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**The Domestic and Decisionmaking Turn in IR Theory:  
A Foreign Policy Analysis Perspective<sup>1</sup>**

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ABSTRACT

Over the last 25 years there has been a noteworthy turn across major IR theories to include domestic politics and decisionmaking factors. Neoclassical realism, and variants of liberalism and constructivism, for example, have incorporated state motives, perceptions, domestic political institutions, public opinion, and political culture. These theoretical developments, however, have largely ignored decades of research in Foreign Policy Analysis (FPA) on how domestic political and decision-making factors affect actors' choices and policies. This continues the historical disconnect between FPA and "mainstream" IR, resulting in contemporary IR theories that are considerably underdeveloped. This article revisits the reasons for this separation and demonstrates the gaps between IR theory and FPA research. I argue that that a distinct FPA perspective, one that is psychologically-oriented and agent-based, can serve as a complement, a competitor, and an integrating crucible for the cross-theoretical turn toward domestic politics and decision-making in IR theory.

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Current International Relations (IR) theory is marked by a paradox concerning the role of domestic politics and decision-making: domestic politics and decision-making are simultaneously everywhere and nowhere. On the one hand, recent developments in realism, liberalism, and constructivism have incorporated domestic level and psychological factors. Compared to twenty years ago, domestic political and decision-making concepts are very much part of contemporary IR theory and theory-informed empirical investigations. On the other hand, much of IR theory ignores or violates decades of research in foreign policy analysis (FPA) on how domestic political and decision-making factors affect actors' choices and policies.

The disconnect between FPA and IR theory is not new and there are many reasons for it. But as IR theory increasingly incorporates domestic and decision-making factors, it makes sense to revisit this disengagement. Domestic and decision-making factors and conceptions of agency are under-theorized and under-developed in contemporary IR theory. If FPA research continues to be excluded (or self-excluded) from "mainstream" IR approaches, it is to the detriment of IR theory, FPA, and our understanding of international politics.

This article begins with the observation that FPA is not typically acknowledged as part of "IR theory," despite the increasing role that domestic politics and decision-making (the domain of most FPA research) plays in prominent theorizing. I then summarize the development of IR theory's attention to domestic politics and decision-making, focusing on neoclassical realism, liberalism's democratic peace thesis and related institutional perspectives, and constructivist attention to culture, identity, and norms. With each of these theoretical perspectives, I show ways in which FPA research challenges or

enhances the treatment of domestic and decision-making factors. In this regard, I develop a critical analysis of the domestic politics and decision-making turn in IR theory.

I conclude by arguing that FPA offers more than complementarity (although this in itself would be a viable role for FPA to play). A psychologically-oriented and agent-based FPA also offers an alternative, but not necessarily superior, perspective on international relations. This perspective, or approach, stresses the role of the central decision-making unit and the subjective understandings of leaders as funnels for other international and domestic factors. This perspective is not only a distinct ontological orientation to understanding international politics; it can integrate IR theories that currently focus on different aspects of domestic politics and decision-making. While others have recently called for more dialogue between FPA and specific IR theories (e.g. Houghton, 2007) and there are long-standing, existing critiques of IR theories, this essay differs by looking at the connection across a set of theories, beyond bilateral engagements and appraisals of single theories. I highlight that the trend toward incorporating domestic and decision-making factors is occurring *across* IR theories. This development is noteworthy for the field as a whole and I explore how this is happening, how different theories are following distinct trajectories in their turn toward domestic politics and decision-making, and how FPA can steer this turn.

This essay is meta-theoretical and seeks to develop theoretical and conceptual understanding about world politics. This purpose stands in contrast to calls for “the end of IR theory”, by which most mean an end to distracting inter-paradigmatic debate between incommensurable “camps” that do not further knowledge. I do not advocate a return to the “paradigm wars” of the past, although those debates did facilitate theory

development and guide research (Jackson and Nexon 2013). Consistent with contributions to the special issue on “The End of IR Theory” in the *European Journal of International Relations*, I see theoretical development as a worthwhile endeavor for the discipline, alongside theory testing. The ‘isms’ of IR are heuristics for intra-disciplinary communication and meta-theoretical questions underpin all research (see Bennett 2013; Dunne, Hansen, and Wight 2013; Mearsheimer and Walt 2013; Reus-Smith). As Bennett notes: “IR theory cannot sidestep meta-theoretical debates” (2013: 461). Reus-Smit remarks: “one can bracket meta-theoretical inquiry, but this does not free one’s work, theoretical or otherwise, of meta-theoretical assumptions” (2013: 590). I address theoretical assumptions across the mainstream IR approaches that continue to inform scholarly activity and situates FPA vis-à-vis recent theoretical developments.

### **FPA: Subfield and Perspective**

FPA is a vibrant subfield of IR with roots in the 1950s (see Hudson, 2005, for review). Kubáľková offers a comprehensive definition:

FPA refers to a complex, multilayered process, consisting of the objectives that governments pursue in their relations with other governments and their choice of means to attain these objectives....Thus foreign policy encompasses the complicated communications within governments and amongst its diverse agents, plus the perceptions and misperceptions, the images of other countries, and the ideologies and personal dispositions of everyone involved. An important part of the study of foreign policy has been the nature and impact of domestic politics (Kubáľková ,2001a:17-18).

Key areas of research have long pedigrees and remain vibrant areas of research (Hudson 2005). These include: (1) individual- and small group-level psychological factors in foreign policy decision-making; (2) variation in institutional decision-making processes;

and (3) elite-mass relations. While FPA is a large tent, home to a wide range of substantive, methodological, and theoretical orientations, FPA research tends to focus on explaining governments' foreign policy decisions through specified factors at multiple levels of analysis.<sup>2</sup>

I conceptualize FPA in two ways. First, FPA is *a subfield, or area of research*. As a subfield, FPA's parameters are fairly identifiable, following Kubáľková's definition above. FPA includes scholarship that has foreign policy processes or behaviors as the explicit explanandum and domestic and decision-making factors as the starting place for explanations. FPA research does not, by definition, ignore external factors – much of the research in this area takes seriously the difference between domestic policy and foreign policy. Research on the role of public opinion in foreign policy, for example, examines the distinctive characteristics of the public's views on policy involving interactions with actors and conditions outside a state's borders. FPA research on images, identities and national roles focuses on self or ego relations vis-à-vis external 'others' or alters. But attention to domestic politics or decisionmaking is an essential characteristic of FPA research – FPA scholarship does not 'black-box' the state, although the focus of internal dynamics varies considerably within FPA.

As with any area of research, the boundaries of FPA are not hard-shelled or hermetically sealed. Scholarship often situates itself simultaneously in FPA and in other subfields, such as security studies, human rights, or international organizations. And not

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<sup>2</sup> I do not include the full range of FPA literature here. Excluded is more rationalist work in FPA as I focus on the psychologically-oriented research that challenges rationality assumptions.

all who work within FPA parameters self-identify as such, but many do and FPA has the typical organizational features (i.e. a section in the International Studies Association, a journal) that support and distinguish it as an independent subfield. Conceptualizing FPA as an area of research, this article examines the way in which the domestic and decision making turn in IR theories (notably realism, liberalism, and constructivism) ignores work in this area and how FPA challenges some of these developments and offers a bridge across the varied directions IR theories towards which are turning.

The second way of conceptualizing FPA is as a *distinct perspective or approach*. This conceptualization is more narrow and psychologically-based, drawing on Hudson's essentialist statement that FPA has "an actor-specific focus, based upon the argument that all that occurs between nations and across nations is grounded in human decision makers acting singly or in groups" (Hudson, 2005:1). This is not to say that FPA offers a single theory, but this makes it no different than contemporary constructivist, liberal or realist perspectives. As a perspective, FPA stresses the role of the central decision-making unit and the subjective understandings of leaders as funnels for other international and domestic factors, including the institutional and societal factors in the broader FPA subfield. It is a much more parsimonious than FPA as a subfield, in that the subjective understandings of leaders are the single factor through which all others flow. The FPA approach operates from this different assumption and therefore has a distinct starting point for understanding and explaining international relations. In the conclusion, I use this conceptualization of FPA to argue that FPA is a *sui generis* IR perspective with a distinct beginning point for understanding international politics. This perspective can

contribute to and bridge theoretical developments occurring across the study of international politics.

