

Interpreting Foreign Policy: National, Comparative, and Regional Studies

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Abstract

This Special Issue advances an interpretive research programme into Foreign Policy Analysis and International Relations by showcasing new work on the study of foreign policy and regional cooperation. This introductory article explains the rationale and contents of the Special Issue in three parts. The opening part explains how the contributions complement the broader study of ideas in Foreign Policy Analysis and International Relations through a critique of methodological positivism in the social sciences. The second part elaborates the theoretical framework used to cohere the collection, which centres on the study of ‘situated agents’ who, when confronted with policy dilemmas, draw on inherited traditions to inform their foreign policy practices. This is accompanied by a methods case study centring on David Cameron’s European Union referendum strategy, which is used to illustrate the practical ways in which one can conduct interpretivist research into foreign policy. In conclusion, we spell out how the contributors conducted their work to advance the interpretivist research programme.

Keywords: Foreign Policy Analysis; International Relations; interpretivism; positivism; situated agency; David Cameron; European Union referendum.

This Special Issue works at the nexus of Foreign Policy Analysis (FPA) and International Relations (IR) to develop an interpretivist research programme into foreign policy decision-making.¹ Our objective is to contribute to the broad genres of literature on: individuals (or Irving Janis's cohesive 'groups') in foreign policy decision-making,² as well as the constructivist work in IR which argues that foreign policy activity is, at heart, a realm of social practice.³ This work persuasively suggests that, just as with individual agents operating in domestic polities,⁴ state behaviour in the international realm can be explained as a form of social practice, unfolding in a world of cognition, perception and misperception, and the generation of intersubjective meanings about how the world 'works' and the intentions of different actors within it.⁵

Since the study of identity constructions are a prominent feature of the work in this Special Issue it speaks in particular to the elements of this extant work dealing with the identity-based as well as the material and institutional sources of foreign policy adaptation.⁶ As Jeffrey Checkel and Peter Katzenstein have suggested, identities 'refer to shared representations of a collective self' and can be accessed, as the contributors do here, using a variety of sources (mainly those produced by elites in the relatively 'closed' foreign policy communities studied by our contributors) which home in on 'collective beliefs about the definition of the group and its membership' and are also 'revealed by social practices as well as by political attitudes shaped by social and geographical structures and national contexts'⁷ – not to mention inherited traditions handed down through history. These traditions, 'what might be termed the political culture of foreign policy' inform elite thought about their country's international role 'and the strategic habits that have evolved from that role'.⁸

We thus see the work showcased here as feeding onto two sets of literature in particular. On the one hand the 'classic' FPA scholarship on individual cognition and the cultural and domestic factors shaping national 'style' and content of foreign policies.⁹ On the other, the recently reinvigorated 'linguistic turn' in constructivism and post-structuralism,¹⁰

and the cognate ‘international practices’ turn,¹¹ both of which privilege the construction of national subjectivities in sustaining the social fabric of international life. These have usefully been applied to the analysis of regional and transnational governance as well as national cases.¹² In the spirit of these literatures we treat discourse and other data about elite beliefs as analytical prisms through which we can see identity issues unpacked, external and internal pressures on foreign policy being perceived, and different sources of material power and influence being weighed up and acted upon to produce foreign policy decisions. This is an explicitly constructivist move that sidesteps blunt recourse to material explanations (as detailed in the next section) by showing how the beliefs of key decision-makers are fundamental to explaining foreign policy outcomes. As Dan Reiter has explained, beliefs are important because they ‘are used to inform decisions in the face of uncertainty. Beliefs are derived from interpretations of past events’,¹³ meaning that they have a direct bearing on day to day policy practices as well as being part of a wider national conversation with the history of the nation. The contributors to this Special Issue deal explicitly with the presence of the past in the present.

