

CHAPTER 10

Foreign Policy

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■ Summary

This chapter addresses theories and approaches involved in **foreign policy analysis**. Foreign policy analysis is a study of the management of external relations and activities of nation-states, as distinguished from their domestic policies. The chapter unfolds as follows: first, the concept of **foreign policy** is outlined. Next, various approaches to foreign policy analysis are discussed. The arguments of major theories are introduced by using a '**level-of-analysis**' approach that addresses the international system level, the nation-state level, and the level of the individual decision maker. A case-study on the Gulf War demonstrates how insights from various approaches to foreign policy analysis can be brought together, and concludes with comments on the limits of such knowledge. Finally, a note on foreign policy experts and '**think tanks**' is included to indicate the extent of research on the subject which extends well beyond universities.

The Concept of Foreign Policy

Foreign policy analysis is a study of the management of external relations and activities of nation-states, as distinguished from their domestic policies. Foreign policy involves goals, strategies, measures, methods, guidelines, directives, understandings, agreements, and so on, by which national governments conduct international relations with each other and with international organizations and non-governmental actors. All national governments, by the very fact of their separate international existence, are obliged to engage in foreign policy directed at foreign governments and other international actors. Governments want to influence the goals and activities of other actors whom they cannot completely control because they exist and operate beyond their sovereignty (Carlsnaes 2002: 335).

Foreign policies consist of aims and measures that are intended to guide government decisions and actions with regard to external affairs, particularly relations with foreign countries. Managing foreign relations calls for carefully considered plans of action that are adapted to foreign interests and concerns—i.e., goals—of the government (see web links 10.01 and 10.03). Government officials in leading positions—presidents, prime ministers, foreign ministers, defence ministers, finance ministers, and so on—along with their closest advisers—are usually the key policymakers.

Policymaking involves a means–end way of thinking about goals and actions of government. It is an instrumental concept: what is the problem or goal and what solutions or approaches are available to address it? Instrumental analysis involves thinking of the best available decision or course of action—e.g., giving correct advice—to make things happen according to one's requirements or interests. The analyst seeks to provide knowledge that is of some relevance to the policymaker. It involves calculating the measures and methods that will most likely enable him or her to reach a goal, and the costs and benefits of different available policy options. It may extend to recommending the best course to enable a government to solve its foreign policy problems or achieve its foreign policy goals. At that point policy analysis becomes not only instrumental but also prescriptive: it advocates what ought to be done.

Foreign Policy Analysis

Foreign policy analysis ordinarily involves scrutinizing the external policies of states and placing them in a broader context of academic knowledge. That academic context is usually defined by theories and approaches—such as the ones discussed in previous chapters (see web link 10.09). The relationship between theory and policy does not necessarily lead to any one clear policy option; in most cases there will be several different options. Even so, the choice of theory—how policymakers view the world—is likely to affect the choice of policy.

That is partly because different theories emphasize different social values. Realists underline the value of national security: enhancing national military power and balancing that of other states is the correct way of achieving national security. International Society scholars emphasize the values of order and justice: a rule-based and well-ordered international society is a major goal. Freedom and democracy are the core values for liberals: they are convinced that liberal democracies will support peaceful international cooperation based on international institutions. Finally, scholars who emphasize the importance of socio-economic wealth and welfare as a central goal of foreign policy are likely to take an IPE approach. For them, the promotion of a stable international economic system that can support economic growth and welfare progress is a major goal. It should be noted, however, that some of these theories are more policy-oriented than others. That is clearly the case with Realism and Liberalism.

Foreign policy theorists who are concerned with defence or security issues are likely to take a realist approach, emphasizing the inevitable clash of interests between state actors, the outcomes of which are seen to be determined by relative state power (see web links 10.16 and 10.17). On the other hand, those concerned with multilateral questions are likely to take a **liberal approach**, emphasizing international institutions—such as the United Nations or the World Trade Organization (WTO)—as means of reducing international conflict and promoting mutual understanding and common interests.

In addition to the general IR theories discussed in previous chapters, there are various approaches that are specific to foreign policy analysis. Some approaches are derived from IR theories. Some are adapted from other disciplines, such as economics or social psychology. Policy analysis approaches are evident not only in academic scholarship but also in advocacy think tanks and the analyses of experts associated with them (see section on think tanks). Box 10.1 presents major approaches to foreign policy analysis; they are explained in what follows.

1. A **traditional approach to foreign policy** analysis involves being informed about a government's external policies: knowing their history or at least their background; comprehending the interests and concerns that drive the policies; and thinking through the various ways of addressing and defending those interests and concerns. That includes knowing the outcomes and consequences of past foreign policy decisions and actions. It also involves an ability to recognize the circumstances under which a government must

BOX 10.1 Approaches to foreign policy analysis

1. traditional approach: focus on the decision maker
2. comparative foreign policy: behaviouralism and 'pre-theory'
3. bureaucratic structures and processes; decision making during crisis
4. cognitive processes and psychology
5. 'multilevel, multidimensional'; the general theories
6. the constructivist turn: identities before interests.

operate in carrying out its foreign policy. The traditional approach involves, as well, the exercise of judgement and common sense in assessing the best practical means and courses of action available for carrying out foreign policies.

That 'feel' for what is possible under the circumstances is usually derived from experience. It could be said that a satisfactory grasp of a country's foreign policy is best achieved by direct knowledge of its government's foreign affairs, e.g., by serving in a foreign ministry or similar government agency. The next best thing would involve trying to put oneself into the mindset of such an official: attempting to grasp the circumstances of such a person; endeavouring to understand the reasons such an official arrived at a decision; and trying to ascertain its consequences, both good and bad. In short, traditional foreign policy study is a matter of gaining insight into the activity of foreign policymakers, either from experience or by careful scrutiny of past and present foreign policies.

Foreign policy analysis was traditionally the domain of diplomatic historians and public commentators. The subject still exists, although it now has many rivals. It was rooted in the state system and statecraft of modern Europe as that emerged and acquired its classical characteristics, between the late seventeenth and early twentieth centuries. There were several distinctive features of traditional foreign policy analysis (Carlsnaes 2002). It was seen as a virtually separate sphere from domestic policies and activities of sovereign states. It was the realm of 'high politics' defined and guided by reason of state, now more commonly labelled 'national interests'. It was directed and managed by the leading state officials (emperors, kings, presidents, prime ministers, chancellors, secretaries of state, foreign ministers, defence secretaries, etc., and their closest advisers). It was not subject to popular scrutiny or democratic control. It was an exclusive and often secretive sphere of statecraft.