### **The FPA-IR Disconnect**

Despite its long history of research and the large number of IR scholars who identify with FPA, the FPA subfield is often seen as marginal to the ‘grand’ IR theoretical debates. If IR textbooks are a proxy for the field, many introductory and IR theory texts (e.g. Baylis, Smith, and Owens 2011; Burchill et al., 2009; Sterling-Folker, 2013) and specific textbooks on security studies, international political economy, and international organizations do not address FPA research and rarely offer domestic politics and decision-making explanations as part of the theoretical terrain for understanding international politics.<sup>3</sup> Brown’s (2013) recent review of contemporary IR theories makes no mention of FPA. University courses on IR theory rarely dedicate much time and space in syllabi to domestic politics and decision-making.

In 1986, Smith asked if FPA as a “distinct (if eclectic) approach to the study of foreign policy has anything to offer other than footnotes to grand theories of international relations or historical case studies?” (Smith, 1986: 13). Over twenty years later, Houghton reiterated the point that FPA has a “persistent ‘minority status’ within IR: it has not fully engaged with the rest of the discipline and does not appear to fit anywhere

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<sup>3</sup> Of these, international political economy (IPE) is the subfield that incorporates domestic political factors (mainly institutions and principal-agent relations) the most, but there is little cross-fertilization between IPE and FPA scholarship. See Vertzberger 2002 for the missed connection between FPA and IPE.



within the framework of the contemporary debates going on in IR.” (Houghton, 2007:26). More recently, Flanik agrees: “FPA is often treated indifferently by nonpractioners and lacks its own chapter in most IR textbooks, which shoehorn it into approaches (realism and liberalism) that – at best – fit awkwardly with FPA’s focus on decision makers” (Flanik, 2011:1). What explains this disconnect between FPA and IR? The primary reasons, in my opinion, clearly lie with the historical development of the IR discipline, the evolution of and problems in the FPA subfield itself, misperceptions of FPA research, and a belief that FPA and IR are, and should be, separate enterprises. Here, I address each of these reasons for the disconnect between IR and FPA, as a subfield.<sup>4</sup>

The birth of IR as a distinct field of study was very much affected by realism, the then-dominant IR theory. Realism foundationally asserted that international politics, due to the condition of anarchy, differed from domestic politics. Although early realists such as Morgenthau and Herz advanced political realism and realist concepts of interests and the security dilemma as a theory to explain all politics, the degree of anarchy in the international system created very different, Hobbesian dynamics compared to domestic politics (Herz, 1950; Morgenthau, 1946). Classical realism acknowledged that statesmen need to cultivate domestic support for legitimacy, but it also cautioned leaders to ignore fickle publics that led them away from national interests. More generally, early realists argued that because external threats are the primary danger to states, politics stopped at the water’s edge for the sake of state survival (Lippmann, 1922; Morgenthau, 1946).

This separation of domestic and international politics continued. According to

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<sup>4</sup> For discussions of the FPA-IR relationship, see Carlsnaes, 2002; and Kubáľková, 2001b; and Smith, 1986.

Schmidt:

To determine how and why the deeply entrenched analytical distinction between domestic and international politics took hold, we need to turn to the disciplinary history of political science. Within the field of IR, the presumed differences demarcating domestic and international politics gradually became cemented first under Kenneth Waltz's levels of analysis schema introduced in the 1950s, and then in terms of his distinction between reductionist and systemic theories that have informed the field ever since the publication of *Theory of International Politics* in 1979....[A] gradual division arose between those studying domestic politics on the one hand, and international politics on the other (Schmidt, 2002:25).

Early on, FPA's focus on domestic cultures, institutions, decision-making, and the psychological milieu (Rosenau, 1966; Snyder, Bruck, and Sapin, 1954; Sprout and Sprout, 1956) were seen closer to the study of comparative politics or public policy (Smith, Hadfield, and Dunne, 2008). The trajectories of FPA and IR continued along very different parallels. As foreign policy researchers first searched for a grand theory of comparative foreign policy (Rosenau, 1968) and then delved into the micro-processes of organizational and psychological making (<sup>1</sup> e.g., Allison, 1971; Jervis, 1976), Waltz's structural realism specifically excluded a theory of foreign policy as part of neo-realist theory (Waltz, 1979, 1986). IR theorists largely ignored his call for a supplementary theory of foreign policy, focusing instead on systemic characteristics. This was not unique to realism. Liberalism morphed from Keohane and Nye's complex interdependence, which incorporated internal factors, to neo-liberalism, which assumed

unitary and rational actors (Keohane and Nye, 1977; Keohane, 1984).<sup>5</sup> Wendtian constructivism is also largely systemic in its approach to international politics. Although Wendt argues that structures only have effects based upon agents' attributes and interactions, he clearly states that "like Waltz, I am interested in international politics, not foreign policy" (Wendt, 1999:11). In sum, by the end of the 1980s, constructivism, liberalism, and realism largely divorced international politics from domestic politics and decision-making.

Weaknesses and proclivities within the FPA subfield also help explain its distance from IR theory. Rosenau, in his launch of the study of comparative foreign policy, eschewed deductive theorizing for 'pre-theory' and a positivist, inductive, quantitative search for general patterns, causal laws, and a grand theory of foreign policy (Rosenau 1966, 1968). When a grand theory did not materialize, the comparative foreign policy project was pronounced dead. Much FPA research in late 1970s and 1980s focused on single country, single case studies and islands of middle-range theories, with little cross-fertilization, accumulation of knowledge, or attempted connections to IR.<sup>6</sup> Efforts to redefine the subfield in the 1980s and 1990s did not seriously engage with IR (e.g. Hermann, Kegley, and Rosenau, 1987; Neack, Hey, and Haney, 1995). Many theoretically-minded FPA researchers grew weary of their challenges to neo-realism falling on seemingly deaf ears, and turned to engage, arguably more productively, with

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<sup>5</sup>. Other versions of liberalism, however, did not adopt the unitary actor assumption (see Moravcsik, 1997).

<sup>6</sup> For discussions of this period of decline and self-reflection, see Carlsnaes, 2002; Hudson, 2005; Smith, 1986; and Vertzberger 2002.

psychologists within the interdisciplinary field of political psychology.

With its inward-looking orientation, the FPA subfield missed key opportunities to connect with IR theory. In the 1990s, FPA largely overlooked the neo-institutionalist turn in liberalism, despite shared concerns with political institutions (Vertzberger, 2002). Similarly, FPA failed to grasp the significance of the constructivist-ideational turn, despite common concerns with ideas and discourse. FPA scholars did eventually engage constructivism (e.g. Kubáľková, 2001a), but there was considerable lag in its response, missing chances to influence formative constructivist research agendas. Finally, FPA generally did not attempt to connect to work in IPE, new security studies, or new research on ethics in IR.

A third reason for the FPA-IR disconnect is perceptions that many IR theorists have about FPA research. These will be covered more directly below, in relation to specific IR theories, so I will simply note them here. First, FPA is often seen as excessively individualistic, with little or no social or inter-subjective component. Second, FPA is often seen as “ultra”-positivist, not fitting with the “thin” positivist epistemologies of some IR theories. Third, FPA is criticized for offering an unparsimonious laundry list of variables, not a single theory. I return to each of these in later sections. For now, the point is that these perceptions continue to divide FPA from IR theory and that addressing any misconceptions is important if FPA and IR are to engage more directly and fruitfully.

The fourth reason for the FPA-IR disconnect is what I call the “division of labor” argument. This is related to Waltz’s insistence on separating a theory of foreign policy from a theory of international politics, but it is not necessarily a realist argument; it is

broader and transcends a particular theory. The basic idea is that theories of foreign policy are ontologically-oriented toward explaining discrete behaviors, or as Waltz put it, “why state X made a certain move last Tuesday” (Waltz, 1979:121). IR theory, on the other hand, is oriented toward explaining systemic patterns (for instance, decline in great power wars, levels of protectionism in trade, changing norms for humanitarian intervention). Thus, the argument goes, there is a division of labor in IR research and a good, functional reason for the disconnect. As Waltz puts it: “economists get along quite well with separate theories of firms and markets. Students of international politics will do well to concentrate on, and make use of, separate theories of internal and external politics...” (Waltz, 1996: 57).

