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Foreign Policy in International Relations

To the non-academic citizen 'foreign policy' is an uncontentious aspect of the world of politics, albeit one that is generally remote and inaccessible. Most people in most states would have little difficulty in accepting that foreign policy exists and that it consists in what one state does to, or with, other states. To many specialists, however, this conventional wisdom is deeply suspect. As the concepts of state sovereignty and independence have come under attack in recent decades, so the idea that a government might have a discrete set of actions (let alone strategies) for dealing with the outside world has come to seem anachronistic, even naïve. The very division between home and abroad, domestic and foreign, inside and outside has been brought into question from a number of different viewpoints, conceptual and political. In consequence, a serious division has opened up, not for the first time, between the normal discourse of democratic mass politics and the professional discourse of academic commentators. Some attempts have been made at bridging this gap through popularizing such terms as 'interdependence' and 'globalization', but since no scientific consensus attaches to them, the only result has been to obscure matters further. On the other side of the coin various forms of nationalist reaction have taken place against the idea that a given society might have to accept limits on its freedom of action by virtue of inhabiting a common international system, and there are too many examples of groups, even whole nations, believing that survival requires a foreign policy geared to a degree of brutal self-interest barely imaginable even by Thomas Hobbes.[1]

The gap between popular and professional understandings of foreign policy is beginning, therefore, to have some serious consequences. These are compounded by the fact that intellectuals are themselves

divided three ways, between the specialists in a given country or area, who still tend to talk the language of normal diplomacy, the academic subject of International Relations, which has become introverted in musings about its own philosophical evolution, and 'public intellectuals' from other disciplines who sometimes feel a responsibility to intervene in the key ethical issues of foreign policy, such as Bosnia, but are all too often innocent of the history and theory of international politics. These various divisions mean at best that debates are conducted at cross-purposes and at worst that in the area of external policy the democratic process is severely compromised.

It is my hope in this book to go some way towards redressing the imbalance caused by people talking past each other. I aim to provide a conceptualization of foreign policy that might stand some chance both of bringing its usefulness back into focus for an academic subject which seems to have lost interest in actions and decisions, and of helping public debate about international affairs to evolve in the direction of understanding the interplay between the state and its external context. For both audiences the aim is basically the same: to break the association of foreign policy with the cruder versions of realism – that is, the assumption that behaviour can only be understood and/or guided by reference to self-evident national interests – and to show that both democracy and efficiency, the twin totems of modern society, require a workable notion of foreign policy if they are not to be lost in a miasma of generalization about 'global governance' and the like.

Foreign policy needs liberating from the narrow and over-simplified views that are often held of it, and International Relations as a subject needs to move forward in reconstituting its notions of agency after the waves of attacks on realism in recent decades, which have established the weakness of state-centric accounts without putting much in their place.

The approach taken here is to rework the idea of foreign policy, not to defend a particular school of thought or appeal to a mythological past of paradigmatic unity and shared discourse. Too many people have doubts about the contemporary function of foreign policy for the issue to be brushed aside. Equally, there is widespread bewilderment as to where we can realistically expect meaningful actions to be taken in international relations, and over the appropriate contemporary roles of states, international organizations, pressure groups, businesses and private individuals. The very definition of international politics is at stake in the questions a reconsideration of foreign policy naturally throws up, that is, 'who acts, for whom and with what effect?'

An Initial Definition

The increased internationalization of much of daily life, especially in developed, commercially active countries, causes problems when it comes to defining foreign policy and what should be studied under that heading. Is the focus to be reduced to the rump of what diplomats say to each other, which would leave out many of the most interesting aspects of international politics, or should it be widened to include almost everything that emanates from every actor on the world scene? This genuine dilemma over what foreign policy includes has led some to assume that its content is now minimal, and that agency lies elsewhere, with transnational enterprises of various kinds. It has led others to ignore the question of agency altogether, as if in embarrassment, concentrating their attention on structures – power balances for neo-realists, international regimes for liberals, and markets for the gurus of globalization. Both of these reactions represent a *trahison des clercs*, as they lead to the neglect of a wide range of activities with the potential for influencing the lives of millions. Foreign policy consists in varied activities, whether Richard Holbrooke's mediation over Kosovo, the conflict with Russia over NATO enlargement, debates over China's entry into the World Trade Organization or Nelson Mandela's intercession for Ken Sara Wiwa in Nigeria. It is not a residual category to be associated with a dwindling number of 'diplomatic' issues.

A brief definition of foreign policy can be given as follows: the sum of official external relations conducted by an independent actor (usually a state) in international relations. The phrase 'an independent actor' enables the inclusion of phenomena such as the European Union; external relations are 'official' to allow the inclusion of outputs from all parts of the governing mechanisms of the state or enterprise while also maintaining parsimony with respect to the vast number of international transactions now being conducted; policy is the 'sum' of these official relations because otherwise every particular action could be seen as a separate foreign policy – whereas actors usually seek some degree of coherence towards the outside world. Lastly, the policy is 'foreign' because the world is still more separated into distinctive communities than it is a single, homogenizing entity. These communities therefore need strategies for coping with foreigners (or strangers) in their various aspects (it should be noted that the word 'foreign' derives from the latin 'foris' meaning 'outside').[2]

