

MATRIX ADAPTATION FOR MODERN CHALLENGES: NUCHECHTERLIEN'S ROLE IN NATIONAL INTEREST RESEARCH

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Original scientific paper

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Abstract: Donald Nuechterlein's matrix for researching the intensity of national interest holds a pivotal position in the field of national interest research within international relations and security sciences. Widely adopted, this matrix serves as a fundamental tool for theorists, either in its original form or with various modifications tailored to enhance precision in measuring investigated phenomena. This paper presents both Nuechterlein's original matrix and several of its adaptations.

The primary contribution of this paper lies in the author's modification of the matrix, resulting in the creation of a tailored analytical framework for investigating national security issues. By incorporating the parameter of internal

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stability of homeland, this adapted matrix becomes particularly adequate for examining a state's national security policy. The recognition that national interest encompasses both internal and external dimensions, related to the political stability and order of the state as well as its international position and security, underscores the paper's significance. This enhanced matrix offers researchers and policymakers a more comprehensive tool for nuanced analyses of national security concerns.

Keywords: national interest, security, security science

Introduction

In accordance with Rosenau's perspective, the examination of the foreign policies that precipitated the Second World War served as a catalyst for the intensified study of the national interest. During that historical epoch, realist theorists played a pivotal role in shaping the discourse, emphasizing distinct facets of the national interest. Rosenau, having scrutinized the works of these realist scholars, discerned a critical dichotomy within the concept of national interest, notably distinguishing between its role as an analytical concept and its function as a tool for political action. This conceptual distinction, identified by Rosenau, stands out as one of the most significant contributions to the understanding of national interest, highlighting its dual nature as both a theoretical construct and a practical instrument guiding political decision-making. "As an analytic tool, it is employed to describe, explain, or evaluate the sources or the adequacy of a nation's foreign policy. As an instrument of political action, it serves as a means of justifying, denouncing, or proposing policies" (Rosenau, 1968:34). Rosenau's differentiation between the theoretical application and practical utilization of the national interest marks a key divergence between the scholarly discourse surrounding this term and its application in political practice. Undoubtedly, the national interest has a historical legacy of serving as a tool for political action, a point emphasized by Charles Bird (Beard, 1934), who cautioned against its frequent and sometimes

indiscriminate use in everyday political rhetoric. This common usage has, at times, obscured the inherent analytical value of the concept. Some research endeavors have faced scrutiny, with challenges to their scientific contributions when employing the national interest to describe and elucidate the origins of states' preferences or to evaluate their individual strategies and courses of action.

Despite these challenges, theorists have exhibited unwavering determination and persistence in their research efforts to demonstrate the national interest's utility as an analytical framework for studies in national security and foreign policy. This resilience has ensured that the national interest continues to occupy a preeminent position among research questions, reflecting its enduring significance and the ongoing quest to refine its application both as a theoretical construct and as a practical guide in political decision-making.

Conceptualization of national interest in security science

The conceptualization of the national interest within the theoretical framework of international relations and security sciences has divergent outcomes contingent upon the methodological orientation and scholarly commitment of analyticals. The initiation of the scientific discourse pertaining to the determination of national interest can be traced back to the realist tradition, particularly driven by Hans Morgenthau's seminal contributions.

Realist theorists, including but not limited to Morgenthau, have undertaken extensive examinations of the national interest. Nevertheless, consensus remains elusive within this theoretical paradigm regarding the precise objectives to be pursued through the national interest. Morgenthau posits power as the ultimate goal, while Aron emphasizes the satisfaction of the state, and Waltz underscores the imperative of state survival (Trifunović, Ćurčić, 2021).

This ongoing debate transcends the confines of realism and permeates into other theoretical frameworks, prominently within liberalism and social constructivism. The concept of national interest has found resonance within the liberal tradition, notably within the domain of neoliberal institutionalism spearheaded by Robert Keohane. This perspective underscores the significance of institutional collaboration in comprehending national interests (Keohane, 1984). Specifically, it emphasizes the analysis of a state's participation in international organizations and cooperation with other states in the pursuit of realizing national interests and fortifying national security. Additionally, it acknowledges the substantial impact exerted by international organizations in the (re)configuration of a state's national interests.