I have three responses to this claim. First, not all of IR theory is about general, systemic patterns. As Elman has demonstrated in detail, neorealists (including Waltz) consistently offer foreign policy explanations and predictions (Elman, 1996; see also Barkin, 2009; Fearon, 1998). Mearsheimer clearly states that his brand of neorealism is a theory of international outcomes and a theory of states’ foreign policy (Mearsheimer, 2001: 422, footnote 60). Moravcsik (1997) asserts the same with regard to liberalism (1997) and many constructivists apply their approach to foreign policy (Hopf, 2002; Katzenstein, 1996).

Second, FPA research is not necessarily tied to making pinpoint predictions or explaining specific choices. Most FPA studies are not idiographic accounts, but seek to contribute to our understanding of nomothetic trends. Schafer and Crichlow’s work on groupthink, for example, examines many cases of foreign policy to specify the conditions under which group, situational, and leadership factors facilitate high-quality decision-

making (Schafer and Crichlow 2010). Even studies of a single case typically seek to advance knowledge of general trends or repeating processes. Larson's (1985) work on the origins of U.S. containment policy and Khong's (1991) research on policy making in the Korean and Vietnamese wars, for example, draw broader implications on psychological decision-making dynamics that affect international conflict. While FPA abandoned, by the 1970s, the search for a grand, single theory of foreign policy, FPA research today is theoretically informed and orients itself to theory building and theory testing.

Third, discrete behaviors are not easily separated from systemic patterns, as patterns are rooted in discrete actions. As Goldgeier notes, "...a concern with developing a theory of international politics leads scholars to debate the structure of the international system and the resulting general patterns of interstate behavior. States interact, however, through their foreign policies." (Goldgeier, 1997:139). Moravcsik also makes the argument that "systemic predictions can follow from domestic theories of preferences." (Moravcsik, 1997:523). Bueno de Mesquita writes: "systems become bipolar or multipolar, balanced or unbalanced, nuclear or nuclear-free, polluted or clean, growing or contracting because of the interdependence among individual decisions. International politics are not...some predetermined exogenous fact of life...International politics are formed by the aggregated consequences of...individual and collective decisions." (Bueno de Mesquita, 2002:7).

This last point is, of course, connected to the relationship between agents and

structures. Although a detailed discussion of this debate is beyond this article's purview,<sup>7</sup> it is important to note here that the "division of labor" argument rests on a demarcation of agents and structures that is rejected by most contemporary IR theory. It is also rejected by the very roots of FPA. As Houghton has pointed out, Waltz's separation of foreign policy and international relations "would have made little sense" to Snyder and his colleagues with their focus on how agents define situations and structures (Houghton, 2007:41). FPA may indeed focus on agents' choices and behaviors (and this may be one of its limitations), but it sees these behaviors as acts that constitute all international interactions.

The growing attention to domestic politics and decision-making in IR theory (illustrated below) is a strong indication that many IR theorists are beyond this division of labor. If this ontological wall is dismantled, the disconnect between IR and FPA has no real justification, and serious engagement between FPA and IR should occur. There are beneficial reasons for engagement. FPA research has consistently shown the significance of domestic politics and decision-making to issues central to international politics, including international interventions, state cooperation in financial crises, regional dynamics, and nuclear proliferation. Many have suggested that FPA has much to offer IR theory with respect to preferences, motives, and agent-structure relationships (Breuning, 2011; Schafer and Walker, 2006). More generally, Carlsnaes argues that "the divide between domestic and international politics...is highly questionable as a feasible foundational baseline for a sub-discipline that needs to problematize this boundary."

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<sup>7</sup> For treatments of the relationship between the agent-structure debate and FPA, see Carlsnaes, 1992; Hill, 2003; and Kubálková, 2001b.

(Carlsnaes, 2002:342; see also Caparoso, 1997 and Hill 2013). Current IR theory does problematize this distinction and is increasingly incorporating domestic politics and decision-making factors. This move is happening, however, without much attention to or consistency with FPA research. Moreover, this turn is driving different IR theories in variant directions. FPA as a subfield and as a distinct perspective, while certainly not omnipotent or flawless, does offer a bridge across these developments.

### **The Domestic Politics and Decision-Making Turn in IR Theory**

One seminal piece of research that marks the turn away from the neo-liberal vs. neo-realist debate is Putnam's 1988 two-level game article. Putnam's argument that leaders stood at the intersection of international and domestic win-sets was not particularly surprising to FPA scholars, although it did offer a novel way of integrating levels of analysis. It also captured the attention of the larger IR community and re-focused some attention on domestic politics and decision-making (Gourevitch, 2002; Milner, 1997). Putnam's article came at a time when IR was experiencing other significant challenges and changes, including the constructivist turn, the 'Third Debate' (Lapid, 1989), and the rediscovery of liberalism in quantitative studies of the democratic peace. These developments brought attention to culture and identities, subjectivity, and domestic institutions.

The following sections discuss the role of domestic politics in three contemporary (post-1990) IR theoretical schools: liberalism, realism, and constructivism. A few caveats are important to note. First, I only focus on certain variants of these theories, as will become clear. Not all realists, liberals, or constructivists include domestic and



decision-making factors. Second, I generalize about these areas of research. Not all ignore FPA or get it wrong; there are exceptions that I note. I do believe, however, I capture important central tendencies in these research areas. Third, while arguably the most prominent, these theories do not represent the full range of “IR theory.” Although my main arguments might indeed apply to some versions of other theories (including neo-Marxist, post-colonial, and feminist perspectives, the English School), my scope here is limited to the IR theories chosen. Finally, while there is work on domestic politics and decision-making happening outside and across particular theoretical frameworks, my focus is on research within these three theoretical traditions.

### *Liberalism*

Current liberal theory is perhaps the most logical and expected place to find domestic political factors. Indeed, the importance of domestic institutions and public opinion is often folded into and presented only as part of liberalism in IR texts (e.g., Dunne, Kurki, and Smith, 2010). According to Doyle, “liberals pay more attention to domestic structures and individual differences than do realists.” (Doyle, 2008:59). This has not always been the case for liberal IR theory. Although Keohane and Nye’s (1977) liberalism in the form of “complex interdependence” included multiple channels for sub-state actors to influence states, Keohane (1984) later moved liberalism into its neo-liberal variant with assumptions of rationality and unitary actor in order to challenge realism on its own grounds. Liberal-inspired regime theory also did not directly incorporate domestic political variables (e.g., Krasner, 1983). In the 1990s, however, variants of liberalism (ideational, commercial, and republican) abandoned the unitary state

assumption. According to Moravcsik (1997), all versions of liberal IR theory assume that individuals and private groups are the fundamental actors in international politics. The suppositions made by liberalism about domestic politics and government decision-making, however, do not sit comfortably with much FPA research. In particular, assumptions of individual and group rational actions, states as mere transmission belts for domestic interests, and constraints on government policy by interest groups and the public (see Moravcsik, 1997: 517-518) are quite different from an FPA approach.

Research on the ‘democratic peace’ thesis certainly revived the role of domestic politics in liberalism, with institutions and public opinion and cultural values and norms as dominant explanations of dyadic peace (Dafoe, Oneal, and Russett, 2013; Debs and Goemans, 2010; Hayes, 2011; Lektzian and Souva, 2009; Maoz and Russett, 1993; Owen, 1994; Valentino, Huth, and Croco, 2010). How do liberal treatments of domestic and decision-making variables look from a FPA perspective? The first concern for many FPA researchers is the stark dichotomy drawn between democracies and non-democracies. This distinction assumes differences between them and uniformity within regime types. FPA scholarship, on the other hand, stresses differences within democracies and how these differences influence foreign policy making processes and outcomes (e.g., Hagan, 2001; Hagan and Hermann, 2002). For example, in their study on national restrictions in NATO military operations, Saideman and Auerswald (2012) find that a country’s particular institutional design (for instance, parliamentary vs. presidential, single party vs. coalition) explains the great variation in the number and type of conditions countries put on the use and activities of their troops in Afghanistan. This

variation in democratic design has critical implications for national credibility, alliance relationships, and the success of multilateral missions.