Definitions of political activities are notoriously difficult and foreign policy is no exception.[3] To some extent decision-makers themselves

decide what foreign policy is by what they choose to do, but now that foreign offices do not monopolize external relations this only pushes the problem onto another level, to the point of deciding which personnel are to be counted as 'foreign policy-makers'. In a world where important international disputes occur over the price of bananas or illegal immigration it would be absurd to concentrate foreign policy analysis on relations between national diplomatic services. Although the latter try to achieve the status of gatekeeper and clearing-house, in practice they have to accept a great deal of parallel diplomacy on the part of colleagues in 'domestic' ministries. It is for the same reason that the once popular distinction between 'high' and 'low' politics is no longer of much help.[4] High politics – in the sense of serious conflict touching on the state's most basic concerns – can be as much about monetary integration as about territory and the threat of armed attack. Conversely low politics – in the sense of routine exchanges contained within knowable limits and rarely reaching the public realm – can be observed in NATO or OSCE multilateralism as much as (perhaps more than) in discussions over fish or airport landing rights. Thus the *intrinsic content* of an issue is not a guide to its level of political salience or to the way it will be handled, except in the tautological sense that any issue which blows up into a high-level international conflict (and almost anything has the potential so to do) will lead to decision-makers at the highest level suddenly taking over responsibility – their relations with the experts who had been managing the matter on a daily basis then become a matter of some moment, which can be studied as a typical problem of foreign policy analysis.

The idea of foreign policy also implies both politics and coherence. Everything that a given actor generates officially at the international level is grist to the mill of foreign policy, but when we are asked to say what foreign policy consists of we usually refer to the more centrally political aspects of the activity, that is, actions, statements and values relating to how the actor wishes to advance its main objectives and to shape the external world – a version of 'the authoritative allocation of values', except that what connotes 'authority' is precisely what is at issue in international relations. It is natural that foreign policy should be seen as a political activity, given the at best informally structured nature of the international system, but as we have already seen, it is difficult to predict in advance what is likely to rise up the political agenda.

There is a similar issue with coherence. The very notion of a 'policy' in any field implies conscious intentions and coordination. It is the umbrella term under which huddle the myriad particular 'decisions' and

routinized outputs of an actor's behaviour. That very often the system of policy-making fails to live up to these aspirations is beside the point; the pursuit of a foreign (or health, or education) policy is about the effort to carry through some generally conceived strategy, usually on the basis of a degree of rationality, in the sense that objectives, time-frames and instruments are at least brought into focus. Thus foreign policy must always be seen as a way of trying to hold together or make sense of the various activities which the state or even the wider community is engaged in internationally. In that sense it is one way in which a society defines itself, against the backcloth of the outside world.

Foreign policy is therefore both more and less than the 'external relations' which states generate continually on all fronts.[5] It attempts to coordinate, and it is the way in which – at least in principle – priorities are established between competing externally-projected interests. It should also project the values which the society in question thinks are universal, whether through Robin Cook's ethically-motivated foreign policy or less directly as with the Canadian or Swedish commitment to UN peace-keeping operations. It is, in short, the focal political point of an actor's external relations.

Competing Approaches

Foreign policy may be approached in many different ways within International Relations. The subject has also, however, been extensively studied by historians, at first via the detailed accounts of diplomatic historians and then through the lens of '*international history*', which strove to relate diplomacy to its domestic roots, whether political, social, economic or cultural.[6] Indeed, in recent years there has been something of an equal and opposite move towards foreign policy analysis on the part of historians, as IR has moved away from it. The tools of decision-making analysis are readily adaptable to detailed cases, and the opening up of many state archives has made it impossible to avoid evidence of such pathologies as bureaucratic politics or small group dynamics. In the United States in particular, there has been a deliberate encouragement of links between historians and political scientists, with much useful cross-fertilization.[7]

At a half-way house between history and political science lie *country-studies*. There remain many scholars immune to the pull of intellectual fashion who continue to develop their expertise on the foreign policy of an individual state, almost always with the will and capacity to

demonstrate the intimate links with domestic society. Area-studies are strong in both the United Kingdom and, particularly so, in France, as any reading of *Le Monde* will demonstrate. United States foreign policy naturally generates most analysis, although from regrettably few non-Americans.[8] The other permanent members of the UN Security Council also continue to be studied in some depth, while there has been a notable upsurge of interest in Italian and, particularly, German foreign policy. Japan, Australia, Canada, Egypt, India, Indonesia, Spain and Brazil figure quite prominently in the literature, while other states are usually dealt with in groups, as with 'African foreign policies' or 'European foreign policy'.[9] There is a need to break down some of the larger categories used, such as 'the foreign policies of new states' and in particular to provide more detailed work on important cases such as Iran, South Africa, Syria, Turkey or Pakistan.[10] It will be a pity, however, if those who remain convinced of the importance of states in international relations are confined to studying single cases. Unless welcomed by IR in general they will inevitably be forced into the camps of either history or comparative politics, which will be to the gain of the latter but much to the detriment of International Relations.

Realism is the best known approach in IR, and the most criticized. It is the traditional way in which practitioners have thought about international relations, emphasizing the importance of power in a dangerous, unpredictable world. Realism became the orthodoxy in academic writing after the discrediting of the 'legalistic–moralistic' approach of the inter-war period, and in the Cold War it seemed self-evident that states, and military force, were the main features of the international system. Much realist thought was more subtle than this summary allows, as any encounter with the work of E.H. Carr, Hans Morgenthau, Reinhold Niebuhr, Martin Wight and Arnold Wolfers soon reveals.[11] What realism did not do, however, was probe into decision-making or other domestic sources of international behaviour.

In recent years foreign policy analysis has often been seen as realist on the grounds that it is 'state-centric'. This is ironical given that FPA grew up in reaction to the assumption of classical realism that the state was a single, coherent actor pursuing clear national interests in a rational manner, with varying degrees of success according to the talents of particular leaders and the constraints of circumstance. The work done in FPA invariably challenged the ideas of rationality, coherence, national interest and external orientation – possibly, indeed, to excess. As will be shown below, it is fundamentally pluralist in orientation. It is true that states remain important to FPA, but its methods may be used

to study all types of actor in international relations, and indeed this book focuses on actors and agency rather than limiting itself in principle to states.[12] The only way that the label of realism can be justified is if all those who believe that states are of continued significance in international relations are deemed *eo ipso* realists.[13] This is an indefensible proposition, as the large body of liberal thought about states and international society indicates.

