

## **The *agent's* logics of action: defining and mapping political judgment**

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**Abstract.** How do individual actors figure out what to do? This article advocates a departure from carving up research on this key question about political agency into narrow scholarly categories. Such categories, especially what has to become framed as incompatible logics of action in International Relations Theory, may make for neat and tidy scholarly boxes. But they miss the winding roads through which actors come to embark on a course of action. In order to overcome this shortcoming, I start with uncovering an important clue on which authors adhering to different logics of action converge; political agency has a lot to do with making judgments. I proceed with conceptualising political judgment broadly in terms of subsuming particulars and universals. I follow up with outlining a map for empirical research on judgment that helps us follow the actors in how they figure out what to do (the agent's logics of action) rather than superimposing our narrow scholarly categories on their reasoning (a scholarly logic of action). Scrutinising the usefulness of this map, finally, I analyse McNamara's exercise of political agency during the Cuban Missile Crisis. The findings underline my overall argument: the inclusive conceptualisation of political judgment, coupled with the balance of theoretical and empirical inquiry that the research map facilitates, improves on our understandings of how actors figure out what to do.

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## Introduction

How do individual actors figure out what to do? This is an *inevitable* question for studying politics. It is obviously the key question for research that takes the agency of individuals seriously. For such research endeavours, it does not suffice simply to stipulate that individuals have the capacity to make things happen. It is also necessary to scrutinise the ways in which they come to make up their minds about how to put this capacity to use. The question is an important one even for the most determined structuralist account. Such an account requires at least some implicit assumptions about how structure makes individuals figure out what to do. Even if one is to assume this ‘figuring out’, along with the entire exercise of agency, to be entirely determined by structure, it is still human beings and not structures who come to embark on certain courses of action rather than others.

It is not surprising, therefore, that this question receives a lot of scholarly attention in International Relations; it is at the core of the discipline. Sparked by March and Olsen (1989) some twenty years ago, International Relations Theory has grown more and more accustomed to thinking of the proliferating approaches dealing with this question as clusters of logics of action (Risse, 2000; Pouliot, 2008).<sup>1</sup> Four of these logics, often understood as incommensurable paradigms, feature particularly prominently: consequences, appropriateness, argumentation, and practice. According to these logics, individuals figure out what to do by calculating costs and benefits (consequences), abiding by identity-constituting rules (appropriateness), generating a convincing argument (argumentation), or following tacit commonsense (practice).

My three-fold argument uses this distinction of logics of action as a starting point but moves much beyond the incompatibility assumption. First, I argue that logics of action are better understood as overlapping horizons than incommensurable paradigms. In International Relations, many scholars adhering to different logics of action concur that there is a creative element in human reasoning that makes it implausible to reduce scholarly accounts of it to a

deterministic exercise, and they routinely allude to this creative aspect by employing the term ‘judgment’. This shared emphasis on the perils of determinism and the crucial role of judgment constitutes an overlap across logics of action that deserves much more of our attention. The fact that scholars relying on different meta-theoretical, theoretical and methodological assumptions come to the same conclusion – i.e. that judgment plays a key role in politics – strongly suggests that *studying judgment is an important task for the student of politics*. It is all the more an important task because the shared emphasis that judgment matters has not generated much of a research agenda on judgment. Indeed, it has not even prompted much diligence in defining the concept. Judgment seems to be such a self-evident part of political life to us that we forget to ask what it actually is.

Second, I borrow clues provided by all four logics of action, and the Political and Social Theory underpinning them, in order to conceptualise judgment. The definition revolves around particulars and universals. Agents figure out what to do by *subsuming particulars under universals*. This conceptual clarification deliberately refrains from over-conceptualising judgment. How actors come to subsume should be primarily a matter of empirical research rather than subject to a more or less elegant set of assumptions about how they supposedly always do so. Judgment has a lot to do with human creativity. Squeezing this creativity into neat scholarly boxes, such as the entrenched logics of action, is counterproductive. What matters instead is understanding what constitutes logics of action – i.e. what lines of reasoning are compelling – *for them* in a given situation.

Third, I provide a map for studying how actors come to make their judgments. In principle, I agree with Bruno Latour that researchers should ‘follow the actors themselves’ (Latour, 2005: 12) and accept that ‘[t]he task of defining and ordering the social should be left to the actors themselves, not taken up by the analyst’ (Latour, 2005: 23). At the same time, however, my argument goes beyond calls to simply follow the actors. I draw a map meant to help researchers follow these actors. The main interjunctions drawn on the map are the *social*

*dynamics of political judgment*. I identify four key interaction patterns shaping individual judgments. In brief, individuals re-enact their history of interaction with others (*tool kit*); communicating with one another, they potentially shape each other's judgments (*resonance circuit*); they have to adapt and change their judgments, depending on the evolution of the political situation that they engage with and how they engage with it (*co-configurative cycle*); and their judgments feed back into the history of interaction with others (*structuration*).

