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Foreign Policy Analysis

This exciting new book aims to reinvigorate the conversation between foreign policy analysis and international relations. It opens up the discussion, situating existing debates in foreign policy in relation to contemporary concerns in international relations, and provides a concise and accessible account of key areas in foreign policy analysis that are often ignored.

Focusing on how the process of foreign policy decision making affects the conduct of states in the international system, and analysing the relationship between policy, agency and actors, the work examines:

- Foreign policy decision making
- Foreign policy and bureaucracies
- Domestic sources of foreign policy
- Foreign policy and the state
- Foreign policy and globalization
- Foreign policy and change

This work builds on and expands the theoretical canvas of foreign policy analysis, shaping its ongoing dialogue with international relations and offering an important introduction to the field. It is essential reading for all students of foreign policy and international relations.

Chris Alden is a Reader in International Relations at the London School of Economics and Political Science.

Amnon Aran is a Lecturer in the Department of International Politics at City University

London.

Foreign Policy Analysis

New approaches

Chris Alden and Amnon Aran

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Acronyms

ANC	African National Congress
BBC	British Broadcasting Corporation
BPM	bureaucratic politics model
CW	Cold War
DFA	Department of Foreign Affairs
EU	European Union
FPA	foreign policy analysis
GT	globalization theory
HS	historical sociology
IEMP	ideology, economic, military, political
IMF	International Monetary Fund
IR	international relations
MNC	multinational corporation
NATO	North Atlantic Treaty Organization
NGO	non-governmental organization
SOP	standard operating procedure
TNA	transnational actor
UK	United Kingdom
UN	United Nations
US	United States
WHS	Weberian historical sociology
WWII	World War II

1 Foreign policy analysis – an overview

Introduction

Foreign policy analysis (FPA) is the study of the conduct and practice of relations between different actors, primarily states, in the international system. Diplomacy, intelligence, trade negotiations and cultural exchanges all form part of the substance of foreign policy between international actors. At the heart of the field is an investigation into decision making, the individual decision makers, processes and conditions that affect foreign policy and the outcomes of these decisions. By adopting this approach, FPA is necessarily concerned not only with the actors involved in the state's formal decision-making apparatus, but also with the variety of sub-national sources of influence upon state foreign policy. Moreover, in seeking to provide a fuller explanation for foreign policy choice, scholars have had to take account of the boundaries between the state's internal or domestic environment and the external environment.

FPA developed as a separate area of enquiry within the discipline of international relations (IR), due both to its initially exclusive focus on the actual conduct of inter-state relations and to its normative impulse. While IR scholars understood their role as being to interpret the broad features of the international system, FPA specialists saw their mandate as being a concentration on actual state conduct and the sources of decisions. The FPA focus on the foreign policy process as opposed to foreign policy outcomes, is predicated on the belief that closer scrutiny of the actors, their motivations, the structures of decision making and the broader context within which foreign policy choices are formulated would provide greater analytical purchase. Moreover, scholars working within FPA saw their task as normative, that is to say, as aimed at improving foreign policy decision making to enable states to achieve

better outcomes and, in some instances, even to enhance the possibility of peaceful relations between states.

In the context of David Singer's well-known schema of IR, in grappling with world politics, one necessarily focuses on studying the phenomena at the international system level, the state (or national) level, or the individual level.¹ FPA has traditionally emphasized the state and individual levels as the key areas for understanding the nature of the international system. At the same time, as the rise in the number and density of transnational actors (TNAs) has transformed the international system, making interconnectivity outside of traditional state-to-state conduct more likely, FPA has had to expand its own outlook to account for an increasingly diverse range of non-state actors, such as global environmental activists or multinational corporations (MNCs).

