Foreign policy decision-making and the construction of state’s identity

Preface

There were talks long ago about possibility to integrate together International Relations [IR] and Foreign Politics Analysis [FPA] disciplines. Like many others, I argue that it could be implemented with social constructivism.

Classical IR theories suggest that leading players are states which as rational and principal actors are responsible for decisions making. FPA has view, reflecting state being simply as “metaphysical abstraction”; while, decision-makers are realized as real persons which initiate significant decisions at the state level.

The question is: how these two previously identified viewpoints [i.e. IR and FPA] could be combined together? And what is the real essence of this compatibility? This question is raised and fully discussed in this report.

1. FPA

First of all, foreign policy is a set of decisions. FPA analyses how decision makers face and cope with problems if they are limited by the internal environment [the attention is focused on bureaucratic politics, institutions, various agencies interaction, features of communication process, and, finally, the attention is focused, in general, on internal politics environment and its characteristic] or psychology [perception and false perception, ideologies, group-think, images, and etc.]². FPA explains how and

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why one or another decision was made; however, FPA speaks only a little about the origin of particular decisions; precisely, how certain developed situation in state or international space has become a problem which should be solved?

As Houghton mentioned, if we take the classic example of crisis in Cuba [1962], we could ask ourselves why Kennedy chose to maintain Navy blockade rather than an air strike? This decision, for instance, could be influenced by psychological factors. On the other hand, we could ask question, why Kennedy or his advisors even could not think about possibility to ignore the missiles in Cuba? Here, according Houghton,

beliefs about Cold War Communism and appropriate presidential behavior in response to security threats shared by practically all Americans […] seem so critical that it is difficult to understand how any useful explanation could conceivably leave them out.

No decisions are made in a blank space; meanwhile, people who have come to one or another decision do not live in a vacuum! Consequently, one or another foreign politics decision was significantly influenced by the context. From constructivism point of view, this context includes intersubjective ideas, meanings, traditions etc., whose social construction and changes must be examined.

2. Constructivism

The argument, that the social world is constructed intersubjectively — is fundamental principle of social constructivism. It means that concepts or objects in social world are not only objectively given, but also they are not determined by separate individuals understanding or perception. This is the consequence of continual corporate society practice.

Majority of constructivists express viewpoint that identity of state significantly determines its foreign policy. According to Wendt, subjects


hardly could know their wants, if they would not know themselves as subjects. Identity discloses the subject; while, interests represent what subject wants\textsuperscript{5}. Weldes added that foreign politics could be substantiated by particular interests\textsuperscript{6}.

While applying constructivism for foreign political decision making analysis, it should be noted, that a particular decision will not necessarily be determined by the [state’s] identity. As mentioned above, many factors can influence the decision, also material. In example, after joining the EU foreign policy makers in Lithuania decided to pursue an “active and visible” foreign policy. In is hard to ignore that in part the improved economic situation led this decision. However, how this policy was implemented [precisely, “The leader of the region”] depended on identity. Precisely, it depended on collective understanding, what is the state, its identity, which was inherent to foreign policy makers.

So, the question should be raised: who have made particular foreign policy decision and how they [decision makers] “ideologically came” to it? Either, what intersubjective ideas, meanings led to one or another foreign policy decision?

How to disclose? Constructivist paradigm for international relations is not homogenous; different attitudes towards state’s identity, its construction and relation with foreign politics are prevailing. Speaking about foreign politics decision making analysis, we should pay our attention to these discussions.

3. System/ unit-level constructivism

System level

According to Wendt, state’s identity is determined by the anarchy cultures of international system; meanwhile, these „cultures“ are created through the social interaction between the states [i.e. actions and responses to those actions]. There three anarchy cultures: briefly, in Hobbe’s culture, different states consider other states being enemies to each other; in Locke’s culture states are competitors, but they pay respect to each other’s sovereignty; meanwhile, in Kant’s culture states are friendly to each other.


Generally speaking, if we follow Wendt, state’s identity, which determines its behavior, is determined by international system or systemic factors\footnote{Wendt A., Social theory of international politics, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999.}.

Another ‘systemic’ constructivist Finnemore argues that international norms are significant; precisely, these intersubjective meanings [i.e. international norms] not only determines state’s inter-relations, but also develops their collective identities. International social norms are embedded and assigned to separate states with the help of international organizations.

Finnemore grounded his insights using three empirical examples: role of UNESCO which develops state’s scholarly politics; the significance of international Red Cross Committee for inter-state war leading practice; the role of World Bank which changes the goals of state’s economy politics, precisely, from economic development towards state’s wellbeing goal\footnote{Finnemore Martha, National Interests in International Society, Cornell University Press: Ithaca and London, 1996.}.

