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## Foreign policy making with the academe



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### ABSTRACT

As career foreign policy practitioners, we were asked by a group of academics/political scientists led by North Carolina State University to evaluate a series of papers they had prepared on energy security and the energy and security nexus. The organizers noted that an important stimulus for our invitation was that the academic community was hearing that their work needed to be more policy relevant, that it needed to be more “applicable” to help policy makers make better decisions. So they asked us to join their workshop to help determine how their papers and the arguments within them might better elaborate the value of and means to effect cooperation on energy based on the connection between energy and security. And if so, how to stimulate a sustained dialogue between and among scholars and policy-makers because of the prospect of making better informed policy.

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We knew from our own experience at the U.S. Department of State and other agencies the pressure on foreign policy makers to better understand the context in which they were working so that there would be fewer negative or unintended consequences of their policies that could have been avoided if they had taken the time to learn more. We also knew that energy had had an interesting history in the foreign policy community. This is perhaps best characterized by the fact that over the last decade, the State Department elevated energy to the responsibility of an Assistant Secretary as awareness grew of energy’s vital role to national stability, national security and international security due to the increasingly connected world.

Policy makers/implementers (henceforth “policy practitioners”<sup>1</sup>) and political scientists/academics seek to understand phenomena, but for different purposes. Academics seek patterns of causation and regularities in the course of events on a macro-scale, what conditions were necessary and/or sufficient to the occurrence of particular events or render those events unlikely. Policy makers on the other hand often must seek to manipulate individual events on the micro-scale to produce or prevent specific outcomes. Yet, on a practical level, such efforts to comprehend events, and in particular the processes of causation, overlap. Primarily then,

the differences may result from different timetables. Academics are looking at the past and maybe the present to examine and understand what happened or will happen. They often look at the past to help predict the future. Policy practitioners deal in the present and are focused on making the future what they think is best for the national interests. Put another way, instead of working from a theory about the forces operating in history, they deal with the nitty-gritty of what needs to be done now and with whom. So the timelines and timing of actions by these two sets of players differ. This could be an advantage, and this has been one reason why these two communities seek to interact.

So how should/can the academics and foreign policy makers best be tied together? When we began to evaluate these papers on this basis, we were motivated by questions raised to us by the academic community and our own sense of why these two communities might and might not value dialogue. These included:

- 1) Would policy practitioners’ policies and/or decisions be better if they had some of the perspective and objectivity that academic analysis can provide?
- 2) Would either one really accept what the other said or are their cultures and methods too different?
- 3) What kinds of insights from academic writings would policy practitioners seek?
- 4) What conditions or circumstances will facilitate a policy practitioner taking time to include an academic expert in the policy process?
- 5) Is a sustained dialogue useful or is the separation between them what makes their contributions most valued, including to each other?

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<sup>1</sup> “Policy makers/implementers” is a rather awkward formulation to emphasize that in the practice of governance these are seen as two different functions, one at the political level of government and the other at the senior career level. With the term “policy-practitioners” we wish to emphasize the commonality in these two functions while not conflating them or erasing the differences.

We focused on why the interactions might be useful and the circumstances where this applies the best. We did not take on the evaluation of how best the two communities might work together to promote cooperation in energy as this was beyond our expertise.

As decades long foreign policy practitioners, each of us has had different experiences in interacting with academics and we came to some shared views. While there is value to policy practitioners interacting with academics, these interactions are constrained by several factors. One is that policy practitioners must look at all situations as multidimensional problems, and rarely can focus policy or decisions on a single issue such as energy security. This is one reason why we support this exercise's approach of looking at energy and security and not just energy security. This is not to claim that everything is connected to everything else. Rather, in our experience, we have found that the connections important for implementing a policy objective may cut across very different and often apparently unrelated issues. A current example is the concern that if the U.S. Congress were to reject the nuclear agreement that the P5+1 negotiated with Iran that this may hurt future agreements the U.S. wants with the Europeans. Congress' action would constitute U.S. rejection of an agreement we concluded with key allies Germany, France, and the UK; one we committed to negotiate in good faith and concluded with them, Russia, and China, not just with Iran. U.S. credibility and reliability, which are already tarnished in these countries by continuing leaks of U.S. spying on their heads of state, would be further damaged. Eventually, trade and environment agreements could be affected because they perceive the U.S. as an unreliable negotiating partner. Hence, while the Iran nuclear agreement is often portrayed, especially by the media, in a bilateral U.S.-Iran context, it is not, and its rejection by Congress could have consequences in some very different contexts.

