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**Precedents, Parliaments, and Foreign Policy:
Historical Analogy in the House of Commons Vote on Syria**

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Abstract. This analysis investigates the role of historical analogies in the influence that parliaments have in foreign policy. Our empirical focus is the UK House of Parliament's unusual opposition to the Prime Minister on UK involvement in Syria in 2013. The Parliament's vote challenges many conventional expectations about the role of parliament in security affairs. Important in this vote were lessons learned and strategically used from UK participation in the intervention of Iraq in 2003. We develop this argument theoretically based on research on historical analogies, arguing that parliaments, 'learn' (primarily negative) lessons about past foreign policy events which guide parliamentary preferences and procedures and can enhance parliaments' role in subsequent foreign policy. We contribute to research on analogies by extending the logic to lessons on process. This use of precedents can offer more structurally-oriented perspectives mechanisms that translate critical junctures into reforms in procedures and policy making practices.

Introduction

After the 21 August 2013 chemical attack on a Damascus suburb, UK Prime Minister (PM) David Cameron and US President Obama agreed that, if credible evidence suggested the Syrian government was responsible, a robust response was required from the international community. Having been recalled by Cameron, MPs convened on Thursday, 29 August to debate and vote. Cameron opened the debate with a forceful statement, which sought to: establish legality of any strikes without an explicit UN Security Council resolution; promise that no UK military involvement would occur without a second, explicit parliamentary vote; distinguish proposed action in Syria from the 2003 invasion of Iraq; and stress that any military action would be a narrow response to the use of chemical weapons and not the beginning of a broader effort at regime change or deep involvement in the on-going conflict (Hansard 2013: Col. 1425-40).

Despite Cameron's arguments, hours later the government motion was defeated. Cameron, visibly surprised, confirmed that the UK would not participate in military action against Syria, even with the proviso that the Commons would have to be consulted again. With this vote, Cameron became the first UK PM since Lord North to be defeated in the House of Commons, on a matter of war and peace, since 1782. Cameron's defeat sent a shockwave through the UK political establishment. The shock was triggered by the fact that a parliament – and one often considered particularly weak in foreign and security policy (see Joseph 2013) – had decisively influenced the development of UK foreign policy. An explicit preference of a PM, in this case to support the U.S. in air strikes against Syria, had been taken off the table.

During the parliamentary debate, UK participation in the 2003 Iraq war was raised on numerous occasions. In this investigation, we use the Commons' vote of 29 August 2013 to explore the role of historical analogy in facilitating parliamentary influence in foreign and security policy. We first review the propositions from Raunio and Wagner in the introduction to this collection as well as other traditional explanations of parliamentary influence in the context of the Commons vote on Syria. We conclude that this case challenges many expectations, including propositions that the powers of the executive should be strongest in security matters and grow in response to external threats; that only parliaments with explicit formal powers can influence security policy; that coalition governance enhances parliamentary

engagement; and that conservative parties are likely to grant discretion to the executive. We argue that key to this particular vote were intraparty factions, particularly in the Conservative party, mismanagement of the vote by party leaders, and, to some extent, public opinion (see Kaarbo and Kenealy 2016; see also Mello 2017).

We agree with Raunio and Wagner's proposition that tighter legislative oversight can be triggered by a lack of trust in the government. In the Syrian case, this distrust was connected to the Iraq precedent and to the role of parliament in foreign policy decision-making. We develop theoretical expectations for how analogical reasoning affects policymaking *processes*, not just foreign policy *outcomes*. We conclude that historical analogies and the importance of analogical reasoning (the use of past events to interpret and make judgments on current situations) offer considerable promise for understanding the role of precedents in parliamentary influence in foreign policy.

In the next section we briefly outline events leading to the vote and consider existing explanations for parliamentary influence in foreign and security policy, evaluating how important they were in the Syria vote. The following section offers a theorisation of historical analogies and the role of analogical reasoning. The next section considers the importance of analogies in the Syria vote. A conclusion highlights our key contributions, connects them to examples outwith the UK, and suggests directions for future research.

