

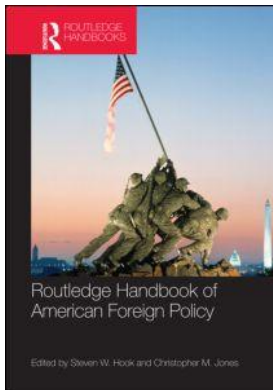
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Part I

Research Traditions and Historical Experience

The Study of American Foreign Policy

Margaret G. Hermann

An analysis of scholarship on American foreign policy presents a study in contrasts revolving around a set of questions that remain both historically significant and contemporarily relevant despite two centuries of discussion. Consider: (1) Is American foreign policy characterized by continuity or change? (2) Who is in charge of making U.S. foreign policy? (3) What is the “correct” approach for the country to take to the world? (4) What are the appropriate instruments of statecraft? (5) How should American foreign policy be studied? This chapter will examine these core questions and the contrasts found in the literature. Its focus is on indicating the nature of the discourse surrounding these issues and the optional answers to these questions that have been posed. The authors encourage readers to continue to seek answers as they peruse the rest of this handbook and to consider their own positions regarding these queries, what scholars who are expert in these domains propose, and the suggestions for further research that are generated.

What is Foreign Policy?

But before delving deeper into the contrasts inherent in the American foreign policy literature, let us first define foreign policy. Just what is foreign policy? Interestingly, while an appropriate starting point, this question is not asked very often in the literature for several reasons. For example, when studying a particular case such as the U.S. decision to invade Iraq, the focus of attention is on one situation and its accompanying decision-making process. Both reader and analyst know what is being studied; there is no need to define foreign policy. Moreover, say the analyst wants to explore U.S. use of force, attention is directed to considering what is counted as a use of force. Does sending in military advisers or threatening to bomb constitute a use of force or must there be troop movements on the ground in enemy territory to count? Once again, there is little need to define what foreign policy is, we know what we are trying to explain. However, what if we want to understand how the foreign policies of two or more administrations are similar or different from one another; or we want to compare U.S. foreign policy in response to crises such as 9/11, the attack on Pearl Harbor, the Iranian hostage crisis, and the downing of the U.S. plane on China’s Hainan Island; or we want to contrast American foreign policy during and after the Cold War? For such comparisons we need to consider what we mean by “foreign policy.”

One oft-used definition of foreign policy in the American politics literature is that it involves “the goals that the nation’s officials seek to attain abroad, the values that give rise to those objectives, and the means or instruments used to pursue them” (Wittkopf, Jones, and Kegley 2008: 17). In other words, foreign policy involves goals, values/norms, and the means for their representation and achievement. Foreign policy links aspirations to actions as “decreed or promulgated by those in power” (Carlsnaes 1986: 60)—those with the authority to commit the resources of the government. In effect, foreign policy is a guide for action declared by an authoritative source that makes certain behaviors more probable and other behaviors less probable, narrowing the range of actions that are likely to be viewed as appropriate in response to a particular situation. Indeed, policies are considered to exist when they are explicitly stated and recognized by officials as such—“by being spoken, stated intentions and plans [gain] some degree of normative force in their own right” (Onuf 2001: 77–78).

To recapitulate, policy is viewed as a guide or plan of action centered around a set of goals or objectives that are enunciated by those with the authority to commit the resources of the U.S. government; as such, policy provides a rule for interpreting what is happening as well as for delimiting the range of actions that appear feasible for achieving a particular goal and representing a set of values in the current context. Policy becomes foreign in orientation when it is directed toward entities outside one’s borders or jurisdiction or, as noted above, when it is focused on goals and objectives that “the nation’s officials seek to attain abroad.” Some examples of U.S. foreign policy actions that reflect this definition are containment, the “enlargement and engagement” focus of the Clinton administration, and the guides for intervention often referred to as the Weinberger and Powell Doctrines.

Continuity vs. Change in U.S. Foreign Policy

Opinion and scholarship seem to differ with regard to how consistent American foreign policy is and has been across time. Some scholars have argued that there is consistency in American foreign policy—that U.S. foreign policy is both reflective of and contributes to the exceptionalism inherent in American history (e.g., Smith 1994; Huntington 2004). Originating most tangibly with de Tocqueville’s (1835) observations, American exceptionalism is represented in the notion that the United States inherited a “special spiritual and political destiny”—that the [United States] is a shining beacon of liberty to the rest of the world. The argument goes that American exceptionalism remains a dominant component of American national identity and by extension is promoted through its foreign policy, embracing as it does the language of the nation’s founding documents: liberty, democracy, and independence (Huntington 1993).

