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## **Contested Roles and Domestic Politics: Reflections on Role Theory in Foreign Policy Analysis and IR Theory**

### **ABSTRACT**

Many of the strengths of research in Foreign Policy Analysis have been overlooked by role theorists. Role theorists often assume that roles are shared across elites and masses, that elites can manipulate masses, or that public opinion on roles constrains elites. Role theorists also tend to assume that there is a consensus among elites over national roles. Research in Foreign Policy Analysis, on the other hand, demonstrates that foreign policy may be contested both vertically (between elites and masses) and horizontally (among elites) and that these conflicts affect foreign policy decision making and foreign policy behavior. We propose that: 1) contested roles mean that roles and foreign policy are not as stable as is often implied; 2) research on contested roles offers Foreign Policy Analysis a less preference-oriented way of conceptualizing policy disagreements and decision making; and 3) structures reveal themselves as important when agents use them in domestic discourse over contested roles but the impact of international norm and role structures is not automatic, as it is shaped by the agents (and domestic structures) in the domestic political process. We suggest that research on the strategic use of roles could bring together these benefits of examining contested roles.

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Interest in role theory and national role conceptions (NRCs) has ebbed and flowed in the field of international relations. Holsti (1970), Walker (1987), and Le Prestre (1997), for example, have dedicated considerable attention to this topic in the last three decades. Generally speaking, NRCs include "the policymakers' own definitions of the general kinds of decisions, commitments, rules and actions, suitable to their state, and of the functions, if any, their state should perform on a continuing basis in the international system or in subordinate regional systems" (Holsti 1970, 246). For example, a state that defines one of its roles as a "balancer"

(Holsti 1970, 255) is expected, among other things, to seek to balance between blocs of power in order to preserve autonomy. Even though it has mostly been foreign policy analysis scholars who have used role theory, this literature has developed largely without much interaction with other research in foreign policy analysis (FPA). Most importantly, role theorists have often made a series of assumptions about the existence of consensus surrounding roles without providing clear evidence in this regard and without investigating the potential presence of role contestation.

The current paper urges a dialogue between role theory and research on domestic sources of foreign policy. We argue that some weaknesses in role theory can be addressed by the strengths of FPA, and vice versa. The strengths of FPA are, at best, overlooked by role theory research and, at worst, what we know about how domestic politics influences foreign policy is inconsistent with assumptions in much of the role theory literature. FPA can provide insights on the mass-elite nexus and intra-elite conflicts, which can often include disagreements about roles. FPA theories can use the NRC literature as a way to include ideas and identity in their analysis of foreign policy-making. Together, foreign policy analysts and role theorists can better address agent-structure relationships.

We do not argue that the integration of FPA insights into role theory will always be fruitful. There may be many cases in which scholars will discover that NRCs are not, in fact, contested by either elites or by masses. What we do take issue with is the assumption that such consensus exists in every case without the provision of strong evidence in this regard. FPA has had a long tradition of challenging assumptions of domestic consensus with regards to foreign policy, and role theory would be strengthened by engaging with this literature in greater depth.

We proceed as follows. First, we describe the NRC approach and the theoretical gaps in the literature. Our focus will be on the overlooked interaction between masses and elites and intra-elite conflicts in the foreign policy realm. Second, we argue that FPA can fill these gaps, to the mutual benefit of both the foreign policy literature and role theory.

## ASSUMPTIONS AND GAPS IN ROLE THEORY LITERATURE

### **Privileging Elites, Overlooking the Masses**

Role theory initially developed in sociology and psychology to understand the behavior of individuals (Le Prestre 1997; Biddle and Thomas 1966; Grossman 2005). Scholars who have extended this approach to understand a *state's* “national role conceptions” (NRCs) have had to deal with and justify the wisdom of such aggregation (Holsti 1970; Adigbuo 2007). Usually, researchers have chosen to resolve this problem by investigating the NRCs of foreign policy elites (e.g. Korany 2005). This begs the question of why foreign policy elites can stand for the entire country with regard to its role conceptions. Two explanations have been put forth in extant literature.

First, role conceptions are argued to have a social origin or are “social phenomena” and can, as a result, be shared “even among most of the individuals within a state” (Chafetz et al. 1996, 733; see also Krotz 2001).<sup>1</sup> This assumption is logical given assertions that the sources of roles are, among other things, a nation's history, culture, and social characteristics (Aggestam 2006). In addition, role theorists justify their use of elite NRCs by asserting that roles are intersubjective and are, therefore, shared in society at large. This contention remains mostly unsubstantiated in their work, however. There is little use of polling data and other measures that would tap into whether the masses really do agree with the elites on a country's national roles.

A second explanation for why elite NRCs can serve as an indicator of a nation's role conceptions is that even if these are not shared at the national level, foreign policy elites are the ones who make decisions about how a country should behave internationally. In addition, these elites will supposedly behave based on their idea of what would be acceptable to the people (Chafetz et al. 1996; Adigbuo 2007). One indication of what “acceptable” means can be parsed out in Chafetz et al.'s argument that public opinion polls reflect the degree of congruence between the foreign policy belief of the masses versus the belief of leaders. This argument suggests that public opinion does matter, at the very least as a constraint on the construction of NRCs, and begs the question of what happens when public opinion or society at large contests or disagrees with the role conceptions promoted by elites. In any case, the recognition of the potential importance of public opinion is not accompanied by serious consideration of this

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<sup>1</sup> Aggestam notes that “role conceptions have a social origin and that the state is the role-beholder” (1999, 10). The author adds that foreign policy-makers are used in her article as “collectively representing the state as a social actor in foreign policy” (1999, 10).

variable or of the masses in general.

