that prompted its own security concerns.

In this context, the analysis moves toward the very identity discourses themselves, their history, their composition in multiple scripts, what will constitute threats to them, and how actions and understandings not only fix but also undermine them. In an almost complete reversal of the usual understanding of the national interest as being driven by given physical security concerns, there *can* be moments in which states’ identities are so much accustomed to an enemy other that its disappearance induces insecurity. Georgy Arbatov, Director of the Institute for USA and Canada Studies and advisor to Mikhail Gorbachev, is widely quoted for saying in an interview to a US journalist in 1988 that ‘[w]e are going to do a terrible thing to you—we are going to deprive you of your enemy’. In such cases, states are looking for matches of pre-defined danger and threats, looking for an enemy other that stabilizes the self: ‘On a deep level, they prefer conflict to cooperation, because only through conflict do they know who they are’ (Mitzen 2006, 361). There can hence be a national (identity) interest in insecurity. In an echo of Kissinger’s concern with identity and absolute security, this specifies why peace-building and diplomacy may turn out to be far more complicated (Rumelili 2015b).

The work by Mitzen and Rumelili also provides a further example of the analysis of identity in FPA, namely Ontological Security Theory (OST). Initially inspired by social psychology and Anthony Giddens’ social theory (Giddens 1991, chapter 2), ontological security refers to the idea that ‘human beings need relatively stable expectations about the natural and especially social world around them’ (Wendt 1999, 131). It ‘entails having a consistent sense of self and having that sense affirmed by others’ (Zarakol 2010, 6) so as to be able to sustain a coherent autobiographic narrative. Since this ‘pushes human beings in a conservative, homeostatic direction, and to seek out recognition of their standing from society’ (Wendt 1999, 131), ‘[o]ntological security does not presuppose a threat to identity but underlines an ongoing concern with its stability’ (Rumelili 2015a, 58).

The analysis of ontological security initially targeted what one could call status anxieties and foreign policy pathologies. A major research issue is the study of the systematic ontological insecurity for those whose integration into international society is deferred and/or comes from the outside of that which is considered the civilizational ‘standard’, those ‘forced ... to rearticulate their new state identities around the anxiety of “demonstrable” inferiority and the goal of catching up with the West by following its “standards”’ (Zarakol 2011, 62). This makes ontological security studies particularly fruitful for analyzing foreign policies at the periphery of the international order (Ejdus 2017; Vieira 2017). Indeed, some countries may get stuck in identity discourses that offer different scripts which are alternatively mobilized to meet crises without ever being able to provide a stabilized self, such as in the case of Turkey (Bilgin 2012) or Russia (Astrov and Morozova 2012; Morozov 2015).

Methodological/Theoretical Problems: Anthropomorphization, Homeostasis, and Reflexivity

Anthropomorphization is underlying all rationalist analysis where actors are assumed to have interests, ideas, aims, indeed a ‘character’, as Kissinger called it. But it is arguably more pronounced for discursive methodologies and theories of social recognition when applied to IR. There are three proposed solutions to this problem, none perfect (for a good discussion, see also Narozhna 2020).

One consists in arguing that states are persons in international society (Wendt 2004). Here, anthropomorphization is not metaphorical, but ontological in the figure of a (social) person. That is an ambitious take, and one that has met resistance (Jackson 2004; Neumann 2004; Wight 2004; yet see also the discussion in Lerner 2021). A second solution consists in focusing on the actual decision-makers and hence not scaling up at all. Yet, for this to work, some collective ideas and identifications need to enter the picture. Hopf (2002, chapter 1) achieves this by positing that identity is a cognitive device that stabilizes human orientations and understandings in their social environment. This creates societally shared discursive formations composed of different identity scripts. Decision-makers, as members of the same society, rely on these when understanding the situations in foreign policy. Alternatively, this link can be made by using other forms of social psychology, as in the study of nationalist mobilization (Kinnvall 2004, 2017), or, put slightly differently, by focusing on the ways and processes/institutions that provide ontological security to members of a society (Zarakol 2017), i.e. defending not the self but the wider social context (Pratt 2017).