Others have viewed U.S. foreign policy as reflective of turning points in its history, defining these junctures as “paradigm shifts” or critical transformations in the “strategic culture” (see Kupchan 1994). Such seismic shifts in policy—for example, the abandonment of continental isolationism inherent in early U.S. foreign policy upon entering World War I or the application of deterrence after dropping the atom bomb in 1945—are used by scholars to explain policy trends. Indeed, many textbooks favor this historical shift approach in organizing their narratives regarding American foreign policy.

More recently, scholars have moved to view consistencies and shifts in U.S. foreign policy as related to changes in presidential administrations (e.g., Greenstein 2000; Inderfurth and Johnson 2004; Melanson 2005). Since most U.S. presidents have promulgated some sort of foreign policy “doctrine,” it becomes possible to examine where there is continuity or change comparatively by examining presidential administrations over time. These differences are often reflected in the comments of presidents and their advisors as well. Consider the following:

“The ultimate test of our foreign policy is how well our actions measure up to our ideals ... Freedom is America’s purpose” (Secretary of State Madeleine Albright 1998). “I claim not to have controlled events, but confess plainly that events have controlled me” (President Abraham Lincoln 1864). “Decisions are made by people, and they make them based on what they know of the world and how they understand it” (Vice President George H.W. Bush 1987).

At issue here is whether U.S. foreign policy is built around a set of values—“freedom from the dictates of others, commercial advantage, and promotion of American ideas and ideals” (Wittkopf, Jones, and Kegley 2008: 29)—or whether it is based on notions of power and national interests. These represent dueling visions about what constitute the goals, norms, and means that are the focus of American foreign policy. They also bring with them different philosophies regarding human nature and how important the situation and context should be in determining policy. And they represent the ongoing debate among presidents, policy makers, pundits, and scholars on the importance of idealism versus realism as the basis for U.S. foreign policy (e.g., Kissinger 1994; Holsti 1995; Johnson 2007).

For idealists, foreign policy has a consistency to it. The foundation of idealism in American foreign policy originates in Jeffersonian rhetoric but is probably most identified with Wilsonian internationalism. Since the end of the Cold War, it has been linked to humanitarian intervention. In this philosophical tradition, U.S. foreign policy is based on principles, preferably related to freedom, democracy, and the rule of law. Idealism is often linked with American exceptionalism and the extension of American values in and through international institutions. There is a certain inflexibility as to what can constitute foreign policy.

For realists, in contrast, foreign policy is more context dependent; it is focused on national interests and relative power vis-à-vis other countries in the world and these can change. Foreign policy is focused on security and economic well-being; use of force and war become viable options when either of these tangibles is threatened. According to this philosophical view, international relations are anarchic at heart, managing conflict and competition is critical to survival as a country. There are, indeed, critical junctures.

Could it be, as some have proposed, that in U.S. foreign policy idealism is used to justify policy that is based on what a president views as important behavior for purposes of addressing national interests (see, e.g., Hoffmann 1972; Lepgold and McKeown 1995)? American ideals become the justification for policy demanded by national interests. Or, as others have argued, does U.S. foreign policy represent a blend of idealism and realism with events and presidents determining the proportions of each emphasized in and with the policy (e.g., Herring 1995; Kane 2003; McCartney 2004). Thus, at times, an either-or choice is made, at other times the blend emphasizes idealism, and at still other times realism becomes the dominant ingredient in the blend. Or, as Kissinger (2000) has observed, American foreign policy tilts back and forth between idealism and realism based on the generation currently dominating the halls of power and the critical life experiences that have shaped their views of the world be they World War II, the Cold War, the Vietnam War, the 1990s, or the post-9/11 era. Or, is it, as Kupchan (1994) has suggested, that American foreign policy gets caught up at certain points in time in a particular view of how its national interests and values intersect and a strategic culture forms that transcends presidential administrations and changes in the international system? Like with the U.S. “war on terror,” a particular way of viewing and dealing with events takes shape and becomes ingrained among both the political elite and the mass public.

Who Is in Charge of Foreign Policy?

Intent on ensuring checks and balances among the various parts of the U.S. government, the founding fathers built in a tension between the presidency and the Congress when it comes

to making foreign policy. The president is the commander-in-chief, the chief negotiator, and the chief diplomat but the Congress makes laws, must ratify treaties, and appropriates funds. The focus is on shared responsibility and an “invitation to struggle” (Corwin 1948). And, as Melanson (2005: 6) has observed, the pendulum often shifts regarding “presidential-congressional understandings about the respective tasks” each is to perform. These shifts have led to terms such as the “imperial presidency” and the “imperial Congress” as each stakes out a claim for “being in charge.” Lindsay (2004) has proposed that it is during times of peace and as U.S.-sponsored conflicts wind down that Congress becomes more active in foreign affairs; it is in times of conflict and war that Congress appears to “rally round the flag” and become more deferential to the executive. The presence of a foreign policy crisis and of a threat to national security seems to tilt the relationship more toward presidential leadership—there is a contraction of authority to the top and those most politically accountable. But without such a crisis—and sometimes in response to the sense of loss of power during these times—Congress works to reassert itself. Consider how Presidents Lyndon Johnson and Richard Nixon viewed the Gulf of Tonkin Resolution as providing congressional *carte blanche* authority for their conduct of the Vietnam War only to see Congress pass the War Powers Resolution to reduce the power of the president once that war ended.