These assumptions and arguments have had an important consequence in the NRC literature: the focus on elite NRCs has left the elite-masses nexus underexplored and undertheorized in role theory. Since Holsti's (1970) formulation, this literature has focused on the effects NRCs have on state foreign policy behavior. That is, NRCs have been utilized as independent variables to explain foreign policy decisions (Breuning 1995; Catalinac 2007; Grossman 2005; Walker 1987). This approach could only be possible if scholars assumed the existence of a set of roles, measured these, and then analyzed their impact.

The analysis of roles essentially stops at the definition of a number of these for a country, usually during a particular period. Two issues receive very little attention after this point. First, it is unclear how much opposition there is in society with regards to a particular role. For example, Thibault and Levesque (1997) find that between 1992 and 1993, speeches of Russian leaders expressed the role of “integrator of Russia into the Western world” 17 percent out of the total percentage of roles expressed during that period. The question is whether this role generated any opposition. How much contestation with regards to this role existed in 1992 and 1993? Did anyone propose or support an alternative role that would be very opposite of integration into the West? What does an alternative role look like? Secondly, role theorists generally do not define the inner and outer bounds of the role, which would allow them to identify the nature and degree of role contestation. That is, was agreement or disagreement about Russia’s role as “integrator into the Western world” related to the legitimacy or the role itself, or to its implementation? How are the two different from each other, and when does contestation of the means with which to implement a role become contestation about the legitimacy of the role itself? These questions are largely left unanswered in the literature. This weakness, however, is not insurmountable. In fact, FPA has provided both empirical and theoretical tools with which these questions can be answered, particularly when it comes to investigations of mass-elite interactions in the context of NRC construction and expression

There are, of course, some exceptions to this relative inattention to public opinion and to the masses in general with regards to role contestation. Some authors acknowledge the fact that the public at large and opinion-makers have an impact on role formulation, but do not go beyond this insight, preferring to focus on foreign policy elites (Grossman 2005; Macleod 1997; Prys

2008). Others suggest that subnational units -- like *Länders* in Germany -- could have an impact on the expression of national roles (Harnisch and Maull 2001). Some talk about attempts by leaders to mould (Letourneau and Rakel 1997), mobilize (Thumerelle and Le Prestre 1997), or manipulate public opinion to “sell” actions scripts (Rosenau 1990, 219). There are even some hints about possible disagreement between elites and citizens regarding a country's role (Letourneau and Rakel 1997). Many of these statements, however, are marginal to the primary concern with elite NRCs.

Authors who have thought more systematically about this issue include Catalinac (2007), who speaks about the possible influence and relevance of public opinion in the Japanese government's policy toward the two Gulf Wars (although the author argues that public opinion did not account for the difference in Japan's policy between 1991 and 2003) (Catalinac 2007). Lucarelli also uses public opinion polls and European Union documents to establish the European Union's self-images (2006). For Holsti (1987), public opinion and personality are sources of national role conceptions. He notes that leaders defining new national roles for a country will have a hard time doing so if public opinion is not sufficiently flexible or if there is insufficient public support). Evans argues that this is why the foreign policies of authoritarian regimes cannot be understood with the help of roles because dictators are not worried about consistent behavior that would normally be required by public opinion (Evans 2001). The problem with this assumption is that the little research on public opinion in authoritarian systems suggests that public opinion can indeed matter (e.g., Telhami 1993). Even some role theory scholars have recognized the fact that the assertion of roles by leaders could be used to gain legitimacy in both democracies and non-democracies, which is illustrative of the fact that popular opinion in dictatorships does, in fact, have some influence (Smart 1995). In general, it is safe to say that the focus on elite NRCs has limited both the exploration of the acceptance of these roles in the society at large and the analysis of the masses-elites nexus. FPA, in contrast, provides a bulk of theoretical and empirical support for exactly these two gaps in the NRC literature.

### **Black-boxing Elites, Assuming Consensus**

Aside from the focus on elites, NRC scholars often underplay or ignore the contestation of roles within the elite group. “Elites” are normally defined as a unit and are essentially black-boxed. We often do not get to see the actual identity of the elite member who made a certain statement which was later used to code a particular national role conception (e.g. Macleod 2004). As a result, the notion of national role conceptions suggests some degree of unity and agreement among elites in a country regarding NRCs when such agreement may not, in fact, exist.<sup>2</sup> Some authors even see black-boxing elites as an advantage, as it is more parsimonious.<sup>3</sup>

One of the main reasons why NRC scholars typically ignore role contestations by elites lies in their approach to measurement. Statements of individual elites are aggregated and averaged to form a collection of NRCs a country holds.<sup>4</sup> This aggregated collection is then used for correlations with foreign policy behaviors. The identities of the people whose speeches and words are used to aggregate NRCs usually become obscured. That is, if an author uses speeches by the Japanese Prime Minister, Foreign Minister, and Parliamentary Vice-Minister (Macleod 1997), we do not get summaries of the role conceptions according to each of these actors, but distributions of NRCs which were collected from all of them.<sup>5</sup>

Even when researchers identify multiple roles for a country, they aggregate these in the form of a distribution of roles, assumed to be held by the entire elite group, rather than assigning different roles to different individuals or subgroups. Catalinac (2007), for example, compiles a list of about 500 role statements expressed by foreign policy elites during the two Gulf Wars in Japan, aggregates them into distributions (three main roles are identified), and then says that a

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<sup>2</sup> There are some, like Holsti (1970), who look at the number of NRCs expressed in each source – one source like a leader's speech, for example, will mention a number of roles. This particular approach is not problematic insofar as it recognizes that even single leaders do not have one notion of their country's behavior abroad.

