Theories of Foreign Policy and International Relations

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Diplomacy is not new. It has assumed various characteristics in the modern age, but the idea of sending emissaries to another state is old and was common to many cultures. In the 19th century King Lobengula of the Ndebele nation, in what is now Zimbabwe, dispatched ambassadors to Queen Victoria to protest encroachment on his territories by British settlers and adventurers. An earlier Queen, Elizabeth I, received the Moroccan ambassador at her court, and his portrait still hangs in the Tate Britain gallery. In the wake of Henry VIII's rejection of Catholicism, Elizabeth deliberately sought diplomatic allies in the North African states – Islamic states – in the struggle against Catholic Spain. In fact, the image of North African statesmen and military men was not uncommon in Elizabethan England, and gave rise to Shakespeare's *Othello*, a play featuring a 'Moorish' admiral in the service of the Venetian navy. Not only was Othello accorded noble attributes, he married a white European wife – and the inter-racialism provoked no public outrage. The cosmopolitan nature of Elizabethan diplomacy and art was a feature of a hugely creative, if also bloody, era.

We shall see echoes of the Elizabethan outreach to North Africa later, in the case of the very young USA and its search for diplomatic recognition in the face of British antagonism and a European command of the international relations of the day. However, we begin with an observation that, while diplomacy is old, its service on behalf of a particular kind of state reaches back to only early modern times. In fact, diplomacy as we know it, is a foundation attribute of the advent of modernity.

This particular kind of state was what arose from the lengthy deliberations that led to the Peace of Westphalia in 1648. This was at the end of the 30 Years War that devastated Europe. The entire continent was militarised, even if some countries avoided the worst of the conflict. The internal feuds and armed suspicions by rival groups, as epitomised by Alexander Dumas's *The Three Musketeers*, reflected the mood within Europe at large. In the Middle European region, however, the conflict was savage and the devastation extensive. The continent then was an assemblage of often tiny states. 194 of them were represented by 179 ambassadors at Westphalia – and much of the early deliberations were about the seating plan. Since, however, the wars had been religious, one of the key principles of the treaties that emerged was to do with the secularity of the state system. Another was that diplomacy was possible by congress, i.e. multilateral diplomacy in this case worked to end an era of turbulence. Most important was the sense that a member state of the international system should have a recognised sovereignty; recognition meant that there was a limit to how far states could intervene against the borders of another.

Of course, these principles were more honoured in the breach than actual practice in the years that followed. Napoleon clearly wreaked havoc against the borders of neighbouring states. But he also brought with his conquests an era of constitutionalism, in which citizens had rights against their rulers. Despite his defeat, the idea of rights within states remained. The question was the extent to which rights could become a trans-state, an international, norm. Beethoven's 9th Symphony, using Schiller's lyrics, celebrated the aspiration to a universal brotherhood. Before

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that question could be addressed, the Congress of Vienna, 1814-18, was convened to ensure there could never be another Napoleon, and established the sense of a concert of power. There might be a congress of states, but the most powerful states would score the music and conduct its performance. Rogue performers could not be in the orchestra. Beautiful lyrics were fine, provided the conductor controlled the way they were sung.

The idea of a concert was repeated after World War II, with the establishment of the United Nations – a congress for multilateral diplomacy – but it had a Security Council, a concert master. To Henry Kissinger, it seemed an ideal form of international relations. His Harvard PhD was about the outcome of the Congress of Vienna, and he applied the idea of a concert, and concert master, to all his practice of diplomacy as US National Security adviser and Secretary of State.

The state and power

The sense of powerful states, with not only their sovereign interests, but their interests in projecting a control over the international relations of the state system, became the foundation concept of a new academic discipline established after World War I. The carnage of that conflict, this time accomplished with a technology unheard of in the 30 Years War, prompted the US President to leave his country for a full six months to impose his sense of how the international system should be orchestrated. The Woodrow Wilson principles seemed to many so inspiring that the first Chair of what came to be called International Relations was endowed and established by Welsh millionaire and philanthropist, David Davies, at the University of Wales Aberystwyth, and called the Woodrow Wilson Chair.

Essentially, those principles were concerned with diplomatic transparency and international cooperation. The League of Nations was established as a multilateral assembly for diplomatic cooperation. Wilson's effort in Europe – he was the first serving US President to visit Europe, and the first to meet the Pope – greatly dissipated his health. His long absence also meant his leverage over his own Senate had waned. The treaty that emerged from the European discussions was not ratified by the Senate; the US never joined the League of Nations, and this meant there was no concert master at the heart of a congress of states that proved ineffectual. Japan invaded China, Italy invaded Abyssinia (now Ethiopia) and, despite impassioned appeals to the League from the invaded countries, the League could do nothing to protect its own members from the projection of power by other members.