Two interesting literatures have arisen examining this procedural relationship between president and Congress and how the behavior of each affects not only the political fortunes of the other but the nature of U.S. foreign policy as well. The first centers on the conditions under which presidents will assert their authority and use foreign policy to counter vulnerability or low standing domestically. The second focuses on the role of Congress in framing the foreign policy agenda for presidents.

Some have called presidents’ use of foreign policy as a means to deal with problems domestically the “gamble for resurrection in the eyes of the voters” (Downs and Rocke 1994; Smith 1996). And the literature (e.g., Ostrom and Job 1985; James and Oneal 1991; Morgan and Bickers 1992; Richards et al. 1993; DeRouen 1995) has reported a diversionary use of force internationally in response to a decline in public approval at home. This reaction has been described in terms of “policy availability” (e.g., Miller 1995; Gelpi 1997; Brule 2006)—the use of foreign policy as a substitute when other avenues are closed to the president. Consider Brule’s (2008) study examining relations between the president and Congress in decisions to use force. He argues that an uncooperative Congress can compel “the president to look beyond the domestic arena for opportunities to demonstrate his competence” (Brule 2008: 353). At such times, a president turns to foreign policy—that place where constitutionally he has a greater capacity to act without congressional approval. Brule contends, and finds, that presidents do, indeed, initiate disputes internationally when Congress is generally being unsupportive of their policies. In effect, he reports a higher likelihood of the initiation of a dispute when the president’s success in Congress is minimal. Others have found that U.S. interventions are less successful when there is a lack of consensus between the president and Congress on what is being done (e.g., Peceny 1995; Hermann and Kegley 1998).

The same appears to be the case for foreign policy of a more positive or cooperative tone as well. Consider, for example, the fact that President Bill Clinton traveled abroad the most during 1998—the same year that the Monica Lewinsky scandal broke at home—and that Nixon engaged in the most foreign travel of his presidency during 1974 at the height of the Watergate scandal (Berthoud and Brady 2001). As President Ronald Reagan’s staffers admitted regarding one of his trips to Europe, “because the polls were showing a drop in the president’s popularity, which made him vulnerable in Washington, we decided that conferring on location with European heads of state would be good for his image as a leader” (Kernell 1986: 96). In effect, as Brace and Hinckley (1992) have argued, much foreign travel of U.S. presidents is strategic and reactive and timed closely with conditions affecting a president’s

support at home. A similar kind of phenomenon has also been found to occur after peace-making ventures (e.g., MacKuen 1983; Burbach 2003). As Secretary of State James Baker is reported to have observed: Why shouldn't presidents use positive, non-crisis events to mask periods of vulnerability in the same way that they do for incidents involving conflict and tension?

Moreover, research has shown that presidents' expectations about public reactions to their foreign policy ideas and initiatives are generally filtered through their interactions with members of Congress (e.g., Graham 1994; Powlick 1995; Foyle 1999). This influence appears to occur in at least three ways: (1) assessments regarding what a particular Congress is likely to support and preempting or tailoring proposals to take such preferences into account (e.g., Baker 1989; Daalder 1994); (2) procedural legislation that changes the nature of the relationship between Congress and the president enabling Congress to play a larger role in shaping what the president can and cannot do in the foreign policy arena (e.g., the War Powers Resolution); and (3) activities that frame the need for a particular foreign policy using the media and public discussion that are meant to change the climate of debate and influence what the president does. Indeed, there is some evidence to suggest that the public only learns about foreign policy discussions, proposals, and options when the Congress and the president disagree—when there is dissensus between the two on what should happen and each turns to the media and the public to make its case (Powlick and Katz 1998).

Is There a “Correct” Approach to the World?

This question focuses on how Americans perceive the world and their place in it and the role of public opinion in the shaping of American foreign policy. There has been a debate across U.S. history regarding the impact of public opinion on policy and, in this case, foreign policy. Does the public shape and/or constrain what their leaders can do in foreign policy or do the leaders mold and/or educate the public, shaping general opinion on policy? As a democracy, the American people and their views are considered important in the formation of policy. But in the foreign policy domain, is the public knowledgeable and interested enough to stay on top of events and do they have preferences that need to be taken into account lest the leadership find itself in trouble and out of office? To come to grips with this question, we need to ask another first. Which public are we discussing?

