

IR in the Middle East: Foreign Policy Analysis in Theoretical Approaches¹

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INTRODUCTION

Middle East scholars have consistently cautioned against an intellectual gulf dividing International Relations (IR) theory and the study of international relations of the Middle East (IRME). Noting a lack of cross-fertilization between IR theories and region-focused analyses, many have highlighted the necessity to move beyond the “Area Studies Controversy” in favour of dialogue between IR Theory and Middle Eastern Studies.¹ Theoretical approaches applied to IRME have increasingly crossed this schism, bridging IR theories with the study of the region’s particularities and complexities.² The last three decades provide numerous outstanding, sophisticated work that combined IR theories and in-depth knowledge of regional affairs to propose a modified IR theory applied to the Middle East. Whereas some have contextualized mainstream IR approaches to fit the alleged exceptional regional characteristics,³ others have adopted a disciplinary eclecticism combining insights from several approaches to capture the region’s political dynamics.⁴ Despite difference in ways to engage IR theory, most IRME scholarship includes the domestic sphere as the primary corrective strategy to attain a “valid” IR theory applied to the region. Middle East scholars agree that states in the region developed as fragmented, unstable, and vulnerable to transnational forces, what Salloukh called ‘state permeability’.⁵ Due to this persistent weakness, states in the region cannot be approached as unitary actors;⁶ domestic politics are at the center of IRME.

This ontological position within contemporary IRME work converges with the turn to decision-making and domestic politics that has occurred over the last 25 years in IR Theory. This domestic turn in IR, however, often lacks theoretical development and makes assumptions that can be challenged by research in foreign policy analysis (FPA), with its focus

on agents for understanding international politics. FPA considers the role of decision-making units to be central, where leaders (decision makers) subjectively interpret international and domestic factors. Despite the centrality of domestic politics in IRME, this scholarship generally ignores work in FPA, particularly FPA's psychological and agent orientation. This constitutes a missed opportunity for the study of the region. We propose that FPA offers an analytical framework, a research agenda, and an ontological stance that allows fruitful development of domestic politics in IRME scholarship.

This article develops a critical analysis of the domestic politics orientation in IRME while situating it within broader theoretical developments in the IR discipline. The aim of this article is not to offer a single foreign policy theory for IRME that is alternative to existing theoretical frameworks. Instead, it is a meta-theoretical contribution with the intent of developing theoretical understanding of IRME. We argue that the incorporation of domestic factors in the study of IRME has not led to clear and sustained theoretical progress and that a serious engagement with an FPA perspective — conceptually rich in its understanding of how domestic politics influences foreign policy — can increase the comparative value of research conducted by Middle East scholars within the IR discipline. We draw on Kaarbo's promise that an FPA perspective can offer an "integrating crucible for the cross-theoretical turn toward domestic politics and decision making in IR theory" and illustrate the value of such exercise at a regional level.⁷

We begin by defining FPA as a subfield and a distinct perspective in IR. We then examine how domestic factors have been integrated within IRME, focusing on realist-based approaches and constructivism. Within each of these theoretical perspectives, we explore how FPA research defies or develops the integration of domestic and decision-making factors

with IRME. The last section suggests four avenues of research for incorporating FPA research into IRME: an understanding of public opinion's influence based on the distribution of information, the decision unit framework, leadership style, and role theory. This section shows that an FPA perspective offers an alternative and complementary approach to the additive and eclectic frameworks predominant in IRME scholarship.

FOREIGN POLICY ANALYSIS: A DISTINCT PERSPECTIVE

Domestic politics and decision-making processes have historically not been at the centre of most IR theory. Instead, structural explanations of IR and foreign policies have dominated research on international politics. From the neorealist focus on anarchy and power distribution to liberalism's expectations⁸ on constraining factors of economic interdependent structures and international regimes, foreign policy is understood as reactions to external pressures faced by states.⁹ Constructivism also focuses on role and normative structures to explain state behaviour according to logics of appropriateness and constructed narratives of self and other.¹⁰

IR theory has, however, developed over the last 25 years to incorporate domestic political and decision-making factors.¹¹ Neoclassical realism, variants of liberalism and constructivism have integrated state motives, perceptions, public opinion, and political culture. IR has moved away from the argument that IR theory is only about general patterns of international politics, not discreet foreign policy behaviours.¹² This promising turn, nevertheless, ignores FPA research, despite FPA's central concern with examining "inside the black box" of states to explain foreign policy.¹³ FPA, as subfield of IR, emerged in the 1950s and focuses on the role of psychological factors, institutional policy-making processes, and public opinion in foreign policy. FPA offers a distinct perspective, with its "actor-specific focus,

based upon the argument that all that occurs between nations and across nations is grounded in human decision makers acting singly or in groups".¹⁴ The agent decision maker is at the centre of state behaviour and constitutes the core contribution of FPA. Decision makers' response to domestic and international environments is subject to a number of factors: psychological, societal, ideational, political, institutional, and material.

