Between Politics and Policy: International Cooperation Beyond COVID-19

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Many predictions of how the COVID-19 pandemic will reshape the world have focused on a tension at the heart of international affairs. On the one hand, countries have turned inwards to deal with the pandemic, closing their borders and asserting their sovereignty. Nationalism is on the rise. On the other hand, there is a recognition that transnational problems like the pandemic require transnational solutions. Global governance must be reinvigorated. This tension between nationalism and cosmopolitanism is also reflected in other opposing positions that have defined the study of international relations: isolationism versus internationalism; realism versus idealism; competition versus interdependence; and the list goes on. This article suggests that the tension can also be conceived as existing between politics and policy. Dividing politics and policy in this way helps to explain the influence of different actors on international negotiations and the prospects and pitfalls of international cooperation.

Politics is the pursuit and maintenance of power within specific communities, which in this context are nation-states. Policy is the strategy for solving particular problems, which in this context are transnational. Defined in this way, politics and policy loosely map onto the opposing positions listed above. Politics is local, policy is global. Politics is the concrete reality, policy is the normative striving. Politics is about relative gains, policy is about absolute gains. Although conceptually distinct, politics and policy are inextricably linked. The struggle for power does not necessarily involve disagreements over policy, and policy disagreements are not necessarily resolved by a political contest, but one usually informs the other. Thinking about policy and politics as separate concepts is useful for analytic purposes provided they are seen as closely interrelated. This interrelationship also offers insights into how other opposing positions in international relations scholarship could be reconciled.

This approach to understanding international affairs is both empirically and theoretically grounded, including in my own research on international police cooperation (McKenzie 2018). It has three distinctive characteristics. First, it is actor-centric rather than state-centric. So, rather than focusing on unitary states as the only relevant actors, it also attends to the many sub-state and non-state actors that shape international negotiations. Second, it examines governance rather than politics. So, rather than concentrating on the distribution of power at the international or domestic levels, it takes a broader governance perspective that incorporates policy and institutional dimensions. Third, it is pragmatic rather than idealistic. So, rather than working within a particular research tradition and privileging a particular explanatory variable, it operates across traditions and examines multiple variables. The aim is not theory-building but elucidation and problem solving. This holistic approach is well suited to a changing world in which historical patterns of cooperation (and conflict) may no longer hold. It helps to navigate an increasingly crowded and complex international terrain even if its predictive power is limited.

The next section uses the politics-politics framing to explain the differing influence of government and private actors on international negotiations, and the institutions that moderate their interactions. The article then develops this analysis by examining the key mechanisms of international cooperation – politicization and reciprocity – and the way different actors harness these mechanisms. Finally, it draws out some lessons for driving international cooperation using the analogy of driving a car as a heuristic device.

Actors in international affairs

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A multitude of different government (or state) and private (or non-state) actors shape the relations of states. The capacity of a given actor to influence international negotiations depends on their available resources, and the nature of that influence depends on their interests. Their ability to exert influence depends on the institutional context.

Government actors

Where government actors are viewed as representatives of states, their resources are often defined with reference to the wealth and military assets of those states. It is these resources that government actors bring to bear on international negotiations. Wealth enables the state, and hence its representatives, to buy influence, military assets enable the state and its representatives to project influence. One is a carrot, the other a stick.

The interests of government actors as state representatives are often captured by the elusive concept of 'national interest'. In broad terms, the national interest is the interest of a state in international affairs, but it lacks more specific meaning and content (Burchill 2005). Government actors often claim to be prosecuting the national interest of their respective states, but what does this entail? Nationalistic approaches emphasise the importance of state survival to the national interest and thus the need to maintain a stable 'balance of power' between states. Cosmopolitan approaches incorporate global concerns into the national interest or query the utility of the concept in a globalising world. The politics-policy framing accommodates both approaches. Applying this frame, the 'national interest' emerges at the intersection of political interests (in maintaining power within states) and policy interests (in solving transnational problems). Seeing the national interest in this way is helpful in explaining the imprecision of the concept – as there is no single or agreed point of intersection – and in particularizing the interests of different actors.