<sup>3</sup> Macleod (2004) notes that “I have decided to stick to them [to using speeches from national leaders] not just because official declarations are easily accessible but also because they are usually the outcome of a collective process, involving power struggles, policy disagreements and partisan infighting” (Macleod 2004, 364). Others, like Ingebritsen, aggregate countries and refer to regions, Scandinavia in this case, as having similar roles in the world.

<sup>4</sup> Or just one national role conception – see Krotz (2001). Others, like Venneson et al. (2009), look at the role conceptions of bureaucracies, like the military. Within the role theory literature, there seems to be a division between authors who use individual statements and national-level statements (such as foreign policy documents issued by a relevant ministry). So there is some degree of disagreement over whether role conceptions can be parsed out from those expressed by individuals or by institutions. We do not address this internal disagreement because our critique is applicable to the literature as a whole no matter at what level the role is defined.

<sup>5</sup> There are some exceptions. Breuning does investigate whether a minister's political affiliation matters in the relative emphasis of NRCs in overall debates and ministers' statements. Evans (2001) mentions the role of particular Japanese Prime Ministers in the expression NRCs.

change in the distribution of these roles is correlated with Japan's difference in approaches during the two wars. There is relatively little indication of what exactly accounts for this change and what the identities of these elites were during every debate.<sup>6</sup> Chafetz et al. (1996, 774) also aggregate NRCs from Ukraine and Belarus, and then compare percentages of role conceptions articulated in both countries.<sup>7</sup> They then argue that “role theory can explain and predict the proliferation behavior of other states” (748). What is unclear with this practice is whether one NRC, for example, which was expressed in 40 percent of the references in the data used during a particular period of time was the result of a particularly persistent elite member or was shared throughout the elite group.<sup>8</sup> While FPA tends to emphasize the significance of foreign policy disagreement among elites, NRC theorists de-emphasize these by aggregation. But it seems important to know, for example, whether Foreign Ministers express different role conceptions than their respective Prime Ministers.<sup>9</sup> This is all the more important in coalition governments, where foreign policy-making actors may, in fact, have wholly different role conceptions which will be hidden by aggregation. The NRC literature can therefore lose considerable empirical information in the process of creating a general measure of NRCs. We are not arguing, of course, that the investigation of such disagreements will always reveal disagreements about roles. FPA literature has shown, however, that it is a mistake to assume foreign policy consensus. Consequently, the analysis of role contestation is inherently valuable because it will either provide evidence for the assumption of role consensus or reveal contestation. In either case, the role theory literature will be stronger from a theoretical and empirical standpoint than it is now.

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<sup>6</sup> Ironically, although many role theorists recognize the importance of leaders and elites in foreign policy-making because they study their speeches, they aggregate their statements into proportions of roles expressed and therefore efface the identity of these elites. In short, NRC theorists use individual-level information to create aggregate measures. Foreign policy analysis has, on the contrary, attempted to investigate whether individuals and groups can be conceptualized in foreign policy-making.

<sup>7</sup> The authors do mention that a change in the relative weight of the expression of NRCs could be explained by changes in leadership (Chafetz et al. 1996, 747).

<sup>8</sup> For example, Breuning (1995) uses parliamentary debates, codes them, and then identifies how often a particular role is expressed. She finds that in the Netherlands, the activist role conception is expressed 43.4 percent of the time. Breuning does investigate whether a minister's political affiliation matters in the relative emphasis of NRCs in overall debates and ministers' statements. Evans (2001) mentions the role of particular Japanese Prime Ministers in the expression NRCs.

<sup>9</sup> This is not, of course, possible to do when the data being used is based on speeches from one leader and one leader only (Thumerelle and Le Prestre 1997, 142). Also see Macleod (1997, 172) for an exception to this approach in the literature.



Statements made by elites are also aggregated across time.<sup>10</sup> This is usually done to allow the analysis of changes in NRC distributions. The problem is that the particular unit of aggregation (often a year) is rather arbitrary and may obscure possible temporal differences in the expression of types of national roles during particular weeks and months. In addition, the fact that we are not familiar with the identity of the people making the statements does not allow us to investigate if changes in NRC distributions are due to particular leaders or subgroups.<sup>11</sup> Importantly, depending on the data being used, temporal aggregations do not permit analyses of how contested or debated NRCs were during a specific period.

It is unclear, for example, whether the distribution of role conceptions in Japan in Catalinac's study between February 1 and July 30, 2003 changed during this period.<sup>12</sup> The situation at this time – the run-up to the Iraq war – was extremely dynamic, and there is a possibility that NRCs were in flux; there might have also been quite a lot of disagreement about these roles, but the aggregation obscures evidence of any debates. Evans (2001), for example, indicates four time periods (1964-1967; 1980-1982; 1986-1987; and 1990-1991) with distributions of roles, but there is little indication of fluctuations in roles within these periods. For the period between 1990 and 1991, Evans gathers the number of times certain roles were expressed, and then provides a list. For example, the “developer” role was expressed eight times during these two years, while the “faithful ally” role appeared nine times. There is no dynamic timeline for when these roles were expressed in 1990-1991 and whether there were any significant fluctuations. For example, perhaps the “developer” role was mostly expressed in 1990 and the “faithful ally” role was expressed mostly in 1991. Would such a finding be significant or matter for foreign policy-making during these two years? Grossman (2005) and most of the chapters in Le Prestre (1997) provide yearly aggregations of NRCs, with little indication of either monthly variations or of the actual nature and dynamic of NRC expression during every year.

