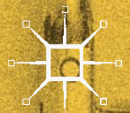# FOREIGN POLICY ANALYSIS

A TOOLBOX

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Foreign Policy Analysis

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A Toolbox

palgrave
macmillan

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Cover Design: Tjaša Krivec

Printed on acid-free paper

Acknowledgments

CONTENTS

LIST OF FIGURES

What Is Foreign Policy Analysis?

Foreign policy analysis (FPA) is very appealing to students, irrespective of age or caliber. Some people expect to find a field of study that is more concrete and practical than international relations theories. Others are fascinated by great historical figures, from Otto von Bismarck to Winston Churchill, or are drawn, without always wanting to admit it, by the apparent romanticism of diplomacy.

These are, of course, only lures. The novice soon realizes that the theoretical models in FPA are just as complex as those in other fields of international relations. They also realize that most foreign policy decisions, far from being clinched in padded embassy drawing rooms, between a cigar and a martini, are the result of bureaucratic processes similar to those in other areas of public policy.

As the complexity unfolds and diplomacy loses its aura, other attractions come into play. First and foremost, FPA provides a unique opportunity to integrate analysis at different levels. At the crossroads between the theories of international relations and public policy analysis, FPA is not limited to the study of the international system that fails to take account of its component parts, or to the study of one-off decision-making processes in the international context.

Instead, FPA focuses on the continuous interaction between actors and their environment. To understand and explain foreign policy, the international context must be taken into account. The distribution of power

between countries and the influence of transnational stakeholders and intergovernmental organizations partially determine foreign policy. Governments that adopt foreign policies perceive the international system through their own filters, which may be cultural, organizational or cognitive. Therefore, to understand and explain a foreign policy, it is also essential to study the state's domestic dynamics and decision-making processes (Sprout and Sprout 1965).

Although FPA does not have its own specific level of analysis, it can be defined by its dependent variable, namely, foreign policy itself. Most research in FPA seeks to explain how one or more public authorities adopt a given policy in certain conditions. Why do great powers actively try to forge alliances with small countries despite their limited military resources (Fordham 2011)? Why did Jordan drop its territorial claims on Palestine (Legrand 2009)? Why did members of the Organization of the Petroleum Exporting Countries (OPEC) sign the Kyoto agreement, even though it aims to reduce the consumption of their main export (Depledge 2008)? Why does France concentrate more of its official development assistance in its former colonies than does the United Kingdom (Alesina and Dollar 2000)? Why did Norway join the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) but refuse to join the European Union (EU), whereas Sweden chose to do the opposite (Reiter 1996)? The questions are endless, but the starting point is always the same: identify a foreign policy, which is often puzzling or counter-intuitive, and then try to explain it.

What Is a Policy?

Despite the fact that foreign policy is the focal point of FPA, or perhaps for that very reason, there is no consensual definition of what a foreign policy actually is. The truth is that the question is hardly ever discussed in the literature. Most analysts quite simply avoid tackling the concept directly, even though it is central to their work. Other fields of international relations are organized around definitions, which act as reference points for theoretical debates, as well as for operationalizing variables. But FPA has no equivalent.

After all, the concept of foreign policy adopted by analysts is in constant mutation, as a function of the changes in practices and theories. It would be illusory to freeze foreign policy within a specific empirical reality that is timeless and universal. Indeed, what is considered to be a foreign policy

today may not have been so yesterday and may not be tomorrow. As a result, every definition remains more or less dependent on its context.

This book, which seeks to reflect the field of study overall and its evolution over the past few decades, adopts a broad definition of foreign policy: *a set of actions or rules governing the actions of an independent political authority deployed in the international environment.*

Our definition emphasizes that foreign policy is the "actions of an *independent* political authority" because it is reserved to sovereign states. The Canadian, the German or the Spanish governments, for example, are the legal custodian of their states' sovereignty and the representatives of the international personality of their respective states. Hence, subnational states such as Quebec, Bavaria or Catalonia are not conducting foreign policy. They can conduct international relations according to their constitutional jurisdictions, but they cannot deploy a foreign policy on the international scene because they are not sovereign and independent entities (Vengroff and Jason Rich 2006). Of course, there are exceptions—in Belgium, for instance, federalism is quite decentralized and gives several exclusive constitutional jurisdictions to Wallonia and Flanders as well as the right to sign international legal agreements (treaties) in their jurisdictions (Criekemans 2010).