An underlying theme within the study of FPA is the 'structure-agency' debate.² As in other branches of the social sciences, FPA scholars are divided as to the degree of influence to accord to structural factors (the constraints imposed by the international system) and human agency (the role of individual choice in shaping the international system) when analysing foreign policy decisions and decision-making environments. However, the FPA focus on the process of foreign policy formulation, the role of decision makers and the nature of foreign policy choice has tended to produce a stronger emphasis on agency than is found in IR (at least until the advent of the 'constructivism turn' in the 1990s). Thus, early analyses of foreign policy decision making recognized from the outset the centrality of subjective factors in shaping and interpreting events, actors and foreign policy choices. Writing in 1962, Richard Snyder and colleagues pointed out that 'information is selectively perceived and evaluated in terms of the decision maker's frame of reference. Choices are made in the basis of preferences which are in part situationally and in part biographically determined.'³ Indeed, as the chapters in this book show, in many respects, FPA anticipates key insights and

concerns associated with the reflexivist or constructivist tradition.⁴

FPA has much in common with other policy-oriented fields that seek to employ scientific means to understand phenomena. Debate within FPA over the utility of different methodological approaches, including rational choice, human psychology and organizational studies, has encouraged the development of a diversity of material and outlooks on foreign policy. This apparently eclectic borrowing from other fields, at least as seen by other IR scholars, in fact reflects this intellectual proximity to the changing currents of thinking within the various domains of the policy sciences⁵ At the same time, there remains a significant strand of FPA which, like diplomatic studies, owes a great debt to historical method. Accounting for the role of history in shaping foreign policy – be it the identity of a particular nation-state, conflicting definitions of a specific foreign policy issue or their use (and misuse) as analogous in foreign policy decision making – is a rich area of study in FPA.

Set within this context our book aims to revisit the key question motivating foreign policy analysts, that is, how the process of foreign policy decision making affects the conduct of states in the international system and the relationship between agency, actors and foreign policy, which is crucial for a reinvigoration of the conversation between FPA and IR. Our book seeks to open up this discussion by situating existing debates in FPA in relation to contemporary concerns in IR and providing an account of areas that for the most part in FPA have been studiously ignored. What follows is a brief summary of some of the key theoretical approaches and innovations that have featured in FPA as scholars have attempted to address the questions of who makes foreign policy, how is it made and what influences the process. We refer to this body of literature as Classical FPA. We explore the main features of Classical FPA and identify three areas that have been overlooked by scholars. For instance, in FPA there is no *theory of the state*, no meaningful incorporation of the systemic changes provoked by *globalization* and no comprehensive accounting for *change* in foreign policy.

This is followed by a brief elaboration on these shortcomings through our presentation of three critiques of FPA.

Realism: the state, national interest and foreign policy

The roots of FPA lie in its reaction to the dominance of realism and its depiction of the state and its interactions with other states, whether through direct bilateral relations or through multilateral institutions such as the United Nations (UN), and a general dissatisfaction with realism's ability to provide credible explanations of foreign policy outcomes. In keeping with the realist paradigm, the state is seen as a unitary and rational actor, rendering it unnecessary to analyse the role of the discrete components of government (either the executive or the legislature) in order to assess state foreign policy. In this context, a key concept in the traditional realist canon is 'national interest'. Although a much-disputed term, national interest remains a central preoccupation of foreign policy decision makers and a reference point for realist scholars seeking to interpret state action. Hans Morgenthau defines national interest as synonymous with power and, therefore, both the proper object of a state's foreign policy and the best measure of its capacity to achieve its aims.⁶

What constitutes national interest, how it is determined and ultimately implemented are crucial to understanding the choices and responses pursued by states in international affairs. Realists assert that the character of the international system, that is, its fundamentally anarchic nature, is the most important guide to interpreting foreign policy. The pursuit of security and the efforts to enhance material wealth place states in competition with other states, limiting the scope for cooperation to a series of selective, self-interested strategies. In this setting, the centrality of power – especially manifested as military power – is seen to be the key determinant of a state's ability to sustain a successful foreign policy. Geographic

position, material resources and demography are other important components of this equation.

Realists believe that all states' foreign policies conform to these basic parameters and that scholars above all need to investigate the influences of the structure of the international system and the relative power of states in order to understand the outcomes of foreign policy decisions. Calculation of national interest is self-evident; it can be arrived at rationally through careful analysis of the material conditions of states as well as the particulars of a given foreign policy dilemma confronting states.

Scholars such as Richard Snyder and his colleagues, frustrated by the facile rendering of international events in established IR circles, issued a call to move beyond this systemic orientation and 'open the black box' of foreign policy decision making. Rather than producing a normative critique of realism (something that later would become commonplace in academia), Snyder, Rosenau and others were intent primarily on finding an improved methodological approach to assessing interactions between states.⁷ And, while in creating the field of FPA these scholars accepted key tenets of realism such as the centrality of the state in IR, they also set in motion a series of investigative strands that ultimately would contribute to an expansion of the knowledge and understanding about the relationship between foreign policy and IR.