Few NRC scholars have recognized that there could be some disagreement about roles in a country. Holsti (1970), for example, provided a table of incompatible national roles (Holsti

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<sup>10</sup>Holsti (1970) picks 1965-1967, for example.

<sup>11</sup> Some authors (in Le Prestre 1997; Chafetz et al. 1996) do note that changes in the aggregate weight of NRCs may be associated with changes in leadership, but these statements are once again made while using aggregate measures.

<sup>12</sup> Catalinac (2007) does not address this.

1970, 302). He noted, however, that although some NRCs may appear incompatible, they may actually be orientations toward different sets of relationships.

Aggestam dealt directly with role conflict, arguing that one of the most visible stimuli for change is the appearance of role conflict and an actor's experience of it (Aggestam 2006, 23). Conflict appears "when dominant role conceptions in the role-set are incompatible with one another." (Aggestam 2006, 23). According to Aggestam, there are several reasons why role conflicts could appear. First, a role set includes many roles, "several of which are generated from different institutional contexts, both domestic and international." (Aggestam 2006, 23). Second, role conflict will appear "when the conditions and context within which they were originally formulated change." (Aggestam 2006, 23). Others have acknowledged that role conflict can lead to foreign policy dysfunctions (Le Prestre 1997). Although Tewes (2004) and Barnett (1993) look at this subject more in-depth, this topic would benefit from engaging more directly with the foreign policy literature, which would not only be helpful in explaining how groups might deal with role conflict, but how individual decision-makers have to struggle with inconsistent or contradictory notions of how they should behave. In short, the NRC literature is weak on the elite-masses nexus and on intra-elite conflicts regarding a country's foreign policy. It is precisely on these two topics that other research in FPA can offer insights.

#### FPA CHALLENGES TO ASSUMPTIONS AND GAPS IN ROLE THEORY LITERATURE

##### **Vertically-Contested Roles**

Research in FPA suggests that elites and masses may disagree on their country's proper roles in the international system. Indeed, there is often a disconnect between leaders' and the public's views on a number of specific issues, as well as more general foreign policy orientations, such as national role conceptions. According to Page and Barabas, for example, "the most conspicuous gap between citizens and leaders [in the United States] is a familiar and long-standing one: more leaders than citizens tend to be 'internationalists' at least in the simple sense that they say they favor the United States taking an 'active' part in world affairs" (Page and Barabas 2000:344; see also Page and Bouton 2006). Similarly, Risse and his colleagues argue that elite and mass attitudes toward the Euro differed over a long period, partly due to different

conceptions of German identity (Risse et al. 1999:177). Gaps between elite and mass foreign policy attitudes in France also tend to be significant (Risse-Kappen 1991:504) and Arab public opinion is typically more radical than elite views on countries' roles in the Arab-Israeli conflict (Telhami 1993:438). A more radical view may, in fact, point to mass conceptions that oppose the role of “balancing” Israel against Iran that elites may express,.

If disagreements between elites and the public exist over foreign policy roles, the relationship between the public's views and elite choices is far from straight-forward. The previous consensus (consistent with Realism) that foreign policy elites are unconstrained by an apathetic, uninformed public with unstable views has been challenged by a number of studies, particularly after the Vietnam War (Holsti 2002). Shifts in foreign policy public opinion, for example, may not stem from instability and indicate volatility, but can be quite predictable and “rational” in the sense that they are responsive to external cues (e.g., Mueller 1973; Page and Shapiro 1992). While there is little evidence that the public has a high level of factual information about foreign policy, studies have shown that the public's views are structured by underlying core values or orientations (e.g., Wittkopf, 1987; Hurwitz, Peffley, and Seligson 1993; Jenkins-Smith, Mitchell, and Herron 2004). These orientations, such as internationalism or pacifism, certainly relate to public notions of national roles.

How much public opinion actually influences foreign policy is still unanswered in foreign policy research. We know that foreign policy issues are more important in voting behavior than was previously assumed (e.g., Aldrich, Sullivan, and Borgida 1989), that foreign policy issues matter for evaluations of leaders' performance, and that public opinion and foreign policy are significantly correlated (see Holsti 2002 for a review). Case study research has also demonstrated that in many decisions, leaders are both attentive and responsive to public opinion (e.g., Foyle 1997; Graber 1968; Sobel 2001). In addition, the institutional explanation in democratic peace research is consistent with the idea that leaders are constrained by the public.

While this research in FPA does offer some support for the assumption in role theory that a culturally-based national role conception at the mass level can influence foreign policy via elites, other research challenges this. Case study research shows that in many other decisions, leaders ignored or defied public opinion, even under democratic institutions (e.g., Fischer 1997; Hildebrand 1981; Elman 1997). And recent studies have focused on the success of leaders to

manipulate public opinion to support their preferences (e.g., Foyle 2004; Shapiro and Jacobs 2000; Rathbun 2004). Media and framing influences on public opinion also challenge the notion that mass views are a stable and independent source of foreign policy (e.g., Entman 2004; Kull, Ramsay, and Lewis 2003-2004; Boettcher and Cobb 2006).

Research on the influence of public opinion on foreign policy has turned toward investigations of intervening conditions that affect this relationship. Foyle, for example, argues that leaders' beliefs about the appropriateness and necessity of considering public opinion affect the role that the public will play in foreign policy decisions (Foyle 1997; see also Dyson 2006). Others suggest the type of issue and the stage of decision making are important conditions in the mass-elite linkage (e.g., Knecht and Weatherford 2006). Risse-Kappen (1991) proposed that domestic political structures play a key intervening role and democratic peace research has moved toward teasing out the effects that different democratic institutions have on conflict behavior (e.g., Elman 2000; Ireland and Gartner 2001; Leblang and Chan 2003; Palmer, London, and Regan 2004).