I probe the usefulness of this research map by analysing the judgments made by Robert McNamara during the Cuban Missile Crisis. This case strongly suggests that the map provides an important added value. Unlike the established logics of action, the map allows for appreciating the *multifaceted nature of political agency*. Trying to figure out what to do, actors routinely twist and intertwine what established scholarly logics of action struggle to keep neat and separate. This twisting and intertwining, in turn, has crucial repercussions for their political efficacy, i.e. whether they fail or succeed to influence political decisions and transform social relations, and for what cause they put this efficacy to use.<sup>2</sup>

The organisation of this article follows the line of argumentation previewed above. First, I review the scholarly literature on logics of action, uncovering the shared research interest in judgment. Second, using clues provided by these horizons, I develop an inclusive definition of political judgment. Third, I draw a map for doing empirical research on political judgment. Fourth, I apply the map to study McNamara's exercise of political agency during the Cuban Missile Crisis. Finally, the conclusion summarises my findings and elaborates on its implications for studying world politics.

### **Reviewing logics of action: incommensurable paradigms or crisscrossing horizons?**

The entrenched understanding, for the most part implicit, of the relationship across logics of action in our field is one of incommensurability<sup>3</sup>. The story goes something like this. There is the logic of consequences, which assumes that actors weigh costs and benefits in order to

figure out what to do. Within this logic, two scholarly interpretations of how actors weigh costs and benefits can be distinguished. On the one hand, there are the adherents to rational choice. For the sake of parsimony (Keohane, 1988: 379; Kydd, 2008: 430), they assume that individuals calculate – based on consistent, stable and exogenously given preferences – what makes for the optimal course of action for them to get what they want.<sup>4</sup> On the other hand, psychological approaches criticize that actors do not compute endlessly until they have found the optimal course of action. Instead, these approaches hold that actors put heuristics (analytical short-cuts such as a historical analogy)<sup>5</sup> to use that tell them when to stop searching for alternative options. Herbert Simon's notion of bounded rationality (Simon, 1957) rests on heuristics and so do a number of approaches that build on this notion, such as prospect theory (Kahnemann and Tversky, 1979) and fast and frugal heuristics (Gigerenzer and Todd, 1999).

This is only the beginning of the incommensurability story; the plot thickens. While the differences between these two strands of consequentialism are already highly pronounced, the schisms among different logics of action cut even deeper. With the Constructivist Turn in International Relations came the logic of appropriateness. Following March and Olsen (1989), many Constructivists started to maintain that actors do not weigh costs and benefits but abide by identity-constituting norms (Berger, 1996; Herman, 1996). More recently, two other logics of action have become forceful contenders. The logic of argumentation holds that individuals, embedded in a shared stock of taken-for-granted knowledge (lifeworld), figure out what to do together by exchanging arguments with one another. Most theorising about argumentation in International Relations (Müller, 1994; Risse, 2000) draws heavily from Jürgen Habermas's *Theory of Communicative Action* (Habermas, 1995a; 1995b). At its core is the ideal-speech situation, which configures the social context of the argumentative encounter in a way that it does not interfere with the 'force of the better argument' (Habermas, 1991: 132).<sup>6</sup> Finally, there is the logic of practice. Mainly drawing from the social theory of Pierre Bourdieu (1977;

1990), a number of authors emphasise the habitual dimension of international relations (Hopf, 2002; Adler 2005; Pouliot, 2008). Agents take their reasons for action too much for granted as that they could reflect upon these reasons by themselves, not even to speak of debating them among themselves. Instead, they act upon commonsense, which is generated out of the interplay of habitus and field (Pouliot 2008). The habitus is the ‘matrix of perceptions, appreciations and actions’ (Bourdieu, 1977: 83) into which the individual has been socialised, and predisposes actors to pursue certain practices rather than others. The field is about the organising principles of social encounters among individuals, which put actors into (unequal) relationships with one another.