Although some democratic peace researchers have unpacked the category of democracies and democratic constraints on aggression, these studies have focused on institutional characteristics, assumed that institutional constraints are solely in the direction of peace, and generally not traced the underlying mechanisms that translate institutional constraints into peaceful decisions (e.g., Elman, 2000; Palmer, London, and Regan 2004). Foreign policy analysts would challenge these tendencies in this research (Kaarbo 2008; Clare 2010). Kaarbo (2012) in process-tracing case studies, found that when parliamentary systems ruled by coalition cabinets do act more peacefully, it is not necessarily because of a constraining voice for peace. Indeed, coalition partners with the blackmail potential to bring down the government often advocate more aggressive policies but fail to influence policy. This finding directly confronts assumptions in liberal democratic peace research.

Much research on the foreign policies of non-democracies would also challenge the assumption in liberalism that authoritarian leaders are unconstrained by and unaccountable to societal pressures (e.g., Hagan and Hermann 2002; Lawson 1984; Mendelson 1993). Hagan, for example, extensively reviews historical work on state behavior in the July 1914 crisis and concludes that “domestic political pressures were...profound for Germany and Russia....Pivotal decisions by William II (approving the ‘blank check’) and Nicholas II (approving mobilization) were motivated, in part, by the fear that domestic audiences would not tolerate another backing down in a major crisis” (Hagan, 2001: 20). Additional examples of domestic pressures affecting foreign

policies of non-democratic states comes from Telhami's (1993) study of Arab public opinion in the first Gulf War and research by Davies (2012) on Iranian diversionary tactics in its relations with the United States. Rosato's analyses support this point: "there is little evidence that democratic leaders face greater expected costs from fighting losing or costly wars and are therefore more accountable than their autocratic counterparts" (Rosato, 2003:594).

In reaction to work on democratic peace, many scholars have more recently taken up this FPA-consistent view that not all authoritarian systems are equally unconstrained. This work is not theoretically founded in liberalism but is connected to liberalism's assumption of differences in regime types. This research ranges from rationalist expectations that authoritarian leaders are motivated to survive and constrained by domestic audience costs and selectorates, to categorizations of types of authoritarian regimes, to those who examine leader age and prior experience (Bueno de Mesquita, et al. 2003; Debs and Goemans 2010; Horowitz, McDermott, and Stam 2005; Lai and Slater 2006; Weeks 2012). From an FPA perspective, however, the assumption of rationality is problematic and the focus on institutional variation overplays structure at the expense of agency. FPA would support the work on individual differences, but note that much of this research draws on a narrow set of leader characteristics (such as military experience, age), and misses the opportunity to build on richly diverse and broad research on leaders' styles, personalities, and beliefs. More generally, these studies typically do not trace the processes in which institutional dynamics or leadership styles translate into foreign policy. While many scholars working in this research area conclude with a call for

abandoning liberalism's dichotomy between democratic and non-democratic regimes, their focus on authoritarian regimes reifies this division.

Another major FPA criticism of democratic peace research concerns the assumption in the institutional explanation that public opinion influences leaders in democracies. Even recent democratic peace-inspired work that unpacks the role of audience costs, partisanship, information, support for war, and public threat perceptions assumes, and does not directly investigate, the impact that public support has on foreign policy (e.g., Horowitz and Levendusky 2011; Levendusky and Horowitz 2012; Tomz 2007; Tomz and Weeks, 2014). From the FPA perspective, the relationship between the public's views and elite choices is far from straight-forward. The previous "Almond-Lippman consensus" (consistent with realism), which holds that foreign policy elites are unconstrained by an apathetic, uninformed public with unstable views was challenged, particularly after the Vietnam War (for review, see Holsti 2002). Shifts in foreign policy public opinion, for example, may not stem from instability, but can be predictable and "rational" in that they respond to external cues (Mueller, 1973; Page and Shapiro, 1992). And while there is little evidence that the public has a high level of factual information about foreign policy, numerous studies have shown that the public's views are structured by underlying core values or orientations (e.g., Jenkins-Smith et al 2004; Wittkopf, 1987).

How much public opinion actually influences foreign policy (assumed in liberal democratic peace research) is still unanswered. We know that foreign issues are more important in voting than was once assumed, that foreign policy issues matter for evaluations of leaders' performance, and that public opinion and foreign policy are

significantly correlated (<sup>1</sup> e.g., Aldrich, Sullivan, and Borgida 1989; Holsti 2002). Case study research has also demonstrated that in the making of many decisions, leaders are both attentive and responsive to public opinion (e.g., Foyle 1997, 2004; Sobel 2001; Hayes 2012).

While this research in FPA does offer some support for the *assumption* in liberalism that democratic public opinion (and norms and values) can influence foreign policy via elites, other research challenges this supposition. Case studies show that in the making of many other decisions, leaders ignored or defied public opinion, even in democracies (e.g., Elman 1997; Fischer 1997). Kreps (2010), for example, demonstrates that unpopularity of the Afghanistan mission hardly affected NATO countries' troop commitments. Elite consensus, she argues, inoculated leaders from electoral punishment. And recent studies have focused on the success of leaders to manipulate public opinion to support their preferences (Shapiro and Jacobs, 2000). Rathbun, for instance, demonstrates that German leaders purposefully and effectively "set out to change the German public's approach to the use of force by gradually escalating the scale of participation" (Rathbun, 2004:90). Media and framing influences on opinion also challenge the notion that mass views are a stable and independent source of foreign policy (e.g., Baum and Potter, 2008; Boettcher and Cobb, 2006; Kull, Ramsay and Lewis 2003-04). Research on the influence of public opinion on foreign policy has turned toward investigations of intervening conditions that affect this relationship. Foyle (1997), 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. Dyson's (2006, 2007) studies of Tony Blair trace the prime minister's decisions to

override public opposition to the Iraq war to Blair's beliefs and personality traits. 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).

Overall, FPA research questions the assumption in liberalism that democratic institutions allow for public influence. Hayes notes that "structural approaches [to the democratic peace] *assume* the political dynamics that are so critical to their basic underpinnings," (Hayes, 2011:773 (italics in original) and, according to Houghton, "the societal-level image of 'democratic peace' theory leapfrogs over much of FPA, ignoring what goes on inside states." (Houghton, 2007: 25; see also Hayes, 2012). Rosato (2003) compiled a list of the key arguments against democratic peace assumptions: democratic publics are unlikely to constrain war proneness because the costs of war fall on a small subset; aversion to war may be overcome by nationalism; democratic leaders are as likely to lead as follow public opinion; there is little evidence that anti-war groups capture the decision-making process more than pro-war groups; there is no evidence that mobilization is slow in democracies (many leaders have bypassed constraints); and democracies are as capable of carrying out surprise attacks and not less able to conceal their intentions.

Some democratic peace theorists have incorporated the decision-making factor of perceptions in their theoretical framework. Owen, for example, argues that "history shows many cases where perceptions tripped up democratic peace....To determine which states belong to the pacific union, we must do more than simply examine their constitutions. We must examine how the liberals themselves define democracy" (Owen, 1994: 96-97). FPA would agree with this subjective conceptualization and decision

maker focus, but criticize this research for not explicitly theorizing and investigating how perceptions and their inherent biases and information processing tendencies unfold.<sup>8</sup> Research on leader perceptions by FPA scholars has taken up this challenge (e.g. Farnham, 2003; Schafer and Walker, 2006). But, as Hayes notes, “scholarly understanding of the mechanisms of the democratic peace remains uncertain” and “much work...remains to be done relating the psychological processes of leaders to the foreign and security policies of democracies.” (Hayes, 2011:782-83).