Behaviourism and rationalism

The original studies by FPA scholars in the 1950s and 1960s posed some explicit challenges to the realist assumptions in ascendancy in the field of IR at that time. Instead of examining the *outcomes* of foreign policy decisions, behaviourists sought to understand the *process* of foreign policy decision making. In particular, scholars such as Robert Jervis, Harold Sprout

and Margaret Sprout investigated the role of the individual decision maker and the accompanying influences on foreign policy choice. They believed that shining a spotlight on the decision maker would allow them to unpack the key variables linked directly to studies of human agency which contribute to foreign policy decision making.

This 'behaviourist' approach with its focus on the 'minds of men' came at a time when those working on decision making in the policy sciences were increasingly enamoured with the notion of applying a set of fixed rules to understand the process and outcomes of decision making. The methodology, which came to be known as rational choice theory, amongst other things posited a unified decision-making body in the form of the state, as well as a belief that the pursuit of self-interest guided all decision makers. Since rational choice strongly adhered to some of the key ideas of realism, it was relatively easy for rationalism and realism to find common cause in their assessment of the world of international politics.

The emphasis on individual decision makers in FPA led scholars to focus on psychological and cognitive factors as explanatory sources of foreign policy choice. For instance, Jervis asserts that the psychological disposition of a leader, the cognitive limits imposed by the sheer volume of information available to decision makers and the inclination to opt for what are clearly second-best policy options, all contribute to imperfect foreign policy outcomes. For Kenneth Boulding, it is the set of beliefs, biases and stereotypes, which he characterizes as the 'image' held by decision makers, that play the most important role in shaping foreign policy decisions. In addition, other scholars point out that the decision-making process itself is subject to the vagaries of group dynamics while the constraints imposed by crises introduce further distortions to foreign policy choice.⁸

The result was a comprehensive critique by FPA scholars of many of the key findings related to foreign policy in the realist and emerging rationalist perspectives. At the same time, while the policy sciences continued to move towards elaborating rational choice theory, those

FPA scholars working in the rationalist tradition sought to find a way to reconcile their insights into the effects of psychology and cognition on foreign policy decision making, with some account of rational decision making. This effort characterises foreign policy making as a far less organized, consistent and rational process than depicted by the realists. Psychology constrains rationality; human divisions and disagreements challenge the notion that the state is a unitary actor. Equally significant was the introduction of what could be called a ‘proto-constructivist’ strand within FPA, which asserted the subjectivity of the decision maker and, concurrently, the notion that foreign policy was the product of mutually constitutive processes that involved individuals, societies and the construction of an ‘other’. Chapter 2 explores this literature more fully.

Bureaucratic politics and foreign policy

The focus on the individual decision maker, despite the insights it produced, was seen by some FPA scholars to be excessively narrow. Even within states, the conflicting outlooks and demands of foreign policy bureaucracies, such as the ministries of trade and of defence, clearly influence foreign policy decisions in ways that reflect the primacy of parochial concerns over considerations of national interest. While the executive decision maker was clearly a key component of the foreign policy decision-making process, it had to be recognized that any decisions made took place within the context of institutions specifically charged with interpreting and implementing foreign and security policy for the state. The role and contribution of specialized ministries, departments and agencies – supplemented by ad hoc working groups tasked with a particular foreign policy mandate – needed to be accounted for in FPA.

Drawing on organizational theory and sociology, scholars sought to capture the manner in

which institutional motivations and procedures impacted upon the foreign policy process. For Graham Allison, Morton Halperin and others, an analysis of foreign policy decision making had to start with these bureaucracies and the various factors that caused them to play what, in their view, was the determining role in shaping foreign policy outcomes. Their approach emphasized the interplay between leaders, bureaucratic actors, organizational culture and, to an extent, political factors outside the formal apparatus of the state.⁹

Broader in reach than the behaviourists' single focus on the individual decision maker, advocates of the bureaucratic politics approach to FPA began a process of investigation into sources of influence over foreign policy that went beyond the actors directly involved in the formal decision-making apparatus. This search opened the way for consideration of the role of societal factors, such as interest groups, in influencing public opinion, all of which ultimately contributed to a radical rethinking of the importance of the state itself in IR. Chapter 3 provides a more complete overview of this literature.