While this was going on, the debates on International Relations as a new academic discipline established two principal schools of thought. One was certainly what we now call Realism, with its centrality of the state and the projection of state power on behalf of state interests; the other was an Idealism or Utopianism that suggested a broader foundation for international cooperation in citizen organisations and multilateral diplomacy. The high moral tone that seemed to have emanated from Wilson was part of this Idealism, establishing the beginnings of a normative concern for International Relations – but Wilson had also boasted that it was the US, with its values and norms, that had shown it was leading the world. "At last the world knows America as the saviour of the world."[1] The high morality was a US morality, even if based on the European thought that had inspired the American Revolution, and they were the moral norms of the most powerful state in the world.

Realist power has never, in any case, existed by itself, but always with a normative shadow shrouded in international law. It has always meant an International Relations as a discipline, as well as international politics as practice and policy, being divided, somewhat schizophrenic, but with one side of its concerns being unable to achieve freedom from the other. The entire assemblage also has to confront the decidedly atheoretical, and simply messy, phenomenon of foreign policy formulation. The nuts and bolts nature of this, its arguments and even pettiness – even in times of crisis – have meant no normative conceptualisation of foreign policy formulation. Studying it is an applied 'science', and diplomacy is an applied practice emanating from states and their policies, with outcomes messily achieved. If anything, it is 'organisational theory', as taught in business schools, that can be usefully deployed in the study of foreign policy formulation. One particular crisis, studied in some depth by Graham Allison, illustrates these points. As described below, Allison proposed three models of policy formulation. Each is discussed in turn in the next section.

Essence of decision

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The 1962 Cuban missile crisis was a moment of grave jeopardy for the world, as nuclear confrontation between the US and the Soviet Union seemed inevitable. Following upon a failed, CIA-supported invasion of Cuba by exiles the year before, the Chairman of the Soviet Council of Ministers and Party Secretary, Nikita Khrushchev, seemed determined both to strengthen his Cuban ally and to test the mettle of the young US President Kennedy. His policy was to arm Cuba with missiles capable of bearing nuclear warheads – pointed at the US. This alarmed the US as a genuine security threat and the warning went out to the Soviet Union that its ships, carrying such weapons to Cuba, would be stopped on the high seas by US naval vessels. In international law this would have been illegal. Without a declaration of war, ships had freedom on the high seas. Also, a state, under the Westphalian doctrine, could acquire arms and another state could send them. But the determination to counter threats, particularly those launched or aided and abetted by European powers, had been a US concern since the Monroe doctrine of 1823 – which basically determined Latin America as a US sphere of influence, and a zone of exclusion for the great European powers. In 1962, the Soviet ships refused to turn back and sailed ever closer to Cuba and the US naval blockade.

The question the watching world was asking was a simple one: who would blink first? Would the tough Soviet Chairman try to sail his ships through the blockade and, if so, would the US warships sink them? If it came to that, nuclear war seemed imminent. In the end, it was the Soviet ships that turned around. It was seen as a great triumph of brinksmanship for the young President. In the account of Robert Kennedy, then Attorney-General and a member of his older brother's 'war cabinet', it was down to the steely determination of the President and his closest advisers who, even when moments of great uncertainty set in, did not waver and adhered to a path of great risk but calculated rationality.[2] Would the Soviets risk huge destruction in Russia for the sake of arming Cuba? Any war would destroy Cuba as well. Graham Allison, in his 1971 study, *Essence of Decision*, argued however that there was probably no single straight line rationality that was decisive.[3] Allison proposed three models of foreign policy formulation – and his models are still used as analytic tools to this day.

The 'Rational Actor' model is one which the US public probably ascribed to President Kennedy. In fact, as Allison said, a lot of facts have to be ignored to make scenarios fit within a 'rational' framework. Acting rationally, the US anticipated that, if the Soviets also behaved rationally, they would turn back. Mutually Assured Destruction (MAD, as the nuclear jargon of those days had it) was too high a price to pay for Cuba.

The 'Organisational Process' model is a persuasive one in that, in any moment of crisis, a government will seek to break down the crisis into component parts and assign each part to a specialist governmental agency or department. The Department of Defense would know more about military matters than the State Department, but the State Department would know more about diplomatic options. However, in a moment of crisis, when time is short, pre-existing plans and options that reflect the ethos and inclinations of the department concerned, in short 'repertoire' plans and responses, would likely be used. This means that, even in a highly organised government, crisis diplomacy may not be exactly fitted to the nature of the crisis at hand. Often, the first proposed form of response that 'fits' may be used for want of another that might fit better but take more time to devise. In the case of the Cuban missile crisis, Kennedy contemplated a surgical airstrike against the Soviet equipment that had already reached Cuba – but the only pre-existing airforce plans were based on saturation bombing that would also cause huge collateral damage. A naval blockade became the best pre-existing plan of action.