Overall, research in FPA points to the notion that elites and masses may disagree over the state's proper roles. The relationship is complicated; public opinion is not an automatic constraint on leaders (and leaders can manipulate public opinion). Yet public opinion on roles may matter for some states, for some leaders, at some times. Role theory could benefit from engaging with this literature because FPA has increasingly found that elites are not insulated from the masses in foreign policy-making. This is bound to affect both the influence of roles on foreign policy and the ability of elites to act on them.

### **Horizontally-Contested Roles**

Much of the research in FPA demonstrates that there is often considerable disagreement among domestic political elites over foreign policy. Although this research has not focused specifically on disagreement over roles, it has much to say about the way in which conflicts over foreign policy affect both the policymaking process and resulting foreign policy behavior. This research has concentrated on conflicts between governing elites and political opposition (both institutionalized and informal), within governing coalitions, in small decision making and advisory groups, and across bureaucratic agencies.

### Foreign Policy Conflict between Governing Elites and Political Opposition

Research on the role and effects of non-institutionalized domestic political opposition in foreign policy has focused on non-democratic, weak states and how leaders use foreign policy to divert attention away from internal conflicts and/or enhance their legitimacy. Rather than accepting the conventional wisdom that non-democratic leaders can ignore internal opposition, foreign policy analysts have argued that because of the lack of popular legitimacy or the historical origin of many non-democratic states, foreign policy can be central to political power dynamics in authoritarian systems (Lawson 1984; Dawisha 1990; Hagan 1993; Hagan 2001). According to Telhami, for example, Arab states' legitimacy has historically been tied to transnational issues and regional influence. In particular, "...the Palestinian issue remains at the core of every major Arab, Islamic, and anti-western political movement....Its history is closely linked to the inception of Arab nationalism, anti-imperialism, and all those defining moments of Arab relations with the rest of the world....Arab governments have always understood that the regional influence that affects their legitimacy depends on the degree to which they offer advantages on the question of Palestine..." (Telhami 1993:441).

Research on the foreign policy effects from institutionalized political opposition has concentrated on democratic states and the influence of legislatures as institutional actors. The U.S. Congress is generally regarded as having more influence than most other democratic legislatures. Although it often defers to, or is ignored by, the U.S. President, Congress can have influence through legislation, resolutions, oversight, and public appeals (Howell and Pevehouse 2007; Johnson 2006). Conflict between Congress and the President can be rooted in NRCs with Congress, for example, defending a more isolated role for the United States in the international economy and the president advocating a more internationalist role (Mayhew 2009, 260; De Vault 2002, 10; but see Nzelibe 2005, 1269). Inter-institutional disagreements about such roles as hegemon, balancer, tribune and agent of American values, and isolate (LePrestre 1997) certainly exist in the United States government, and their analysis is inherently important for a broader understanding of role consensus or disagreement.

In parliamentary democracies, the conventional wisdom on national assemblies as institutional actors in foreign policy is that they are generally very weak, especially if a single

party has a majority in parliament and exclusive representation in the cabinet (see Kesgin and Kaarbo, 2010 for a review). Still, foreign policy powers of parliaments vary widely (Pahre 1997; Martin 2001; Born 2004; Dietrich, Hummel, and Marschall 2008) and some yield considerable oversight and ratification authority. In Denmark, for example, treaties require a five-sixth parliamentary approval, giving parliamentary opposition a clear role in major foreign policy decisions (Martin 2001). Dietrich, Hummel, and Marschall (2008) specifically examine EU national parliaments in the 2003 Iraq war, comparing levels of legislative and budgetary powers, control and communication powers, and election and dismissal powers of parliaments in foreign affairs. For all twenty-five EU countries, they categorize parliamentary war powers as deficient, basic, deferred, selective, or comprehensive. Surprisingly, eleven of the national parliaments were classified as having comprehensive war powers, meaning that prior parliamentary approval is required for every governmental decision relating to the use of force and parliament can investigate and debate the use of military force. They then examine the level of involvement by each country in the Iraq war and found that while there was a general relationship (greater parliamentary war powers was associated with less involvement), there were important exceptions.

Similarly Wolfgang Wagner's (2006) study examines democratic accountability in the EU by comparing parliamentary powers of member states. He argues that "...the consent of parliament prior to any deployment of troops has been required in Germany, Austria, Denmark, Sweden, Ireland, and many of the new member states from Central and Eastern Europe. In Hungary, even two-thirds of the Members of Parliament must vote in favour of a deployment. In Italy and the Netherlands, governments have regarded parliamentary approval as indispensable although there has been no constitutional requirement to do so. However, in some of these countries, the deployment law provides for exceptions from and modifications of the general rule of parliamentary approval" (Wagner, 2006:204-5). The research on variation in the formal powers of parliaments typically notes that legal provisions are only part of the picture. According to Hänggi (2004), for example, "the relevance of these powers, just like all powers of parliaments, is contingent on the resources and expertise at the disposal of parliaments and, last but not least, on the political will of the parliamentarians to hold government accountable for the use of force..." (Hänggi, 2004:15).

