

**THE REPUBLIC OF TURKEY  
ERCIYES UNIVERSITY  
GRADUATE SCHOOL OF SOCIAL SCIENCES  
DEPARTMENT OF INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS**

**AN OVERVIEW OF FOREIGN POLICY ANALYSIS AND ELITE  
LEARNING**

**By  
Mehmet Ozan KASAPOĞLU**

**Supervisor  
Assist. Prof. Dr. Nail TANRIÖVEN**

**Master's Thesis**

**May 2024, KAYSERİ**



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# AN OVERVIEW OF FOREIGN POLICY ANALYSIS AND ELITE LEARNING

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## ABSTRACT

In the literature of Foreign Policy Analysis (FPA), several theories and approaches have been utilized to explain the foreign policy behavior of the states and to understand why states choose an option from many available choices in certain conditions. While researchers of FPA focus on a range of foreign policy decision units such as individual decision-makers, bureaucracies, and group dynamics, this thesis aims to contribute to the integration of a new concept into the studies of foreign policy analysis: elite learning. Despite the works on learning and foreign policy, studies on learning and its effects on foreign policy decision-making are still undertheorized. Integrating learning to FPA studies with adding political elites as a variable, can contribute to the FPA. This promising area of research of integrating a new model into the FPA can contribute to the theoretical discussions in foreign policy analysis. The integration of elite learning into FPA can also represent an essential step to widen the study of foreign policy. By considering the social dimensions of decision-making, we can develop a more comprehensive understanding of how foreign policy behaviors are shaped.

**Keywords:** Foreign policy, foreign policy analysis, political elites, learning, elite learning.

# DIŐ POLİTİKA ANALİZİNE GENEL BİR BAKIŐ VE SEÇKİN ÖĐRENME

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## ÖZET

Dış politika analizi (DPA) literatüründe, devletlerin dış politika davranışlarını açıklamak ve belirli koşullarda devletlerin birçok seçenek arasından neden belirli bir seçeneđi tercih ettiđini anlamak amacıyla kullanılan çeşitli teoriler ve yaklaşımlar bulunmaktadır. FPA araştırmacıları, bireysel karar vericiler, bürokrasiler ve grup dinamikleri gibi çeşitli dış politika karar birimlerine odaklanırken, bu tez çalışmasının amacı, dış politika analizi çalışmalarına yeni bir kavramın entegrasyonuna katkıda bulunmaktadır: elit öğrenme. Öğrenme ve dış politika üzerine yapılan çalışmalara rağmen, öğrenmenin ve etkilerinin dış politika karar verme üzerindeki etkileri hala yetersiz teorileştirilmiştir. Öğrenmeyi bir deđişken olarak ekleyerek ve politik elitleri dahil ederek FPA çalışmalarına öğrenmeyi entegre etmek, DPA'ya katkıda bulunabilir. Bu DPA'ya yeni bir modelin entegrasyonu üzerine umut verici bir araştırma alanı, dış politika analizi teorik tartışmalarına katkıda bulunabilir. Elit öğrenmenin DPA'ya eklenmesi dış politika çalışmalarını genişletmek için önemli bir nokta haline gelme potansiyeli taşımaktadır. Karar verme süreçlerinin sosyal boyutu dikkate alınarak, dış politika davranışlarının nasıl şekillendiđine dair daha kapsamlı bir anlayış geliştirebiliriz.

**Anahtar Kelimeler:** Dış politika, dış politika analizi, siyasi elitler, öğrenme, seçkin öğrenme,

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## **INTRODUCTION**

In the literature of Foreign Policy Analysis (FPA), various theories and approaches explain the foreign policy behavior of the states or why states choose a policy from several available options under certain conditions. While researchers of FPA focus on different units of analysis like individuals, bureaucracies, and group dynamics, this thesis aims to attempt to integrate a new concept, elite learning, into the study of foreign policy analysis. The thesis argues that foreign policy behaviors and decisions of the states can be explained better by the (foreign policy) learning of the political elites who participate in foreign policy decision-making processes as learning processes would compositely contain several factors that different approaches of FPA direct our attention to. Therefore, the central aim of this thesis is to provide a deeper understanding of learning in the context of foreign policy to guide further research and create an umbrella approach that would bring supposedly opposing views of FPA. For this purpose, the thesis analyzes several components of FPA and aims to bind seemingly exclusive approaches together.

In the first chapter, a general introductory discussion on foreign policy is given and different possible understandings of foreign policy are summarized. As a sub-field of International Relations (IR), foreign policy serves as a framework directing actions of actors—mostly state—in world politics, shaping their interactions, priorities, and goals beyond their borders. In this context, foreign policy is simply framed as an action, a behavior, or a preference. After the brief introduction of discussions on foreign policy, FPA, another key term, is discussed.

In the second chapter of the thesis, general approaches to or theories of FPA are briefly introduced. Then, key assumptions of each foreign policy decision model are investigated. Following each discussion, criticisms are summarized and critiques for

integrating learning are directed to each FPA. Although this section is relatively longer than the others, it still covers a limited number of rather more general approaches to FPA within the limits of the thesis. It, thus, paves the way for analysis of other approaches to integrate learning in FPA research.

Next, another key term of the thesis, learning, is analyzed in relation to FPA in the third chapter. To begin with, it should be noted that investigating the concept of learning in the field of IR and FPA starts with realist and liberal theories. Dominant IR theories, in general, embrace the assumption that state interests are a priori-defined and that state preferences in foreign policy are shaped by interests. Besides, it is the uncertain nature of the international system that shapes individual decision-makers in making foreign policy decisions.

Realism depicts a pessimistic view of how states in the international system operate and characterizes international affairs as a “struggle for power” (Morgenthau, 1948, p. 13). Realist scholars claim that to understand and theorize foreign policy, we “should first ask what effect the international system has on national behavior because the most powerful *generalizable* characteristic of a state in international relations is its relative position in the international system” (Zakaria 1992, 197, emphasis original). In this sense, domestic politics and its possible effects, if any, on foreign policy analysis are not the primary concerns of the realist theory. States are defined and considered as billiard balls, and therefore, “[...] what goes on inside does not (and should not) affect how states interact on the international table” (James & Rioux, 1998).

Realist theory sees foreign policy behaviors as the outcomes of decisions made by unitary and rational actors. Accordingly, it presumes that individual decision-makers, in essence, follow similar routes in foreign policy making (Kegley & Blanton, 2011, p. 195). Regardless of the regime type and individual character of the leaders, realist theory asserts that states are “distinguishable by the relative power they hold, not by their internal characteristics” (Neack, 2019, p. 17) and their foreign policy actions are driven by national interest. Like Allison’s rational actor model, a rational decision-maker reaches decisions based on a cost-benefit calculation of alternative scenarios on any issue and “[...] uses the best information available and chooses from the universe of possible responses that alternative most likely to maximize his goals” (Verba, 1961, p. 95).

Scholars from the realist tradition argue that imitation and mimicking may be used to explain the behavior of a state in international politics and foreign policy. To realism, states may imitate the behaviors of other states for similar problems and crises. In an uncertain international system, states try to find solutions to their problems by following other states, apparently successful ones. For instance, Waltz (1979, p. 118) states that “[i]f some (states) do relatively well, others will emulate them or fall by the wayside.” While imitation can be seen close to learning, it can best be defined as situational learning. Considering imitation, in international politics and foreign policy, states can only learn by observing the behavior of other states on similar issues they are facing because imitation requires the observation of already-happened events. However, learning cognitively, since learning at some point is the change of the belief system of the individual decision-makers, does not necessarily occur by observing past decisions and foreign policy events. Therefore, in terms of learning, it can be argued that realist theory falls short of employing the idea of learning and elite learning.

Like realism, the liberal theory of international relations embraces the anarchical nature of the international system. Yet liberalism disagrees with the realist understanding of anarchy that is defined as a constant ‘state of war’ and the realist assumption of inter-state relations performed under conditions of a zero-sum game. Instead, liberalism argues that cooperation can exist between states under anarchy (Oye, 1986). Some scholars from the liberal tradition argue that states and leaders can learn to achieve their goals and change their preferences and perceptions of interests by learning more cooperatively (Keohane & Nye, 2012, p. 201).

Similarly, Rosecrance (1986, p. 212) argues about the international system and defines it as an environment where states can cooperate by learning the benefits of cooperation through “social learning, which would accustom the members of the state system to behave in new ways.” However, there are also some scholars criticizing these arguments as Reiter (1996, p. 204) states “while states draw heavily on their own individual experiences, they pay little attention to those of other states (...).” Nonetheless, system-level explanations fall short of guiding scholars and analysts to predict day-to-day and short-term foreign policy decisions of the states and integrate learning as a tool for foreign policy analysis.

Finally, constructivism is also essential to be introduced in the context of learning and foreign policy. Although many scholars and policymakers follow the route of rational theories, there is a potential with constructivism to understand the foreign policy of the states (Flockhart, 2016, p. 82). Differently from realist theory which points to material constraints of the states and liberal theory's emphasis on the importance of institutions, constructivism stresses the social and intersubjective elements of international relations (Griffiths et al., 2008, p. 51).

According to the constructivist theory, the international system is the result of social construction affected by the ideas and identities of the agents—considering foreign policy they are the decision makers—and thus can change if these very ideas and identities change. As a result, constructivism allows us to integrate non-material concepts like images, perceptions, preferences, and beliefs that are believed to have an influence on foreign policy decisions. When we consider these non-material concepts, we can define foreign policy as “[t]he complicated communications amongst governments and their agents, plus their perceptions and misperceptions, world views, images of other countries, and personal dispositions of everyone involved” (Kubálková, 2015, p. 17-18).

Constructivists argue that inter-state relations are determined by the attribution of the meaning that each state has towards other states and non-state actors. As Wendt (1992, p. 396) illustrated, foreign policy decision varies and depends on whether the target state is perceived as a foe or a friend. Considering the nexus between constructivism and foreign policy, two sub-schools within constructivism are distinct. The first group focuses on the normative notions and claims that shared ideas override material forces (e.g., power); and the second group, on the other hand, focuses on identities and analyzes the connection between identity and interest of the states (Carlsnaes, 2013, p. 313).

As argued before, perceptions of the foreign policy decision-makers are also crucial in the FPA. Besides, cognitive approaches of FPA employ the preposition that learning can have a crucial part in transforming perceptions and altering the foreign policy behaviors of the states. Considering the possible integration of learning into the studies of foreign policy, it can be argued that if the perceptions of the individual decision-makers and/or foreign policy elites converge, then states engage in more cooperative interactions—or socializations—and learn to trust each other. After that, new norms and institutions can

emerge, and we can argue that “international learning” (Knopf, 2003, p. 186) may occur among states. As a result, we can use constructivist theory and its possible explanations on learning and socialization processes that contribute to the formation of shared values, norms, and identities that shape state behavior.

Overall, theories of IR fall short of integrating learning into their analysis of foreign policy. Therefore, this gap necessitates the integration of learning, if possible, into FPA approaches. The second chapter is the first step to integrating learning. This chapter starts with definitions of learning in social sciences, specifically IR. Following this, types of learning models and theories are discussed regarding different meanings and theories of learning that several studies adopt. Then, learning and foreign policy nexus are investigated with reference to cases for each understanding of what foreign policy is given in the first chapter. Next, studies within IR that integrate the concept of learning are introduced. Although learning, in general, is argued to be a fundamental dimension of human behavior, as this thesis argues, learning and its effects on foreign policy decision-making are still an under-theorized topic for several reasons such as difficulties—not impossibilities—in empirical research. By integrating learning into FPA studies and adding political elites as social actors that learn, this thesis can contribute to the FPA by guiding further empirical research. Besides, this rather limited attempt to integrate a new learning model into the FPA would certainly contribute to the theoretical richness of the field.

After the introduction of learning and its relationship to FPA, the concept of elite learning is investigated. Apart from their pivotal roles within society and their model role for investigating other actors in FPA, understanding the dynamics of the political elites in states is crucial to comprehend how political systems and decision-making mechanisms, in our case FPA, affect the process of decision-making. Firstly, this chapter starts with the definition of elites. For this purpose, classical and contemporary theories of the political elites are introduced. Then, the relationship between political elites and foreign policy is investigated and the concept of elite learning is discussed.

# CHAPTER I

## FOREIGN POLICY ANALYSIS AND INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS

### 1.1. What is Foreign Policy?

Foreign policy is one of the two main sub-fields of International Relations (IR) along with international politics (Tayfur, 2011, p. 114). Foreign policy is closely related to the interests and security concerns of states and consists of strategies employed by states to pursue their interests and objectives in world politics. In a broader sense, the study of foreign policy encompasses a variety of actions and approaches through which an independent nation-state engages with other global actors. However, contemporary developments indicate that foreign policy is extending beyond traditional state-to-state interactions to include engagements with non-state entities and international organizations. Parallel to this, there are several definitions of foreign policy.

Traditionally, foreign policy refers to the activities and strategies of sovereign political units, and states, towards the outside world (Brighi & Hill, 2016, p. 157). Although it could be considered as a well-defined concept there are different views on foreign policy (Hermann, 1972; Morin & Paquin, 2018). As Cohen and Harris (1975, p. 381) note, “[t]here is a certain discomfort in writing about foreign policy, for no two people seem to define it in the same way, disagreements in approach often seem to be deep-seated, and we do not yet know enough about it to be able to say with confidence whether and how it may be differentiated from all other areas of public policy.” This might be attributed to the fact that foreign policy is the sum of different factors and can be explained by a range of theories or approaches. Not only any foreign policy decision can be interpreted differently but it also can be the outcome of various processes of or of different actors like individuals, interest groups, and dominant elite and factors such as society, historical

tradition, and opportunities and challenges that occurred in the world (Rosenau, 1987, p. 2). In addition to all these, foreign policy decisions could also be affected by a dramatic change or learning processes the main actors go through while there is no agreement over who the main actors of foreign policy making are.

The dominant understanding of who has been the main decision maker in foreign policy is has been predominantly state-centric. Some scholars assert that states are the fundamental actors in international politics (Frankel, 1963; Holsti, 1983; Modelski, 1962; Rosenau, 1976; Tayfur, 2011)and, hence in foreign policy. From a state-centric view, foreign policy can be defined in several ways, (i) “[...] decisions and actions, which involves to some appreciable extent relations between one state and others” (Frankel, 1963, p. 1), (ii) “[s]ystem of activities evolved by communities for changing the behavior of other states and for adjusting their activities to the international environment” (Modelski, 1962, p. 6), (iii) “[a] set of goals, directives or intentions, formulated by persons in official or authoritative positions, directed at some actor or condition in the environment beyond the sovereign nation-state, to affect the target in the manner desired by the policymakers” (Cohen & Harris, 1975, p. 383), and (iv) “[t]he policy of a state towards external actors and especially other states” (Diez et al., 2011, p. 58).

Pluralists, in contrast to the state-centric emphasis on foreign policy, claim that foreign policy expands to involve non-state actors due to the increasing effects of transnational actors and international organizations. For pluralists, foreign policy analysis expands to cover the relations with and within states encompassing a diverse range of other non-state actors. They believe that there is a growing linkage between states, and states and non-state actors (Alden & Aran, 2017, p. 9). Although modern foreign policy is often related to the emergence of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, the proliferation of non-state actors changes the way foreign policymaking functions (Neumann, 2015, p. 45). Hence, for pluralists, studying foreign policy necessitates the investigation of trans/international negotiations and coordination (Baumann & Stengel, 2014, p. 514). For pluralists, to support and reflect the emphasis on the linkage between foreign policy and non-state actors, we can define foreign policy as “the intentions, statements, and actions of an actor—often, but not always, a state—directed toward the external world and the response of other actors to these intentions, statements, and actions” (Gerner, 1995, p. 18).

Overall, a definition of foreign policy should not merely be defined as the action itself but should include the importance of advising—as one of the most influential processes on individuals—in foreign policy-making processes. For this, to show the significance of the state and draw attention to the individual decision-makers, this thesis herewith employs the definition put forth by Walter Carlsnaes (2004, p. 335):

"Foreign policies consist of those actions which, expressed in the form of explicitly stated goals, commitments and/or directives, and pursued by governmental representatives acting on behalf of their sovereign communities, are directed towards objectives, conditions and actors—both governmental and non-governmental—which they want to affect, and which lie beyond their territorial legitimacy."

## **1.2. What is Foreign Policy? An Action, A Behavior, or A Preference?**

In the literature, the analysis of foreign policy includes studies focusing on how states behave internationally under certain conditions and the processes foreign policy decision-makers go through. Most analyses focus on the factors that direct a nation's actions in world politics, shaping its interactions, priorities, and goals beyond its borders. While foreign policy comprises various understandings, strategies, and actions, studies of foreign policy put emphasis either on hardware dimensions like institutional structure, personnel, and military capacity or software dimensions such as worldviews, principles, norms, and beliefs (Lucarelli, 2006, p. 1). Parallel to this, the foreign policy of the states consists of security, economic, political, and ideational dimensions.

The security dimension of foreign policy often stems from the idea that states seek to ensure their territorial integrity, and sovereignty, and try to implement policies to prevent external threats against their survival. The economic dimension is also crucial to states since they engage in trade agreements, investment partnerships, and economic diplomacy to strengthen their prosperity and competitiveness in the global economy. The political dimension of foreign policy comprises actions that may serve the states to fulfill their ideological preferences, promote foreign policy agenda, and influence the global governance structure. To fulfill their political dimension, states may engage in diplomatic missions, soft power tactics, and backing for political movements to uphold their principles and further their geopolitical goals. Within this dimension lie policies to cultivate stability, mediate conflicts, and champion human rights and democratic ideals. Political factors influence the formation of alliances, diplomatic stances, and reactions to

political upheavals and crises worldwide. Finally, the ideational dimension of foreign policy refers to the cultural factors that shape the policy tactics of the states. Cultural factors likewise have an impact on the foreign policy behaviors of the states. Nations utilize cultural diplomacy and other soft power policies to improve their global impact. Common values, historical connections, and cultural bonds affect diplomatic ties, public sentiment, and collaboration among nations. Therefore, concepts like nationalism, ideology, culture, and identity politics can foster cooperation or escalate tensions in international affairs.

