Coalition foreign policy in the ‘War on Terror’:
A framework for analysing foreign policy
as culturally embedded discourse

Abstract

Building on O’Tuathail’s call for theoretical and conceptual clarity, this paper develops a framework for analysing foreign policy as culturally embedded discourse.¹ In order to conceptualise the nature of ‘embeddedness’, O’Tuathail’s framework is developed in four stages. Firstly, building on Doty, it is argued that asking ‘how possible?’ must be split into ‘how thinkable?’ and ‘how sold?’ in order to encapsulate the circular, processual and recursive nature of foreign policy. Secondly, to understand the agency of foreign policy practitioners, within this circular framework, Jessop and Hay’s strategic-relational approach is used to overcome the structure-agency dualism prevalent in existing accounts. Thirdly, within a structural-relational understanding, Barnett’s notion of framing is introduced to encapsulate the way in which practitioners act strategically to sculpt a foreign policy discourse that will maximise resonance by plugging into foreign policy culture. Fourthly, when dealing with the dynamic political landscapes of democratic coalition states, it is imperative to consider for whom foreign policy is framed. Analysing foreign policy as culturally embedded discourse, this framework enables a comparative analysis of coalition foreign policy in the ‘War on Terror’.

Introduction

This paper, and specifically the framework it develops, form part of a wider research project inspired by the question ‘how was the ‘War on Terror’ possible?’ To answer this question it is necessary to consider the foreign policy of coalition states. A discursive approach enables an interrogation of the differences evident in coalition foreign policy, which is crucial to achieving an understanding of how the ‘War on Terror’ was possible. A purely discursive approach, however, fails to take into consideration the domestic contextual factors that partially account for the differences in foreign policy discourse between coalition states. These differences, and the reasons for them, helped to render the ‘War on Terror’ possible. Thus, this paper develops a framework for the analysis of foreign policy as culturally embedded discourse, enabling a comparative analysis capable of drawing out and explaining differences in foreign policy discourse between coalition states.

Like authors working in the overlapping space between constructivism and poststructuralism, this paper argues that whilst discourse must be taken seriously, so must issues of resonance, agency and context. However, after sketching inadequate approaches at opposite ends of the poststructural-constructivist spectrum, rather than finding a solution in the overlapping space of ‘critical constructivism’, this paper turns to consider critical geopolitics and, specifically, the work of Gearoid O’Tuathail. O’Tuathail’s call for theoretical and conceptual clarity is developed by theorising the nature of ‘embeddedness’ within an understanding of foreign policy as culturally embedded discourse. Firstly however, although space prevents a detailed evaluation of the three relevant literatures, it is necessary to briefly sketch the nature of the problem that this framework attempts to overcome. To this end, the relevant strengths and limitations of poststructuralism, constructivism and critical geopolitics are outlined in turn.

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2 The US, Britain and Australia, as leading members of the coalition and demonstrating numerous similarities (in security culture, political system and language, for example), are the focus of the project.


4 The positions this paper represents deliberately highlight the problems of a ‘thin’ version of constructivism and a poststructural perspective that ignores contextual and agential factors.

5 Clearly, these categorisations are contested constructions. However, such a distinction is useful and can be defended by pointing to differing normative aims, underpinning influences, analytical focus and, most significantly, theoretical assertions.
Situating the Framework within the Existing Literature

Campbell, Der Derian and Jackson have all analysed the ‘War on Terror’ from a poststructural perspective. Poststructural IR offers a theoretical approach that enables discourse to be taken seriously, privileging the production of meaning through linguistic regularities as the principal, or only, focus of analysis. De-reifying the declaration of ‘war’, the ‘uniqueness’ of 9-11 and the writing of identity that followed, these three authors demonstrate the utility of a poststructural approach for denaturalising dominant discourses.

Jackson’s work, as arguably the most successful analysis of the language of the ‘War on Terror’, can however be read to highlight the limitations of existing poststructural approaches. Despite recognising the importance of a poststructural approach for analysing how the ‘War on Terror’ functions domestically, there are few attempts by poststructural analysts to theorise the domestic context, how it influences and is influenced by the language of the ‘War on Terror’. Focusing on discourse, to the exclusion of context, limits comparative analysis, as authors are unable to consider the underlying conditions that facilitate, constrain and shape foreign policy discourse. This paper argues that by theorising context – notably foreign policy culture and the domestic political landscape – and the way in which context facilitates, constrains and shapes foreign policy discourse, a richer analysis can be achieved.

A reluctance to consider context couples with another longstanding criticism of poststructuralism: an inadequate theorisation of conduct. There remains an unyielding

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9 Notable exceptions exist, such as Hansen, ‘Security’.
structuralist legacy in poststructuralism,\textsuperscript{10} to the extent that, where poststructural approaches acknowledge that practitioners require popular consent or acquiescence,\textsuperscript{11} they fail to theorise how practitioners as self-reflexive, strategic agents may attempt to realise this. At the extreme, this can reduce agents to ‘discoursers of discourses’.\textsuperscript{12} As Schattenmann summarises, ‘the poststructuralist is prone to ignore the pulling and hauling of politics... the problem is that actors are more or less absent. This seems to be a fundamental and almost inescapable problem of a discourse-analytic poststructuralist approach: discourses are dominant, and agency is blurred’.\textsuperscript{13} Drawing on Hay and Jessop, this paper argues that, by adopting a strategic-relational understanding of structure and agency, it is possible to achieve a recognition of strategic agency within a poststructural analysis.

Poststructuralism then, is good in theorising the discursive nature of foreign policy, but poor in theorising the relationship of conduct and context that generates discourses. In contrast, constructivist IR excels in recognising the importance of the domestic context, particularly foreign policy culture, in shaping foreign policy. However, particularly in thinner constructivist analyses, foreign policy itself is not analysed discursively.\textsuperscript{14}

Constructivist approaches deliberately set about to remedy the silences and limitations of ‘conventional’ approaches.\textsuperscript{15} Conventional IR has long struggled to account for the dogs that do not bark in world politics.\textsuperscript{16} For instance, why did Germany choose not to participate in intervention in Iraq? Conventional approaches struggle to account for non-participation, given that, from a realist perspective, intervention was generally assumed to be in the national interest. Constructivism remedies this flaw in conventional approaches by turning to the domestic (cultural) context of a state. To illustrate, for Katzenstein, decisions to launch and