Finally, there is the possibility of seeing a state’s identity not as being scaled up but as being the ascription of international and/or domestic society. Hence, anthropomorphization is not an attribute assigned by the observer who imposes an anthropomorphic grid when analyzing a collective actor; it is the various social contexts that attribute such anthropomorphic traits to collective actors, while accordingly making sense of their acts, something the observer then registers and analyses (Guzzini 2012b). States, then, *are* what their circles of recognition make of them, to reuse Pizzorno’s term mentioned above. Put into a more narrative approach to identity (Somers 1994), Erik Ringmar writes that: ‘States too can be intentional, interest-driven, actors, we may conclude, provided that we tell stories which identify them as such’ (Ringmar 1996, 75). This solution has the advantage of overcoming the paradox that, although observers and practitioners routinely declare that states are not persons, they refer to them as such in ways that influence their understanding and actions, and not only in terms of legal personality and liability. It also allows an empirical check on such attributions by analyzing practices of recognition (in its many meanings) within domestic and international society.⁶ Yet it may miss the social psychological component that links it to domestic national identity practices (Guzzini 2017). De facto, most analyses, depending on whether they concentrate more on the domestic or external social context, will use versions of the last two, with their respective limitations, and often explore the tensions between the two (e.g. Subotić and Zarakol 2013).

There are more specific problems with OST. The major unease stems from the ‘conservative, homeostatic direction’ noted by Wendt above that tends to provide functionalist analyses that, in turn, favor securitization strategies for re-establishing an ‘identity equilibrium’ and hence have the usual problems with understanding both agency and change. If all starts from anxiety and its fixing, then ontological security pays a similar price to that paid by constructivist FPA earlier when it took identity discourses as stable (Bucher and Jasper 2016). Whereas the poststructuralist twist of reversing the focus from action to identity processes is taken seriously, the parallel insistence of the openness of such processes has been partly lost.

There have been different ways of dealing with this fundamental problem, but almost all of them open up for more contingency in the re-articulation of narratives and identity scripts. Rather than a functionalist fix, it becomes an open process. One line consisted in finding in the initial inspirational literature – be it Laing or Giddens, but also the existentialist takes in Hobbes and then in Heidegger and Kierkegaard – indications that anxiety not only induces crises to be fixed, but also generates opportunities to be explored (Gustafsson and Krickel-Choi 2020; Kinnvall and Mitzen 2020; Rumelili 2020), where securitization would not be the default coping strategy (Browning and Joenniemi 2017). This allows for a conceptualization of agency that can be more emancipatory (Berenskötter 2020) and may also involve desecuritization moves that bring ontological security closer to classical peace research concerns (Browning and Joenniemi 2017). As Lupovici's (2012) point about ontological dissonance implies, there is no necessity that crises be resolved rather than being constantly patched up and their solution hence adjourned.

In the analysis of identity crisis, the greater openness of the process is achieved by including more process factors in the analysis, not only for the link between interpretations and behavior, but already for establishing the contours of the narrative struggles. Such factors include the analysis of the hierarchies, habitus, and practices in the foreign policy expert field, the ideational path dependency of political cultures, and the struggles within the political field itself (Guzzini 2012b). The idea of an 'identity crisis' hence does not refer to an external event that hits identity discourses, but to the predispositions of identity discourses that may find it difficult to keep consistency in the interpretation of events. The end of the Cold War unsurprisingly unsettled identity scripts in Russia, but also oddly in Italy, and not in Germany and the Czech Republic, which were, however, states newly constituted in this form (Guzzini 2012a). As seen, an international crisis, even a war, may stabilize identity scripts. To constitute the event and assess its effects, the analysis is from the discursive field via scripts and interpretations to the event, an *interpretivist process-tracing*, not the other way round (see van Meegdenburg in this volume).

Last but not least, it is important to highlight a reflexive element so important for constructivist scholarship. What happens when an observational theory is re-translated into a political doctrine and policy justification, as also happened to democratic peace theory (see also Ish-Shalom 2006, 2013)? What happens when ideas about identity mechanisms travel into the world of practice; when the search for recognition is not simply a long-standing practice of international politics, but becomes implicitly justified through our social theories; and when practitioners (or scholars), aware of this justification, use it to defend as untouchable an identity script of their predilection, any infringement of which would count as undermining a vital interest?

This ontologically reflexive twist is a temptation, in particular with ontological security; however, much observers of ontological security have warned about it. It is not too hard to see how ontological security can move from being an observational concept to a practical one. Just as the idea of a sphere of interest, ontological security, if used as a doctrine, defines a red line. But it is a specific red line, since it does not allow for much of a compromise. Indeed, as Maria Mälksoo (2015, 223) has argued, the problem is that such a move normalizes and makes inevitable 'a state's need to seek and sustain the intactness and consistency of its identity [which] could dangerously depoliticize the act of protecting a biographical narrative of the state', normalizing, in turn, strategies of securitization.