In the literature, foreign policy is seen as action, behavior, or preference. Foreign policy as action involves the concrete measures and choices made by a state to advance its interests on the global stage. These measures include diplomatic talks, economic pacts, military involvement, and alliance formations. Examples include treaties, troop deployments, sanctions, and engaging in international organizations. Each of these actions mirrors the objectives of a state, and its capacities, and determines its place in the international structure.

When seen as behavior, foreign policy highlights the tendencies displayed by a state when interacting with other global foreign policy actors. This perspective considers both the apparent actions and the basic and essential motivations, standards, and principles guiding how a state conducts its foreign policy. It covers aspects like cooperation, rivalry, conflict resolution, and commitment to international standards and agreements. The coherence or change in the behavior of a state over time provides clues to its foreign policy direction and goals.

Finally, when regarded as preference, foreign policy examines the fundamental priorities, values, and interests driving the decisions of a state and its actions in global affairs. These preferences reveal the priority of foreign policy objectives and the perceived importance of different matters in the external policies of a state. They are shaped by domestic politics, historical context, cultural influences, and geopolitical factors. Preferences guide policymakers in determining alliances, trade strategies, advocacy for human rights, and responses to pressing global issues like climate change and security risks.

### **1.2.1. Foreign Policy as Action**

Foreign policy as action encompasses a range of tangible steps and decisions taken by a state to pursue its interests and objectives in the international system. These actions are often observable and measurable, serving as manifestations of the intentions and capabilities of a state. When defined as action, foreign policy decisions resonate with a more traditional aspect that can change based on the hard and soft powers of a state.

Foreign policy as action is generally related to national interest and can be associated with realist and liberal theories of IR. Diplomatic conducts, military operations, humanitarian aid and intervention, and economic engagements can be seen as examples of foreign policy as an action. Diplomatic actions involve states and international actors and are performed through formal channels such as embassies, diplomatic missions, and international organizations. These include negotiations, treaties, and diplomatic visits aimed at resolving disputes, advancing common goals, and promoting cooperation among states. Diplomatic actions can range from bilateral negotiations to multilateral conducts to address global challenges such as climate change, pandemics, humanitarian crises, and nuclear proliferation which are all in the end related to the national interests.

Another important aspect of foreign policy as action is military operations which are dependent on the power of states. A military operation is a crucial component of foreign policy, particularly since it addresses security threats and safeguards the national interests of the states. Military operations include deploying troops, conducting military exercises, and participating in peacekeeping operations to maintain international and regional stability and deter aggression. Defense spending, arms procurement, and strategic alliances—long-term foreign policy strategies—also reflect the foreign policy priorities of the states and their approaches to security challenges.

While defining foreign policy as action, one should be cautious and should differentiate (foreign) policy as a design and as a practice (Jones, 1970, pp. 11-32). It is the policy as a practice that foreign policy as an action indicates and refers to actions taken by the foreign policy actors to eliminate or solve foreign policy issues that emerge in the international system (Tayfur, 2011, p. 116). Although foreign policy is the intersection of domestic and international environments, it can also offer different perspectives

depending on how we perceive its meaning. In this section, foreign policy is categorized as an action, a behavior, and a preference.

### **1.2.2. Foreign Policy as Behavior**

Foreign policy as behavior focuses more on the patterns, norms, and interactions of a state with other actors in the global system. It encompasses the possible underlying motivations, values, and norms guiding the behavior of a state.

If one perceives foreign policy as behavior, then, it can be argued that cooperative initiatives, competition in global affairs, policies on conflict resolution and diplomacy, and acceptance of international norms and agreements can be viewed as results of foreign policy behaviors. Because these foreign policy areas are not as solid as the ones resulting from foreign policies as action, foreign policy can be expanded to cover issues in which decision-makers may play a greater role.

Cooperative initiatives involve collaborative efforts between states to address common challenges, pursue shared interests, and achieve mutual benefits. This includes diplomatic cooperation, economic partnerships, and collective security arrangements aimed at promoting peace, stability, and prosperity. Cooperative behavior reflects the willingness of a state to engage constructively with other actors and contribute to collective solutions to global problems. Competition, however, characterizes interactions where states pursue their interests in ways that may conflict with those of other actors, leading to competition and rivalry. This includes economic competition, geopolitical rivalries, and strategic maneuvers aimed at securing advantages and maintaining influence. Competition can manifest in various forms, such as trade disputes, territorial claims, and ideological contests, shaping the dynamics of international relations. Although both cooperation and competition among states can be explained by IR theories like liberalism and realism, theories and approaches inherent to foreign policy analysis can also explain the foreign policy outputs of the states.

Besides cooperation and conflict in the international system, conflict resolution and diplomatic engagements involve efforts to manage and mitigate conflicts through negotiation, mediation, and diplomacy. This includes diplomatic practices, peace

negotiations, and conflict resolution mechanisms aimed at preventing escalation and supporting reconciliation between states. Foreign policy behavior of the states in conflict situations reflects their commitment to peaceful resolution, adherence to international norms, and willingness to compromise for the sake of stability and peace.

Finally, adherence to international norms and agreements signifies the commitment of a state to upholding principles of international law, human rights, and collective security. This includes compliance with treaties, conventions, and agreements, as well as participation in international institutions and organizations. The behavior of the states in accepting international norms reflects their respect for the rule of law, promotion of global governance, and commitment to maintaining a rules-based international order. In short, accepting norms reflect a shared understanding between states what constructivists define as logic of appropriateness (March & Olsen, 1998).

### **1.2.3. Foreign Policy as Preference**

Foreign policy as preference delves into the underlying priorities, values, and interests that shape choices of states and decisions in the international arena. Preferences reflect the hierarchy of goals and the perceived significance of different issues in the external relations of the states. If we employ the idea that foreign policy can be treated as a behavior, then leaders and decision-makers, humans, are at the center of foreign policy decision-making. While IR already accepts that human agents (decision-makers) as the “ground” (Hudson, 2005) and decision-makers are embedded in domestic and international structures (Breuning, 2022, p. 84), then foreign policy decisions can be analyzed by integrating factors affecting the personal character of decision-makers.

Foreign policy as preference may manifest itself in some foreign policy areas such as economic statecraft and trade policy, strategic interest and national security, ideological affinities and cultural diplomacy, and humanitarian concerns in the context of international law and global governance. While preferences may be affected by the structure of the international system, ideas, culture, identity, and other ideational factors can also influence and may play a crucial role.

Economic statecraft and trade policy, which can be among the central aspects of foreign policy as preference, are not only affected by the preferences of the state but also by the preferences of the decision-makers. Economic statecraft includes prioritizing economic growth, trade liberalization (or trade restriction), and investment promotion, as well as formulating trade policies, negotiating agreements, and participating in economic alliances but goes far beyond economic diplomacy. It is the utilization of foreign policy instruments to fulfill the foreign policy aims (Hill, 2003, p. 148). Preferences of the states in economic issues are influenced by factors such as comparative advantage and protection of domestic industries. All these factors are dependent not only on the changes that occurred in the international system but also on changes in the domestic level and ideational (or ideological) factors mentioned above.

Strategic interests and national security drive foreign policy preferences, by shaping approaches of states to regional dynamics, security threats, and defense priorities. These include prioritizing territorial integrity, sovereignty, and protection against external threats, as well as strategic alliances and military partnerships to safeguard national interests. Regarding security, the preferences of the states are influenced by threat perceptions, geopolitical rivalries, and historical experiences, which shape their strategic calculations on foreign policy. However, if we claim that the security policy of a state is intertwined with national interest defined as “the perceived needs and desires of one sovereign state in relation to other sovereign states comprising the external environment” (Nuechterlein, 1976, p. 247), then ideational factors should be investigated since they affect human agents in foreign policy.

To summarize, foreign policy can be understood as actions, behaviors, and preferences that underpin the engagement of a state with the global community. At its core, foreign policy serves as the guiding framework through which nations conduct their policies, and shape their interactions, priorities, and goals beyond their borders in international relations.

When considered as action, foreign policy embodies the tangible measures and strategic decisions taken by states to assert their interests and objectives on the global stage. This encompasses a diverse array of initiatives, from diplomatic negotiations or economic agreements to military operations or participation in international forums. Each action

reflects the calculated pursuit of the national interests of a state, grounded in considerations of security, prosperity, and influence.

Moving beyond foreign policy as action, foreign policy as behavior delves deeper into the underlying motivations, norms, and interactions that characterize how a state conducts international affairs. It encompasses cooperative endeavors, competitive rivalries, conflict resolution efforts, and adherence to international norms and agreements. By analyzing foreign policy behavior, observers gain insights into the values, commitments, and approaches of a state to global challenges, offering a nuanced understanding of its role within the international community.

Finally, foreign policy as preference delves into the fundamental priorities, values, and interests that shape the decisions and actions of a state on the world stage. These preferences, shaped by domestic politics, historical context, and cultural factors, guide the strategic choices of a state in key areas such as economic diplomacy, security policy, ideological alignment, and humanitarian concerns. Understanding foreign policy preferences provides crucial insights into the underlying drivers of the behavior of a state and its alignment with broader national objectives.

In essence, whether viewed through the lens of action, behavior, or preference, foreign policy remains a dynamic and multifaceted domain, reflecting the intricate interplay of state interests, global dynamics, and human agency. Embracing this complexity is essential for policymakers, analysts, and diplomats alike as they navigate the challenges and opportunities of an increasingly interconnected world. By fostering a nuanced understanding of foreign policy, stakeholders can work towards building more effective strategies, fostering cooperation, and promoting peace and prosperity on the global stage.

### **1.3. Foreign Policy Analysis in the Discipline of International Relations**

Foreign Policy Analysis (FPA) aims to explain, understand, and sometimes change the foreign policies of the states. Generally, foreign policies are accepted as either behavior that lasts relatively longer periods or decisions that are rather one-time outcomes in responding to external stimuli that bound states in the pursuit of their national interests. FPA is not a unified field of study—simply, stemming from the disagreement over what

foreign policy is and who the main actors of foreign policy decision-making processes are. To support this proposition, it can be argued that FPA serves as a lens depending on the theory and/or approach scholars prefer to employ to examine the complex interactions between states, non-state actors, and the global environment.

The early studies of 'scientific' FPA date back to the end of the First World War and its development coincides with the rise of the behavioral approach in IR—which certainly gives clues about the underlying assumptions that led to the development of the field. The emergence of FPA, like any scientific—or positivist definition of what science is—field, was the result of the attempts to conceptualize and theorize foreign policy. Since with the dominance of behavioralism, a theory which has been usually considered to provide the necessary tools to understand and explain a phenomenon by presenting a series of related hypotheses and prepositions (Knutson, 1992, p. 1), the FPA studies aimed to understand the foreign policy behavior of the states with a specific focus on approaches that would generate testable hypotheses or would integrate only specifically observable explanations. These approaches, to a large extent, seemed to have understudied or even overlooked the social aspects of foreign policy decision-making processes. This underestimation of the social aspect of foreign policy decision-making processes is thought to be shaped by a few studies influenced by behavioral approaches.

Hudson (2016, pp. 13-14) argues that three ground-breaking studies had formed the foundation of the FPA and built paradigms before new approaches emerged in this sub-field, (i) Snyder, Bruck, and Sapin's *Decision Making as an Approach to the Study of International Politics*, (ii) Rosenau's *Pre-theories and Theories of Foreign Policy*, and (iii) the Sprout's *Man-Milieu Relationship Hypotheses in the Context of International Politics*. What makes these works unique is that they have facilitated new studies to look below the state level and focus on the decision-making processes through individual levels of analysis (Snyder et al., 2002). Moreover, they also introduced comparative foreign policy analysis to generate testable theorization (Rosenau, 1966) and a new variable, the psycho-milieu of the individual and group decision-makers (Sprout & Sprout, 1956).

It should be noted that unlike realism and its monolith view of state excluding domestic factors, FPA approaches like bureaucratic politics or organizational process models

usually consider what happens inside a state. However, in foreign policy decision-making, leaders and foreign policy decision-makers are affected not only by domestic changes but also by the changes in the international system as well. In short, they find themselves in a ‘two-level game’ (Putnam, 1988). Since foreign policy generally occurs where foreign and domestic milieus intersect (Neack, 2019, p. 4; Rosenau, 1971), to understand and explain foreign policy behaviors of the states, domestic dynamics, decision-making processes, and any changes in the international system should all be considered. The reason behind this idea is that foreign policy is “[a] ‘boundary’ activity at the interface between the domestic and the external spheres” (Alden & Aran, 2017, p. 107). Therefore, internal factors and pressures need to be considered as well (Brecher et al., 1969, p. 75).

As argued before, FPA is a “bridging discipline” (Rosenau, 1987, p. 1) that links domestic and international levels of politics and their influence on each other (Light, 1994, p. 94). Early studies of FPA were methodologically affected by the behaviorist school and took up Rosenau’s suggestion on generating testable and cross-national theory foreign policy theory (Hudson & Day, 2020, p. 19). After Rosenau had claimed that FPA, as a sub-field, was devoid of a grand theory (Smith, 1983, p. 138), scholars tried to generate law-like generalizations about the foreign policy that can be applied to any case. This was the birth of comparative foreign policy (CFP) studies. Practitioners of the CFP probe the events resulting from foreign policy behaviors. Therefore, CFP mostly aims to generate a grand unified theory to explain and cover all the foreign policy behaviors of each state at all times (Hudson & Day, 2020, p. 19).

Starting from late 1970s, there had been a self-reflection period in the FPA studies that the practitioners of the CFP were affected most. This effect was felt in both theoretical and methodological dimensions of the CFP (Hudson, 2014, p. 28). Theoretically, because of the rise of psychological approaches in decision-making studies, the attempt to grasp a scientific and statistical analysis to generalize about foreign policy decisions failed. Moreover, the lack of conceptual tools for CFP studies caused comparative studies in the FPA to become theoretically underdeveloped. When decision-making studies began to evolve methodologically during the 1970s and new studies were introduced especially in cognitive approaches, the behavioral methodology of the CFP began to fail. Not only did

it become more difficult to gather, analyze, and conceptualize the data when more than one country was involved in the process of analysis (Cyr & deLeon, 1975, p. 376) but also the data to be used in the analysis became unavailable for many years because of security-related concerns (Hudson & Day, 2020, p. 25).

During the 1970s, other studies in the FPA contributed to the development of the sub-field. For instance, Allison (1969) introduced the Organizational Process and the Bureaucratic Politics models as alternatives to the Rational Actor model and demonstrated how different interpretations can be reached over a single case of foreign policy. In the 1980s, cognitive approaches gained popularity in the studies of FPA. Having been influenced by the studies from psychology, scholars began to explore how cognitive biases, perceptions, and information processing influenced foreign policy choices. The end of the Cold War brought about new challenges and opportunities for FPA. With the emergence of non-state actors and transnational issues, globalization became a central theme, and the study of foreign policy evolved to encompass a broader array of actors ranging from states to non-governmental organizations. However, it could be still argued that states maintain their dominant position in the FPA studies while there is an increasing interest in the roles and/or impact of non-state actors in foreign policy decision-making processes.

In the 21<sup>st</sup> century, with scholars adopting diverse theoretical perspectives and methodologies, FPA continues to evolve. The field has become increasingly interdisciplinary, incorporating insights, among various others, from economics, sociology, anthropology, and technology studies. This disciplinary eclecticism enables FPA studies to benefit from all the fields of social science.

## **CHAPTER II**

### **A SURVEY ON APPROACHES TO FOREIGN POLICY ANALYSIS**

This chapter briefly introduces approaches to foreign policy decision-making. Although, in the literature, there are various theories and approaches employed to explain the foreign policy of a state, in this chapter, general and mostly-preferred approaches are discussed. To do so, firstly, Graham Allison's three models on foreign policy decision-making are explained in this section. Then, approaches to small group dynamics are analyzed. After that, cognitive approaches and poliheuristic theory are analyzed. By doing this, throughout the chapter, the relationship between decision-making and rationality is analyzed as well. Not all theories and approaches employ 'the perfectly rational actor' assumption in their theoretical view on foreign policy analysis. Because it is the difference in understanding what rationality constitutes and how it affects the foreign policy decision-makers causes theoretical divergence in the FPA.

#### **2.1. Large Group Dynamics in Decision-Making: Allison's Three Models on Foreign Policy Decision-Making**

Foreign policy decision-making (FPDM) approaches are generally interested in the decision-making processes and the individual decision-makers lie at the center. FPDM studies aim to explain why states behave the way they do in foreign policy. For the practitioners of this approach, foreign policy behaviors of the states are usually determined by the combination of the (mis)perception of the decision-makers against the outside world and their evaluation of the relative power of a state compared to other states. Since the actions of the states are set by the decision-makers, the key to the explanation of foreign policy behaviors of the states "lies in the way decision-makers as actor define the situation" (Snyder et al., 1962, p. 60). Besides, an actor crucial to the foreign policy

decision-making process “could arrive different *outcomes* depending on the decision process” (Mintz & DeRouen Jr., 2010, p. 4, emphasis original). Therefore, to provide a theoretical assessment, studies of FPDM utilize various works from different fields such as psychology and economics.

Decision-making approaches problematize structural theories of foreign policy and open the ‘black box’ of the decision-making process (Levy & Thompson, 2010, p. 128). While these approaches take domestic factors into account, they also consider system-level factors (Mintz & DeRouen Jr., 2010, p. 62). FPDM studies are currently dominated by in two main approaches, the rational choice and cognitive psychology school, each having its sub-strands (Mintz, 2003, p. 1). Since each approach offers a different view on foreign policy decision-making and embodies diverse studies, the following section will briefly introduce the Rational Actor Model, the Organizational Process Model, and the Bureaucratic Politics Model.

### **2.1.1. Rational Actor Model**

The Rational Actor model (RAM) is mostly associated with the realists assuming that states are unitary actors and they maximize their national interest. States are not differentiated by their internal properties such as government type, economic model, and history but by solely relative power (Neack, 2019, p. 17). RAM assumes that decision-makers are guided by rationality defined as “consistent, value maximizing choice within specified constraints” (Allison, 1971, 30) and for that reason, leaders choose the best option from a set of alternative decisions that satisfies their expectations mostly.