Under the 'Governmental Politics' model, those department chiefs under the President may argue; if they do not argue, they may be 'yes men', appointed by the President precisely because they are 'yes men' and the quality of their advice may suffer; but, in moments of extreme crisis, even a confident and very powerful President would have to negotiate or utilise political techniques to get his way, at the very least to avoid having his orders misunderstood or actioned in a way he had not intended. In a democracy, he must use political techniques to convince the legislature and the public he is correct. The failure of the 1961 invasion of Cuba by dissident exiles – the Bay of Pigs fiasco – had led Kennedy to distrust the advice of the CIA. In order to keep his military advisers on side, both Kennedy brothers attacked the diplomatic avenues proposed by UN Ambassador, Adlai Stevenson. Within the military, Kennedy had to manoeuvre opinion away from air strikes towards the blockade. The naval blockade thus emerged from a political process, but Kennedy also had to make certain political gestures so that the Soviet leader could save his own political face. Kennedy agreed never to invade Cuba. He instructed his brother, Robert Kennedy, to promise the Soviets privately that US missiles in Turkey – missiles that could reach the Soviet Union easily – would be

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withdrawn a few months later.

The essence of decision probably involved aspects of all three models. Whatever the ratio in the mix, the decision to launch a naval blockade – even though with fewer risks than an aerial onslaught – was one with huge difficulties and unavoidable risks that could not be removed. The size and calibre of those risks were such that no decision-making process could be assured of success, and certainly not safety or even survival. Allison's three models are illuminating when applied to the US situation, especially with this particular case example. However, there are dangers in a universal application, despite apparent similarities in different conditions in different countries.

A brief meditation

Even in the case used by Allison, the Cuban missile crisis, such analysis of the Soviet situation as his book contained was purely speculative. We do not know the manner of Khrushchev's policy-making apparatus, nor the weight he was able to give to any part of it; nor do we know how he weighed the US policies and ultimatums – how he, in rational calculations, weighed what was bluff and what had substance. We do not know what kind of specialist advisers he used, what branches of the government and military they represented and, above all, what role the Communist Party and the Politburo played. The idea of not only a government, but a commissariat over the government, each with its bureaucratic and organisational processes, and politics, makes the Soviet situation even more difficult to analyse than the US one.

We do not have an elegant testimony by Khrushchev's younger brother, like Robert Kennedy's, solemnly setting out a version of how a group of what seemed to be intrinsically decent men pondered the fate of the world.

What the American pundits called 'Kremlinology', analysing Moscow's foreign policy intentions, became a game involving guess-work as much as arcane forms of knowledge.

In the case of early-Cold War China, especially after the McCarthy witch-hunts had forced John Service and the majority of Sinologists and Chinese-speakers out of the State Department, there was no way that the US could reliably decipher Beijing's foreign policy. There, the separable but inter-connected forms of apparatus of government, party, and military to this day make Beijing-watching a hazardous process – and is made considerably more hazardous by the addition of China's vast fiscal and economic machinery as it lays out a new world order of Chinese domination.

In recent times, reading Tehran, with its vexed power-plays and intensely complex checks and balances in the constitutional and theological maze that represents the politics of Iran, even being an expert on Shi'a Islam would give an analyst only one part of the picture of how Tehran sought to approach negotiations on nuclear capacity; that, allied to the immense skills of its diplomats – who, to all intents and purposes, represented an enigma – made negotiations with the regime something far from amenable to secular rationality and calculation.

Finally, in the case of the African state of Zambia, when its President Kenneth Kaunda – against the advice of other African Presidents – entered negotiations in 1989 with the new South African President F.W. de Klerk, he did so without any regard for the foreign policy apparatus behind him. There were no organisational processes or governmental politics. He just did it all himself. But he had no grounds for rational action. He had not a single briefing note on de Klerk (de Klerk had five volumes of notes on Kaunda). Kaunda did it by intuition and a huge trust in the moral force he convinced himself could move the mountain of the Apartheid state. A crucial moment in Zambian foreign policy, which all the same was instrumental in hastening the end of Apartheid, cannot ever be analysed or deciphered by any, or any combination of Allison's models.

Discursive formations and foreign policy

As International Relations theory has developed since 1918, competitive but overlapping schools of thought have arisen. Always, however, the state has remained in place as a central actor, with debate over the extent to which it is the only actor. Schools that concentrate on pluralism have emphasised international organisation and citizen groups.