A significant way of accessing information about foreign policy ‘mind-sets and actions’, is, noted Christopher Hill, through a close study of the language of foreign policy, which helps unpack the beliefs on which foreign policy practices are based. However, the study of ‘discourse’ is an important but not the only means used in this collection,¹⁴ which covers a diverse range of national, comparative, and regional cases. Concurring with Theda Skocpol’s characterization of states as ‘Janus-faced’ entities which look outwards and inwards simultaneously,¹⁵ we account for patterns of foreign policy change and continuity ‘through a contextual approach which locates the state at the intersection of two environments – the international and domestic’.¹⁶ Our theoretical focus is on the beliefs that come to be held by ‘situated agents’ (the decision-makers, usually at the apex of foreign policy machineries) charged with drawing on prior foreign policy traditions to identify the national interest and the

scope and limits for foreign policy action they see as flowing from dilemmas they encounter in the international arena. These dilemmas might be foreign policy ‘crises’ that challenge preconceptions about the behaviour of another state or international actor. Dilemmas can also arise in the form of new information or knowledge about ‘routine’ or non-urgent foreign policy matters.

The articles presented in the Special Issue cohere around a theoretical framework centring on the study of ‘situated agents’ responding to policy dilemmas by drawing on – and sometimes adapting – foreign policy traditions in response to dilemmas. We see this framework, which puts the methodological focus on ‘situated agents’ as foreign policy decision-makers, as an enormously useful way of developing the foreign policy and international politics literatures mentioned above.¹⁷ To frame the contributions that follow we begin by presenting interpretivist approaches to explaining foreign policy practices, rooted in a critique of methodological positivism in the social sciences. In the second part, we use a review of previous work on foreign policy traditions as the basis for discussing the Special Issue’s research programme. This programme is themed around the idea that ‘situated agents’ draw on inherited foreign policy traditions when confronting policy dilemmas, and the practices that result give meaning to the action undertaken. How far this leads to a reconfiguration of the prior foreign policy traditions is a question that needs answering on a case by case basis, opening the way for the individual articles presented in the rest of the collection.

Explanation, Interpretation and Explanation through Interpretation

As the etymology of the word ‘interpret’ indicates, from the Latin *interpretari*, the interpretivist agenda is to explain, expound, and understand. The interpretive approach balances the goals of explanation and understanding often, incorrectly, said to be incommensurable in IR.¹⁸ This position rests on the assumption that explanations for political

action follow from an empathetic understanding of the social meanings that underpin political activity, especially ‘how the processes of social representations are formed and internalized’ in the realm of the ‘international’. Interpretivists are comfortable seeking answers to ‘why’ questions through an investigation of ‘how’ things came to be, rather than falling back on a covering-law model that posits: (i) the identification of an ‘initial condition statement’ will (ii) flag up the applicability of relevant scientific law(s) leading (iii) to an outcome that holds in all cases in which conditions (i) and (ii) are met.¹⁹ Coming from a desire to make the social and natural worlds more predictable, in this model too much work is done by abstract and putatively deterministic ‘structures’ which act as outside ‘variables’ pushing and pulling agents into performing certain actions irrespective of their own intentions, interests, beliefs, normative or ethical desires, and a capacity not just for purposive agents not only to identify lessons but also to change their beliefs and associated behaviour as a result.

This point can be illustrated by looking momentarily to another field, the law, where narrative modes of explanation are fully accepted as the basis for making adjudications between parties in dispute.²⁰ Qualitative evidence is gathered to create rival narratives (the prosecution narrative and the defence narrative), with the final judgement resting for judge and jury on which narrative seems best to explain the timeline of events as (usually) agreed by the parties. Particularly since the ‘cultural turn in legal studies’ the study of narratology is now seen as a prerequisite to unpacking such vital matters as sequencing and the causal presentation of events in which ‘facts’ are imbued with normative properties by virtue of being embedded in stories about the past.²¹

Narrative explanations rooted in empathetic understanding of agents’ beliefs and practices can act as a useful counterbalance in FPA and IR to the covering-law model, which has been embraced via methodological positivism. This interweaves three propositions. First, it advances the utility of a natural science or natural science-like epistemology which identifies knowledge with the production of covering laws of the ‘if X, then Y’ variety

described above. Second, it equates the existence of an object with its observability, which makes it easier to study the physical than the social world. Third, it draws a distinction between the observer on the one hand and the object being studied on the other. The observer ideally remains detached and 'outside', instead of being a participant in the events being classified and linked together in relationships of dependence in a causal chain.²² The scientist in this idealised version is 'a mere processor of information like a computer', so 'the assumption is that both the data and the processor are neutral, with no ability to alter the ways in which the question or its answer is understood'.²³ Normatively speaking, methodologically positive scientists do not 'interpret' their data, they merely report 'findings'.