Parliaments allow for representation of a wide range of viewpoints and thus may be a forum for discourse on and conflict over national role conceptions. This conflict can occur within parties holding a majority of seats and between the majority and opposition parties in parliamentary systems. Indeed, role conceptions may stem from party ideology and be institutionalized in electoral platforms. Although there is little research on partisanship and political ideology in foreign policy, Rathbun (2004) makes a strong argument that partisanship and political parties matter in state policies on humanitarian interventions. According to Rathbun (2004:8), "...parties articulate and implement very different policies in the areas of humanitarian intervention and European defense cooperation due to their different ideological fundamentals. This proposition calls into question the assumption of consistent national approaches to international affairs that has long been the dominant tradition in the policy literature." Rathbun argues that there is little synthesis between those international relations theorists who focus on ideas and those who focus on domestic politics and domestic political institutions. For Rathbun, political parties bring "ideas through the front door" (2004:7; see also Schuster and Maier 2006 and Therien and Noel 2000).<sup>13</sup>

For example, political parties in the post-Soviet world have frequently been divided over the roles their countries should play after independence. Some parties have voiced the desire to act as "active independents" (see Holsti 1970) by refusing to align with the West or with Russia, while others have frequently expressed opinions that suggest the role of "protectee" of the West (see Holsti 1970). Ukraine and Georgia would be good examples in this context (Kuzio 2005; Benn 2010).

### Foreign Policy Conflict in Multiparty Coalitions

In some parliamentary democracies, role conflict that is institutionalized in political parties may surface in the cabinet – the primary body for making foreign policy decisions – if the cabinet is a multiparty coalition. Coalition cabinets, in which two or more parties share decision making authority, are the dominant form of governance in European parliamentary systems and

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<sup>13</sup> Breuning (1995) is one of the few role theorists who takes an in-depth look at whether political affiliation matters. Some of the chapters in Le Prestre (1997), like Macleod's, also note some inter- and intra-party debates on roles.

are often found in other states, such as Japan and India. The shared authority in the cabinet can be particularly important for foreign policy as the key posts in the cabinet are often split across party lines. Indeed, next to the prime minister, the positions of foreign and defense minister are the “prize” ministries that parties seek to control and in many cases, the posts of foreign and/or defense minister are controlled by a party that is different from the party that controls the prime ministership.

Although coalition partners do not always disagree over foreign policy, they frequently do, and these disagreements may be rooted in different national role conceptions. Binnur Ozkececi-Taner (2005) argues that political parties are a primary medium for the expression of ideas, that the impact of ideas is most visible when there is political discord, and that “...coalition governments present a potential venue for analyzing and operationalizing how the ‘battle of ideas’ at the decision-making level are influential in affecting foreign policy” (2005:250). Her research tracks ideational and ideological conflict among Turkish cabinet coalition partners and finds that different conceptions of Turkey’s role (e.g., nationalist, Kemalist, and internationalist) are indeed institutionalized in political parties and these discordant ideas have been an important source of Turkish foreign policy.

When coalition partners disagree over foreign policy, research suggests that coalition politics can affect decision making and foreign policy, although there are competing expectations of the nature of those effects. Consistent with the logic of the democratic peace, for example, there is evidence that the multiple voices in a coalition cabinet constrain a government from aggressive policy (Ireland and Gartner 2001; Reiter and Tillman 2002). On the other hand, some studies have found coalitions to be more aggressive, perhaps because they allow for small, ideologically extreme parties to blackmail and hijack cabinets that their support to stay in power (Prins and Sprecher 1999, Palmer, Regan, and London 2004).<sup>14</sup> In their analysis of event data, Kaarbo and Beasley (2008) found that multiparty cabinets tend to choose more “extreme” foreign policy (both more cooperative and more conflictual) than do single party cabinets. Kaarbo’s case study research on Germany, Israeli, Dutch, Turkish, and Japanese foreign policies

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<sup>14</sup> For a review of the theoretical arguments underlying these expectations, see Kaarbo and Beasley (2008), Kaarbo (2008), and Kaarbo (2009). There are also competing expectations about the effects of coalition politics on the quality of foreign policy decision making. For a review, see Kaarbo (2008).



has found that the effect of coalition politics on foreign policy is contingent on a number of factors, including leadership style and the nature of the issue (Kaarbo 1996; Kaarbo 2009).

These cases also demonstrate that policy conflicts between coalition partners can certainly be related to more general conflicts over national role conceptions. In Turkey in the mid-1990s, for example, the cabinet included the Welfare Party, an Islamist party, and the True Path Party, each preferring quite different roles for Turkey. While True Path embraced a more traditional, Western-looking role, Welfare promoted Turkey as a leader of the Islamic world. As a result, Turkish foreign policy resembled "... a car with two drivers, each trying to steer it in opposite directions" (Hale 2000: 239). In Japan in the late 1990s, debates over Japanese participation in multilateral peacekeeping and strategies to secure a permanent seat on the United Nations Security Council involved competing roles of Japan as a "small country" versus Japan as a more "normal power" (Mochizuki, 1995, but see Miyagi 2009). These competing roles were represented in multiparty cabinets and paralyzed Japanese efforts in this policy area. More recently, the coalition between the Conservatives and the Liberal Democrats may certainly reveal a number of disagreements on the United Kingdom's roles, such as its status as "faithful ally" (see Holsti 1970) to the U.S. or as "regional collaborator" (see Macleod 1997).

#### Foreign Policy Conflict in Small Groups

The small group perspective in FPA argues that most foreign policy decisions are made by a small group of decision makers or by a leader with a small group of advisors and that there are certain dynamics unique to small group decision making that may significantly impact foreign policy choices ('t Hart, Stern, and Sundelius 1997; Garrison 2003). Much of the research on small groups is about how conflict is managed. Even groupthink, which focuses on the dangers of too much consensus in small groups, includes dynamics for the suppression of conflict (i.e., mind-guarding and self-censorship) (Janis 1972; 't Hart 1994). From this research, we know that small groups are particularly susceptible to two decision making pathologies: too much conflict that leads to paralysis, deadlock, and meaningless compromises and too little conflict that leads to unquestioned assumptions, a lack of contingency planning, and premature closure on policy options (Hermann 1993; Hermann et al. 2001). We also know that leaders' position and decision making styles have a significant impact on how conflicting ideas are

managed (or not) in small groups (Kowert 2002; Peterson 1997; Verbeek 2003) and that there are certain conditions that allow minority viewpoints to challenge prevailing, majority positions (Maoz 1990; Levine and Kaarbo 2001; Kaarbo 2008).