The constructivist paradigm plays an important role in the conceptualization of the national interest by situating it within broader social relations, wherein the state outlines its objectives not only based on material necessities but also through social interactions. Social constructivism, as a theoretical framework, directs attention towards comprehending the processes through which national interests are articulated. Rather than elucidating the reasons behind actors' choices, the primary objective is to delineate the mechanisms through which these actors shape and adapt their identity, as well as their understanding of the world. In essence, social constructivism delves into the complexity of how actors define their interests within the realm of security, emphasizing the dynamic nature of identity formation and the interpretative frameworks through which interests are construed and redefined.

The improvement of the conceptualization and operationalization of the national interest, along with the systematization of knowledge in this domain, owes much to the contributions of theorists who defy easy classification within specific theoretical orientations. These scholars, in addressing the research topic, undertake significant efforts to establish a robust conceptual framework, delineate levels of generality, and

clarify correlations between key concepts. In particular, they contribute to the scientific community by creating typologies of national interest, a phenomenon evident in the copious scientific works replete with references to theorists such as Joseph Frankel (Frankel, 1970) and Donald Nuechterlein (Nuechterlein, 1976, 2001).

Donald Nuechterlein's matrix, designed for analyzing the intensity of national interests, stands out as one of the most frequently used tools in national interest research. Through a nuanced analysis of the weighted elements of choice, decision-makers can more effectively evaluate their interests. This framework posits that the national interests are not a mere aggregation of needs; rather, it underscores the nuanced nature of interest determination. It suggests that a multitude of marginal interests should not override vital interests. Recognizing the inherent logical connection between interests and values, Nuechterlein identifies eight critical factors that decision-makers must consider when evaluating each situation. This approach facilitates a comprehensive assessment, acknowledging the intricate interplay between interests and values in decision-making processes.

The intensity of national interests according to Donald Nuechterlein

It is noteworthy to highlight the significant contribution of Donald Nuechterlein to the elucidation of national interest as an analytical framework in research. His seminal work, "National Interests and Foreign Policy: A Conceptual Framework for Analysis and Decision Making" published in 1976, stands as essential reading for security and international relations theorists engaged in the exploration of the national interest.

For scholars and researchers in the field of security studies, Nuechterlein's work represents a critical resource, offering a nuanced perspective that continues to influence the ongoing discourse on national interest, foreign policy, and decision-making processes. In this paper, Nuechterlein proposes his

definition of national interest: “the national interest is the perceived needs and desires of one sovereign state in relation to other sovereign states comprising the external environment” (Nuechterlein, 1976:247). This definition represents a good starting point for further study of national interest as an analytical concept. The definition itself does not provide any particular guidance to help the decision-maker or theorist identify national interests. For this reason, Nuechterlein proposes the division of national interests into four basic needs and requirements, which represent the foundation of every foreign policy of states. Nuechterlein calls them basic national interests, and those are: defense, economic, world order and ideological interests (Nuechterlein, 1976:248). The conceptual division of basic national interests, as articulated in this manner, seeks to illustrate the existence of multiple interest types vying for precedence. Importantly, these interests are not mutually exclusive; rather, a delicate balance must be struck among them, necessitating a process of compromise. This framework recognizes the nuanced interplay and potential conflicts among various national interests, emphasizing the imperative for decision-makers to navigate and reconcile competing priorities in the pursuit of a harmonized national agenda. In addition to identifying four basic national interests, Nuechterlein draws attention to the fact that it is also necessary to determine “the intensity of feelings that leaders have in specific international issues” (Nuechterlein, 1976:248).

For this reason, Nuechterlein proposes the use of a non-parametric scale, in which values are described in descending order of importance. By introducing a scale that outlines the hierarchy of importance, Nuechterlein seeks to offer a more comprehensive framework for evaluating the depth of leaders' commitment to specific international issues. This classification system allows for more detailed analysis, enabling researchers and policymakers to consider the nuanced variations in the intensity of national interests within the broader conceptual framework. The following parameters are involved: survival

issues, vital issues, major issues, peripheral issues (Nuechterlein, 1976: 249-250).

In formulating the matrix, Donald Nuechterlein aimed to systematize and categorize the national interests of major powers while quantifying their intensity. The matrix also served as a tool for assessing potential allies and adversaries. Through this approach, Nuechterlein sought to bring coherence to a multitude of data and facts, offering a fresh perspective on the intricate dynamics of national interests.

However, despite Nuechterlein's efforts to create measurable and precise categories through the operationalization of concepts, the process of filling in the matrix involves a subjective assessment of belonging to these categories. As a result, different analysts may arrive at divergent results. This subjective component in determining and evaluating categorization represents a potential weakness of the entire paradigm. The interpretive nature of assigning values within the matrix introduces an element of subjectivity, influencing the outcomes and potentially affecting the reliability and consistency of the analysis. Recognizing and addressing this inherent subjectivity is crucial for maintaining the robustness and accuracy of the analytical framework.