The Role of the House of Commons in UK Foreign and Security Policy

The Syria Vote

As the international community reacted to the chemical attacks in Syria, Cameron recalled the UK Parliament to debate and vote on military strikes. Cameron, his Deputy PM Nick Clegg – also the leader of the Liberal Democrats, the junior partner in the coalition government – and the UK Foreign Secretary William Hague met with opposition Labour party leader Ed Miliband on 27 August. Cameron and Miliband remained in contact throughout 27 and 28 August. Reports differ as to whether Miliband initially suggested he would support the motion that Cameron planned to put before the Commons (BBC 2014; Mason 2013). Certainly, Cameron amended his motion in response to specific concerns of Miliband. By the end of 28 August, the day

before the Commons met, it was clear that Miliband would lead his party to oppose the government motion, tabling a separate motion – a roadmap to the use of force emphasising the need for a full report from UN inspectors before any action – to be voted on alongside the government motion. Both motions called for a second vote to be held before any military action. The government motion was defeated by 285 votes to 272 and Labour’s opposing motion was also defeated, by 332 votes to 220.

The vote on Syria presents a challenge to conventional understandings of parliamentary influence in foreign policy. Despite appointment by and accountability to parliament, cabinets generally lead in decision-making and parliaments follow, even rubber stamp, as Raunio and Wagner (2017) discuss in this collection. There are, however, several factors that affect parliamentary influence in security policy (Kesgin and Kaarbo 2010). These include the nature of the external threat, the institutional powers of parliament, public opinion, cabinet type, deference to executive by right-wing parties, intraparty factions, and PM leadership style. Some of these factors were important in the Commons vote on Syria. Others were not.

Explaining the Influence of Parliaments in Foreign and Security Policy¹

The vote strongly challenges the conventional wisdom that parliaments are most likely to defer to executives on security issues (see Raunio and Wagner’s discussion of deference and external threats this in this collection’s introduction; for an overview that also challenges that notion see Raunio, 2014). Although there was no imminent threat of attack on the UK, the question of military strikes against Syria was certainly ‘high politics’ and successfully securitised. The Government did not try to sideline the Commons and there was no deference by parliament on the grounds of security risks or secrecy. The parliament was not only engaged at the ex ante stage, but it prohibited any independent executive action by voting in the way that it did. Parliament was not content with only receiving information from the government or exchanging information behind closed doors, as is often expected for security issues.

Parliament’s role in this case cannot be attributed to any specific institutional, legal or constitutional authority. The Commons has been described as ‘weak and reactive: a legislature that chooses never to bite, a tiger muzzled by partisan politics’ (Heffernan 2005: 68). The UK Parliament is at the ‘weak’ end of a spectrum of control over security policy, in comparative perspective (Dieterich *et al.* 2008; Peters

and Wagner 2011). Deploying UK military force is a Royal Prerogative, meaning a power in the hands of the PM. UK cabinets have considerable ability to bypass parliament and the democratic process when making security policy (Burrall *et al.* 2006). There is no constitutional requirement to consult parliament in advance. Recent cases of deployment demonstrate this. The UK's military deployments in Afghanistan were not subject to a vote until 2010 and the 2011 deployment in Libya was authorised post-hoc by parliament.

There are indications of changing norms and efforts to strengthen parliamentary authority in security policy, particularly since 2003 and the Commons' vote on Iraq. Successive governments have, rhetorically at least, signalled their support for the notion that Blair's action constituted a new precedent (Strong 2014). UK PMs may increasingly feel political pressure to hold a vote before deploying military force, but they are not constitutionally obliged to do so. Events in 2015 – in which it was revealed that the UK had been involved in bombing targets in Syria alongside the U.S. (BBC 2015) – were a reminder that the UK parliament can be worked around and that governments can take first steps towards involvement before returning to parliament, having politically framed the issue and changed facts on the ground. Successive UK governments have refused to move decisively and create a statutory obligation for PMs to submit to a parliamentary vote before deploying military force. In the absence of law the situation remains one driven by the political management of the executive-legislative relationship and although Strong (2014) is correct to point out that a convention may be solidifying, such conventions can be politically manipulated.

The public nevertheless supported Parliament having a role in any decision to deploy UK military force in Syria. A majority of the public also opposed UK military action (YouGov 2013). The salience of such public opinion to MPs was notable during the debate in the Commons. Speakers frequently invoked poll results and almost all references in the debate linked public opposition to fallout from Iraq, a topic to which we return below (Hansard 2013: Cols. 1450, 1452, 1475-76, 1479, 1483, 1506, 1508, 1513, 1515, 1521, 1535). Yet the Commons did not simply follow public opinion. The tightness of the vote, and the fact that the vast majority of MPs cast a vote that kept the option of military force on the table, suggests that public opinion was not decisive.²

The mood of the public may, however, have played an indirect role. Had a majority of the public been supportive of military action, Cameron may have committed and then held a retrospective vote, as in the 2011 Libya intervention. Such a scenario would have made it politically far more difficult for parliament to vote against the (continued) use of force. Furthermore, public opinion – specifically a desire to reflect such opinion and inflict a defeat on the government in the name of the public – may have influenced Miliband’s decision not to back the government motion (BBC 2014). Whilst the opposition motion kept the option of force on the table, it did create a wedge issue that allowed Labour MPs to present themselves as closer to public opinion although in reality the difference was slight.