Our definition of foreign policy also refers to "actions or rules governing the actions" because the notion of policy is polysemic. Some scholars consider that a foreign policy comprises actions, reactions or inaction, which may be *ad hoc* or repeated (Frankel 1963). From this perspective, France's decision to withdraw from the negotiations for the Multilateral Agreement on Investment in 1998, or the repeated practice of providing emergency assistance to a neighboring country in the event of a major natural disaster, would be considered examples of foreign policy.

Other scholars view foreign policy not as the action itself but as the underlying vision—in other words, the specific conception that a state has regarding its place in the world, its national interests and the key principles that allow it to defend them. According to this view, the American policy to contain communism during the Cold War or Beijing's "one China" policy concerning Taiwan would be examples of foreign policy.

A third option places foreign policy between these two extremes. This is the middle path, favored, notably, by James Rosenau, who considers that doctrines are too country-specific, which rules out the study of their variation, and that the decisions are too irregular and idiosyncratic to allow for generalizations (1980: 53).

The definition of foreign policy proposed in this book does not settle this debate. Some research, which clearly comes within the FPA framework, focuses on well-defined decisions, while other research focuses on practices that are repeated so often that they are taken for granted. Some researchers concentrate on what states do materially, while others consider what states declare verbally. Given this diversity, there is *a priori* no need to limit the field of FPA to a narrow definition of policy, whatever it may be (Snyder et al. 2002 [1962]: 74).

WHEN A POLICY BECOMES FOREIGN

Are foreign policy and public policy different? Research show that there is a substantial amount of overlap between these two fields of research. However, scholars differentiate foreign policy because it is located at the junction between international politics and domestic public policy (Rosenau 1971). On the one hand, as Lentner explains, "(t)here are foreign policy writers who concentrate on exactly the type of analysis that most public policy analysts do" (2006: 172). Authors like Richard Neustadt (1960), Graham Allison (1969) and Alexander George (1980) are good examples. On the other hand, several FPA experts belong to the discipline of international relations and are directly influenced by research paradigms such as realism or liberalism, which try to explain states' behavior in the international system. What differentiates these two traditions of FPA from the study of domestic public policy, however, is that they must somehow take into account the international system as they deal with problems arising outside state borders. This is the reason why this book defines foreign policy as being "deployed in the international environment".

Nonetheless, we cannot hide the fact that the boundary between foreign and domestic policies is increasingly porous in today's world. Several issues that were previously considered strictly international now include domestic policy. Homegrown terrorism in Western democracies where citizens perpetrate terrorist acts on behalf of international terrorist organizations such as the so-called Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (ISIS) or al-Qaeda is a case in point. It led governments to adopt public policies to prevent and to tackle citizens' radicalization. Conversely, other issues traditionally perceived as domestic public policy now have obvious international ramifications, Chinese environmental policies on greenhouse gas emission being an obvious example.

During the Cold War, some observers assimilated the distinction between external and internal policies to that between high politics and low politics. From this perspective, foreign policy was perceived as an instrument to serve vital state interests, geared specifically to guaranteeing security or maximizing power (Morgenthau 1948). The prospect of a nuclear war heightened the impression that all public policy objectives, from public health to transport, including education, should be subordinated to the security priorities of foreign policy. As John F. Kennedy expressed in 1951, when he was a House representative in the US Congress:

> Foreign policy today, irrespective of what we might wish, in its impact on our daily lives, overshadows everything else. Expenditures, taxation, domestic prosperity, the extent of social services – all hinge on the basic issue of war or peace. (Dallek 2003: 158)

In reality, despite Kennedy's comments, economic and social policies have never been systematically subjected to foreign policy security concerns. Likewise, state security has never been viewed exclusively through the prism of foreign policy. The artificial distinction between high politics and low politics, combined with that of domestic and external policy, is an idea that has been encouraged by introductory textbooks on foreign policy for years. However, it has never really corresponded to the realities of exercising power (Fordham 1998).