There is the so-called “foreign policy establishment” or the policy influentials who are knowledgeable about international affairs and have access to policy makers although they are not policy makers themselves. Those in this group are often referred to as opinion leaders and, though still relatively small in numbers (an estimate of 2 percent), they have increased in size since the advent of the 24/7 media, the increase in think tanks and interest groups, and the presence of the blogosphere. Then there is the attentive public that includes those who keep abreast of what is happening in the world but do not have access to the policy community; here estimates run between 5 and 10 percent of the public. And there is the mass public who are only sporadically interested or knowledgeable about foreign affairs—the vast majority of people. Learning about the interactions among these various publics is important to understanding exactly who is shaping the nature of American foreign policy.

As we might expect, there are generally differences in what is viewed as important on the part of the opinion leaders and the mass public. An overview of data from recent Pew polls and those of the Chicago Council on Global Affairs suggests this difference averages around 20 percent. For example, in the 2009 Pew poll on American views concerning the country's foreign policy, 85 percent of the mass public were concerned with protecting the jobs of U.S. workers whereas only 21 percent of the opinion leaders showed such a concern. In turn, the

opinion leaders were more worried about what was happening in Pakistan than the mass public. An attempt is made to take these differences into account in opinion polls by asking those polled about time spent following the news on foreign affairs generally or on a particular situation and separating the responses of the more attentive public from the general public. But one can wonder about the disconnect between opinion leaders, the attentive public, and the general public when it comes to influencing policy makers. Just whose opinion do policy makers take into account, if any?

And are these differences reflected in the more general belief systems that have been used to characterize the public's views about the role the United States should play in the international arena (e.g., Wittkopf 1990; Holsti 2004)? Such beliefs appear to range from isolationism—a disinterest in having the United States play an active role in world affairs—to internationalism—an interest in the United States taking an active role in foreign affairs. Since the end of the Vietnam War, internationalists have come in three forms: accommodationists whose focus is on the United States engaging in cooperative and multilateral activities in the foreign policy arena, hardliners who are willing to use force and unilateralism in foreign policy, and traditional internationalists who believe in employing both cooperative and conflictual strategies depending on the context and situation. Roughly one-quarter of the public have fallen into each of these belief systems since the Vietnam War. Although in the 2009 Pew poll on Americans' views on foreign policy both opinion leaders and the general public were together in their belief that the United States should take an active role in the world today, there are differences in the beliefs among opinion leaders and the general public in the way such a foreign policy should be pursued. Opinion leaders consistently are found to favor traditional internationalism and accommodation—a foreign policy that is based on multilateralism and a context-based response to what is happening in the world—more than the mass public; the latter are more hardline in their belief systems.

Lindsay and Daalder (2003) have collapsed these four belief systems into two: Americanist and globalist. Americanists focus on U.S. primacy and “see a world in which the United States can use its predominant power to get its way, regardless of what others want” (Lindsay and Daalder 2003: 3). Globalists argue that the United States can only deal with the problems facing the world in a multilateral fashion—international cooperation is critical. Isolationists and hardliners appear to favor an Americanist philosophy while accommodationists and traditional internationalists are more likely to be globalists. Pew polling in April 2010 suggests that there is an even 50–50 split between Americans in the mass public on these two beliefs. Given, as we have already observed, that opinion leaders seem to espouse those beliefs most comfortable with the globalist philosophy while the mass public is more Americanist in its focus, are policy makers forced to walk a fine line in designing American foreign policy between engaging with others while honoring the self-preservation instincts and sense of importance that appear in the mass public? Once again, we ask the question: whose belief systems count?

Research suggests that U.S. presidents have differed in how and when they take the public's opinions and beliefs into account (see Foyle 1999). Of interest in such studies are presidents' beliefs about the relevance of public opinion to the foreign policy-making process and about the necessity of having public support for foreign policy decisions once made. Considering the ten U.S. presidents to hold office from Truman to Clinton, we note that three of them (Truman, Johnson, and Reagan) thought it was neither desirable nor necessary to consider public opinion in foreign policy making—one should do what is “right” regardless of public support as the public can be educated once the policy is in place. Five presidents (Eisenhower, Kennedy, Nixon, Ford, and Bush Sr.) believed it necessary to gain public support once a decision was made; indeed, public opinion can become the rationalization justifying a decision. Only two of these presidents (Carter and Clinton) believed it important to consider public opinion in the making of foreign policy. Clinton believed that public opinion should not only shape

the evaluation of policy options but should partially define what is viewed as correct policy. Carter thought public opinion should shape the evaluation of policy options and the resulting decision. In effect, only 20 percent of these ten presidents believed it desirable to consider public opinion in the foreign policymaking process while 60 percent believed it necessary to garner public support for a policy once decisions were made. For these presidents, public opinion was more useful as a justification than as a constraint on the nature of the policy.