Traditional foreign policy analysis, accordingly, was a body of wisdom and insights which could only be acquired by lengthy study and reflection. The main writers on the subject were historians, jurists, and philosophers (see web link 10.02). Some were practitioners as well, such as Machiavelli and Grotius at an early period (see web links 10.10 and 10.11), and George Kennan and Henry Kissinger at a later period (see web links 10.12, 10.13, 10.14, and 10.15). Their commentaries on foreign policy attempted to distil that wisdom and those insights. The approach continues to appeal to historically minded International Society scholars and classical realists, because it gets into the detailed substance of foreign policy. It is cautious about allowing theory to get ahead of practice and experience.

2. The **comparative approach to foreign policy** was inspired by the behaviouralist turn (see Chapter 2) in political science. The ambition was to build systematic theories and explanations of the foreign policy process in general. This was to be achieved by gathering and amalgamating large bodies of data, and by describing the content and context of the foreign policy of a large number of countries. It was theoretically informed by James Rosenau's (1966) 'pre-theory' of foreign policy. Rosenau identified numerous possibly relevant sources of foreign policy decisions and grouped them into five categories which he called: idiosyncratic, role, governmental, societal, and systemic variables. He then proposed a ranking of the relative importance of these variables, depending on the issue at hand and on the attributes of the state (e.g., size, political accountability/level of democracy, level of development). A large number of empirical studies of foreign policy employed Rosenau's

scheme, but the 'pre-theory' never emerged as a clear explanation of foreign policy; it remained a classification scheme.

3. The **bureaucratic structures and processes approach to foreign policy** focuses on the organizational context of decision making, which is seen to be conditioned by the dictates and demands of the bureaucratic settings in which decisions are made. Analysing processes and channels whereby organizations arrive at their policies is seen to be a superior way of obtaining empirical knowledge of foreign policy. The strength of the bureaucratic politics approach is its empiricism: its detailed attention to the concrete way policies are carried out in the bureaucratic milieu within which policymakers work. The approach seeks to find out not only what happened but why it happened the way it did.

The best-known study of this kind is Graham Allison's book on the 1962 Cuban missile crisis, *Essence of Decision* (Allison 1971; Allison and Zelikow 1999). The analysis suggests three different and complementary ways of understanding American decision making during that crisis: (1) a 'rational actor approach' that provides models for answering the question: with that information what would be the best decision for reaching one's goal? The assumption is that governments are unified and rational; they want to achieve well-defined foreign policy goals; (2) an 'organizational processes' model, according to which a concrete foreign policy emerges from clusters of governmental organizations that look after their own best interests and follow 'standard operating procedures'; (3) a 'bureaucratic politics model' which portrays individual decision makers (as bargaining and competing for influence, each with their own particular goals in mind). Despite criticism (Bendor and Hammond 1992), Allison's three models have informed much research on foreign policy.

4. The **cognitive processes and psychology approach** also focused on the individual decision maker, this time with particular attention to the psychological aspects of decision making, such as perceptions of actors. Robert Jervis (1968, 1976) studied misperception: why do actors mistake or misunderstand the intentions and actions of others? Jervis gives several reasons: actors see what they want to see instead of what is really going on; they are guided by ingrained, pre-existing beliefs (e.g., the tendency to perceive other states as more hostile than they really are); and they engage in 'wishful thinking'. Another example in this category is the work of Margaret Herman (1984). She studied the personality characteristics of fifty-four heads of government, making the claim that such factors as the leaders' experience in foreign affairs, their political styles, their political socialization, and their broader views of the world should all be taken into account to understand their foreign policy behaviour.

5. The 'multilevel and multidimensional approach' was developed over the last several decades, as it became increasingly clear that there would never be one all-encompassing theory of foreign policy, just as there is not one consolidated theory of IR. Many scholars now study particular aspects of foreign policymaking by using the various major theories presented in Parts 2 and 3 of this book. Studies of balance of power behaviour and of deterrence and security dilemmas—both Realist approaches—are examples of that. Thomas Schelling's strategic realism, which was derived from game theory (see Chapter 3), focuses directly on foreign policy decision making. It was applied most successfully in strategic studies during the Cold War, when the United States and the Soviet Union were locked in a

struggle involving nuclear weapons (Schelling (1980 [1960])) (see web links 10.38 and 10.40). Schelling won the 2005 Nobel Prize for economics for his groundbreaking application of game theory to foreign policy.

As indicated in Chapter 4, liberals study complex interdependence, the role of international institutions, processes of integration, and paths of democratization. In the liberal view, all of these elements contribute in their separate ways to foreign policies that are more orientated towards peaceful cooperation for mutual benefit. International Society scholars (Chapter 5) trace the three traditions (realism, rationalism, and revolutionism) in the thought and behaviour of statespeople and ponder their consequences for foreign policy. In IPE (see Chapter 6) neo-Marxists focus on the relationship between core and periphery, and they identify the vulnerable position of underdeveloped, peripheral states in relation to developed core states as the basic explanation of their lack of room for manoeuvre in foreign policy.

6. A focus on the role of ideas, discourse, and identity is characteristic of a **social constructivist approach** to foreign policy analysis (see Chapter 8). Constructivists see foreign policymaking as an intersubjective world, whose ideas and discourse can be scrutinized in order to arrive at a better theoretical understanding of that process. They trace the influence of ideas and the discourse of policymakers on the processes and outcomes in foreign policy—since many actions are conveyed by speech and writing (Goldstein and Keohane 1993). ‘Strategic culture’ is an example of the influence of ideas. Over time, countries tend to develop a more lasting set of ideas about how they want to go about using military force in conducting foreign affairs; this set of ideas is the strategic culture (Johnston 1995). A study by Henrik Lindbo Larsen has shown how the difficulties of formulating a common European Security and Defence Policy can be explained by the incompatibilities of strategic cultures in France, Britain, and Germany (Lindbo Larsen 2008) (see web link 10.22).

A more ambitious version of constructivism is not satisfied with the notion of ideas as one among several factors influencing foreign policy. These constructivists claim that identity, rooted in ideas and discourse, is the basis for a definition of interests and thus lies behind any foreign policy (see web links 10.23, 10.24, and 10.25). Some constructivists focus on domestic sources of ideas and identities (Hopf 2002); others concentrate on the dialogue and discourse of states (Wendt 1999).

How to Study Foreign Policy: A Level-of-Analysis Approach

The different theories and approaches briefly identified in the previous section can all be of some assistance in the analysis of foreign policy. It will not be possible to present all of them in detail here; simplification is necessary. We propose to demonstrate the arguments of major theories by using a **level-of-analysis approach**. The level-of-analysis approach was introduced by Kenneth Waltz in his study of the causes of war (Waltz 1959; see also

Singer 1961). Waltz searched for the causes of war at three different levels of analysis: the level of the individual (are human beings aggressive by nature?); the level of the state (are some states more prone to conflict than others?); and the level of the system (are there conditions in the international system that lead states towards war?). We can study foreign policy at these same three levels of analysis:

- the systemic level (e.g., the distribution of power among states; their political and economic interdependence);
- the nation-state level (e.g., type of government, democratic or authoritarian; relations between the state apparatus and groups in society; the bureaucratic make-up of the state apparatus);
- the level of the individual decision maker (his/her way of thinking, basic beliefs, personal priorities).

