

## 12/14/09 - How do states make their foreign policy

Tackling this question has been incredibly hard because foreign policy (FP) is torn between International Relations (IR) and a genuine foreign policy analysis. It is a level of analysis problem (Singer 1961) - do we deduce from national structures or from the international system? FP is caught in between domestic and foreign politics. Here, I will choose the bottom-up approach and extrapolate from national conditions, even though this approach has allegedly 'come to realise its limitations' (Krieger 1993, 313) and 'has generally produced little cumulation of knowledge or lasting impact' (Gideon 1998, 154). I wish to be accurate about FP in this essay (micro-level) and IR theories (macro-level), almost by definition, neglect detail.

According to Webber and Smith (2002) and Brown (2001), I interpret *make* as *formulate*, not implement. So "A" might formulate a FP like 'stronger economic ties to "B"', but how "A" will actually implement this is another story.

I will consider FP as 'the strategy of action developed by a state [or non-state actor] with respect to other *states or international actors*, aimed at achieving specific goals defined in terms of the "national interest"' (Gregory 2009). The national interest is the 'territorial integrity of a nation, the preservation of its values and way of life, and the promotion of a nation's welfare' (Gregory 2009). Let us then turn to the environment a *democratic* leadership would find itself in, trying to set up its FP.

### The environment of FP formulation

FP formulation is done within the executive in order to increase efficiency and continuity because of the high stakes involved in FP. However, this control by the executive is not total. It is dependant upon an electorate - be it the people or a coalition government. Also, the constitution might give the legislative some influence (like the US Senate has) or install an arrangement like a referendum (e.g. Switzerland). All these institutionalised constraints limit the power of the executive leadership has over defining or redefining FP (Webber and Smith 2002, 69-72).

There are also informal, non-institutionalised constraints. Allison (1971, as quoted in Brown 2001) evinced organisational inertia in the Soviet administration in that the Soviet Rocket Forces used old rocket layouts for the missiles stationed on Cuba, easily identifiable for the US even though the objective of secrecy was clear. Also, unlike the KGB, they transported the missiles in daylight. On the other side, the US Air Force wanted to bomb the missile sites, but mistakenly projected too high casualties and too little likelihood - they had simply adopted an existing plan.

Besides organisational inertia, one can make out bureaucratic interests too. 'In the United States, the State Department usually favours negotiation, the UN Representative action by the UN, the US Navy action by the US Navy and so on. It is not to be expected that organisations will promote courses of action that do not involve enhancements to their own budgets' (Brown 2001, 79-80). Bureaucratic interests might come from 'ministers, government departments and agencies, embassies, civil servants [and] legislature' (Gregory 2009).

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These influences all reside in the environment of the leadership. Next I will examine influences within the leadership group or the leader's psychology.

**Psychology and grand theories**

In 2003, Condoleezza Rice described the Bush Doctrine as a mix of pragmatic realism and Wilsonian liberal theory (Snyder 2004). It shows that whether or not IR theories are valid, leaderships make assumptions on their grounds. Evidently, IR theories influence foreign policy (FP) even in my bottom-up approach<sup>1</sup>. This leads to the point that a leader's perceptions of an environment must not match reality. Furthermore, like Allison (as quoted in Brown 2001, 77) demonstrates, we never know all information relevant to our decision. It is impossible to consider all available options and foresee all consequences. Even a completely rational actor would need to make assumptions and, I argue, IR theories can be such assumptions. This consorts with Webber and Smith's argument that a FP maker may fall back on core beliefs in situations of high complexity or uncertainty (Webber and Smith 2002). Therefore we must assess the main macro theories shortly:

Source: Snyder (2004, 54)

