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A Glass Half-Full? No, but Perhaps a Glass Filling: The Contributions of International Politics Research to Policy*

The contribution of international relations research to public policy is not a new topic for discussion. Indeed, it has been the subject of repeated commentary and analysis. Most considerations of the topic, alas, are not sanguine with respect to the contributions of international relations research to political life generally and policy making in particular.¹ The reasons advanced to explain this are several, but usually include ideas about the two different cultures in which academics and policymakers exist. These two cultures

foster different outlooks, leading to what is alternatively described as either a gap (George 1993)

or a chasm (Kruzel 1994). To the extent that the two cultures are the reflections of the different institutional demands of organizations that are, on the one hand, dedicated to the creation and dissemination of knowledge and, on the other, charged with making and executing public policy, the gap will naturally persist. Academics, for example, will only rarely work under the time constraints often imposed upon the employees of government agencies, and those in the foreign policy establishment will almost never know the luxury of academic contemplation. Still, the differences notwithstanding, there is ample opportunity for academic research to make significant contributions to improving the formulation and execution of foreign policy. This is a particularly apt time to consider these opportunities because there have been a number of significant academic achievements in the last decade that have already made contributions and, further, there are some recent innovations in theory and research that

have the potential to offer a good deal more.

I begin with a consideration of the contributions of political scientists to the design of strategic policies and deterrence strategies, then I discuss the impact the idea of a democratic peace has had on national policy, and I conclude with a consideration of the use of “fair division” and forecasting models of policy making in international politics. Two things need to be said about my review. First, it is not exhaustive. There are a number of other subjects that could be included, but I leave them out because of space limitations and because they have been considered elsewhere. An example is my omission of a discussion of the direct contributions of political scientists to public policy through office holding. It is probably the case that most, if not all, political scientists in the field of international politics have a friend or a colleague who has served in the government. It is also worth noting that a president (Wilson 1911), a secretary of state (Kissinger 1954) and a secretary of defense (Clausen and Cheney 1970) published articles in the *American Political Science Review* before they held public office.² Also not included is a discussion of the contributions of the Correlates of War project, a subject treated often by J. David Singer.³

Second, the contributions I discuss were not chosen at random, but rather because each typifies a particular type of knowledge. Let me explain. In his consideration of the interaction between the academic study of international politics and the needs of policymakers, George (1993) identifies three types of relevant knowledge: (1) abstract conceptual models of strategy, such as deterrence; (2) generic knowledge, which would include the idea of the democratic peace; and (3) actor-specific behavioral models, which would include models of fair division and social choice. That

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recent progress can be identified in each of these three different areas of knowledge ought to give us encouragement about the future prospects of international relations research to make useful contributions to national policy making.

Strategic Behavior

It is impossible to survey the development of international relations theory without appreciating the contributions of scholars such as Bernard Brodie, Albert Wohlstetter, and William Kauffman to the study of strategy. Frequently, such theorists have alternated between government work and academic life. For example, Brodie, whose *Strategy in the Missile Age* (1959) had tremendous influence over the direction of academic research and in guiding the strategic policies of the nation,⁴ worked at both Rand and the University of California, Los Angeles. Likewise, Wohlstetter worked at both Rand and the University of Chicago⁵ and Kauffman carried out research at MIT and was head of Rand's Social Science Department in 1961-62.

While questions of nuclear strategy have not disappeared from the research agenda of international relations (see, in particular, Powell 1990), the overall thrust of theorizing has changed, leading to some significant improvements in our ability to understand strategic behavior. The primary theoretical innovation has been the development of sophisticated game-theoretic models. To be sure, the application of game theory to strategic behavior has a long history, but recent developments have led to insights that explain counterintuitive behavior such as, for example, why the weak can successfully challenge the strong.

How is this so? It is perhaps most clearly shown in Fearon's analysis of crisis bargaining. A main idea in deterrence theory is that a state should be more capable of deterring another state to the extent that its capabilities exceed those of the other state. Fearon argued that the main problem with this formulation is that it does not allow for the "strategic dynamics linked to the fact that crises are sequences of decisions to threaten or escalate" (1994, 238). Thus, when a challenging state can observe the distribution of capabilities and still challenge, it tells the defending state a good deal about the challenger's resolve on the issue at stake. Put differently, weak challengers will challenge on issues that are not of central interest to a stronger defender; to do otherwise is to invite a strong response from the defending state and a defeat for the challenger. While the argument makes sense, and is supported by Fearon's data analysis, it is a possibility that is not considered in classic deterrence theory.