FPA is not a single theory — but neither is constructivism, or realism, for example. But FPA does propose a distinct starting point for explaining international relations in which leaders' subjective understandings filter the influence of all other international and domestic, institutional and societal factors. Key areas of FPA research are "(i) individual- and small-group-level psychological factors in foreign policy decision making, (ii) variation in institutional decision-making processes, and (iii) elite-mass relations".¹⁵ The incorporation of domestic politics and decisionmaking in IR theories has missed the opportunity to build on FPA research, broadly defined as a subfield or narrowly defined as a perspective. IRME scholarship has similarly missed this opportunity and, like IR theory, remains disconnected with FPA, despite common ground.

THE FPA-IRME DISCONNECT

Middle East scholars have noted a disconnect between IRME and FPA. Korany and Dessouki observe that mainstream approaches in IRME favor the macro level in international relations at the detriment of unit-based analyses.¹⁶ There are some exceptions, such as Hinnebusch and Ehteshami's *The Foreign Policies of Middle East States*,¹⁷ informed by FPA.¹⁸ Yet, IRME scholars tend toward *ad hoc* eclecticism in incorporating domestic and decision-making variables to their adapted-IR approaches to the Middle East. Scholars have often adopted various eclectic frameworks blending several elements and an expanding list of domestic

causal factors. These frameworks lacked discernable mechanisms within causal stories as opposed to the more conscious effort of analytical eclecticism within IR.¹⁹ Despite the richness that eclecticism provides in explaining real-world issues, this approach further isolated IRME from mainstream IR approaches. Moreover, the dialogue between IR and the Middle East has been unidimensional where the interchange was limited to theory testing, application, and adaptation to produce sophisticated and complex analyses of various regional phenomena. In general, the Middle East remains absent from IR theory building efforts.

This section examines the role of domestic factors in mainstream IR approaches that were modified, then applied, to the Middle East. Although our argument about the disconnect between IRME and FPA may apply to other perspectives used in IRME (such as Historical Sociology,²⁰ the English School,²¹ post-colonial studies,²² and critical security approaches²³), our scope here is limited to research developed within realism and constructivism. Within each perspective, we explore various ways domestic factors were incorporated and how research within FPA can inform and develop this research. We propose that FPA, as a perspective offering both complementary and alternative lens to IR theory, provides an important added value to the integration of domestic factors in IRME scholarship.

Realism

One of the distinguishing features of Middle East politics is the high degree of militarization and recurrence of interstate conflicts. The Middle East thus appears to be the region where realism retains significant relevance. Realism is primarily based on the assumption that states are unitary actors advancing their interest and power amidst the anarchy of the international system. In its neorealist version, the anarchy-induced insecurity of states is the determinant

driver of state behavior. A classic theoretically-informed neorealist analysis of IRME is Stephen Walt's *The Origins of Alliances*.²⁴ Although Walt acknowledges that domestic concerns can drive alliances, his analysis focused on structural dimensions of regional alliance-making and subjective dimensions in his study were left untheorized. As Goldgeir²⁵ notes, "Walt argues for the importance of perceptions, beliefs, motivations, and bias while leaving the origins of these factors to case-by-case empirical study rather than systematic theoretical investigation".²⁶

IRME scholars have considered neorealist structural analysis as "necessary, but not sufficient"²⁷ and challenged its assumptions from several angles, leading to two major strands in the adaption of neorealism to IRME. The first strand is the regime security approach that challenges the neorealist characterisation of states as unitary cohesive units and argues that state behaviour is contingent upon elites or regimes in power. The second strand evolves from the neoclassical realist approach (NCR). While maintaining the primacy of structural factors, NCR includes domestic factors that shape states' reactions to systemic pressures and opportunities. While both approaches have similarities to FPA, an FPA perspective would challenge some of their assumptions and question how domestic and especially decision-making factors are treated.