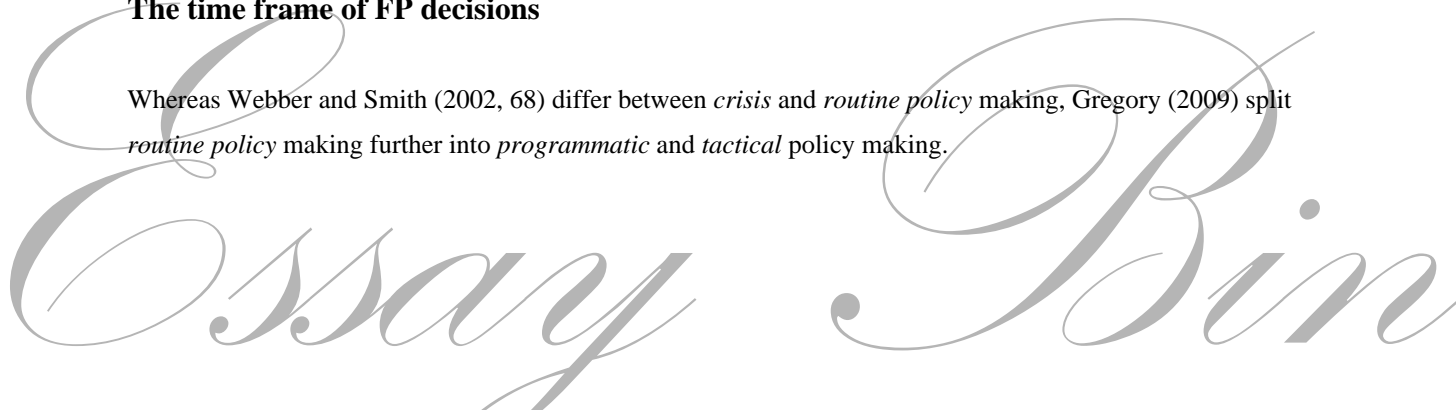
	Realism	Liberalism	Constructivism (Idealism)
Core Beliefs	Self-interested states compete for power and security	Spread of democracy, global economic ties, and international organisations will strengthen peace	International politics is shaped by persuasive ideas, collective values, culture, and social identities
Key Actors in International Relations	States, which behave similarly regardless of their type of government	States, international institutions, and commercial interests	Promoters of new ideas, transnational activist networks, and nongovernmental organisations
Main instruments	Military power and state diplomacy	International institutions and global commerce	Ideas and values

It is extremely hard to show the degree to which the ideas of these theories play a role, but they certainly do. To exemplify: Human rights, as reflecting the liberal belief in the values of individual dignity and integrity, did have an impact by, for instance, rendering strong relations to the Apartheid regime in South Africa unacceptable (Webber and Smith 2002, 60).

We have seen that leaderships' actions are not fully rational, because the human capability is limited. This becomes more dramatic when we consider the limited amount of time they sometimes have at hand.

**The time frame of FP decisions**

Whereas Webber and Smith (2002, 68) differ between *crisis* and *routine policy* making, Gregory (2009) split *routine policy* making further into *programmatic* and *tactical* policy making.



In a *crisis*, decisions are time urgent and have serious implications. What is further, leaderships have little information. To be quicker, they must simplify their processes and refrain from consulting all available intelligence. They will rely heavily on assumptions. When there is more time, in *routine* decision making, there are small, *tactical* decisions that are easy to reverse and have small consequences like the change of a foreign aid budget. *Programmatic* decisions, however, have great, long-term implications and are hard to reverse, like the adoption of the Euro as currency. According to Gregory (2009), leaderships avoid programmatic decisions or share their responsibility for them, for example, by the means of referenda.

### **Contrasting our micro approach with macro theories**

I have tried to account for a states' FP formulation by assessing the strong constraints under which its leadership makes foreign policy decisions in the pursuit of national interest. But nevermind the constraints, what would a state try to do? I have answered that it would try to follow its national interest, which is, again, the 'territorial integrity of a nation, the preservation of its *values and way of life*, and the promotion of a nation's welfare'. What is more, I hold that *state-rationality is impossible* and that the *initiative for action* can be taken up by the leadership itself or come from the international environment.

*Neo-realists* would disagree with all italic claims and, most importantly, with my focus on domestic structures, because 'pressures from the international system are assumed to be strong and straightforward enough to make similarly situated states behave alike, regardless of their internal characteristics'. So states give way to these pressures, their values or way of life have little say. The neo-realist world is inhabited by 'rational states pursuing security'. For all neorealists, FP is a reaction to the environment (Gideon 1998, 149-50).

*Neo-liberalists* would agree with my definition of the national interest. They would, however, emphasise 'the preservation of its values' or might even extend it to 'the preservation *and spread* of its values' (democracy, market economy). I disagree with neo-liberalism on different grounds. It holds that FP pressures, that is incentives to act, come from within a state. I believe the ultimate cause for action is always the leadership's perception of reality and its values and emotions. Does North Korea not demonstrate how few pressures, domestic or abroad, are imperative? The location of the perceived event is of little importance to me.

How, then, do states actually make their FP? I think the leadership *perceives* the world and acts in accordance to what it believes is in the national interest (or in its self-interest if corrupt). This act is hugely influenced by institutionalised and non-institutionalised constraints, bureaucratic interests, the limits of human capability (psychology) and the time frame.

### **Conclusion**

In this essay I have paid careful attention to the constraints under which a leadership acts when formulating FP. I did attempt to give a direction (national interest) into which I believe FP will often go. However, I did not stress this part for fear of determinism. For if I answered the question conclusively, I would inevitably contradict the notion of free will and I would like to believe that humans have this capacity. I therefore

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answered the question inconclusively for sheer matter of congruency with the principle of a free spirit.

## Notes

Is it not a paradox that IR theories affect the reality they seek to explain objectively?

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