When government actors are viewed as actors in their own right, rather than mere state representatives, a richer picture of their approach to international negotiations emerges. Here I distinguish between two categories of government actors: politicians and bureaucrats.

The most significant resource of politicians is their authority to determine the policies of their state. In modern states, this authority is vested in political offices by a state's constitution. Together with related resources such as control of the public purse, the authority over public policymaking – including in response to transnational problems – gives politicians significant influence in international affairs. Some politicians are more capable of exercising this authority than others. Generally speaking, politicians from a governing party are better placed than those in opposition, and certain office holders – such as heads of state and ministers – are the best placed. It is usually these office holders that represent states in international negotiations.

Politicians may claim to prosecute the national interest, but their primary interests are political. In other words, they are focused on securing power. As Max Weber observed, 'He who is active in politics strives for power either as a means in serving other aims, ideal or egoistic, or as "power for power's sake".' Politicians live 'for' and 'off' politics (Weber 1946). They have a *political orientation*. In representative democracies, a political career usually depends on being elected and reelected. While success at the ballot box is certainly not the only goal that can be attributed to politicians, they are generally more capable of achieving other goals (such as enhancing public welfare or their own profile) by maintaining their political offices. Of course, politicians also have policy interests. They are granted the powers of public office for the purpose of public policymaking, and they risk losing office if they fail to do this to the satisfaction of their constituencies. Politics and policy are deeply intertwined. Only the most idealistic politicians pursue policy interests at the expense of political ones, however, with the former typically serving – or giving way to – the latter. In any national interest equation involving politicians, political imperatives usually prevail over policy ambition.

The dilemma for politicians in international negotiations is that their political interests differ from those of their foreign counterparts, because they serve different (and often competitive) political communities. This gives rise to a challenging 'two-level game', where politicians must negotiate a deal at the international level that also satisfies their respective domestic constituencies (Putnam 1988). An international agreement will not hold unless it can be endorsed in each of the participating states. Some politicians are skilled at playing such games, finding ways to bring their national interests into alignment and secure cooperation. But others do not have the talent or disposition. Some

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focus on short-term domestic wins whatever the cost internationally. This often manifests as a form of uncompromising nationalism – or pure politics – that plays well at home even if it frustrates negotiations abroad. It is 'us' versus 'them', and cooperation can become untenable.

Bureaucrats are the other government actors that influence international negotiations, and in ways that can be quite different from their political masters. The most valuable resources held by the bureaucracy are information and expertise. Bureaucrats are 'specialists' in their policy domains whereas politicians are 'dilettantes' (Weber 1978). Politicians may have the authority to determine international policy, but bureaucrats play a significant role in developing and implementing this policy, including through direct negotiations with their foreign counterparts. Politicians typically attend major international meetings but delegate lower-level international engagements to their bureaucrats. Traditionally this work has been done by diplomats, but increasingly other bureaucrats from across government cultivate international links. The proliferation of these 'transgovernmental networks' – which work to address shared policy challenges with limited political supervision – is described by Anne-Marie Slaughter (2004) as the basis for a 'new world order'.

What are the interests of bureaucrats? As Weber (1978) observed, they are focused on the impersonal administration of public policy, applying the most efficient means given certain goals. They have a *policy orientation*. Although bureaucrats have other concerns, both personal and organizational, the development and implementation of policy is at the core of their mission. Politics is a secondary concern for most bureaucrats. While their political masters engage in daily power battles, bureaucrats concentrate on more enduring policy objectives. Still, the policies they administer are – at least in theory – determined by a political choice. Bureaucrats without an appreciation of politics may struggle to get results. Some bureaucrats also have significant political interests because of their proximity to political life (departmental heads for example) or their personal ambition. There are power-hungry bureaucrats just as there are highly principled politicians. Nonetheless, in any national interest equation involving bureaucrats, policy interests are generally paramount.