The Systemic Level

Theories at the systemic level explain foreign policy by pointing to conditions in the international system that compel or pressure states towards acting in certain ways, that is, to follow a certain foreign policy. Therefore, systemic theories first need to say something about the conditions that prevail in the international system; they then need to create a plausible connection between those conditions and the actual foreign policy behaviour of states. As we have seen in previous chapters, the various theories of the international system are not in full agreement about the conditions that primarily characterize the system. Realists focus on anarchy and the competition between states for power and security; liberals find more room for cooperation because of international institutions and a common desire by states for progress and prosperity. For many social constructivists, the goals of states are not decided beforehand; they are shaped by the ideas and values that come forward in the process of discourse and interaction between states. For present purposes, these different views of the international system can be summarized as shown in Box 10.2.

So different images of the international system lead to different ideas about how states will behave. But, even if we agree on one of these theories, it remains complicated to get from the general description of the system to specific foreign policies by states. Let us focus on realism; it proclaims a post-Cold War resurgence of great-power competition in an anarchic world where states compete for power and security. This would appear to be accurate in the broad sense, for example, that US foreign policy 'is generally consistent with realist principles, insofar as its actions are still designed to preserve US predominance and to shape a post-war order that advances American interests' (Walt 1998: 37).

But how exactly does anarchy and self-help in the system lead to a certain aspect of US foreign policy? For neorealists such as Kenneth Waltz or Stephen Krasner the basic factor explaining state behaviour is the distribution of power among states. With a bipolar

BOX 10.2	Three conceptions of the international system		
	REALISM	LIBERALISM	CONSTRUCTIVISM
Main theoretical proposition	Anarchy. States compete for power and security	States want progress and prosperity; commitment to liberal values	Collective norms and social identities shape behaviour
Main instruments policy	Military and economic power	Institutions, liberal values, networks of interdependence	Ideas and discourse
Post-Cold War prediction	Resurgence of great-power competition	Increased cooperation as liberal values spread	Agnostic: depends on content of ideas
Significantly modified version of Walt (1998: 174)			

distribution of power, the two competing states are compelled to 'balance against' each other and thus to become rivals:

Britain was bound to balance against Germany in the First and Second World Wars because Germany was the one state that had the potential to dominate the continent and thereby pose a threat to the British Isles . . . Realism is less analytically precise when the international system is not tightly constraining. A hegemonic state, for instance, does not have to be concerned with its territorial and political integrity, because there is no other state . . . that can threaten it.

(Krasner 1992: 39–40)

In the absence of constraints, the balance of power will be less helpful in understanding the leading state's foreign policy. According to Stephen Krasner, 'it may be necessary to introduce other arguments, such as domestic social purpose or bureaucratic interests. A realist explanation always starts with the international distribution of power but it may not be able to end there' (Krasner 1992: 41). In the post-Cold War world, the United States is by far the predominant power. Therefore, the US is not particularly constrained by other states or groups of states in the system.

Even in cases where the balance of power is tightly constraining, however, assumptions need to be made about what it is that states want when they compete with other states. An important distinction here is between defensive and offensive realists (Rose 1998; Walt 1998). Defensive realists take a benign view of anarchy; states seek security more than power. Offensive realists, such as John Mearsheimer, believe that states 'look for opportunities to gain power at the expense of rivals, and to take advantage of those situations when the anticipated benefits outweigh the costs. A state's ultimate goal is to be the hegemon in the system' (Mearsheimer 2001: 21). For defensive realists, states are generally satisfied with the prevailing balance of power when it safeguards their security; for offensive realists, states are always apprehensively looking to increase their relative power position in the system. It is

clear that different foreign policies can follow from adopting either the defensive or the offensive assumption.

For realists the systemic distribution of power among states is the most important level for analysing and explaining foreign policy. According to Kenneth Waltz:

The third image [the systemic level] describes the framework of world politics, but without the first and second images there can be no knowledge of the forces that determine policy; the first and second images [the level of the individual and the level of the nation-state] describe the forces in world politics, but without the third image it is impossible to assess their importance or predict their results.

(Waltz 1959: 238)

The Level of the Nation-state

A comprehensive explanation of foreign policy would have to include the level of the nation-state as well as the level of the individual decision maker. One approach is to examine the relationship between a country's state apparatus and domestic society. For some realists, this relationship is important because it assesses the ability of a government to mobilize and manage the country's power resources.

Foreign policy is made not by the nation as a whole but by its government. Consequently, what matters is state power, not national power. State power is that portion of national power the government can extract for its purposes and reflects the ease with which central decision makers can achieve their ends.

(Zakaria 1998: 9)

According to this argument, the United States may be a very powerful nation, but national power may not be at the ready disposal of the government. For long historical periods, the US was a 'weak state' facing a 'strong society'. Consequently, the government was unable to conduct an expansive and more assertive foreign policy that matched the actual power resources of the country (see Box 10.3).

This realist analysis indicates that it is not sufficient to examine the overall or systemic distribution of power. It is also necessary to examine the connection between a country's government and its society in order to properly assess the government's ability to mobilize and extract resources from society for foreign policy purposes (e.g., military expenditures, foreign aid) (see Christensen 1996; Schweller 1998). Unlike realists, liberals believe that individuals, groups, and organizations in society play an important role in foreign policy (see Chapter 4). They not only influence or frustrate the government; they also conduct international relations (or 'foreign policies') in their own right by creating transnational relations that are an important element in international interactions between countries. Sociological liberals argue that international relations conducted by governments have been

BOX 10.3 Fareed Zakaria on the US as a 'weak state'

The decades after the Civil War saw the beginning of a long period of growth in America's material resources. But this national power lay dormant beneath a weak state, one that was decentralized, diffuse, and divided. The presidents and their secretaries of state tried repeatedly to convert the nation's rising power into influence abroad, but they presided over a federal state structure and a tiny central bureaucracy that could not get men or money from the state governments or from society at large . . . The 1880s and 1890s mark the beginnings of the modern American state, which emerged primarily to cope with the domestic pressures generated by industrialization . . . This transformation of state structure complemented the continuing growth of national power, and by the mid-1890s the executive branch was able to bypass Congress or coerce it into expanding American interests abroad. America's resounding victory in the Spanish–American War crystallized the perception of increasing American power . . . America expanded dramatically in the years that followed.