Domestic structures and foreign policy

In moving away from a focus on the individual decision maker and the state bureaucracy, FPA scholars began to show an interest in the domestic, societal sources of foreign policy. This interest produced a rich literature which we describe as the domestic structure approach. One of its strands deals with the effects of the material attributes of a country, such as size, location, agricultural and industrial potential, demographic projections, etc., on foreign policy.¹⁰ A second category develops a more sophisticated notion of the domestic structure. Thomas Risse-Kappen and Haral Muller's work, for instance, deals with the nature of the political institutions (the state), with the basic features of the society, and with the institutional and organisational arrangements linking state and society and channelling

societal demands into the political system'.¹¹ The debate on the emergence of democratic peace theory is an interesting illustration of how FPA used the domestic structure approach to explain foreign policy. Advocates of democratic peace theory argue that democracies inherently produce a more peaceful foreign policy, at least as far as relations with other democratic states are concerned. An intriguing debate followed this assertion, probing the degree to which the nature of the polity can account for the conduct of foreign policy.¹² Chapter 4 explores this literature.

Pluralism: linkage politics and foreign policy

While the previous three approaches sought to understand FPA through recourse to the structure of the international system, the decision-making process within states and the societal sources of foreign policy, there is a fourth, pluralist, interpretation of foreign policy. Pluralists do not believe that states are the only significant actors in international politics. They maintain that, at least from the 1970s (but perhaps even earlier), the increased linkages between a variety of state, sub-state and non-state actors have eroded the traditional primacy of the state in foreign policy. Indeed, one of the central features of the globalizing world is the possibility that MNCs could exercise de facto foreign policy based on their financial resources, or that non-governmental organizations (NGOs) wield power through their ability to mobilize votes. For pluralists, crucial for an understanding of foreign policy outcomes is analysis of the influences derived from domestic and transnational sources – not necessarily tied to the state. The pluralist approach portrays the transnational environment as an unstructured, mixed actor environment. It is unstructured in so far as it is 'entirely actor generated' and it is difficult to distinguish the intentional from the incidental'.¹³ It is a mixed actor environment to the extent that state and non-state actors either coexist or compete. This

pluralist environment of complex interdependency effectively diminishes the scope of state action in foreign policy making, to that of management of a diversity of forces within the domestic sphere including government, and outside the boundaries of the state.¹⁴

Robert Putnam's 'two-level game' attempts to capture the challenges imposed by complex interdependency on foreign policy decision makers. Writing in the rationalist tradition, he suggests that the decision-making process involves both a domestic arena where one set of rules and interests governs, and an international arena, where a different set of rules and interests prevail. Balancing the logic and demands of the two arenas, which often are in conflict, forms the central dilemma of foreign policy making as seen by pluralists.¹⁵ Other scholars, such as Joe Hagan, incorporate particular features of the domestic structure in the form of regimes and autonomous political actors (e.g. factions, parties, institutions) into the decision-making rubric.¹⁶ The pluralist literature captures well the trends that have shaped the external environment in which foreign policy operates. It also examines many of the issues in the vast literature on globalization. For example, scholars such as Hill argue that the pluralist literature is better equipped than the literature on globalization to explore the implications of issues of concern to each for foreign policy. We explore this proposition in Chapter 6, which examines the relationship between foreign policy and globalization and the implications it might have for the study of FPA.

Three critiques of 'Classical' FPA: bringing in the state, globalization and change

This brief overview of the field of FPA shows that there are many different ways of understanding the conduct and significance of states and sub-state and non-state actors in foreign policy making. Though there is no consensus amongst these approaches, each is seen to contribute to a fuller picture of how states and, ultimately, the international system, work.

Indeed, FPA illumines much that is obscure in IR (a shortcoming somewhat grudgingly acknowledged by recent developments such as neo-classical realism). While IR emphasizes the role and influence of structural constraints on the international system, FPA focuses on the inherent possibilities of human agency and sub-national actors to affect and even change the international system.