\textsuperscript{11} See, for example, Jackson, ‘Writing’.
\textsuperscript{14} This paper talks about a thinner version of constructivism, despite the existence of many more nuanced positions. For a discussion of versions of constructivism in IR, see Fierke, K. M. and K. E. Jørgensen, Eds. (2001). Constructing international relations: the next generation, International relations in a constructed world. Armonk, N.Y.; London, M.E. Sharpe.
\textsuperscript{15} ‘Conventional’ approaches include those associated with rationalism.
participate in the ‘War on Terror’ are the ‘consequence of institutionalised norms’.\textsuperscript{17} Differing institutionalised norms made it ‘normal’ for Germany to define 9-11 differently to the US.\textsuperscript{18} As Katzenstein succinctly summarises, Germany ‘betrayed a distinctive narrowness in outlook and inwardness in orientation that can be explained only with reference to their historical experiences in the first half of the twentieth century’\textsuperscript{19}

Katzenstein performs what Doty identifies to be the task of research asking ‘why’ questions: showing that a course of action was \textit{probable}. But \textit{how} was it \textit{possible}? A poststructural discursive ontology denies that German non-participation in the coalition can be shown to occur \textit{because} of institutionalised norms that came about following ‘bitter lessons from history’.\textsuperscript{20} Whilst Katzenstein does acknowledge that ‘collective identity is both nested in a variety of other identities and deeply contested politically, thus preserving the element of political choice’, his analysis seeks to demonstrate that state action is predictable, likely and determined by extra-discursive causal variables, which effectively removes the role of political agents.\textsuperscript{21} Katzenstein thus offers an extremely \textit{structuralist} explanation in which institutionalised norms \textit{cause} foreign policy. Thus, paradoxically, we are left with an analysis where ideas matter but people do not. Constructivism, like poststructuralism, is prone to reduce agents to mere vectors. Context then, rather than being seen to facilitate, constrain and shape foreign policy, becomes everything.\textsuperscript{22}

In contrast to poststructuralism, which is strong on discourse but poor on culture, constructivism emphasises culture but is weak on discourse. A reluctance to incorporate discourse leads constructivist IR to treat the nature of world politics beyond the state as given.\textsuperscript{23} To illustrate, Katzenstein asserts that Germany is able to ‘contribute to combating the “crime” of global terrorism ... because it conceived of itself as an integral part of an

\textsuperscript{17} Katzenstein, P. (2003). "Same war, different views: Germany, Japan, and the war on terrorism." \textit{Current History} 101. p.754.
\textsuperscript{18} Katzenstein, ‘Same war’ p.756.
\textsuperscript{20} Katzenstein, ‘Same war’ p.756.
\textsuperscript{21} Ibid., p.755.
\textsuperscript{22} The opposite tendency is evident in some constructivist FPA literature, where the ideas of an individual are treated as the causal variable in analysis, flipping constructivism to an, equally undesirable, gross intentionalism. Bulley, D. (2006) Ethics and Foreign Policy: Negotiation and Invention, PhD Thesis. pp.25-33.
international coalition fighting a global network of terrorists’.\textsuperscript{24} Placing the word crime in scare quotes reveals that Katzenstein is aware of the contestable nature of such a description.\textsuperscript{25} However, his (thin) constructivist account cannot demonstrate how such constructions of foreign affairs (the outside Other) constitute state identity (the inside Self). Declaring terrorism as a ‘crime’ places Germany in a ‘policing’ role, a positioning that would have proved far more difficult if all acts of terrorism were declared acts of war. Clearly, the discursive construction of international relations impacts upon constructions of the self and, as Katzenstein is at pains to stress, these norms of self-perception are vitally important.

The constructivist weakness on discourse derives from a philosophically realist ontology. By excluding discourse, constructivist accounts miss-conceptualise the nature of foreign policy and the foreign policy process. While constructivists are right to argue for the importance of culture in influencing foreign policy, they fail to conceptualise that foreign policy is discursive and embedded in foreign policy culture. Cultural contexts have not \textit{caused} divergences between Germany and the US, post 9-11; they facilitate, shape and constrain foreign policy discourse.

So what is the solution? To paraphrase Weldes, it cannot be a case of: discourse, see poststructuralism; culture, see constructivism.\textsuperscript{26} Critical geopolitics offers a preferential starting point, conceptualising foreign policy as culturally embedded discourse. Critical geopolitics defines discourse as ‘the representational practices by which cultures constitute meaningful worlds’.\textsuperscript{27} Thus foreign policy is a ‘discursive practice by which intellectuals of statecraft spatialise international politics in such a way as to represent it as a ‘world’ characterised by certain types of places, peoples and dramas’.\textsuperscript{28} Through foreign policy discourse ‘the world is actively ‘spatialised’, divided up, labelled, sorted out into a hierarchy of places of greater or lesser ‘importance’ by political leaders. This process provides the geographical framing within which political elites and mass publics act in the world in pursuit

\begin{thebibliography}{9}
\bibitem{Katzenstein} Katzenstein, ‘Same war’ pp.723-733
\bibitem{In German eyes} ‘In German eyes, September 11 required intense international collaboration in multilateral institutions. Unilateral action was inappropriate and ineffective in the combating of horrific international crimes. The German government felt that war, however, was less suitable for defeating global terrorist networks than careful attention to the underlying social and economic causes of terrorism in failing states, patient police cooperation, intelligence sharing, and international legal proceedings.’\textit{Ibid.}, p.733.
\bibitem{Weldes} Weldes, ‘Constructing Insecurity’ p.2.
\bibitem{O'Tuathail et al.} O’Tuathail et al., ‘Geopolitics Reader’ p.1
\end{thebibliography}
of their own *identities and interests*. In short, critical geopolitics recognises that foreign policy is both discursive and culturally embedded; a position most fully and explicitly set out by O’Tuathail.

Linking foreign policy discourse to domestic foreign policy culture, O’Tuathail provides a framework for analysing foreign policy as a culturally embedded discourse. O’Tuathail argues that foreign policy culture is crucial to the formation of foreign policy discourse. Foreign policy culture consists of ‘the practices that make sense of a state and its identity, position and role in the world’, encompassing foreign policy traditions, strategic culture and geographical imaginations within a population. However, O’Tuathail is conspicuously silent on the *relationship between foreign policy culture and foreign policy discourse*. If a framework is to be developed that enables the comparative analysis of coalition foreign policy in the ‘War on Terror’, by conceptualising foreign policy as culturally embedded discourse, it is imperative to theorise the notion of ‘embeddedness’.