In contrast to politicians, who can be at odds with their foreign counterparts because of differing political interests, bureaucrats often have an affinity with their foreign counterparts because they share policy interests. They are focused on tackling the same transnational problems albeit from the perspective of their own states. In pursuing the national interest, they can work towards a coordinated policy solution at a distance from political tensions. This is particularly true where they have a high level of 'bureaucratic autonomy' from their respective political centres (Deflem 2002). A good example is the police forces of different countries, which generally operate with a degree of independence and share a professional subculture based around a common policy interest in fighting crime. This shared police culture – which is often defined in terms of a global policing community or mission – can be very powerful in facilitating cooperative responses to transnational crime. Many other bureaucrats also operate with a level of autonomy and share professional subcultures with their foreign counterparts that can facilitate international cooperation. Whether advising their respective political masters, or engaging with each other more directly, they can help navigate through a political impasse to achieve common policy goals.

Private actors

Private actors such as non-governmental organizations (NGOs), businesses, think tanks, activists, journalists, academics, and lawyers can also be influential players in the international realm. Their resources may include money, votes, information, expertise and organizational capacity. Their interests are diverse.

Whatever their particular interests – financial, social, environmental, personal, or otherwise – private actors seek to have these interests reflected in the outcomes of international negotiations. They approach this task in different ways depending on their available resources. Some directly lobby the government, others run media campaigns, hold protests, conduct research, prepare policy papers, or take legal action. All these interventions can alter how government actors conceive of their own interests and frame the national interest. Some private actors are overtly political (tying their position to donations or votes) while others focus more on policy (tying their position to data or analysis).

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Private actors often have a greater impact on international negotiations when they work together, and in concert with government actors, to form 'webs of influence' (Braithwaite & Drahos 2000). By pooling their resources in such webs, weak private actors can become strong. Webs of influence are particularly potent when they cross borders. In this way, pressure can be exerted on all sides of an international negotiation. The challenge is to know when and where to exert pressure; it is one thing to build a coalition of like-minded actors and another to mobilize it effectively. Private actors must identify 'which strand(s) to seek to tighten at which moment in order to tauten a web that floats in time and space' (Braithwaite & Drahos 2000). This requires a good understanding of the other actors involved in the relevant negotiations. Also important is an appreciation of the institutional context.

Institutions

Institutions – being established and prevalent social rules that structure social interactions (Hodgson 2006) – define the way different actors engage in international negotiations. Some institutions open up possibilities for actors to exert influence, others close them off.

One critical set of institutions is the political and legal systems of the participating states, which can differ significantly and be a source of misunderstandings and tension. To take one state as an example, Indonesia's governing institutions have changed considerably since it gained independence from the Dutch in the middle of last century, which in turn has influenced its international relations. Of most significance was the transition from authoritarian to democratic rule that followed the resignation of President Soeharto in 1998. Among other things, democratisation has opened up Indonesia's international policymaking to a diversity of stakeholders, including a newly empowered legislature and private actors such as the media and civil society organisations. The police and other bureaucrats have also enjoyed greater levels of independence, enabling them to forge stronger links with their international counterparts. Having said this, some bureaucratic agencies have struggled to shake the culture of subordination and corruption that prevailed under Soeharto, which diminishes their capacity to operate across borders.

The principle of sovereignty is another influential institution. Internationally, it refers to a state's right to organise its internal affairs without interference from external actors, which both necessitates international cooperation and provides a political lever to oppose it. The example of Indonesia is again useful here. Due in part to its colonial history, the sovereignty principle has particular potency in Indonesian political discourse. Drawing on the myths and symbols of the anti-colonial struggle, Indonesian politicians often invoke the sovereignty principle to resist perceived interventions into its affairs by other states and score domestic political points in the process.

International organisations such as the United Nations, the World Trade Organization (WTO), the International Criminal Police Organisation (Interpol), and the World Health Organisation (WHO) are institutions constituted primarily by states that may also exercise agency. They can facilitate international cooperation by creating conditions for orderly negotiations, establishing legitimate standards of behavior, improving information exchange to reduce uncertainty, facilitating linkages, and providing ways to monitor compliance (Keohane 1984). The WHO's response to COVID-19 provides a good illustration of the potential and limitations of international organizations to promote international cooperation. The WHO has been at the forefront of international efforts to manage the pandemic, including through the provision of advice and resources to member states. At the same time, it has been subject to the political whims of its members, most notably powerful states like the United States and China (and the rivalry between them), which has compromised its investigations and funding. At the end of May 2020, US President Donald Trump indicated that the United States would terminate its relationship with the WHO, including because of concerns it was too close to China.