Perhaps of even more interest, it was not the “actual” public opinion data that drove the behavior and policies of these presidents but their “expectations” regarding what the public wanted as well as their views regarding whether or not their approval ratings were declining or increasing. The particular policy chosen and how well they were doing were based on anticipation of others’ responses. Indeed, “when public opinion affected foreign policy choices, it was because the president feared losing the public’s support of either the policy or the administration” (Foyle 1999: 266). The data suggest that it may be the public’s approval ratings that presidents use to gauge the need to take the content of the public’s beliefs into account in making policy. And the data suggest that those around the president in the form of the influential elites and opinion leaders are probably those most likely to be shaping the presidents’ expectations and supplying the content of the public’s beliefs.

Appropriate Instruments of Statecraft

As a policy maker in the George W. Bush administration was heard to say: “We’re [the United States] the ones who respond when the world dials 911” (*International Herald Tribune* 2002: 3). What the nature of the response should be is something that remains under debate as discussions range from a focus on high to low politics and from hard to soft power. Some wonder if the United States is not overly dependent on its military and military instruments of statecraft (Johnson 2007). Others have raised concerns about the use of economic sanctions and their effectiveness (e.g., Elliott 1998; Drezner 2003). Still others have noted that the most influential of America’s instruments of statecraft may be its “soft” or “cultural” power—the effects of its media, film, music, ideas, and ideals (Nye 2002). What do we know about each of these arguments?

Military

Consider to start that 20 percent of the 2010 U.S. budget was devoted to the military and defense; indeed, the Department of Defense accounted for 49 percent of U.S. discretionary spending in this same budget (for details, see Obama 2010). In effect, military spending during Fiscal Year 2010 (October 1, 2009–September 30, 2010) received equal attention as Social Security and Medicare/Medicaid—each were roughly 20 percent of the federal budget. Consider also that the U.S. military has bases in 130 countries—around 750 such bases—with special forces located in 125 countries (Johnson 2007). At issue is does the United States place too much emphasis on the military as an instrument of statecraft? And has this reliance on the military led to the development of a military industrial complex that is “the very structure of our society”—“our toil, resources, and livelihood are all involved” in keeping the military strong (Eisenhower 1961: 1038)? Can the U.S. government decide *not* to build particular types of equipment, choose to close certain bases, and move to reduce expenditures on the military without rocking national employment figures, local and state fiscal stability, and the quality of life of citizens in all parts of the country? Has the United States, in fact, created an iron triangle involving the military, “ear-mark-oriented” lawmakers, and lobbyists for companies,

such as Boeing and Halliburton, that make it difficult to do other than continue to emphasize the military in American foreign policy?

And what happens to diplomacy as the military begins to take over such activities as nation building, peacekeeping, peace enforcement, and humanitarian interventions (see, e.g., Priest 2003; Johnson 2004)? Indeed, compare the budgetary figures for the Defense Department described above to the 6 percent of discretionary spending directed toward the Department of State and other international programs—some 1 percent of the total U.S. 2010 budget. Even with a 41 percent increase in its budget in 2010 over 2009, the State Department still represents, as Gardner (2000) observes, a 1 percent investment in solving international problems through diplomatic means versus the 20 percent investment in the military. Interestingly, even if one sums together the other departments in the U.S. government that can engage in diplomacy—for example, Commerce, Energy, Justice, and Treasury—the investment only grows to 4 percent of the total budget and 11 percent of discretionary spending.

Economic Sanctions

The U.S. government saw a diminution in its focus on the military in the 1990s with the end of the Cold War and the loss of an enemy until September 11, 2001 re-introduced an ongoing threat to national security. For a period of time, the government turned to so-called “low politics” and became concerned with economic security (Melanson 2005). Economic liberalization, merging domestic with foreign economic policies, building an architecture that resulted in the World Trade Organization (WTO), and expanding U.S. markets through regional and bilateral trade arrangements became the focus of attention. One particular economic tool the United States has increasingly turned to in the past two decades as an alternative to the use of force is economic sanctions—economic coercion meant to change behavior without resort to military intervention (Drury 2000). Economic sanctions have been employed as if they represented a middle rung on the escalation ladder between diplomacy and the use of force. Indeed, as some have observed, economic sanctions are often viewed as the only palatable alternative to military action when the government believes it needs to take some action (e.g., Weisberg 2006).