Second, as mentioned above, foreign policy practitioners live in a "what do we do next?" world. General patterns of causality can be important to understand the context and broad outlines of the problem, but are of less use than specific or unique factors that can be used to shape the most effective country-specific decisions. Metaphorically, if we think of an equation that predicts a country's behavior from correlated factors the better or more available policy options are usually things that would fall in the error term, i.e., with little to no correlation or relationship to the behavior sought. For example, in 1994, Kim Jong-Il (as had his father) specifically wanted the technology of light water nuclear power reactors.<sup>2</sup> This became important when proposing an agreement with the U.S. in return for North Korea giving up nuclear weapons related facilities. The carrot needed to be not just some reliable power generation capability, but one particular nuclear technology. Positive security assurances and diplomatic recognition were also necessary, but not sufficient, to achieve North Korea's agreement. History is replete with such situations where a personal characteristic or interest of a head of government or foreign minister proved key to the course of events.

Third, the government of today works on a 24/7 schedule of demands. As a consequence, foreign policy practitioners have brought many subject matter experts into the government as intelligence analysts, policy advisors, and even at the policy implementation level (such was our experience) to get their input more quickly. While this is a positive in terms of bringing expertise into the policy process, for academic experts this may mean that policy practitioners' need for outside expertise is more limited.

In our experience, advice from academic or think-tank experts is most valuable when it frames the situation or problem in a larger perceptual context, (even more broadly than the earlier example on North Korea, perhaps a regional context) and their analysis ties

disparate elements (threads) of an ongoing situation into one big picture or related ongoing processes, or calls attention to a situation that policy practitioners should know about. The papers by Stulberg and Meierding are particularly forceful in this respect. Stulberg draws an excellent picture of the constraints on the West in placing energy sanctions on Russia due to energy dependence in Europe. Meierding's analysis of some historical examples of energy cooperation shows how difficult it is for rival countries to cooperate on something as important to their security as energy resource developments. Her conclusion, elucidating the need for steps forward in improved relations between rivals before they can successfully cooperate on energy development, is a useful lesson learned for the policy community to remember. Cottrell's opinion that the schism over nuclear energy is threatening progress on climate change and nuclear disarmament also falls in this category.

The papers by Stulberg and by Van de Graaf and Colgan examine the role Russia's natural gas supply policy has played in the Russia-Ukraine crisis – Russia's seizure of Crimea and military support for dissidents in eastern Ukraine – either as a cause or as a dimension of the conflict. Van de Graaf and Colgan's paper on "Russian Gas Games? Energy Security and the 2014 Ukraine Crisis" seeks to show how energy issues "were important in laying the foundations for the conflict rather than triggering the crisis itself." Their analysis indicates that two aspects of energy had significant effects on the Russia-Ukraine crisis: the role of natural gas price disputes between Russia and Ukraine and the nature of Russia as a petrostate which facilitates aggressive foreign policy". They did not see any significant effect from the possibility that Russia may have annexed Crimea for its energy resources. Their analysis provides some useful information on the energy competition history between Ukraine and Russia and a useful perspective on the course of events related to energy leading up to and during the ongoing Russia-Ukraine crisis. Their analysis provides insight helpful to the policy community on the extent to which energy security has been an important issue since before the conflict between Russia and Ukraine and also with the Europeans, who depend on Russia for gas and especially oil, and hence were limited in their ability to craft energy sanctions on Russia for its action in Ukraine. In fact, they warn policy makers that they should not put much stock into use of the "energy weapon given the practical limits to its use" as their article points out. They also draw policy makers' attention to the risks of politicizing the energy trade unless the sanctions on Russia are laid out without impact to current supply. From an energy security standpoint, they suggest policy makers look into a long-term strategy of making Eurasian gas trade less opaque and more market conforming, but also focus on strengthening Ukraine through continued EU and IMF assistance to Ukraine that is leveraged to bring about domestic energy reforms needed to strengthen its energy sector.

Stulberg's "Natural Gas and the Russia-Ukraine Crisis: Strategic paralysis and the Promise of Network Diplomacy" provides an alternative, insightful and sophisticated narrative of the energy geopolitics, woven in time with the Russia-Ukraine crisis. As Van de Graaf and Colgan note, Stulberg also emphasizes that interdependence on natural gas sales has constrained all sides in their use of gas as a tool in dealing with the larger crisis of Russia's aggression in Ukraine. Thus, he opines, policies directed at reversing Russia's aggression in Ukraine cannot rely on gas policy for leverage in the short term. In the longer term, he proposes steps the West can take to reduce European dependence on Russian gas and not hostage to Russian supply. The Western officials who must analyze what options might be available now to the U.S. and Europe to solve the larger issues – stemming Putin's advance into eastern Ukraine and, in fact, getting Russia out and deterring it from any future such action, will find little in gas policy to achieve these ends. Stulberg's long term view of future energy investments focuses on Russia (as

<sup>2</sup> Siegfried S. Hecker, Chaim Braun, & Robert L. Carlin, "North Korea's Light Water Reactor Ambitions," *Journal of Nuclear Materials Management*, Spring 2011.

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