There are many other institutions – both domestic and international – that shape the interactions of government and private actors across borders. The mechanisms of international cooperation discussed next are themselves defined by institutions; namely, systems of political communication (politicization) and norms of exchange (reciprocity).

Mechanisms of international cooperation

International cooperation – being policy coordination among states – involves two primary mechanisms: politicization

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and reciprocity. The politicization of a transnational problem provides the impetus for cooperation but can (somewhat paradoxically) also impede it. Reciprocity is the catalyst for cooperation. The way different actors engage with these mechanisms determines the likelihood of a cooperative outcome.

Politicization

The impact of politicization on international cooperation is most apparent at its extreme end. The extreme form of politicization is securitization, which is the act of framing an issue as an existential threat requiring an extraordinary response (Buzan, Waever, and de Wilde 1998). As an issue moves from non-politicized (not a matter of concern for the state) through politicized (part of public policy and subject to political debate) to securitized, the pressure on governments to respond – and their justification for doing so – increases. In the case of securitization, the response is generally more urgent and may involve special measures. In a transnational context, governments may be compelled to pursue cooperation with other affected states as part of their response. In short, the politicization of a transnational problem generates the political will necessary to drive international cooperation. Where a transnational problem is securitized, finding a cooperative solution becomes a political priority (McKenzie 2019).

Someone may securitise an issue because of a genuine belief that it represents an existential threat, or for an ulterior purpose. Politicians may securitise an issue because they think this will be popular with the electorate, or to defend special measures that would otherwise be unpopular. Bureaucrats may securitise an issue in order to obtain additional resources to tackle the issue. Private actors may securitise an issue to elevate it within political debates.

An example of how politicization provides the impetus for international cooperation is the expansion of international crime control efforts since the 1970s. The securitizsn of various criminal threats during this period – led by the United States – has spurred international agreements to tackle those threats. On each occasion, the securitizing impulse has been reflected in the metaphor of 'war'. In 1971 the Nixon administration officially launched a 'war on drugs', following an extended period of politicization of the drug threat by both government and private actors. To contain the threat, the US government drove the construction of an international drug control regime during the twentieth century. In the 1990s the global 'war on drugs' morphed into a 'war on crime', partly due to a scramble to find new security threats and missions in the post-Cold War era (Andreas & Nadelmann 2006). With the United States and other Western powers leading the charge, a series of international instruments were negotiated in quick succession to deal with the new threats, including corruption, transnational organized crime and cybercrime. Then, shortly after the 9/11 terrorist attacks in 2001, George W. Bush declared a 'war on terror'. At the behest of the United States, the UN Security Council adopted Resolution 1373, which requires states to treat terrorism as a serious crime and to cooperate in the pursuit of terrorists. Many related resolutions have followed.

Importantly, while the politicization of transnational problems generates the political will necessary to drive international cooperation from *within* states, this does not mean that cooperation will necessarily be realized *between* them. Levels of politicization may differ across different states, making it harder for them to align their interests. Moreover, the very act of politicization can inhibit international cooperation by engaging politicians – and other politically-minded actors – seeking to gain from a political contest with other states. It enlivens the 'us' versus 'them' mentality discussed above.