But just how successful are economic sanctions? On this topic, there is debate. First, how does one define success? For example, does prolonging the time before the Iranians get nuclear weapons, making them invest more capital both domestically and internationally in such an enterprise, indicate success even if in the end they acquire such a capability? Or, is it enough for economic sanctions to create a climate of pressure and isolation that can combine with other international occurrences to lead to the desired change in behavior? Second, what factors seem to be related to success? Some have argued that economic sanctions are more successful when they are multilateral versus unilateral (e.g., Martin 1992; Haass 1999). Others have indicated that to be successful, the use of force cannot be ruled out—that if it is known that economic sanctions are being used or threatened because there is no will to use force, they are likely to be less credible and, in turn, less successful (e.g., Elliott 1998; Pape 1998; Kaempfer and Lowenber 1999; Li and Drury 2004). And still others have observed that to be successful economic sanctions need to be part of a package that is combined with some incentives for change in behavior such as a “sunset clause” or end date (e.g., Cortright and Lopez 2000, 2002).

Of concern also are the victims of economic sanctions—who are they? One set of victims that receives little attention are businesses and workers in the United States involved in exports to the targeted countries. Consider that in one year—1995—U.S. unilateral economic sanctions reduced exports by up to “\$19 billion, eliminated more than 200,000 jobs in relatively high-wage export sectors, and caused American workers to lose nearly \$1 billion in

wages” (Hufbauer et al. 1997: 3). Indeed, Martin (1992) has found that multilateral sanctions regimes are more effectively maintained the greater the costs to the country pushing for the sanctions. Then there are the civilians in the targeted country who often bear the brunt of the sanctions—some 400,000 Iraqis are thought to have died as a result of U.S.-backed multilateral economic sanctions imposed following the First Gulf War (Halliday 1999; Mueller and Mueller 1999). And businesses in the targeted countries often see their livelihoods replaced by black-market goods smuggled in by those in power—“the trouble with sanctions is that they squeeze out legitimate businesses and leave the field wide open for [those who] have spent decades mastering the art of sanction-busting” and enrich the very “people the sanctions are trying to target” (Dehghanpisheh 2010: 42; see also Cortright and Lopez 2000). As Andreas (2005) has noted, sanctions appear to create coalitions among those in power, private entrepreneurs, and organized crime that can undermine governance as well as persist once sanctions are lifted. In addition, there is the “rally round the flag” phenomenon that occurs in the targeted country making more difficult any push for reform from within as the population’s sense of nationalism and victimhood increases (see, e.g., Christensen and Powers 1993; Woodward 1993; Amuzegar 1997); after all, they are being “attacked” as well as “maligned” in the international arena for who they are and what they are doing.

Ideas and Information

Although not necessarily new, an instrument of statecraft that has received increasing discussion since the end of the Cold War is “public diplomacy”—using ideas and information to influence policy in the world. And the U.S. government is not the only entity involved in such diplomacy. Nye (2002) has talked about this kind of diplomacy as a third dimension of power—as epitomized by transnational relations and involving essentially non-state actors. Consider, for example, the role that the Cuban Miami exile community has played in shaping U.S. policy toward Cuba and the so-called Jewish lobby has played with regard to U.S.-Israel and U.S.-Arab relations. What about the outsourcing of American jobs by U.S.-based companies to countries like China to lower costs? How about the ideas and information that are exchanged in the person-to-person diplomacy that occurs as international students seek an education at U.S. universities? And what about the notions of civil society and democracy that are brought by U.S.-based nongovernmental organizations to countries in the Global South as they deliver humanitarian relief services and engage in development projects? Finally, consider the importance of remittances to immigration to the United States. Given that remittances can account for 25 to 75 percent of the budgets of some countries, risking being an illegal in the United States may be a small price to pay for improving the quality of life of a family “back home.”

Brown (2010) has called these activities transnational transfers and views them as a new type of instrument of statecraft affecting how the United States is both viewed and can act abroad. Note that the actors described above are not part of the American government; yet their behavior shapes both the problems and the options that U.S. policy makers face in developing foreign policy. Like terrorist groups and criminal organizations, these non-state actors give governments pause because they are not states. Governments are used to interacting with other countries but these types of actors have no borders, no sovereignty, and are not necessarily tethered by international law. In many respects, these transnational transfers are emblematic of what has been called the “vanishing borders” phenomenon that is increasingly causing problems for policy makers, governments, and scholars of foreign and international politics because what it represents does not fit easily into the Westphalian map of the world nor with views concerning how this system functions.

How to Study American Foreign Policy

And just how should we study American foreign policy? Are we observers and documenters of what is happening or are we interested in how those participating in the policy-making process are viewing the situation? Is the focus on the structures that constrain what is possible or the people who challenge or respect such constraints? Is the intent of our scholarship to demonstrate patterns in U.S. foreign policy or to focus on what is of interest to policy makers, namely, the problems that they face? Is it the policy and its ramifications that are critical to what we want to know or are we more interested in the process and how we get to the policy? It may occur to the reader to say “all of the above”—both answers to these questions seem important to learning about American foreign policy. But, surprisingly, scholars have tended to go in one direction or the other. Let us explore why this may be the case.