There is little evidence to suggest that the coalition itself (the first multiparty cabinet in the UK since 1945) or any distrust between the coalition partners (as discussed by Raunio and Wagner 2017) was an important, direct factor in this case. At no point did the Liberal Democrat party take a collective stance in opposition to the motion (see Clegg *et al.* 2013). Backing their leaders, the majority of MPs from both coalition parties voted for the government motion. Perhaps the only impact of the coalition government was in the chamber itself, as the closing speeches were given. The coalition parties shared the tasks of delivering the opening speech (by Cameron) and closing remarks (by Clegg). It is generally accepted that Clegg’s closing speech for the government was weak (BBC 2014; Wigmore 2013). The coalition may have also indirectly impacted the vote insofar as it aggravated pre-existing frustrations amongst Conservative backbench MPs who subsequently rebelled against the government. Many rebels were ideologically to the right of Cameron and, already frustrated by their own leadership, were further aggrieved by the influence of the Liberal Democrats in government.

Indeed, more important to parliament’s role in this case were internal divisions in both Conservative party, and within the Liberal Democrat party. On the eve of the vote, Liberal Democrats MPs were sceptical that the evidence presented justified the planned intervention and the perception was that ‘the wider political leadership ... [was] going to have to work a lot harder to get them on side’ (Morris 2013). The concerns of those rebels or abstainers, who spoke publicly, either in the Commons or afterwards in the media, were broadly consistent. They saw a vote for the government motion as a first step towards inevitable military action (see, for example, Hansard 2013: Col. 1519, 1499-1500). Furthermore, Liberal Democrat rebels were sceptical of

the practical effect of any military strikes, with many favouring the continuation of humanitarian assistance and supporting a firmer UN process. Considering abstentions and absences, only 31 Liberal Democrat MPs out of a total of 57 (just 54%) voted for the government, with 10 rebelling, a poor result for the party leadership. Unlike the Conservative rebels (see below), Liberal Democrat rebels did not form a homogenous group within the parliamentary party but were unified by their cautious approach to the deployment of military power.

Conservative intraparty divisions were also critical to the vote's outcome. 'In total 30 Conservative MPs rebelled, 1 abstained, and a further 13 did not vote for their government's motion despite being in London.' These MPs emphasised – explicitly or implicitly – the pragmatic shortcomings of proposed missile strikes. Rebels and abstainers raised questions about the impact of strikes, arguing that it would not degrade Assad's chemical weapons stock, would do little to protect Syrian civilians, and could escalate the conflict and draw the UK in further. Within the Conservatives, there was thus a range of disparate views about the prudence of military strikes. Cameron's foreign policy is shaped by both conservative and liberal traditions (Beech 2011). The liberal interventionist streak that animated Cameron's attitude towards the conflict in Syria caused intraparty tensions with many of his MPs, some of whom have views closer to the realist foreign policy during the Major government and others whose foreign policy orientation borders on isolationism. This case therefore challenges the expectation (outlined by Raunio and Wagner (2017) in the introduction to this collection) that conservative (right-wing) parties are more prepared to grant discretion to the executive. In the Syria vote, the backbenchers in the Conservative party were significantly vocal opponents of the PM's preferences (see also Mello 2017). Those Conservative rebels were from a section of the parliamentary party that Heppell (2013) characterised as 'implacable critics of Cameron'. Such MPs were disproportionately hard eurosceptics and social conservatives, in contrast to Cameron's softer euroscepticism and social liberalism.

Cameron's leadership style, and broader party management processes, exacerbated intraparty tensions, particularly those within the Conservative party. Recalling Parliament in a haphazard manner, attempting to rush through a vote before the UN inspectors completed their work, and refusing to disclose comprehensively the legal advice received by the UK Government, were all signs that Cameron underestimated the degree of opposition. In addition, there are indications that the

vote itself was poorly managed. Once Labour's support was withdrawn, on the morning of the vote, the government were left with little time to organise and to convince their backbenchers to back its motion. Yet the necessary work had not gone in, over the preceding days, to secure support. One senior backbench Conservative cited this poor party management and a failure to prepare the ground as pivotal in the loss (Lilley 2013). As the debate proceeded in the Commons, government whips were engaged in a too little, too late effort to bring rebels on board (BBC 2014). Numerous news stories in the aftermath of the vote reported that Cameron and his senior Cabinet colleagues and the government whips office did not meet privately with many wavering backbenchers (e.g., Dominiczak and Tweedie 2013; Rigby 2013).