More generally, Fearon's argument addresses the larger issue of selection effects. Until recently, most studies of international conflict did not pay significant attention to why the cases under study took place. Following from Fearon's ideas, however, is the realization that the cases we see in history do not represent a random sample of all possible conflicts, but rather are a biased sample of wars that were selected by a state

because of their expectation of a favorable outcome. Deterrence failures, then, become cases in which state leaders have made miscalculations, most likely, either about the resolve of another state or the salience to that state of the issue under contention. Given such a view, it becomes important for leaders to communicate clearly the extent of their resolve and the importance they attach to the issue at contest. Consequently, beginning a conflict with the explicit statement that there are limits to one's own resolve, as the United States did in the conflict over Kosovo, is an invitation to the other side to exploit the situation for its own ends.

The Democratic Peace

In the late nineteenth century, Immanuel Kant ([1795]1983) offered an optimistic vision of what the future might hold if governments that ruled in accord with republican constitutions became more numerous. Such governments, based upon representative principles and the responsibility of the executive to a representative body, would be based upon the rule of law rather than the whim of a single individual. Importantly, the benefits of the rule of law seen by Kant did not stop within the state, but instead would be externalized into the international realm, where trade would flourish and war would decline to the point of disappearing. Kant's ideas did not immediately find acceptance among the world's leaders, but neither did they die.

Woodrow Wilson's ideas on the relationship of democracy to international politics were so close to those of Kant that, as Bruce Russett put it, "his Fourteen Points sound almost as though Kant were guiding Wilson's writing hand" (1993, 4). Wilson's Kantian ideals survived him, but it is fair to say that most students of international politics did not take them seriously until Michael Doyle (1983) and Rudolph Rummel (1983) began doing research on the relationship of, respectively, liberal and libertarian governments and war. Using quite different research designs, both concluded that wars did not occur between governments that were liberal or libertarian, for which we may read "democratic." Following this, the research on what has come to be called the "democratic peace" grew rapidly, producing such strong results that Jack Levy observed that "the absence of war between democracies comes as close as anything to an empirical law in international relations" (1988, 661-62).⁶

This is not the place to review the empirical results supporting the democratic peace⁷ (nor the evidence offered by those who are skeptical⁸), but it is the place to note that the idea of the democratic peace has elicited more interest from and exerted more hold on the policy community than any recent idea from the field of international relations. Explicit references to democracies not fighting with each other have been made repeatedly by United States leaders, including President Clinton, his first national security advisor, Anthony Lake, and earlier by President Bush's secretary of state, James Baker. The possibility of a democratic peace was also asserted by British Prime Minister Margaret

Thatcher. More generally, in recent State of the Union messages the mention of expanding democracy as a goal of U.S. foreign policy has increased substantially. While presidents during the height of the Cold War would speak of the community of free nations, meaning those that were anticommunist whether they were democratic or not, since 1981, the focus of presidential policy statements shifted to the expansion of democracy as a means of securing a peaceful world.

But what difference does this make? Joseph Krugel, who spent time in both academic and governmental institutions before his tragic death in Bosnia, observed that a powerful kind of knowledge in the policy making community was the simple empirical generalization. He specifically singled out the democratic peace:

Knowledge that can have a clear impact on policy is the simple, well-founded empirical proposition. One of the most powerful to come out of international relations research in decades is the notion that democracies do not go to war against each other. This proposition has had a substantial impact on public policy. You hear policymakers talk about it because it has a clear policy implication for the Defense Department: You can prepare to defend yourself against a threat, or you make the threat go away by turning a country into a democracy. (1994, 180)

Indeed, the Department of Defense now takes the democratic peace idea seriously enough to consistently include in the *Annual Message of the Secretary of Defense* the promotion of democracy in other states as a method of increasing the security of the United States.⁹

To be sure, some (e.g., Mansfield and Snyder 1995) argue that states making the transition to democracy are more violence-prone than those that have already become democratic (and those that are autocratic and not changing) and some (e.g., Schwartz and Skinner 1999) may offer the view that it can be dangerous for the United States to rely upon the idea of the democratic peace. To such challenges, however, John Owen (1999) proposes the following thought experiment:

If America's security is unaffected by the types of internal regimes other states have, then the U.S. should not work for the liberalization of political institutions in China; Washington should be indifferent whether liberal reformers, reactionary nationalists, or "former" communists hold power in Russia; and should condemn Douglas MacArthur as having wasted our time and resources when he imposed liberal democracy on Japan; likewise for John McCloy and others in West Germany. Many of us, in America and elsewhere, are grateful that MacArthur and McCloy knew better.