After laying out the ontological premise of a poststructural approach, a theorisation of ‘embeddedness’ is attempted in four stages. Firstly, building on Doty, it is argued that asking ‘how possible?’ must be split into ‘how thinkable?’ and ‘how sold?’ in order to encapsulate the circular, processual and recursive nature of foreign policy. Secondly, to understand the agency of foreign policy practitioners, within this circular framework, Jessop and Hay’s strategic-relational approach is used to overcome the structure-agency dualism prevalent in existing accounts. Thirdly, within a structural-relational understanding, Barnett’s notion of framing is introduced to encapsulate the way in which practitioners act strategically to sculpt a foreign policy discourse that will maximise resonance by plugging into foreign policy culture. Fourthly, when dealing with the dynamic political landscapes of democratic coalition states, it is imperative to consider for whom foreign policy is framed.

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30 O’Tuathail, ‘Geopolitical Structures’.
31 O’Tuathail et al., ‘Geopolitics Reader’ p.8
32 Foreign policy culture includes the ‘culture of knowledge’ and ‘interpretation of the state as a foreign policy actor in world affairs’ at a popular level, as well as a states ‘war fighting style’ (strategic culture) and ‘historical schools of foreign policy theory and practice’ (foreign policy traditions) at a more formal level. In sum, foreign policy culture is the ‘cultural and organisational processes by which foreign policy is made in states’. O’Tuathail, ‘Geopolitical Structures’ pp.98, 87.
Theorising ‘Embeddedness’: Developing a Framework for Coalition FPA

Discursive Ontology

The existence of ‘reality’ outside, or exclusive of, discourse is impossible to ‘know’ and consequently irrelevant. We simply cannot remove our heads to see what the world looks like without the mediation of thought.\(^{33}\) How the world is seen and understood inevitably depends upon malleable but pre-existing concepts and categorisations. These concepts and categorisations – ways of understanding and making sense of the world – are held within thought; articulated and communicated through language; and shared and partially stabilised as discourses.

Interpretation and understanding are always ultimately conducted at the level of the individual, by relating new information to unique, previously acquired and constantly evolving knowledge. This subjective thought process, whilst unique at the level of the individual, is heavily influenced by intersubjective socio-cultural ‘knowledge’ and the processes that operate to produce and verify or limit and even prevent it. Language is the most significant of the processes facilitating intersubjective understandings. Through language, humans communicate and represent the world. Discourses occur where particular linguistic representations become relatively stable,\(^ {34}\) regulating which meanings are produced by legitimising or discrediting statements in a relatively systematic way.\(^ {35}\)

A poststructural view of language thus recognises a number of features. Firstly, as a system of communication, employing collective codes and conventions, language is social.\(^ {36}\) Secondly, an ontology of linguistic production recognises that language is ‘constitutive for what is brought into being’; it is ‘ontologically significant’.\(^ {37}\) The meaning and identity of

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\(^{34}\) Discourses are nearly always temporary and internally contradictory but nevertheless serve to produce meaning in a systematic way. Coherency and systematicity are evident within the ‘regime of truth’ that polices acceptability within a discourse. See Gregory ‘Discourse’ in Johnston, R. J. et al., Eds (2000). *The dictionary of human geography*. Oxford, Blackwell. p.181.

\(^{35}\) The notion ‘discourse’, however, is not purely linguistic, but instead encompasses the ‘series of representations, practices and performances through which meanings are produced, connected into networks and legitimised’. For instance, buildings and gestures are discursive and can serve to reinforce or contradict, the more obviously discursive, messages contained within the language of foreign policy practitioners. See Gregory, ‘Discourse’ p.181. Nor is discourse equivalent or reducible to ‘ideas’. See Hansen, ‘Security’ p.18.

\(^{36}\) Hansen, ‘Security’ p.18.

\(^{37}\) Ibid., pp.18, 17.
‐things’ – ‘objects, subjects, states, living beings, and material structures’ – is always constructed in language. These ‘things’ possess no intrinsic or essential qualities. Thus, as a site of contestation for the production, reproduction, inclusion and exclusion of particular subjectivities and representations, language is political. Thirdly, meaning and identities are constructed in language through simultaneous processes of linking and differentiation. For instance, ‘coalition’ constructions of the ‘the Taleban’, ‘Al Qaida’ and ‘Afghanistan’, after 9-11, linked ideas of Afghanistan as barbarian, underdeveloped, violent and irrational, simultaneously reinforcing ideas of the Self through juxtaposition to ideas of ‘freedom loving nations’ as civilised, developed, controlled and rational.

Where processes of linking and differentiation achieve partial and temporary stability, regularity in connections and juxtapositions becomes evident. Here, discourses are established and maintained, which demonstrate relative (but always incomplete) fixity in the systematic construction of meaning and identity. As Hansen notes, poststructuralism recognises ‘structure’ and ‘post’; discourses are structured systems of linguistic construction albeit inevitably marked by instability and incompleteness. This systematicity yet inherent instability and incompleteness ‘brings to the fore the importance of political agency and the political production and reproduction of discourses’. Discourses are political. As impermanent constructions of reality, which are created through and dependent upon human agency, discourses are a medium through which power operates to create knowledge. This power-knowledge nexus serves to demarcate acceptable and unacceptable ways of talking and thinking. Thus for Judith Butler, discourses mark the limits of what it is possible to say.

38 Ibid., p.18
39 Ibid., pp.18-19
41 Hansen, ‘Security’ p.42.
42 Laclau and Mouffe, like Derida, Wittgenstein, Heidegger, stress the ‘impossibility of fixing ultimate meanings’. See Laclau and Mouffe ‘Hegemony’ p.111. Hansen too stresses that poststructuralism is structure but also post; systematic but unstable and incomplete. Hansen, ‘Security’ p.20. And, lastly, it is crucial to stress that discourses are analytical not empirical. See Hansen, ‘Security’ p.51.
43 Hansen, ‘Security’ p.21, drawing on Foucault.
44 This boundary drawing was starkly evident in the response to 9-11, where ‘patriotism’ was used as a tool to curtail dissenting voices. See, for instance, Butler, J. (2004). Precarious life : the powers of mourning and violence. London, Verso.
One of the most persistent (and incorrect) criticisms of a discursive ontology argues that ‘material facts’ are ignored. Adopting a discursive ontology does not deny the materiality of the world, but instead argues that the world is given meaning through discourse. The material is not dissolved; rather the material and the ideational are seen to be fully imbricated in one another. ‘What is denied is not that objects exist externally to thought’; this is neither denied nor asserted, as it is impossible to know either way. Rather the different assertion is made that ‘they could not constitute themselves as objects outside any discursive condition of emergence.’