Indeed, Donald Nuechterlein has demonstrated remarkable consistency in his academic and theoretical contributions to the study of national interest. An examination of his book "America Recommitted: A Superpower Assesses Its Role in a Turbulent World" published in 2001, reveals that, despite a quarter-century lapse since the inception of his first matrix, the core conceptual framework remained largely unchanged. This stability attests to Nuechterlein's enduring commitment to his theoretical perspectives.

It is noteworthy that the geopolitical landscape underwent significant transformations during this period. In the initial matrix from 1976, formulated during a bipolar international system, Nuechterlein identified ideological interests as basic.

However, as the structure of the international system evolved, so did Nuechterlein's matrix. The conceptual shift was evident in the replacement of ideological interests with what he called *promotion of values*. This shift reflects the changing dynamics of the international system and Nuechterlein's adaptability in updating his analytical framework to align with contemporary geopolitical realities.

By formulating and subsequently adapting the matrix, Nuechterlein seeks to mitigate the inherent arbitrariness in the ratings arising from the subjectivity of political decision-makers. In essence, he seeks to examine national interests with as much objectivity as possible by employing predefined categories and factors within the matrix. This approach is a conscious effort to address the limitations introduced by the subjective perspectives of policy makers.

Acknowledging the imperative for caution due to the inherent subjectivity in political decision-making, Nuechterlein's National Interest Intensity Matrix, either in its original form or with adaptations, emerges as one of the most widely utilized tools on national interests' research. Its utility lies in providing a systematic and structured framework that aims to bring objectivity to the analysis of national interests, offering researchers a valuable tool for navigating the complexities of international relations and foreign policy analysis. Despite the challenges posed by subjectivity, Nuechterlein's matrix remains an influential and prominent resource in the field of national interest research, either on its own or when integrated with other analytical tools.

A Review of Historical Applications of the Nuechterlein Matrix in National Security

Nuechterlein's matrix for analyzing the intensity of national interests has gained widespread recognition as a valuable tool in the research of various security phenomena. To address diverse research questions, researchers frequently tailor and adapt the matrix according to the specific country whose national

interests are being investigated. This adaptability underscores the matrix's versatility and applicability across different geopolitical contexts, enabling researchers to customize it based on the unique characteristics and priorities of the country in focus.

Macnamara and Fitzgerald emphasize a preliminary political step before employing Nuechterlein's matrix for analyzing the intensity of national interests. According to their perspective, this initial step involves the articulation of national goals and values, essentially the identification of national interests. Before engaging with the matrix, a clear understanding and articulation of a nation's overarching objectives and values are deemed essential (Macnamara, Fitz-Gerald, 2002:16). Macnamara and Fitzgerald posit that, when tailored to Canadian conditions, the Nuechterlein Matrix serves as a valuable framework for national security research in Canada. They contend that this adapted matrix goes beyond merely explaining the interests at risk in a given situation; rather, it proves useful for assessing the level and adequacy of responses. Moreover, they view the matrix as a model for fostering communication among diverse government stakeholders and the Canadian public (Macnamara, Fitz-Gerald, 2002:16).

Also, this matrix was used to research some special types of national interests. Thus, Shaw used this matrix to research the connection between energy security and national interests, that is, he adapted it to become a framework for researching energy national interests (Shaw, 2009:18-19). The Nuechterlein matrix can be combined with other research tools, as demonstrated by a group of authors from the Bulgarian Defense Institute, among others. They tried to develop an approach that prioritizes the national interests of EU member states by combining the Nuechterlein matrix, the Delphi technique and the Analytical Hierarchy Process (Bozhilova et al, 2020: 55-83).

In the literature, we can find adaptations of the matrix in the form of changing the categories in the column of basic national interests, while the order of intensity of interest remains

unchanged. We find such an adaptation of the matrix in the work of Dimitrijević and Lipovac. In order to adapt Nuechterlein's matrix to research the national interests of small states, they suggest that interests of the world order be replaced by regional interests, because small states do not have a global reach of power, but at best can influence relations in the region and be affected by regional problems (Dimitrijevic, Lipovac, 2017:76).