Zakaria (1998: 10–11)

'supplemented by relations among private individuals, groups, and societies that can and do have important consequences for the course of events' (Rosenau 1980: 1). Interdependence liberals note that international relations are becoming more like domestic politics, where 'different issues generate different coalitions, both within governments and across them, and involve different degrees of conflict. Politics does not stop at the water's edge' (Keohane and Nye, Jr 1977: 25; see also Chapter 4). According to these liberals, then, it is too narrow to consider foreign policy as exchanges between state elites from different countries; the complex networks of relations between societies must enter the picture as well.

Another important liberal theory of foreign policy stems from republican liberalism. As explained in Chapter 4, the claim is that foreign policies conducted between liberal democracies are more peaceful and law-abiding than are foreign policies involving countries that are not liberal democracies. This can be seen as a liberal theory of foreign policy: liberal democracies are based on political cultures that stem from peaceful conflict resolution. That leads to pacific relations with other democracies because democratic governments are controlled by citizens who will not advocate or support wars with other democracies. With processes of democratization having been taking place in many countries since the end of the Cold War, there is a renewed intense debate about the liberal theory of democratic peace. Some critics claim that on the one hand early processes of democratization may lead to more, rather than less, conflict in the country (Elman 1997); other critics argue that there are serious flaws in the theoretical logic, according to which liberal democracy leads to more peaceful behaviour in foreign policy (Rosato 2003).

We should thus take note of a general difference in the approach of realists and liberals when it comes to foreign policy analysis focusing on the nation-state level. Realists most often see the state (i.e., the government) as a robust, autonomous unit, capable—at least most of the time—of extracting resources from society and imposing its will on society. Therefore, the analysis of foreign policy should first and foremost focus on government of

the state. Liberals, by contrast, most often see the state as a relatively weak entity which follows the bidding of strong groups in society. As noted by Andrew Moravcsik, foreign policy reflects and follows the preferences of different combinations of groups and individuals in domestic society (see Chapter 4). Foreign policy analysis should therefore concentrate on how different groups in society not only influence, but even preside over, the formulation of foreign policy. In both cases the relationship between state and society plays a role in the analysis of foreign policy; but the realist approach is state-centred whereas the liberal approach is society-centred (see web links 10.20 and 10.21).

One major example of corporations influencing government is what President Eisenhower called 'the military industrial complex' in his farewell speech in 1961. Eisenhower said:

In the councils of government we must guard against the acquisition of unwarranted influence, whether sought or unsought, by the military industrial complex. The potential for the disastrous rise of misplaced power exists and will persist . . . We must never let the weight of this combination endanger our liberties or democratic processes.

(Quoted from: http://www.sourcewatch.org/index.php?title=Military-industrial_complex, accessed 18 November 2011)

In 2002, James Fallows claimed that 'the military-industrial complex has returned to the situation that worried Eisenhower: it doesn't matter whether weapons are used (or usable) as long as they are bought. The military budget is, of course growing rapidly' (Fallows 2002: 47).

The foregoing approaches at the nation-state level of analysis focus on different types of relationships between the state (government) and society. The approaches to which we now turn focus on the decision-making process within the state apparatus. They call into question whether decisions made by states are really based on 'rational choice'. According to rational choice, states are able to correctly identify foreign policy challenges and to make the best possible decisions in terms of benefits and costs, taking into account the goals and values of the state. This is the **Rational Actor Model (RAM)** of decision making in foreign policy (Allison and Zelikow 1999). Is this really the way states make decisions or is it more complicated than that?

The 'bureaucratic politics' approach rejects the idea of bureaucratic decision making as a rational process. Decision making in bureaucracies is much more a process in which individuals compete for personal position and power: 'the name of the game is politics: bargaining along regularized circuits among players positioned hierarchically within the government. Government behaviour can thus be understood . . . not as organizational outputs, but as results of these bargaining games' (Allison 1971: 144). A study by David Kozak and James Keagle (1988) has identified the core characteristics of the bureaucratic politics model (see Box 10.4).

Critics of the bureaucratic politics model claim that it goes too far in its non-rational view of bureaucratic decision making. Some scholars argue that decision making during crisis is less prone to bureaucratic politics because such decisions would be made at the top level by a few key decision makers with access to the best available information (see web link 10.39).

BOX 10.4 The bureaucratic politics model

- Bureaucrats and bureaucracy are driven by agency interests in order to ensure their survival.
- Agencies are involved in a constant competition for various stakes and prizes. The net effect is a policy process whereby struggles for organizational survival, expansion and growth, and imperialism are inevitable.
- Competition produces an intra-agency bureaucratic culture and behaviour pattern. The axiom 'where you stand depends on where you sit' accurately describes this condition.
- Bureaucracies have a number of advantages over elected officials in the realm of policymaking. They include expertise, continuity, responsibility for implementation, and longevity. These characteristics create an asymmetrical power and dependence relationship between the professional bureaucrats and the elected officials.
- Policy made in the arena of bureaucratic politics is characterized by bargaining, accommodation, and compromise.
- In the bureaucratic politics system proposals for change are driven by political considerations. Bureaucracies have a deep-seated interest in self-preservation.
- By its nature, bureaucratic politics raises questions concerning control, accountability, responsiveness, and responsibility in a democratic society.

Modified from a longer list in Kozak and Keagle (1988: 3–15)

The model also downplays the role of president in the American system. He/she is 'not just another player in a complex bureaucratic game. Not only must he ultimately decide but he also selects who the other players will be, a process that may be critical in shaping the ultimate decisions' (Holsti 2004: 24).

That brings us to the 'groupthink' approach. The term was coined by psychologist Irving Janis to describe a process by which a group arrives at faulty or irrational decisions. Janis defined groupthink as follows: 'a mode of thinking that people engage in when they are deeply involved in a cohesive in-group, when the members' strivings for unanimity override their motivation to realistically appraise alternative courses of action' (Janis 1982: 9). When groupthink occurs the group fails to consider alternative ways to arrive at the best possible decision. When decisions are affected by groupthink, the following shortcomings occur: the objectives are not precisely defined; alternative courses of action are not fully explored; risks involved in the preferred choice are not scrutinized; the search for information is poor; the information is processed in a biased way; and there is a failure to work out contingency plans (Janis 1982). Janis identified eight primary characteristics of groupthink (Box 10.5).