Objective vs. Subjective

Through whose eyes do we look in studying American foreign policy? Are we the investigative reporter piecing together the story by looking at available documents and interviewing participants (e.g., Woodward 1991, 2002, 2004) or are we the political psychologist trying to understand what is happening through the eyes of the policy makers who have particular goals, experiences, interests, and worldviews (e.g., Foyle 1999; Preston 2001)? In other words, is the focus on being an objective observer examining the scene from outside or taking a more subjective view and letting those involved tell their story? Each lens has its benefits. In assuming the role of the observer, the scholar has the advantage of taking in all aspects of the story and identifying factors that appear to be influencing policy. With the more subjective approach, the scholar is given an “inside scoop” as to what participants are thinking and why they perceive they are adopting a particular foreign policy. But there are also disadvantages to each lens too. Is it possible for us as scholars to be objective given our experiences, training, beliefs, identities, and worldviews? The latter can affect not only the cases we choose to study and what we see but the research questions that we ask. And can we trust what policy makers say? They could be distorting what happened to make themselves look good; their memories can play games on them; and they only know a part of the story.

The interesting cases become those when the results from these two approaches lead to different constructions regarding what happened. Consider the following. Descriptions of the U.S. government’s reactions to the September 11 terrorist actions are built around a frame that it was an “attack against America.” But the author who was in London on that date was told, instead, by Tony Blair, the British prime minister, that it was a “crime against civilization.” These represent two different framings or interpretations of the very same event and have led the British and the Americans to deal with terrorists in different ways—one through the courts and the rule of law, the other through the military and nationalism. The PATRIOT Act, the internments at Guantanamo Bay, the Department of Homeland Security, and the War in Afghanistan are more easily described from the frame of September 11 being an “attack against America” than a “crime against civilization.” How the U.S. president framed the problem defined the norms for behavior and set the parameters for what would be allowable and what not. Our observations are guided by the frame and we fail to ask why this frame or why policy makers chose to make this a national security issue and invoke the liberty versus security dilemma. As observers we merely assume the frame; in a more subjective mode, we seek to learn from the policy makers why this frame and not others, and seek to understand the ramifications of the choice on their policy making and resultant policy.

Institutions vs. People

Many discussions of American foreign policy focus on the institutions involved in policy making. Much like this handbook, there is an interest in the domestic structures within which foreign policy is made. The “institutional lens” takes into account constitutional prerogatives, organizational roles and responsibilities, standard operating procedures, and formal and informal relationships among such entities. By focusing on institutions, we learn about the constraints that impinge on foreign policy making. Consider the ratification process for international treaties which, though signed by presidents, can only become law if ratified by a two-thirds vote of the Senate; the 24/7 media which is omnipresent and monitoring what is happening; elections that can change the relative balance among institutions; the increased reliance of the Defense Department on outsourcing its functions; or the increase in the size of the White House staff. The “people lens” examines the individuals who occupy the many roles in these institutions, generally those who are found at the tops of the organizational charts—those who have the authority to make policy and commit the resources of the U.S. government. People identify and interpret problems; they have beliefs and worldviews that lead them to see what they want to see; they develop shared ideas regarding how to behave and what is important; and they create the norms that define the “foreign policy culture.” They are the agents who push for change or maintain the status quo.

So why is there a problem? Both institutions and people are important. But what if one believes that roles and responsibilities limit what the people involved can do? Institutions constrain what those that are part of them can do. Institutions place certain demands on policy makers if they want to retain their positions and rise in the organization. Moreover, it is difficult to gain access to the policy makers involved and even if one could, they would probably describe the constraints under which they work as limiting what is possible. And then we have Harry Truman’s oft-cited statement that “I make American foreign policy” and the fact that U.S. doctrines are named after presidents or secretaries of defense and state. Thus, people seem important as targets of study even though constrained.

In the past decade there has been a movement to differentiate policy makers according to how likely they are to respect or challenge constraints (see, e.g., Hermann et al. 2001; Preston and Hermann, 2004; Keller 2005). Some policy makers perceive and prefer to work within institutional constraints while others are likely to push for change even if constrained. There is an interaction between institutions and people—agents are not always passive. In the literature, there are also attempts to explore “whose positions count” in the making of foreign policy using institutions and structure as the basis for examining which people have the authority to commit the resources of that institution for the particular problem or issue under study (see, e.g., Preston and ‘t Hart 1999; Hermann 2001; Mitchell 2005). Whose positions count and how they are configured can differ by institution. By focusing on whose positions count, the researcher cuts down on the individuals to be studied.