**Epistemology: ‘How Possible’ Questions and Causation**

A discursive ontology has two important and related epistemological implications. Firstly, recognising the discursively constituted nature of reality lends poststructural analysts to investigate processes of discursive construction. This is reflected in the questions that poststructural analysts ask. Secondly, a discursive ontology, which views the material and ideational as fully imbricated in one another, denies the possibility of identifying causation. In turn, the task of poststructural analysis is not to establish how much discourse matters or to establish whether identity causes foreign policy. Rather, poststructural analysis investigates processes of discursive construction, as inevitable and important operations of power, to understand how certain actions became a possibility.

Conventional and constructivist approaches in IR attempt to explain that state actions were predictable or even probable given a particular set of circumstances. These investigations as to why a certain policy was adopted take as unproblematic the possibility that such a policy

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45 This criticism comes from conventional approaches and thinner versions of constructivism. Larsen for instance employs discourse analysis but clings to the notion of extra-discursive, material facts. These facts include socio-economic statistics, geographical features such as Britain’s island status and geopolitical facts such as national borders. Clearly, all of these ‘facts’ only make sense within prevailing discourses. Moreover, they only matter within particular discursive representations. What is important is not Britain’s island status, but how this is represented. See Larsen, H. (1997). Foreign policy and discourse analysis : France, Britain and Europe. London, Routledge; and for critique, Bulley ‘Ethics’.


47 Laclau and Mouffe. ‘Hegemony’ p.108.

48 Ibid.

could be decided upon and/or undertaken.\textsuperscript{50} For Doty, asking ‘why’, as conventional and constructivist approaches do, circumvents analysis of the way in which the context for foreign policy decisions comes about. Asking ‘why’ takes as given the particular identities, interests and relationships that are themselves the ‘result’ of complex and contestable (i.e. deeply political) operations of power. In contrast, asking ‘how’ seeks to understand the way in which it became possible for a particular decision, policy or action to be undertaken. This possibility is inevitably reliant upon ‘a background of social/discursive practices and meanings’; such a background ‘makes possible the practices as well as the social actors themselves’.\textsuperscript{51} This background is taken as given by asking ‘why’, whereas, by asking ‘how’, poststructural analysts take this background as an indispensable element of political analysis. Asking ‘how’ interrogates that which conventional and constructivist approaches reify: ‘the way in which power works to constitute particular modes of subjectivity and interpretive dispositions.’\textsuperscript{52} Instead of ‘why’, within a discursive ontology, the relevant questions become ‘how did policy A become the only reasonable course of action?’ and, ‘how did policy A come to appear necessary and policy B unthinkable?’\textsuperscript{53}

Asking ‘why’ did the US launch and lead a ‘War on Terror’, unlike Germany which did not participate in the coalition?’ leads inexorably to a philosophy of social science that seeks to establish causation. It is not possible to get behind our language to compare it to that which it describes.\textsuperscript{54} We cannot ‘escape’ our cultural constructions to measure ‘material facts’ or ‘institutionalised norms’ exclusive of their discursive constitution. Moreover, it is not possible, or necessary, within an ontology arguing that everything is discursively constituted, to demonstrate how much discourse matters. Similarly, it is not possible to speak of identity causing foreign policy. Contemporary German identity, in opposition to a temporal Other, cannot be said to have caused German non-participation in the coalition. Identity and foreign policy are mutually constitutive; identity is both a product and a justification of foreign policy.\textsuperscript{55} As foreign policy produces and reproduces identity the separation and independent observation of variables, that a Humean conception of causality requires, is impossible. In short, ontological inseparability prevents poststructural analysis from claiming that identity

\textsuperscript{50} Ibid.  
\textsuperscript{51} Ibid.  
\textsuperscript{52} Ibid., p.299.  
\textsuperscript{53} Ibid., pp.297-8. See also Bulley, ‘Ethics’ p.34.  
causes foreign policy.\textsuperscript{56} This epistemological choice arises from a discursive ontology; it is not a flaw in poststructural methodology.\textsuperscript{57} Instead, it opens a space for the analysis of foreign policy as a process of discursive construction, which is a crucial first step to understanding how the ‘War on Terror’ was possible.\textsuperscript{58}

\textit{Theorising the Agency of Foreign Policy Practitioners}

As well as refuting attempts to establish causation, this paper repudiates analyses that rely upon the reduction of political agents to cultural dupes. However, it is similarly misleading to present overly agentic accounts of foreign policy, whereby the ideas, personality and decision-making of elite political practitioners are privileged at the expense of contextual factors. Contexts facilitate, constrain and shape the agency of foreign policy practitioners. Foreign policy practitioners, as thinking, reflexive agents, exploit, (re)produce and change the contexts in which they operate. This section presents Hay and Jessop’s strategic-relational understanding of structure and agency, which conceptualises strategic actors located within particular strategically selective contexts.\textsuperscript{59} ‘Strategic calculation’ – the ‘formulation of strategy within a context’ – by thinking, reflexive agents is theorised through Barnett’s notion of ‘framing’.\textsuperscript{60} ‘Framing’ recognises the strategic agency of practitioners and the strategic selectivity of contexts, which ensures that, whilst not inevitable, certain courses of action are favoured over others.\textsuperscript{61} Framing is the process by which practitioners embed foreign policy discourse in foreign policy culture, attempting to maximise resonance through an exploitation of contextual specificities. It thus represents a second phase of the ‘how possible’ question, which shifts the focus from ‘how thinkable?’ to ‘how sold?’ Understanding how practitioners framed foreign policy discourse in the ‘War on Terror’ requires consideration of their respective target audiences. Thus this paper concludes by considering ‘for whom’ is foreign policy discourse framed?

\textsuperscript{56} Ibid., p.27.
\textsuperscript{57} Ibid., p.28
\textsuperscript{58} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{61} Such a realisation distances this research from claims that discursively attuned work adopts an ‘anything goes’ mentality. See, Bewes, T. (1997). \textit{Cynicism and postmodernity}. London, Verso.
There have been numerous attempts to overcome the inadequacies of overly intentionalist or structuralist political analysis. These attempts have not ‘overcome’ or ‘solved’ the ontological dualism that they have sought to transcend. The most prominent of these attempts has been Giddens’ theory of structuration. For Giddens, structure and agency are inseparable; flip sides of the same coin. However, his theory of structuration, rather than breaking down the dualism, reinforces the distinction by resorting to a methodological bracketing. This bracketing arises from Giddens’ focus upon the ‘duality of structure’, which correctly asserts the dual nature of structures as both mediums and results of human agency. At its crux, Giddens’ theory claims that structure and agency are ontologically intertwined but epistemologically we are incapable of viewing both simultaneously. Thus, the analyst must ‘bracket off’ one or other in an alternating analysis that, whilst able to analyse the duality of structure and/or agency, ‘is incapable of interrogating the internal relationship between structure and agency’. Giddens’ theory of structuration does not, therefore, achieve an ontological duality (interlinking) of structure and agency, instead delivering an analytical dualism (separation) through a self-imposed methodological bracketing, which derives from the epistemological limitations imposed by his initial ontological position.