Several major instances of groupthink involving United States foreign policy are identified by Janis: Pearl Harbor (the US naval commanding group believed that the Japanese would never risk attacking the US; the admiral in charge joked about the idea just before it happened); the Bay of Pigs invasion (the President Kennedy group convinced itself that Castro's army was weak and its popular support shallow; objections were suppressed or overruled); the Vietnam War (the President Johnson group focused more on justifying the war than on rethinking past decisions; dissenters were ridiculed). According to Janis, it is

BOX 10.5 Characteristics of groupthink

- Illusion of invulnerability: the group believes that its decision making is beyond question, which creates excessive optimism and extreme risk taking.
- Belief in the inherent morality of the group: members ignore the moral or ethical consequences of their decisions.
- Collective rationalization: the group discounts warnings that might have otherwise led them to reconsider their assumptions before they recommit to past policy decisions.
- Out-group stereotypes: others are framed as too evil or stupid to warrant consideration of their strategies or attempts to negotiate with them.
- Self-censorship: members feel inclined to avoid deviation from consensus, and minimize the significance of their doubts and counter-arguments.
- Illusion of unanimity: partly from the silence or self-censorship, members share the belief that they are unanimous in their judgements; silence means consensus.
- Direct pressure on dissenters: challenges or sanctioning comments are made to those who express strong arguments against the group's stereotypes, illusions, or commitments; loyal members do not bring up questions.
- Self-appointed 'mindguards': these members protect the group from adverse information that might threaten the shared illusions regarding the effectiveness or morality of the group's decisions.

Based on Janis (1982: 244)

possible to devise a number of remedies that will avoid the negative consequences of groupthink and enhance the capabilities of groups for making better decisions (Janis 1982; see also Hart et al. 1997). The usefulness of knowing about groupthink is not only to better explain misguided foreign policies; it is to know how to avoid them next time.

The Level of the Individual Decision Maker

Just as bureaucracies or small groups may not always make decisions based on the RAM of decision making, this applies to the level of the individual decision maker as well. Human beings have limited capacities—cognitive constraints—for conducting rational and objective decision making. According to Ole Holsti,

the cognitive constraints on rationality include limits on the individual's capacity to receive, process, and assimilate information about the situation; an inability to identify the entire set of policy alternatives; fragmentary knowledge about the consequences of each option; and an inability to order preferences on a single utility scale.

(Holsti 2004: 27; see also Jervis 1976; Rosati 2000)

These limitations are connected to the way in which individuals perceive and process information. In Alexander George's summation:

every individual acquires during the course of development a set of beliefs and personal constructs about the physical and social environment. These beliefs provide him with a relatively coherent way of organizing and making sense of what would otherwise be a confusing and overwhelming array of signals and cues picked up from the environment . . . These beliefs and constructs necessarily simplify and structure the external world.

(George 1980: 57)

A recent analysis by Jerel Rosati suggests several ways in which human cognition (i.e., the process of acquiring knowledge by the use of reasoning, intuition, or perception) and policymaker beliefs matter (Box 10.6).

These effects can be expanded as follows (based on Rosati 2000):

1. The content of policymaker beliefs; an early study by Nathan Leite (1951) characterized the belief system of the Soviet Communist elite as an 'operational code' consisting of 'philosophical beliefs' steering the diagnosis of the situation, and 'instrumental beliefs' framing the search for courses of action. Stephen Twing (1998) has explained how American cultural myths and traditions helped structure the world views and decision-making styles of John Foster Dulles, Averell Harriman, and Robert McNamara during the Cold War. Robert Axelrod and others studied the 'cognitive complexity' of international decision making by tracing the influence of foreign policy beliefs in relation to specific issues (Eagly and Chaiken 1993).
2. Organization and structure of policymaker beliefs: the belief systems of policymakers can vary; some are coherent and comprehensive while others are fragmented and sketchy. The latter type is prone to 'uncommitted thinking': decision makers who are 'beset with uncertainty and sitting at the intersection of a number of information channels, will tend at different times to adopt *different* belief patterns for the same decision problem' (Steinbrunner 1974: 136). Jimmy Carter, for example, was prone to 'uncommitted thinking', while experienced American foreign policy advisers such as Zbigniew Brzezinski and Cyrus Vance displayed coherent belief systems (Rosati 2000: 58).

BOX 10.6

The effects of human cognition and policymaker beliefs on foreign policy

1. through the content of policymaker beliefs
2. through the organization and structure of policymaker beliefs
3. through common patterns of perception (and misperception)
4. through cognitive rigidity (and flexibility) for change and learning.

Quoted from Rosati (2000: 53)

3. Common patterns of perception (and misperception): there are several ways in which perception patterns can lead to biased views; one is the creation of a stereotype image of the opponent. Ole Holsti (1967) showed how John Foster Dulles held a hostile image of the Soviet Union during the Cold War, 'regardless of changes in Soviet behaviour. Dulles rejected information that was inconsistent with his "inherent bad faith image" of Moscow' (Rosati 2000: 60). Engaging in wishful thinking is another source of bias. During the Vietnam War, American policymakers were convinced that the US could not lose the war; that overconfidence led them down the path of increased entanglement and difficulty in South East Asia.
4. Cognitive rigidity (and inflexibility) for change and learning: deeply held images and beliefs tend to be resistant to change. In a review of Henry Kissinger's foreign policy beliefs, Harvey Starr demonstrated very considerable stability in their content over a lengthy period. When core convictions do change, they are most likely to do so following big shocks and setbacks. Mikhail Gorbachev's 'new thinking' emerged in a period of severe Soviet political and economic crisis. American leaders' image of Japan changed dramatically after the attack on Pearl Harbor. American elite views of the United States' role in world affairs were strongly affected by the Vietnam war (Holsti and Rosenau 1984).

When we study the general effects of systemic structures or domestic pressures on decision makers, the usual assumption we make is that of rationality, as emphasized by Robert Keohane: 'The link between system structure and actor behaviour is forged by the rationality assumption, which enables theorists to predict that leaders will respond to the incentives and constraints imposed by their environments' (Keohane 1986: 167). The literature on human cognition and belief systems raises important questions which should increase our scepticism about the rationality premise in foreign policy analysis:

Because the existence of threats depends on the perceptions of individuals and societies, we need to incorporate the psychological dimension of threat perception and identity formation into our more structural analyses . . . The growing attention given by neorealists to perceptual variables, the examination by neoliberals of the role of ideas, and the social constructivist focus on identity, all suggest that models operating at other levels of analysis could be strengthened by incorporating work operating at the psychological level.

(Goldgeier 1997: 164–5)

At the same time, taking the road of 'cognition' instead of that of 'rationality' also has a potential downside. Even a somewhat comprehensive study of human cognition in world politics raises an extremely large and complex research agenda that will be very time-consuming both in terms of collecting information and in terms of analysis. Furthermore,

there is a danger that adding levels of analysis may result in an undisciplined proliferation of categories and variables. It may then become increasingly difficult to determine which are more or less important, and ad hoc explanations for individual cases erode the possibilities for broader generalization across cases.

(Holsti 2004: 31–2)

However, many scholars are confident about the possibility of combining different theories and modes of analysis in an attempt to bring together insights from competing approaches. The following section introduces a study that attempts to do just that.