These features of Classical FPA have preoccupied foreign policy analysts for decades, providing a foundation for a steady accretion of knowledge, primarily through an elaboration of the established literature and detailed case studies, all of which is contributing to a maturing research agenda. At the same time, we would contend that there are oversights and areas that are neglected in Classical FPA, which is hampering development of the field. As already mentioned, these include the fact that there is no theory of the state in FPA, no meaningful incorporation of the systemic changes brought by globalization and no accounting for change in foreign policy.

FPA and the state

In highlighting the importance of such elements as human agency and sub-national actors, FPA has significantly enhanced our understanding of foreign policy making and its implementation. However, this analytical achievement comes at a conceptual price. In focusing on an unpacking of the realist black box, FPA failed to develop its own conception of the state with the result that the state is reduced to nothing more than the various actors responsible for foreign policy making. For example, early studies focus on the individual and de facto equate the state with the decision makers, thus rendering the state as no more than the sum of its individual (human) parts. In the bureaucratic politics approach, the state is little more than an arena in which competing fiefdoms engage in their inward-looking games. The

state is ultimately no more than the sum of its bureaucratic units. From this perspective, foreign policy is either formulated by chance, or is captured unpredictably by different bureaucratic elements at different times.¹⁷

The domestic structure approach would seem more useful for conceptualizing the state, however, it does not provide a conceptualization of what the state is. Rather, as the debate on democratic peace theory and foreign policy forcefully shows, the state is equated with the polity. Consequently, it is treated more as *an arena* (not an actor) in which the social and political values of a given polity are manifested in its foreign policy. Finally, in pluralist formulations and Putnam's two-level game the principal role of the state is to mediate between the pressures from the domestic and the external spheres. These pressures arise from the socio-political activity in the domestic and transnational spheres, the inter-state activity occurring within the international realm and the principal motivations of the central executive. Hence, in contrast to earlier approaches, the state is rooted *simultaneously* in the domestic and the external spheres. In this respect, the pluralist approach and Putnam's metaphor of a two-level game are more useful than methods that accommodate the activities of actors in *either* the domestic *or* the international sphere. However, capturing the dual anchoring of state in the domestic and external spheres does not amount to a conception of the state. In this formulation the state is no more than the sum of the pressures exerted by external and domestic forces, derived from the activities that occur across the domestic–statist–transnational axis. The lack of a conceptualization of the state in FPA's key middle-range theories produced conceptual, ontological and epistemological tensions within FPA. These tensions are explored and addressed in Chapter 5.

FPA and globalization

FPA's notion of the state (or lack thereof) is not the only conceptual task we tackle in this book. Since the 1980s, a stimulating and charged debate on globalization has been taking place in the social sciences, including IR. In their work, *Global Transformations* (1999), Held et al. bring together the vast literature on globalization, laying the foundations for Globalization Theory (GT) and provide the tools for examining empirically the globalization of multiple activities: from politics and organized violence, to finance, trade, production and migration, culture and environmental degradation.¹⁸ Held et al.'s appraisal of the hyperglobalist, global-sceptic and transformationalist theses defined the contours of the first great debate on globalization, placing the transformationalist thesis at the forefront of what emerged as GT.¹⁹ Two broad assumptions unite the huge literature comprising GT. First, that globalization is producing a fundamental shift in the spatio-temporal constitution of human societies. Second, that this shift is so profound that, in retrospect, it has revealed a basic lacuna in the classical, territorially grounded tradition of social theory, promoting the development of a new post-classical social theory in which the categories of space and time assume a central, explanatory role.²⁰

Since publication of *Global Transformations*, another great debate on globalization has emerged, much of it centring on the direction that GT should take. Authors, such as Rosenberg, argue that GT is fundamentally flawed,²¹ hence, the way forward is to perform a postmortem, to expose its 'follies' and draw lessons from these follies. Others acknowledge that the debate on globalization has generated a useful and insightful body of literature, but are resistant to attempts to turn it into a 'theory'.²² This reluctance to theorize, and Rosenberg's dismissal of GT, are rejected by Scholte, Albert, Robertson and by Held and colleagues' ongoing work. Nevertheless, all these authors concede that GT faces a real challenge: how to develop beyond the formulations generated by the first great debate on globalization.²³