The RAM has an overwhelming influence on foreign policy explanations (Allison, 1969, p. 690) and it postulates that foreign policy decisions are made by rational unitary actors with no biases. The RAM assumes that the decision-makers can be considered as single and unified rational actors who show consistent preferences. In this model, decision-makers have consistent preferences and are utility maximizers (MacDonald, 2003, p. 552). Since rational actors are utility maximizers, they never decide on an action that offers less value compared to alternative policy choices (de Mesquita, 1981, p. 29).

Simply, in the RAM, all actors are considered rational. Therefore, the behaviors of individuals can be observed and even predicted (Morin & Paquin, 2018, p. 217). Moreover, choices made by these individuals result from a cost-benefit analysis and evaluation of available information on any situation. Danilovic (2003, p. 128) provides a useful summary of rationality or rational choice, “[...] decision-makers make choices between alternatives with the goal to maximize their preferences. They are rational if their preferences are connected and transitive.” To offer an alternative definition of rationality that suits better to international politics and international relations, we can argue that rationality is the goal-oriented foreign policy behaviors that occur in the domain of foreign policy when “[...] the individual responding to an international event (...) uses the best information available and chooses from the universe of possible responses most likely to maximize his [or her] goals” (Verba, 1961, p. 95).

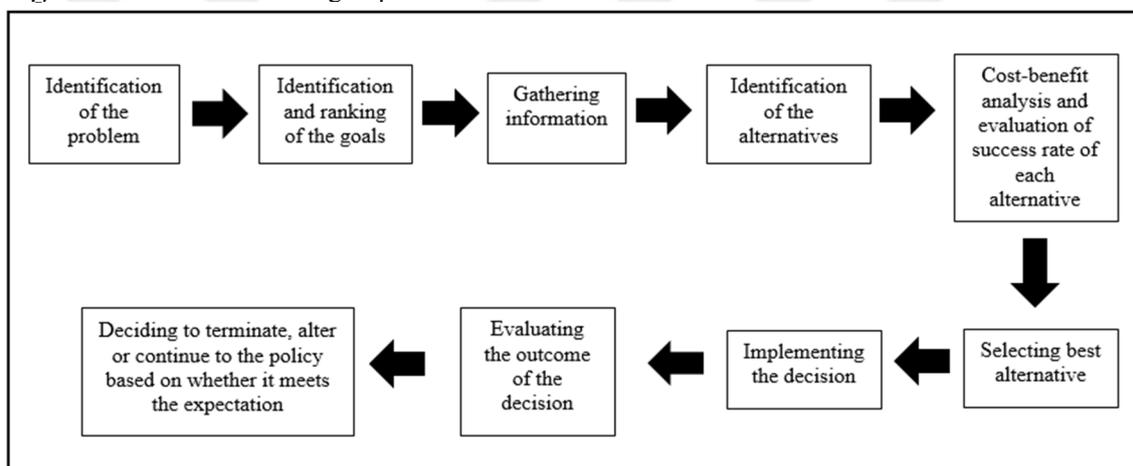
The ‘rationality of decision-makers’ is the core principle of the RAM. However, it essentially supposes that decision-makers not only have clear knowledge about all the options but also they reach the best decision by considering all aspects of a foreign policy issue (Verba, 1961). However, studies following Allison’s RAM show that decision-makers do not reach a perfect decision since it is quite difficult to gather and analyze all the information needed for such decisions (Tayfur, 2011, p. 84). This assumption is conceptualized as ‘bounded rationality.’ Although bounded rationality is introduced in the cognitive approaches, we can simply introduce it as decision-makers decide on the first option they see that satisfies their interest (2011, p. 84). In other words, this kind of rationality refers to the notion that the capability of human beings in terms of calculating and evaluating the outcomes of decisions enforces cognitive limits on minds (Selten, 1990, p. 651).

After this brief introduction, it is also important to investigate how the RAM conceptualizes the decision-making process. As shown in Figure 2.1., Cashman (2014, pp. 51-52) asserts the process of decision-making as (i) the identification of the problem, (ii) the identification and ranking of the goals, (iii) the gathering of information, (iv) the identification of the alternatives, (v) the cost-benefit analysis and evaluation of the success rate of each alternative, (vi) selecting the best alternative, (vii) implementing the decision, (viii) evaluating the outcome of the decision. Considering this definition, it can

be argued that RAM is “[...] a normative model of how decisions *ought* to be made as well as a parsimonious explanatory model of how decisions actually *are* made” (Levy & Thompson, 2010, p. 129, emphasis original).

The RAM provides some useful insights for the researchers. It may allow the researcher to conduct his/her research on how a particular decision is made. In other words, as Verba (1961, p. 106) illustrates, “(...) if the decision maker behaves rationally, the observer, knowing the rules of rationality, can rehearse the decisional process in his mind, and, if he knows the decision maker’s goals, can both predict the decision and understand why that particular decision was made.”

**Figure 2.1.** Decision-making steps in the Rational Actor Model.



Source: (Cashman, 2014, p. 51-52).

To summarize, the theoretical background of the RAM is based on the assumptions of the rational choice theory which helps scholars to analyze the decision-making process under conditions of risks (Tversky & Kahneman, 1986). To do so, scholars of the FPA defending the RAM embrace the rationality of the decision-makers. Considering the great debates in IR, it can be argued that the nexus between rationality and decision-making has been intertwined with the ongoing ontological and epistemological debates within IR (Alden, 2017). As mentioned in the introductory section, studies of the FPA differ from the traditional and systemic theories of the IR like realism and liberalism by aiming to “open the black box” of the states—and in a way foreign policy—and try to provide a deeper analytical account. Moreover, the RAM posits a unitary actor model that results from the actions of a single decision-maker, usually a leader. In this model, decision-makers are

considered to act rationally and cohesively, with a set of preferences guiding the decision-making on a foreign policy issue.

In the RAM, the decision-makers access and analyze all the relevant information and predict the possible outcomes to finalize their decisions based on a comprehensive understanding of the foreign policy situation. The practitioners of this model argue that leaders are expected to evaluate the alternatives objectively, consider the advantages and disadvantages, and weigh the benefits and costs of each alternative option. After the evaluation of the options, decisions are made by selecting the best alternative that helps decision-makers reach the desired aims. As stated above, in the RAM, the process of decision-making is logical and systematic. That is, leaders finalize their decisions after identifying the problems on a foreign policy issue, generating the possible alternatives, evaluating all the options, and selecting the most rational course of action that suits their foreign policy objectives.

Despite the insights that the Rational Actor Model can provide scholars, there are some criticisms directed at the model. To begin with, this model is often criticized for its overemphasis on rationality. Another criticism of the RAM might be its oversimplification of the decision-making process. While this model draws a decision-making framework that decisions are made by a single and unitary actor, the real-world decision-making process can often be complex and affected by numerous factors like emotions, organizational dynamics, and competition in the bureaucracy. The RAM also fails to recognize the importance of social dynamics, including ideological differences and cultural varieties within the states.

The Rational Actor Model is also heavily criticized for its lack of consideration of organizational constraints. In this model, single decision-makers make their decisions by following a set of rules and processes introduced before, but the foreign policy decisions can also be affected by the organizational structure, process of information compiling, organizational behavior, ideologic preferences of the decision-makers and political advisers, and bureaucratic politics. Another criticism of the RAM is related to its information processing mechanism. It is often argued that in the RAM, the process and evaluation of the information is comprehensive and, in a way, analytic. However, it is often neglected that the decision-makers may sometimes face ambiguous information,

time limitations, and cognitive setbacks that lead to imperfect outcomes. These uncertainties might lead the decision-makers to adapt to changing or new conditions and this adaptation process might contain learning.

### **2.1.2. Organizational Process Model**

The organizational process model (OPM) rejects the assumption of the RAM which postulates that the decision-making is the result of a set of rational calculations of alternative scenarios and evaluation of available options by the leaders on a given issue. Instead, OPM claims that foreign policy outputs result from organizational mechanisms (Morin & Paquin, 2018, p. 111). OPM analyzes decision-making as an organizational process that is “less as deliberate choices and more as *outputs* of large organizations functioning according to standard patterns of behavior (...) and each organization attends to a special set of problems and acts in quasi-independence on these problems” (Allison, 1971, p. 67, emphasis original).

Allison argues that at the core of the OPM lies the very idea that governmental bodies of the states are the conglomerates of many subunits that form the structure of a government (Cashman, 2014, p. 128). These subunits mostly have specific roles in the decision-making process of a given foreign policy issue. However, each subunit isolates itself from other subunits while forming a solution addressing a foreign policy issue and the implementation of solutions occurs independently (2014, p. 128). As shown in Figure 2.2., policy-making in the OPM starts with the identification of a policy issue or problem and continues to involve multiple actors in the body of different organizations in a government.

**Figure 2.2.** Decision-making steps in the Organizational Process Model.



OPM argues that each subunit of the government puts its organizational survival at the top of its priorities vis-à-vis other subunits (Hudson & Day, 2020, p. 18). Yet these subunits function by developing standard operating procedures (SOPs) to reach foreign policy decisions. In essence, SOPs are pre-existing routines developed over time by the organizational bodies within a government to deal with urgent issues that are usually handled by “low-level bureaucrats” (Mintz & DeRouen Jr., 2010, p. 73) since government decisions are usually certain, risk-free, and taken by following priori-established guidelines (Dougherty & Pfaltzgraff, 1990, p. 487).

The Organizational Process Model highlights the SOPs which provide established routines or patterns of behavior within governmental bodies. These routines or procedures guide the decision-makers on how certain foreign policy tasks are completed. Therefore decision-makers generally rely on these established routines. SOPs, which often output from past decisions and precedents, lead the decision-makers to search for similar cases from the past. This leads to a continuity in foreign policy decision-making.

These guidelines further form organizational decision procedures or dynamics known as incrementalism. Initially introduced by Braybrooke and Lindblom (1963), incrementalism leads to stagnation in decisions because subunits in a governmental organization tend to embrace and implement the same policy options acquired by past

decisions (Mandel, 1986, p. 259). In addition to this effect, since incrementalism seldom changes the *status quo* in the decision-making process of the organizations (Mintz & DeRouen Jr., 2010, p. 74), it can only offer a partial and temporary solution to a given crisis.

To summarize, the Organizational Process Model highlights the effects of organizational structures, processes, and SOPs on foreign policy decision-making. The OPM aims to provide a framework that in return helps us understand how bureaucratic dynamics can affect the foreign policy decision-making process. At the core of the OPM is the assumption that the decision-making mechanism of a state is influenced by the internal bureaucratic dynamics within government organizations. Different departments, agencies, and individuals within a government have a role in the foreign policy decision-making process, competing against each other to influence the governmental body. In OPM, it is the result of these internal power struggles that shape a foreign policy decision.

Organizations playing a role in the foreign policy decision-making process develop guidelines called SOPs which help decision-makers decide during foreign policy making. These guidelines are often already established ways to handle recurring foreign policy issues. They are usually followed by the foreign policy actors within governmental organizations which prioritize maintaining efficiency is important in the organizations. In this model, decision-makers tend to rely on established procedures even when they face new or even radical challenges.

In the OPM, foreign policy decisions are often made incrementally. Decisions are finalized by following the existing guidelines and existing patterns of practice. This situation does not provide enough space for maneuvering for the decision-makers who are slightly likely to make small adjustments to ongoing policies rather than opting for radical changes in the existing paths of decision-making.

Even though the OPM may provide some useful insight to better understand the decision-making mechanism in the governments, there are also some criticisms directed at the model. First, some critics of this model center around its overemphasis on the dynamics within the bureaucracy. This potentially overlooks the role of individuals or leaders, their worldviews, and the possible influence of external factors on decision-making. Second,

the complex prepositions of this model and its focus on internal processes within the governmental bodies make it difficult to predict foreign policy outcomes. Therefore, the OPM may not always lead to precise predictions on possible foreign policy decisions. Finally, it can be argued that the OPM does not adequately consider the role and effect of public opinion and domestic politics in shaping and implementing foreign policy decisions. Its overemphasis on organizations within the government and the bureaucracy may generate inadequate analyses of foreign policy decisions.

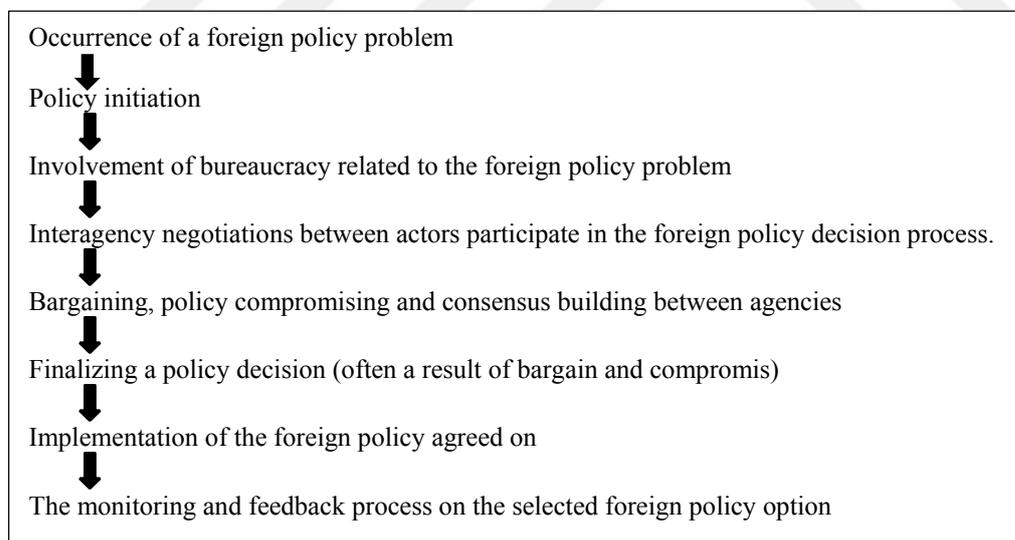
### **2.1.3. Bureaucratic Politics Model**

Heavily influenced by the early works of Lindblom (1959), Neustadt (1960), and Simon (1965) who analyzed the link between bureaucracy and foreign policy, the Bureaucratic Politics Model (BPM) was introduced by Graham Allison (1969; 1971) in his work on the Cuban Missile Crisis that tries to explain the behaviors of the USA and the USSR. Allison's BPM discounts domestic factors of foreign policy and decision-makers' worldviews (Carlsnaes, 2013, p. 311) and investigates individuals and their interaction with each other through organizational bodies. Hence, the decisions do not result from a single strategy and rational analysis of a unitary actor (e.g., presidents or prime ministers), but from various actors. Although it focuses primarily on the institutional features and organizational bodies, BPM aims to provide an agent-oriented rather than a structural explanation of foreign policy decisions (2013, p. 311).

The bureaucratic politics model has some prepositions such as (i) the involvement of multiple actors; (ii) actors with individual agendas are involved in political games characterized as competition or cooperation; (iii) the power relations are diffuse and changeable depending on the political context; (iv) interactions between the bureaucratic actors are characterized by continuous "pulling and hauling" and bargaining between a cluster of actors; (v) decisions result from bargaining, coalition formation, and compromise; and (vi) the outcomes of the decision process are sensitive to slippage both in temporal terms (e.g. time delays between decision-making process and its implementation) and in content (e.g. modification of the content after the implementation of a decision) (Preston & 't Hart, 1999, p. 55).

BPM postulates that there is no hierarchy among decisions initially and any ultimate decision results from political bargaining among groups (Dougherty & Pfaltzgraff, 1990, p. 477). This situation can reveal political competition among these clusters of individuals (Mintz & DeRouen Jr., 2010, p. 71) because in the processes each actor employs different beliefs and preferences reflecting the parties they represent (Allison & Zelikow, 1999, p. 256). Hence, foreign policy decisions result from various actions such as bargaining, compromising, competition, cooperation, and coalition as shown in Figure 2.3. (Cashman, 2014, p. 134). As a result of the several ways used to finalize a decision, BPM is generally dominated by domestic interests rather than national interests and decision-makers seldom reach a solid and integrated foreign policy decision because each party offers a different and usually competing policy (2014, p. 135). Hence, decision-makers involved in bureaucratic politics generally reach a suboptimal decision rather than an optimum decision. Moreover, the BPM model postulates that even if all decision units act rationally to form a decision, the outcome of the bureaucratic interaction may still be irrational (Lebow, 1981).

**Figure 2.3.** Decision-making steps in the Bureaucratic Politics Model.



Besides the theoretical explanations that the BPM introduces, it should also be considered how bureaucratic politics can be identified in the first place. To answer this, Cashman (2014, p. 140-141) provides a set of conditions under which circumstances bureaucratic politics are said to be in play, (i) there must be at least three individuals or groups of decision-makers involved to form a decision, (ii) decision groups competing in the

bureaucracy should be culturally, socially, and institutionally heterogeneous, (iii) members of a group involved in decision-making should have equal political power, (iv) the loyalty of group members is to their institution rather than to the decision unit which involves multiple individuals and group members, (v) there should be sufficient time for various bureaucratic organizations and their members to influence the decision process, and (vi) decision-making process should be open to multiple international actors.

Like other approaches to the FPA, the BPM is also substantially criticized (Art, 1973; Krasner, 1971; Rhodes, 1994). First, BPM embodies many variables that are left obscure and make it difficult to be used as an analytical tool (Bendor & Hammond, 1992, p. 318). Another criticism of the BPM is the lack of consideration for the power and political influence of the leaders in the decision-making process (Korany, 1984, p. 13; Krasner, 1971). In BPM, the head of the state is treated as an ordinary player like many others in the bureaucracy who has an opinion and tries to defend and influence others with no positional superiority or monopoly over other players (Morin & Paquin, 2018, p. 115). Some assert that Allison's BPM fails to grasp the leader's influence, especially in times of crisis. During a crisis, the leader's stance may dominate the choice of some other players participating in the decision-making process despite their mindsets falling into other alternative scenarios (Caldwell, 1977, p. 97).

## **2.2. Small Group Dynamics in Decision-Making: Groupthink and Polythink**

Like organizational process and bureaucratic politics models, groupthink and polythink are also group decision-making approaches. While it can be argued that there are many benefits of decisions made by a group like diversity of policy opinions, generating more complex knowledge that guides decision-making, and increased chance of the acceptance of policy decisions. It could also be argued that group decision-making may also have weaknesses. Groupthink and Polythink are two theoretical approaches that show the weakness of small decision groups in foreign policy decision-making.