Going to War in the Persian Gulf: A Case-study

On 2 August 1990, Iraq invaded the small neighbouring state of Kuwait; four days later, the country was annexed as Iraq's nineteenth province. The United States and many other states feared that Iraq would next invade oil-rich Saudi Arabia. UN resolutions condemned the invasion and demanded Iraq's unconditional withdrawal from Kuwait. Five months of negotiations led nowhere. The only option remaining was war. A US-led military campaign to expel Iraq from Kuwait was launched in mid-January 1991. By the end of February, Iraq had been forced to withdraw from Kuwait.

Why did the United States decide to go to war in the Persian Gulf? (See web links 10.55, 10.56, and 10.66). In an attempt to address that question Steve A. Yetiv (2004) demonstrates how a combination of three different theoretical perspectives is necessary to arrive at a more comprehensive answer: the RAM; the groupthink model; and the cognitive model. They parallel the three different levels of analysis introduced above. The baseline model in Yetiv's analysis is the RAM, which views the United States as a unitary actor driven by its national interests; it also assumes that the decisions made by the US are based on rational choice. The explanation of how and why the United States went to war from an RAM perspective is summarized in Box 10.7.

The RAM model highlights the strategic interaction between the US and Iraq and plausibly explains why going to war was ultimately unavoidable. But there are also elements that

BOX 10.7 Applying the RAM perspective

The argument is that the United States perceived itself as having vital national interests in the Persian Gulf. In order to protect them, it tried to consider and exhaust diplomatic and economic alternatives to war. It faced an intransigent Iraqi regime, and over time believed that the costs of waiting for sanctions to work increasingly exceeded the benefits. Therefore, taking into consideration Iraq's behaviour in the crisis, and its continuing threat even if it had withdrawn from Kuwait, Washington came to see war as necessary. While Iraq may or may not have reached a similar conclusion, it was also the case that the two sides could not locate or agree upon a negotiated settlement, because their bargaining positions did not overlap very much, if at all. This further inclined the United States towards war. Furthermore, the structural condition of anarchy in international relations enforced this logic. In their strategic interaction, the United States could not trust Iraq to withdraw from Kuwait and not to invade it at a later time, and Iraq could not trust the United States not to attack or harass it, if it agreed to withdraw.

Quoted from Yetiv (2004: 32–3)

leave us in the dark, and assumptions that are not questioned. RAM is clearly premised on a realist model of the international system; it is characterized by anarchy and self-help; therefore, war is always a possibility. This would appear entirely plausible in the present case; but, as noted in Box 10.2, there are different conceptions of the international system that can lead to different ideas about the systemic pressures on states. We cannot fully know whether the decision makers were driven by a realist understanding of the international system until we open up the 'black box' of 'The United States' and further scrutinize their reflections. Nor can we know whether the process of decision making was fully rational, as the RAM model assumes. Were all possible alternative options to the war decision carefully identified and meticulously examined before the decision was taken? In order to know about this, other theoretical perspectives that further investigate the process of decision making are necessary.

The *cognitive model* focuses on the individual key decision maker, in this case President George Herbert Walker Bush. Why did he frequently employ emotional rhetoric against Saddam Hussein? What made him emphatically reject any compromise with Saddam? Why did he tend to prefer the war option ahead of his advisers? Yetiv's application of the cognitive approach focuses on the importance of historical analogies: 'how decision makers create their own images of reality and simplify decision making through the use of analogies' (Yetiv 2004: 99). In the Gulf War case, the most important historical analogy for President Bush was that of Munich, as explained in Box 10.8.

The cognitive model highlights aspects of the US war decision that are not accounted for in the RAM perspective. The notion of historical analogy helps explain why President Bush strongly preferred the war option and rejected compromise with Saddam. Did the strong reliance on historical analogy lead Bush towards acting in a non-rational way? That need not be the case; analogical thinking can help identify the nature of the problem at hand and inform the search for possible courses of action. Such thinking can also 'undermine rational

BOX 10.8 Applying the cognitive perspective

For Bush, compromising with Saddam, as many wanted at home and abroad, would have made him a modern-day Neville Chamberlain. As Britain's Prime Minister, Chamberlain yielded to Germany the Sudetenland of Czechoslovakia at the 1938 Munich conference, a borderland area of German speakers that Hitler wanted to reintegrate into Germany. Chamberlain, duped by Hitler, believed that his action at Munich, which followed repeated efforts by Britain to appease Nazi Germany, would bring what he called 'peace in our time'. In fact, Hitler proceeded to seize Czechoslovakia and to invade Poland, forcing a change in British policy and creating the Munich analogy, which referred to the failure of appeasement in the face of brutal aggression. Through the Munich lens, Bush tended to see Saddam as a Hitler-like dictator who could not be accommodated or even offered a minor, veiled carrot . . . The analogy made Bush more likely to personalize the conflict with Saddam, to undermine others' efforts at compromise with Saddam, and to prefer war to the continued use of economic sanctions.

Quoted from Yetiv (2004: 61)

processes if it introduces significant biases, excludes or restricts the search for novel information, or pushes actors to ignore the facts and options that clash with the message encoded in the analogy' (Yetiv 2004: 61). Did that happen in the Gulf War case? Yetiv's analysis leaves the question open; on the one hand, the analogy supported the efforts of rational thinking; on the other hand, Bush also used the analogy 'to construct the crisis, so that we could say that the analogy was both heartfelt by a president who experienced World War II and used to advance the war option' (Yetiv 2004: 158).

The groupthink model emphasizes critical elements of small-group behaviour that can lead to defective decision making. Two overlapping groups are of interest in the Gulf War case: an inner group of four that consisted of President George Bush, Vice President Dan Quayle, National Security Adviser Brent Scowcroft, and Chief-of-Staff John Sununu. An outer group of eight comprised the group of four plus Secretary of State James Baker, Secretary of Defence Richard Cheney, Chairman of the Joint Chiefs-of-Staff Colin Powell, and Deputy National Security Adviser Robert Gates. Yetiv's analysis seeks to demonstrate that the conditions promoting groupthink were present and they did lead to defective decision making in the sense that alternative courses to the war option were not given greater consideration. The elements of groupthink in the Gulf War case are set forth in Box 10.9.