We should, however, hope that future democratic transitions do not require the kinds of events that changed Japan and Germany.

Fair Division

Whether it involves territory, trade, or something else of value, a great deal of what takes place in international politics is deciding how various things will be divided between and among states, groups, or some mixture of these. Often, these divisions are peacefully

accomplished through negotiation, but sometimes they are not, leading either to extended conflict or to lingering resentment when the stronger party imposes its will on the weaker. Examples of each outcome abound international history. Why is this so? There is a multitude of answers to this question, but there is now one among them that is amenable to solution: leaders cannot agree on a fair division of the object or issue of contention. To be sure, in many cases there is no "fair" division that is acceptable to all the parties to a conflict. Hitler, for example, had ideas about fair division that were totally unacceptable to the Polish government and most of the other governments of Western Europe. However, in many instances, states have goals that can be mutually accommodated if they can get through the process of negotiating who gets what that is seen as fair and envy free. "Envy free" means that each participant thinks that he or she has received the most desirable portion of what is being divided.

Discussions of fair division usually begin by noting how easy it is for two people to divide a cake: one cuts and the other chooses. When the number of people is greater than two and what is being divided is not as straightforward as a cake, problems of fair division quickly emerge. However, a method recently developed jointly by a political scientist and a mathematician offers the opportunity for states (and individuals) to negotiate fair, envy-free division much more easily than has been the case in the past.

In *Fair Division*, Steve Brams and Alan Taylor (1996) presented an extended analysis of the problems of fair division and an explication of various techniques that have been offered as solutions to the problem. The most promising method of fair division, at least from the perspective of international politics, is Brams and Taylor's idea of the Adjusted Winner (AW). In essence, the procedures of AW involve the allocation of 100 points to the participants in a division, who then assign points to the good or goods being divided according to the value they place upon them. Assuming two parties, in the first round, each participant gets the goods to which they have assigned more points than the other participant. In the unlikely event that the two parties have spent equal amounts of their points on the goods, and thereby have received goods they value equally, the process would end. More likely, however, they have spent unequal points, and one participant will then have necessarily received more of what they want than has the other. If so, a redistribution of goods takes place. This is an equitability adjustment, under which good are transferred, perhaps repeatedly, from one to the other until both have the same point totals. This process has significant advantages over other methods of division because it produces outcomes that are proportionate (i.e., both participants get at least 50% of what they want), envy-free (i.e., neither participant would trade what they have for what the other has), and equitable (i.e., each participant has the same value for the goods they hold).¹⁰

It would be useful in the present context to be able to report that the AW method has been used to solve a

significant international dispute, but, alas, such is not yet the case. However, it has been used successfully in a context that some may see as disputatious as an international conflict: divorce settlements (Brams 1999). While applications to international politics may as yet be absent, there are reasons to believe that AW can be useful. Brams and his colleagues have reported several case studies of the application of AW to international disputes. One is an analysis of the 1974 Panama Canal agreement (Brams and Taylor 1996, 95-98); another is an extended analysis of the 1978 Camp David Accords (Brams and Togman 1996). The latter is particularly interesting as both an exposition of the AW method and as an analysis of a difficult situation that was, in the end, settled largely in accord with what an AW procedure would have produced. More recently, Denoon and Brams (1997) have analyzed the application of AW to the Spratly Islands dispute, and the results have not only been published but have been the subject of presentations to "senior policymakers in Washington, Beijing, and the Southeast Asian capitals--as well as the Secretary General of the Law of the Sea Authority" (Denoon 1999).

While the AW method holds considerable promise for the future,¹¹ another technique has already found surprisingly wide, if largely unnoticed, use.