### **2.2.1. Groupthink**

Groupthink is one of the small group decision-making approaches that has received considerable attention among FPA scholars. Groupthink is more of a syndrome rather

than a theory that explains foreign policy-making. That is, groupthink essentially investigates and demonstrates underlying causes that under what circumstances states do not reach preferred, or optimum, foreign policy outputs. In this way, groupthink describes the failure of the foreign policy decision-making mechanism.

In groupthink, foreign policy decisions emerge in a single group defined as a “set of individuals, all of whom are members of a single body, collectively select a course of action in face-to-face interaction and obtain compliance” (Hermann & Hermann, 1989, p. 363). Single groups can be “as small as two or three people or as large as a parliament of hundreds, so long as there is a collective, interactive decision process in which all the members who are needed to make authoritative commitments participate” (Hermann et al., 2001, p. 134).

Irving Janis was the first to coin the term groupthink in both social sciences and FPA. In his analysis of the Bay of Pigs fiasco, Janis seeks to understand why a group of qualified people, foreign policy advisors, command echelons, and other officials make poor and even bad decisions. As defined as a syndrome rather than a foreign policy approach, groupthink occurs when the individuals forming a single group prioritize group loyalty, seek consensus over policy decisions, and fail to explore any alternatives to do so. Groupthink is “a strong concurrence-seeking tendency that interferes with effective group decision making” (Forsyth, 2010, p. 40). Groupthink is the result of a process that “group norms and patterns essentially take over and result in deeply flawed decision-making” (Smith, 2016, p. 71). Following these reflections on groupthink, to draw a general framework, we can employ the proposition made by Janis (1972, p. 9), “[G]roupthink refers to a deterioration of mental efficiency, reality testing, and moral judgment that results from in-group pressures.”

Janis (1972, pp. 197-198) identifies the symptoms of groupthink, (i) having an illusion of invulnerability, (ii) the use of collective rationalizations, (iii) an unquestioned belief in the group's inherent morality, (iv) having stereotype views on out-groups, (v) pressures on heterodoxy, (vi) self-censorship, (vii) illusions of unanimity, and (viii) the emergence of self-appointed mindguards. In situations where any of these symptoms are combined, then, essential aspects and key points can be overlooked and ignored. As a result, the group's decision on any issue will be flawed (Kowert, 2002). Similarly, Morin and Paquin

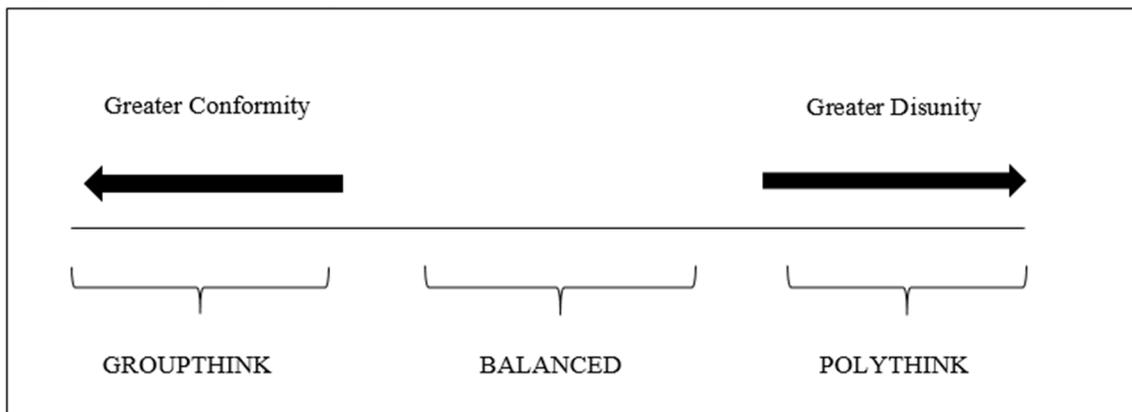
(2018, p. 108) introduce some possible factors as a high level of stress, strong socio-cultural uniformity, a weak or dominant leader, a feeling of isolation, an overestimation of the group's capacities, a dubious decision-making method, a high concentration of sources of information and low self-esteem.

### **2.2.2. Polythink**

Polythink is the opposite of groupthink. While groupthink has an overwhelming tendency towards unanimity, polythink resonates with a variety of opinions. Mintz and Wayne (2016, p. 3) define polythink as a “[G]roup dynamic whereby different members in a decision-making unit espouse a plurality of opinions and offer divergent policy prescriptions, and even dissent, which can result in intragroup conflict and a fragmented, disjointed decision-making process.” As a result, as shown in Figure 2.2., while, in groupthink, the decision group reaches a foreign policy option without evaluating possible alternatives, in polythink, the decision group may choose a policy option suboptimal because of disunity among the members of the group.

Although it seems better at first glance, polythink can lead to a situation in which members of a single group are not able to follow, understand, or value the opinions and perspectives of other group members and therefore, these group members cannot benefit from the various possible views (Mintz et al., 2005). Therefore, a decision-making group may reach a different policy decision compared to a decision made under the groupthink syndrome (Mintz & Sofrin, 2017). Like groupthink, polythink can lead to defective and suboptimal policy decisions, inadequate analysis of possible alternatives, objectives, and risks, selective use of information, and deadlock in decision-making (Redd & Mintz, 2013, p. 21).

**Figure 2.4.** Groupthink-Polythink continuum



Source : (Mintz & Wayne, 2016, p. 5)

Mintz and Wayne (2016, pp. 12-13) offer an analysis of the symptoms of polythink, (i) greater likelihood of intra-group conflict in the decision group, (ii) greater likelihood of leaks from the members of the decision unit (iii) higher possibility of confusion and lack of communication among the members, (iv) higher possibility of framing effects, (v) employing a situation with the lowest common denominator, (vi) decision paralysis which either leads to a complete failure or the adoption of the sub-optimal policy, (vii) limited review of alternative policy options, and (viii) a complete denial for a reappraisal of previously ignored or rejected policy choices.

### **2.3. Cognitive Approaches**

Cognitive approaches increased its popularity in the 1990s and became one of the most appealing approaches in the study of foreign policy analysis (Carlsnaes, 2013, p. 310). Scholars interested in psychology focused on cognition defined by the American Heritage Dictionary as “the mental process or faculty of knowing, including aspects such as awareness, perception, reasoning, and judgment” (cited in Neack, 2019, 37).

The starting point of cognitive studies is the idea that individual decision-makers respond not to the world but to the world that is shaped by their beliefs and perceptions (Korany, 1984, p. 13). Differing from the rational actor model, cognitive approaches focus on the psychological characteristics of the decision-makers such as perceptions and personal beliefs. Cognitive approaches essentially assume that individual decision-makers perceive their environment differently and operate referring to their psychological environment (Sprout & Sprout, 1965). As discussed before, the rational actor model

presupposes that individuals have all the inputs, cost-benefit analysis, and feedback for any outcomes of a foreign policy. However, cognitive studies emphasize “‘beliefs’ and ‘process’ as well as where ‘preferences come from’ and ‘how preferences are established’ among policymakers” (Rosati 2000, 49). As a result, cognitive approaches to FPA involve non-material factors like emotions, belief systems, psychological dimensions of decision-making, and learning that the RAM, OPM, and BPM are devoid of.

Cognitive approaches are thought to offer a better understanding of complex foreign policy decisions and processes. They are distinguished from the rational actor model by referring to perceptions and misperceptions (Neack, 2008, p. 43) and psychological aspects of the decision-making process (Jackson & Sørensen, 2013, p. 255). Since FPA is actor-specific (Hudson, 2005, p. 3) and decision-makers can decide different policies on similar cases (Jervis, 2013), cognitive approaches can help us to “understand the cognitive regularities and how the mind deals with uncertainty and infers inductively” (Rosati, 2000, 51).

Cognitive approaches differ from rational foreign policy decision-making models by referring to human psychology and cognitive aspects of the mind as argued above. Therefore, learning can be used as a better analytical tool compared to rational models of foreign policy analysis. While learning as a concept is not used while investigating Allison’s three foreign policy decision-making approaches, it is considered that mentioning learning in this section would be better since learning resonates cognitive and psychological dimensions of the individuals. Therefore, learning, in the context of cognitive approaches, can play a central role in understanding how decision-makers adapt their cognitive frameworks based on experiences and feedback. Decision-makers learn from past successes and failures, adjusting their mental models and information-processing strategies. Besides, cognitive models of foreign policy decision-making often neglect the rational actor assumption and prioritize bounded rationality (Simon, 1986), and in these models, leaders do not have all the possible options and all the information on a foreign policy problem.

The term, bounded rationality, was initially introduced by Simon (1957) to challenge neoclassical economics and its homo economicus model. Bounded rationality refers to an alternative conception of rationality by arguing that decision-makers from everyday life

are cognitively limited. In the literature, most theoretical models on decision-making refer to logical omniscience (Wheeler, 2018), the proposition that individuals make their decisions logically and rationally since they have complete knowledge of any set of possible options for any case. However, Simon (1985), classical understanding of rationality can be defined as substantive because it is more about the goal or the outcome of a decision rather than the process itself. If the decision-maker has a single goal, then, this type of rationality can be employed (Simon, 1959). But people seldom behave rationally. Instead of optimizing, they often seek satisfaction with their decisions while making (Hudson & Vore, 1995, p. 211). In contrast to the rational approach, bounded rationality assumes that decision-making is procedural because the behavior of the individual is “adaptive within the constraints imposed both by the external situation and by the capacities of the decision maker” (Simon, 1985, p. 294). Therefore, if the complexity of the decision process increases then the rational model falls short because more information regarding the decision environment will be needed “about the mechanisms and processes” that the decision-maker “uses to relate himself to that environment” (Simon, 1959, p. 279).

As mentioned before, there are many critics of the rational approaches to foreign policy. One of which is made by the Sprouts (1956) to whom there are two environments considering processes of the foreign policy decision-making, operational and psychological environments. To the Sprouts, the operational environment is where objective reality can be observed, and the psychological environment is where decision-makers have subjective perceptions and are affected by perceptual biases. If the logic of the Sprouts is followed, it can be argued that foreign policy decision-makers make foreign policy decisions within their psychological environment. That is, psychological factors, guided by perceptions, predominate objective facts, and rationality. This, then, necessitates the examination of psychological and cognitive factors affecting the decision-making process.

To summarize, unlike rational approaches to FPA, cognitive approaches advocate a broader way of studying foreign policy. Cognitive approaches depart from rational foreign policy approaches by integrating the psychological factors of the individual decision-makers. Therefore, intuitions, belief systems, and perceptions can play a

significant role in decisions. As mentioned before, the emphasis of individuals on the decision-making process led scholars of FPA to investigate and focus on cognitive and psychological factors as explanatory factors of foreign policy outputs. Since some approaches prioritize the psychology of leaders and consider their minds not as *tabula rasa* but filled with “[c]omplex and intricately related information and patterns, such as beliefs, attitudes, values, experiences, emotions, traits, style, memory, and national and self-conceptions” (Hudson, 2016, p. 23).

Like Allison’s three models on FPDM, the concept of learning can be integrated into the cognitive approaches of FPA. To begin with, we need to acknowledge that compared to the rational assumption of foreign policy decision-making which assumes that foreign policy decision-makers are fully rational and take their decisions based on means-ends calculations (Morrow, 1997; Zagare, 1990), cognitive approaches assume that decision-makers are not fully but procedurally rational. Procedural rationality presumes that the minds of foreign policy decision-makers make decisions with their limited cognitive capacities. This prevents them from processing data, comparing possible options, completely specifying the policy options they need, and learn preferably and optimally from foreign policy events (Rapport, 2017).

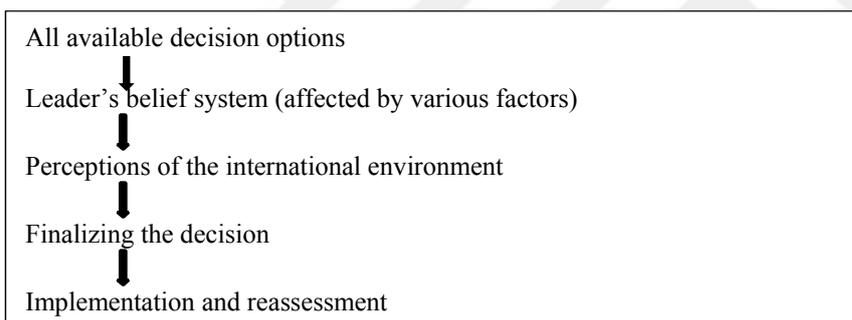
### **2.3.1. Operational Code**

Essentially, operational code is an attempt to establish a dataset that involves information about the beliefs of an individual decisionmaker. This method provides scholars “a means of testing a leader’s fundamental predispositions toward political action” (Crichlow, 1998). Introduced by Nathan Leites (1951; 1953) in his works on Soviet leaders’ belief sets to portray the political power in the USSR by establishing a correlation between the political culture in the Soviets and the Bolshevik ideology (Walker et al., 2003, p. 215), it was Alexander George who identified a set of questions to assess the belief of the leaders.

George (1969, p. 197) defines the operational code as “[a] political leader’s beliefs about the nature of politics and political conflict, his views regarding the extent to which historical developments can be shaped, and his notions of correct strategy and tactics.” Since belief sets of a leader affect him or her to analyze and interpret the information

about the world (Drury, 2006, p. 190), beliefs play a crucial role in decision-making as shown in Figure 2.5., and “beliefs as a subjective representations of reality matter in the explanation of world politics” (Tetlock, 1998, p. 876), the practitioners of operational code focus on the belief system of the leaders to understand world politics and identifies two belief groups defined as philosophical beliefs and instrumental beliefs. These belief groups were initially set by George (1969) and he generated some questions to identify the operational code of a decisionmaker. While the first group of questions help scholars to “determine a leader’s perceptions of the political universe and the role of the “Other” that the leader confronts” (Özdamar & Canbolat, 2018, p. 20), the second group of questions “reveal an image of the leader’s “Self” to provide a map of his or her means to achieve foreign-policy goals” (2018, p. 20). The first group of questions is about philosophical issues, and the second group of questions is about instrumental issues (George, 1969, pp. 199-216).

**Figure 2.5.** Decision-making steps in the Operational Code.



The philosophical questions are the following:

**P-1:** What is the essential nature of political life? Is the political universe essentially one of harmony or conflict? What is the fundamental character of one's political opponents?

**P-2:** What are the prospects for the eventual realization of one's fundamental political values and aspirations? Can one be optimistic, or must one be pessimistic on this score; and in what respects the one and/or the other?

**P-3:** Is the political future predictable? In what sense and to what extent?

**P-4:** How much control or mastery can one have over historical development? What is one's role in moving and shaping history in the desired direction?

**P-5:** What is the role of chance in human affairs and in historical development?

The instrumental questions are as follows:

**I-1:** What is the best approach for selecting goals or objectives for political action?

**I-2:** How are the goals of action pursued most effectively?

**I-3:** How are the risks of political actions calculated, controlled, and accepted?

**I-4:** What is the best timing of action to advance one's interest?

**I-5:** What is the utility and role of different means for advancing one's interests?

Questions P-1, P-4, and I-1 are considered master beliefs and they are at the core of the operational code because answers to these questions help the researcher find the answers to the rest of the set of questions (Özdamar, 2017, p. 172).

Operational code studies generally examine the personal writings and statements of the decision-makers to identify their psychological beliefs (Neack, 2019, p. 45). In the operational code approach, belief systems are factors that “filter incoming information from the outside world and influence the perception of individuals as well as their preferences” and scholars of operational code argue to better understand foreign policy decisions “by establishing a systematic study of leaders’ operational codes” (Walker & Schafer, 2006, p. 7). Scholars studying operational code argue that the belief system of the leaders both establish the self and other images —and in foreign policy makings the self and the other are usually formed or represented at state level. In this regard, it can be stated that the leaders’ “[...] beliefs about their nation and its relationship with the world, colored their perceptions and expectations concerning policy choices” (Matarese, 2001, p. 4).

### **2.3.2. Prospect Theory**

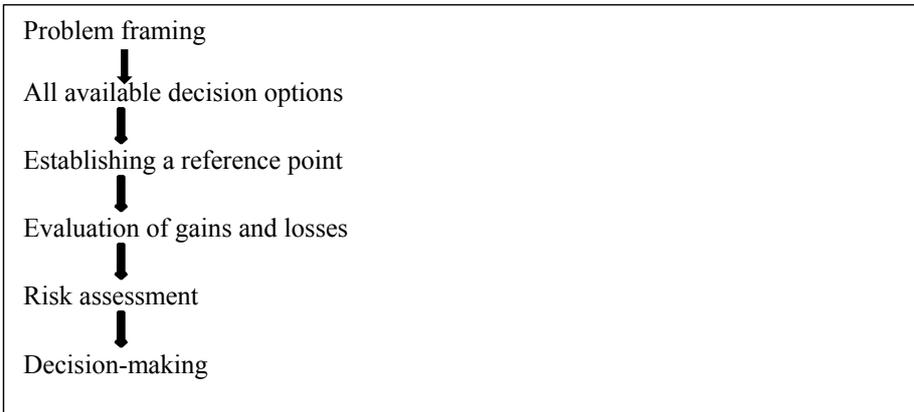
Prospect Theory, the second theoretical approach in cognitive studies of FPA, is mostly affected by the developments from the research in economics, behaviorism, and psychology (Morin & Paquin, 2018, p. 237). Initially introduced by Kahneman and

Tversky (1979), prospect theory essentially argues that individuals are discontented when they face a loss and this loss causes psychological pain which overrides the pleasure resulting from an equivalent gain. Similarly, if individuals experience a loss, most of them are generally ready to take more risks to prevent that loss (Morin & Paquin, 2018, p. 238). Practitioners of the prospect theory assert that people avoid taking risks when they have gained and tend to take risks when they face a crisis or have much to lose (McDermott, 1998, p. 18). Then, what can be understood by the risk? For Prospect theory, it is not the concept itself but the uncertainty of outcomes that defines the character of a risk (1998, p. 39). Therefore, in prospect theory, possible outcomes of a certain decision usually define the level (or severity) of the risk.