Methodological positivism has left an indelible mark on FPA and IR through recourse to different forms of 'structure' which are said to mould national foreign policy choices, not entirely but quite often removing the 'human' element from explanations of state behaviour on the world stage.²⁴ States in this image are treated as unitary actors possessing unchanging interests in safeguarding their own security in an anarchic system lacking the means either of ordering itself from below or having order imposed on it from above. Realists, for example, posit that foreign policy choices are the product of the distribution of material capabilities. Liberal theorists, particularly institutionalists and constructivists, accept the same anarchic power-driven ontology of international relations but argue that the creation and maintenance of international organizations and 'regimes' changes the calculus facing decision-makers and can lead to more cooperative ventures among states signed up to the idea of acting in concert rather than alone, especially through the evolution of transnational norms which regulate expectations and provide more information and certainty for international action.²⁵ States use these regimes as repositories of norms 'to coordinate their expectations and organize aspects of international behavior in various issue-areas'.²⁶ In other words, rationally calculating unitary states craft organizations and regimes 'to create social orderings appropriate to their pursuit of shared goals'.²⁷

In putting this case liberal constructivists share more in common with their supposed disciplinary ‘others’, the Realists, than is often supposed. For example, many of the classical Realists, including Hans Morgenthau, drew explicit attention to the social and ideational aspects of the exercise of material power. Look at Morgenthau’s nine ‘elements of national power’ in *Politics Among Nations*: geography (size; position); natural resources; industrial capacity; military preparedness; population (not size but the will to pull at the material levers of power internationally); national ‘character’; national morale; quality of diplomacy; quality of government.²⁸ In theory, the possession of huge material capability would in the Morgenthau view be rendered useless if there was not the will amongst leaders of publics to deploy it effectively. The will of leaders is clearly a social choice that depends on things such as individual leader beliefs, bureaucratic tugs of war, and democratic dialogue involving the public and civil society actors.

Unfortunately, the study of the social choices underpinning political action became marginalised in the work of the methodological positivists who became leading figures in the development of IR as a distinct subfield of study, especially so in US academia after the Second World War. For example, Kenneth Waltz’s brand of Neorealism in the later 1970s attempted to create a ‘science’ of international politics using modelling techniques drawn from Economics to create a ‘systemic’ theory of international politics.²⁹ Significantly, Waltz’s work was spurred by a critique of reductionist theories of international political behavior which relied on the individual and national level explanations for foreign policy action that feature prominently in this Special Issue. Waltz’s discussion of the background beliefs that shape foreign policy decision-making was heavily constrained because all states were assumed to share the same goals. He accented military and economic factors in the creation and sustenance of the balance of power; but he left behind the presumably less easy to observe final five components of Morgenthau’s list, as well as his own earlier reflections on

war as a social activity undertaken at the behest of humans organized into separate collectivities with different visions of who ‘they’ are in relation to ‘others’ in the world.³⁰

Responding to this position, interpretivists agree with those in FPA and IR identified at the beginning of this article, who work on the assumption, succinctly put by J. David Singer, that people experience things while institutions do not, so how can we account for ‘causes’ of a nation’s foreign policy if we do not include ‘the media by which external conditions and factors are translated into a policy decision?’³¹ Interpretivists are interested in accounting for the ways in which ‘Material attributes feed into conceptions of the national role, in a way that then shapes behaviour; but [also how] a state’s behaviour then affects national attributes in turn’.³² In the study of foreign policy, as this collection shows, interpretivists might operate using many and varied methods and sources, but two goals are common to all such accounts of foreign policy action. First, to identify the meanings embedded in agents’ practices. Second, to explain these meanings by locating them in their social, cultural, institutional and historical contexts. The next part of the article will explain the theoretical framework used by contributors in this collection to explain the foreign policy practices of the situated agents whose practices they account for via a study of the beliefs underpinning the practices.

Foreign Policy Traditions, Dilemmas and Situated Agency

The research programme in this collection uses a set of concepts which aims to give empirical depth, particularly on the historical side, to a number of contexts within which foreign policy activity occurs.³³ Given that this framework and the accompanying epistemological position on structure and agency is fundamental to the research showcased in the Special Issue, this section begins by explaining the concepts of ‘tradition’ and ‘dilemma’ using extant research, shows how they inform our position on situated agency, and ends by clarifying the concepts by explaining how an interpretivist study might unfold methodologically speaking using the

case study of David Cameron's policy for a referendum on Britain's membership of the European Union (EU).