FACTIONS/Policon

In the spring of 1995, readers of *Izvestia* were treated to an unusual account of the likely future of the Russian state, including a forecast that the path Russia was following would lead to a mixed economy similar to that of Sweden. What was novel about the article was not just the projection of a mixed economy but the fact that the analysis that led to this forecast emerged from a previously classified analytic tool of the Central Intelligence Agency that for the first time was being displayed for the citizens of the country under analysis. The tool, called FACTIONS by the CIA, had been in use for a number of years and, according to *Izvestia*, the results it produces on a wide range of topics are "on the desks of top U.S. leaders." The article, written by Sergey Chugayev, furnishes a brief explanation of the methodology of FACTIONS and considerable claims for its accuracy, but does not go into detail on either.

Fortunately, another analysis did. In 1995, a different account of FACTIONS appeared reporting the specifics of the tool at much greater length. The exposition had been written in 1987 by Stanley Feder (1995), then an employee of the CIA, and published in an internal CIA journal, *Studies in Intelligence*. It became public when the CIA declassified the journal and H. Bradley Westerfield, after reviewing most of the journal's contents, sought and gained Agency permission to publish a selection of articles in *Inside CIA's Private World* (1995). Feder's account of FACTIONS is noteworthy in several respects. First, it presents detailed description of the social science modeling underlying FACTIONS, particularly the spatial theory

of voting. Second, it presents an analysis of the accuracy of the forecasts generated by FACTIONS and, of particular interest, compares these to the forecasts made by Directorate of Intelligence analysts using their standard methods. Without going into detail, the forecasts produced by FACTIONS were shown to be both more specific and more accurate than the results generated by the Directorate of Intelligence. Third, Feder presented a discussion of the traps often encountered by analysts and how FACTIONS helps overcome them. For example, analysts, says Feder, have a tendency to look to the future as a projection of the past, while FACTIONS, to the contrary, begins with the assumption that policies are the product of changing political forces that are estimable.

Another noteworthy aspect of Feder's article is that it is vague on who created the model on which FACTIONS is based. He states that it was developed by Policon Corporation. This is true, but he does not state that the model was, in fact, the development of a single scholar: Bruce Bueno de Mesquita, who has used it successfully in a variety of other contexts beyond forecasts for the CIA. The model's content and method of operation are described at length in a number of his publications (e.g., Bueno de Mesquita 1994, 1997). How was FACTIONS developed by the CIA? As Feder admits in the first footnote of his article, the CIA reverse engineered its own version of the model "and it is very similar to Policon" (1995, 274). If imitation is indeed the sincerest form of flattery, this is high praise for the model's value.

Without going into detail about the actual construction of the model or how it functions (see the sources cited in the previous paragraph), it may be noted that it generates forecasts about policy outcomes using information on how stakeholders (i.e., those with both an interest in an issue and an ability to affect its outcome) are positioned on an issue, how important the issue is to them, and how much power each stakeholder has. The information on these three variables is generated through the use of experts, often area experts who have particularly well-informed knowledge on a state and its policies. Thus, FACTIONS functions as a bridge between rigorous formal theory that emphasizes a generic model of decision and policy outcomes and the more ideographic, but deep knowledge of area experts.

How does the model fair? Quite well, in fact. To return to Feder's account, he noted that the model was used "to analyze scores of policy issues in over 30 countries" (275). He reports the model's rate of accuracy was about 90%, and when the forecasts of the model and CIA analysts differed, the model's forecast was correct in every case. The forecasts generated through the model have been the subject of other assessments. Twelve specific forecasts about the future of Hong Kong reported in Bueno de Mesquita, Rubuska, and Newman's *Forecasting Political Events* (1985) were evaluated in an article in the *Far Eastern Economic Review* (McGurn 1996) and found to be overwhelmingly accurate. A number of other specific

assessments of the model are also reported at length by Bueno de Mesquita (1997).

Significantly, the model has also begun to find use in the business sector. Three individual firms, two in the United States and one in Europe, are using the model to make specific business-related forecasts regarding the outcomes of negotiations over such issues as the settlement of lawsuits and corporate mergers. While the accuracy of the forecasts generated in this environment has not been subject to the kind of audit reported by Feder or *Izvestia*, an illuminating and dramatic, if slightly inaccurate, account of its use in the business world may be found in a *Financial Times* (London) article on the European defense mergers of 1998 (Dixon and Nicoll 1999).