The regime security approach offers a corrective reading of inter-Arab politics as the result of regimes' quest for survival. Upon a closer look at the particularities of the state system in the Middle East, this approach argues that statehood and sovereignty do not yet conform with Weberian notions of statehood. From this perspective, the core unit of analysis is the "regime", that is a centralised authoritarian rule in the hands of a ruling elite or a leader. Regime security is, hence, defined as the maintenance of power by ruling leaders or elites.²⁸

The logic of regime survival is at the forefront of any foreign policy decision, where leaders are at the intersection of domestic and structural levels of analysis. Regimes' foreign policy decisions are often driven by internal and external threats to their survival.²⁹ Regime survival explanations complement structural analysis by adding domestic factors, such as legitimacy, economics, ideology, state-society relations, leaders' perceptions, and state-building imperatives. Examples include Hinnebusch and Ehteshami's framework of "complex realism".³⁰ They argue that while state behavior is often driven by external threats to sovereignty and territorial integrity, also relevant are domestic factors, such as the level of state formation, foreign policy role, regime-society relations, and idiosyncrasies of leaders. Telhami's analysis of the origins of the 1978 Egyptian-Israeli peace treaty is another attempt at integrating realist explanations with variables from psychological analyses of leaders' personalities.³¹

Other scholars consider domestic factors to be predominant in shaping state behavior. Gause argues that Middle East regimes give higher priority to internal over external threats.³² Harknett and VanDenBerg's analysis of Jordanian alliances during the 1991 Gulf War demonstrates that foreign policy is a reaction to interrelated external and internal challenges.³³ Telhami combines realist theories of alliances with the notion of legitimacy to account for Arab regimes' alliance decisions.³⁴ He claims that threats are constituted by transnational symbols of legitimacy in the Arab world. Rubin's framework of "ideational balancing" also examines regime security as the result of interaction among states, between state and society, and between a foreign state and another state's society.³⁵ Other scholars examine domestic economic capabilities as determinant of alliance behavior.³⁶

Alongside the regime security approach, some IRME scholarship lies within neoclassical realism (NCR). NCR distinguishes itself from neorealism by including unit-level characteristics and abandoning some neo-realist claims that IR theory is separate from a theory of foreign policy. NCR gives systemic-level factors primary weight but argues that states and states' characteristics are transmission belts through which external imperatives are acted on in states' foreign policies.³⁷ NCR includes perceptions,³⁸ states' motives,³⁹ nationalism and ideology,⁴⁰ and domestic institutions.⁴¹ In general, NCR "foreign policy analysis stresses that foreign policy decisions are made by human beings, political leaders and elites".⁴²

NCR's incorporation of domestic and decision-making factors is, however, different from regime security approaches. Whereas regime security work treats domestic and decision-making factors as independent variables alongside systemic stimuli, the domestic in NCR are intervening variables. Salloukh, for example, develops a first-cut theory of NCR to examine Syria and Jordan's alignment decisions.⁴³ While structural factors are paramount in explaining alliance choices, Salloukh argues that state formation processes influence regimes' responses to systemic pressures. Juneau also develops a NCR variant to explore causes of Iran's deviation from "realist" foreign policy. Domestic factors — including status, identity, and factional politics — play intervening roles leading Iran's foreign policy to depart from otherwise "optimal" performance. Juneau argues that structural power distribution shapes possible foreign policy options and domestic intervening variables determine which foreign policy decision is taken.⁴⁴ Incorporating domestic factors, these realist adaptations to the Middle East relate to FPA research in many ways. Nevertheless, an FPA perspective would

challenge these approaches and critique them for their underdevelopment of domestic and decision-making factors from three angles.

First, although IRME scholars have dismissed neorealism for black-boxing the state, the regime security approach presents the “regime” as an abstract concept, where the decision-making unit is a catch-all for all regime types. As Ryan argues, “all Arab regimes are comparable, as all can be described as authoritarian or semi-authoritarian security-states, whether they are led by a president, king, sultan, or emir”.⁴⁵ With authoritarian regimes placed in one category, little room is left for factors at bureaucratic, small groups, and individual levels affecting the decision-making process. FPA scholarship argues that non-democracies are far from uniform⁴⁶ and explores how variation in authoritarian states influences foreign policy processes and outcomes.⁴⁷