We begin with the concept of 'tradition', a term that crops up frequently in the study of foreign policy. A good example is Andrei Tsygankov's 2014 article on the dynamics of Russian foreign policy decision-making. His starting point was that interpretive perspectives are not antithetical to explanatory perspectives because the 'why' of foreign policy can be addressed through a consideration of the 'how' and 'in which contexts' foreign policy activity takes place. In his view, a combination of material capabilities and the layered interactions of all actors involved in and outside the state can create heavily constrained ideational possibilities for decision-makers, 'but not enough to deprive them of meaningful choices'.³⁴ Suggestively for our purposes Tsygankov pointed out that IR has developed around 'Western' and especially US concerns, so one very obvious benefit of bringing an interpretive approach to a range of other cases is that it brings in specificities of locally meaningful action in countries and regions often theorized away by the scholarly community.³⁵ Tsygankov interpreted Dmitri Medvedev's European Security Policy in a series of steps which took in his actions and statements towards Europe, his speeches, Medvedev's reference to other 'national schools of thought' on foreign policy, international reactions, and in light of Medvedev's experience of what he deemed to be other similar cases from the past (on Russia see Ekaterina Koldunova's article below).

Other examples from case studies around the globe bear testament to the significance but also the complexities involved in identifying the nature and impact of traditions in the study of foreign policy. First, according to William Callahan, in China the ancient concept of *Tianxia* ('All-under-Heaven') has made a recent reappearance in elite foreign policy discourse, imposing memories of the hierarchies of imperial China on proposals for new approaches to world order (on China see Frank Gaenssmantel's article below).³⁶ Second, accounts of American foreign policy have alighted on the ways in which historical traditions

inform foreign policy outcomes, although there is little consensus on how best to package them analytically speaking. Washington foreign policy decisions are variously held to be the product of contestation between different strands of thought on ‘isolationism’ and global ‘commitment’, the legacy of partition/union and multiculturalism, and/or the product of imagery around ‘immigrants and frontiersmen’.³⁷ Interwoven with these the American ‘democracy tradition’, writes Nicolas Bouchet, is ‘a fundamental narrative for thinking about, making and presenting foreign policy’ regardless of whether the president is Democrat or Republican (Andras Szalai studies US nuclear strategizing in his article below).³⁸

Third, to understand Brazil’s foreign policy E. Bradford Burns informs us that we need look no further than ‘the founder of its modern foreign policy, the Baron of Rio-Branco and his foreign policy manifesto from 1964 (Brazil as a regional actor features in Elisa Lopez-Lucia’s article below).³⁹ Fourth, in Canada, a ‘new’ internationalist slant to foreign policy at the turn of the twenty first century has been traced back to the intermingling of Liberal discourse with Conservative practices, reflecting a uniquely strong commitment to a UN-led world order in Canadian foreign policy.⁴⁰ Fifth, historical memory and a fast paced back-and-forth between perceptions of past and present feature in David Jones and Andrea Benvenuti’s study of Australian foreign policy, where traditions are said to be composed of ‘myths’ about national identity and the country’s role regionally and globally.⁴¹ For Frank Bongiorno the influence of the Liberal Party’s Robert Gordon Menzies was a significant factor in the invention of Australian foreign policy thought, particularly his views on the British Commonwealth.⁴² In Europe, sixth, Finland’s foreign policy tradition is said to have been shaped by its troublesome and tragic relations with Russia and the popularization of ideas about ‘survival’ and ‘progress’.⁴³ Seventh, Silvio Berlusconi’s foreign policy is argued to be based on some very strong traditions in Italian foreign policy, pro-Americanism and a Euroscepticism echoing an exceptionalist reading of the Italian past.⁴⁴ Finally, work on the dissident tradition on Czech Republic foreign policy argues likewise, that to unpack a

tradition we rely on a close study of norm-promoting agents' beliefs as well as the material conditions under which foreign policy is made.⁴⁵ In Britain, finally, developments in foreign policy are commonly explained with reference to the ways in which foreign policy entrepreneurs construe the balance between the traditions of Atlanticism, Empire and Europeanism, the stories these tell them about the national interest usually working synergistically with inherited party political traditions to give shape and meaning to foreign policy actions (feeding the articles below by Oliver Daddow and Falk Ostermann).⁴⁶

