

Introduction to Foreign Policy Analysis

Introduction to Foreign Policy Analysis (FPA)

Key Concepts, Theoretical Foundations, Actors, Process, and Methodological Approaches

1. What Is Foreign Policy Analysis?

Aspect	Definition
Scope	Study of how states (and sometimes non-state actors) formulate, adopt, and implement policies that affect their relations with other international actors.
Goal	Explain <i>why</i> particular foreign policies are chosen, <i>how</i> decisions are made, and <i>what</i> outcomes they produce.
Level of Inquiry	Micro-level (decision-makers, domestic politics) and meso-level (bureaucracies, interest groups) – complementing the macro-level focus of traditional international relations (IR) theories.

2. Core Theoretical Traditions

Tradition	Main Premise	Typical Variables	Representative Scholars
Realist / Neorealist	States act to maximize power/security in an anarchic system.	Power distribution, threat perception, balance of power.	Hans Morgenthau, Kenneth Waltz
Liberal / Institutional	Cooperation, institutions, and domestic preferences shape policy.	Economic interdependence, democratic peace, international regimes.	Robert Keohane, John Ikenberry
Constructivist	Ideas, identities, and norms construct state interests.	National identity, discourse, normative commitments.	Alexander Wendt, Martha Finnemore
Psychological / Cognitive	Decision-makers' perceptions, beliefs, and heuristics matter.	Risk perception, framing, mental models, groupthink.	Graham Allison, Robert Jervis

Introduction to Foreign Policy Analysis

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Bureaucratic Politics	Policy results from bargaining among government agencies.	Organizational interests, standard operating procedures.	Graham Allison (<i>Bureaucratic Politics Model</i>)
Two-Level Games	Leaders must satisfy both international and domestic audiences.	Domestic coalition preferences, international negotiation outcomes.	Robert Putnam

Most contemporary FPA research adopts a **synthetic** approach, blending elements from several traditions.

3. Key Actors & Units of Analysis

1. **State Leaders** – Presidents, prime ministers, monarchs; set overall direction.
2. **Foreign Ministries & Diplomatic Corps** – Formulate strategy, conduct negotiations.
3. **Security & Defense Establishments** – Military, intelligence agencies; influence threat assessments.
4. **Political Parties & Legislatures** – Provide constraints, legitimacy, and policy alternatives.
5. **Interest Groups & NGOs** – Lobby for specific outcomes (e.g., business lobbies, human rights NGOs).
6. **Public Opinion & Media** – Shape the “national mood” and constrain leaders.
7. **International Organizations** – Provide forums and normative frameworks (UN, WTO, NATO).

Analysts decide which actor(s) best explain a particular policy case.

4. The Foreign Policy Decision-Making Process

Stage	Description	Typical Analytical Questions
1. Agenda Setting	Issue gains prominence; triggers (crises, media, elite advocacy).	What events moved the issue onto the decision agenda?
2. Policy Formulation	Options are generated, debated, and refined.	Which actors propose alternatives and why?

Introduction to Foreign Policy Analysis

Stage	Description	Typical Analytical Questions
3. Decision	Formal adoption (executive order, treaty ratification).	Who has the authority to decide and what constraints exist?
4. Implementation	Policies are enacted via diplomatic, economic, or military tools.	How are bureaucratic capacities and inter?agency coordination managed?
5. Evaluation & Feedback	Outcomes are	