The wider practical implications of normalizing ontological security have to do with a similar twist, namely that it is the country itself which can define the legitimate red line of its 'vision of itself'. Yet all of the classical international practices, such as spheres of influence, only

work when they are recognized by others. Unilateral actions can be part of their establishment, but not more. However, whereas shared rules that define the acceptance of such practices have been established over time, which ‘visions of itself’ would be legitimate and which not is more difficult to establish. If actors decide that there is a completely untouchable ‘vision of itself’, based for instance on a historical status of victimhood (Lerner 2019), that any security arrangement will have to accept, a world order can easily become impossible.

It is therefore important to note that although great power status and recognition involve the privilege to make fewer compromises, the ‘vision of itself’ is objectively never the property of an actor alone; it is social. Its invocation for foreign policy purposes is hence always contestable. If ontological security is erroneously translated into a self-centered doctrine to justify uncompromising foreign policy action, it leads to diplomatic pathologies. It expresses, metaphorically speaking, a form of narcissism (see also the discussion in Hagström 2021). In fact, in this case, it is not that a given ontological insecurity justifies uncompromising behavior; uncompromising behavior serves to essentialize a certain definition of the vision of oneself. Such a temptation is visible in many political justifications of foreign policies, as analyzed, for instance, in research on foreign policy discourses in Central and Eastern European countries, and in particular in Russia (see, for instance, Hansen 2016; Akchurina and Della Sala 2018; Kazharski 2019; Freire 2020; Narozhna 2022).

Conclusion

Kissinger’s concern with ‘vision of the self’ cannot be consistently accommodated in a rationalist framework of analysis because of its individualist understanding of beliefs, its objectivation as external cause, and the exogenization of interest formation that neglects the constitutive role of ideas and identity. The constructivist and then poststructuralist research agenda on identity remedies this situation by framing the role of ideas within a more appropriate sociological theory, yet meeting problems of their own. In this process, the question of identity has not only moved center stage but also shifted beyond Kissinger’s take.

For Kissinger, that vision of itself was surely contingent to some extent, but it was something given that could be threatened by events and decisions. Seeing how particular events may pose problems for such identities (and identity discourses) is surely part of the previously mentioned research programs (and also for the concept of societal security, as introduced by Wæver 1993). But there has been a further twist, in that such identity discourses are intrinsically unstable and in need of fixes. Identities are relational and hence part of continuous recognition practices for an identity that *is*, by being, always *in the making*. No actor ever has an identity that is guaranteed to be at one with the ‘vision of itself’. Hence – and this is different from Kissinger’s take – there is not only a given identity registering tensions with the outside world, be they in self-identifications or role recognitions. Instead, identities are part of processes that have autonomous effects on that very mediation between self and the world. In particular, the search for recognition informs identity practices that intervene in this world. It gives meaning to our actions. Following the trail of an increasingly thicker account of ideas and identities leads us to a theory of action that is not utilitarian, but symbolic, and where the search for recognition, not value maximization, becomes the main underlying logic.

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Notes

- 1 They do so even though (other) realist theorists argued early that no such given set of preferences can be assumed: the effects of international anarchy are indeterminate (Wolfers 1962), and individual aims are not reducible to one that could express a maximization of utility (Aron 1962).
- 2 In his forceful critique of such systemic approaches, Andrew Moravcsik presented a liberal theory based on the domestic determinants of state preferences, including ‘social identity’ (Moravcsik 1997, 525 ff.), defined, in turn, by a set of shared preferences, whose origins are exogenous to the theory.
- 3 The study of belief-systems has been an important precursor of this turn. As the different contributions to Little and Smith (1988) however show, it mixes diverse methodologies that go from those undergirding cognitive psychology, social psychology to more sociological and discursive approaches. Important research also looked at the institutional underpinnings of norm and beliefs diffusion. See, just as an example, the studies on the end of the Cold War by Risse-Kappen (1994), Checkel (1997) and Evangelista (1999). Evangelista (2015) has later reflected on how ideas enter a more open process-tracing approach.
- 4 As Juliet Kaarbo (2003) rightly noted, role-theory has been a closely related research program. For this, see Breuning in this volume. For a socio-psychological approach, see Sucharov (2005).
- 5 This is closely connected to the research agenda on collective memories in Foreign Policy Analysis. For cases in Central and Eastern Europe, this has been analyzed by, for instance, Elizaveta Gaufman (2017), Maria Mälksoo (2009, 2015) and Jelena Subotić (2020a, b). This, in turn, relates to the materiality of many practices of ‘commemoration’ that feed into the scripts of national biographies. See e.g. Heath-Kelly (2016).
- 6 This position is hence exactly not metaphorical ‘as if’. The state is a person and real, yet ‘only because we act as if it were and consequently *make it so*’ (Jackson 2004, 283). See also the discussion in Fleming (2017) which fruitfully does not start from the ontology of the state as such but on the implications of our practice of ascribing actions (or properties) to states.

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