

Bridging the Gap

Bridging the Gap
Theory and Practice in Foreign Policy

Alexander L. George

Foreword by Ambassador Samuel W. Lewis



UNITED STATES
INSTITUTE OF PEACE PRESS

Washington, D.C.

The views expressed in this book are those of the author alone. They do not necessarily reflect the views of the United States Institute of Peace.

UNITED STATES INSTITUTE OF PEACE
1200 17th Street NW, Suite 200
Washington, DC 20036-3011

©1993 by Alexander L. George. All rights reserved.

First published 1993
Sixth printing 2005

Printed in the United States of America

The paper used in this publication meets the minimum requirements of American National Standard for Information Sciences—Permanence of Paper for Printed Library Materials, ANSI Z39.48–1984.

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

George, Alexander L.

Bridging the gap: theory and practice in foreign policy / by
Alexander L. George.

p. cm.

ISBN 1-878379-23-2 (alk. paper).—ISBN 1-878379-22-4 (pbk.:
alk. paper)

1. United States—Foreign relations—Iraq. 2. Iraq—Foreign
relations—United States. 3. United States—Foreign
relations—1981–1989. 4. United States—Foreign
relations—1989–1993. 5. Persian Gulf War, 1991—United States.
6. Persian Gulf War, 1991—Causes. I. United States Institute of
Peace. II. Title.

E183.8.I57G46 1993
327.730567—dc20

92-45232
CIP

For
Emil and Irene
and
Lee and Jane

Contents

Foreword by <i>Samuel W. Lewis</i>	ix
Preface	xiii
Introduction	xvii
Part One The Gap between Knowledge and Action	1
1. The Two Cultures of Academia and Policymaking	3
2. The Role of Knowledge in Policymaking	19
Part Two The Inadequate Knowledge Base for U.S. Policy toward Iraq, 1988–91	31
3. Outcomes of U.S. Strategies toward Iraq	33
4. Reforming Outlaw States and Rogue Leaders	45
5. Appeasement as a Strategy for Conflict Avoidance	61
6. Why Deterrence and Reassurance Sometimes Fail	71
7. The Failure to Coerce Saddam Hussein	79

8. War Termination: Integrating Military and Political Objectives	89
Part Three The Bridge between Knowledge and Action	105
9. Contemporary International Relations Theory	107
10. Types of Knowledge for Policymaking	115
Summary and Conclusions	135
Notes	147
Index	163

Foreword

Policymakers and scholars alike have long noted the existence of a significant gap between theory and practice in foreign policy. Indeed, some days the distance between the two seems more like a yawning chasm.

One explanation for this gap lies in a conflict between the two different cultures of academe and government. From the standpoint of the policymaker, the scholar is “too academic,” all too often prone to abstraction and jargon. The academic can operate in a more relaxed time frame. The policymaker must nearly always act with imperfect information, before a fully satisfactory analysis is complete. He or she does not have the luxury of saying, “Other things being equal . . .” Scholars, on the other hand, may complain that practitioners are too haphazard and ad hoc in their approaches to situations, and too ready to apply pat formulas or supposed lessons of history in uncritical ways. Practitioners place too much faith in intuitive judgment, scholars say, and may make simplistic generalizations.

This gap between theory and practice in foreign policy is a subject that has long interested us at the Institute of Peace, and we have been especially fortunate to have Alexander George with us for the past two years as a distinguished fellow in the Jennings Randolph Program for International Peace.

In this ground-breaking volume, George provides a penetrating analysis of the many striking differences between the two cultures of academia and policymaking. He argues that while the gap between theoreticians and practitioners cannot be eliminated, it can be bridged. To that end, he identifies specific types of “policy-relevant knowledge” needed by the practitioner, and notes that scholars have not yet provided adequate conceptualization and general knowledge, drawn from historical experience, of many strategies and instruments of foreign policy. The lack of such knowledge, he demonstrates, was in part responsible for failures of U.S. policy towards Iraq in the period leading to the Persian Gulf War.

A point that George stresses is that general knowledge about a strategy cannot substitute for, but can only aid, the judgment of the policymaker, who is often called upon to make difficult choices between competing considerations. Policy-relevant information can play an especially important role during this phase, when the policymaker must weigh various options while at the same time taking into account other factors such as the need to muster public support.

But even after you build a bridge, there’s no guarantee anyone will use it. We have a lot of work to do. I say “we” because it should be a shared responsibility—serious and committed scholars and those of us in relevant institutional roles need to work together to promote more meaningful interaction. We at the Institute of Peace can provide forums and catalytic support. The academic community can provide more of the policy-relevant knowledge and intellectual frameworks that are needed. Practitioners can come to the table with an open mind about better utilizing all the resources available to them.