FPA research on non-democracies and the regime security approach are alike in challenging the assumption that authoritarian leaders and governments are unaccountable to and unconstrained by societal pressures.⁴⁸ Yet the regime security approach and its regime survival logic often fail to explain how leaders take foreign policy decisions that ignore domestic public opinion. Al-Assad’s decision to ally with Iran against Iraq during the Iran-Iraq War (1980-1988) and Sadat’s decision to pursue peace with Israel in 1979 are examples of unpopular foreign policy. Another example is Egyptian President Al-Sissi’s decision to hand control of the Tiran and Sanafir Islands to the Saudi kingdom in 2015, which sparked street protests and public controversy in Egypt. From an FPA perspective, the relationship between foreign policy and the public is not straightforward. Whereas some research supports the proposition that publics constrain foreign policy even in authoritarian regimes,⁴⁹ other research challenges this, noting leaders’ frequent decisions that are counter to public opinion

and the ability for the media and leaders to manipulate public views.⁵⁰ By problematizing the domestic political processes in authoritarian regimes, an FPA perspective would provide the regime security approach with further depth and rigour in analysing regimes vis-à-vis their domestic and institutional environments.

Second, regime security work conflates leadership and regime security. Leadership security means that those particular personalities who are in power remain so. Regime security is broader, for leaders may be overthrown, but if the dominant coalition and system of rule remain, the regime is intact. This analytical problem became more relevant during the Arab uprisings, as heads of states changed but regime structures in Egypt, Tunisia, and Yemen endured. This issue is related to FPA debates over whether, how, and under which circumstances, a change of leadership affects foreign policy.⁵¹ FPA research on coalitions, institutions, and elites in authoritarian regimes can be helpful for disentangling leaders from regimes. Work on bureaucratic politics, for example, explores relationships between coalitions within the regime and leaders as cue-takers and brokers.⁵² Work on decision units suggests that coalitions and the locus of authority for making foreign policy are fluid, even within the same regime.⁵³ Finally, the vast research on the importance of individual leaders' beliefs, perceptions, and personalities for foreign policy leads us to expect that changes in leaders are critical to foreign policy even without regime change.⁵⁴

Third, an FPA perspective would also challenge regime security and NCR's assumptions about how domestic politics influences executives. FPA research demonstrates that leaders cannot always adopt "a view from above" domestic pressures. The same applies to international constraints; leaders may not be constantly "driven by international pressures" as Ripsman, Taliaferro and Lobell argue.⁵⁵ FPA, including polihereustic theory,⁵⁶ offers more

complex perspectives on relationships between international and domestic spheres and executives than is seen in much regime security and NCR work.

The role of perceptions and beliefs in NCR research is underdeveloped, from an FPA perspective. The psychological approach has arguably become dominant in FPA,⁵⁷ focusing on a variety of (related) psychological sources, including leadership styles, beliefs, images, cognitive frames, personality traits, analogies, errors and biases in information processing, threat perception, and small group dynamics. Middle East scholars have questioned the psychological school's validity in explaining foreign policy behavior in the region, considering it to be "reductionist".⁵⁸ Yet leaders, such as Saddam Hussein and Gamal Abdel Nasser, show that personality and beliefs play a major role in IRME and indeed, some work has found psychological factors to can be crucial in explaining Middle East foreign policy behavior.⁵⁹ FPA's psychological research can provide IRME scholarship with considerable theoretical and empirical grounding and explanatory leverage,⁶⁰ and is a missing aspect of IRME's orientation toward domestic factors.⁶¹

Constructivism

Constructivist research also underscores the importance of domestic politics in international politics. While some constructivist work operates at the system level, with a focus on shared norms and general social construction of international politics,⁶² other constructivists go inside states, engaging with ideational and normative factors at societal levels. Constructivist research, for example, points to the importance of discourse, ideas, identity and roles in alternative explanations to interest-based and material explanations of foreign policies.⁶³ The politics of identity, operating at supranational, national, and sub-state levels, render the Middle East an optimal pool for constructivism and constructivism has

generated refreshing interpretations of IRME that take into account regional particularities without lapsing into culturally-reductionist arguments.