This section has briefly demonstrated how different analytical perspectives can be brought together and yield insights into a case-study of why the United States chose to go to war in the Persian Gulf in 1991. The RAM is the most general and comprehensive approach. It takes in the challenges to US national interests raised by the Iraqi invasion of Kuwait; it posits how the strategic interaction between Iraq and the US inclined the United States towards going to war. Other approaches are less comprehensive; even so, each of them contributes significantly towards understanding why the war option was preferred over other options. Additional perspectives that will yield other insights can be applied; they will generate further information about the case. Scholars will not agree on any 'best combination' of approaches; some will find that the RAM really tells us enough about the case because it examines the challenge to the US presented by Saddam and accounts for why the war option

BOX 10.9 Applying the groupthink approach

The exclusive nature of the group of eight and the rejection of methodical decision-making procedures both contributed to groupthink and made it easier for Bush and Scowcroft to advance the war option without carefully considering the costs and benefits of other alternatives. The group of eight had slowly coalesced, behind its strong and partial group leader, around the notion that economic sanctions would fail . . . Bush insisted on that decision ahead of most of his advisers, and it was adopted without consulting the most senior US generals and admirals, including Powell, who was disturbed by it, and Schwarzkopf, who was furious about it. [Chas W.] Freeman [US ambassador to Saudi Arabia], who played a fundamental role with Schwarzkopf in the field and was in communication with Washington, asserted his view that 'the record will show that a lot of issues were not fully discussed'.

Quoted from Yetiv (2004: 118)

was the response to that challenge. Others might argue that we must include the nation-state level and the level of the individual decision maker to achieve a full analysis.

By way of conclusion: it may be worth remembering that many foreign policy decisions and actions are taken in circumstances of uncertainty and with imperfect knowledge. Foreign policy is more prone to uncertainty and more exposed to instability and conflict than is domestic policy, which is carried out under the jurisdiction of a sovereign government that possesses the legal authority to preside over domestic society. Not only that: many of the issues and problems that foreign policymakers have to come to grips with are in motion, in flux, and that too will introduce uncertainties and difficulties. Rarely, if ever, can there be 'correct' or 'incorrect' foreign policies known to the policymakers at the time. Usually that knowledge only becomes evident in retrospect. The foregoing difficulties of the subject should perhaps make us sceptical of analytical models that claim to provide definitive accounts of foreign policy decision making.

A Note on Experts and 'Think Tanks'

Foreign policy has prompted a great deal of interest and research, much of it directed at influencing and possibly improving the foreign policy process and goals of countries. Over the past century many so-called think tanks have been established with that aim in mind (see web links 10.58 and 10.59). These are organizations that disseminate useful information and provide expert advice on international issues and problems. It is important to know about them because they have entered into the foreign policy process in many countries, especially the United States, where their influence is widely registered. They supplement conventional policymaking organizations, such as foreign ministries, departments of defence, ministries of foreign trade and commerce, and so forth. Some think tanks have the status and standing of annexes to government ministries and departments. The Rand Corporation, a well-known American think tank, is a highly trusted policy unit of the United States Department of Defense.

Some of the most important think tanks are private organizations engaged in developing and marketing foreign policy ideas and strategies with a view to shaping public opinion and influencing government policy. Many of the leading experts on foreign policy are members of these organizations rather than regular university departments of international relations. In the United States such experts have a prominent role as public intellectuals. Included among them at the present time would be Ivo Daalder, Robert Kaplan, Thomas Friedman, Michael Hirsh, Samantha Power, Jonathan Schell, Benjamin Barber, and Fareed Zakaria (see web links 10.60–10.66). It is possible to build a successful career in foreign policy analysis entirely in the private sector outside of both government bureaus and university departments.

The first foreign policy think tanks emerged in the early part of the twentieth century in the United States. They reflected the desire of the leading American philanthropists and public intellectuals of that time to create institutions where scholars and leaders could meet

to discuss and debate international issues with a view to solving them or at least addressing them more effectively than in the past. Three institutions from that period are particularly significant: the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace (1910) which was established by steel tycoon Andrew Carnegie; the Hoover Institution on War, Revolution and Peace (1919) founded by Herbert Hoover, later US president; and the Council on Foreign Relations (1921) which evolved into one of the most respected foreign policy institutes in the world (see web link 10.67). There are approximately 2,000 think tanks in the United States alone. Most are affiliated with universities, but perhaps as many as 500 are private organizations. Major American think tanks such as the American Enterprise Institute, the Brookings Institute, the Rand Corporation, and the Council on Foreign Relations, among others, have substantial numbers of staff, sometimes running into hundreds, and budgets running into many millions of dollars (Box 10.10).

The United States is home to some of the most distinguished foreign policy institutes. But over the past century think tanks have also been established in many other countries. Of these, the best known is Britain's Royal Institute of International Affairs (Chatham House) which was founded around the same time as its US counterparts (1920). Foreign policy organizations of similar vintage are the Canadian Institute of International Affairs (1928) and the Australian Institute of International Affairs (1933). These organizations were supposed to generate and disseminate practical knowledge of how to bring an end to the problems of war and how to institute peace on a more permanent foundation. The historical context of their formation was the misery and destruction caused by the First World War.

More foreign policy think tanks were established after the Second World War in Europe and beyond. A few of the more noteworthy include the German Institute for International and Security Affairs (1962), the Stockholm International Peace Research Institute (1966), the French Institute of International Relations (1979), the Japanese Institute for International Policy Studies (1988), the Netherlands Cicero Foundation on European Integration (1992), the Danish Institute for International Studies (1995), and the Indian Institute of Peace and Conflict Studies (1996). Such organizations deal with a remarkable diversity of foreign policy issues, including: defence and strategy; terrorism; human rights; global poverty; European integration; peace research; regional conflicts; international trade, energy, science, and technology; social policy; and much else besides.

What differentiates leading American think tanks from their counterparts in other parts of the world is the readiness of government policymakers to turn to them for policy advice and often to follow that advice. Foreign policy expertise has high visibility and prestige. It is the opportunity and ability to participate in policymaking that leads some scholars to conclude that US think tanks have greater impact on public policy than those of most other countries. Immediately following the terrorist attacks on New York and Washington, policy experts from some of America's leading foreign policy institutes appeared prominently in the mass media to offer their thoughts and advice. Some think tanks used the event as an opportunity to market ideas to policymakers and the public (see web links 10.41 and 10.42). That is only one example of the expertise that exists in the United States for dealing with foreign policy issues and problems.

After the Second World War and faced with responsibilities of being the pre-eminent world power, decision makers in Washington sought the advice of experts who could help

BOX 10.10 Foreign policy think tanks

THE CARNEGIE ENDOWMENT—UNITED STATES

The Carnegie Endowment for International Peace was established in 1910 in Washington, DC, with a gift from Andrew Carnegie. As a tax-exempt operating (not grant-making) foundation, the endowment conducts programmes of research, discussion, publication, and education in international affairs and US foreign policy. The endowment also publishes the quarterly magazine *Foreign Policy*.

COUNCIL ON FOREIGN RELATIONS—UNITED STATES

The Council on Foreign Relations, established in 1921, is a non-profit, non-partisan membership organization that takes no position on issues but is dedicated to improving the understanding of international affairs and American foreign policy through the free exchange of ideas.