Pattern vs. Problem

As the definition of foreign policy raised at the start of this chapter suggests, policies initiate patterns of behavior. Consider such policies as containment, enlargement and engagement, preemption, the domino effect, and the war on terror. Such policies become standard operating procedures and shape the actions of the U.S. government. As Kupchan (1994) has proposed, such policies define the “strategic culture” in which both government and people live and respond. Patterns are also a focus of scholarship on American foreign policy. Seeking them out

lies at the heart of such questions as under what conditions are economic sanctions likely to be effective, when does the public support intervention, what do the data suggest is the nature of the trade-offs between guns and butter before, during, and after the Cold War. But it is the problem and not the pattern that policy makers face. “Things are not going well with regard to X, what should we do”? Or, “how do we take advantage of the opportunity that has just arisen”? At issue is how policy makers move from what George (1993) calls “actor-general” to “actor-specific” information—between the policy/pattern and the current problem.

What if policy makers have experience or expertise in dealing with a particular type of problem; does it predispose them to rely more on the policies and patterns that are familiar than when such experience is lacking? Consider, for example, that the last three American presidents—Clinton, Bush, and Obama—had little experience in dealing with foreign policy before coming to office. They had less background on which to draw in the decision-making process when compared to presidents like Eisenhower or George H.W. Bush who spent their careers leading up to the White House dealing with foreign policy. Recent research (Schafer 1997; Beer, Healy, and Bourne 2004; Mintz 2004) suggests that prior experience becomes important when the problem seems familiar, whereas what leaders are like appears to shape policy making without such expertise. In other words, personal predispositions are important in decision making unless the policy maker knows and has worked with the policies and is well acquainted with previous situations, precedents, and plans. With experience, patterns and policies are more likely to shape options and choices, without it what the policy maker is like and believes takes over.

Process vs. Outcome

Studies in American foreign policy often follow one of two paths. Along one path the focus is on what happens when a particular policy is implemented. What happened and what are the implications, how effective was it in achieving its purpose, is there a difference between actions and reactions based on that policy before and after a particular occurrence (e.g., September 11, the Cold War, North America Free Trade Agreement, and heightened security at the Mexican border)? The other path centers around the policy-making process itself and how it shapes the resulting policy. Consider Melanson’s (2005) interest in understanding the nature and degree of the foreign policy consensus that existed in the United States after the end of the Vietnam War, the Cold War, and September 11. What were the reactions of the public, government institutions, and the so-called foreign policy establishment to these events? Contrast that study with Goldgeier’s (2004) anatomy of the decision by the Clinton administration to expand the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO). Whereas one path is trying to explain what happened to policy once made and implemented, the other is working on understanding why a particular policy was selected.

What is interesting is that each of these paths tends to be linked in the literature to one side of the other contrasts just discussed. The study of outcomes is linked to focusing on patterns, institutions, and observation whereas the study of process tends to go along with examining problems, people, and being subjective. One path looks at “what happens” types of questions while the other examines “why” and “how did we get here” types of questions. It is possible to consider linking these two paths by posing a feedback loop that moves from a study of the process leading to a policy (say the Bush policy on preemption) and then the implementation of that policy in several different situations (say in Iraq and Afghanistan) or in dealing with different problems (such as nuclear proliferation and terrorism) with what happens feeding back into the policy-making process. Bolton (2005) has proposed such a process in examining the Bush administration’s response to September 11 and then to the more general problem of terrorism.

Putting the two paths together allows our studies to become more dynamic and provides scholars with the means of exploring policy-making across time in the sequence in which it occurred. Why was a policy chosen (what problem triggered it, who framed the problem, who was involved in the choice process, and what factors shaped the options generated and the resulting policy) and when implemented, what happened? One could think of separating the policy-making process into the various occasions for decision when people got together to form policy and then implement a decision, only to have the response trigger another occasion for decision with perhaps new people involved and a new decision made and implemented, and so forth. Studying such a sequence of decisions has been proposed by Beasley et al. (2001) in discussing the impact of decision units on foreign policy and debated by Kuperman and Ozkececi-Taner (2006).

In Conclusion

The purpose of this chapter was to overview the current study of American foreign policy and in the process to raise the questions that scholars are wrestling with as they do their research. The questions pose the many complexities that we meet in trying to both explain and understand what the United States is doing in world affairs. Given the debates discussed here, we are at the point of identifying sources of American foreign policy and of thinking systematically about the ways these factors influence policy making. However, we are just beginning to engage in integration exercises. Remember, readers, to think about how you would answer the questions discussed here as you proceed through the rest of the handbook and consider how you would go about integrating what scholars are finding.

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