Gidden’s initial ontological position, from which the problems of structuration theory arise, is encapsulated in his coin analogy. For Jessop and Hay, structure and agency should not be seen as flip sides of the same coin, but as metals in the alloy from which the coin is forged. For Jessop and Hay, the distinction between structure and agency is ‘purely analytical’ and

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63 Archer’s morphogenetic approach, for example, is based upon an ontological dualism. See Hay, ‘Political Analysis’ p.126.
64 This focus derives from a belief that we can see only structure or agency at once. Hay, ‘Political Analysis’ p.120.
65 Ibid.
66 Ibid.
67 There are other well documented problems, such as Giddens’ re-definition of structure. Hay, ‘Political Analysis’ p.121.
68 Hay, ‘Political Analysis’ p.127
should not be reified into a ‘rigid ontological dualism’.\(^6^9\) Structure and agency, ‘from our vantage point’ do not exist independently, ‘but through their relational interaction’; they are ‘completely interwoven’ such that we can see neither ‘alloy only the product of their fusion’.\(^7^0\)

Recognising the ontological duality of structure and agency (two highly abstract concepts) leads Jessop and Hay’s strategic-relational approach to focus on the substantive interplay of **strategic action** and the **strategically selective context** it operates within and impacts upon.\(^7^1\) This duality is achieved in two steps (see Figure 1). Firstly, starting from the analytical dualism of structure and agency, one is brought into the other, generating a structured context (an action setting) and a contextualised actor (a situated agent).\(^7^2\) Secondly, the move is repeated to bring the structural context and contextualised actor into each other, yielding ‘a new conceptual pairing in which the dualism of structure and agency has been dissolved’.\(^7^3\) Jessop’s ‘strategic actor’ and ‘strategically selective context’ far better reflect ‘both the manner in which actors appropriate’ their contextual environment and ‘the manner in which that context circumscribes the parameters of possible actions for them’.\(^7^4\)

A strategic-relational approach therefore turns from the abstract notions of structure and agency to consider the substantive examples of the interaction between strategic actors and the strategic context in which they are located. It recognises that ‘agents both internalise perceptions of their context and consciously orient themselves towards that context in choosing between potential courses of action’.\(^7^5\) Likewise, contexts present an ‘unevenly contoured terrain which favours certain strategies over others and hence selects for certain outcomes while mitigating against others’.\(^7^6\) Over time, strategic action yields ‘direct effects’ upon the context in which it occurs and ‘strategic learning’ as actors judge the effects of strategic action to modify future agency.\(^7^7\) Thus ‘the interaction of strategy and context serves to shape both the development of that context and the very conduct and identity of

\(^{6^9}\) Hay, ‘Political Analysis’ p.127. This refusal to reify analytical categories is in keeping with the wider project of poststructural analysis.

\(^{7^0}\) Ibid.

\(^{7^1}\) Ibid.

\(^{7^2}\) Ibid. p.128 and Jessop, ‘Institutional’ p.1224.

\(^{7^3}\) Hay, ‘Political Analysis’ p.128.

\(^{7^4}\) Ibid.

\(^{7^5}\) Ibid., p.129.

\(^{7^6}\) Ibid.

\(^{7^7}\) Ibid., p.133; Jessop, ‘Institutional’ pp.1224, 1227.
strategic actors after the event’. Despite being written for different subdisciplinary audiences, Hay and Jessop’s strategic-relational approach, whilst being theoretically more advanced, demonstrates significant parallels with Barnett’s notion of ‘framing’ in IR.

Figure 1 The Strategic-relational Approach

Abstract Structure Agency Dualism

Concrete Structurally selective Strategically selective

Action setting Actor in context

Socialised agent

Dualism

Context

ii) Framing

‘States need to justify the wars they wage, they must be constructed as just and perceived as just by citizens’; ‘[h]ow states justify their wars differs greatly however’.

The act of going to war is so costly as to warrant extraordinary discursive effort to persuade audiences and populations of its necessity, virtue and practicality. This extraordinary discursive effort is rarely random in nature, but seeks to persuade a population of key arguments. These arguments may well be repeated across a coalition of states participating in the same interventions. However, when this occurs, the unique strategically selective context of domestic foreign policy culture and the domestic political landscape ensure that political practitioners act strategically – and thus differently from coalition partners – to ensure that their foreign policy discourse is appealing. The question of ‘appealing to whom?’ is vital and

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79 Hay and Jessop have written largely from a position of ‘historical institutionalism’, in contrast to constructivist IR.
80 Taken from Hay, ‘Political Analysis’ p. 128.
82 See, for instance, Jackson, ‘Writing’ p.1.
is considered in the next section. Here, Barnett’s notion of ‘framing’ is introduced to conceptualise the manner in which foreign policy discourse is both targeted at specific audiences by embedding foreign policy discourse in foreign policy culture to maximise resonance.

That politics is different from one state to another is a political truism so apparently obvious that it is often taken for granted. However, understanding how politics comes to differ between states is an important theoretical and substantive task. Foreign policy is a particularly effective way of comparing ‘politics’ and political processes between states, as it is, by definition, a cross-border issue. This is especially true when comparing coalition foreign policy, whereby, ‘officially’ at least, states are adopting the same foreign policy. How then, and by what process, does foreign policy discourse come to vary between coalition states? This paper adopts Barnett’s notion of framing as a way in which to conceptualise the inevitable process of domestic contextualisation that occurs even when dealing with ‘mutual’ coalition foreign policy.

Framing ‘highlights that actors are constantly attempting to guide political mobilisation toward a particular outcome and for a particular goal by using symbols, metaphors and cognitive cues to organise experience and fix meaning to events’. The concept of framing is ‘critical for understanding the cultural foundations that make possible and desirable certain actions’. The ‘calculations of strategically-minded political elites’ are, of course, delineated by the domestic cultural and political context that shapes ‘which narrative and frames are selected and become politically consequential’. Crucially, ‘actors strategically deploy frames’ for a variety of reasons, including to: ‘situate events’; ‘interpret problems’; ‘fashion a shared understanding’; and, significantly, to ‘mobilise and guide social action’.