This modified matrix was used by the research of the national interests of the Republic of Serbia through a qualitative analysis of the exposés of the government representatives from 2007 to 2017. As an argument for using exposés as a data source for content analysis, they stated the following: "1) exposés provide more content for analysis, 2) cover a wider time frame, 3) cover more political actors, i.e. decision makers who operationalize national security policy/policies, and they can also contain comments on the policies of previous governments, 4) they are more sensitive to political changes and the relationship of political forces in the country, than strategic documents, and 5) they provide insight into specific regional and global problems at a given moment" (Dimitrijević & Lipovac, 2017: 78 according to Lipovac & Dimitrijević 2015:102-103). The paper analyzed eight exposés, presented by five representatives of the government, so it is possible to follow the consistency and changes, both with specific representatives who had two exposés each, and in the context of the continuity of state policy.

A Modified Nuechterlein Matrix Approach to National Security Policy Analysis

Nuechterlein's theoretical argumentation emphasizes that the mentioned matrix serves as a valuable tool specifically for political decision-makers and policymakers in assessing the potential threat to vital interests in international relations. The primary focus is on assessing the intensity of interests within the sphere of foreign policy, making it less applicable to

internal policy issues. The matrix is not designed for analyzing issues such as the fight against corruption, crime, demography, or the improvement of living standards. This limitation arises from the original matrix's emphasis on defense and economic interests, who are primary related to the protection of the state from threats posed by other states or enhancing the state's well-being in relation to other states.

Consequently, the original matrix does not provide the analytical space for comprehensively examining the entire spectrum of phenomena associated with national interests related to the internal stability and security of the state. To address this gap, further adaptation of the matrix is required if researchers aim to apply it to issues within the purview of internal stability and security. This recognition underscores the need for flexibility and adjustment in analytical frameworks to suit the specific context and nature of the phenomena under investigation.

The suggestion to incorporate a category addressing internal stability among the basic interests in the matrix is insightful, particularly in the context of national security research. Internal stability is recognized as a critical aspect of national security, influencing the character of institutions, actions, and moral values of political actors. This dimension complements the traditional focus of the matrix on defense against external threats by emphasizing the significance of social and political factors in maintaining a secure and resilient nation (Cvetković, 2019:88).

The rationale that internal social balance and justice are fundamental to defense against external attacks aligns with a longstanding axiom in political thinking and action. Acknowledging the interdependence of internal and external security, the proposed inclusion of internal stability as a basic interest highlights the holistic nature of national security (Ćurčić, 2023:143). By incorporating this category, the matrix could provide a more comprehensive framework for analyzing

and prioritizing national interests, encompassing both external defense considerations and internal stability concerns (Table 1).

This adapted matrix, with the inclusion of internal stability as a fundamental interest, expands the scope to encompass the diverse facets of a nation's well-being. By incorporating both internal and external considerations, it offers a more complete and integrated framework for policymakers and researchers to assess and prioritize national interests. This approach aligns with the contemporary understanding that national security is a multifaceted concept requiring a holistic examination that goes beyond traditional military and defense perspectives.

Table 1: Modified Nuechterlein matrix for the analysis of national interests as a category of national security (Ćurčić, 2023:144)

National interest	Survival	Vital	Major	Peripheral
Internal stability of homeland				
Defense of homeland				
Economic well-being				
Favorable world order				
Promotion of values				

Conclusion:

Nekterlein's comprehensive conceptual framework not only provides a theoretical foundation for the understanding of national interest but also serves as a practical guide for analysis and decision-making in the realm of foreign policy. The work has become a cornerstone in the literature on national security, offering insights into the intricacies of evaluating and prioritizing national interests.

Constructing the national interest as a pivotal category within the field of security science inherently incorporates both internal and external dimensions. Internally, it is intricately tied to the political stability and order of the state. Externally, it bears significance in relation to the international position of the state and contributes to considerations of national security. This dual nature underscores the multifaceted character of the national interest, as it simultaneously reflects the state's internal dynamics and its positioning within the broader international context. The recognition of this inherent duality is crucial for a comprehensive understanding of the complexities associated with the national interest in the realm of security studies.

This paper introduces a modified Nekterlein matrix designed to offer a comprehensive framework for analyzing national interests with a focus on both internal and external dimensions of national security. By incorporating internal stability as a basic interest, the matrix seeks to provide a holistic understanding of a nation's well-being. The paper argues that this approach aligns with contemporary perspectives on national security, emphasizing the interconnected nature of internal and external considerations. Through this adapted matrix, policymakers and researchers gain a more integrated tool for assessing and prioritizing national interests, contributing to the development of effective and nuanced national security policies.

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