The interconnection between domestic and foreign policy is well illustrated by the crosscutting operations of the armed forces and the police forces. Traditional discourse suggests that the armed forces deal with external or interstate threats and the police forces deal with internal and civil threats. Yet, the armed forces have always played a specific role in domestic order, particularly in colonies or peacekeeping operations, while police forces have been involved in international relations for years, for example, in their fight against organized crime or terrorist organizations (Sheptycki 2000; Balzacq 2008; Friesendorf 2016).

The fictitious assimilation of high politics to foreign policy and low politics to domestic policy remained relatively intact in political discourses until the first oil crisis in 1973. When the repercussions of the Middle East conflict were felt directly at fuel stations around the world, the strict and rigid distinction between security and the economy, like that between internal and external policies, became obsolete (Keohane and Nye 1977).

The binary distinction between high and low politics disappeared definitively from FPA lexicon at the end of the Cold War. In the contemporary world, nuclear conflict no longer appears to pose as great a threat as financial crises, new epidemics, migratory movements, biotechnology or climate change. In order to affirm that the single objective of foreign policy is still to guarantee state security, the notion has to be extended to cover economic, health, energy, human, nutritional, societal and environmental securities, until all areas of state action are included and the notion loses all meaning (Buzan et al. 1998). It is undoubtedly simpler to acknowledge that foreign policy is multisectoral. Indeed, it focuses equally on promoting cultural diversity, respecting human rights, prohibiting chemical weapons, restricting agricultural subsidies, conserving fish stocks in the oceans and so forth.

The field of foreign policy, unlike other areas of public policy, cannot be defined by a single question, objective, target or function. Rather, it can be defined by a geographic criterion: every action (or inaction) undertaken by a sovereign political authority in a context beyond the state's borders can be considered as a component of foreign policy, regardless of whether it is the responsibility of the ministry of foreign affairs or any other public authority.

It is actually this transition from internal to external that gives foreign policy its specificity: the political authority that adopts and implements a foreign policy has very limited control over its outcome because the outcome depends on variables that elude its sovereignty. The Brazilian government cannot reform the UN Security Council in the way it reforms its own institutions; the French government cannot govern Greenpeace boats navigating in international waters the way it regulates NGO activities in France; and the Chinese government cannot protect its investments in Africa as it does in its own territory.

Of course, the notion that the modes of governance of the international system are fundamentally different from those of national systems can be challenged. After all, the categories of actors, their capacity for action and the factors that determine their influence are relatively similar. As a result, the traditional distinction is fading between the national context, where the state alone has the monopoly over legitimate violence, and the anarchic international context, which has no hierarchical authority. However, the fact remains that, from a government's perspective, there are two distinct contexts, which always present radically different constraints and opportunities (Walker 1993).

An Array of Explanations

A vast array of independent and intermediate variables can explain a given foreign policy. These explanations range from social structure to leader's personality. They include interest groups, institutional architecture, the influence of the media and bureaucratic politics.

To identify the most suitable variables, FPA draws on multiple disciplines. In fact, few fields of study have embraced disciplines as varied as sociology, economics, public administration, psychology and history with the same enthusiasm. Although there are now calls for interdisciplinarity in all the social sciences, FPA can, undeniably, claim to be a leader when it comes to integrating different disciplines.

This interdisciplinarity has generated a remarkable diversity in theoretical models and methodological approaches. A single issue of a journal devoted to FPA can quite easily include the psychological profile of a head of state, a study on national identity based on iconography, a cybernetic model of the rationale of a ministry of foreign affairs and a statistical analysis of the relationships between inflation rates and declarations of war over the last two centuries. A 2010 issue of the journal *Foreign Policy Analysis*, for example, purposely published a collection of articles that relied on very different theoretical approaches, methodologies and substantive issues to show the extent to which FPA could contribute to knowledge production in international relations. As the editors of the issue pointed out:

> The theoretical and methodological approaches used in foreign policy analysis are as varied as the substantive questions asked. Thus, the strength of foreign policy analysis is its integrative approach that emphasizes individuals, groups, and institutions at or within the level of the state as driving forces in foreign policy behaviour and outcomes. (Drury et al. 2010)

At first glance, this theoretical and methodological eclecticism is vertiginous. The sheer diversity can seem discordant, particularly for a reader who is used to the structured theoretical debates of international relations, which have generally recognizable dividing lines. The internationalist who opens the state's black box will find a jumble of different approaches that are neither catalogued nor ordered. This may seem confusing and incoherent.

