INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS

Professionalization of Foreign Policy: Transformation of Operational Code Analysis. By Michael Haas. London: Palgrave MacMillan, 2023. 276p. $120.99 cloth.

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This book promises to show "scholars and practitioners that there is a way to avoid groupthink and other traps that lead to foreign policy blunders" (ix). That way is what Haas describes as "professionalization": the creation of systematic procedures for reviewing the options available to foreign policy decision makers against the criteria established by their own "operational codes."

In part one, Haas reviews the existing academic literature on foreign policy and foreign policy decision making, which he defines primarily in terms of the study of policy blunders and the (unnecessary) use of force. In a useful corrective to the sub-field of Foreign Policy Analysis, which tends to begin its own internal histories with James Rosenau's "pre-theories" ("Pre-Theories and Theories in Foreign Policy," in R. Barry Farrell, ed., *Approaches to Comparative and International Politics*, 1966), Haas adopts a much longer time horizon. His account begins with classical political philosophy, moves through the emergence of the modern industrialized international order, and only then deals with more recent scholarship.

Identifying a lack of cumulative progress in the field, Haas then conducts a meta-analysis of all prior foreign policy research, aiming "to determine which theory is best at explaining decision-making" (51). This involves identifying 68 conceptual variables derived from prior research, covering prestimulus, stimulus, information-processing and outcome stages of the decision making process, and affective, cognitive, evaluative, and structural framings of the situation, together with outcome variables and variables intended to adjust for variation in quality between empirical studies. Scores are assigned to these variables using an expanded version of a case study database created by Kent Roberts Greenfield (Command Decisions, 1959). The results are subject to a factor analysis which leads Haas to conclude that "more attention should be paid to cultural factors in the minds of decision-makers" (73). This conclusion leads naturally, he argues, to the focus on operational code analysis in the remainder of the book.

In part two, Haas develops an "explanation and critique" of operational code analysis, defined as the study of "a set of beliefs on which individuals and groups rely in making [foreign policy] decisions" (81) and as "beliefs derived from experience that serve as a filter through which a leader perceives, processes, and responds to whatever behavior or information appears to need attention." Haas begins by arguing that prior research on operational codes in foreign policy has been erratic, characterized by fundamental distinctions in approaches taken by different scholars, and an excessive focus on small-n case-study methods. In particular, he notes variation in terms of whether operational codes are individual or collective, whether they consist purely of beliefs and opinions or extend to potential decision rules, and whether they are solely cognitive or also rational and psychological in nature.

In part three, Haas presents his solution to these problems; the "professionalization" of foreign policy through "options analysis." Here Haas argues that a leader's operational code consists of the relative weight they give to a series of considerations organized under the headings of security, wealth, prestige, and feasibility (137–142). This enables him to argue that both decision makers and analysts should adopt a three-stage approach; identifying the options available, specifying the operational code of key decision makers, and then assessing how well each option meets the needs defined by those operational codes (145). Using software (Haas recommends a program called Decision Pad), it should then be possible to identify the "best" policy option available, as well as to determine the option(s) most likely to be chosen by leaders of other states. Haas then demonstrates this approach through case studies of U.S. foreign policy toward Cambodia, North Korea, and Ukraine.

Haas' book has a number of clear strengths.

First, Haas is right that both academic research on foreign policy and actual foreign policy decision making could be improved by a greater and broader focus on the full range of options available. He rightly notes that an options analysis approach would reduce the risk of groupthink. In recommending an options analysis approach to scholars, he likewise offers them a route to reduce their own subjective biases, and to consider possibilities irrationally excluded by practitioners.

Second, Haas is also right that too much contemporary Foreign Policy Analysis research offers improved empirical tests of underdeveloped or poorly validated theories. This is most clearly true in terms of cognitive and psychological approaches to FPA. Both operational code analysis, as practiced by FPA scholars after the style of Alexander George ("The 'Operational Code': A Neglected Approach to the Study of Political Leaders and Decision-Making," *International Studies Quarterly* 13(4), 1969), and Leadership Trait Analysis, first introduced to FPA by Margaret Hermann ("Explaining Foreign Policy Behavior Using the Personal Characteristics of Political Leaders," *International Studies Quarterly* 24(1), 1980), rely on appeals to authority and deductive reasoning over experimental validation. It is notable that the field of academic psychology, which has been through a major validation crisis in recent years, has developed a reasonably solid consensus around the

psychological drivers of human behavior—and that these drivers are not the ones employed by foreign policy analysts.

Third, Haas is right to try to speak to both analysts and practitioners, and to argue that the same concepts and tools may be of use to both. An approach that improves analysts' understanding of foreign policy decision making *should* improve practitioners' conduct too.

Notwithstanding these strengths, however, I was disappointed by this book.

To begin with, it is not exactly timely. The majority of the scholarship discussed properly dates from the 1950s and 1960s. More recent work is dismissed without serious engagement. The software recommended—Decision Pad —is *old*. It was favorably reviewed in the LA Times in 1990 (Lawrence Magid, "Software Helps Users Make Hard Decisions," 8 February 1990). I was unable to confirm it is still available. This is not a book for anyone interested in cutting-edge research.

Second, the book suffers from a degree of conceptual confusion. Because the author does not seriously engage with contemporary research, the theoretical setup encompasses a hodgepodge of mid-twentieth century IR, security studies and emergent FPA ideas. There is no consistent distinction between foreign policy decision making— what practitioners do—and foreign policy analysis—the work of outside observers. It is unclear whether the author is primarily interested in decisions to use force—as the

setup implies—or other forms of foreign policy—as the empirical case studies suggest. It is unclear whether they are studying blunders or regular decision making. The definition of operational codes used is not one that contemporary foreign policy analysts would recognize.

Third, the book makes sweeping statements about foreign policy without seriously considering that states other than the United States of America make foreign policy. Given the unique situation of the US as the largest power in the international system, this seems odd.

Finally, and most damningly, the book claims to be *scientific* but is actually *scientistic*. Ultimately the proposed method boils down to subjectively assigning quantitative values to a set of subjectively determined variables, and then pretending to be able to reach objective conclusions because you are using numbers. There is no getting away from the fact that Haas's supposedly superior method relies heavily on concepts developed in (and exclusive to) the work of Haas, and includes steps in which the author conjures values out of thin air that then miraculously become objectively valid through the magic wand of a software program from the early days of personal computing.

Foreign policy decision making is above all characterized by uncertainty. An approach predicated on the idea that certainty is possible if only we think more systematically is doomed to fail. That is doubly true when "thinking more systematically" actually means "assigning quantitative values to guesswork."