### *Constructivism*

The rise of constructivist perspectives in IR also brought more attention to domestic politics. Although some variants of constructivism focus on social construction of international politics and the importance of shared norms of appropriateness at the systemic level (e.g., Tannewald, 1999; Wendt, 1999;), other constructivists go inside states, attending to societal-level normative and ideational forces. Constructivist concepts of culture, identity, ideas, discourse, and roles for example, have been used to explain why the foreign policies of some states defy realist and liberal expectations (e.g., Banchoff, 1999; Barnett, 1999; Brysk, Parsons, and Sandholtz, 2002; Duffield, 1999; Hopf, 2002; Katzenstein, 1996). Constructivist discourse analyses focus on how meaning is constituted through language and often see language as residue of underlying cultural understandings and as powerful in its own right (e.g., Onuf, 1989; Weldes, 1996). More

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<sup>8</sup> For detailed reviews of the role of biases and information processing in foreign policy analysis, see Levy, 2000 and Vertzberger, 1990; for a psychological criticism of liberal neo-institutionalist claims, see Goldgier and Tetlock, 2000.



recently, constructivists have examined internal norm contestation and internalization (the special issue of *International Organization*, introduced by Checkel, 2005; Cortell and Davis 2005; Wiener 2007).

For many, the link between constructivism and FPA is natural, given constructivists' notions of agency and ideas. As Smith notes, "social construction starts from the assumption that actors make their worlds, and this assumption lies behind most of the foreign policy literature....Social construction and foreign policy analysis look made for one another." (Smith, 2001:38; see also Breuning, 2011; Houghton, 2007; Shannon, 2012). Kubáľková also notes that "the active mode of foreign policy expressed even in the term 'making'...resonates with the constructivists' stress on processes of social construction" (Kubáľková, 2001a:19).

Checkel agrees that constructivists and FPA scholars share "a strong focus on agency" (Checkel, 2008:74). He argues, however, that constructivism is not "simply warmed over FPA – highlighting only the dynamics the subfield discovered many years ago" (Checkel, 2008:74). Instead, Checkel sees key differences between constructivism and FPA – namely, constructivism's epistemological split between positivist and interpretive branches (contra FPA's "loose" positivist orientation) and constructivism's social focus (contra FPA's supposed individual focus). Checkel suggests that FPA sees actors as rational, even if bounded and asocial: "They decided alone, as it were. If they are instrumentally rational, individuals simply calculate in their heads; if they are boundedly rational, they look to organizations and routines for cues. In neither case is there any meaningful interaction with the broader social environment..." (Checkel, 2008:74).

Others (e.g. Goldstein and Keohane, 1993) have made similar comparisons between constructivism and FPA, and FPA is often characterized as ultra-positivist, individualist, and asocial. Many in FPA, however, would reject these general categorizations. Epistemologically, much FPA scholarship is indistinguishable from the ‘conventional’, ‘neoclassical’ or ‘thin’ constructivists who accept many tenets of positivist epistemology. Borrowing from Hill, I would characterize FPA as generally consistent with positivism without being positivist. In other words, “it accepts that some of the painstaking work...coming out of the behavioural stable, on crises, misperceptions and bureaucratic politics, is of great use, being suggestive and systematic. On the other hand, the belief that political and social behaviour can be reduced to law-like statements, made on the basis of value-free observations of a whole ‘class’ of phenomena, is taken to be axiomatically mistaken” (Hill, 2003:23).

Indeed, the early era of comparative foreign policy research of the 1960s and 1970s, with its positivist search for general laws, is generally seen as an unproductive and unsuccessful period by FPA scholars (Kegley, 1980; Smith, 1986). In a sense, FPA went through its own “Third Debate” before the rest of IR. Instead, contemporary FPA focuses on context, multi-factor explanations, middle-range theory, and conditions and contingencies (Hudson, 2005; Neack, Hey, and Haney, 1995). Moreover, FPA’s ontological focus on subjectivity rejects positivist assumptions of a single, knowable, objective reality. FPA research on opinions, cultures, beliefs, motives, perceptions and decision-making processes violate the neopositivist requirement of focusing only on directly observable forces and puts FPA closer to transfactualist critical realism (as outlined by Jackson, 2011).

The classification of FPA as individualist and asocial is also questionable. Although FPA certainly does focus on agents, its conceptualization of agency incorporates agent-other interactions and agent-structure relations. FPA research draws heavily on *social* psychology (Flanik 2011: 2). Indeed, constructivists and FPA scholars often cite the same social psychological research (e.g., Wendt, 1999 and Checkel, 2001). Even those who focus on single leaders typically examine how leaders interact with advisors (e.g. M. Hermann, 1993; Kowert, 2002). Following Janis, many FPA researchers investigate how small decision-making groups are more than the sum of their parts and process information, engage in social influence, and make decisions in ways that are different than (and inherently more social than) individuals (e.g., 't Hart, Stern, and Sundelius, 1997; Schafer and Crichlow, 2010). This work is grounded in social psychological research on social obedience, conformity to social pressures, and social communication. Vertzberger's assessment of India's aggressive and unsuccessful foreign policy vis-à-vis China in 1962 is but one example of the importance of social relations in FPA: "the unchallenged prevalence of misperceptions and the associated risky policy can substantially be attributed to the nature of *social relations* within the influential group of decision makers centered around Nehru" (Vertzberger, 1997: 287; italics added).

Others who look at individuals' beliefs also incorporate relationships between agents and external others. Recent research on leaders' 'operational codes', for example, specifically "captures the subject's beliefs about self's best approach and strategy [in international relations] *and* self's beliefs about other's likely approach and strategy" (Walker and Schafer, 2006:11; italics in original). Image research focuses on how perceptions of other states, as, for example, enemies or allies, are critically related to

maintaining cognitive balance and positive images of self (.g. Cottam, 1986; Herrmann and Fischerkeller, 1995). And a long tradition of research on role theory in FPA draws on sociological symbolic interaction theories to understand ego and alter roles and role relations (Thies, 2013; Walker, 1987).

With this attention to social interactions, FPA research looks very similar to Checkel's description of "communicative agents in constructivism": "They decide by deliberating with others.... Individuals do not come to the table knowing what they want; the whole point of arguing is to discover what they want...." (Checkel, 2008: 76). Indeed, as Smith has argued, constructivism's

... view of the social world fits well with the foreign policy analysis literature. That literature focused exactly on the linkage between social structures and calculating agents. Bureaucratic politics, for example, seems almost a paradigmatic example of social constructivism, as does Irving Janis's work on groupthink. In short, FPA looks at the interface between institutions, agents, and rules with the aim of showing how these led to the foreign policy choices made by the collective agents as states (Smith, 2001:52-53).

To be sure, FPA's conceptualization of the social is different from constructivist conceptualizations (that is, it is more social psychological than sociological), but the point here is that FPA cannot be accurately characterized as only individualist and asocial.

Setting aside constructivists' characterizations of FPA, how do FPA scholars read constructivist accounts of foreign policy and their attention to internal factors such as

culture and ideas? Generally, FPA research would challenge constructivism for privileging social structures over agency, despite its original aim to challenge (material) structural accounts. Flanik writes that “constructivists endorse co-constitution in principle, but in practice, much constructivist works favors structure” (Flanik, 2011:9). Barnett offers a similar critique: “constructivism has tended to operate with an oversocialized view of actors, treating them as near bearers of structures and, at the extreme, as cultural dupes. The real danger here is the failure to recognize that actors have agency, can be strategic, are aware of the cultural and social rules that presumably limit their practices, and as knowledgeable actors are capable of appropriating those cultural taproots for various ends.” (Barnett, 1999:7; see also Breuning, 2011). FPA, on the other hand, approaches politics from a much more agent-centered standpoint. This stance not only provides the micro-foundations of agent’s relationships to structure, it allows for the instrumental use and varying interpretations of and responses to structures.

For FPA, constructivism also lacks attention to how the social is constructed (black-boxing the process) and does not take seriously how ideational factors operate within individuals’ belief systems and are aggregated to the social level via institutional, cultural, and small group rules, norms, and processes. (Ilgit and Ozkececi-Taner, 2012). Wiener (2007), for example, notes the importance of and even foundational aspects of the contested meaning of norms. But his and related research provides little conceptualization of how norms are contested and negotiated.