Life was breathed back into realism, despite the attacks from foreign policy analysts, students of transnational relations and others, by Kenneth Waltz's formulation of *neo-realism* in the late 1970s.[14] Whereas realism was not clear about where the drive for power originated – in human passions, in the state itself, or in a world which lacked rules – Waltz was clear and systematic. His view was that the international system was dominant in certain key respects. It represented a balance of power with its own logic, so that if one wished to explain war or other major features of the international system as a whole the only resort was to a parsimonious theory such as his which stressed 'the logic of anarchy'.[15] Neo-realism captured the heights of IR in the United States both because of its scientific set of propositions and the appeal of balance of power theory to the system's hegemon. By the same token it has had less appeal elsewhere.

In neo-realist theory, foreign policy, with its associated interest in domestic politics and in decision-making, was simply not relevant, and indeed barely discussed. Waltz can be accused of inconsistency, since his previous book had been about the differences between US and UK ways of making foreign policy, concluding that the more open American system was also the more efficient.[16] Yet he has a broadly integrated view which allows for a discussion of agency through foreign policy, so long as it does not pretend to explain what inherently it cannot explain – for example, by taking a 'reductionist' approach to the study of war in general, as opposed to the origins of a particular war where it may have a great deal to contribute.

Neo-realism therefore deals in levels of analysis, with foreign policy analysis operating at the level of the explanation of particular units. This is not the place to debate the overall value of neo-realism in IR. It is important, however, to show that it is unsatisfactory – because highly limiting – as an approach to foreign policy. In Chapter 2 I shall discuss the underlying issues of structure and agency. For the moment, it is worth stressing how few interesting political and intellectual problems are left for an actor in a system which operates in the top–down manner envisaged by Waltz and his colleagues. Given the historical debates

which have taken place on the role of German foreign policy in the origins of two world wars (with special reference to Prussian culture and Nazi leaders respectively), on the international impact of the differences between Soviet and Chinese communism, or on the domestic politics of US policy in Vietnam, to take only the most dramatic examples, it seems self-defeating to assume the predominance of the 'pattern of power' in determining great events in international relations. For neo-realism has a deterministic quality which is at odds with the tendency of FPA to stress the open interplay of multiple factors, domestic and international.[17] It also assumes that states are primarily driven by the need to maximize their security, largely through the exercise of power and independence. Most students of foreign policy would see this as excessive generalization, doing less than justice to the variety of states' actual positions and goals.

An approach which has so far had little particular impact on the study of foreign policy, although it is widely disseminated elsewhere in political science, is that of *rational choice*, or public choice in some recent incarnations. This is partly because FPA grew up attacking the assumption of rational action on the part of a unitary actor with given goals (usually power maximization) which was associated with realism. It continues to be the case because few IR scholars of any persuasion believe that the explanation of international relations can be reduced to the individual preferences of decision-makers seeking votes, political support, personal advantage or some other kind of measurable currency. Rational choice has grown out of the individualist assumptions of economics, and in its stress on power as currency and on the drive towards equilibrium it is closely related to neo-realism. Yet the collective action problems are particularly acute in international relations. As David Lake has pointed out, 'there is no necessary reason why the interests of self-seeking politicians should coincide with the national interest'.[18] This is hardly news to any foreign policy analyst, but there is a real issue in relating the motives and behaviour of individual decision-makers to the collective ends of foreign policy, particularly when mistakes are only likely to be punished occasionally, and *in extremis*, unlike much of domestic politics where politicians are afraid to raise taxes by one per cent for fear of defeat at the next election.

Public choice theory addresses this very problem of collective action, and the converse, that policies agreed jointly (often bipartisanly) may be remote from the actual preferences of individual politicians – let alone those of the voters. It therefore offers some possibilities for foreign policy, particularly in relation to foreign economic policy, to the

environment, and to alliance politics, where pay-offs, free-riding and the like may be more evident. Even here, however, the necessary assumption that states are unified actors is difficult to sustain empirically. More generally, the economic formalism of the public choice approach and the contortions it must perform to cope with such matters as competing values, geopolitics and conceptions of international society limit its ability to generate understanding. Like game theory, public choice can be of considerable heuristic use, but to start from an assumption of unitary decision-making optimizing given preferences, with the influences which shape preferences bracketed out, limits the applicability to actual cases.[19] Moreover, contrary to some globalization theory, as well as to public choice, international politics is about much more than adapting to the market.

In recent years the wave of *post-positivism* has brought a new perspective to bear on foreign policy. Post-positivists are another broad church, but in general they reject the fact–value distinction most prominent among realists and behaviouralists, and consider that there is little point in attempting to work scientifically towards a 'truthful' picture of human behaviour. This is because politics is constituted by language, ideas and values. We cannot stand outside ourselves and make neutral judgements. That this view has incited considerable controversy is not the issue here. More relevant is the extra dimension it has given to foreign policy studies – another competing approach, but one which confirms the importance of the state. Writers like David Campbell, Roxanne Doty and Henrik Larsen have examined the language of foreign policy and what they see as its dominant, usually disciplinary, discourses.[20] These are, however, still national.[21] Language is seen as crucial to national identity, on which the representation of outsiders ('the Other') will be a significant influence. Indeed, foreign policy is important precisely because it reinforces (undesirably, in the views of Campbell) national and statist culture. If this approach can be linked more effectively to the analysis of choice, and can confront the problem of evidence, then it may yet reach out from beyond the circle of the converted to contribute more to our understanding of foreign policy. Language, whether official or private, rhetorical or observational, has a lot to tell us about both mind-sets and actions, and it is a relatively untapped resource.