Moving beyond the conceptualization of the prospect theory, this theory has four main prepositions, (i) reference dependence, (ii) loss aversion, (iii) diminishing sensitivity, and (iv) probability weighting (Vis & Kuijpers, 2018, p. 577). The first, reference dependence, is the assumption that individual decision-makers decide by considering a reference point, usually the status quo (Lau & Levy, 1998, p. 37). Second, loss aversion refers to the idea that decision-makers react more intensely negatively to losses than to gains with similar proportions. The prospect theory asserts that avoiding loss outweighs securing gain. Third, diminishing sensitivity, suggests that if the given loss or gain is close to the reference point, then it has a bigger impact on the decision-makers. Last, probability weighting, is “the effect of an outcome’s probability on an option’s perceived value is not linear” (Linde & Vis, 2016, p. 104).

The decision-making process as shown in Figure 2.6. in the prospect theory involves two phases, editing or framing, and evaluation (Levy, 1992). In the editing phase, the individual decision-maker forms a representation of the action, possible outcomes, and foreseeable possibilities available and relevant to a given issue. In the evaluating phase, the decision-maker analyzes the possible outcomes or values of each set of actions and finalizes his/her decision accordingly. The prospect theory made some contributions to the social sciences after it had become “the most influential behavioral theory of choice in the social science” (Mercer, 2005, p. 1).

**Figure 2.6.** Decision-making steps in the Prospect Theory.



Prospect theory and its emphasis on loss aversion have many implications for the studies of foreign policy. For instance, DeRouen (1995) made use of the theory to study the incidents in which the decision-makers use military power when they face political trouble. In addition, McDermott (1992) utilized the theory to analyze President Jimmy Carter’s decisions on the hostage crisis with Iran in 1980. He focused on the process leading to the rescue operation designed to free hostages. Although the operation was risky, the President was also faced with the possibility of political loss while running for the 1980 presidential election (McDermott, 1992).

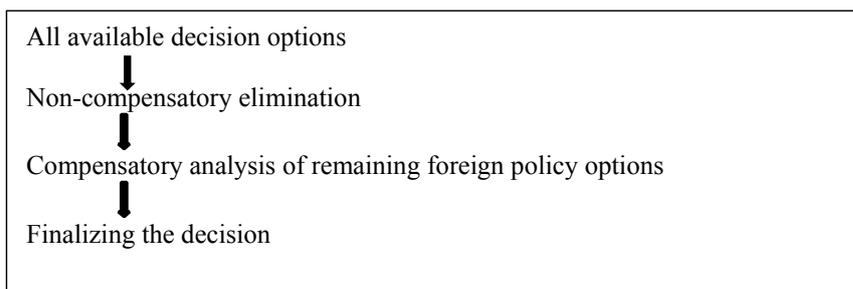
Though it was initially embraced by the theorists who study international security (Mercer, 2005, p. 2), Prospect theory has been used to analyze and explain decision-making (Vis & Kuijpers, 2018, p. 576). Yet, there are some criticisms directed at the prospect theory. The first criticism is about the reference point. Some scholars point out that it is hard to establish a reference point since foreign policy decision-makers are usually faced with various outcomes of multiple dimensions (Stein, 2017). The second criticism of the prospect theory is the difficulty of measuring loss aversion. It is argued that when it comes to being measured, it is usually challenging to know “which prospect or strategy involves the greatest risks or how the actor evaluates the risks” (Levy, 1992, p. 301). Finally, the prospect theory can also be criticized for its overemphasis on the leaders. While the theory attributes individual decision-makers’ cognitive biases to the states, it should be taken into consideration that most foreign policy decisions are made by an institution or a group (Morin & Paquin, 2018, p. 242), in our case argued in the thesis it is foreign policy elites.

## 2.4. Poliheuristic Theory

Poliheuristic Theory (PT) in FPA studies was introduced in the early 1990s (Mintz, 2004, p. 4). PT argues that rational actor models and cognitive approaches in foreign policy studies are not incompatible. Both schools should be used to understand foreign policy decisions. This model argues that leaders utilize several (poly) cognitive shortcuts (heuristic) to reach a decision (Morin & Paquin, 2018, p. 242). Hence, PT not only refers to rational choice but also “[...] alludes to the cognitive mechanisms used by decision makers to simplify complex foreign policy decisions” (Mintz & Geva, 1997, p. 554).

According to PT, individual decision-makers decide through a two-stage process as shown in Figure 2.7. While cognitive shortcuts are more crucial in the first stage, rational choice and analytical calculations correspond to the second stage (Mintz, 2004, p. 4). In the first stage, foreign policy decision-makers eliminate some alternative decisions by applying a non-compensatory analysis. PT offers this noncompensatory principle and suggests that leaders evaluate unacceptable decisions based not on a cost-benefit analysis, but as an element of a cognitive process. That means, unlike the RAM and its emphasis on the rationality of the leaders, decision-makers usually use their perceptions, beliefs, and psychology to evaluate alternative foreign policy outcomes. Besides, the strategy used in this stage is intradimensional and implies “focusing on a given dimension, reviewing all the options along this dimension, and then repeating the process for another dimension” (Mintz et al., 1997, p. 554). This first stage is where the noncompensatory principle is used. According to this principle, “[i]f a certain alternative is unacceptable on a given dimension (e.g., it is unacceptable politically), then a high score on another dimension (e.g., the military) cannot compensate/counteract for it, and the alternative is eliminated” (Mintz, 1993, p. 598).

**Figure 2.7.** Decision-making steps in the Poliheuristic Theory.



Domestic politics and political gains lie at the heart of the noncompensatory principle. Since leaders are concerned about public support, and political survival (Mintz and Geva 1997, p. 83), the noncompensatory principle postulates that leaders seldom choose an alternative decision that will cause political damage to them (Mintz, 2003, p. 3). Decisionmakers, therefore, generally avoid experiencing political failure more than gaining political success because political ‘loss aversion’ (Jervis, 1992; Levy, 1992) predominates all other possible decision outcomes (Anderson, 1983). Mintz (2004, p. 9) argues that this political loss aversion can manifest itself in several ways, (i) a threat to a leader’s survival, (ii) significant drop in public support for a policy, (iii) significant drop in popularity, (iv) the prospect of an electoral defeat, (v) domestic opposition, (vi) threat to regime survival, (vii) intraparty rivalry and competition, (viii) internal or external challenge to the regime, (ix) potential collapse of the coalition, government, or regime, (x) threat to political power, dignity, honor, or legitimacy of a leader, (xi) demonstrations, riots, and so forth, and (xii) the existence of veto players (e.g., pivotal parties in parliamentary government).

Once the set of possible decision options is reduced to a manageable size, the decision process moves to the second stage. In the second stage, decision-makers evaluate the remaining options more analytically and apply different strategies (even a mixture of strategies) in different situations (Mintz et al., 1997, p. 554). Whereas the first stage is intradimensional, the final stage is more interdimensional and suggests “a sequential review of all items for a given alternative across different dimensions or aspects and then a review of information for another alternative across dimensions” (1997, p. 554). Moreover, while the first stage postulates a noncompensatory principle, the second stage is compensatory. In the second stage, not only dimensions of each alternative are analyzed simultaneously but also the strength of a dimension can compensate for the weakness of other dimensions (Morin & Paquin, 2018, p. 243). In the final stage, various decision strategies such as lexicographic (LEX), elimination-by-aspects (EBA), conjunctive (CON), and disjunctive (DIS) decision rules are used to determine the best alternative option selected in the first stage (Mintz & DeRouen Jr., 2010, p. 35).

LEX decision strategy claims that decision-makers make the selection of the most proper option from the menu of decisions based only on the most vital dimension to them (Payne,

Bettman, & John, 1988, p. 536). For example, the US sanctions on Iran for the enrichment of uranium. Although it is economically a setback for the US government, the possibility of the production of weapons of mass destruction outweighs economic gains.

Unlike LEX, EBA has “no fixed prior ordering of aspects [...] and the choice process is inherently probabilistic” (Tversky, 1972, p. 285) and follows a sequential elimination process in which decision-makers make the elimination of the alternatives based on “dimensions they judge to be important in descending order” (Mintz & Sofrin, 2017). EBA starts with the determination of the most important dimension. Then, all the alternative options are evaluated and those below the determined value will be eliminated. After that, a second dimension is chosen and the same process is applied to the remaining alternatives, then a third, and so on, until there is only one option left (Payne et al., 1988, p. 536).

CON, another decision strategy, refers to noncompensatory logic that decision-makers set a minimum value acceptable for each dimension of the decision and each dimension of alternative decisions must be above this level (Mintz & DeRouen Jr. 2010, p. 35). Hence, even if it offers the highest overall sum, any decision with at least one dimension that cannot meet the minimum value is rejected.

Like CON, DIS also offers the same path to decide among alternative options. According to DIS, leaders or decision-makers set a minimum acceptable value for each dimension and if any alternative decision passes this value with at least one dimension, then these decisions are accepted (2010, p. 36).

The PT brings new insights to the FPA in several ways. First, PT allows its practitioners to analyze foreign policy events by enabling them to focus on multiple actors, many alternatives, and various decision criteria at the same time (Mintz, 2003, p. 7). PT is also very useful for linking several cognitive concepts like heuristics, noncompensatory principle, and dimension-based strategy, and not only incorporates but also provides a meaningful synthesis of them (Danilovic, 2003, p. 135). This contribution of the PT can be best seen in Mintz’s (1993) ‘use of force,’ DeRouen’s (2001) ‘diversionary use of force,’ Astorino-Courtois and Trusty’s (2000) ‘conflict resolution and war and peace decisions,’ and Sathasivam’s (2003) ‘decision to test nuclear weapons.’ Finally, and

perhaps most importantly, PT, especially in its second stage of the decision-making process, attempts to be parsimonious; therefore, it has “[t]he potential to make robust and refutable predictions that are almost completely absent in other cognitive models” (Danilovic, 2003, p. 135).

Despite the PT offers a great understanding of the process of foreign policy decision-making, it has some limitations. Stern (2004, pp. 110-111) lists five limitations and blind spots that PT suffers from, (i) it offers little theoretical explanations about how problems are detected, how decisions are activated, and how decision units are formed in real-world settings; (ii) although the notions of dimension-based search and elimination by aspects do contribute to our knowledge of how problems are “represented” contextual and institutional variables have not been emphasized, with the significant exception of the domestic political constraints; (iii) the PH researchers correctly note and emphasize the multiple constraints that operate on foreign policy decision-makers. They have argued and found some degree of experimental support for the notion that domestic political considerations are very close to an absolute constraint on policy making; (iv) the sensitivity of policymakers to the domestic political context should be seen as a contingent rather than a general phenomenon; (v) political constraints should be conceptualized in dynamic rather than static terms.

## CHAPTER III

### LEARNING AND FOREIGN POLICY ANALYSIS

#### 3.1. Learning in Social Sciences

In social sciences, learning is one of the most interesting concepts because it provides a deeper understanding of human behavior, social interactions, and especially changes in their behavior, their attitude, or their actions towards others. It is used within many disciplines such as psychology, sociology, and anthropology. Before establishing the relationship between foreign policy and learning, we must first define what learning is. Considering foreign policy and foreign policy analysis, defining learning should be the first step because it may help researchers to clarify the processes and mechanisms by which knowledge acquisition and policy adaptation happen in foreign policy. Besides, defining learning may also help scholars to set the parameters that used for an analysis of foreign policy in the context of learning.

Learning is a “*process* that leads to *change*, which occurs as a result of *experience* and increases the potential for improved performance and future learning” (Ambrose, et al., 2010, p. 3, emphasis original). Therefore, learning is a rather dynamic process because it involves acquiring new information about a specific topic that is subject to change. Additionally, learning can be seen as a form of change since it leads to adjustments in one’s a priori knowledge, attitudes, perceptions, beliefs, and behaviors. Moreover, learning is more of an experiential phenomenon, stemming from both intentional and unintentional, as well as conscious and unconscious responses to personal experiences. Therefore, it can be argued that learning encompasses the acquisition, understanding, and incorporation of new information into existing knowledge structures, which subsequently influence future actions, including decision-making processes. While the literature often

links the change in policy with the process of learning (Moyson et al., 2017), it can be argued that policy change does not necessarily occur even if actors can learn from previous decisions and their outcomes (Dunlop & Radaelli, 2020, p. 1123). Besides, the process of learning can be ‘un-intended’ (Hecllo, 1974), ‘conscious’ (Hall, 1993), or ‘organic’ (Liberatore, 2013).

Policy learning, for instance, is one of the many branches of learning. It provides some insights for scholars of comparative politics, governance, and public policy, and IR scholars. Simply, there are four sub-categories in policy learning according to Dunlop and Radaelli (2012), reflexive learning, epistemic communities approach, bargaining and social interaction, and learning in the shadow of hierarchy.

In reflexive learning, knowledge is used for a deeper discussion on an issue, and learning in this model is often complex. Moreover, to label a learning process ‘reflexive,’ the level of uncertainty must be low. In this type of learning, there is no a priori defined “hierarchical role in terms of learning and no presupposition about who should learn from whom” (Dunlop & Radaelli, 2012, p. 607).

The epistemic communities approach offers a learning process for a technical solution to a policy and comprises a small group of experts that guides the individual decision-makers. These experts—epistemic communities—can be influential ‘teachers’ (Haas, 1990; 1992) for decision-makers. In the epistemic communities approach, the technical knowledge and expertise provided on a complex issue revolve around both individually and collectively. For that reason, epistemic communities must “embody a belief system collectively on an issue” (Dunlop, 2017, p. 219). Following Haas (1992, p. 3), in the epistemic communities approach, there are four knowledge components:

"(1) a shared set of normative and principled beliefs, which provide a value-based rationale for the social action of community members; (2) shared causal beliefs, which are derived from their analysis of practices leading or contributing to a central set of problems in their domain and which then serve as the basis for elucidating the multiple linkages between possible policy actions and desired outcomes; (3) shared notions of validity – that is, intersubjective, internally defined criteria for weighing and validating knowledge in the domain of their expertise; and (4) a common policy enterprise."

In the bargaining and social interaction model, there is a high level of uncertainty with low or no policy advocates for the decision-makers. In this model, learning as an outcome is “the unintended product of political competition and negotiations” (Dunlop & Radaelli,

2012, p. 610), and the pay-off decisions for all policy issues are calculated by the actors whose policy preferences are constant.

Finally, in the shadow of hierarchy, there is a low level of uncertainty and there are many actors that identify the nature of the shadow. As Dunlop and Radaelli (2012, pp. 612-613) explain, “[t]he shadow provides clues on what to do with learning. It structures interaction among learners. There is pressure to learn but the logic of discovery is relatively free concerning the means and content. This freedom should facilitate improvement at the level of the tools of government and the instruments of public policy.”

Apart from Dunlop and Radelli’s (2012) classification, political learning is also an important type of learning worth analyzing. Political learning can simply be defined as the process through which individuals change and reshape their political beliefs and preferences because of radical changes in their environment (Bermeo, 1992, p. 274). Political learning, therefore, is the acquisition of political information because of exposure to any political process. So, political learning can be defined as the changes in knowledge that facilitate policy advocates to aid decision-makers in generating new strategies (May, 1992, p. 339). For the individual decision-makers, to get information on any political situation, they must be exposed to it and comprehend it. Besides the various studies on learning in social sciences as mentioned above, the learning and foreign policy nexus is also worth investigating. The following section focuses on the relationship between learning and foreign policy.

## **3.2. Learning in IR and FPA**

### **3.2.1. Learning and Different Understandings of Foreign Policy**

As introduced and summarized in the first chapter, it is argued that foreign policy can be identified as action, behavior, and preference. First, ‘foreign policy as an action’ refers to the decisions and steps taken by a government to interact with other states. These actions can include diplomatic negotiations, military interventions, economic sanctions, and treaties. The US invasion of Afghanistan can be given as an example of “foreign policy as an action.” In 2003, the United States, under the leadership of President George W. Bush, launched a military invasion of Afghanistan. This decision was based on the belief

among the members of the US government that Afghanistan under the regime of the religious fundamentalist Taliban, was responsible for the terrorist attacks on September 11.

This action involved a military invasion, the overthrow of the Taliban regime, and nation-building efforts. The invasion was a significant foreign policy action undertaken by the United States, with far-reaching consequences for the region and beyond. Following the terrorist attacks on the USA on September 11, the Bush administration adopted a foreign policy against perceived threats to national security. This new foreign policy employs a set of guidelines to the US foreign policy of 'war on terrorism' and emphasizes military pre-emption, unilateral action, and military superiority in world politics (Gupta, 2008, p. 182). The national security strategy of the US, also referred to as the 'Bush Doctrine' was a commitment to democracy, liberty, and security (White House, 2002).

'Foreign policy as behavior' (Carlsnaes, 1980, p. 5) refers to the consistent patterns and tendencies displayed by a government in its interactions with other countries over time. These behaviors can include alliance formation, conflict resolution, and trade relations. Besides, behaviors can alter over time and are affected by the mindsets of decision-makers. Moreover, differing from foreign policy as actions, foreign policy as behaviors do not necessarily resonate with power politics and competition among states.

The development of the European Union's common foreign and security policy (CFSP) is a good example of foreign policy as a behavior. The CFSP represents the collective foreign policy of the EU member states, aimed at promoting peace, security, and cooperation. Over the years, the EU has consistently pursued policies of diplomacy, conflict resolution, and multilateralism in its relations with other countries and regions.

The EU also emphasizes multilateral and institutional cooperation in addressing global challenges such as climate change, international terrorism, and international immigration. The EU actively participates in international organizations like the United Nations and the World Trade Organization in their policy-making processes. Finally, the EU uses economic incentives to foster stability and development in and beyond its region. The European neighborhood policy and development aid initiatives can be examples of the EU's commitment to promoting stability through economic instruments.

Finally, ‘foreign policy as preference’ refers to the goals, values, and ideals that guide a government’s approach to international affairs. These preferences can include principles such as democracy promotion, human rights advocacy, and non-interventionism. Besides, preferences are also shaped by ideas, identity, and other abstract concepts. For example, as stated in the first chapter, foreign policy is conducted where domestic and international environments intersect. When one follows constructivist theory and how it explains the state identity which simply employs the idea that states form their identities both domestically and internationally (Bozdaglioglu, 2008), then, it can be argued that foreign policy as preferences are changeable and vary depending on the targeted actor. Therefore, as in the foreign policy as behaviors, foreign policy as preferences can be also developed under the effects of identity.

The Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) of China is a good example of foreign policy as preference. The BRI is a global development strategy aimed at promoting cooperation and connection between China and countries across Asia, Africa, and Europe. Through the BRI, China seeks to promote economic development, infrastructure investment, and regional integration. These reflect its preference for expanding its influence through peaceful means and economic cooperation rather than military intervention.

While the BRI emerged as part of China’s broader strategy to expand its influence, promote economic development, and secure access to resources and the global market, in this initiative, China has preferred economic cooperation and non-interventionism (Duchâtel et al., 2014; Zheng, 2016), and possible soft power influence. In economic cooperation, China uses the BRI to advertise infrastructure development, trade facilitation, and investments as a means of fostering economic growth and connectivity between China and participating countries. This initiative includes the construction of ports, railways, roads, and energy pipelines. China’s foreign policy preference for non-intervention in the internal affairs of other states is reflected in the principle of respecting the sovereignty of the BRI. Unlike traditional Western development assistance, China’s approach to development under the BRI often comes with fewer political conditions attached. Finally, to have soft power influence (Sterling, 2018), China uses the BRI by promoting its culture and language and offering language education programs (Anand,

2023). Besides, cultural diplomacy initiated by the Chinese government like the ‘Silk Road Cultural Belt’ aims to strengthen China’s influence and visibility.

To conclude, we can also try to establish a connection, if any, between learning and foreign policy typology. Integrating learning into the study of foreign policy analysis can enhance understanding and critical thinking between the three meanings of foreign policy. Besides, considering the relationship, if any, between learning and foreign policy as actions, behaviors, and preferences can contribute to the theoretical dimension of the FPA.

In foreign policy as an action, researchers can focus on case studies and analyze foreign policy documents to establish a possible link between learning and foreign policy actions. Using case studies helps to analyze the decision-making processes behind foreign policy actions. It might offer new insights to investigate factors such as national interests, strategic calculations, and the role of leaders and institutions. With the idea that they can all evolve through learning, learning can occur if leaders consider the fact that they cannot have all policy alternatives on a given problem and try to think beyond realist foreign policy understandings. Yet, as mentioned before, any changes in foreign policy action do not necessarily occur after learning. It can simply happen when leaders and decision-makers use analogies to reassess past experiences.

In foreign policy as a behavior, states recognize patterns in their interactions with other actors. Through observing the responses and behaviors of other states, as well as the outcomes of various diplomatic initiatives and conflicts, states can gain insights into the dynamics of international relations and global affairs. This understanding allows them to adapt their behavior to better achieve their objectives and navigate complex environments. Moreover, as mentioned in the previous chapter and throughout the previous sub-section, foreign policy behaviors of states are rather dynamic compared to foreign policy actions.

Finally, in foreign policy as preferences, learning may occur when states reevaluate their policy output priorities, values, and interests by considering global dynamics. As the international system and global politics evolve and shift, states may reconsider their foreign policy objectives and recalibrate their strategic focus. This process of learning in

preference involves the analysis of emerging trends, like the power shift from West to East, and anticipation of future challenges like cybersecurity, global health crisis, and environmental issues enabling states to align their foreign policy priorities with evolving realities.

To demonstrate a pattern between learning and preferences, as it is in behavior, scholars should focus on ideational factors affecting foreign policymaking. These factors may include values, ideologies, and beliefs that inform foreign policy preferences. Besides, it can be crucial to explore how democracy, human rights, and sovereignty shape foreign policy agendas. Moreover, the role of public opinion and public diplomacy in shaping foreign policy preferences is also important to consider when we investigate the learning and preferences nexus.

### **3.2.2. Learning in IR**

Learning is an interesting concept for social scientists who specialize in comparative politics, public policy, and governance, but not so popular in IR. Scholars of IR have broadly addressed the overarching question of what variables cause decision-makers or policymakers to change their foreign policy strategies or outputs. To contribute to the studies of FPA, scholars have been studying the nexus between human behavior and decision-making. In this regard, it can be argued that understanding how individuals, societies, and states acquire knowledge, adapt their behaviors, and respond to new information is crucial for comprehending decision-making processes. Therefore, exploring the concept of learning, its relevance in the context of social science, and its specific applications within IR are worth investigating since new research from other fields, like neuroscience does not rule out learning and change (Stein, 2016, p. 144) and suggests its importance both theoretically and empirically. Although the grand theories of IR like realism and liberalism try to provide an answer to the process of foreign policy decisions, FPA, with its actor-specific orientation, offers a diverse range of theoretical explanations for foreign policy behaviors of the states. While realism and liberalism generally focus on the structure to analyze the foreign policy of the states, FPA scholars use various theories and approaches to analyze the foreign policy decisions of the leaders. However, foreign policy beliefs and preferences are also essential to explain foreign policy decisions since they affect the learning process of the decision-makers. The lack

of analysis of beliefs and preferences creates a theoretical gap as Morrow (1988, p. 95) states, “[A]lthough structure has attracted much attention in theories of international relations, preference generally has not.” Therefore, the exclusion of learning from foreign policy studies deepens this theoretical gap.

In FPA, the general conception is the idea that states determine their foreign policy options and strategies through decision-makers. As mentioned before, it is individual decision-makers who decide on foreign policy actions and implement them. Approaches to FPA prioritize leaders and policymakers because of how they define themselves and perceive individuals serving in the decision mechanism of other states, how representations and perceptions can change or be redefined is crucial (Malici, 2008, p. 143).

After mentioning this theoretical gap in IR on foreign policy analysis, we can now introduce the nexus between learning and foreign policy in IR. The study of learning as an academic research program emerged in the field of IR in the 1980s (Knopf, 2003, p. 185). For instance, in the literature on FPA, while some studies investigate the effect of learning in crisis bargaining behavior (Leng, 1983), the cooperation between the USA and the USSR during the Cold War (George et al., 1988); some others have applied the concept of learning to explain the foreign policy behaviors of the Soviet Union (Breslauer, 1987; 1992), analyze the decisions of the states to form alliances under the conditions of uncertainty (Reiter, 1996), and regional integration (Bomberg, 2007; Zito & Schout, 2009). Finally, there have been studies examining learning and institutions (Goldstein & Keohane, 1993). Despite the studies on foreign policy and learning, a considerable lacuna also persists between learning and foreign policy decisions since learning is itself an “elusive concept” (Tetlock, 1991). Besides, there is no unified theory of learning among the scholars of IR (Stein, 1994, p. 170).

Learning can form after a change in the belief system of the individuals. Although it is often accepted that beliefs tend to be solid and unchanging, sometimes decision-makers can change their views and learn something new. Learning can occur when the belief of decision-makers changes due to dramatic changes, crises, and terrorist attacks which all can be defined as “focusing events” (Birkland, 2006, p. 1). The impact of learning on foreign policy can be examined through two perspectives, individual and collective

learning. Individual learning refers to the cognitive processes of decision-makers, while collective learning pertains to the shared knowledge and experiences within governments, bureaucracies, and societies. Following this argument, we can define learning as the “[c]hange of beliefs, or the development of new beliefs, skills, or procedures as a result of the observation and interpretation of experience” (Levy, 1994, p. 283). This definition of learning does not indicate that learning leads to more efficient policy decisions, but it gives room for the researchers to identify learning without “[...] having to analyze whether a given set of changes in beliefs led to more effective policies” (Keohane & Nye, 2012, p. 278).

In the literature of IR, there are several classifications of learning. For instance, there is a categorization of learning that comprises two types, simple learning and complex learning. While simple learning, on the one hand, refers to the change in means, complex learning, on the other hand, refers to the change that occurred both in means and goals on an issue (Ziv, 2013, p. 204; Nye, 1987). Similarly, Argyris and Schön use single-loop and double-loop learning in their study on organizational learning. While single-loop learning involves the “error-detection-and-correction process” (Argyris & Schön, 1978, p. 2-3) with no changes in the goals, in the double-learning, not only error detection and correction occur but norms, policies, and objectives also change accordingly. Haas also makes a contribution to learning and uses the terms ‘adaptation’ and ‘learning’ (Haas 1991).

Stein (1994, p. 156) focuses on Gorbachev’s foreign policy behavior in her study. She contends that learning in the realm of foreign policy can occur easily when foreign policy issues are ‘ill-structured’ in the minds of the foreign policy decision-makers causing incomplete beliefs (Neack, 2019, p. 42). She begins her research by rejecting approaches that utilize the power distributions in the international system and prioritize domestic politics as the source of the foreign policy behavior of the Soviet Union. Her proposition is the integration of both international and domestic variables affecting Soviet foreign policy.

To explain Gorbachev’s foreign policy behavior, Stein offers two alternative options other than systemic and domestic explanations. The first is the assessment that Gorbachev’s cognitive mind might have changed after he became the president and the

second alternative is the proposition that Gorbachev might not have developed any cognitive mind construction related to security and international politics (Stein, 1994, p. 156) since Gorbachev's position was mostly about domestic economic issues of the Soviet Union (Neack, 2019, p. 42). In her research, Stein tries to provide an alternative explanation to understand Gorbachev's foreign policy decisions. She argues that regarding the foreign policy realm, Gorbachev as the President of the USSR has little preexisting foreign policy beliefs. To Stein (1994, p. 172), learning is "the construction of new representations of the problem" and Gorbachev was open-minded so that he was able to learn new foreign policy implementations. That is, Gorbachev was not *a priori* bounded by the well-structured beliefs that have already existed on the foreign policy issues of the Soviet Union. Thus, learning can occur when "the lack of strongly established beliefs" exists (Neack, 2019, p. 42) and "unanticipated failures that challenge old ways of representing problems" (Stein, 1994, p. 172) occur.

Ziv (2013, p. 203), another scholar who investigates learning and foreign policy nexus, argues that although there have been many studies that used learning to understand and explain major changes in international politics, few focused on the process of learning that the decision-makers went through. In the literature, most of the studies have generally investigated the impact of formative events (Goldsmith, 2005, p. 11). However, Ziv focuses on the long-term effect of learning and uses the concepts of simple and complex learning in the context of the decision-making processes of Israeli Prime Ministers from the Likud Party, Ariel Sharon, Ehud Olmert, and Benjamin Netanyahu towards the question of a Palestinian state. His main goal is to investigate the impact of learning with the help of the cases he selected so that no formative events—or policy failure in other words—are observed. Ziv (2013, p. 204) argues "[D]ecision makers who alter their foreign policies gradually are more likely to have had a fundamental rethinking of their underlying assumptions on a core issue than those who exhibit sudden shifts in their foreign policy decisions absent a formative event."

Ziv (2013, p. 204) selects these cases based on two reasons, (i) all the Israeli Prime Ministers selected for the analysis are conservative—who should be expected to employ a hard-line approach to the establishment of a Palestinian state—yet endorse a two-state solution and (ii) all cases are more suitable to observe whether each of these Prime

Ministers has exhibited simple or complex learning. As stated earlier, while complex learning is gradual and should be observable in notable and important political changes that decision-makers decide upon, simple learning does not manifest itself in real change but in means. When he traces Ariel Sharon, he observes that Sharon changed his rhetoric from “Jordan is Palestine” (Haberman, 1992) to a Palestine state that was in development in territories under “Israeli occupation” (Wallace, 2003). Following the change in rhetoric, in 2003, Sharon joined the plan called ‘Road Map’ initiated by the U.S. government to support the aim of peace in the region. Finally, in 2004, he ordered the dismantling of the settlements that Israeli citizens had established in Gaza and the West Bank (Neack, 2019, p. 43).

Following the changes in Sharon’s view on Palestine, Ziv (2013, p. 211) argues that all these policy changes are significant, and he concludes that Sharon’s learning is ‘complex.’ Like Sharon’s policy change, his successor Ehud Olmert also changed his disposition on the Palestine issue. Although Olmert was rather hawkish and showed strong opposition to Palestine, he began to moderate his thoughts in the late 1990s. While he defended the idea that no territorial demands can meet the expectations of the Arab states and the security concerns of Israel at the same time and rejected any possible two-state solutions by arguing that “[W]hat is needed, therefore, is a different kind of compromise based not on a partition of land but on a division of administrative functions between Israel and Jordan” (Olmert, 1982), later in his career, Olmert’s view on the Palestine issue began to change slowly but steady. To Ziv (2013, p. 212), Olmert’s change was more noteworthy compared to Sharon’s given that Olmert was ideologically exposed to anti-Palestinian ideas, having been born into a right-wing-oriented family.

Like Olmert, his successor, Netanyahu, was raised in a hawkish family and was a fierce critic of the two-state solution. Early in his career, Netanyahu was strongly opposed to the establishment of a Palestinian state. To him, a Palestinian state “would nullify the whole value of the buffer area on Israel’s eastern front” (Netanyahu, 1993, p. 288). His opposition continued in the early 2000s and 2002, his proposal to the Likud Central Committee aiming to restate the party’s opposition to the establishment of Palestine was supported by most of the party members (Ziv, 2013, p. 214). However, when he was reelected for the second term in 2009, his rhetoric on the Palestine issue began to change

though initially he had still been defending his opposition. On June 14, 2009, it was the first time that Netanyahu supported the two-state solution in his speech at Bar-Ilan University (Neack, 2019, p. 44). To Ziv (2013, p. 215), this sudden change is not the result of a complex learning but rather affected by the strong pressure coming from the U.S. President Obama.

Learning within the realm of foreign policy analysis extends to the domain of organizational learning within government agencies. Here, bureaucratic procedures, the exchange of information, and the existence of policy feedback loops collectively foster the adjustment and development of foreign policy approaches. Government agencies and bureaucratic entities undergo learning processes via mechanisms like information exchange, feedback loops in policy implementation, and assessments of past actions. Insights gained from prior policy outcomes play a significant role in influencing the creation of novel policies and strategies. It's important to note that, as entities, organizations do not possess independent learning capabilities; rather, learning transpires through the individuals constituting these organizations. Since organizational bodies of the states comprise individuals who are experts on different subjects, learning can only occur via individuals. As Jervis (1976, p. 238) writes, “[w]hen an event affects the perceptual predispositions of many members of an organization we can speak of organizational learning. The lessons can become institutionalized.”

To briefly conclude, in IR literature, there are many studies investigating learning and foreign policy. These studies generally focus on leaders who determine the foreign policy decisions of the states. However, as it is claimed throughout the thesis, the literature on learning and foreign policy analysis can be broadened by embracing the concept of ‘elite learning.’ Since elites, as introduced in the last chapter of this thesis, resemble rather a class, leaders are placed in this group along with others who form foreign policy elites. Therefore, efforts put into this thesis are to expand our understanding of foreign policymaking by focusing on a group (or class) rather than analyzing individual decision-makers.

### **3.3. Integrating Learning to the FPA Approaches and Theories**

As argued before, FPA is a sub-field of IR that seeks to understand the processes and outcomes of the foreign policy behavior of the states. Historically, FPA has been dominated by a range of various decision-making models like the RAM, OPM, and BPM and other approaches such as poliheuristic theory, operational code, and prospect theory each offering unique perspectives on how foreign policy decisions are made. While these models have significantly advanced our comprehension of foreign policy dynamics, integrating learning, if possible, into these approaches and models can contribute to our understanding of foreign policy analysis.

Learning, in foreign policy, refers to the process by which states and their decision-makers adapt their strategies, policies, and actions based on past experiences, new information, and evolving circumstances. By integrating learning into existing FPA models, we can develop a more comprehensive understanding of how states decide on a certain foreign policy behavior in the international system.

In this regard, the possible integration of learning into the foreign policy analysis models and theories is investigated in the following section. By integrating learning into the rational actor model, Organizational process model, bureaucratic politics model, operational code, prospect theory, and poliheuristic theory, we can develop a more comprehensive framework of how states make foreign policy decisions. I contend that integrating learning into these foreign policy analysis approaches may strengthen the explanatory power of these models.

#### **3.3.1. Rational Actor Model and Learning**

If possible, integrating learning with the Rational Actor Model might provide an approach that grasps the essence of FPA better. As mentioned before, the RAM assumes that decision-makers act rationally by evaluating available information and choosing the option that maximizes their foreign policy objectives. However, when we try to integrate the learning with the RAM, we can argue that individual decision-makers can adapt and adjust their strategies not only based on their carefully calculated goals but also on experience and changing international and domestic conditions in the realm of foreign

policy. To diverge from the static view of the RAM, we should first reject its conception that decision-makers are non-social, that is incapable learners having fixed and *a priori* defined preferences and do not have all the information. Instead, they are capable of learning from past experiences, updating their beliefs, and adjusting their behavior over time. This adaptation may involve modifying strategies, reassessing priorities, or reconsidering the expected outcomes of various choices which all can occur by utilizing learning.

Integrating learning into the Rational Actor Model can be done by considering how decision-makers acquire, process, and apply new information. It is argued in the second chapter that RAM frames leaders as rational and self-aware actors who have access to all information about a foreign policy choice. Therefore, in the RAM, acquiring, processing, and applying new information to a foreign policy decision process would necessitate considering *a priori* defined national interests. This could involve examining how feedback from previous decisions influences future choices, how learning from mistakes or successes shapes behavior, how external events prompt the process of adjustments in decision-making strategies, and—at the expense of parsimony—various domestic and international structures that might have an impact on the status and/or position of the political elite. By integrating learning, the RAM may become more flexible and responsive to the complexities of real-world decision-making. It may then allow for a better understanding of how decision-makers evolve and respond to both internal cognitive processes and external environmental changes.

### **3.3.2. Organizational Process Model and Learning**

The concept of learning can be integrated to the OPM by acknowledging that organizations, as decision-making bodies, can adapt and evolve in time. They can evaluate past experiences and learn from their previous decisions depending on the efficiency of the past policies. In the OPM, organizations in the state follow certain stages like the recognition of the problem, the search for a possible solution to the foreign policy issue, and the implementation of the decision. Incrementalism in the OPM does not allow for a change in the policy preferences of the same foreign policy issue. However, if the concept of learning can successfully be integrated into the model, then the processes of decision-making in this model become more adaptive and evolving.