Not all of the scholars producing the literature above share one method of researching foreign policy, nor do they entirely agree on how to package and describe the traditions that they set out to interpret. This Special Issue extends the 'problematique' by including comparative work on complex international organisations (see Elin Hellquist's article) and regional leaders (Lopez-Lucia). Nonetheless, across this corpus as a whole we find reference to at least one of the following attributes of a foreign policy tradition. First, traditions are bound up with collective folk memories crystallizing around shared (usually national but sometimes regional, as in the early European Economic Community) myths and memories coming from experiences of war and peace, conflict and insecurity, heroism and treachery, defeat and victory, violence and generosity, and the normative debates that accompany them about national rights, duties and obligations flowing from them (see Matteo Dian's piece below). Second, traditions are constantly reinterpreted by elites in light of current challenges they encounter domestically and internationally. Finally, although traditions are routinely found to 'stick' and/or to be impervious to rapid change, there is nothing predictable or structurally deterministic about their influence on foreign policy beliefs – the beliefs of agents themselves have to be the starting point for an interpretive account.

We therefore define a tradition as a set of understandings someone receives during socialization. This definition underscores the communicative aspect of a tradition which has written and oral dimensions and through which 'narratives of the past' become 'community

process in the present' through the social 'transmission of rumour and legend'.⁴⁷ Having sketched the idea of a tradition, we can now consider the notion of dilemma, and why this makes a study of 'situated agents' beneficial to the study of foreign policy. A dilemma arises for an individual or group when a new idea stands in opposition to existing beliefs or practices and so forces a reconsideration of the existing beliefs and associated tradition. Agent-centred dilemmas bear the weight of causality in interpretive accounts of political change. Change for interpretivists occurs contingently (but not randomly) as people reinterpret, modify, or transform an inherited tradition in response to novel circumstances or other dilemmas.

A good example from the foreign policy literature comes from the case of New Zealand. David McCraw has examined how the archetypal 'Realism' of the National Party made way for an increasing dose of 'internationalism' in foreign policy through the 1990s. This change was brought about by two factors: the National Party's relative weakness compared to other political parties and its concomitant willingness to incorporate elements of their agenda into its own; and a greater attentiveness to public opinion in the formation of foreign policy. 'Pragmatic adaptation' to the recognition of governance dilemmas was the order of the day for the National Party. The process of adaptation weakened the Realist hold over the New Zealand foreign policy tradition.⁴⁸ None of this could straightforwardly have been 'read off' the National Party's previous foreign policy record as the party of government, or the beliefs of the leaders expressed by those responsible for foreign policy when they took office.

Just as units and structures in international relations are mutually constitutive (states make the structure and the structure makes states),⁴⁹ so individuals and cohesive groups of decision-makers are capable of responding to dilemmas creatively, setting 'current policy questions in terms of past experiences'.⁵⁰ In the process of deliberating and seeking out guides to action from analogous situations in the past,⁵¹ agents are positioned within ideational and institutional traditions but they are capable of modifying these traditions through their agency,

such that agency occurs against a particular historical background that influences it without determining it. The situated-ness of agency draws attention to the inherited practices and social relationships that influence individual decisions. An agent's response to a dilemma is difficult to 'read off' from her or his nominal 'location' on an organizational flowchart in a foreign policy process because that is merely the positional setting for the taking of a decision. Their organizational 'rank' ('she would say that, she's the Secretary of State') will rarely provide an agent with all the answers to a policy problem. Decisions, particularly on complex foreign policy problems, are likely to require domestic as well as foreign policy input, not least from the decision-maker's close team of advisers, as well as the other institutions of government: intelligence and security agencies, home offices, ministries of defence, ministries for international development, trade and business departments. Depending on the time available to make the decision, advice, information and opinion may be sought from non-governmental stakeholders such as think-tanks and political consultancies either on a formal or ad hoc basis. Decision-makers may also seek counsel and information from journalists and academics.