The more recent generation of constructivist research on norm internalization and socialization has attended to domestic mechanisms that condition internalization of regional or international norms. The framework introduced by Checkel (2005), for

example in the special issue on “International Institutions and Socialization in Europe” specifically includes strategic calculation by elites, and thus agency, as one pathway for socialization of actors. Some of this research, however, is based on rationalist notions of strategic action and is thus quite different from FPA’s psychological conceptualization of actors as limited information processors driven by internal beliefs and motives (e.g. Schimmelfennig, 2005). Other research in this area (e.g., Cortell and Davis, 2005; Gheciu, 2005) also continues to focus more on normative and institutional structures rather than agency (Breuning 2011; Zürn and Checkel, 2005). Constructivists themselves recognize the need for more attention to domestic processes. Indeed, Zürn and Checkel conclude: “students of socialization would appear to be operating with an underspecified theoretical apparatus, especially at the domestic political level.” (Zürn and Checkel, 2005: 1072).

Constructivists also often assume a strong connection between culture at the mass-societal level and policymaking at the elite level. Research on identities and roles, for example, typically takes for granted that there is a single national identity or role that is shared between elites and masses (e.g., Banchoff 1999; Brysk, Parsons, and Sandholtz, 2002; Catalinac 2007; Duffield 1999; McCourt 2011).<sup>9</sup> Some constructivists allow for a disconnect between elite and masses, but see cultural values and identities residing at the societal level and constraining elites (similar to some democratic peace explanations) from adopting foreign policies more commensurate with these states’ power in the international system (e.g., Berger, 1998; Duffield, 1999). For those that do focus on

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<sup>9</sup>One important exception is the framework by Abdelal et al (2006) that includes internal contestation as definitional to the concept of identity.

identity construction, there is often little theoretical mechanism advanced for how multiple identities are aggregated or how societal identities influence elites and foreign policy choices. Ilgit and Ozkececi-Taner note, for example, that Hopf's work on Soviet identity assumes elites represent society and reflect identities but "...does not provide a convincing account for how these societal identities are linked to state behavior" (Ilgit and Ozkececi-Taner, 2012: 96). Legro's (2005) work on changes in ideas and grand strategies, while drawing a link between collective, subnational, and individual levels of ideas, similarly does not theorize the domestic-political and individual-psychological processes. Legro concludes his book with a call for more attention to domestic political structures and the agency of leaders.

Both of these assumptions – that identities are shared and that they reside at the societal level and constrain elites – are inconsistent with much FPA research. As we have seen, FPA scholarship points to the complicated relationship between public opinion and values and elite decision-making. It is certainly not an automatic determinant as many identity studies assume. On the issue of how shared identities are, research in FPA suggests that elites and masses may disagree on their country's identity. 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). Similarly, Risse and his colleagues (1999) argue that elite and mass attitudes toward the Euro differed over a long period, partly due to different conceptions of German identity. Thus, FPA would challenge assumptions of shared identity and cultural constraints on elites.

Instead, FPA would point to the disconnects and complicated relationships between elites and cultural values that can involve elite framing and manipulation. Rathbun (2004), for example, argues that the Christian Democratic party in Germany used peacekeeping policies strategically to ‘habituate’ the public to acceptance of German participation in military interventions. This finding directly challenges constructivist interpretations of a passive, anti-militaristic culture that restrained German foreign policy.

FPA research also suggests that identities and roles are likely to be contested at the elite level and it has much to say about the way in which these conflicts affect both the policymaking process and resulting foreign policy behavior (Ashizawa 2008; Cantir and Kaarbo 2012; Kaarbo 2003). FPA research on elite conflict has concentrated on conflicts between governing elites and political opposition, within governing coalitions, in small decision-making and advisory groups, and across bureaucratic agencies (e.g., Beasley and Kaarbo forthcoming; Hagan, 1993; ‘t Hart, Stern, and Sundelius 1997; Kesgin and Kaarbo 2010; Marsh 2013; Stern and Verbeek 1998; Wagner 2006). This research has much to say about how ideas and identities are contested, which ideas, identities and discourses come to dominate or how they are negotiated, and how this process affects both policies and processes. Ozkececi-Taner (2009), for example, finds that Turkish political parties have promoted competing ideas of Turkish national identity and foreign policy and that the impact of those ideas is conditioned by a variety of institutional, political, and ideational factors.

Contested identities and roles among elites or between leaders and masses are key points at which FPA would intervene in the constructivist project and challenge assumptions that underlie most constructivist research. These assumptions more



generally stem from constructivists' greater attention to social structures over agents. Despite common characterizations of FPA by constructivists, FPA offers a complementary but distinct perspective on agent-structure relationships and the role of ideas in world politics.

### *Neoclassical Realism*

Neoclassical realism (NCR) has changed dramatically from its intellectual predecessor with its focus on domestic politics and decision-making factors. This turn is ironic since realism was instrumental in advancing the division between the international and domestic realms of politics. Rejecting neo-realist arguments that unit-level characteristics are unimportant and that IR theory is separate from foreign policy theory, neoclassical realists have sought to create a coherent realist perspective on foreign policy (for overviews, see Barkin, 2009; Brooks, 1997; Lobell, Ripsman, and Taliaferro, 2009; Wivel, 2005). NCR places primacy on the international system and relative material capabilities, but see these as filtered through the state. State responses are affected by a wide range of domestic political and decision-making factors, including perceptions, states' motives, political traditions and identities, domestic institutions and coalition-building, and perceived lessons of the past. According to Schweller, "domestic processes act as transmission belts that channel, mediate and (re)direct policy outputs in response to external forces (primarily changes in relative power). Hence, states often react differently to similar systemic pressures and opportunities, and their response may be less motivated by systemic-level factors than domestic ones." (Schweller, 2004:164). Neoclassical realists concede that systemic dynamics explain long-term trends, but argue

that domestic factors are needed to understand specific foreign policies (Taliaferro, Lobell, and Ripsman, 2009; Wivel, 2005).

There are variations in ontological orientation within NCR. Some focus on domestic politics and state-society relations, putting the national security executive at the center, with the ability to define the national interest. But they must bargain with domestic actors to extract resources and make policy (e.g., Dueck, 2009; Lobell, 2009; Taliaferro, Lobell, and Ripsman, 2009). These elites are constrained by domestic politics. Therein, according NCR, lies the difference between their approach and alternative models. Other NCR researchers focus more on ideational elements at the domestic level, such as nationalism and ideology (e.g., Schweller, 2009; Sterling-Folker, 2009; Taliaferro, 2009). Leaders, for example, may need to inspire the public for war. In doing so, they may invoke nationalist sentiment (Dueck, 2006).

Finally, decision-making processes, perceptions, beliefs, and motivations are seen, by some, as important, as “neoclassic realist foreign policy analysis stresses that foreign policy decisions are made by human beings, political leaders and elites” (Wivel, 2005:361). Rose (1998), coining the term NCR, included decision-makers’ perceptions as a critical intervening unit-level variable in NCR. Walt’s (1987) balance-of-threat (perception) is one example; Van Evera’s (1999) study of the “cult of the offensive” as mistaken belief about military strategy is another (see also Edelstein, 2002; Lobell, 2009). Clearly, according to Wivel, “assumptions about motives and ideas are already integral to the realist framework, and moreover, impossible to escape” (Wivel, 2005:368).