Using the Knowledge

Some of the tools and theories developed by political scientists have already been used by policymakers. The FACTIONS model is still used by the CIA (Feder 1999). Adjusted Winner has favorable features that should make it attractive in the future for use in settling conflicts in which each side recognizes the need for a settlement but cannot agree on the terms. Game theory models have probably had the least direct impact, even if the term “zero-sum” is ubiquitous among policymakers. Most visibly, the democratic peace has entered the vocabulary of policymakers and apparently is influencing choices at several junctures in the policy process, perhaps because it is the least technically demanding of the four topics discussed here. Inevitably, realizing benefits from FACTIONS, AW, or game theory will either require policymakers to be trained in their use or to rely on consultants who have command of the tools. New training for policymakers seems overly optimistic. Henry Kissinger’s assertion that policy making consumes intellectual capital rather than creates it (1979, 27) has often been echoed. Drawing upon consultants is not straightforward for several

reasons. First, the use of a consultant is an admission that an agency or individual does not have the requisite tools to do the job. To be sure, Washington, DC, is filled with consultants, but their use appears to go down as the importance of the issue rises in the policy-making community, so that at the highest levels consultants appear relatively less frequently than they do at the lower levels.

Second, even if the consultants are drawn in at a relatively high level, they give advice at their own peril. A cautionary tale is offered by Friedheim in his account of consulting for the government on the Law of the Sea Conference. Working with a colleague, Friedheim developed a powerful forecasting tool that, in his words, “provided a greater information, analytic, and forecasting capacity for the U.S. delegation than had ever existed before for a U.S. delegation accredited to a major international decision conference” (1978, 147). This should have been welcomed by all involved. Initially, it was, but as the sponsor’s personnel shifted, and as other segments of the government beyond the initial sponsor became involved, it became, in Friedheim’s words, “clear that although the work technically was better than ever, we were permanently locked out of the policy process and the work would have little or no impact . . . [the project was] a scientific success and an applied failure” (151). It is doubtful the conditions that created this situation have changed in the intervening years, so no matter how well a model may analyze international politics, forecast political events, or help solve a long-standing dispute, it will be useful only if there are policymakers willing to use it.

George (1994, 172) has written of academics who approach Washington with a sense of hubris about their knowledge. Doubtless, this is sometimes true. But it is also true that policymakers can have their own predispositions toward new ideas from the academic community. We can hope that the demonstration of success from the kinds of ideas discussed above will create opportunities for them to reach out.

Notes

* In the course of preparing this paper, I benefitted from conversations with Bruce Bueno de Mesquita, Stanley Feder, James Morrow, and Michael Ward, and the help of Robert Friedheim. They, of course, are not responsible for any errors.

1. For some exceptions, see Bueno de Mesquita (1999) and Lepgold (1998).

2. It is a bit of close call to say that Wilson had an article in the *American Political Science Review* before he held public office. Wilson was elected Governor of New Jersey on November 8, 1910, while the article appeared in February 1911. However, given the proximity of those two dates, he certainly had a paper accepted in the *Review* before he held public office. In addition, we should not forget that both Wilson (1919) and Kissinger (1973) won the Nobel Peace Prize, as did Ralph Bunche (1950), who received his Ph.D. in political science from the University of California, Los Angeles.

3. See, for example, Singer (1990).

4. For example, Henry Kissinger referred to Brodie as “one of the

leading strategic thinkers” (1965, 313).

5. Kissinger described Wohlstetter’s views on nuclear control in NATO as being dominant “in the Pentagon through the 1960s” (1965, 186).

6. Note that Levy did not say it is a law, but only that it came closer to being a law than any other reported empirical relationship.

7. An excellent summary is provided by Russett and Starr (2000).

8. For one such critique, see Gowa (1999).

9. See, for example, *1996 Annual Defense Report* (www.dtic.mil/execsec/adr96/).

10. The process is more technically sophisticated than can be described here. Interested readers should consult Brams and Taylor (1996, chap. 4) for an exposition of the method of Adjusted Winner.

11. The promise is sufficient that Brams and Taylor sought patent protection and, on November 9, 1999, were issued Patent No. 5,983,205 for “A Computer-Based Method for the Fair Division of Ownership of Goods.”

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