A good example of how politicization can also frustrate international cooperation is global efforts to tackle climate change. In recent decades, climate change has moved from non-politicized to politicized in most states, and it is now being securitized in some. This securitizing move is reflected in the increasing use of terms like 'climate emergency' and 'climate crisis'. International cooperation in response to climate change has also ramped up during this period, but it has been halting. Part of the difficulty in finding a cooperative solution has been the uneven levels of politicization across states, with some framing climate change as a significant security threat and others rejecting this characterization (Warner & Boas 2019). Cooperative efforts have also been hampered by politicians exploiting the issue for domestic political purposes. For example, when announcing that the United States was pulling out of the 2015 Paris climate agreement, President Trump declared, 'What we won't do is punish the American people while enriching foreign polluters. I'm proud to say it, it's called America First.' Trump was appealing directly to his domestic political base in withdrawing from an agreement that the previous US administration had been instrumental in

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negotiating. Trump's response to COVID-19 – including the use of the term 'Chinese virus' – also plays to his domestic audience at the expense of collective international action.

It is not unreasonable, of course, for government actors to pursue – or at least claim to pursue – the best possible deal for their state in international negotiations. After all, each state is a distinct political community with limited resources. Their representatives must agree on how each state's resources will be applied to a particular transnational problem for international cooperation to occur. They must reconcile the national interests of their respective states (however so defined). Politicization may create the push and pull of international cooperation, but it is does not explain this dealmaking process. To understand how government actors from different states agree to cooperate, it is necessary to understand the operation of a further mechanism: reciprocity.

Reciprocity

In his classic study of the evolution of cooperation, Robert Axelrod (1984) examined the conditions under which cooperation could emerge in a world of egoists without a central authority. Axelrod's findings challenged the Hobbesian assumption that in a 'state of nature' cooperation could not be maintained without a strong government. Using a computer simulation, he demonstrated that cooperation could emerge and persist among self-interested actors who adopt a strategy of reciprocal exchange – meeting good with good and ill with ill – where those actors are likely to have an ongoing relationship. It is the 'shadow of the future' that makes reciprocity an effective strategy.

As Axelrod notes, the interactions of states are a paradigm case of an ongoing relationship without a central authority. Reciprocity, then, should facilitate international cooperation. Not all reciprocal exchanges are the same, however. The type of reciprocity that triumphed in Axelrod's simulation is *specific* reciprocity, which involves an exchange of items of equivalent value in a strictly delimited sequence (Keohane 1986, 4). It is 'tit-for-tat'. Variants of specific reciprocity are often seen in bilateral trade negotiations, with one state agreeing to reduce its protections on imports in return for equivalent concessions from its trading partner. In addition to reducing the risk that either state will defect, this type of reciprocity is easier for politicians to explain to their constituencies because the terms of the bargain are clear. Yet, it is far from a perfect strategy for cooperation. If one player begins with a malign move, the cooperative relationship may be doomed from the start. Such negative reciprocity is exemplified by the recent 'trade war' between the United States and China, which involved tit-for-tat tariff hikes. Other pitfalls with specific reciprocity include parties evaluating equivalence in biased ways, deadlocks resulting from parties hoarding 'bargaining chips', and the complexity of reaching a deal in multilateral contexts (Keohane 1986).

The scope for cooperation widens in cases of *diffuse* reciprocity, but so does the risk of exploitation. This is because the expectation of equivalence is less precise and the sequence of events is less narrowly bounded. Borrowing from the extensive literature on social exchange, Robert Keohane (1986) defines diffuse reciprocity as an ongoing series of sequential actions that may continue indefinitely, never balancing but continuing to entail mutual concessions within the context of shared commitments and values. Rather than being detrimental to relations between the parties, this lack of balance can generate confidence between them over time. The relationship is sustained by the existence of credits and debts, which compel another meeting. Keohane suggests that diffuse reciprocity is only possible where some norms of obligation exist, such as within strong multilateral institutions. In the WTO, for example, most favoured nation (MFN) treatment constitutes diffuse reciprocity. Each member state is required to extend the benefits provided to one trading partner to all other members; there is no requirement of an equivalent concession in return but rather an expectation that all members will benefit from the good faith application of this rule over the long term. The risk is that some states abuse these arrangements by acting as 'free-riders'.