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Structuralist schools have argued that the state is the articulation of other forces such as capital and class. More recently, the so-called English School has invested Realism with a renewed historical foundation. A state's history provides a context for analysing its decisions.[4] The Copenhagen School has added discursive formations to the historical context. How the state constructs discourse, and is in turn constructed by prevailing discourse, has huge impact on the formulation of foreign policy.[5] The implication of the Copenhagen School is that there must be a government machinery that undertakes discursive formation and reinforcement that is far beyond the apparatus of foreign policy and diplomacy – and links foreign policy much more closely to the central concerns of the state than before, i.e. it is not separable from the demands of domestic policy. We shall, later in this book, look at Uriel Abulof's account of discursive forces in Israel, and how they have led to an immense 'securitisation' of the state, its forces, and its foreign policy.

A coda as meditation: The Middle East as a falsifier or antagonist of the Westphalian state

As we write, the focus of the world's diplomacy is on two areas. Russian President Putin's annexation of Crimea, and his perceived 'new' expansionism of foreign policy – on behalf of a state that is still massively nuclear-armed – will be discussed a little later. The other area is the Middle East, with the turmoil caused by the Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (ISIS); and with the dawning realisation that some of the state actors in the region may be playing, or at least tolerating its senior personnel and institutions playing a double game. In his latest (and probably last) book, Henry Kissinger airs his suspicions of Saudi Arabia being an ostensible member of the Westphalian system, but for confessional reasons supporting the propagation of what is proposing itself as an Islamic state system.[6] This too will be discussed towards the end of this book. It is a real challenge to the foundations of International Relations theory, as well as a major complication in foreign policy formulation and diplomacy. It is a challenge to theory since Westphalia sought to secularise the international system, and there are few well-developed tools for conceptualising a resacralised world, especially one resacralised not even in its previous Christian sense, but an Islamic one. The last time the world had a Christian/Western and Islamic clash was hundreds of years ago. It is a challenge to policy and practice since confessional values do not fit well into any of the models someone like Allison put forward. If Kennedy and his advisers calculated there would be a moment of rational lucidity in which the Soviets, projecting the costs, would back down – there is no guarantee that worldly costs would trump the anticipated values of Godly blessing.

It may be that what we see today is fleeting, or that the challenge against Westphalia turns out to be the attempt at falsification that, finally, renders the Westphalian system 'true' and durable. Or it could be a genuine antagonism that is determined to supplant the Westphalian system, or at least marginalise it in favour of a new world order. It could even be that there is a discrepancy of aim between Saudi and ISIS strategists – with the former certainly testing the durability of today's system but ultimately content should their efforts prove only to be an act of unsuccessful falsification, and Saudi Arabia continues to benefit from its place in the international system; for them, it might be a kind of win-win situation; and the latter hell-bent on overthrow, knowing military force is not good at destroying an idea, and knowing that today's diplomatic practice is not shaped for religious conflict.

Notes

[1] An address in Portland Oregon, 15 September 1919. www.presidency.ucsb.edu/ws/?pid=117383

[2] Robert F. Kennedy, *Thirteen Days: A Memoir of the Cuban Missile Crisis*, New York: Norton, 1969.

[3] Graham T. Allison, *Essence of Decision: Explaining the Cuban Missile Crisis*, New York: Little Brown, 1971.

[4] Barry Buzan, *An Introduction to the English School of International Relations: The Societal Approach*, Cambridge: Polity, 2014.

[5] Barry Buzan, Ole Waever, Jaap de Wilde, *Security: A New Framework for Analysis*, Boulder: Lynne Rienner, 1998.

[6] Henry Kissinger, *World Order: Reflections on the Character of Nations and the Course of History*, London: Allen

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Lane, 2014, espec. Pp 134-141.

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Stephen Chan OBE was Foundation Dean of Law and Social Sciences at SOAS University of London, where he remains as Professor of World Politics. He has occupied many named chairs around the world, most recently the Konrad Adenauer Stiftung Chair of Academic Excellence at Bir Zeit University in 2015, and the George Soros Chair of Public Policy at the Central European University in 2016. He was the 2010 International Studies Association Eminent Scholar in Global Development. As an international civil servant he helped pioneer modern electoral observation in Zimbabwe in 1980, worked in many post-conflict zones – where 'post' was a largely fictional if politic appellation – and continues to be seconded to many diplomatic initiatives around the world today. He is the author of *Meditations on Diplomacy: Comparative Cases in Diplomatic Practice and Foreign Policy* (2017).