All the approaches listed above have something to offer the student of foreign policy – and they need not be seen as 'competing' in every respect. History and country-studies are an indispensable part of any analyst's armoury, while it would be pig-headed to ignore the ideas generated from realism, public choice and post-positivism. Nonetheless, there are

limits to eclecticism, and the present book is rooted in the particular tradition of writing known as *foreign policy analysis* (FPA), albeit with a concern to extend the subject well beyond decision-making, and in particular to ensure that foreign policy is seen not as a technical exercise but as an important form of political argument. Since the chapters which follow apply FPA in some detail, there is no need to describe its approach here in more than summary form.

FPA enquires into the motives and other sources of the behaviour of international actors, particularly states. It does this by giving a good deal of attention to decision-making, initially so as to probe behind the formal self-descriptions (and fictions) of the processes of government and public administration. In so doing it tests the plausible hypothesis that the outputs of foreign policy are to some degree determined by the nature of the decision-making process. As the language used here suggests, there was a strong behaviouralist impetus behind the rise of FPA, but the subject has subsequently developed in a much more open-ended way, particularly in Britain.[22] The Comparative Foreign Policy school which was dominant in the United States for so long did not probe the politics of foreign policy, internal or external; it was interested in finding correlations between the factors involved in foreign policy over as wide a range as possible.[23]

This is a world away from the kind of FPA which has developed in alliance with the more theoretically-minded historians, and which is the basis of the present book. This approach employs 'middle-range theories' to examine particular areas of human activity such as perception or geopolitics, and is sceptical that an overarching single theory of foreign policy can ever be achieved without being bland and tautological.[24] The Scandinavian attempt to promulgate 'weak (general) theory' to cope with the problem of integrating middle-range theories might succeed – but it is difficult to see what it would look like in practice.[25] A great deal of high-quality scholarship has already come out of FPA's middle-range theories and the challenge is to build on that rather than to start again. They are already integrated in the sense that foreign policy analysis is underpinned by systems theory, even if there are still many creative interconnections to be explored.[26]

The approach taken in this book is based on the assumption that Foreign Policy Analysis can and should be open, comparative, conceptual, interdisciplinary and range across the domestic–foreign frontier. It should be analytical in the sense of detachment, of not being *parti pris*, but it should not be positivist, in the sense of assuming that 'facts' are always external and disconnected from actors' perceptions and self-understandings.

What is more, it should always attempt to connect its analysis to the underlying questions of all political life, such as 'who benefits?' 'what is the right course of action?' and 'which institutions best serve our desired ends?' Like much American International Relations, FPA strove at first to earn the status of science, only to suffer in range and reputation as a result. It is time to move on.

The Changing International Context

The politics of foreign policy are perpetually changing, depending on the country or the region, and by no means always in the same directions. This is why case and country-studies are so important. There is no point in lofty generalizations if they seem beside the point to experts on Guyana, or Germany, or Gabon. Yet as the result of imperial expansion, world war and economic integration we have had to get used to seeing the world, and the international political system, as a whole. Changes in the whole are thus real and of great significance for the parts. Conversely, changes in a particularly important part may lead to upheaval in the system as a whole. We have had a strong sense of this since the implosions of communism, the Cold War and the Soviet Union in the dramatic events of 1989–91. When the phenomenon – or perhaps the idea – of globalization is added to the equation it is natural to conclude that we are living in dramatic times which cannot but have a transformative effect on foreign policy as an activity, and on individual states' foreign policy problems.

There are three elements of the contemporary international context which can be taken to represent major change: the end of the Cold War; the process of globalization; and the challenge to the Westphalia state system represented by the doctrine of humanitarian intervention (*le droit d'ingérence*). Each of these great issues will be examined in turn, but only in terms of the implications for foreign policy.

The end of the Cold War with the collapse of the Warsaw Pact in 1989 is seen by some as a revolution in international affairs in itself.[27] Alternatively, it can be viewed as involving 'only' the collapse of a particular state/empire, with large consequences for the balance of power but no different in kind from the end of Napoleonic France or Wilhelmine Germany. This second position seems more convincing, but when one bears in mind the causal interconnections between the end of the Cold War and globalization (possibly accelerated) and the extent of the current challenge to the principle of non-intervention

(not feasible in the era of the Brezhnev doctrine) then the contrast between the two becomes rather less sharp.

The end of an empire always alters the outlook and calculations of the other members of the system, and not only at the end of major wars. The dismantling of the French and British empires between 1945–64 created many new states and seemed to have weakened the two metropole powers. Yet adjustment soon takes place. By 1973 it had become difficult to remember the world as it was before decolonization, while the position of France and Britain remained remarkably unchanged. Even to this day their permanent seats on the UN Security Council are not in real danger. On the other hand, both decolonization and the end of the Cold War signalled the death of a set of particular ideas, and the arrival of new possibilities. The nature of a new order may not be immediately apparent, but it can be immanent. In the case of 1991 and after, what happened was not only the humiliation of a superpower, and the folding up of a set of international institutions, but also the destruction of a major transnational ideology.

This ideology, coupled with the power of the Soviet Union, had acted as a straitjacket for the foreign policies of many different states, not just those in eastern Europe. Poor states needing Soviet aid, or looking for reassurance against American power, all found themselves defined by it. Opponents, likewise, either turned directly to the US and its allies for fear of international communism, or self-consciously adopted a strategy of non-alignment in the hope of escaping the bipolar trap. Some states found themselves the victims of various kinds of intervention in any case. Large resources were consumed by those who saw themselves (rightly or wrongly) as threatened by Soviet communism.