The possible attempts to integrate learning into the OPM should also include incorporating feedback mechanisms in the organizations. The consequences of past decisions, whether they are successful or not, might influence the approaches of the organizations in future cases. Organizational memory can also be closely tied to learning. Since the aim of integrating a learning model is to explain the decision-making process within the organizations, the OPM can be enriched by recognizing the assumption that organizations have institutional knowledge accumulation—or short- or long-term learning—which would shape the foreign policy decision-making processes. However, it is not an easy task to theoretically establish the nexus of learning and organizational memory and institutional knowledge, and it is rather difficult to empirically show the impact of learning. Another essential point worth mentioning is how organizations gather information related to foreign policy decision-making. Organizations can learn from past experiences, global events, and changes that occurred in the international system and be selective in collecting data.

### **3.3.3. Bureaucratic Politics Model and Learning**

Despite the difficulty of integrating learning into the BPM since many actors and bureaucratic bodies are participating in the decision-making process, it still is worth investigation. First, we can recognize the fact that organizations and bureaucracies comprise individuals who aim to preserve their sphere of authority—‘turfs’—and compete with each other. Learning can help scholars understand how these individuals from different bureaucracies adapt and learn from past interactions and decisions. Hence, bureaucratic bodies involved in the foreign policy decision-making process may change their strategies and positions based on previous interactions with foreign policy conflicts or diplomatic negotiations. Therefore, if an analytically and empirically strong learning theory is integrated into the BPM, scholars may provide a deeper and stronger analysis of the relationship between learning and decision-making in the BPM. Learning can also be a useful tool to understand the changing dynamics of inter-bureaucracy relations since bureaucratic politics often include exchanges between different agencies having distinct and various perspectives, and interests over a policy.

### **3.3.4. Cognitive Approaches and Learning**

Cognitive approaches analyze the foreign policy decision-making process by focusing on a specific event at a specific time. However, tracing learning necessitates focusing on the long-term effects of a foreign policy decision. In this regard, if learning can be integrated into the cognitive approaches effectively, then, scholars can provide better insights on how foreign policy decision-makers adapt their foreign policy strategies. When we integrate learning into the cognitive approaches, scholars can now focus better on the psychological dimensions of foreign policy decision-making since learning may offer new research areas in the context of human cognition. Besides, foreign policy decisions and strategies shaped by personal experience, organizational feedback, and the changing and evolving nature of the international environment can now be better theorized. The integration of learning can also help us to understand foreign policy changes of the states which manifest themselves as shifts in foreign policy preferences, the alteration of risk perceptions, or adjustments to foreign policy decision-making heuristics which all are inherent to cognitive aspects of the decision-makers.

In the realm of foreign policy and the foreign policy decision-making process, learning implies the long-term existence of feedback loops that contribute to the assessment of foreign policy outcomes. Cognitive approaches to foreign policy can guide scholars to explore how the mechanisms behind the feedback process influence decision-makers foreign policy modeling. This recurrence process includes continuous adjustments based on the observed results of previous decisions.

Cognitive approaches often focus on and analyze the decision-maker's cognitive biases and heuristics in the foreign policy decision process. Thinking this process with possible insights that learning can provide us on how foreign policy decision-makers learn from their past mistakes, change and adjust their processes, and improve their foreign policy strategies. As a result, changes in foreign policy resulting from shifts in cognitive dimensions lead researchers to offer better theoretical explanations of foreign policy change.

Cognitive approaches and the concept of learning can also be used to analyze how individuals who take part in the foreign policy decision-making process collectively learn

and adapt to new conditions. This type of learning can occur within institutions and necessitates a focus also on the possible effects of organizational culture, shared beliefs, and institutional memory. All these factors can contribute to the foreign policy learning process. It can be argued that individuals—both foreign policy elites and others—can develop cognitive frameworks and then these frameworks can spread through the institutions. This diffusion can be likened to the spill-over effect and contributes to foreign policy decision-makers interpreting and formulating foreign policies.

Cognitive approaches and learning can be used to explain how decision-makers adapt themselves to the changing foreign policy environment. Since the adaptation to the change resonates with the “psychological environment” (Sprout & Sprout, 1956) of the decision-makers, cognitive approaches help scholars analyze how foreign policy decision-makers adjust their minds in response to possible shifts occurring in the international system.

#### **3.3.4.1. Operational Code and Learning**

The concept of learning can be integrated into the operational code approach. It can be argued that since operational code investigates the belief systems of the leaders, and while operational codes of the foreign policy decision-makers are sometimes resistant to change they should not be necessarily considered fixed but subject to change. This can lead to the understanding that leaders can adapt their cognitive structures and belief systems over time across issues to make better foreign policy decisions. Leaders change their beliefs, preferences, policy priorities, and strategic thinking and adjust themselves to changing and evolving contexts and circumstances of foreign policy making. Besides, belief systems can be affected by policy failures or successes. Even though there can be resistance to change the belief system accentuated by personality rigidities (George, 1969, p. 216), some political elites are prone to use past experiences and draw conclusions from past experiences (1969, p. 212). In this regard, learning can be a useful tool to understand the belief changes of the decision-makers and foreign policy elites. To support this argument, studies from the literature that focus on the operational code of the decision-makers and changes in the belief system of the leaders and its relationship with the changes in political events can be given as examples. This focus on the relationship has led scholars to study experiential learning behaviors (Levy, 1994).

The response of the leaders to the feedback coming from various parties that play a role in the decision-making process is also important and closely related to the belief system of the leaders. It can be argued that leaders may often seek and incorporate feedback into their foreign policy decision-making processes. This feedback can come from institutions that contribute to the shaping of foreign policy, international interactions where foreign policy decision-makers learn from diplomatic engagements and negotiations, and public opinion. All these factors can be related to the learning process and affect the belief system of the decision-makers.

#### **3.3.4.2. Prospect Theory and Learning**

Integrating learning into the prospect theory in the context of foreign policy analysis necessitates recognizing the possible adjustments of the preferences, risk perceptions, and foreign policy decision-making strategies of the leaders. In prospect theory, the decisions of individuals are influenced by reference points. Integrating learning can help scholars to understand how reference points change over time since reference points are shaped and determined by past experiences of the individuals. In the realm of foreign policy, decision-makers can shift their reference points by considering their perceived gains and losses depending on different courses of action. A positive outcome, or gain, in the past can cause the change of reference point to evaluate similar decisions in the future.

Regarding the foreign policy decision-making process, prospect theory emphasizes that decision-makers are risk-averse when expected gain outweighs but risk-seeking when face with losses. This situation is closely related to the risk perceptions of the decision-makers. Therefore, learning is said to enable the possible adaptation and adjustment to risk perceptions of the leaders. Considering their previous decisions on the same issue or problem, leaders may become more cautious or willing to take risks. This and loss aversion are both tied to experiences and learning, and prospect theory can both be used to analyze how loss aversion influences the risk perceptions of the decision-makers and how this affects the foreign policy choices.

Finally, as highlighted in the operational code approach, learning can be integrated to utilize prospect theory to investigate the link between foreign policy learning of the decision-makers and institutions. As argued in the previous section, organizational

learning, institutional memory, and the experiences of foreign policy advisors may influence the decision-making process of the leaders.

### **3.3.5. Poliheuristic Theory and Learning**

Considering the possibility of integrating the concept of learning into the poliheuristic theory, there might be some criticisms that can be directed to the poliheuristic theory itself. First of all, like cognitive approaches, poliheuristic theory also employs the very idea that foreign policy decision-makers are suffered from bounded rationality and therefore, cognitive structures of their minds are inherently limited. This can be regarded as the oversimplification of the rationality of the decision-makers because poliheuristic theory neglects foreign policy events where decision-makers can improve their level of rationality over time through learning. Second, because the essence of the poliheuristic theory is the assumption that foreign policy decision-makers use heuristics to decide foreign policy strategies, the theory itself can be criticized for its simplicity in the foreign policy decision-making process. That is, in the realm of foreign policy, decisions are dependent on many factors that emerge from the international system having complex and dynamic nature. However, if learning can be integrated into the poliheuristic theory, then, the explanatory and predictive power of the theory may increase.

Poliheuristic theory tends to focus on decision-makers and their heuristics in the foreign policy decision-making process. Then, it can be argued that poliheuristic theory should emphasize the role of learning and the learning process more. Although the integration of learning into the poliheuristic theory would necessitate theoretical modifications, which is beyond the scope of this thesis, it would contribute to our understanding of the cognitive processes in the process of decision-making by expanding the understanding of heuristics and decision rules. Moreover, integrating learning can also cause the recognition of the role of emotions and perceptions of the decision-makers. Finally, considering the ongoing debates on IR being Western-oriented—Eurocentric (Acharya & Buzan, 2007; Friedrichs, 2004) or US-driven (Hoffman, 1977; Wæver, 1998), PT may have its share of criticism. That is, a universal view of the decision-making process can be problematic. Rules of the decision-making process and the possible effect of the learning on foreign policy decisions may vary across societies and cultures. Therefore, the integration of learning into PT can also enrich the theoretical value.

The efforts to integrate learning into the PT should begin with accepting the fact that individual decision-makers are not only guided by cognitive shortcuts and focus on the essential aspects of a foreign policy issue but also can adapt their processes of decision-making based on experience and feedback coming from foreign policy advisors. As introduced before, in the PT, decision-makers follow simple decision rules or heuristics to quickly evaluate and choose among possible options. If learning can be integrated into the theory, then, scholars can work on how these decisions change and new decision rules can be employed by the decision-makers since we a priori accept that decisions are not fixed.

The PT also enables us to consider the possibility that decision-makers can develop cognitive shortcuts that are based on personal experience. Then, it can be claimed that learning occurs when individual decision-makers gain insights into which factors are the most influential in certain foreign policy decision contexts. By gaining more experience, decision-makers can refine their insights and understandings of relevant information and that can lead to the improvement of the accuracy of their foreign policy decision-making heuristics.

### **3.4. Future Directions on Learning: Elite Learning**

It is highlighted throughout the thesis that while many theories and approaches to FPA help researchers grasp the issues at stake, learning can also offer important insights to better understand the foreign policy decision-making process that might vary from one state to another. Since theoretical efforts in the IR have been focused on developing grand theories and scholars of FPA try to generate mid-range theories, integrating learning into the FPA can contribute to this effort and help to enrich and strengthen the explanatory power of the theories and approaches to FPA.

Since learning is a dynamic process, learning in foreign policy may necessitate the analysis of several factors. In this regard, learning can comprise a range of processes where policymakers and stakeholders acquire, process, and utilize knowledge and experiences. Besides, as the effects of globalization and the interconnectedness of the states have become more evident, states, and therefore decision-makers must learn not only from past experiences but also through interactions. As a result, learning may enable

policymakers to anticipate possible emerging challenges, seize opportunities, and adapt strategies to develop policies on the complex nature of global affairs effectively.

In this chapter, first, a conceptualization of political elites is made and theoretical approaches to political elites are given. Following this, the concept of ‘foreign policy elites’ is introduced. This thesis argues that foreign policy elites can and should be perceived as a class rather than a group of individuals who shape the foreign policy of a state. Moreover, since it is a class, foreign policy elites can change over time as the class structure of a state varies due to various reasons. Finally, elite learning as a new possible research direction is introduced. Since it is quite challenging to theorize a new concept, in this chapter, alternative ways to investigate elite learning are given to the researchers.

### **3.4.1. Political Elite and Foreign Policy**

The subject of political elites has been widely discussed in Political Science. At the heart of the elite studies lies the claim that ordinary people and/or citizens lack the tools to rule. Despite the studies on elites can be traced back to Ancient Greek, Roman, Chinese, and Indian philosophers, modern elite theory is different from these antecedents because it employs an empirical approach to society (Dunleavy & O’Leary, 1987, p. 138). The origins of the modern elite theories lie mostly in the works of Vilfredo Pareto (1935), Gaetano Mosca (1939), and Robert Michels (1962). While Pareto (1935) calls the minority group who hold the political power in a society ‘the governing elite,’ Mosca (1939) prefers to label it as ‘the ruling class.’ Looking into the works of Pareto, Mosca, and Michels, the core aim seems to generate a class-based and power-driven theoretical background unlike class-based and economy-driven analysis (e.g., Marxism) on society (Blondel & Müller-Rommel, 2007).

Before introducing various theories on political elites, it is important to define political elites. It is Pareto who introduced the concept of elite to political science. For Pareto, society is a pyramid-shaped structure that consists of two strata. The first is the elite—the group that ranks at the higher level in the hierarchy of a society—and the second is the non-elite. Moreover, the elite class is also divided into two groups, a governing elite and a non-governing elite (Pareto, 1935, p. 1424). It should be noted that the concept of elite does not refer to a single, unitary group; rather in Pareto’s classification of the society,

there are different groups of elites exist in a society (Kolegar, 1967, p. 357) and comprise individuals who excel their peers in a particular branch of activity.

Political elites indicate a group of people who hold political power and key positions in the government. However, the dominance does not solely indicate political power and can manifest itself within other areas of interest. In this regard, we can simply define political elites as “persons who, by their strategic locations in large or otherwise pivotal organizations and movements, can affect political outcomes regularly and substantially” (Higley, 2010, p. 163). This definition can be useful for the structure of this thesis because it emphasizes the critical roles and influence of individuals situated within key political and organizational structures. Following this definition on political elites, we can classify elites into various categories, with a specific focus on foreign policy elites which is addressed after the introduction of elite theories.

### **3.4.2. Theories on Political Elites**

The most preferred categorization of the elite theory, in the literature, is the classical elite theories and democratic elite theories (Etzioni-Halevy, 1997, p. xxix). Classical elite theorists claim that elite formation in societies is inevitable and even in democracies, the power is accumulated in the hands of elites (Heywood, 2019, p. 197). Democratic elite theories claim that the majority of the society in democracy can still affect the elites despite they are still subject to the power of the elites. Considering the elite theory in general, the shared assumption of all the studies on elites is the idea that the rule of the minority over the majority is inevitable although what the majority can do to supervise the rule of the few may vary in both theories.

Pareto asserts that independent from the type of government or regime, elites are the group of people who channel the general will of the people and “[...] whether universal suffrage prevails or not, it is always an oligarchy that governs” (Pareto, 1935, p. 1526). In his conception of political elites, the class structure of a society should be explained by considering economic relations. He investigated the distribution of wealth in Western societies and figured out that the distribution of income generally led to the emergence of a group of people. Hence, to Pareto, the existence of an economic elite is inevitable in every society though this elite group changes over time (Femia, 2006, p. 69). Briefly,

Pareto's explanation comprises two groups of individuals forming a pyramid which is an unchangeable and socio-economic-based grouping. What Pareto means by the unchangeable nature of the pyramid is the reality of the societies that there is the ruling of the minority over the majority. However, these two groups constantly move up and down, so that an individual who once was poor can become rich (Kolegar, 1967, p. 356). Pareto argues that governing and non-governing elites rule the majority and as long as a governing elite consists of a group of people with proper skills and qualities to rule the majority, the circulation of elites occurs and this keeps the society in equilibrium (Etzioni-Halevy, 1997, p. 43-44). The circulation of elites is the process in which people from the lower class (non-elite) constantly change their skills and abilities to become elites since non-elites strive to hold a position in the upper stratum (Arslan, 2010, p. 59-60).

Like Pareto, Mosca—another well-known classical elite theorist—divides society into two groups, the ruling class and the ruled class. He employs the idea that no equality exists in the societies at any time and while the elites—the ruling class what he prefers to call—is “[t]he less numerous, performs all political functions, monopolizes power and enjoys the advantages that power brings” (Mosca, 1939, p. 50). According to Mosca, the elite group in society has two strata, the highest stratum, and the second stratum. In his theory, the highest stratum is the core of the political elites, but the functionality of this group is dependent on the assistance of the second group (1939, p. 430) and to Mosca, the social struggle is nothing but a matter of supremacy (Beetham, 1981, p. 83).

Mosca claims that every society—democratic and non-democratic—needs a ruling minority that can easily organize and dominate the masses (Delican, 2000, p. 326). Mosca (1939, p. 404) argues that the highest stratum cannot control the activities of the masses and therefore, even in autocratic political regimes, this power group requires individuals from various branches of the society such as white-collars, scholars, and opinion leaders. Moreover, the very existence of the ruling class is dependent on “the level of morality, intelligence and activity that this second stratum has attained” (1939, p. 404).

Besides Pareto and Mosca, Michels is also essential among classical elite theorists. He claims that both a shared power in the decision-making mechanism and a leaderless political organism are doomed to fail because, throughout human development history, there is no branch of human activity without a leader (Michels, 1962, p. 72). Heavily

influenced by Pareto's "circulation of elites" and Mosca's ideas about the inevitability of oligarchy (Beetham, 1981, p. 82), Michels employs the thought that there is a dichotomy in democracies in terms of what it is and what ought to be. Hence, in every democracy, there is a tendency toward oligarchy which manifests itself through political parties. He argues that even the rulers [political elites] are selected by the electors, it is the organization that enables the dominance of the rulers over the majority.

Although leaders and leadership in general are necessary for every society (Delican, 2000, p. 329), Michels defends the proposition that there is no tool in democracies to control or balance the power and dominion of minorities over the majority. For him, democracy has "an inherent preference for the authoritarian solution of the important questions" (Michels, 1962, p. 342). Therefore, even in democracies, the rule of the minority is inevitable, and it is the leader who gains power over the laws and the principles of democracy. As Michels (1962, p. 368) concludes, "[H]istorical evolution mocks all the prophylactic measures that have been adopted for the prevention of oligarchy. If laws are passed to control the dominion of the leaders, it is the laws which gradually weaken and not the leaders."

Classic elitism, on the one hand, assumes that each society, whether it is governed by the principles of democracy or not, is ruled by a minority. Hence, the only connection, albeit indirectly, that the citizens or voters have with the ruling class is the elections (Damele & Campos, 2022, p. 2). Democratic elitism, on the other hand, rejects the idea claimed by classical elitism that elite rule reflects human nature and is a character of the social interactions of people (Edwards, 2014, p. 1013).

Democratic elitists, however, argue that procedures and transactions in the democratic regimes, transparent, secret, and competitive elections in particular, provide a check and balance system over the political elites and hold of their interests while providing a political mechanism for the elites to control the bureaucratic body of the nation-state (Edwards, 2014, p. 1014). Nevertheless, some scholars reject this optimism and claim that democracy is nothing but a political regime in that elites compete and distort the expectations and interests of the citizens and voters (Higley, 2010, p. 161; Ingham, 2022, p. 689).