In similar vein, we try to address what would appear to be a significant lacuna in GT and FPA. An examination of some of the best-known works and forums on globalization reveals that foreign policy is virtually excluded from GT.²⁴ Similarly, scholars of FPA have excluded GT from their matrix. For instance, the studies by Smith et al. and Hudson on the state of the art in FPA completely ignore globalization and GT,²⁵ while Hill argues that existing transnational formulations in FPA are better equipped than GT to examine issues that are of common concern to these literatures.²⁶ Webber and Smith, on the other hand, embrace the notion of globalization and explore its implications for FPA, but do not consider the reverse position.²⁷

This mutual exclusion in our view is somewhat problematic since the relationship between foreign policy and globalization might have significant implications for the subject matter of IR. Thus, the gap in contemporary IR theory, framed by the mutual conceptual neglect of FPA and GT, would seem significant. Chapter 6 explores ways to bridge this gap and how we might conceptualize foreign policy in the context of globalization, to try to establish how and to what extent FPA can contribute to the study of foreign policy in the context of globalization, and to understand the relationship between these two aspects.

FPA and change

Finally, alongside the failure adequately to theorize the state and to account for the forces of globalization, *foreign policy change* has been rather ignored by classical FPA scholars. Similar to IR, which failed to account for the rapid series of events that precipitated the ending of the Cold War (CW) in 1989, FPA says little about the sources and conditions giving rise to significant alterations in a state's foreign policy. This is despite seminal foreign policy moments, such as Nixon's dramatic diplomatic turn to the People's Republic of China

in 1972, and the systematic reorientation of post-Soviet states towards the west, when foreign policy change was a significant feature of the fabric of international politics.

Understanding and integrating ‘change’ into analyses of foreign policy requires accounting for its impact in relation to individual decision makers, institutions and structures of decision making as well as the wider socio-political and external context within which such change occurs. David Welch’s *Painful Choices: A Theory of Foreign Policy Change* (2005) is one of the few efforts to tackle this subject. Welch tries to capture some of the diverse sources of foreign policy change by focusing on cognitive and motivational psychology, insights from organizational theory and, most successfully, by employing prospect theory. In the latter, foreign policy change is linked to decision makers’ fears that continuing with the status quo will generate ever more painful losses.²⁸

However, there is clearly much more scope for assessing the role of change in foreign policy. Drawing on other relevant sources, the literature on ‘learning’ provides insights into the part played by personality in facilitating foreign policy choices that embrace change.²⁹ If we examine the topic from a different angle, institutional sources of *resistance to change* may be tied to the levels of bureaucratic embeddedness in the decision-making process through role socialization, procedural scripts and cultural rationales, but there is little discussion in FPA of processes such as institutional learning and its impact on foreign policy choice.³⁰ Michael Barnett’s analysis of how skilful ‘political entrepreneurs’ are able to re-frame identity issues within a specific institutional context so as to embark on dramatic foreign policy shifts, provides a theoretically eclectic treatment of foreign policy change which reasserts the role of agency.³¹ Finally, against the backdrop of a ‘wave of democratization’ that has been sweeping across all regions of the world since 1974, a fruitful avenue for assessing foreign policy change is the relationship between regime type and socio-political changes in conjunction with broader systemic factors. Alison Stanger, building on the work

of transitologists, such as Juan Linz and Samuel Huntington, suggests that it is the nature of democratic transitions – whether elite-led reformist regimes, revolutionary regimes or power-sharing arrangements – that shape the underlying approach adopted by a post-authoritarian regime to foreign policy questions.³² How FPA might more fully account for change is explored in Chapter 7.

Conclusion: FPA and the study of IR

FPA has constantly engaged with the broader debates in the discipline of IR, from challenges to realism's key concepts, to introducing IR to new literatures, to employing a new type of methodology – that of a middle-range theory. We believe that if FPA is to maintain its status as an innovative sub-strand of IR, it is essential that it engages with the discipline. As we develop our three critiques of FPA, we will highlight new points of intersection between FPA and IR theory. Two strands of IR appear particularly useful for the development of an ongoing dialogue between FPA and broader IR theory: historical sociology of international relations, and constructivism. Engaging more closely with the broader debate in the social sciences on globalization and its implications for IR would also seem pertinent. Finally, FPA has potential points of intersection with neo-classical realism, which we explore in later chapters. Through this effort, we hope to be able to build on and expand the theoretical canvas of FPA and to shape its ongoing dialogue with IR.