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Reinvigorating the Study of Foreign Policy Decision Making: Toward a Constructivist Approach

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Abstract

For many years, the study of foreign policy analysis (FPA) has been a kind of free-floating enterprise, logically unconnected to the main theories of

international relations (IR). Sometimes, it has been subsumed under the liberal or pluralist sections of textbooks, and at other times placed within a discussion of realism. But the logical connections to both of these paradigms were always strained. The appeal of FPA approaches has also waxed and waned over the years, in part because these approaches do not appear to “fit” anywhere within the framework of the larger debates going on in IR. This article suggests that a dialogue with social constructivism provides the most logical base from which to launch a revitalized approach to FPA, especially the cognitive psychological approach to the study of foreign policy. If the FPA agenda is to be reinvigorated and taken more seriously outside the subfield itself, this article suggests, it must hitch its wagon to some of the critical substantive debates going on in IR theory today. Indeed, there are already some signs that the cognitive approach to FPA in particular is increasingly being associated with this larger body of theory.

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