While NCR looks very similar to many studies in contemporary FPA, and some scholars build directly on FPA research (e.g. Ripsman, 2009), an FPA perspective would

question some NCR assumptions and critique it for its under-development of domestic political and decision-making factors. As Rathbun (2008) argues, NCR treats both ideas and domestic politics in a very limited way. First and foremost, FPA would challenge NCR's primary assumption (and what makes it realist) that privileges the international system over the domestic system. For NCR, domestic politics and decision-making are intervening conditions on leaders' reactions to the international system. Ripsman (2009), for example, puts the executive as the central filter, but argues that international pressures are prioritized.<sup>10</sup> This ordering is not convincingly justified or accurate from the perspective of FPA research, which sees domestic political and decision-making factors at times equal to, or more important than international factors. More basically, as Fordham argues, the "neoclassical assumption that domestic and international pressures are easily separable and identifiable is problematic" (Fordham, 2009:251). Neoclassical scholars also often do not justify why certain domestic factors are chosen over others, and the addition of unit-level characteristics seems ad hoc (Wivel, 2005).<sup>11</sup>

FPA research would also challenge NCR's characterization of how domestic politics influences executives. As we have seen in the case of democratic peace research, FPA work demonstrates that leaders cannot always rise above the fray and have "a view from above" (as Ripsman argues) to respond to international pressures. Unlike liberal approaches, however, FPA research also shows that some leaders ignore or manipulate

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<sup>10</sup> Ripsman does, however, acknowledge diversionary motives of executives.

<sup>11</sup> An important exception is Ripsman's (2009) discussion of which domestic groups matter, the international conditions and types of states in which they will influence foreign policy, and the ways in which domestic groups have an effect.

domestic constraints and are not automatically determined by them. The same holds for international constraints; leaders are not always “driven by international pressures.” (Ripsman, Taliaferro and Lobell, 2009:202). FPA presents a more contingent view of the relationship between domestic and international politics. Executives – leaders’ responses to domestic and international pressures are conditioned by a number of factors, including their own beliefs and perceptions.

Some neoclassical realists, noted above, do embrace the importance of subjectivity, incorporating perceptions, beliefs, and motives. This link is consistent with FPA’s long-standing tradition of research on subjective understandings. NCR attention to perceptions and beliefs, however, is critically underdeveloped in comparison. As Goldgeier argues, for example, Walt’s research “argues for the importance of perceptions, beliefs, motivation, and bias while leaving the origins of these factors to case-by-case empirical study rather than systematic theoretical investigation.” (Goldgeier, 1997:141). Similarly, Lobell’s (2009) focus on “threat assessment” does not unpack the psychological underpinnings of threat perception. According to Wivel, NCR needs more attention to how objective material factors, such as power, are perceived and interpreted by decision makers. He argues: “if we acknowledge that foreign policy is made by real people interpreting their environment, including the structure of the international system, then we need to engage in a discussion of how we understand the interplay between materialist and idealist variables” (Wivel, 2005: 367-8). Wivel suggests NCR should borrow from psychology for theoretical foundations of perceptions, interpretations, and motivations (see also Goldgeier 1997).

FPA has, however, already incorporated and adapted psychological research. The psychological approach to foreign policy has a long and robust history. Rooted in Snyder, Bruck and Sapin's work on the policymaker's definition of the situation and Sprout and Sprout's conception of the psychological milieu, it arguably became the dominant approach after the 1990s (Levy, 2003; Rosati, 2001). The psychological approach in FPA includes a focus on personality traits, leadership styles and beliefs, images, analogies, framing effects, consistency-based and schema-based information processing, attribution biases, threat perception, problem representations and problem solving, and the psychology of small group social influence dynamics (e.g., Cottam, 1986; Dyson, 2006; Hermann, 1980; Hermann, 1993; Herrmann and Fischerkeller, 1995; Kaarbo, 1997; Keller, 2005; Khong, 1992; Levy, 2000; McDermott, 1998; Larson, 1985; Renshon, 2008; Sylvan and Voss, 1998; Schafer and Crichlow, 2010; Schafer and Walker, 2006; 't Hart, Stern, and Sundelius, 1997; Vertzberger, 1990).

This FPA research can provide NCR with considerable theoretical and empirical leverage (Freyberg-Inan, Harrison, and James, 2009). Edelstein (2002), for example, makes a strong case for the importance of beliefs about others' intentions in great power relations, arguing that this focus is one of the fundamental differences between offensive and defensive realism. Edelstein's conceptualization of belief system dynamics, however, is limited. He asserts the cognitive categories that states use to judge others' intentions, rather than investigating the categories and their meanings that agents themselves employ. More generally, his argument rests on how states change (or do not change) their beliefs about others' intentions, but lacks conceptualization of how intentions and beliefs change. Research on motivations and belief system dynamics, the

focus of empirical work in psychology and applied by foreign policy scholars, is thus an essential, though missing aspect of NCR's turn toward subjectivity.<sup>12</sup>

Goldgeier and Tetlock (2001) make a convincing and detailed case (drawing on work on behavioral decision theory, information processing in ambiguous situations, misperceptions, evolutionary psychology, and cognitive effects of accountability) for how psychology can speak to realism's internal camps. They suggest, for example, that insights from prospect theory, based upon extensive, empirical experimental research, has the capacity to reconcile the disagreement between offensive and defensive realism: "when states are in the domain of losses...they are more likely to take the irredentist approach that Mearsheimer posits....When states are in the domain of gain, they are more likely to accept the status quo, as Waltz would predict..." (Goldgeier and Tetlock, 2001:70-1). In addition, a more nuanced understanding of perceptual factors can pre-empt misuse of psychological terms or their inappropriate mixing together of concepts that rest on very different psychological mechanisms with concomitant different effects. More generally, I agree with Wivel that "realists should devote less attention to specific case studies and more attention to the general conceptual and theoretical basis of their foreign policy analyses" (Wivel, 2005:374). NCR generally lacks this theoretical basis.

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<sup>12</sup> Some security scholars do focus on the dynamics of perceptions and beliefs (e.g., Hymans, 2006; Rousseau 2006) but this research is not explicitly situated within the NCR tradition.

**An FPA Perspective of International Politics:  
Complement, Competitor, and Crucible**

With the increased attention to domestic politics and decision-making in IR theories, FPA is ideally-situated to provide insights to further develop liberalism, constructivism, and realism. Indeed, many have started to link FPA research with each of these traditions in IR theory (e.g., Ashizawa, 2008; Clunan, 2009; Houghton, 2007; Ripsman, 2009; Thies and Breuning, 2012; Walker and Schafer, 2006). This ad hoc, supporting role is one that FPA can certainly play. But FPA can also provide an alternative perspective, approach, or “frame of reference”, as Snyder, Bruck, and Sapin proposed as early as 1954. If we take a psychologically-oriented and agent-based FPA as an approach, even while recognizing that it is not a completely hard-shelled area of research, it offers a distinct standpoint from which to look at the world and international relations. FPA as a perspective starts with the role of central decision-making units and subjective understandings of leaders as filters for other international and domestic opportunities and constraints. This includes the dynamics of institutional decision – making processes and elite-mass relations (covered in broader FPA as subfield), but these factors are filtered through agents’ subjective understandings.

Table 1 delineates the key differences between these three IR theories and the FPA perspective. Similar to NCR, the decision-making unit (be it a leader, a small group, or a coalition of actors), is a funnel through which other factors are transmitted and interpreted (Hagan and Hermann, 2002). The FPA perspective differs from NCR in that systemic pressures are not necessarily more important, and FPA pays more theoretical, conceptual, and empirical attention to social psychological processes that influence

leaders' interpretations. In line with constructivism, the FPA perspective does not take objective, material forces as given, but instead focuses on their meanings and the ideational environment constructed by agents in their social contexts. The FPA perspective differs from constructivism in its attention to conflicting ideas and understandings in the domestic political system, the institutionalization of ideas, and the instrumental manipulation of ideas such as norms and identities. Similar to liberal perspectives on the democratic peace, the FPA perspective acknowledges the importance of institutions, the potential constraint on foreign policy, and particularly the disconnect between leaders and masses. The FPA perspective differs from liberal research in that it does not assume automatic constraints in democracies, allows for constraints in non-democratic systems, and generally sees more variation in institutional structures as important for foreign policy and foreign policy processes.