While small group research has typically focused on the presence or absence of conflict over policy preferences, preference disagreement may indeed stem from different national role conceptions held by group members. Indeed, the literature on problem representations suggests that more general disagreements drive small group decision making (Voss 1991; Sylvan and Thorson, 1992; Beasley 1998). In other words, preferences fall from basic understandings of the problem. A representation of Hitler's demands at Munich, for example, as simply annexation for national integration would lead to a set of policy options that were incompatible with options stemming from a representation of the situation as a first step in German aspirations for domination. Similarly, incompatible policy preferences may fall from alternative NRCs. If this is the case, then a focus on conflict over roles in a small group may be particularly important for examining horizontal role conflict.

#### Foreign Policy Conflict Across Bureaucratic Agencies

Research on bureaucratic conflict over foreign policy has also largely focused on preference disagreement, but role conflict may also underlie inter-agency "pulling and hauling" as well. Indeed, although preference disagreements may stem from different organizational missions and political and personal incentives, they may also be rooted in different worldviews which may include different national role conceptions. If roles are contested along bureaucratic lines, research on bureaucratic politics tells us that we can expect a number of problems, including poor interagency communication and coordination and resultant outcomes (Allison 1971; Stern and Verbeek 1998). Drezner's research on how idea-infused agencies survive and thrive in bureaucratic struggles also shows how "missionary" agencies can change bureaucratic routines and practices to spread their ideas throughout the organization (Drezner 2000:746). Since some research on bureaucratic roles has already wrestled with the problems of role determinacy and role conflict (e.g., Hollis and Smith 1986; Ripley 1995), how national role conceptions relate to bureaucratic roles may be a particularly fruitful avenue for research. Some authors have already begun looking at this topic. Venneson et al. (2009) look at the national role

conceptions of militaries and make a strong case that bureaucracies do not necessarily hold compatible national role conceptions. In addition, the investigation of roles in bureaucratic organizations makes sense given that one of the ways role theory initially entered political science and foreign policy analysis in particular was via the “bureaucratic politics” research program (Jonsson and Westerlund 1982). Afterwards, attention turned toward aggregating the role expressed by national elites. A return to individual decision-makers and bureaucracies would be fruitful.

#### INTEGRATING CONTESTED ROLES INTO ROLE THEORY ANALYSIS: BENEFITS FOR ROLE THEORY, FOREIGN POLICY ANALYSIS AND IR THEORY

What can attention to contested roles contribute to the study of foreign policy, role theory, and IR theory? In this section, we offer four ways in which a better understanding of role conflict can directly benefit these areas of scholarship:

- Contested roles may mean that roles are not as stable as is implied by the assumptions in role theory research; ***attention to contested roles would allow role theorists to explain changes and inconsistencies in roles and foreign policy behavior, no matter how quickly or slowly they may change.*** If NRCs are not shared, then different political actors may follow different foreign policies simultaneously or foreign policy may change over time due to changes in the dominant political actors or the internal power balance in the country. Some role theorists do see changes in the expression of NRCs. Thumerelle and Le Prestre (1997), for example, found that the French role of promoting peace and stability is expressed in 13.9 percent of the speeches investigated in 1989 and 8.2 percent of them in 1990, yet they do not account for this variation. Does this mean that the role was on the wane? Does it mean that more leaders expressed its opposite instead? Domestic politics could certainly be an explanatory factor and a helpful tool with which to answer these questions. Unfortunately, role theorists have done little work on this topic.

As mentioned earlier, changes in public opinion, rulers, and institutions could have a significant impact on the expression of a country’s national role conceptions. Without taking these elements into consideration, role theorists black-box the state and/or “elites” as a group. The fact that a leader or a set of elites *express* a number of multiple roles may not necessarily

mean that they *endorse* multiple roles as a collectivity. Different actors may consistently behave according to competing roles and role expression might ebb and flow as they get access to power and lose it. Moreover, leaders might express different roles even if they do not believe in them in order to appease coalition members, opposition parties, and public opinion. In short, just because a national role conception is expressed does not mean it is sincerely promoted or believed in; it may be the result of a political struggle, a particularly tough electoral campaign, or a strategic expression of role for various purposes. It may also exist by virtue of one persistent political actor. An examination of the domestic political conflicts over roles would provide role theory the underlying mechanisms to account for the emergence of shared roles, the imposition of a dominant role, and the changes in roles and foreign policy when domestic political conditions change.

- Research on contested roles can not only enhance role theory specifically, it can also contribute to theoretical development in FPA. Although (as we have argued in this paper) a strength of FPA lies in its research on domestic political conflict, ***a focus on contested roles may give FPA a fresh way of conceptualizing policy disagreements***. FPA (and International Relations more generally) has traditionally focused on interests-based preference orderings. Domestic political conflict over foreign policy, therefore, has been conceptualized largely in terms of preference disagreements. Rather than mapping role conflict directly onto how we understand preference conflict, FPA should take this as an opportunity to theorize what may be special or unique about role conflict. If roles are more identity- or culturally-based, for example, or if they are more intersubjectively-constructed than domestic political, conflict over roles may play out differently than domestic political conflict over preferences or policy options. Roles may (like problem representations, as discussed before) proscribe preferences in a constrained way. Roles may also be less amenable to compromise and thus role conflict may be more likely to end in deadlock or with one side prevailing. If agents are more deeply invested in roles, role conflict may involve more manipulation, and information processing around role conflict may be more susceptible to framing effects, but less vulnerable to direct persuasion.