Barnett makes two important further observations on framing. Firstly, for practitioners, framing is a contested and competitive process ‘because how the event is understood will have important consequences for mobilising action and furthering their interests’. This process of strategic framing sees foreign policy practitioners draw on ‘cultural symbols that

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84 Ibid., p.9.
85 Ibid.
86 Ibid., p.15.
87 Ibid.,
are selectively chosen from a cultural toolchest and creatively converted’ into the frames deployed in foreign policy discourse. For Barnett, practitioners employ ‘a stock of symbols’, from that cultural toolchest, ‘to mobilise sentiment and guide action’ for ‘strategic reasons and principled purposes’. Thus for Barnett, framing is processual, contested and instrumental. Significantly, Barnett’s notion of framing is far more ‘explicit’ than Hay’s use of ‘strategy’. Both framing and strategy are the ‘intentional conduct oriented towards the environment in which it is to occur’, ‘motivated by the desire to realize certain outcomes’, which, in order to succeed, ‘must be informed by a strategic assessment of the relevant context’. However, Hay distinguishes between intuitive and explicit strategic action.

What do actors know? What is their motivation? How can we know? For Hay, whilst all action is strategic (i.e. intentional conduct oriented towards the environment in which it is to occur for instrumental reasons), agency can be conducted consciously (explicit strategy) or unconsciously (intuitive strategy). Whilst it is likely that the notion of explicit strategy, towards which Barnett hints at, is appropriate for analysing the discourse of foreign policy practitioners, it is not a distinction that can be confirmed or that is necessary. In either case, the process of framing operates in the same way and attempting to distinguish between conscious and unconscious framing requires an epistemological solipsism which appears untenable. Ascribing motivation, from a poststructural approach, is an impossibility; however, with a strategic-relational appreciation of framing, it is not a crucial distinction to make as both explicit and intuitive strategy operate in the same manner.

Barnett’s second point is that ‘although frames are always important for collective mobilization, their importance is amplified at historical moments defined by cultural contradictions and competing visions for the future’. Whilst this is correct, framing also achieves heightened significance, not when there are multiple competing frames, but when there exists a lack of framing discourses. Such a scenario was evident in the void of 9-11,

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89 Barnett, ‘Culture’ p.15. Barnett is much more ‘explicit’ than Hay who distinguishes between explicit (deliberate) and intuitive (unconscious) strategy.
90 Hay, ‘Political Analysis’ p.129.
91 Ibid., p.132.
92 Ibid.
94 Barnett, ‘Culture’ p.15.
when a perceived inability to even comprehend events raised the impact of the decisive intervention conducted by the Bush administration as it sought to discursively frame a particular and contestable narrative. In the 9-11 void, Bush did ‘a remarkable job of defining the attacks of September 11 to his advantage’; the discursive framing that he employed was ‘a key factor in his success’, which saw him elevated from a perceived poor leader to an increasingly popular wartime President.95

Clearly, it ‘would be extremely unlikely – and politically unsavvy – for politicians to articulate foreign policy without any concern for the representations found within the wider public sphere as they attempt to present their policies as legitimate to their constituencies’.96 Within a strategic-relational approach to structure and agency, framing recognises that practitioners construct frames that situate events ‘in ways that mesh with the cultural terrain’.97 This process of ‘meshing’ or ‘plugging into’ represents the embedded nature of foreign policy as a culturally embedded discourse. Before turning to consider the elements of foreign policy culture, with which foreign policy discourse must mesh, it is necessary to consider ‘for whom?’ foreign policy discourse is framed.

### iii) Target Audience

Since Westphalia, and despite the ever-increasing role of transnational flows and subnational movements, the state remains the most important level of political organisation. The ‘War on Terror’ was launched by a state and has been conducted by a coalition of states.98 It is a function of democracy that state leaders, and other foreign policy practitioners, have had to target foreign policy discourse, first and foremost, at their respective domestic populations. Although Howard, Blair and Bush, in particular, have, at times, addressed other (national, regional and global) audiences, their respective domestic audiences remain the most important. All consistently had to explain, justify and sell foreign policy discourse to the population of the state that they represent; the state that elected them and held the power to re-elect them. Differing national contexts often account for much of the variation in foreign

97 Barnett, ‘Culture’ p.15.
98 Although non-state members have been incorporated on an ad hoc basis e.g. The Northern Alliance in Afghanistan.
policy discourse within a coalition. In the ‘War on Terror’, however, the US, Britain and Australia have been marked by the targeting of specific groups within the domestic population, which has shaped respective foreign policy discourses and the differences between them. This feature has resulted from the increasing significance afforded to measuring the electorate, identifying important categories and groups of voters, and devising strategies and discourses that appeal to them.

Firstly, going to war requires popular support or acquiescence. If this is lost, it is incredibly difficult for a state to launch or continue a war. Secondly, state representatives fear electoral failure and thus attempt to ‘sell’ decisions by framing foreign policy discourse in a manner that maximises popular resonance. This sees practitioners sculpt discourses that mesh with foreign policy culture. It is a function of democracy that the targeted population is domestic, but a function of the domestic political (and often electoral) landscape that ensure the target audience is defined more narrowly.

Targeting key sectors of the electorate has long been a feature of electoral strategies. However, a number of factors have heightened the significance of framing foreign policy discourse in recent years: the increased sensitivities that media exposure has brought; the larger budget for, and sophistication of, measuring the electorate; and the higher profile of political advisors in manipulating the peculiarities of specific electoral systems and the social dynamics of domestic political landscapes. The growing importance of paid professionals in charting a strategic course of action has been much lamented in the US, Britain and Australia and a growing body of literature is assessing the impacts of political ‘spin’. So-called ‘spin’ describes the way in which politicians represent issues, events and policies in the best possible light for themselves, or their party. ‘Spin’ includes the way in which foreign policy discourse is deliberately framed to maximise resonance. This framing is inevitably targeted. Targeting policies and political discourse has become a multi-million pound business in the US, Britain and Australia. Being able to target key groups of voters has been vital to electoral success in recent general elections and successful politicians have been acutely aware of this.