This impression is exacerbated if one considers, wrongly, that the different approaches are competing to dominate this field of study. In reality, FPA has long since given up on developing a highly generalizable theory

that would explain the most important foreign policies. Instead, middle-range theories are being developed to explain only a limited number of decisions or even just one aspect of the decision-making process in well-defined circumstances. This lies halfway between general theories, which cannot explain specific features, on the one hand, and the complexity of the real world, which cannot be reported intelligibly, on the other hand (Sil and Katzenstein 2010; Lake 2011).

This epistemological modesty, referred to as a leitmotif in the literature on FPA, is a way of avoiding sectarian and sterile clashes. In FPA, there is no trench warfare between different paradigms. No one pledges allegiance to a specific school of thought. On the contrary, the availability of a huge spectrum of medium-range theories invites the researcher to combine these theories in order to build new constructions. FPA is not only multi-level and multidisciplinary; it is resolutely multicausal. By freeing ourselves from the pursuit of a single explanatory variable, a confusing first impression can be transformed into a creative impulse (Schafer 2003).

Levels of Analysis and the Evolution in FPA

The behavioral revolution that marked the discipline of political science in the United States in the mid-twentieth century led to a split between the field of FPA and international relations. One of the main dividing lines between the different theories is the level of analysis (Singer 1961). In his book *Man, the State and War* published in 1959, Kenneth Waltz distinguishes three levels of analysis: the individual level (first image), the national level (second image) and the international system (third image).

FPA mainly relies on Waltz' first and second images as it is an agent-centered field of research. It focuses on actor-specific decisions and places the decision-making process at the center of its attention. FPA, therefore, concentrates on subnational factors, such as the personality of government leaders, social groups or the bureaucracy.

The field of international relations, by contrast, mainly focuses on Waltz' third image as it is structure-oriented. It is through the macro-scopic scale of analysis that this field of research tries to explain interstate or transnational phenomena, and this without looking inside the state. This field of research is outcome-oriented as oppose to process-oriented. Considerations such as the distribution of power in the international system or the impact of international norms on states' interactions are key.

This said, even if the individual, the state and the international levels of analysis focus on different actors, processes and outcomes, they can all be relevant, depending on the research puzzle that is driving the research (Singer 1961: 90).

Focusing on the individual and national levels of analysis, James Rosenau and Harold and Margaret Sprout called for a scientific analysis of foreign policy, which led to the behaviorist turn in FPA in the 1960s (Rosenau 1966; Sprout and Sprout 1965). Rosenau argued that FPA should strive for a greater degree of generalization by going beyond simple case studies and the descriptive and interpretative approaches traditionally used in diplomatic history (1968).

Responding to this call, databases were put together by a generation of scholars in order to systematically study foreign policy, and experts produced a burgeoning literature that defined the modern field of FPA. The research agenda on comparative foreign policy analysis (CFPA) contributed to this development (Rosenau 1968). Vast databases, such as the World Event Interaction Survey or the Conflict and Peace Data Bank, were created to systematically observe the behavior of states with respect to international events. The main objective of CFPA was to identify empirical patterns from which it would be possible to isolate independent variables and develop generalizable theoretical models to explain states' behavior.

But after years of intensive research supported by governments and private foundations, FPA experts had to face reality: attempts to identify the main behavioral patterns in foreign policy had proved unsuccessful. Experts failed to achieve a degree of abstraction and parsimony sufficiently high to develop large-range theories of FPA. This is because states' behavior is conditioned by peculiar characteristics, such as cultural and political values, economic development and leaders' perceptions. This makes impossible the production of theories with universal and timeless significance.