Constructivist studies of IRME explore the impact of changing norms, public sphere deliberations, and identity on foreign policy.⁶⁴ Although some scholars consider the factors shaping identities at interstate levels,⁶⁵ others have look to the domestic level as the main source of state identities.⁶⁶ Identities can shape a society's internal politics and, hence, co-constitute its foreign interests. For instance, Lynch⁶⁷ links inconsistencies in Jordanian foreign policy over time with public struggles over identity. Similarly, Barnett⁶⁸ argues that state identities often influence foreign policy through legitimizing the course of action while making other choices "unthinkable". Elsewhere, Barnett⁶⁹ shows that change in national identity narratives in Egypt from pan-Arabism to Egyptian nationalism made the peace process with Israel plausible.

Many scholars argue that the link between constructivism and FPA is natural, considering constructivists' conceptions of agency and ideas. As Smith⁷⁰ notes, "social construction and foreign policy analysis look made for one another".⁷¹ Checkel posits that constructivists share with FPA scholars "a strong focus on agency", but contends that constructivism is not "simply warmed over FPA", since constructivism often stems from a more interpretivist branch and focuses on mutual co-constitution.⁷² Constructivists often view FPA as individualist, ultra-positivist, and asocial.⁷³ Many FPA scholars, however, would challenge these labels of FPA research. Epistemologically, FPA is similar to "conventional", "neoclassical" or "thin" constructivists who do not reject positivism.⁷⁴ Furthermore, the central ontological role of subjectivity in FPA means FPA scholarship deviates from strict positivist epistemological assumptions of an objective reality. FPA research is also not as

asocial as some perceive. FPA's conceptualisation of agency includes agent-other interactions and agent-agent social dynamics,⁷⁵ and builds on insights from *social* psychology. A serious engagement between IRME and FPA is therefore possible and can fill several lacunae in research on identity politics in IRME.

First, FPA research challenges constructivism for giving primacy to social structures over agency. Flanik,⁷⁶ notes that "constructivists endorse co-constitution in principle, but in practice, much constructivist works favour structure". Agency in an FPA perspective, on the other hand, is foundational. FPA research not only examines micro-foundations of agent's relationships to structure, it allows for varying perceptions of, instrumental uses of, and responses to structures. Similarly, Middle East scholars have often criticized constructivism for disavowing "the role of the domestic environment in mediating the interplay between norms (coming from outside via the state) and identity (emanating from the society)".⁷⁷ Many Middle East scholars have made similar criticisms to the constructivist characterization of identity politics in the region. Despite the initial appeal of constructivism to include agency, constructivist scholars focus mostly on structures and hardly unpack processes through which identities change and do not address why some identities among others become salient in the foreign policy making.⁷⁸

Second, from an FPA perspective, constructivism also overlooks processes of social construction⁷⁹ and does not include ideational factors in individuals' belief systems and how these transfer to collective levels.⁸⁰ Constructivists also tend to assume a seamless match between culture at the societal level and policymaking at the elite level. For example, studies of identities take for granted that elites and masses share a single national identity.⁸¹ When

constructivist research allows differences between elites and masses, the assumption is often that culture and identity are powerful enough to constrain elites.⁸²

The Middle East provides countless examples supporting FPA's criticism of constructivist views of the domestic sphere. Saddam Hussein and Hafiz al-Assad, for example, needed to appeal to ruling coalitions and masses in framing regime identity — consensus was not automatic. Moreover, competitions among groups within their constituencies were crucial in framing collective identity and its influence on foreign policy. Also, the pan-Arab dimension driving Jordanian foreign policy has been partly shaped by the Palestinian-Transjordanian social divide.⁸³ Israel presents other examples of foreign policies shaped by domestic identity tensions of Jews versus non-Jews and Israelis versus Arabs.⁸⁴ Moreover, the role of public opinion in the foreign policies of Arab states⁸⁵ challenges the constructivist assumption that policymakers and masses share a similar meaning of state identity, yet empirical analyses demonstrate that Arab elites and societies may hold separate identities. Valbjørn and Bank show how Jordanian, Egyptian, and Saudi societies exhibited an Arabism reflecting a regime-society divide that constrained their foreign policies during the 2006 Lebanon War and the 2009 Gaza War.⁸⁶ Similarly, although elites in Syria, Egypt, Yemen, Jordan, and Saudi Arabia wanted to recognize and develop a relationship with Israel, they were constrained by public opposition.⁸⁷

FPA would challenge constructivist scholars for assuming uncontested identities or that identities only function to constrain elites. FPA scholarship suggests that when identities are contested, elites may frame and manipulate public opinion or even operate fairly free of the public and against mass-level identities and values.⁸⁸ FPA research offers insights about how norm, identity, and role contestation affects both the policymaking process and resulting

foreign policy behaviour.⁸⁹ Overall, FPA challenges constructivist assumptions that social structures powerfully constraint agents. In this way, FPA offers a complementary but distinct perspective on the role of ideas in international relations and on the relationship between agents and structures.