Academic analyses have often recognised the importance of targeted political discourse but have rarely explicitly theorised how such a targeting and framing functions. Within IR, Jackson, as a key figure in the analysis of the language of the ‘War on Terror’, has stressed that ‘terrorism discourse is both deeply embedded in state institutions and is functional to electoral politics’. In a similar vein, within critical geopolitics, O’Loughlin et al stress that ‘[g]eopolitical imaginations vary significantly depending on social status and education, gender and age, region and the size of a settlement, and are closely related with political values and voting patterns’. Although it seems logical to assert practitioners ‘concerns about’ domestic public opinion and ‘satisfying various domestic constituencies’, rarely is it noted how specific groups are chosen as the target of political discourse. Understanding ‘for whom’ foreign policy discourse is framed requires an appreciation of the electoral dynamics of the domestic population.

In the US, Britain and Australia, all three countries have enjoyed a relatively stable period of government during the ‘War on Terror’. However, understanding this stability requires a consideration of earlier electoral strategies and key sectors of the population. US, British and Australian elections do not operate on a proportional representation basis. Instead, the states are divided into constituent regions that operate on a ‘winner-takes-all’ approach, whereby the votes of that area go towards the election of only one candidate or party. This regional homogenisation serves to accentuate geographical variations and social, cultural and demographic differences. It also ensures that, at any given time, depending on how political candidates divide the electorate, certain groups and regions take on heightened electoral significance. Devising a political strategy that targets such groups has been central in shaping the foreign policy discourse of Bush, Blair and Howard. Understanding the foreign policy culture of these groups and the way in which foreign policy practitioners act strategically to plug into them, enables an explanation of differences in coalition foreign

100 Jackson, ‘An analysis of EU counterterrorism discourse’ p.245.
103 This was especially the case from 9-11 to mid 2003, covered by this research.
104 Limited exceptions exist, such as the Maine Method.
policy. Having theorised the nature of embeddedness, we can return to flesh out an understanding of foreign policy as culturally embedded discourse.

**O’Tuathail’s Framework: Foreign Policy as a Culturally Embedded Discourse**

‘Critical geopolitics’ analyses foreign policy as culturally embedded discourse. In spearheading the subdiscipline, Gearoid O’Tuathail has developed a theoretical framework, which aims to increase theoretical and conceptual clarity. In keeping with ‘critical geopolitics’, this framework theorises foreign policy as both discursive and culturally embedded. It does not, however, theorise the nature of ‘embeddedness’. This has been attempted in the previous section, by developing a strategic-relational approach to structure and agency, in which practitioners frame foreign policy discourse to mesh with foreign policy culture. Whose foreign policy culture is targeted is a crucial concern. O’Tuathail acknowledges this in attempts to apply his framework to Russian foreign policy discourse in the ‘War on Terror’, arguing that the success of Putin’s ‘risky westward turn’ has relied on achieving high degrees of resonance with ‘ordinary Russians’. However, inevitably, this resonance ‘is caught up in the web of domestic politics and traditional divisions regarding the geopolitical orientation of the country’; ‘various socio-demographic groups … were the targets of political messages in the recent Duma and Presidential election.’ Targeting specific sections of the population requires foreign policy discourse to be framed by practitioners. This framing draws on the foreign policy culture of the target audience to maximise resonance. This section theorises foreign policy culture, by drawing on and developing O’Tuathail’s framework.

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107 O’Tuathail ‘Geopolitical Structures’.
108 Despite hinting at the importance of specific ‘influential groups’ and ‘population groups’ and ‘intellectuals of statecraft’. O’Tuathail ‘Geopolitical Structures’ p.84, 93.
110 O’Loughlin et al., “Risky” p.27.
All states have a foreign policy culture, which O’Tuathail defines as ‘a culture of conceptualising their state and its unique identity, position and role in the world’. Foreign policy culture ‘concerns prevailing public opinion about the role and mission of a state in world affairs, and popular perceptions of the dangers, foreign policy priorities and security challenges facing a state in world affairs’. The conditioning factors of foreign policy culture include: ‘a state’s geographical situation, historical formation and bureaucratic organisation, discourses of national identity and traditions of theorising its relationship to the wider world, and the networks of power that operate within the state’. Of course, within a discursive ontology, it is not ‘physical geography’ that determines foreign policy culture; instead, it is the ‘cultural interpretation’ of physical geography that is significant in sculpting foreign policy culture.

Foreign policy culture is an encompassing term, incorporating the foreign policy traditions, strategic culture and geographical imaginations of a population. Foreign policy culture thus includes the ‘culture of knowledge’ and ‘interpretation of the state as a foreign policy actor in world affairs’ at a popular level, as well as a states ‘war fighting style’ (strategic culture) and ‘historical schools of foreign policy theory and practice’ (foreign policy traditions) at a more formal level. To illustrate, US strategic culture has long been characterised by illusions of Homeland impenetrability (sheltered by two vast oceans), a zero-death military culture and a hypervaluisation of American life. US foreign policy traditions share these assumptions but contest the role of the US in the world, including the correct use of the military. A foreign policy tradition is an ‘historical cannon of thought on state identity, foreign policy, and the national interest’. Foreign policy traditions are characterised by distinct social bases and cultural identities, for example, drawing on Mead’s work, the US

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115 Ibid.
folk-nationalist, WASP culture of Jacksonian military populism contrasts, for instance, the pluralism of the business classes promoting Hamiltonian views. Mead identifies four historical schools of foreign policy tradition, which represent the more formalised ‘high culture’ of a state’s foreign policy culture. Nonetheless, these schools have evolved in US foreign policy culture as a ‘national conversation’ that finds contributors and support at popular, formal and practitioner levels. Underpinning the competing voices in this conversation are, frequently contrasting, intersubjective pictures of the globe. These cognitive cartographies are an indispensible element of foreign policy culture and provide a foundation from which derivative arguments are made.

Foreign policy culture, incorporating foreign policy traditions and strategic culture, is shaped by, and often inseparable from, the geographical imagination. The geographical imagination is a ‘vital building block’ of foreign policy culture, but ‘not quite the same thing’. ‘[I]maginative geographies fold distance into difference through a series of spatialisations. They multiply partitions and enclosures that demarcate "the same" from "the other," at once constructing and calibrating a gap between the two by designating in one's mind a familiar space which is "ours" and an unfamiliar space beyond "ours" which is "theirs."’

O’Tuathail takes this definition and invests it with contemporary geopolitical specificity: ‘a geographical imagination can, thus, be defined as the way in which influential groups in the cultural life of a state define that state and nation within the world. It addresses the primary acts of identification and boundary-formation that population groups within a state engages.’ Such a definition brings to the fore ‘geographies of the unconscious’, which mark the foundations of spatial identification and exclusion. Questions of the Self, Others, friends and enemies, Homelands and targets, distance and proximity are resolved through the geographical imagination.