All this has now disappeared. There is no communist aid or interventionism. There is no anti-communist excuse for western interventionism. There is no need for neutralism or non-alignment, even if, like the Cheshire cat's grin, something always remains in the ether. Resources are (or should be) released for other purposes, domestic and international. Internal politics have, in many cases, been reconfigured as the result of the ideological straitjacket being removed. Indeed, for some states the very relationship between foreign and domestic politics has been cast into the melting pot. In some rather unpredictable states, politics has been shaken up by the removal of the old orthodoxy. France has found it easier to move into a working relationship with NATO, and Italy has begun to develop a more confident national foreign policy. In both countries the domestic environment has become more fluid as the result of the demoralization of what were previously strong communist parties.[28]

The end of the Cold War has thus introduced qualitative changes to international politics, which foreign policies have to take into account, but which do not amount to a challenge to foreign policy as such. *Globalization*, by contrast, is seen by many as having rendered foreign policy redundant. At least, the large numbers who write about globalization give this impression by the simple fact of ignoring it.[29] In part, foreign policy is a sub-set of the problem of what is happening to the state in an age of globalization, understood as the creation of an integrated world capitalist market, and the putting in place of some of the sinews of a global civil society, through developments in information technology, travel and education. Globalization in its turn has been boosted by political change, notably the emergence of the confident states of east Asia in the wake of the Vietnam war, and the collapse of the communist bloc in Europe.

At one level the problem of globalization is just the latest episode in the long-running debate about the impact of economics on politics, which began with Richard Cobden in the 1860s making a linkage between peace and free trade, and has had at least one other active phase, during the 1970s discussion of interdependence and détente. It is always a bad mistake to assume that the present will resemble the past, but in the case of foreign policy and globalization there seem to be good reasons for supposing that the death of foreign policy has been forecast prematurely.[30] If foreign policy is essentially the political strategy conducted by independent units in relation to each other, indeed, then this could only happen with the *de facto* disappearance of independent units. Discounting the possibility of world government, this could conceivably come about by stealth, through the emergence of global *governance* in the form of a net of issue-based regimes, in which units took up positions on the merits of a problem, without concern for community-based linkages. This seems improbable for three reasons: states would become unviable as devices for satisfying their citizens, who expect the use of linkage in order to achieve priority goals; there would be a significant danger of partial interests capturing the policy of the state as a whole, and subordinating the notion of the 'common good';[31] the overall relationship between goals, resources and institutions could not be effectively managed – issues can never be kept in neat compartments.

Much more significant in terms of the impact of globalization is likely to be a reshuffled relationship between foreign policy and foreign economic policy. The two things should be considered in tandem, but rarely are because of the intellectual difficulties of keeping such a wide range of activity in focus at the same time – and because of scholastic

habit. In times of stability, as the post-1991 period seemed at first likely to be, it is natural to expect that economics will occupy a central place in foreign policy. Modernity heightens this expectation. Although Europe at least seems to have exchanged a period of grim stability in the Cold War for one of mixed hope and turbulence, this trend need not be denied. Much of foreign policy for modern states is about promoting prosperity as much as security, and indeed about blurring the two concepts together. In some areas of economic and social life governments' role may be extremely limited as they bend the knee before the efficiency of the market principle, but this does not mean that it is non-existent; far from it, in fact. Governments simply become subtle and varied in their strategies for protecting the welfare of their citizens, sometimes working together with other states, sometimes intervening indirectly (even illegally) to win contracts, and sometimes using traditional means, such as defence expenditure, for reasons of economic policy. Of course handling instant financial transfers, multinationals' tax avoidance and the fast-changing nature of innovation means that the decision-making system for external policy cannot remain unchanged. Foreign ministries have no choice but to accept the direct involvement of many more ministries, while trying to reposition themselves as coordinators in some form, and experts on 'the international' as a whole. This does not make any fundamental difference to the fact that states need some form of external strategy, and machinery, for managing their external environment. That it now contains many more events of importance, which press directly onto the domestic, makes the conduct of foreign policy more important, not less.

The third major contemporary development in international relations could well in the long run turn out to be the most significant. The emergence of serious support for the idea that the right of a state to determine its own internal affairs should be qualified so as to prevent serious human rights abuses has the potential to precipitate moves towards a different kind of system, in which superordinate law and institutions set limits to both internal and external behaviour – in short, towards an embryonic international constitution. Foreign policy has always, of course, been constrained from the outside, but the inhibitions have come from fear, or concerns about practicality, or from internal value-systems. If a *law of humanitarian intervention*, or what Tony Blair has called 'the doctrine of international community', becomes established, the constraints will become more systematic, transparent and institutionalized.[32] The trial of Slobodan Milosevic at The Hague is an attempt to begin this process.

Even if the trend continues, it is clear that any challenge to the 'Westphalian system' of sovereign states possessing the ultimate right to determine their own law and political system will be a long-drawn-out and difficult business. The United Nations Charter flagged the tension between human rights and sovereignty over 55 years ago, but left the issue hanging in the air. The Universal Declaration of Human Rights in 1948 was little more than a hopeful signpost, with no capacity for enforcement. The move towards greater consensus on the value of human rights, and indeed liberal democracy, since 1991 means that if powerful states are prepared to sponsor change, it might begin to have more practical meaning – as arguably it has already begun to do.[33] For the present, the most that can be said is that we have entered a long period of transition with respect to the foundational principles of international order, and that this will have inevitable consequences for foreign policy.