Specific reciprocity is far more common in international relations than diffuse reciprocity. Keohane suggests genuine diffuse reciprocity is rare, occurring only in cooperative international regimes linking states with extensive shared interests. He gives the example of international integration processes that involve an upgrading of the common interest, such as the early years of European integration. This accords with research suggesting that the expectations of equivalence in a reciprocal exchange will be impacted by the compatibility of actors' preferences (Shambaugh & Lepgold 2002): 'The greater the degree of overlapping preferences, the less important one's ability to achieve a particular outcome.' In other words, where the parties have similar interests – either in dealing with specific issues or

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because of their shared values, history, culture, or ideology – the expectation of equivalence may be relaxed. Over time this may allow diffuse reciprocity to emerge.

Moving the level of analysis from the state to its representatives provides further insights into how reciprocity is practised in international relations. Politicians are more likely to favour specific reciprocity, given they have few shared interests with their international counterparts (at least politically speaking). They also have narrow time horizons, particularly in the lead up to an election, making them liable to privilege short-term payoffs over longer-term gains. This is why politicians often frame international negotiations as 'tit-for-tat'. In contrast, bureaucrats are more likely to favour diffuse reciprocity, given the objectives and identities they share with their international counterparts – including norms of obligation – deriving from their professional subcultures. They also have longer time horizons than their political masters. Many bureaucrats enjoy some degree of permanency in their positions and are less vulnerable to the political exigencies of the day.

The way specific and diffuse reciprocity are practised in international relations, and the distinction between them, is not clear-cut. As Keohane (1986) states, 'specific and diffuse reciprocity are closely interrelated. They can be located on a continuum, although the relationships between them are as much dialectical as linear.' Successful specific reciprocity may evolve into diffuse reciprocity, and a failure of diffuse reciprocity may lead actors to revert to specific reciprocity. The most effective type of reciprocity depends on the circumstances, including the extent of overlapping interests between the participating states and their representatives. While private actors are not directly involved in reciprocal exchanges between states, they can play an important role here by shaping the way government actors perceive the national interest and their own interests.

Driving international cooperation

Whatever form of international order (or disorder) emerges following the COVID-19 pandemic, the politics-policy framing offers a novel way of navigating it. The framing captures a tension at the heart of international relations between nationalism and cosmopolitanism, and enables these opposing positions to be reconciled. On the one side is political parochialism, on the other side is policy ambition, and in the middle is the messy business of international negotiations. The outcome of these negotiations depends on the mix of actors involved, their institutional context, and the way they engage with the mechanisms of international cooperation.

This concluding section draws the analysis together by likening the dynamics of international cooperation to driving a car. As imperfect as this analogy may be, it helps to illuminate the complex interplay of actors, institutions, and mechanisms that defines cooperation between states. The anology can be summarised as follows. Driving international cooperation is like driving a car. The actors that influence cooperative efforts are like the occupants of the car, with each having a direct or indirect role in its operation. Institutions are like the rules of the road. The mechanisms of international cooperation are like the mechanics of the car.

As the representatives of their states, government actors sit in the front of the car. Politicians are in the driver's seat given their authority to determine public policy. Bureaucrats are the expert navigators sitting in the passenger seat. Sometimes bureaucrats also 'take the wheel' and have a more direct influence on international negotiations. Private actors provide commentary from the back seats. While the interventions of private actors are not always welcomed – much like 'back-seat drivers' – they can play a critical role in shaping the decisions of the government actors in the front. Institutions provide the rules of the road by defining what is permissible when driving international cooperation.

The politicization of a transnational problem is like the accelerator. It generates the political will required to pursue international cooperation in response. The greater the politicization (acceleration), the greater the political will (power). At the same time, politicization can inhibit international cooperation. In this way it resembles the brake in a car. This is the paradox of politicization; it both compels and curtails cooperation between states. It is like the accelerator *and* the brake.

Reciprocity is like the transmission. Just as the transmission propels a car by transferring the power generated by acceleration to the wheels, reciprocity propels international cooperation by translating the political will generated by

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politicization into cooperative action. There are different types of reciprocity, which are not unlike the different gears within the transmission. At the risk of overextending the analogy, distinctions can be drawn between positive reciprocity (forward gears) and negative reciprocity (reverse gear). Within the former, distinctions can be drawn between specific reciprocity (lower gears) and diffuse reciprocity (higher gears). The type of reciprocity employed, like the choice of a gear, will depend on the circumstances.