Furthermore, an agent's response to a dilemma cannot be 'read off' biographical facts about them, whether childhood ('her mother was American'), education ('she studied at Harvard') or career ('she used to be in oil'). Biographical facts are at most background contexts that help to explain how and why the individual arrived at the current point. They do not determine responses to dilemmas which will likely pull an individual in a number of ways – personally (with advisers, speechwriters, researchers and confidantes), politically (the party management dimension), institutionally (the wider decision-making configuration of government and relations with other government colleagues) and internationally via pressure from outside actors, friend/enemy and state/non-state alike. This Special Issue is interested in probing the dilemmas that confront policy-makers with challenges of all different varieties, and across a range of national and international settings.

There is also the ‘inside’ of states to consider. Domestic political realignments,⁵² such as the emergence of new parties in the party system, or political challenges coming from powerful voices within the national polity (such as the media), may produce dilemmas that require new positions to be adopted on foreign policy issues. At this point, therefore, we use a case study to elucidate how the key interpretivist insights garnered from the research programme in this Special Issue can inform the study of foreign policy decisions in practice. Hopefully this will help answer the following key question about this enterprise: ‘What does interpretivist research look like?’

The example chosen is UK Prime Minister David Cameron’s January 2013 pledge to hold a referendum on Britain’s membership of the EU during the 2015-2020 parliament. Evidently this move was undertaken to quell backbench dissent from his Conservative Party, as a response to growing media pressure to settle the EU question,⁵³ and to head off the challenge to Cameron’s party coming from the right of the political spectrum in the form of the anti-EU UK Independence Party (UKIP). The referendum outcome will have huge economic and strategic implications for Britain globally and domestically, but neither the fact of the referendum nor its timing could have been predicted with reference to Cameron’s prior ‘pragmatic’ stance on the Europe issue, the material conditions in Britain in the ‘age of austerity’, or Britain’s ‘standing’ in the EU at the time. Referendums on different aspects of the ‘Europe’ question had been hinted at, half-promised and then not taken place under Cameron’s Labour predecessors in government; the previous one coming in 1975. In this example Cameron can be seen to have operated as a situated agent, meaning in the words of Walter Carlsnaes, that ‘human agents and social structures are in a fundamental sense intertwined entities, and hence that we cannot account fully for the one without invoking the other’.⁵⁴

Cameron’s policy decision (the referendum) can be understood as a response to his reading of the pressures incumbent upon him from his position as Prime Minister of the

United Kingdom (and therefore symbolic guardian of the ‘national interest’), as leader of the Conservative Party (very deeply divided over the Europe question since Margaret Thatcher’s time), and as European statesman putting forward his preferred ‘vision’ for the future EU. These pressures Lawrence Freedman described in 1976 as those emanating from an individual’s beliefs about the ‘rules of the game’ at a moment of decision.⁵⁵ None of them alone or in tandem compelled Cameron to adopt the foreign policy strategy he did; as noted above, previous leaders such as Tony Blair had made a point of trying to avoid a referendum at all costs. But time moved on, political calculations changed, and so did the domestic and international environments, notably the rise of UKIP domestically and, abroad, the legitimacy crisis in the EU. The factors Cameron seems to have considered in his decision-making were: first, his understanding of the immediate and longer term history of the British experience of European integration; second, his appreciation of the depth of the European fissures in the post-Thatcher Conservative Party; third, his reading of Britain’s ‘place’ in an EU that was heading into potential trouble post-Eurozone crisis; and finally, his reading of Britain’s capacity to ‘reform’ different aspects of ‘Europe’ which the British, and others in the EU, find unpalatable, including its major institutions especially the European Court of Justice, and the underlying philosophical commitment by member states to ‘ever closer union’.⁵⁶

Evaluating the weight given by Cameron to the various pressures seemingly upon him could result in a two-step interpretivist research programme, searching for information on what ‘Europe’ meant to Cameron in material, political and ideational and affective terms, and how those meanings became translated into practice. In the first stage we would ask: what did Cameron make of the benefits of Britain’s membership of the EU? Why was the prime minister critical of the EU institutions – this links to the views of Eurosceptical activists prominent in Conservative Party and the largely Conservative-supporting media? Why did Cameron believe Britain could remain a ‘global’ power through membership of the EU, and

why did he marginalise alternative visions for Britain's future world role, such as that centred on the 'Anglosphere'?⁵⁷

The second stage of the research would be to identify how Cameron drew on and/or adapted traditions of thought about the British in Europe, and how this question was 'managed' in the various political and bureaucratic settings in which he operated: within Cabinet, his Party, with his Liberal Democrat coalition partners in the 2010-2015 parliament, and with elements of the bureaucratic machinery outside Downing Street, notably the Foreign and Commonwealth Office and Treasury. There would also be questions asked of the currents of thought about 'Britain and Europe' that pose dilemmas for the decision-making process, not least the influential British Eurosceptic press and wider media coverage, think-tanks, and those day-to-day cultural representations of Europe in Britain that help mould the climate of ideas from 'below' as it were.