Third, FPA would challenge some constructivist-oriented role theory research within IRME. Roles are “repertoires of behaviour, emanating from one’s own conceptions and others’ expectations , selected in reaction to cues and demands”⁹⁰ and role theoretical approaches emphasise roles as social positions states take in international society.⁹¹ A small number of scholars have adopted constructivist role theory in the study of ideational factors in IRME. Ovah, for example, uses role theory to explain change in Turkish foreign policy following the AKP’s rise to power.⁹² Barnett examines role conflict and institutions in Arab politics. He shows membership in several institutions (sovereignty and Arabism) created role conflict and regional instability.⁹³ Although some role theory work in IRME recognises the importance of domestic sources and constraints on roles, most of it, similar to constructivist research on identities, assumes more consensus or societal constraint within the state than would an FPA approach to roles. An FPA approach more specifically develops, with middle-range FPA research, the domestic political and even psychological mechanisms of contestation over national roles.⁹⁴

AN FPA PERSPECTIVE OF IRME

FPA can do more than challenge the way domestic politics is approached in IRME work, it can guide research into new directions. In this concluding section, we discuss specific ways future research can integrate FPA ideas into IRME scholarship. We offer four avenues for research — an understanding of public opinion’s influence based on the distribution of information,

the decision unit framework, leadership style, and role theory. Our suggestions draw from established FPA research areas and offer considerable potential benefits for both FPA and IRME. We conclude with a more general perspective as a distinct standpoint from which FPA can approach IRME.

If IRME work is going to take seriously public influence on foreign policy, how can it approach this complicated relationship? FPA offers no easy answers and includes a variety of intervening factors between a bottom-up perspective that sees public opinion as very important to a top-down perspective in which publics follow elites.⁹⁵ Baum and Potter's framework is particularly attractive as it integrates and explains a number of findings on the role of public opinion in foreign policy. They focus on information held by elites and available to the public, with a key role played by the media. They characterize the dynamic relationship between the public, the media, and decision makers "as a marketplace in which the relative distribution of information among these three actors in large part determines their relative influence on foreign policy". In early stages of a policy or response to an international event, governments enjoy an information advantage. As time goes by, there is more "opportunity for the public to accumulate sufficient information to overcome — or at least reduce — its informational disadvantage".⁹⁶ Although based largely on research on democracies, the model's general principles may apply to other countries,⁹⁷ including Middle East states. The model's relevance to IRME may be more significant with the increasing role of media outlets, including social media, in Middle East politics.⁹⁸ While elites' information advantage may be greater in the Middle East, compared to other regions and regime types, the basic idea that publics have more information about foreign policy at some points in time and that changing

distributions of information affect the role the public plays in foreign policy are plausible. The model's relevance to the IRME is at least an empirical question, worthy of investigation.

The decision units framework is another FPA approach that can be useful for examining domestic political divisions within regimes.⁹⁹ The framework identifies three types of decision units — actors with authority to commit regime's resources in foreign policy — that commonly occur across and within regimes, in democracies and non-democracies: 1) predominant leaders (single individuals holding authority to commit regime resources); 2) single groups (a small number of people collectively make foreign policy decisions); and 3) coalitions (autonomous political actors among which a subset need to agree to foreign policy). Decision units can change across a single policy and across time. The framework acts as a theory-selector — different decision units and different key characteristics of those units point analysts to middle-range theories (e.g., bureaucratic politics, groupthink, or coalition formation). The decision units framework has the advantage of integrating several strands of research in its approach to opening the black box of foreign policy decision making.

Another avenue of promising research for IRME would incorporate FPA work on leaders' beliefs and personalities. Leaders have incredible potential to impact foreign policy, in both democracies and authoritarian states. As Hermann and Hagan argue, "state leaders play a pivotal role in balancing international imperatives with those arising from, or embedded in, domestic politics".¹⁰⁰ Leaders shape intentions and strategies of their states and are themselves an important part of their countries' diplomatic capabilities.¹⁰¹ FPA research includes a number of ways leaders shape foreign policy, including leaders' beliefs about the nature of the political universe, how leaders represent foreign policy problems and define international situations, leaders' orientations toward risk, various pathologies and

neuroses in leaders' psyches, leaders' cognitive biases, motivations, and perceptions, and leaders' images of other countries.