These consequences will mean uncertainty about rules and norms, and particularly about their implementation: it is highly probable that the 'double standards' problem will become ever more evident, with intervention – even for the best of reasons – occurring on a patchy and discriminatory basis. To some degree all states will have to take on board new considerations and obligations as they formulate foreign policy, but for many of them, having just become used to the notion of sovereignty, it will be disconcerting to see new principles introduced in parallel. This is particularly true of regimes in new states, which are often the most passionate defenders of independence and non-intervention. The new possibilities will be twofold: interference in one's own affairs if they draw the hostile attention of the 'international community', usually in the form of the more powerful democratic states; and being drawn into new international commitments, including what might be actions with both high risks and high costs. In either case, domestic society would become more exposed to external developments, with potentially significant consequences for the citizenry. As the external environment becomes more complicated, with law, organizations and transnational human rights groups all protruding more into states, or engaging their support, so foreign policy will be a more critical site for political decision-making, not less.

The Challenge to Foreign Policy Analysis

Change is a perpetual challenge to social science, and Foreign Policy Analysis is no exception. It has faced, for example, the problem of how to

integrate transnational actors into its framework since the early 1970s. The changes in the international context described above – themselves with longer roots than just the past ten years – represent the current challenges. As I have argued, none of them poses the kind of threat to the very purpose and existence of foreign policy which is often rather unthinkingly assumed. Each of them, however, is having a significant impact on the nature of contemporary foreign policy, on its relationship with domestic society and on the means by which it is conducted. The details of these changes – and the elements of continuity – will become clear in the chapters which follow. Beneath the detail, however, lie certain key questions, theoretical and practical, which provide the rationale for the book as a whole.

In theoretical terms the main issue FPA faces is whether foreign policy remains a key site of agency in international relations, or whether it is being steadily emptied of content. This in turn depends on views about the nature of agency and its relationship to structures in world politics. Part of the answer may be given through theorizing the state, evidently still a major source of political life, but not all of it. The state is one of a variety of different international actors, whose positions relative to each other and to structures need to be traced.

Another dimension of the problem is the extent to which actors, and the communities they embody, can still be said to have distinct 'foreign' and 'domestic' environments. If they do, then it follows that they will need some form of means of coping with the particularities of the foreign. But if the environments are blurring into each other so as to become functionally indistinguishable, do they not need to integrate policies and mechanisms accordingly? If one allows the more modest proposition that any entity with the capacity to make decisions has an 'inside' and an 'outside' (associated with the universal notion of 'minding our own business') does this mean in the international context that dealing with the outside is another way of describing foreign policy, or is it rather an administrative boundary, with no qualitative shift?

The third aspect of the theoretical challenge facing the study of foreign policy concerns the category of 'external relations'. If we do conclude that inside is not the same as outside, and in particular that policy-makers have to operate in differing kinds of environment, does this mean that everything which a system projects outwards is foreign policy? Conversely, how do those activities which are conventionally labelled 'foreign policy' relate to the multiple strands of a society's interactions with the world, private and public? This issue is closely related to that of the very definition of foreign policy, on which a provisional

answer has been given earlier in this chapter. Yet, as with other large political concepts such as democracy, analysis and definitions are in a constant dialectical relation with each other. This means that no position on the relationship of external relations to foreign policy will convince until the problem has been broken down into its component parts – as it will be in subsequent chapters through the discussions of bureaucratic politics, transnational relations and domestic society.

Finally, Foreign Policy Analysis must also face the normative issues which its positivist roots have tended to obscure. If it is an area of serious enquiry then it must confront – if not be dominated by – the possibility that it might contain built-in normative biases. More prosaically, it just might not address certain important value-based questions. It is certainly true that many of the interesting questions about foreign policy are not technical but involve issues of value or principle. One such is how far foreign policy may be effectively harnessed to an ethical cause, without damaging other legitimate goals. Another is the long-debated issue of how far foreign policy can or should be accountable to citizens who are probably ignorant of the issues but who may ultimately be asked to die in its name. The tension between efficiency and democracy, and the need to trade them off, is particularly sharp here. The changing contemporary environment, however, has given extra force to one particular normative issue which has always existed between the interstices of foreign policy, namely how much responsibility to take for shaping the lives of others outside one's own society, and for the international milieu as a whole. Although states vary in what they can do, and view the matter through the lens of self-interest, this is a perpetual ethical challenge for every foreign policy. The broadening of horizons enabled by technology and the pace of economic growth since 1945 have brought the issue of wider responsibilities to the forefront of policy-makers' concerns.

This brings us to the practical questions facing Foreign Policy Analysis. The first links theory to practice by asking what expectations is it reasonable for citizens to have of policy-makers, and for policy-makers to have of themselves? How much of what may be deemed desirable is also feasible? There are naturally limits to the extent to which a general answer can be given, but it must surely be the task of any analyst to clarify the nature of action in relation to the outside world by relating the complexity of the environment to the needs and circumstances of particular actors. On that basis realistic expectations may be constructed about both instrumental gains and shared responsibilities. Capabilities can be the better brought into line with expectations,

if some sophisticated understanding exists of the degree to which choices are constrained, and of the margin there might be for initiative. Only by analysing actors and their milieux in conjunction can this be done.

How far can we generalize about foreign policy? The assumption of this book is that there are many common features and dilemmas which can be anatomized. Yet states clearly vary enormously in size, power and internal composition, to say nothing of non-state actors. In the post-1991 world this argument can be extended to the point where it might seem that the foreign policy of the world's only superpower is in a category of its own. Indeed, the United States shows few signs of angst about whether foreign policy exists or counts in the world, unlike the middle-range states. It is revealing that in the American study of International Relations, the state and its power is still a central theme, whether through the successful policy journals like *Foreign Affairs* and *Foreign Policy*, or through the dominant academic school of neo-realism. Globalization theory, and constructivism, which tend to stress the impact of international structures, have made far less ground than in Europe, or neighbouring Canada. Where you sit really does influence what you see.