The UK's experience in Iraq, and the process leading up to the decision to support the U.S. in the intervention in Iraq in 2003, was an additional factor (one that has not been explored in previous research on parliamentary influence) that influenced the role parliament played in this decision. The importance of Iraq in the UK debate on Syria is connected to the issue of distrust as a trigger to greater legislative engagement (Raunio and Wagner 2017). As the debate unfolded in Parliament, *The Spectator* magazine ran a story about how Cameron was attacking Blair's 'ghost' complete with a picture of Blair's spectre floating over the chamber (Hardman 2013). Indeed, Cameron observed in his opening statement that 'the well of public opinion was well and truly poisoned by the Iraq episode' (Hansard 2013: Col. 1428). Cameron dedicated a significant portion of his opening speech to differences between Iraq in 2003 and Syria in 2013 (Col. 1427-28). Yet during the debate, MPs repeatedly returned to the case of Iraq.

It is this factor – the role of a previous experience and its use as an analogy during the debate – that we turn our attention to for the remainder of our analysis. Before considering how MPs used the Iraq analogy as historical precedent in the Syria vote we offer some theoretical observations.

Theorising Historical Precedents

To better help understand and theoretically ground the importance of the Iraq analogy in the House of Commons vote, and to suggest future research on precedents and the role of parliaments more generally, we focus here on historical analogies. After

reviewing prior research on historical analogies, we further examine the use of the Iraq case in the Commons debate on Syria. We extend the logic of analogical reasoning beyond the substance of a lesson learned from a prior case to a lesson based on process and the role of institutions in policy making procedures.

Historical Analogies and Foreign Policy

Decision-makers' use of historical analogies (analogical reasoning or case-based reasoning) has been employed in the study of foreign policy to explain particular, often non-rational, foreign policy choices. Jervis (1976) was one of the first to use insights from cognitive psychology to highlight leaders' use of historical knowledge and experience to process information about a current situation in international politics. Neustadt and May (1988)'s pioneering study examined the use of history by decision makers and suggested strategies for improving analogical reasoning. Khong (1992) proposed a psychologically-based framework to demonstrate how U.S. leaders drew lessons from the Korean War that, he argues, resulted in mistakes and ineffective policies in Vietnam.³

The Vietnamese case and the Munich case are widely used 'negative' analogies; highlighting for leaders what policy choices they should avoid in order to prevent similar unwanted outcomes (Record 2007). The Somalia (1993) case of 'Black Hawk Down' (with U.S. helicopter crews killed in Mogadishu) is also a negative analogy purportedly important in guiding subsequent U.S. foreign policy in Somalia (Brunk 2008; Power 2003). Miller (2016) argues that historically unsound and strategically unhelpful analogies have guided U.S. policymaking in Afghanistan since 2001. Siniver and Collins (2013) argue that Israeli leaders' analogy between the war in Lebanon in 1982 and the war in Lebanon in 2002 contained conceptual boundaries that prevented consideration of alternative policies during the latter military operation. And Houghton (1996) persuasively argues that even in 'novel' foreign policy situations, leaders use parts of analogies to define the situation and proscribe policies.

From the psychological point of view, the use of analogies (one type of cognitive schema) simplifies decision making for leaders, who can be portrayed as 'cognitive misers'. The current situation policymakers face may be complex, ill-structured, uncertain, and ambiguous. As humans tend to strive to simplify their reality, analogies are mental shortcuts that allow individuals to transform ill-structured problems into

more certain ones (Voss *et al.*, 1991). This, from a psychological point of view, is the attraction of analogies. Decision makers, as human agents, may also be psychologically motivated to seek certain analogies, those that are consistent, for example, with their other beliefs, that serve emotional needs or are psychologically motivated to, for example protect or highlight the importance of a leader. Of course, the ‘lessons’ leaders learn from analogies depend on individuals’ subjective understanding of the historical case, including their assessment of the outcome (positive or negative) and, critically, their attribution of cause. Leaders’ use of historical analogies also depend on their subjective interpretations of the present case, including what features they see analogous with the prior historical episode and what factors with which they might have leverage to change policy and outcomes. For these reasons, individuals can disagree on the meaning of the analogy and the lessons to be drawn from the historical case (Sylvan and Thorson 1992).

