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Edited by
Fredrik Bynander and
Stefano Guzzini



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Rethinking Foreign Policy

This edited volume is a tribute to, and a debate with, the scholarship of Walter Carlsnaes and his contribution to the study of foreign policy in both its conceptualisation and application.

This book probes the theoretical boundaries of foreign policy analysis, and questions orthodox understandings of the field. It examines the agency–structure debate, the question of how human decision making affects the norms and institutions of international interactions (and vice versa), and analyses how the study of foreign policy can be applied to the European Union as a supranational entity devoid of traditional statehood. Contributors offer an in-depth discussion on the intricacies of studying foreign policy, and provide new perspectives on the standing of the European Union (EU) as a foreign policy entity.

Rethinking Foreign Policy will be of interest to students and scholars of International Relations, Foreign Policy, Global Governance, EU Studies and the work of Walter Carlsnaes.

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General preface

Fredrik Bynander and Stefano Guzzini

This anthology on the study of foreign policy is inspired by the work of Walter Carlsnaes, Professor of Government at Uppsala University and longstanding contributor to core theoretical debates in international relations and foreign policy analysis. The authors are colleagues and friends of Walter who did not just gather for a traditional Festschrift in his honour, but wanted to make a more coordinated contribution to the topics closest to his heart. In so doing, we either engaged in a dialogue directly with his work or picked one of his favourite issues for our analysis.

There are certainly aspects of his scholarship that perhaps made our endeavour difficult: its impressive theoretical scope and depth, its polemic qualities for the debates that have been engaged, and the complexity of the issues broached. Yet the clarity of argument and the acute sense of relevance that you get from reading his work make it easy to interact with and the room for dialogue considerable.

In conceiving this volume, we decided to focus on the core of Walter's contribution, the study of foreign policy¹ – but in the particular way he conceived of it, with an interpretivist theory of action at its heart. For, despite having had most of his early experiences in South Africa, and having received much of his collegiate education in the United States, Walter is at heart a thinker in a more classical European tradition. He has resisted the calls for instant answers residing in unreflecting rationalism or behaviouralism. In its stead, he favours an altogether nuanced approach to the subject of international relations and foreign policy. Walter's is a more humanist tradition, and his world is succinctly populated by ideas, governed by the interplay between actors, dispositions and structures, and only understandable through a comprehensive perspective. This principled position may not have earned him any shortcuts into the scholarly walk of fame, but they guarantee that his relevance will be above and beyond yesterday's topic du jour.

Foreign policy has always been in the foreground of Walter Carlsnaes' work, as an object of study from a comparative perspective, and with considerable attention to ideational reasons of foreign policy actions. Ideology, he argues, works primarily through intentional psychological (as opposed to dispositional) processes and he thus takes issue with behaviourist and structuralist explanations

of foreign policy actions. Individuals as decision makers are, in Carlsnaes' world not merely 'rational actors', but meaning-givers. The trappings of rational choice explanations, therefore, are not sufficient for providing a theoretical guide to political action. The typical rational choice causation is teleological (meaning a simple statement of the intention-action relationship) and thus ignorant of underlying *reasons* for political behaviour. Carlsnaes has thus carved a niche for an interpretivist science of political action as reasoned choice – informed by ideas – in a time when the 'constructivist turn' in international relations was yet to come.

Another theme that became increasingly important in Carlsnaes' scholarship is the standing of the European Union in foreign policy and as a foreign policy actor. In *European Foreign Policy: The EC and Changing Perspectives in Europe*, a volume co-edited with Steve Smith, he helped usher in European foreign policy as a major sub-discipline of the field. The debate that the two editors decided to use to encapsulate their book was the agency–structure debate, and it is fair to say that this exchange of ideas between the co-editors has come to frame a longstanding and important debate in the study of international cooperation as will be illustrated by several of the contributions to the present volume. As the founding editor for the *European Journal of International Relations*, Carlsnaes encouraged scholarship that took these metatheoretical issues seriously. The journal became a clearing-house of critical theory and constructivist approaches.

The authors in this volume have been fully committed to engage with these important topics: how to conceive of a theory of political action and how that impacts the study of foreign policy?

The first two chapters give a more general overview of Carlsnaes' contribution, be it his intellectual scholarship and his role in the development of IR as a discipline. Stefano Guzzini's chapter deals with the importance of conceptualisation for the analytical use of theory, and the troubling back seat this endeavour has taken to operationalisation and a rush to arrive at a 'clean scientific language'. Guzzini argues that Carlsnaes' early engagement with conceptual analysis, and with the concept of ideology, is a necessary ingredient for understanding his theory of political action and study of foreign policy. In so doing, the chapter problematises the co-dependence of theory and concept, as does Carlsnaes, and its repercussions for the study of foreign policy. A.J.R. Groom takes a hard look at the sociological and political underpinnings of international relations and foreign policy as its study is expanding across borders beyond the habitual western 'zone of comfort'. This process is one of engaging with the Other, and unveils the Westphalian system as a means of exclusion, which has come to distinguish also the social sciences. In this light, Groom points to the significance of, as well as Carlsnaes' contribution to, the *professionalisation* and the *Europeanisation* of International Relations. If IR is indeed to go global, so Groom argues, this development is crucial for the discipline to develop with full engagement with the Other.

Colin Wight, in his chapter, scrutinises the problems attached with the often haphazard and unreflecting treatment of agents and structures as 'mutually