'The changing politics of foreign policy' is not, however, only about perception. Even the USA has to cope with limitations on its freedom of action, despite its apparent hegemony after 1991. It is also just as subject to decision-making pathologies, and to ends–means problems as any other actor. What is more, the interpenetration of foreign with domestic politics is universal, and varies only in degree. Different societies, perhaps different kinds of society, produce different sorts of domestic input into foreign policy, including conceptions of a desirable world and expectations about what can be done to improve it. It is commonplace to observe that the United States, for example, has consistently believed that its own values should be exported, whereas China has never felt the need to proselytize, despite its own conviction of superiority. The nature of variation and the possible links to foreign policy are themselves things to be charted, whether between democracies and autocracies, rich states and poor, ancient cultures and new states engaged in nation-building.

The principal practical challenge for any foreign policy analyst should be to make transparent and help spread to a wider public the often arcane processes of foreign policy-making. In the present environment that means debating the evolving character of foreign policy – is it more than what foreign ministries do? – but ultimately identifying the sites of decision and meaningful action. Both accountability and

efficiency depend on a prior knowledge of how choices get formulated, who has most influence on them and how their feasibility may be evaluated. As any specialist knows, the answers to these questions are by no means always close to those which even an intelligent reader of a good newspaper might infer. In particular, FPA has the capacity to indicate the extent to which the nature of the decision-making process determines the outcomes of foreign policy, in terms of both the intrinsic quality of a decision and its effective implementation. Too often public discussion oscillates between fatalism about the impossibility of affecting international affairs, and the personalization of policy through the high expectations held of individual leaders.

Argument and Structure

In summary, the study of foreign policy faces perpetual challenges of both an intellectual and practical kind, as with any branch of social science. Equally, the exponents of foreign policy have to cope with a confusing, mixed-actor international environment where obstacles and opportunities are by no means clearly delineated. Lastly, citizens face a mass of events, information and competing interpretations which leave many confused. It is the task of FPA to try to resolve some of this confusion by clarifying basic concepts as well as by showing how agency may be understood in the modern world. This does not mean either reasserting traditional notions of the primacy of foreign policy, or accepting the common tendency to downgrade states and their international relations. The challenge is to reconstitute the idea of political agency in world affairs, and to rethink the relationship between agency and foreign policy.

Accordingly this book has begun with an examination of where foreign policy stands, in the world and in the academy. It continues with a more detailed discussion of the politics of foreign policy – that is, the problem of acting in international affairs, through the state and other actors, and of balancing the competing pressures and expectations which beset any foreign policy-maker. There are some difficult theoretical issues at stake in terms of the relationship between foreign policy and the state and its meaning in the context of the 'agency–structure debate' so prominent in social science during recent decades.

In the main body of the book the argument is divided into three sections. The first deals with agency itself, that is the ways in which actions are generated and conducted, and by whom, under the general heading

of foreign policy. The main 'actors' are conceived not as abstract entities but as the decision-makers who are formally responsible for making decisions for the units which interact internationally – that is, mainly but not exclusively states. These actors do not always manage to achieve unity of purpose. In principle the 'agents' of responsible decision-makers are civil servants and other hired guns, and their important discretionary powers are given separate attention in Chapter 3. A fourth chapter deals with the problem of acting rationally, which has exercised all policy analysts since the 1950s; the usefulness of 'rational actor' and 'rational choice' assumptions are examined in the context of the extensive literature on psychological factors in decision-making and on the difficulties of handling information overload. The ineluctable process of 'learning from history' is also central here. Finally, agency has to be understood in the context of the capabilities and instruments at policy-makers' disposal, and the difficulties of using them to achieve stated goals even where they appear to be extensive and efficiently organized. 'Implementation' is now generally recognized as a distinct and difficult dimension of acting in foreign policy.[34]

The second section of the book shifts the focus not so much from 'agency' to 'structure' – since actors and agents are partly themselves structures – as to the international context in which action is played out. This is seen in classical terms as providing *opportunities* for initiating change and for promoting particular concerns, as well as *constraints* on what can be done. A crucial theme will be the limits to determinism: that is, states and other decision-generating entities always possess the suicide option, or the capacity to fly in the face of pressures to be realistic. They may take this option only rarely, but its very existence helps to define what it is to be an actor. The right and the ability to make one's own mistakes is what makes us as individuals responsible adults, and it is worth the risk of anthropomorphism to make the point that collective entities also have on occasions to be able to defy fate, whether in the form of logic, the inevitable, the international political system or some deeper 'structure'. When they cannot even make their own decisions, as with Lebanon in the 1980s, or a purely intergovernmental organization like the Western European Union (WEU), they lack, indeed, both political and legal 'personality'.[35]

The international context is treated in two chapters which analyse the diverse forms of constraint and opportunity that actors experience. The international political system – Hedley Bull's 'anarchical society' – is examined with a view to identifying how far international law, organizations and norms bear down on states and other actors and also to what

extent their values have been internalized through a process of socialization. By contrast, geopolitics is treated as a more 'enduring framework' in the sense that the very existence of separate territorial units on the face of the earth creates issues of 'foreignness', of regionalism and of variable vulnerability to outside interference. Even if boundaries are in a process of continual historical flux, the fact of the uneven distribution of the world's resources among disparate communities cannot help but create problems of choice over security, friendship and political economy. This Waltzian perspective need not, however, be treated in a Waltzian way. Geographical and historical specifics are taken to be more important than abstractions like bipolarity or multipolarity, while geopolitics produces great variation around the notions of threat and 'otherness'.