While analogical reasoning serves an efficiency function for humans, there are disadvantages that can lead to policy mistakes. Because no two cases are exactly alike, the risk of analogical reasoning is that decision makers will overstate similarities, and underestimate differences (again, for cognitive efficiency). As Siniver and Collins (2013: 4) state, ‘the failure here is largely psychological, given that an analogy’s appeal lies in its ability to provide a “short-cut” to rationality; there is therefore seemingly no need to delve deep into researching the particularities and nuances of the analogy being invoked as there already is, supposedly, a clear lesson to be learned and applied.’ These differences may be critical in terms of the effectiveness of the policy. Thus the lessons from Korea, for example, may be inappropriate in Vietnam, due to the dissimilarities in the cases (Khong 1992).⁴

Although decision makers’ use historical analogies for psychological reasons, policymakers can also use analogies strategically. In other words, leaders may not necessarily believe that the two cases are indeed similar, but the historical case is instrumentalised to frame others’ understanding of the current case (or even just the policy options in the current case) to persuade them to agree to leaders’ preferred choices. The use (and possible abuse) of history may lend legitimacy arguments that the state should take a specific course of action. Policymakers may also simply use analogies in a post-hoc rationalisation of their policy choice, which may be influenced by other factors (such as ideological orientation) (Houghton 1996; Peterson 1997; Taylor and Rourke 1995). Regardless of the motive behind analogical reasoning

(psychological or strategic), the use of historical analogies may have the psychological effects described above.⁵ Analogies can also affect discourse and set parameters for the current and subsequent debate. As Breuning (2003: 232) notes, ‘aside from a potential role in reasoning ... analogies structure the explicit discourse about an issue domain in foreign policy debate as well’ (see also Peterson 1997).⁶ Our focus here is on the effects of analogies on parliamentary influence when they are used, psychologically, rhetorically, and strategically.

Historical Analogies and Parliamentary Influence

A historical case can be used in two distinct (but not necessarily competing or unrelated) ways. The first way is the more familiar form in previous research and concerns the substance of the policy. A past case is used to point decision makers in the direction of *what* to do (or what not to do) in foreign policy. US decision makers, for example, presumably learned from the Somalia case that intervention into a African conflict was ‘hopeless’ and thus chose not to intervene in Rwanda (Brunk 2008) and Israeli decision makers used the interpretations of the ‘quagmire’ of the 1982 Lebanese war to choose an airpower strategy over ground troops in the 2006 war in Lebanon (Siniver and Collins 2013).

In the case of the Commons vote on Syria, since many saw the military intervention in Iraq as too costly, illegal, and unnecessary, Iraq as a historical precedent served as an argument against the substance of the government’s preference for military strikes against Syria. This analogy was likely used strategically by those who were against intervention in any event, but it may have also operated on a psychological level, as the public and policymakers truly perceived similarities between the two cases and these similarities prompted the negative analogy of Iraq, which guided their policy preference. Although it is difficult to know if analogies are used strategically, psychologically, or both, the Iraq precedent was not used in a partisan way – members of all parties cited the Iraq case as a negative example in their opposition to Syria, as a cautionary tale from which lessons needed to be learned. This differs from Taylor and Rourke’s (1995) finding that Congressional representatives use of analogies fell distinctly along party lines which, they argue, indicates that they were only used strategically.

During the Commons' Syria debate, those who were opposed to military action mostly employed the Iraq case as a policy failure that ought not be repeated. Remarks typically focused on the costs of Iraq, the illegality and the damage to international institutions, and the resulting quagmire that saw UK involvement stretch over many years. For example Peter Lilley, a prominent Conservative backbencher, stated (Hansard 2013: Col. 1485-86): 'My main concern is that, although the Government's intentions as laid out in the motion are limited, military action will unleash pressures to become further involved'. The veteran Labour backbencher and anti-war campaigner John McDonnell was quick to remind the House that the lessons of Iraq were that 'military intervention does not just cost lives; it undermines the credibility of the international institutions that we look to to secure peace in the world' (Hansard 2013: Col. 1462).