These are just speculative examples; the psychological and sociological literature that serves as Role Theory's foundation should guide investigations of the differences between

preference conflict and role conflict. Taking seriously the special, essential characteristics of roles is one way FPA can heed calls to pay more attention to “ideas”. And according to Houghton (2007), the emphasis on individual ideas and decision making in FPA can be nicely complemented with constructivist notions of collective beliefs. Attention to role conflict allows FPA to engage the theoretical ground and ideational orientation of constructivism, while building on its past record of research on domestic political conflict over foreign policy.

- *Contested roles also provide a different way to think about the agent(s)-structure debate.* Some role theorists have argued that the study of NRCs can bridge the ubiquitous agent-structure gap (Breuning 1995, 237; Elgstrom 2006, 14) because it incorporates the presence of institutional factors and purposive action. Breuning (1995, 237), for example, argues that international structure does not give decision-makers clear indications about what constitutes good foreign policy. Instead, leader perceptions enter into the equation. Yet conflict over roles indicates that international structures clearly matter. When domestic political actors invoke roles to justify their positions, they are tapping into the normative power of roles. The impact of roles, however, is not uniformly felt across the country, but rather enters into and is shaped by the domestic political process.

Despite some of this theoretical writing on the topic, the NRC literature is light on the agent-structure debate. FPA scholars have been struggling with this question for at least the last 50 years, and a more serious engagement with this literature would be of benefit to role theory and to FPA. One thing is clear: role theory, especially when it deals with contested roles, could actually provide an “experimental design” setting in which the structure is held constant as scholars analyze how different elites and decision makers reach different conclusions about their country's role(s). Why is it, for example, that the war in Iraq (which created a series of expectations for state behavior) led to such acrimonious disagreement between the conservative Popular Party and the Socialists over Spain's participation? This conflict was centered in part on whether Spain needed to perform the role of a close ally of the U.S. in the war on terror. Clearly, the two parties (and corresponding parts of society) had different ideas about the country's role in the war on terror. In order to understand the origins of these competing roles, we would once again have to turn to the domestic political structure, which would show that the international

structure does not simply determine country roles. Domestic factors matter in this regard and can actually act as a filter that generates competing roles. The study of NRCs, combined with the study of domestic political factors, is another way in which to study the agent-structure issue because it permits scholars to keep structure constant and account for variations in role conceptions.

• ***Research on the strategic use of roles could bring together these benefits of examining contested roles.*** Examples of the strategic use of roles are not hard to find. Indian leaders used the symbolism of great power status to justify India's first nuclear test in 1998 (Nizamani 2000). In 2006, Dutch proponents of sending troops to southern Afghanistan framed the decision in terms of the Netherlands' commitment to international obligations (Kaarbo 2009). Advocates of post-Cold War U.S. interventions (e.g., in Iraq, Bosnia, Kosovo, and Somalia) often justify such policies in terms of the U.S. role of "world leader." In the Coalition of the Willing that joined the U.S. in the aftermath of the war in Iraq, leaders in countries like Romania justified their participation by saying that their countries needed to play the role of "reliable allies" to the United States (Cantir 2010). In all of these cases, roles were used by domestic actors in their attempts to gain support for a policy.

Attention to actors' conscious use of national role conceptions to achieve particular policy, political, or personal goals is an especially fruitful area for future investigation, for a number of reasons. How agents respond to structure and employ roles vis-à-vis other agents highlights the fact that structures do not deterministically impose behaviors but rather become part of the domestic political "game". It also allows for a fluid conceptualization of the agent-structure "problem" since actors' attempts to strategically use roles for various purposes may not always be successful. In addition, investigations of strategic use of roles can provide the underlying mechanisms for how national role conceptions change, with resulting changes in foreign policy behavior. It is also consistent with the direction that research in FPA is moving in many areas. Studies on the impact of public opinion on foreign policy, for example, have recently focused on attempts by leaders at manipulation (e.g. Shapiro & Jacobs 2000; Foyle 2004) and research on small group decision making has focused on framing and manipulation (Maoz 1990; Hoyt & Garrison 1997; Kaarbo & Beasley 1998). Adapting this research to the topic of "role manipulation" is another way to infuse research in FPA with an ideational

component.

### CONCLUDING REMARKS

If role theory is to further develop in the study of foreign policy, and if it can serve as a bridge between FPA and IR, past assumptions on the shared nature of national roles should be problematized. Research in FPA on conflict over foreign policy between elites and masses and among decision-makers provides a foundation for the study of contested roles. Specifically, studies on the influence of public opinion on foreign policy and leaders' attempts at manipulation can inform future research on the production of national role conceptions. Studies on how disagreements among policy makers are affected by political, institutional, bureaucratic, and psychological factors offer guidelines for research on role disagreement and its effects on foreign policy making and foreign policy behaviors. Although analyses of domestic conflict over foreign policy may not always reveal rifts over NRCs, foreign policy research and many examples suggest that consensus is not inevitable or as strong as role theorists typically assume. FPA offers the tools to investigate the presence of role consensus and conflict, and complements the NRC literature, making it more empirically and theoretically robust.

In addition, national role conceptions say much about a country's identity, its priorities and policies, and how it relates to other states. "Reasonable" agents may disagree about what role(s) their countries should play and may have a political or psychological stake in promoting certain roles. Attention to these contests can help us to better understand the meaning and impact of roles in international politics.

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