The categories presented here constitute analytical lenses through which foreign policy can be analysed as culturally embedded discourse. Figure 2 ‘presents an idealised organising

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122 See Mead, Special Providence’. The acronym WASP stands for White Anglo-Saxon Protestant.
123 O’Loughlin et al., ‘Russian Geopolitical Culture’ p.324.
124 For O’Tuathail, foreign policy is split into popular, formal and practitioner levels. See, O’Tuathail et al., ‘Geopolitics Reader’.
125 O’Tuathail, ‘Geopolitical Structures’ p.84.
127 O’Tuathail, ‘Geopolitical Structures’ p.84.
image’, schematising the relation of foreign policy discourse to elements of foreign policy culture. Summary definitions are presented in figure 3.

Figure 2  Framework for Analysing Foreign Policy as Culturally Embedded Discourse

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128 Ibid., p.97.
This paper develops O’Tuathail’s approach in stressing that whilst the foreign policy culture of a state is crucial, it is imperative to acknowledge the contested nature of foreign policy culture, which is more frequently shared by groups within and/or across populations than by an entire nation-state. O’Tuathail hints at this in both the application and articulation of his framework, talking of ‘influential groups’, ‘population groups’, ‘socio-demographic groups’ and ‘geopolitical orientation clusters’. Yet, for O’Tuathail, foreign policy culture is the ‘cultural and organisational processes by which foreign policy is made in states’. This veils the two moves contained within the foreign policy process. As was argued in the previous section, considering ‘how possible’, requires not only a consideration of ‘how thinkable’ but, additionally, ‘how sold’. The latter is overlooked in O’Tuathail’s definition. Asking ‘how sold’ highlights the strategic agency of foreign policy practitioners and the inevitable feedback loop of the foreign policy process as practitioners adopt ‘recursively selected strategies and tactics’, which target specific sections within the population of the state. In short, ‘critical geopolitics’ must pursue a non-state-centric reasoning and recognise

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129 Taken (and modified) from O’Tuathail, ‘Geopolitical Structures’; O’Tuathail uses terms with ‘geopolitics’ rather than ‘foreign policy’.

130 In ‘Geopolitical Structures’, O’Tuathail talks of ‘influential groups’ and ‘population groups’ in defining the geographical imagination. O’Tuathail, ‘Geopolitical Structures’ p.84. O’Loughlin et al., talk of ‘socio-demographic groups’ and ‘geopolitical orientation clusters’. O’Loughlin et al., ‘Russian Geopolitical Culture’ and O’Loughlin et al., ‘Risky’.


the significance of a lower level of social organisation to explain differences in coalition foreign policy discourse.

This paper then adds to O’Tuathail’s framework two crucial recognitions. Firstly, that foreign policy discourse is not ‘merely’ drawn from foreign policy culture, but is sculpted to mesh with it. The relationship between foreign policy discourse and foreign policy culture is messy, circular and recursive. For example, whilst practitioners are often habitually located within a foreign policy tradition, they still engage in a process of framing foreign policy discourse to resonate with members of the population sympathetic to that historical school; this occurred after 9-11 as Bush – a habitually Jacksonian president – nonetheless strategically sculpted a foreign policy discourse that appealed to militarily populist Jacksonian America, hoping to reassert US strength. O’Tuathail is aware of the importance of practitioners, but his framework implies an upward ‘flow’ from foreign policy culture to foreign policy discourse, which is mediated only by normative foreign policy visions. This paper stresses the strategic nature of agency, which ensures that foreign policy discourse is embedded in foreign policy culture not just through ‘how thinkable’ but ‘how sold’; it is a messy, circular and recursive relationship. Secondly, O’Tuathail is wrong to pin down foreign policy culture to the level of the state. Whilst the state remains the most important site of foreign policy discourse and states do possess distinct foreign policy cultures, these are highly heterogeneous, contingent and contested. Smaller population groups within a state are more likely to ‘share’ commonalities in foreign policy culture, particularly when considering concepts such as foreign policy tradition. Thus, while it is possible to talk of a state’s foreign policy culture, it is equally plausible (and in this analysis, vital) to consider the foreign policy culture of population groups within the state.

**Conclusion**

This paper is located within a wider research project inspired by the research question ‘how was the ‘War on Terror’ possible?’ To answer this question it is necessary to consider the foreign policy of coalition states. A discursive approach enables us to interrogate the differences in coalition foreign policy, which are crucial to an understanding of how the ‘War on Terror’ was possible. A purely discursive approach, however, fails to take into consideration the domestic contextual factors that partially account for the differences in
foreign policy discourse between coalition states. These differences, and the reasons for them, helped to render the ‘War on Terror’ possible. Thus, this paper develops a framework for the analysis of foreign policy as culturally embedded discourse, enabling a comparative analysis capable of drawing out and explaining differences in foreign policy discourse between coalition states.

After highlighting the strengths and weaknesses of positions at opposite ends of the poststructural-constructivist spectrum, rather than turning to ‘critical constructivism’, a potential solution was presented in the critical geopolitics approach of Gearoid O’Tuathail. His framework is capable of guiding an analysis of coalition foreign policy in the ‘War on Terror’, which recognises both the discursive and culturally embedded nature of foreign policy. However, O’Tuathail is conspicuously silent on theorising the nature of ‘embeddedness’ within a definition of foreign policy as culturally embedded discourse. O’Tuathail’s framework was thus developed in four stages. Firstly, building on Doty, it was argued that asking ‘how possible?’ must be split into ‘how thinkable?’ and ‘how sold?’ in order to encapsulate the circular, processual and recursive nature of foreign policy. Secondly, to understand the agency of foreign policy practitioners, within this circular framework, Jessop and Hay’s strategic-relational approach was used to overcome the structure-agency dualism prevalent in existing accounts. Thirdly, within a structural-relational understanding, Barnett’s notion of framing was introduced to encapsulate the way in which practitioners act strategically to sculpt a foreign policy discourse that will maximise resonance by plugging into foreign policy culture. Fourthly, when dealing with the dynamic political landscapes of democratic coalition states, it was argued that it is imperative to consider for whom foreign policy is framed.

This paper thus continues O’Tuathail’s call for theoretical and conceptual clarity by theorising the notion of ‘embeddedness’ within his own understanding of foreign policy as culturally embedded discourse. Analysing foreign policy as culturally embedded discourse, the framework presented here enables a comparative analysis of coalition foreign policy in the ‘War on Terror’, which in turn helps us to understand how the ‘War on Terror’ was possible.

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133 O’Tuathail, ‘Geopolitical Structures’.