A less investigated form of analogical reasoning concerns the process of foreign policy making. Historical analogies can guide leaders on *how* (or how not) to make policy choices. President Kennedy, for example, presumably used his understanding of the Bay of Pigs decision making (in which there was little deliberation from diverse perspectives) to better structure the decision making process in the Cuban Missile Crisis (Janis 1972). One of the 'lessons learned' from the US experience in Vietnam was about the process of generating and maintaining public support for the war. Many post-Vietnam presidents have been reluctant to use military force without public support (to avoid 'another Vietnam') and often altered the decision making process to allow time to mobilise public opinion (Foyle 1999). Although Khong's (1992) six functions of analogical reasoning do not include lessons about the policymaking process, analogies (whether positive or negative) to past processes can serve individuals as scripts for how to make the decision, just as the substance of the past foreign policy can direct policymakers' choice of action.

In the case of the Commons Syria debate, the Iraq case also had implications for the process of decision-making, including the role of Parliament, and the decision-making process that parliamentarians wished to see followed, both domestically and internationally. Indeed the majority MPs' comments that made reference to Iraq – and there were many – made reference to the failures of *the process* of foreign policy decision-making during 2002 and 2003. Lessons learned from Iraq meant that MPs were keen to see more time for the UN investigation of the chemical weapons attack and a UN authorisation of the attack. They also wanted greater transparency and

vetted intelligence. MPs also distrusted the PM and the cabinet, given their interpretation of Blair's closed decision making and handling of legal advice in the Iraq case. Parliament's role in the Syrian conflict, and the votes against a military attack on Syria, were meant to avoid mistakes that Parliament had made when it gave the Blair cabinet its approval of UK participation in Iraq. Parliament was there to provide a check on the executive to ensure that there were no false claims and the legal case was clear.

MPs repeatedly invoked the intelligence on Iraq, which the Blair government told Parliament it possessed, that turned out to be faulty or manufactured. The PM attempted to remind MPs that Iraq had led to certain reforms in the way that intelligence was shared with Parliament. He remarked:

'The Joint Intelligence Committee has made its judgments, and has done so in line with the reforms put in place after the Iraq war ... I do not want to raise, as perhaps happened in the Iraq debate, the status of individual or groups of pieces of intelligence, into some sort of quasi-religious cult. That would not be appropriate' (Hansard 2013: Col. 1436, 1437).

The intention was clear: to mark out the process of intelligence gathering and analysis that underpinned the Syria situation from that underpinning the Iraq case a decade earlier. Former Labour Foreign Secretary Jack Straw remarked similarly: 'one of the consequences of the intelligence failure on Iraq has been to raise the bar that we have to get over when the question of military action arises' (Hansard 2013: Col. 1451).

Whilst the PM and others tried either to say how things had changed since 2003, or to recognise that the bar had been raised, many MPs remained unconvinced and demanded further evidence be produced to avoid being misled once again. The chairman of the House of Commons Foreign Affairs Committee, for example, called on the government to publish more intelligence because of the memories of Iraq and intelligence failures and the residual distrust. The leading Labour anti-war MP, John McDonnell, also cited such lessons from Iraq observing that 'there is no automatic approval of, or even trust in, a prime ministerial judgment ... "highly likely" and "some evidence" are not good enough' (Hansard 2013: Col. 1461). The overarching thrust of this use of Iraq was about a lack of trust in the process of decision making

about the use of force. The key components centred on PM trust, the veracity of legal advice, and the robustness of intelligence.

Interestingly, other MPs attempted to utilise the Iraq precedent in a different way, arguing that lessons had been learned and intelligence procedures had changed. The purpose of this invocation was to suggest that because processes had changed, MPs should feel confident in voting for intervention, as a repeat of 2003 was less likely. In other words, the precedent of Iraq was rejected as inappropriate because the necessary lessons had already been learned.⁷ Several MPs rose to speak in the debate and argued that the tragedy of the 2003 Iraq war must not be used to create a second tragedy, namely a failure to act in the case of Syria (e.g. Hansard 2013: Col. 1470, 1517). Picking up on the use of the phrase ‘double tragedy’ throughout the debate, Deputy PM Nick Clegg, in his closing statement, remarked: ‘Iraq casts a long shadow, but it would be a double tragedy if the memory of that war now caused us to retreat from the laws and conventions that govern our world, many of which the United Kingdom helped to author’ (Hansard 2013: Col. 1546). The use of Iraq as a historical analogy was not uncontested in this case. There was a battle over how Iraq was to be understood and whether it was appropriate to use it as a historical analogy. Most MPs, however, used Iraq as a cautionary tale.