This reality begot a certain lack of interest for the analysis of foreign policy to the point where FPA appeared to be a neglected field of study in the 1980s. To add to this disappointment, the 1970s and 1980s saw the emergence of new theories of international relations favoring an exclusively macroscopic scale of analysis. Neorealism, world-system theory and regime theory, for instance, caught the attention of researchers studying international structures and institutions, but failed to take

account of the domestic processes involved in formulating foreign policy. These theories sought to explain the outcome of international interactions rather than the specific action of particular actors.

The field of FPA was then virtually left to think tanks such as the *Council on Foreign Relations*, the *Royal Institute of International Affairs* or to journals geared more to practitioners than to academics, such as *Foreign Policy* and *Foreign Affairs*. To James Rosenau's great dismay (1980), FPA turned to solving policy problems rather than constructing theories.

Nonetheless, since the end of the Cold War, macroscopic approaches that fail to take account of domestic dynamics have shown their limitations. The collapse of the Soviet Union has shown that international structures are unstable and that national politics and specific individuals can have a profound impact on international relations. Neorealists, for instance, were compelled to recognize that foreign policy agents are the engines of change in international politics. For instance, Mikhail Gorbachev, Lech Walesa and Pope John Paul II all played a role in the fall of the Soviet Union. As a result, it became obvious at the turn of the 1990s that the structure of the system helps to explain continuity in international relations, but that the agents are more suitable for the study of its change.

Fortunately, FPA has come back since the years 2000s and its theoretical and disciplinary openness has no doubt contributed to its recent resurgence. Internationalists are increasingly striving to integrate several levels of analysis, cut across different disciplines and develop medium-range theories. FPA, whose spearhead is multicausality, multidisciplinary and analysis at multiple levels, seems to be a promising field once more (Smith 1986; Gerner 1991 and 1995; Light 1994; Hudson and Vore 1995; Neack et al. 1995; White 1999; Hagan 2001; Kaarbo 2003; Stern 2004; Hudson 2005; Houghton 2007).

There are numerous indicators of the resurgence of FPA. In terms of teaching, a survey conducted among professors of international relations in ten countries revealed that there are now more courses in foreign policy than in international security, international political economy or international development (Jordan et al. 2009). In terms of research, a journal exclusively devoted to FPA, *Foreign Policy Analysis*, was created in 2005, and its distribution shows that it is well received by internationalists. Therefore, in this context of a revival, this book proposes an introduction to FPA, with a forward-looking approach and a classic base.

A Toolbox for Studying FPA

This book is designed like a toolbox from which students and researchers can draw ideas, concepts and references in order to conduct their own research. It does not set out to retrace the evolution of diplomatic practices, present classic decision-making processes or describe the main foreign policy trends of any particular country. Instead, it proposes a panorama of different approaches, which represent just as many keys for analysis.

As these different keys are more complementary than contrasting, we are reluctant to draw conclusions, in absolute terms, as to which is the most equitable or relevant. In any case, such arbitration would be counter to FPA's epistemological modesty and to its commitment to multicausality, multidisciplinary and multisectorality. The subject of specific analysis and its context, as well as the researcher's objectives, should obviously guide the choice of theoretical and methodological approaches.

We as researchers also navigate continuously between constructivism, institutionalism and realism. We rely on discourse and content analysis, process tracing and regression tables for our own research projects. We would definitely feel deprived if we had to limit our research projects to a single theoretical or methodological approach.

With this toolbox, we invite readers to adopt different theoretical and methodological approaches, not in order to reproduce them blindly, but to develop, adapt or, better still, combine them. Conducting FPA research often means putting together an *ad hoc* construction, by borrowing ideas from different approaches. The main interest that FPA holds for us, and others, lies in the intellectual creativity that it encourages.

In this context, this book focuses particularly on works that have become classics, namely, those by Graham Allison, Ole Holsti, Jack Levy, Margaret Hermann, Irving Janis, Robert Jervis, Alexander George, Helen Milner, Jack Snyder, Bruce Bueno de Mesquita and Robert Putnam. Going back to these classics is essential because they continue to be a source of inspiration and provide the basis for debate decades after their publication.