Research on leaders' personalities is another fruitful approach within FPA. Personality can be defined as a *patterned relationship* among cognition, affect, motivations and orientations toward interpersonal relationships.¹⁰² Personalities are a critical sources of “the heterogeneity of preferences, beliefs and decision-making processes” that are significant in international politics.¹⁰³ FPA work on Leadership Trait Analysis — a composite, or multi-factor approach, incorporating beliefs, traits, and style — has demonstrated the importance of personality in international relations in a number of different contexts.¹⁰⁴ Leadership Trait Analysis is useful for investigating agent-structure relations, with its focus on which leaders challenge constraints and which respect them.¹⁰⁵ Leadership Trait Analysis utilises a reliable, systematic, and comparative method for assessing personalities through a computerized content analysis of leader discourse.¹⁰⁶ Given the centralized nature of foreign policy making in Middle Eastern states, leaders and their personalities is a critical gap in current IRME research.

A fourth area of FPA research that is particularly promising for IRME is recent work on role theory. Role theory offers a conceptual framework of internal, external, material, and ideational dimensions of states' social positions. First imported to IR from Sociology by Holsti,¹⁰⁷ role theory research has recently flourished.¹⁰⁸ Role theory is rich conceptually, theoretically and ontologically as it integrates various concepts (e.g. identities, cognitions, expectations, and socialisation) imperative for understanding IR and foreign policy. It provides a conceptual tool-kit for unravelling complex social processes, and operates at multiple levels of analysis, bridging agents and structures; many scholars have considered this as one of its

distinct strengths.¹⁰⁹ Recent role theory work incorporates internal contestation over national roles, connecting roles to well-researched domestic political dynamics.¹¹⁰ Role theory can inform the study of ideational factors in the Middle East in many ways. Revolutions, regime changes, and leadership change can shift role conceptions. Moreover, the rise of small states in the Persian Gulf and their attempt to influence regional politics reveals interactive dynamics of roles at the international level and agent-structure relations, which are central to role theory.¹¹¹ The promise and value of role theory in the study of IRME is illustrated through work using Middle East cases to develop role theory. These have also provided insights on well-researched IRME cases, such as US-Iranian and US-Israeli relations.¹¹²

Conclusion

IRME has traditionally acknowledged the centrality of domestic factors long before the attention to domestic politics and decision making in IR theories. Yet, FPA is scarcely used in examining foreign policy behaviour in the region. Instead, ME scholars often opt for eclectic approaches that combine structural and domestic levels of analyses. This article showed that FPA can offer a distinct standpoint from which to analyse IRME. An FPA perspective proposes that central decision-making units (leaders) subjectively interpret domestic and international constraints and opportunities affect foreign policy. As an alternative approach, FPA foregrounds decisionmakers, whose interpretations of their political environments is conditioned by material, ideational, psychological, societal, and institutional factors. An FPA perspective integrates these through agents' psychological experience. This is a contextualist, not a reductionist argument as other levels of analysis are included.¹¹³ As Bueno de Mesquita argues, "when we examine international affairs through the lens of domestic decision making we provide a way to think about how properties of the international system are shaped by

local considerations as part of the larger strategic fabric of politics”.¹¹⁴ As a multilevel approach that combines ideational and material factors, an FPA perspective is ontologically rich in its integration of decision making and domestic politics.

FPA thus stands in a unique and strong position to inform the domestic political orientation in IRME scholarship as the field seeks to integrate with IR theory. As Middle East scholars face challenges to increase the relevance of their work to the IR discipline at large, FPA can help Middle East scholarship contribute to theoretical debates beyond the region. By integrating domestic and systemic factors through the psychological experience of agents, FPA provides an eclectic framework that allows for the particularities of the region while maintaining a coherent theoretical perspective conducive to cross-regional comparisons. A stronger connection between FPA and IRME scholarship would also be positive for FPA. Despite its long-standing commitment to comparative work, FPA remains parochially focused on the United States. Hudson and Brummer specifically call for deeper engagement between ‘mainstream’ FPA research and FPA scholarship beyond North America, arguing that this is critical for FPA’s theoretical development.¹¹⁵ Although this article has focused on reasons that IRME should incorporate work from FPA, future work in this area holds considerable promise for mutual benefits.

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