Conclusion

Our analysis of the very important 2013 vote suggests historical precedents are one contributing factor, along with other explanations (reviewed by Raunio and Wagner 2017) of parliamentary influence. In this vote, the Iraq analogy interacted with and complemented the other factors important to the outcome. Lessons from Iraq, for example, undoubtedly informed public opinion both on the substance of policy on Syria and on the role of parliament in this foreign policy. Intraparty divisions also mapped onto different uses of the Iraq analogies by MPs. In this way, Iraq, as a historical event, reinforced other driving factors for both the policy outcome and the influence of parliament.

Precedents, however, have not been incorporated into previous analyses and frameworks of parliaments’ role in foreign policy. Furthermore, historical analogies have primarily been used to explain outcomes (positive or negative lessons on what to

do or what not to do). In the UK Syrian debate, the Iraq analogy was used overwhelmingly as a cautionary tale, as a mistake that should be learned from. It was also used to make a procedural point, particularly about the role of parliament in security policy. Because of the breakdown in trust stemming from the Iraq case, UK MPs used the Iraq case, and were arguably influenced by it, to strengthen parliament's role as a constraining factor on the executive.

The conceptual approach of historical analogies – and the previous research on the topic – has great potential to shed light on precedents and parliaments in foreign policy in these and other empirical cases. This would advance work on historical analogies by including lessons learned about the process and role of institutions. To date, in the study of foreign policy, historical analogies have been used to explain the outcome but not the process. To Khong's six functions of analogies (define nature of problem, diagnose political stakes, suggest possible solutions, predict likelihood of success of policy solution, assess moral dimensions, and warn of dangers of policy options), we would add 1) suggest most effective process; 2) assess legitimacy of process; 3) predict likelihood of success given policy making process; and 4) and warn of dangers of certain policy making procedures. These process functions of historical analogies recognise that may be just as concerned about *how* to make decisions, and thus learn from the past lessons about the policy making process, as they are about *what* to decide. There is little research on why some analogies are more attractive than others, but we would suggest that when the understanding of past events has a significant element of reflection on how decisions were made (especially when perceived poor decision making resulted in perceived policy failures), these events will be particularly salient for diagnosing current policy making processes, such as the role of parliament.

Examples beyond the UK suggest the process functions of analogies are a more general phenomenon. We offer two examples here. First, Vietnam became an important analogy to address legislative-executive relations in U.S. security policy. By 1966, Congressional 'suspicion of the president was fed by a spreading belief that the 1964 episode that led to the Gulf of Tonkin resolution had been misrepresented to the legislators, as a pretext for winning the resolution' (Sundquist 1981: 241). Senator Fulbright was a key reformist in the effort to restrain executive actions. In 1966, Fulbright 'abandoned his longtime advocacy of executive predominance in foreign policy' (Woods 1998: 126). Fulbright believed that the U.S. executive, in the context

of the Cold War, was overextending its power and the Vietnam War was evidence of the risks of imperial expansion. ‘One of the answers to the problem of creeping imperialism, he declared, was “to find a way to restore Constitutional balance, to find ways by which the Senate can discharge its duty of advice and consent in an era of permanent crisis”’ (Woods 1998: 127). Fulbright ‘was serving notice that, as far as his [Foreign Relations] committee was concerned, there would be no more “blank checks”, no more “hasty responses to contrived emergencies”. Beyond that, Fulbright proposed to put the Senate as a body on record that thereafter no commitment to a foreign power would be valid without, in some form, the consent of the Congress. He introduced a “sense of the Senate” resolution to that effect,’ known as the national commitments resolution (Sundquist 1981: 245). Throughout debate on the resolution, senators repeatedly justified support for a congressional prerogative in order to prevent ‘another Vietnam’ (Sundquist 1981: 248). This theme carried through to the passage of the War Powers Resolution of 1973, requiring the president to consult with Congress before introducing military troops into conflict in most situations and to remove troops within sixty days if Congress did not approve of the action. The negative lessons of Vietnam arguably underlie Congressional assertiveness in foreign and security policy throughout the Ford and Carter administrations as well (Sundquist 1981).