In addition, this book is influenced by recent research published in North America, Europe and elsewhere. It refers extensively to recent foreign policy articles published in peer-reviewed journals such as—but not exclusively—*Foreign Policy Analysis*, *International Studies Quarterly*,

International Organization, *Review of International Studies*, *Security Studies*, *International Security*, the *European Journal of International Relations*, *Journal of Conflict Resolution*, *Journal of Peace Research* and *Political Psychology*. On the basis of this research, the book illustrates the implementation and the strengths, but also the weaknesses of the different theoretical models presented. The numerous bibliographic references also help guide the reader to more specialized reading.

The book starts with a presentation of FPA's dependent variable, that is, foreign policy itself (Chap. 1). The subsequent chapters look at different explanatory models. It presents the multiple levels of analysis going from the microscopic scale of analysis, inspired by psychology, to the macroscopic scale of analysis of structural theories of international relations. The book also deals with more abstract material and ideational considerations by focusing on the impact of rationality and culture on foreign policy. Hence, the book focuses successively on the definition of a foreign policy (Chap. 2), the decision-maker (Chap. 3), bureaucratic mechanisms (Chap. 4), political institutions (Chap. 5), social actors (Chap. 6), rationality (Chap. 7), culture (Chap. 8) and the international structure (Chap. 9). Finally, it identities the main challenges that are facing FPA today (Chap. 10).

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How to Identify and Assess a Foreign Policy?

This chapter focuses on an essential prerequisite for every FPA, namely, identifying a foreign policy so that it can be grasped and explained. This stage is often neglected and constitutes the Achilles' heel of several studies, which are so preoccupied with the decision-making process that they overlook the foreign policy itself. Yet, it is crucial for analysts to carefully define the policy that they aim to explain. To define is to interpret. In other words, by defining, the researcher attributes a meaning that will, in turn, influence the type of explanation sought.

For example, during the 1991 Gulf War, Switzerland refused to allow members of the coalition to fly over its airspace to transport troops and weapons to Kuwait. Some researchers may see this decision as a manifestation of the Swiss doctrine of neutrality. They would then try to explain why this neutrality persists: does Swiss national identity use this historical heritage as a federating principle? Or do the institutional characteristics of the Swiss political system dissuade the Federal Council from reviewing its constitutional obligations? Other researchers, however, might observe that the Swiss government imposed economic sanctions on Iraq, as outlined in the Security Council resolution 661, and, therefore, conclude that the policy of neutrality was being relaxed. Explaining the change rather than the continuity may then encourage them to study the geopolitical upheavals that occurred in the wake of the Cold War or the shifting balance

of power between members of the Swiss government. This example clearly illustrates that the foreign policy related to the same question during the same period can be interpreted in different ways. From the outset, the interpretation chosen will steer the research in a particular direction.

In order to interpret a foreign policy correctly, researchers must carefully compare it with previous policies, other states' policies or domestic policies. A comparative exercise is essential to provide an overview, even in the framework of a study focusing on a single case. That is why James Rosenau has argued passionately for a resolutely comparative approach to FPA:

> Comprehension of the external activities undertaken by one national system is not sufficient to answer the questions of systemic adaptation and political process that are inherent in foreign policy phenomena. The repeated experiences of two or more systems must be carefully contrasted for an answer to such questions to begin to emerge. Only in this way can the theoretically oriented analyst begins to satisfy his curiosity and the policy-oriented analyst begins to accumulate the reliable knowledge on which sound recommendations and choices are made. Only in this way will it be possible to move beyond historical circumstances and comprehend the continuities of national life in a world of other nations (1968: 329).

For reasons similar to those mentioned by James Rosenau 50 years ago, comparison remains a central component of FPA. Regardless of whether the method is quantitative or qualitative, the enterprise positivist or post-positivist, the comparison between different states, different periods or different fields remains essential when it comes to identifying specific characteristics and generalizations, as well as continuity and change (Kaarbo 2003).

Comparison requires points of reference, which can help to determine what is real and identify variations. Every foreign policy analyst has their own favorite benchmarks. Charles Hermann, for example, uses four: the orientation, the problem, the program and the level of commitment of the foreign policy (1990). Peter Katzenstein, on the other hand, compares policies by contrasting their instruments and goals (1976, 1977).