\textit{Unit level}

However, other constructivists – Katzenstein, Hopf, Kubálková etc. – claim that cultural, social and political processes in the state’s inner life develop their social collective identities. Hopf in example argue that state’s enemies and friends are identified “at home”\footnote{Hopf Ted, Social Construction of International Politics: Identities and Foreign Policies. Moscow, 1955 and 1999, Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 2002, p. 294.}. Meanwhile, according to Weldes:

After all, states are only analytically, but not in fact, unitary actors. The meanings which objects, events and actions have for ‘states’ are necessarily the meanings they have for those individuals who act in the name of the state. And these state officials do not approach international politics with a blank slate on to which meanings are written only as a result of interactions among states. Instead, the approach international politics with an already quite comprehensive and elaborate appreciation of the world, of international system and of the place of their state within it\footnote{Weldes Jutta, „Constructing National Interests“, European Journal of International Relations 2, 1996, pp. 275-318, p. 280, op cit.}.

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  \item \footnote{Finnemore Martha, National Interests in International Society, Cornell University Press: Ithaca and London, 1996.}
  \item \footnote{Weldes Jutta, „Constructing National Interests“, European Journal of International Relations 2, 1996, pp. 275-318, p. 280, op cit.}
\end{itemize}
First of all, in terms of the FPA, it is necessary to follow the unit-level constructivism. It doesn’t matter how others really perceive particular state; decisions start here [within state], identities shape here, also, social cognitive structure which comprise from identities and discourses, and determine decision makers self-understandings. Precisely, inner processes determine how states will treat each other in respect afterwards.

4. Critical/ conventional constructivism

Conventional constructivists – Wendt, Katzenstein, Adler – consider states identities being relatively stable intersubjective constructs. I.e., when state’s identity is created, it becomes relatively stable; therefore, it could be [empirically] fixed and then used as independent variable searching for the causal relation among identities, national interests and certain actions of foreign politics.

Critical constructivists criticizes the assumptions made by conventional constructivists. According to Checkel, „objectification” of state’s identity contravenes one of the most significant meta-theoretical principle of constructivism, which claims that agent and structure are mutually related and interacts together with each other. Whereas, the space of identity will be dynamic as identities develop during this interaction.

Thus, critical constructivists make assumption, that states identities are developed and redeveloped constantly. And this is done through a foreign [and security] policy. Such an attitude is close to international relations post-structuralists standpoint which claims that state’s identity does not have an ontological background; therefore, it can not be treated as objective, stable phenomenon. State’s identity constantly made up and sustained using foreign and security politics11.

The middle path also possible; i.e. the assumption could be made that constitutive relationship exists between state’s identity and foreign politics. This means that the state’s identity significantly affects what particular foreign politics is shaped. On the other hand, foreign politics determines what identity is constructed and articulated. „These conceptions are too much interrelated with each other; therefore, it would be

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hard to identify one way relationship of cause and effect. Moreover, both phenomenon includes discursive and ideological nature. This is one of the reasons why it is impossible to determine the sequence.

Talking about foreign policy decisions, I argue, that on the one hand, state’s identity significantly affects how certain people – precisely, foreign policy decision makers – “ideologically reach” particular foreign policy decisions; on the other hand, through the way how they “ideologically reached” particular foreign policy decisions, this identity / or the discourse of identity emerged and could be disclosed.

5. Empirical analysis

*Historical-empirical research*: firstly, it is important to identify those foreign politics makers, who “ideologically reached” particular foreign policy decisions. In short, it is necessary to answer the question: *who speak / spoke?* For this purpose, the foreign policy-making process and its mechanism must be disclosed.

*Discourse analysis*: after the identification of key persons in foreign politics, other questions should be answered, namely: *how they speak / spoke?*

Any decision is somehow justified, reasoned. Meanwhile, identity, as Campbell noted, „is constituted in relation of difference“13. Hence, it always has two dimensions: *I [We] and Other / Others*, where the latter is different than *I / We*. Thus, it must be disclosed what particular intersubjective meanings are / were “encoded“ in the reasoning:

a. How foreign politics perceived state [*themselves*] – its opportunities or position in international system;

b. And how they perceived *others* – other countries or other subjects of international system.

Instead of conclusions: why this kind of analysis is significant?

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1. As Houghton claims “for many years FPA has been a kind of free floating enterprise, logically unconnected to, and disconnected from, the main theories of IR”. Social constructivism allows to integrate with each other IR and FPA disciplines, which developed separately long time ago.

2. There are variety of factors, which can lead to particular foreign policy decisions making. However, how certain situation has developed in state or international space could become the problem of foreign politics, only constructivism could disclose.

3. From empirical point of view, careful foreign policy decision-making analysis enables to reveal the state’s identity construction process and its peculiarities, and thus to understand the foreign policy. Precisely:
   a. Through the way how foreign policy decision makers “ideologically reached” particular foreign policy decisions, state’s identity / or the discourse of identity emerged and could be disclosed.
   b. State’s identity allows to understand foreign policy as the latter significantly depends from the state’s identity.