A privileged few may be able to interview Cameron, his Europe advisers and speechwriters (a circle which since 2015 has been added to quite considerably)⁵⁸ about the beliefs that informed his European policy practices. This is an 'ideal type' research design that would require considerable resources, time and, when it comes to interviews, greater access to government decision-makers than is usually afforded 'outsiders' investigating national foreign policy decision-making. However, there are plenty of 'on the record' sources such as speeches, policy documents, parliamentary questions, election manifestoes, newspaper articles, legislation and media reporting to help interpret the manner in which Cameron, a powerful agent embedded in various ideational and institutional settings domestically and internationally, exerted his agency to develop, justify and execute his referendum strategy. This example of interpretivism-in-action indicates that foreign policy decision-making on the part of situated agents can be advanced through the framework of traditions and dilemmas, which develops explanations for foreign policy practices by teasing out the links between beliefs and the meaning these are given through foreign policy activity.

Conclusion

We draw this piece to a close with a word on the articles in the Special Issue, accompanied by some final reflections on the framework used to interpret the foreign policy decisions of ‘situated agents’. The purpose of this article was to set out the rationale for, and goals of, a theoretical framework that adds to the now rich study of foreign policy decision-making from within FPA and IR. The articles cover a range of cases from around the globe, their span being a useful way of testing the framework across many foreign policy horizons, and at both the national and organizational levels: Russia, Nigeria and Brazil, the Organization of African Unity and the Association of Southeast Asian Nations, Japan, China, France, Britain and the US. Each contributor was asked to consider several inter-related research questions. First, what are the leading debates and representations about national identity acting as background traditions? Second, how did these traditions relate to other traditions of knowledge about the national role in the world, for example coming from particular partisan or sectional interests such as academia and think-tanks? Third, how did particular thinkers or groups within politics and civil society modify and renegotiate these traditions in response to dilemmas? Fourth, what foreign policy dilemmas did decision-makers see themselves facing? Finally, how did traditions evolve over time (if at all) upon the resolution of those dilemmas?

Clearly, different cases require different accents and the key for each contributor was to justify who were the ‘situated agents’ they felt it important to study, and to explain how they did this using the range of interpretive methods on offer. The use of narrative modes of explanation is, however, central to all the articles, as is a widespread use of formal or informal modes of discourse analysis of documents written or spoken by the key agents studied. All of the articles, therefore approach the subject through the eyes of the agents deemed to be the key ‘movers and shakers’ in the foreign policy communities in which they operated, giving written and spoken sources relating to foreign policy a privileged role in the account of

events. The various decision-makers studied are treated as socially situated and socially constituted, resulting in a dynamic interplay between beliefs and practices. The contributions thus can be read as standalone examples of interpretivism ‘in action’ and as part of a broader dialogue with the cognate and wide-ranging literatures in FPA and IR on structure and agency, constructed identities, institutional politics, and the uses of history and learning in foreign policy, not to mention the specifics of the national and international organization cases themselves.

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² Irving L. Janis, *Groupthink*, 2nd edn (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Co., 1982); Graham Allison and Philip Zelikow, *Essence of Decision: Explaining the Cuban Missile Crisis*, 2nd edn (London: Longman, 1999); Richard E. Neustadt and Ernest R. May, *Thinking in Time: The Uses of History for Decision-makers* (New York: The Free Press, 1986); For useful overviews of the field see Valerie M. Hudson, *Foreign Policy Analysis: Classic and Contemporary Theory*, 2nd edn (New York: Rowman and Littlefield, 2013); Steve Smith, Amelia Hadfield and Tim Dunne (eds) *Foreign Policy: Theory, Actors, Cases*, 2nd edn (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012)..

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