A second example of a historical case affecting parliament’s role in security policy comes from the Netherlands. Former Member of Parliament Jan Hoekema writes that the trauma of the Srebrenica disaster, in which Dutch troops were unable to protect a UN ‘safe haven’, meant that ‘questions like “what are the lessons learned?”, or “what should we do differently next time?” dominated the Dutch discussion on what conclusions could be drawn from the failure’ (Hoekema 2004: 74). At first, the government blocked a parliamentary initiative that would require parliament to approve military missions, but the executive finally agreed to this parliamentary demand in 2000 with a change in the constitution (Hoekema 2004). According to Hoekema (2004: 75),

‘The deeply sobering impact of the Srebrenica events has had a lasting effect on the way parliamentary debate has been and will be organised. The famous words of “lessons learned” were applicable, and the UNPROFOR experience has meant a watershed in many ways in Dutch politics in general and on peacekeeping in

particularly. The will to be the number one participant in peacekeeping, has given way to a sober review of the pros and cons of participation as parliamentary debate. This, at least, is a small positive aside to the drama of Srebrenica.’

Srebrenica’s effect on parliament’s role continued to affect Dutch deployments. In 2006, Dutch deployments of troops in Afghanistan were subject to delays and oversight by the Dutch parliament stemming from concerns to avoid another Srebrenica-like disaster (Saideman and Auerswald 2012).

The U.S. and Dutch examples suggest the effects of analogies on parliamentary influence may be a general phenomena, worthy of future research. These examples are consistent with Peters and Wagner’s (2014) cross-national statistical analysis of parliamentary war powers that found countries with an experience of loss in military conflicts and high casualty rates are more likely to have parliaments with veto power over troop deployment. They argue that,

‘Studies of public policy have demonstrated, policy failures in general create windows of opportunity for large-scale changes in policies and institutions ... As parliaments are the principal institutions in representative democracies through which executive power is controlled, strengthening them is an excellent way of tightening control over the executive after a major failure’ (Peters and Wagner 2014: 313).

These institutional reforms, we suggest, may have been created through learning and with the use of historical analogies.

Historical analogies may be the mechanism by which ‘critical junctures’, in the terminology of historical institutionalism, translate experience (such as military loss or other foreign policy failures) into procedural change. Historical institutionalism stresses the need to understand historical contingencies and path dependencies when trying to understand the development of political institutions (Pierson 2000; 2004). In the historical institutional approach, transformative change can happen at critical junctures, which create processes that can reform existing institutions. Critical junctures may be another part of the explanation for parliamentary influence, particularly for its evolution. In the UK case, Iraq may have served as a critical juncture that set in motion processes for institutional reform to enhance the role of

parliament (Strong 2014). From a historical analogy standpoint, however, critical junctures must be perceived, learned, and acted upon by agents. Furthermore, political agents may contest critical junctures, much as they contest historical analogies, and their meaning and influence on policymaking may not be linear, but instead ebb and flow while conditioned by other factors in the dynamic processes of policymaking.

Indeed, the strength of the historical analogy approach is its recognition of the agent, the agent's subjective understanding and the psychological limitations on the individual's information processing, and the importance of rhetoric and discourse in framing policy deliberation and setting parameters for what is possible. Applied to parliamentary influence in foreign policy, this approach sees the main actors – both ministers and legislators – as psychological and social actors working within institutional contexts, social actors who may see and use historical precedents in struggles over power and policy.

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¹ See 'Author' 2016 for a fuller discussion of these factors in the vote on Syria.

² This is a bizarre aspect of the vote. 490 MPs in total voted for a motion that left open the possibility of a second vote, which may have authorised the use of UK military force. But those 490 votes were divided between a government motion and

an opposition amendment. Both the PM and the leader of the opposition were in favour of keeping the possibility of using military force on the table and yet, following the vote, both were quick to declare publicly that such action was no longer an option.

³ See also Hemmer (1999), May (1973), Peterson (1997), Reiter (1996), Sylvan, Ostrom and Gannon (1994) and Sylvan and Thorson (1992). For an excellent and critical review of research on analogical reasoning in foreign policy, see Breuning (2003).

⁴ Analogical reasoning does not necessarily result in bad outcomes. Some have assessed Kennedy's use of World War I in the Cuban missile crisis, for example, as a case of good (conflict avoiding) use of lessons from a historical case (Breuning 2003). Siniver and Collins (2013) argue that the effective use of analogies may depend on the level of complexity in the leaders' thinking; see also Dyson and Preston (2007).

⁵ For a brief review of the psychological vs. strategic debate regarding analogies, see Siniver and Collins (2013).

⁶ Analogical reasoning is not the only type of mental processing. Individuals can also engage in explanation-based and model-based reasoning (Breuning 2003; Sylvan, Ostrom, and Gannon 1994).

⁷ We are grateful to one of the reviewers for this observation.