In particular, we must concentrate on reaching the decisionmakers in ways that can get their attention. Scholars need to understand better the types of knowledge needed by policymakers, look for ways to disseminate their research more effectively, and explore ways of conveying its practical impli-

cations to senior policymakers, not just to mid-level analysts. We must together translate theory into practice on the tough new international agenda that lies before our nation. The cause of peacemaking demands nothing less.

Samuel W. Lewis, President
United States Institute of Peace

Preface

This book addresses the task of bridging the gap between theory and practice in foreign policy. This task requires me to identify the types of knowledge about international relations that will be relevant and useful to those who conduct foreign policy. I have been preoccupied with this challenging task during much of my career, first during the years spent as a member of the RAND Corporation and since 1968 as a member of the Department of Political Science at Stanford University.

I am grateful to the United States Institute of Peace for the award of a Distinguished Fellowship, which enabled me to pursue the project in Washington, D.C., from September 1990 through June 1992. I was delighted to find that the Institute shares a keen interest in developing scholarly knowledge for use in policymaking and works in constructive ways to encourage two-way interaction between academic scholars and policy specialists.

My study has turned out to be somewhat different, and I think better, for having been pursued in the stimulating environment of Washington. Closer proximity to the policy world forced me to reexamine and sharpen some of the ideas I entertained in the past. I believe I have a better understanding now, which I have tried to communicate in this book,

of the kinds of knowledge needed in policymaking and how such knowledge, when it is available, can contribute to policymaking.

More important, the preparation of the study and in particular the chapters that assess the strategies the United States has employed toward Iraq since 1988 strongly confirmed a long-standing concern that the state of existing policy-relevant knowledge is inadequate and that much additional scholarly research directed to producing such knowledge is badly needed.

I was fortunate in preparing the study to have had the opportunity to discuss U.S. policies toward Iraq with ten senior policy officials in the State Department, the Department of Defense, and the staff of the National Security Council. These individuals participated in and are knowledgeable about U.S. policy toward Iraq. They kindly read and commented on earlier drafts of chapters in part two of the study. I asked these policy specialists to tell me whether I had correctly stated the facts and whether my analytical interpretations of U.S. policy toward Iraq were reasonable. Their responses to these questions were generally reassuring, and they offered additional information and useful judgments, which I have attempted to incorporate into these chapters. For understandable reasons, these officials—two no longer in the government—preferred to remain anonymous.

I am indebted to Jane Holl, a specialist on war termination problems, for helpful comments on earlier drafts of chapter 8 and for allowing me to see several as yet unpublished essays on this topic. I benefited also from stimulating conversations with many foreign policy specialists who are not in the government, though many of them previously were. Some of them kindly read and commented on earlier drafts of some of the chapters in the book. In alphabetical order they are Sanjoy Banerjee, Andrew Bennett, Robert Bowie, Dan Caldwell, Arthur Cohen, Eliot Cohen, Chester Crocker, Terry Deibel, Hugh DeSantis, Daniel Druckman, Arun Elhance,

Muhammad Faour, Juliette George, Ashraf Ghani, Richard Herrmann, Mark Hoffman, Stephen Hosmer, Fred Iklé, Martin Indyk, Bruce Jentleson, Robert Jervis, Michael Krepon, Steven Kull, James Laue, Joseph Lepgold, Samuel Lewis, David Little, Sean Lynn-Jones, Michael Mandelbaum, Ernest May, Alexander Moens, Joseph Montville, Patrick Morgan, Joseph Nye, Robert Pastor, Don Peretz, Alan Platt, Jerrold Post, William Quandt, Stephen Rock, Walt Rostow, Robert Rothstein, Shimon Shamir, William Simons, Richard Smoke, Louis Sohn, Janice Gross Stein, Stephen Stedman, Eric Stern, and I. William Zartman. If they read this book, I trust they will see reflected in it some of their observations and suggestions.

I wish to express appreciation to Samuel Lewis, president of the Institute, and Michael Lund, director of the Jennings Randolph fellowship program, for their unflagging encouragement of the project and insightful suggestions for improving the study. I also wish to thank Otto Koester and Joseph Klaitz, program officers, and Barbara Cullicott, program administrator, for providing so supportive and congenial an environment for serious research; Dan Snodderly for his good-humored and incisive editorial suggestions; Blaine Vesely and Denise Dowdell for indispensable and efficient library services; Mia Cunningham for her careful copy-editing; and Anne Cushman, Tarak Barkawi, and William Tanzola for their competent and cheerful research and secretarial services. Finally, as so often in the past, my wife, Juliette, provided indispensable support and understanding as well as insightful suggestions and comments.