This chapter focuses on five benchmarks that provide the basis for a comparative approach, including the goals, mobilized resources, instruments, process and outcomes. As this chapter makes clear, identifying benchmarks is not generally difficult; it is access to comparable data for research that poses problems.

The Goals of Foreign Policy

Some analysts of international relations ascribe a general predefined goal to foreign policy. This goal is then considered as timeless, universal and valid for every country under all circumstances. Depending on their theoretical preferences, analysts consider that foreign policy aims at the stability of the international system, the accumulation of wealth, the increase in relative power, the maintenance of leaders in power or the reproduction of national identity. Stephen Krasner, for example, suggests that foreign policy aims to protect national sovereignty and presumes that "all groups in the society would support the preservation of territorial and political integrity" (1978: 329).

The assumption that states pursue a single predefined goal in this way has an undeniable methodological advantage. The researcher is then exempt from explaining the goal and can freely interpret or model behavior. As Hans Morgenthau observed, attributing a goal to foreign policy "imposes intellectual discipline upon the observer, infuses rational order into the subject matter of politics, and thus makes the theoretical understanding of politics possible" (1948 [2005]: 5).

However, this is an unrealistic methodological fiction. Political leaders pursue different, sometimes contradictory goals. The concept of national interest, more generally, depends on periods of time, countries and individuals. As a result, there is no general theory of FPA that is valid for all issue-areas and in all circumstances.

Several foreign policy analysts refuse to define a foreign policy goal arbitrarily. Instead, they endeavor to chart and compare the specific goals of the actors they are studying. There are two possible methods to achieve this: to consider that the goals announced by the leaders are actually the ones that they pursue or to deduce the goals that are pursued as a function of the leaders' behavior.

The Goals Communicated

In some cases, foreign policy analysts can identify the foreign policy goals in the government's public declarations. Policy statements, official speeches, government reports to parliament and white papers can be used as sources of information (Paquin and Beauregard 2015).

A foreign policy goal stated clearly in a public declaration should indicate four elements: the target, the direction, the expected outcome and a

timescale. For example, a specific foreign policy objective could be to improve (the direction) the conditions of access to medicines in sub-Saharan Africa (the target) to combat the spread of HIV (the outcome) in the next decade (the timescale) (Snyder et al. 2002 [1962]: 72).

If every state expressed their goals as clearly and precisely as this last example, it would be easy for the analyst to identify variations in any of the elements included in the foreign policy goals. It would be easy to research the dependent variable, and the analyst could, thus, focus on the independent variables. Why do some states, for example, have a more limited timescale than others for controlling the spread of HIV? However, foreign policy goals are rarely stated clearly and explicitly.

Furthermore, when a specific goal is communicated, it is legitimate for the analyst to question whether there is a discrepancy between the stated goal and the goal actually pursued (Onuf 2001). There are at least three reasons for this kind of discrepancy. First, in order to preserve their international reputation and legitimacy, it may be in states' interest to mask their pursuit of relative gains by mentioning the pursuit of absolute gain or, to use Arnold Wolfers' terms, to conceal their possession goals behind milieu goals (1962: 73–77). Trade restrictions that aim to protect a national industry may be applied in the name of environmental protection; a military intervention that seeks to guarantee access to natural resources may be launched in the name of international stability; and inaction in the face of an ally's reprehensible acts may be justified in the name of international law.

Second, it is tempting for political leaders to reduce the scope of a stated foreign policy goal in order to increase the likelihood of success and, thus, boost their status on the national political stage. For example, the Clinton administration claimed that the aim of the 1998 bombings in Iraq was merely to weaken the capacity of Saddam Hussein's regime to manufacture weapons of mass destruction. Many observers, however, suspected that the United States' real goals were more ambitious, ranging from the total elimination of Iraq's weapons of mass destruction manufacturing capability to the overthrow of Saddam Hussein. As these objectives were harder to achieve, the Clinton administration opted for a communication strategy that guaranteed success in the eyes of the American public (Zelikow 1994; Baldwin 1999; Baum 2004b).

Third, decision-makers tend to evade the question of communication goals rather than acknowledge them openly. Military intervention abroad, for example, can be officially justified by the need to overthrow a hostile government or preempt an imminent attack. However, these instrumental