The second chapter in this section deals with the extent to which such choices have become complicated by transnational forces which might simultaneously be making geography less significant and undermining the sense of a distinctive community. Foreign policy might be becoming, in Walter Bagehot's terms, a 'dignified' rather than an 'efficient' political institution if the world it purports to be dealing with is in fact less that of governments than of cross-national social, economic and political movements.

The third and last part of the book picks up on one further possible consequence of transnationalism, namely that it might have a solvent effect on the separate community which a given foreign policy is supposed to serve. Given the moral claims that can be made on behalf of 'duties beyond borders', decision-makers are thus faced with the potential problem of serving competing constituencies, while conversely having other states taking a more direct interest in their 'domestic' environment.[36] Bearing this in mind, the section's theme is that of 'responsibility', or the sense of beholdenness which decision-makers have to the community on whose behalf foreign policy, in the first instance, is conducted, but also possibly to a perceived community of a much wider ambit.

The examination begins with the general issue of how domestic society relates to foreign policy, and which elements represent the most significant 'sources' of foreign policy, in the sense that actions 'begin at home' even if they must be conducted abroad. Foreign policy is about mediating the two-way flow between internal and external dynamics. An attempt is made to grapple with the issue of comparative foreign policy studies, of how far certain kinds of society produce distinctive kinds of foreign policy. The 'democratic peace' hypothesis, that democracies

do not fight wars against each other, is obviously the starting-point here, but there are many other things to say about the impact of domestic structures (for this too is a form of structural explanation) on external behaviour – for example, the impact of revolution and turmoil, or levels of economic development, both of which can be seen as at least as important in defining an actor's external strategies as geopolitical position or formal capabilities.

The second chapter in this section deals with the basic problem of democratic communities in international relations: that is, how to reconcile the need for freedom of action in dealings with intractable outsiders with the requirements of popular consent and parliamentary scrutiny. This involves also considering the ever-increasing interest of public opinion in international relations, to the point where many groups and individuals have lost patience with the governments that formally represent them and have begun either to agitate more loudly for changes in foreign policy, not accepting the classical arguments for national unity over 'national interests', or themselves to engage directly in international relations.[37] The 'no-global' protests at Seattle, Göteborg and Genova during 2000–01 were a dramatic case in point.

As the tripartite survey of agency, the global context and the constituencies of foreign policy moves to its close, the book's last chapter takes stock by looking at the problem of responsibility in a wider frame. It considers whether foreign policy in modern conditions can deliver what is expected of it, whether by citizens, decision-makers or academics. It argues that meaningful and intentional actions are still possible under the heading of foreign policy so long as they are based on a good understanding not just of external constraints but also of the various kinds of interpenetration to be found between structures at home and abroad, and of the limits of unilateralism. While it accepts that 'responsibility' is (and should be) increasingly felt to people outside the immediate foreign policy constituency (indeed, in some respects to humanity as a whole) it does not seek to resolve the ethical dilemmas arising from the notion of duties beyond borders. It does, however, delineate the parameters of responsibility within which all foreign policy-makers have to work, and for which the term 'national interest' is now a wholly inadequate characterization.

* * *

The argument of this book is that foreign policy is a central part of our understanding of international relations, even if it is far from being the whole story. It is currently neglected, for some good reasons, but many

bad, and it needs bringing back into focus. It must play a major part in filling the current hole in accounts of international relations with respect to 'agency', which is much discussed at the epistemological level but insufficiently operationalized. As Valerie Hudson has recently pointed out, 'IR requires a theory of human political choice … one area within the study of IR that has begun to develop such a theoretical perspective is foreign policy analysis'.[38]

Foreign policy is at the hinge of domestic politics and international relations. Raymond Aron said that ' "the problem of foreign policy" … [is] the double problem of individual and collective survival'.[39] If we substitute the word 'development' for the Cold War stress on 'survival', we see that foreign policy is still central to the human predicament. Its study represents a wealth of possibilities for those not blinded by prejudice against 'state-centric' approaches or by stereotypes about FPA as a branch of realism. Fred Halliday has argued that FPA needs to develop a theory of the state which connects its inherent functions with those of external action without falling back on realism, and this is an important next step. It can be done partly in terms of the way the twin needs of democracy and efficiency are played out in the international context.[40] On the one hand more and more of society's needs are dependent on effective action in international relations. On the other hand, democracy has the potential both to turn a state inward and to press it into external crusades on the basis of what are perceived as universal values. Each of these tendencies means that foreign policy becomes crucial both as an expression of statehood, and as a means of brokering what is now a simultaneous stream of internal and external demands upon government. As a crucial form of agency in international relations, foreign policy helps to shape the domestic and foreign environments in which it operates, just as it must perpetually adapt to be effective in them.[41]

There is, after all, a serious problem of *multiple responsibilities* now facing decision-makers. They are responsible to, variously: voters, special interests active abroad, allies, expatriates, humanity as a whole, future generations, the like-minded, linguistic cousins, international law and principles of order, the United Nations, peoples requiring emergency assistance, those with historical claims. The list could be extended. No foreign policy can hope to reconcile so many competing claims; equally, each single one is overlooked at leaders' peril. Foreign policy is the channel by which external action and responsibilities have to be addressed, even if we do not use the term. Public policy has somehow to be related to outsiders and if necessary raised to the higher level of international institutions. Foreign policy therefore faces a major challenge, needing to

be purposeful but not deluded, democratic but not paralysed, ethical but still grounded in a particular society. If the gauntlet is not picked up it is difficult to see where the initiatives and coordinating capacities which international society increasingly requires are going to come from. International cooperation is hardly, after all, self-executing. What follows in this book is based on the knowledge generated by Foreign Policy Analysis thus far; it attempts to assess what may be feasibly expected of foreign policy, and what may not.

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