Unlike classical elite theories, democratic elite theories differentiate between political regimes and employ the idea that in democracies non-elites may have some political power to influence political elites and therefore may affect the decision-making process. In democratic elite theories, the elites are not a single and coherent integrity but are divided into sub-groups (Yayla, 2003)—or “polyarchy” what Dahl (1996) prefers to call it—from relatively autonomous economic, political, and other groups (Rekel, 2008, p. 34). To prevent situations in which political power is accumulated at the hands of a single group, democratic elite theories assert that elites in any society must be independent of the state and each other (Özdemir & Coşkun 2021, p. 1088).

For democratic elite theories, it is a general assumption that even the mass or the majority of a society should have the right to vote, the stability of a political system is still dependent on the continued restriction of the process of the decision-making to elites (McAllister, 1991, p. 238). While democracy is a political system of competition for the votes, it is also an “(...) institutional arrangement for arriving at political decisions in which individuals [political elites] acquire the power to decide” (Schumpeter, 2003, p. 250).

Overall, despite the differences between classic and democratic elite theories, it is inherent to both approaches that even in democracies, the leadership of a small group of individuals is inevitable (Vogel et al., 2019, p. 3). However, to embrace the proposition that claims the possible existence of various elites in any society, we can employ Bottomore’s definition to identify political elites. Following him, we can define political elites as a group of individuals who “(...) exercise political power or influence and are directly engaged in struggles for political leadership” (Bottomore, 1964, p. 7).

### **3.4.3. Foreign Policy Elites**

Although many analyses have been conducted on political elites and these analyses are introduced in the second chapter, it should be noted that political elites differ from each other based at least on the political, social, and economic structures of the states (Jang-Hwan, 2013, p. 257). Regardless of the different approaches to political elites, elite and mass relations and the transformation of political elites are worth studying to understand the power relations in a society and the state. Only then, it can be possible to analyze the

relationship between political elites and foreign policy decisions. However, although much has been written on what elites are, political elites and their role in foreign policy-making are often neglected (Hill, 2008, p. 93). Historically, the question of who holds the political power and the decision-making mechanism, particularly, has been the epicenter of the study of elites. Nevertheless, from Plato and Aristotle to contemporary scholars, the answer remains the same political power and decision-making mechanisms lie in the hands of a “socio-economically and politically homogeneous group” (McAllister, 1991, p. 237).

Policy decisions, especially foreign policy decisions, are taken by the individuals exercising power and occupy strategic positions (Mills, 1956, p. 4). Since “the course of history is determined by the decisions of the political elites” (Blanton & Kegley, 2017, p. 64), any foreign policy analysis necessitates a consideration of the political elites of the states. Moreover, foreign policy analyses should also focus on “foreign policy elites” (Kalela, 1976) which are a sub-group within the umbrella term, political elites. However, while we accept that elites “constitute a somewhat elastic political and social category” (Higley, 2018, p. 28), it is not always easy to determine the foreign policy elites in a state. If we follow Mosca’s assessment of elites, it can be argued that elites in society enjoy “shared ideas, sentiments, and policy preferences” (2018, p. 27). Overall, we can concur that foreign policy elites are “persons who, potentially or actually, wield influence over the formulation of foreign policy” (Kalela, 1976, p. 222).

There is a challenging aspect in the efforts to define the foreign policy elites. That is, estimating the elite population in any state is also quite difficult. The reason behind this argument is that in any society there are many elite groups like policy elite, economic elite, opinion elite, and military elite. This problem results in the confusion best described by Chittick and Billingsley (1989, p. 205) as they claim “[...] they (elites) may be defined so broadly that there is no distinction between the foreign policy elite and more general elites in society.” Nonetheless, as Haas (1961) argued in his neo-functional theory that underlines the role of elites in the European integration process, elites can play a significant role in foreign policy decision-making. Besides, it is the elites, argued by the democratic elite theories, that not only have the resources to make political decisions (Kariel, 1975; Sartori, 1987), in our case foreign policy decisions but also play a

significant role in mediating the demands of the majority (citizens) (Dahl, 1961). To conclude, it can be argued that foreign policy elites should be separated from the general concept of political elites since foreign policy is a technical branch of policy and necessitates the existence of policy experts.

### **3.4.5. Elite Learning**

The complexity of world affairs and the inevitability of human error are substantial two components in the foreign policy decision-making process. These two components lead to a situation where the logic and preferences of foreign policy decisions should be explained better by understanding the ideational and cognitive mechanisms of the decision-makers. Therefore, learning and its relationship with foreign policy analysis may offer new perspectives on foreign policy decision-making processes. One of the perspectives that can be argued is the learning among foreign policy elites and its effects on foreign policy decisions. Since many scholars of FPA and other branches of social sciences emphasize the cognitive dimension of the decision-makers, the nexus of foreign policy decisions and learning is also worth analyzing because learning itself is closely related to human cognition. This argument and learning itself are based on an *a priori* premise that the changing nature of beliefs, perceptions, preferences, and values can also have an influence on the minds of individuals and can be changed over time and after crucial events. As Simon (1986, p. 210-211) argues,

“[I]f we accept values as given and consistent, if we postulate an objective description of the world as it really is, and if we assume that the decision maker's computational powers are unlimited, then (...) we do not need to distinguish between the real world and the decision maker's perception of it (...) [and] we can predict the choices that will be made by a rational decision maker entirely from our knowledge of the real world and without a knowledge of the decision maker's perceptions or modes of calculation.”

As highlighted in the previous chapter, integrating learning into foreign policy analysis involves understanding how decision-makers acquire knowledge, adapt themselves to new information, and adjust their strategies accordingly. Therefore, tracing learning necessitates not only studying case studies but also focusing on the cognitive and psychological processes the individuals go through.

Tracing learning in foreign policy may include some steps including identifying actors, case selections, analyzing decision-making mechanisms specific to the cases, data

gathering on foreign policy actions and reactions, detecting, and identifying changes in foreign policy, and assessing the outcomes. Identifying actors involves the process of determining the key actors playing a role in foreign policy decision-making, especially for feasible research drawing the boundaries of the FP elite. Possible actors may include leaders, policy advisors, government officials, diplomats, and people within intelligence agencies who can be defined as foreign policy elites, and other parties such as interest groups and persons serving in international organizations. It is sufficient to say not all these parties would be included within the FP elite but might play crucial roles in the processes of learning of the elite. Hence, further research might benefit from a categorization like primary and secondary actors.

Case selection is also a crucial part of tracing learning in foreign policy decisions. Criteria that should be applied to case selection include choosing specific foreign policy events or decisions where learning is likely to be identified better. These may include crises, policy shifts, and diplomatic negotiations as critical junctures of the processes that are traced. Analyzing the decision-making process may be another essential part when scholars investigate learning in foreign policy decision-making. This analysis is helpful because it can provide better knowledge of how decisions are made within the body of a state. The analysis of the decision-making mechanism, therefore, may include processes on how foreign policy elites gather information on a possible foreign policy action, how they process it, and how they debate each other on the outcomes of this policy action.

Documenting foreign policy actions and reactions to the implemented foreign policy actions is crucial when one investigates the learning process. This includes gathering data on the foreign policy actions taken by the foreign policy decision-makers (and indirectly foreign policy elites) and their reactions to the result of these actions. To acquire knowledge and assess the actions and reactions, official statements, foreign policy documents, and media reports can be used as main resources.

Detecting foreign policy changes is placed at the core of the analysis of learning in foreign policy. Changes in foreign policy stem from the instances where shifts and/or adjustments in foreign policy positions and strategies occur. These changes are so important since they could reflect learning processes in response to new information and experiences. Finally, assessing the outcomes involves determining the impact of learning on foreign policy

outcomes. To do so, one should seek to answer if the adoption of new knowledge or perspectives leads to more efficient and/or improved foreign policy decisions.

Whether defined as action, behavior, or preference as introduced in the first chapter, foreign policy and foreign policy decision-making of a state may shift and evolve in time. While some changes may occur after foreign policy failures, some may evolve in response to changes in the international system, internal dynamics, experiences, and most importantly cognitive changes in the mindsets of decision-makers. While there can be abundant indicators to be used to trace foreign policy learning among the foreign policy elites, the prominent aspects, albeit arguably, may comprise policy adaptation, behavioral changes of a state in foreign policy, preference shifts of a state, institutional adaptation, and cognitive shifts of decision-makers.

Policy adaptation can be traced to observe if foreign policy learning is occurring. Learning can be observed by monitoring the foreign policy behaviors of a state. This monitoring can be made by investigating whether foreign policy preferences of states change or not. Besides, analysis of official representatives may guide us to observe possible changes. When a state adapts its foreign policy choices and decisions in light of new information, experiences, or changing circumstances both at domestic and international levels, then, one can investigate whether a learning process is present or not. For instance, if a state initially adopts a confrontational foreign policy approach towards a neighboring country, but later shifts its policy towards more of a reconciliatory by employing diplomacy after experiencing the limitations of previous foreign policy strategies, then this policy shift may reflect a process of learning.

Like policy adaptation, behavioral changes can also result from a learning process. Changes that occurred in the foreign policy behaviors of a state on international affairs may indicate a learning process. This can include shifts in military position, and changes in diplomatic rhetoric, alliances, and economic policies toward other states. If one can establish a behavioral shift in one of these areas over time, then, he/she can trace the learning process that underpins it.

Preference shifts are also an important factor worth investigating to trace foreign policy learning. It is safe to argue that foreign policy learning can also manifest in changes

occurring in the preferences of a state regarding foreign policy goals. These changes may involve a reassessment of foreign policy priorities, reconceptualization, and redefinition of national interests, or updating foreign policy strategies based on lessons learned from past experiences. By examining foreign policy changes, it could be possible to investigate and uncover the underlying process of learning.

Institutional adaptation can be regarded as a reflection and result of a learning process. The reason behind this assumption is the idea that learning is often institutionalized within government agencies and institutions playing a significant role in foreign policy decision-making. Besides, foreign policy elites occupy a central position within these agencies and institutions, and they have the political power and jurisdiction to change and redesign governmental structures. Overall, observing changes, if any, in the bureaucratic structures, decision-making procedures, and mechanisms behind the information-sharing process can provide useful insights into how foreign policy learning occurs within the foreign policy tools of states.

Finally, changes in the cognitive system of the decision-makers can also be investigated to assess if foreign policy learning occurs. On a cognitive level, as introduced in the second chapter, decision-makers, policy advisors, and bureaucratic bodies of foreign policy decision-making, foreign policy elites, may absorb new information on a specific policy option, revise their previous decision plan, and update their understanding of international affairs. To build a possible nexus between learning and foreign policy decisions, one can analyze speeches, interviews, and memoirs of foreign policy elites. Moreover, researchers can also trace cognitive shifts in how decision-makers perceive external threats, opportunities, and strategies.

Briefly, by examining these indicators (and in a way possible variables) that may be inherent to foreign policy as ‘action,’ ‘behavior,’ or ‘preference,’ scholars can trace the process of foreign policy learning among foreign policy elites. However, these mentioned indicators may not be sufficient enough to trace the learning process. Hence, one should also consider and incorporate psychological and cognitive aspects of foreign policy elites as well. In this context, we can argue that cognitive biases, perceptions, emotions, learning styles of individual decision-makers, and group dynamics are important aspects of the cognitive and psychological side.

In cognitive biases, decision-makers are susceptible to acquiring new information since biases they have can affect how they interpret information and decide on a certain foreign policy option. While investigating biases, two types are prominent, confirmation bias and availability bias. Confirmation biases, on the one hand, are that individuals tend to recall information that supports their previous beliefs or values (Nickerson, 1998). Availability bias, on the other hand, is another cognitive bias in which individuals make a decision based on recent or closest experience available even if it does not offer the best way to reach a decision (Tversky & Kahneman, 1973). Overall, in cognitive biases, individuals tend to be more close-minded and may resist adapting to changes (Rosati, 1995, p. 50). Therefore, cognitive biases have negative effects on the learning process. By identifying and analyzing these biases, scholars can assess if decision-makers and foreign policy elites may facilitate learning in foreign policy making.

Perceptions are also crucial in the cognitive level of the individual decision-makers. Decision-makers and policy advisors—in our case they all are foreign policy elites—may have perceptions towards any kind of situation and these perceptions are filtered through their cognitive mindsets. Cognitive mindsets are shaped by one's past experiences, beliefs, and cultural backgrounds. Understanding the cognitive mindset can shed light on learning and foreign policy decisions. Moreover, risk perceptions over a foreign policy choice are also related and worth investigating. As mentioned in the second chapter, loss aversion and prospect theory can be important cognitive factors influencing how foreign policy elites and decision-makers assess and respond to risks in international relations. Therefore, tracing changes that may occur in risk perception can also help researchers reveal the process of foreign policy learning.

Emotions, another key aspect of the cognitive dimension, also shape decision-making processes in foreign policy. Different kinds of emotions like fear, anger, and overconfidence can influence the risk-taking level of the decision-makers and how they respond to new ideas and perspectives on any foreign policy options. In this context, examining emotions and emotional factors accompanied by motivation can help us to reveal and determine how these factors may interact with the cognitive mindset of decision-makers to initiate the process of foreign policy learning or cause resistance to change.

Finally, group dynamics is an essential aspect of foreign policy learning. As argued in the second chapter, many approaches to FPA like BPM, OPM, groupthink, and polythink propose the group dynamics in foreign policy decision-making. The decision-making process usually involves groups—as the conceptualization of foreign policy elites would support—in which multiple actors having diverse policy perspectives and interests interact. Therefore, group dynamics as it is in groupthink or polythink, can either hinder or facilitate foreign policy learning with their decision-making bodies. However, assessing learning in group dynamics can be difficult to investigate, and therefore analyze, since foreign policy decisions are usually reached behind closed doors. Moreover, one cannot grasp the true nature of group dynamics by just focusing on memoirs, state archives, and policy documents.

Overall, it can be said that learning is also closely tied to information processing and how individuals. The process itself can result from not only the interaction of the decision-makers and foreign policy advisors but also from the cooperation and/or competition of the political elites who are involved in the decision-making process. Therefore, all the factors and indicators introduced in this chapter can affect information processing. By integrating cognitive and psychological aspects into the analysis, foreign policy learning among foreign policy elites can better be investigated and analyzed.

## CONCLUSION

Since its inception, studies of FPA have been inherently multidisciplinary and scholars of FPA have developed theories and approaches to explain foreign policy decisions. The theoretical background of foreign policy studies comprises a wide range of areas like economics, psychology, anthropology, and sociology. On the one hand, while some theories and approaches focus on the systemic-level variables and seek systemic-level explanations, others focus on individuals, groups, coalitions, and organizations within a state. On the other hand, the evolution of the FPA has also been affected by the challenges directed to rational choice assumption from cognitive approaches.

In this thesis, I have explored the intricate relationships between FPA, various theoretical frameworks, and the concept of learning. By integrating learning, and elite learning in particular, into the study of foreign policy analysis, I aimed to provide a more comprehensive understanding of how foreign policy behaviors and decisions are formulated. This thesis emphasizes the significance of elite learning and outlines the implications for future research in FPA.

As highlighted in the previous chapters, FPA is distinguished from the theories of IR by its focus on individual foreign policy decision-makers instead of structural and systemic variables. Generally, systemic IR theories like realism and liberalism focus mostly on the features of the systemic variables and their possible effect on foreign policy decisions. Unlike systemic theories, constructivism differs from realism and liberalism by integrating non-material factors like culture, norms, and identity. As a result, constructivist theory becomes more effective compared to realism and liberalism by not only offering an option to diverge from system-level limitations to explain foreign policy behaviors but also providing alternative routes to integrate learning and socialization processes to political elites who shape the foreign policy behavior of a state.

Unlike most theories of IR, approaches and theories to FPA prioritize individual decision-makers, leaders, and groups who lie at the very center of the decision-making process (Hudson, 2005, p. 1). Besides, FPA also has a wide range of research areas like individual small group-level psychological factors in foreign policy decision-making, variation in the institutional decision-making process, and elite-mass relations (Kaarbo, 2015, p. 191). Regardless of all, in this thesis, to contribute to the theoretical diversity within the FPA studies, a new approach, elite learning, is introduced to widen the research area.

By introducing elite learning, this thesis aims to open new research gates for novel foreign policy analysis. Considering that FPA studies are often regarded as actor-specific, elite learning as a new theoretical endeavor can help researchers conduct empirical studies since this theoretical framework may enable scholars to focus not only on the great powers and their foreign policies but also on middle powers and small states and their relatively varying foreign policy decisions.

Integrating learning into the studies of FPA can also contribute to our way of theorizing the foreign policy behavior of the states. While most of the approaches to FPA focus on a particular dimension like bureaucracy, group dynamics, psychology, and belief system of leaders, learning may also widen research areas as well.

The integration of elite learning into FPA can also open several areas for future research. First of all, it may guide scholars to consider the cognitive and social dimensions of foreign policy decision-making. Understanding how political elites learn and adapt to new foreign policy conditions can provide valuable insights into the formulation of foreign policy strategies and responses to international crises. Second, empirical research on elite learning can enhance the theoretical richness of FPA. By examining case studies where learning processes have influenced foreign policy outcomes, researchers can develop more solid models that account for the complexities of decision-making. This approach can also bridge the gap between different FPA theories and create a more unified framework for analyzing foreign policy.

Nonetheless, some possible limitations should be mentioned regarding elite learning and foreign policy analysis. For instance, assessing learning and its impact on the foreign policy decision mechanism is not easy to measure. It necessitates the utilization of a wide

range of methodologies such as conducting surveys and questionnaires to gather personal and institutional insights from foreign policy elites, content analysis of public documents, and analyzing official documents (if they are not classified as secret in the government archives) for the relevant case study. Moreover, identifying specific indicators or criteria to evaluate the efficiency of the learning process can also be challenging for researchers.

Yet, to conclude, the learning model and its implications on the political elites can contribute to our understanding of the leadership dynamics in a state. Since not only the individual decision-makers but also political elites are the focal point, elite learning may help to comprehend if there are any hierarchies or decision-making structures inherent to the state that have been under analysis.



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