FOREIGN POLICY INSTITUTE—TURKEY

FPI was founded in 1974 as an independent research organization to study issues related to Turkish foreign policy. Since its establishment, it has enlarged its activities to cover strategic and regional studies and international affairs.

FRENCH INSTITUTE OF INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS

Founded in 1979 by Thierry de Montbrial, the French Institute of International Relations—Institut français des relations internationales, or Ifri—is France's leading independent international relations centre dedicated to policy-oriented research and analysis of global political affairs.

GEORGE C. MARSHALL EUROPEAN CENTER FOR SECURITY STUDIES—UNITED STATES

Founded on 5 June 1993, the George C. Marshall European Center for Security Studies is dedicated to stabilizing and thereby strengthening post-Cold War Europe. Specifically, it aids defence and foreign ministries in Europe's aspiring democracies to develop national security organizations and systems that reflect democratic principles.

GERMAN COUNCIL ON FOREIGN RELATIONS

The German Council on Foreign Relations (DGAP) is Germany's national foreign policy network. As an independent, private, non-partisan, and non-profit organization, the council actively takes part in political decision making and promotes the understanding of German foreign policy and international relations.

INTERNATIONAL INSTITUTE FOR STRATEGIC STUDIES—UNITED KINGDOM

The International Institute for Strategic Studies (IISS), founded in 1958, is an independent centre for research, information, and debate on the problems of conflict, however caused, that have, or potentially have, an important military content. Its work is grounded in an appreciation of the various political, economic and social problems that can lead to instability, as well as in factors that can lead to international cooperation.

NETHERLANDS INSTITUTE FOR INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS ('CLINGENDAEL')

This is the leading Dutch international affairs research organization. 'Special attention is devoted to European integration, transatlantic relations, international security, conflict studies, policymaking on national and international energy markets, negotiations and diplomacy, and to the United Nations and other international organizations.'

STOCKHOLM INTERNATIONAL PEACE RESEARCH INSTITUTE

The task of the Institute is to conduct research on questions of conflict and cooperation of importance for international peace and security, with the aim of contributing to an understanding of the conditions for peaceful solutions of international conflicts and for a stable peace.

them to create a new security strategy that could come to terms with the emerging threat from the Soviet Union. They turned to think tanks for expertise, and they particularly found what they were looking for in the new Rand Corporation. It was formed in 1948, by means of government funds, to develop US security policies at the dawn of the nuclear age. It took a technical–scientific approach, was staffed by scientists and economists, and became famous for providing cost–benefit and rational choice analyses of foreign policy problems. Unlike earlier think tanks, which sought to influence and advise governments from outside, Rand was involved in the development of foreign policy on the inside of government. Rand ushered in a new generation of policy research institutions funded by government departments and agencies whose research was intended to address specific concerns of policymakers.

More recently a new kind of advocacy think tank began to appear in the United States as well as other countries. Unlike policy organizations of an earlier period, such as the Council on Foreign Relations—which was concerned to keep some distance from government—and unlike policy organizations such as Rand—which were directly involved with government in the making of policy—these later organizations were not concerned only to give policy advice or provide expertise. They were concerned with advocating policy doctrines and prescribing policy values which they were established to promote. Many human rights organizations are advocacy think tanks: Amnesty International is the most famous of them. Many environmental organizations are advocacy think tanks, Greenpeace being perhaps the most famous. Some scholars think of these organizations as ‘transnational activist groups’ who are involved in a new kind of ‘world civic politics’, which involves a ‘global civil society . . . across national boundaries’ (Wapner 1995; 312–13).

Some of the most noteworthy American advocacy think tanks on foreign policy are the Center for Strategic and International Studies (1962), the Heritage Foundation (1973), and the CATO Institute (1977). These organizations, and others like them, have given foreign policy studies a doctrinal and combative tone, especially evident in the mass media, which frequently invites opposing positions in op-ed newspaper articles or in live television interviews on current questions of US foreign policy.



KEY POINTS

- Foreign policy analysis is a study of the management of external relations and activities of nation-states, as distinguished from their domestic policies. Foreign policy involves goals, strategies, measures, methods, guidelines, directives, understandings, agreements, and so on, by which national governments conduct international relations with each other and with international organizations and non-governmental actors.
- The relationship between theory and policy is complex, because any one theory does not necessarily lead to one clear policy option; in most cases there will be several different options. Even so, the choice of theory affects the choice of policy. That is partly because different theories emphasize different social values, as explained in Chapter 1.

- 'Multilevel, multidimensional'. Over the last two or three decades, it has become increasingly clear that there will never be one all-encompassing theory of foreign policy, just as there will never be one exclusive theory of IR. Many scholars now use the various major theories presented in Parts 2 and 3 of this book as approaches to study particular aspects of foreign policymaking. These major theories often contain implications for foreign policy or elements that are directly relevant for foreign policy.
- Bureaucratic structures and processes. This approach focuses on the organizational context of decision making, which is seen to be conditioned by the dictates and demands of the bureaucratic settings in which decisions are made. Analysing processes and channels whereby organizations arrive at their policies is seen to be a superior way to acquire empirical knowledge of foreign policy.
- Cognitive processes and psychology. This approach focuses on individual decision maker, paying particular attention to the psychological aspects of decision making.
- Social constructivists focus on the role of ideas and discourse, as recorded in Chapter 8. For constructivists, foreign policymaking is an intersubjective world, whose ideas and discourse can be scrutinized in order to arrive at a better theoretical understanding of the process.
- The usual situation facing foreign policymakers is one of having to choose between different possible courses of action. That raises two fundamental questions: what policy choices, if any, are available? Of those, what is the best course to follow? Responding to such questions takes us to the heart of foreign policymaking.
- The RAM approach indicates the challenges to US national interest raised by the Iraqi invasion of Kuwait; it posits how strategic interaction between Iraq and the US inclined the United States towards going to war against Iraq as leader of a military coalition.
- Despite the many approaches to foreign policy and levels of analysis outlined in this chapter, it remains an imperfect and controversial body of knowledge, where even the most knowledgeable experts are likely to disagree on vital issues.



QUESTIONS

- What is foreign policy analysis fundamentally concerned with?
- Which is the best approach to foreign policy analysis, and why?
- Which level of foreign policy analysis makes most sense, and why?
- Should foreign policy be confined to foreign ministries or state departments (as realists and International Society scholars argue), or should it extend also to groups in society (as liberals argue)?
- How useful is the RAM approach for explaining why the United States chose to go to war in the Persian Gulf in 1991?
- Can theories or models of foreign policymaking be applied in making foreign policy decisions or can they only be used to explain those decisions after they have been made?
- Do the pressures and uncertainties of making foreign policy in reality and on the go require experienced policymakers, if they are to be successful?