Based on this analysis, various strategies can be identified for driving international cooperation. These strategies are context dependant; an effective strategy in one situation could be ineffectual or even counterproductive in another. In most cases, however, they have the potential to be the 'oil and grease' of international cooperation, helping it to run smoothly and not break down.

1. Use quiet diplomacy. Politicians are in the driver's seat of international cooperation but they are not always good drivers. Some work carefully to bring the national interests of their respective states into alignment, but others focus squarely on their own political interests and can be reckless behind the wheel. An example is 'megaphone diplomacy', where politicians engage with other states through public statements rather than direct negotiations. When international negotiations are conducted in the public spotlight, they often descend into domestic political point-scoring. Politicians are prone to jeopardize the long-term policy benefits of international cooperation for the sake of short-term political gains at home. Quiet diplomacy is usually a better approach, with politicians (and bureaucrats) seeking to resolve differences between their respective states out of the political glare. Private actors must also be careful not to generate political friction between states in the course of their advocacy work.

2. Invest in bureaucratic networks: As the expert navigators, bureaucrats can help temper the competitive impulses of their political masters and refocus cooperative efforts on common policy interests. These interests are at the core of the professional subcultures they share with their international counterparts. Yet, close ties between bureaucrats from different states are not guaranteed. In addition to their professional links, personal and organisational relationships are also important. Building these relationships takes time and is best done face-to-face. Thus, cooperation can be promoted by investing in bureaucratic networks, including funding liaison officers in diplomatic missions.

3. Engage with private actors: Although they are confined to the back seats of international cooperation, private actors matter. They play an important role in shaping the national interests of states by engaging in political debates and policy dialogue. In doing so, they can both encourage and obstruct international cooperation. As such, governments have a better chance of succeeding in their cooperative ventures by engaging early with relevant private actors. For the private actors themselves, the best way to exert influence is to build a coalition of like-minded actors, particularly one that crosses borders. Such 'webs of influence' can empower otherwise weak private actors.

4. Enhance knowledge: Institutions may establish the road rules for international cooperation, but they are often not well understood. In particular, misunderstandings about the differing institutions of the participating states – including their political and legal systems – can be an impediment to cooperation between them. Given this, enhancing knowledge among both government and private actors about the institutional context in which international negotiations take place can help facilitate cooperative outcomes. Building knowledge about each other may also assist the participants in a cooperative relationship to see their interests in common.

5. Get political buy-in: As politicization is an accelerator, politicians can generate the impetus for international cooperation by emphasising the threat posed by a particular transnational problem. So too can bureaucrats and private actors, although their influence on political discourse is less direct. Some actors may also have ulterior motives for politicizing a problem. For example, politicians may politicize a problem because they believe it will win them votes, bureaucrats may politicize a problem to secure additional resources to tackle it, and private actors may politicize a problem for financial or personal gain. This type of politicization – where the extent of the threat is exaggerated – risks putting a brake on international cooperation by amplifying political differences between states.

6. Build policy consensus: Reciprocity acts like the transmission for driving international cooperation by bringing the

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interests of different states (and their representatives) into alignment. The greater the perception of shared interests, the greater the scope for a reciprocal exchange. One way to increase the perception of shared interests is to build consensus on the appropriate policy response to a transnational problem. This may be achieved through 'epistemic communities', which are networks of specialists who develop and diffuse consensual knowledge (Haas 1992). Epistemic communities are focused on developing policy-relevant knowledge rather that pursuing a political agenda. Policy consensus can also be built within cooperative relationships through dialogue among government and private actors.

For most practitioners, these strategies will come as little surprise. They are all quite general and intuitive. The real challenge for practitioners is dealing with complexity; every case involves a unique mix of actors, institutions, and mechanisms. The politics-policy framing can assist in understanding the broad dynamics of international cooperation. The hard work of determining how best to drive cooperation in a changing world remains to be done.

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