FPA is not a conglomeration of realism, liberalism, and constructivism – it would challenge critical ontological and theoretical aspects of each. But as IR theories have turned toward domestic and decision-making variables, the FPA perspective can bring them together. This integration is important as each theory is developing along different trajectories with regard to these factors. Neoclassical realists tend to focus on elites, liberals on institutions and societal constraints, and constructivists on ideas and discourse. Consequently, FPA has a separate response to each of these developments, has something to offer each of these avenues of thought, and covers all of them, thus offering a bridge for this significant domestic and decision-making turn in IR theory. That they each have turned is a major point of this article; that they have turned in different directions is an opportunity for FPA to integrate this trans-theoretical development.



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**Table 1**  
FPA & IR Theories: Similarities & Differences

**FOREIGN POLICY ANALYSIS**

	<u>Similarities</u>	<u>Differences</u>
<b>IR THEORIES</b>		
<u>Neoclassical Realism</u>	decision unit as funnel	international factors not privileged; more attention to social psychological processes
<u>Constructivism</u>	subjective & ideational focus	more focus on contested, institutionalized, and manipulation of ideas; more theoretical development of agency
<u>Liberalism</u>	institutions matter; potential constraint from elite-mass disconnect	constraints not automatic and operate across regime type; more institutional variation; challenges to rationality assumptions

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As an alternative perspective, FPA foregrounds the agent decision maker – this is its distinct contribution (Hudson 2005). How decision makers interpret and respond to their domestic and international environments is then subject to a number of factors – psychological, societal, ideational, political, institutional, and material. FPA offers integration of these theories through this psychological experience of agents. My review in this essay supports Goldgeier and Tetlock’s observation on IR theory:

“...when we scrutinize what these traditions trumpet as their most distinctive explanatory achievements, we discover that their capacity to explain relevant trends or events hinges on a wider range of implicit psychological

assumptions that is useful to make explicit. In this sense, these macro theorists are already more psychological than they think. And when we shift attention to each tradition's explanatory shortcomings, we believe these can be at least partly corrected by incorporating other psychological assumptions in the conceptual frameworks. In this sense, these macro theories are not as psychological as they should be" (Goldgeier and Tetlock, 2001:68).

In other words, psychological factors are simultaneously everywhere and nowhere.

This broad development has occurred, in my opinion, because of well-known problems of an artificial demarcation between 'internal' and 'external' politics and because of the agent-structure 'problem' that plagued (predominantly-structural) IR theory through the late 1980s. Constructivism was a clear response to that problem, introducing inter-subjectivity as one solution.<sup>13</sup> Agency, however, remains underdeveloped across the board. As Hill has noted, IR "...as a subject needs to move forward in reconstituting its notions of agency after the waves of attacks on realism in recent decades, which have established the weakness of state-centric accounts without putting much in their place" (Hill, 2003:2).

This is more than a levels-of-analysis argument. Even a focus on the psychological subjective understandings of decision makers incorporates other levels. By

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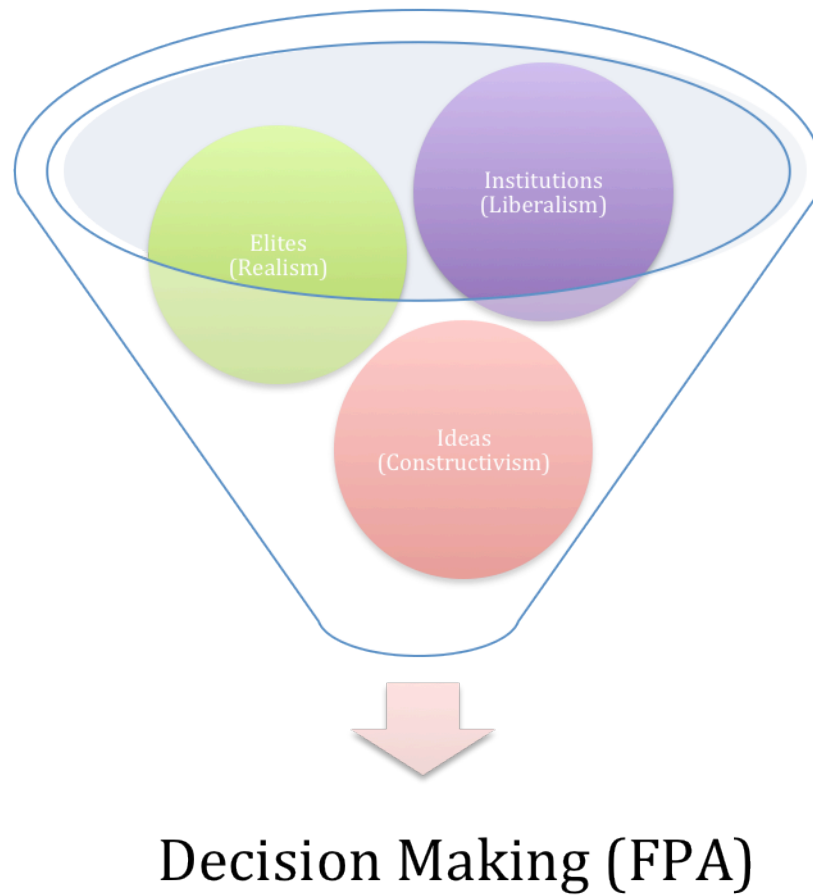
<sup>13</sup> Interestingly, Johnston (2005:1039) notes that "what is called a sociological turn is really a sociological and psychological turn. It remains to be seen whether this particular application of psychology in IR will meet the same fate as the application of psychology in comparative foreign policy analysis—namely being looked down upon by the field as a whole in favor of pristine deductive theorizing."

concentrating on decision-making, it does not exclude other factors, although the focus is on individual agents. Decision-making theories are not reductionist, they are contextualist (Goldgeier and Tetlock, 2001). They include the international context; the international is not by definition exogenous to an FPA approach. As Bueno de Mesquita has argued, “when we examine international affairs through the lens of domestic decision making we provide a way to think about how properties of the international system are shaped by local considerations as part of the larger strategic fabric of politics.” (Bueno de Mesquita, 2002:7). The international system, however, is no longer presumed to be an analytical ‘first cut’ -- a presumption that Moravcsik argues “...is both methodologically biased and theoretically incoherent” (Moravcsik, 1997:516). By incorporating many levels of analyses and material and ideational factors, an FPA perspective is ontologically richer in its treatment of domestic politics and decision-making.

An FPA perspective is not superior to other perspectives and it continues to suffer from weaknesses outlined earlier. FPA, moreover, is also not a single theory of international relations, but this does not make it unique or less-developed than other IR “theories” that are today better characterized as schools of thought or branches of theoretical traditions. An FPA perspective is, however, parsimonious in that other factors and contexts can be funneled through the subjective understanding of the decision maker (although most FPA researchers would sacrifice parsimony in favor of accuracy and validity (Peterson 2006)). In addition, FPA has a history of investigating – with a track record of theoretical conceptualization, methodological development, and empirical examination – all of these domestic and decision-making orientations that currently separate dominant IR theories.

The weakest (but nonetheless important) argument for a place for an FPA perspective alongside other theoretical schools is that it can serve as a *complement*. In this way, FPA research can provide nuance and depth to liberalism's treatment of domestic institutions and public opinion, constructivism's subjective and ideational focus, and NCR's turn toward domestic mobilization and perceptions. In this way, FPA research can be part of the movement toward analytic eclecticism (Sil and Katzenstein 2010). A stronger role for FPA is that of a *competitor*. As such, FPA insights and its beginning point of the subjective understanding of the decision maker can be pitted against other explanations to see which best fares for a particular research question or under certain scope conditions. The competitor role is a familiar one in IR history of paradigm wars. The strongest position for an FPA perspective would be in the form of a *crucible* – a container for melding together other theories (see Figure 1). In this way, insights from other theories would be integrated into the FPA perspective. The crucible role is most consistent with calls for going beyond the “isms” and levels of analyses debates and speaks most directly to agent-structure relationships.

The purpose of this article is not to suggest a singular role for an FPA perspective, but to assert FPA research as a *sui generis* IR perspective that speaks to theoretical developments across the study of international politics. These developments clearly suggest that it is past time to cast aside the division of labor argument that has partitioned our research efforts and our understanding of world affairs.



**Figure 1.**  
**FPA as Crucible for IR Theories' Domestic and Decisionmaking Factors**

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