This incommensurability story, however, is misleading. It is not that it entirely misses the point. Without any doubt, what has been sketched above amounts to important differences across logics of action (and different strands within them). But this story is entirely one-sided. There are not only differences but there are also overlapping concerns. Two of these are particularly noteworthy. First, across the logics of action, many scholars are concerned about avoiding *determinism*. Human beings are not machines that do everything in perfectly predictable manner as it is postulated by the core assumptions of rational choice (Wendt, 1999: 125-130). Instead, there is a very human element in how actors make up their minds that cannot be squeezed into neat scholarly boxes. This human element has a lot to do with creativity. Actors use their imagination to compose pictures of the world that make this world intelligible to them. Second, across the logics of action there are scholars who attempt to capture these creative assemblages with the term *judgment*. They write about judgment in order not to gloss over the less tangible aspects of human reasoning.<sup>7</sup>

Among consequentialists, psychological approaches are at the forefront of circumventing determinism. Rejecting overly rigorous assumptions of rationality, there are frequent references to judgment. The term is juxtaposed to rational choice’s assumptions on human calculation and computation (Kahnemann, Slovic and Tversky, 1982; Vertzberger,

1990; Tetlock, 2005). Self-critical adherents to rational choice, broadly understood, also reject determinism and put judgment at the centre of their inquiries (Elster, 1989; Sen, 2002). Elster (1983: 88) puts it very well: 'If people are agents in a substantive sense, and not just the passive supports of their preference structures and belief systems, then we need to understand how judgement and autonomy are possible.' This concern makes Elster doubt the core assumptions of rational choice outlined above. Similarly to the rational choice strand of consequentialism, there is also a slippery slope from the logic of appropriateness to determinism. As Sending (2002) points out correctly, 'pure' applications of this logic in International Relations are rather deterministic. They assume that a given social structure always makes people do the same things, thus perpetuating the re-construction of this structure. Scholars infusing this logic with other logics react to this problem. The logics with which appropriateness is infused – argumentation (Finnemore and Sikkink, 1998; Checkel, 2001) and practice (Wiener, 2009) – all have notions of judgment at their very core.

Habermas's thought on communication is deeply influenced by Arendt's notion of political judgment (Habermas, 1977). Composing arguments, for Habermas, is a creative act. It involves putting the lifeworld to use to make sense of a political issue. How actors do this is up to their imaginative reasoning and their deliberation with others. It is not the individual on his or her own who is the arbiter of what is a convincing argument but a community of actors, exchanging arguments with one another. Habermas shares the emphasis on creatively composing arguments and deliberating them in a community with classical rhetoric. This cluster of thought is all about connecting judgment and argumentation (Aristotle, 1995; Cicero, 2003). Judgment is one of Bourdieu's key concepts and closely tied to his notion of practice, especially in his highly influential *Distinction* (Bourdieu, 1984). Social embeddedness, constituted by the interplay of habitus and field, features very prominently. It does not determine how actors figure out what to do but merely predisposes them to making certain judgments rather than others.

The gist of all of this is that logics of action are not incommensurable paradigms but, in Gadamer's language (Gadamer, 1972; Kornprobst, 2009), *overlapping horizons*. It may take some effort to uncover them but avoiding determinism and appreciating the importance of judgment – two sides of the same coin – constitute important overlaps across contending perspectives. What to make of this overlapping? In the first place, *it should make us take judgment seriously*. The perspectives reviewed above differ widely in terms of their meta-theoretical, theoretical and methodological assumptions. If these perspectives – these notable differences notwithstanding – point into the same direction, we do have reason to believe that there is something to this direction. Furthermore, the task of improving our grasp of judgment invites a 'multiperspectival mode of social inquiry' (Bohman, 2002: 502) and 'eclectic theorizing' (Katzenstein and Sil, 2008: 109). With clues about how to study judgment being scattered across different horizons, there is a need to *draw from all of these horizons* to improve our understanding of judgment.

When it comes to logics of action more generally, some scholars, rejecting the conventional wisdom of incommensurability, have explored three eclectic pathways. First, there is the attempt to identify scope conditions under which different logics of action apply (Checkel, 2001). Second, other studies 'constructivise' the choice mechanism of the logic of consequences. These explorations come from the Rationalist side, with rational choice scholars putting more emphasis on the ideational dimension of calculating costs and benefits (Goldstein and Keohane, 1993; Bates, Figueiredo and Weingast, 1998); and they come from the Constructivist side, with endeavours to inquire into the formation of identity and interests (Klotz, 1995; Hopf, 1998).<sup>8</sup> Third, there are authors who distinguish – some more explicitly and others more implicitly – between different phases of the political process through which actors come to make up their minds. Some of these phases are dominated by consequentialism and others by alternative logics such as argumentation (Finnemore and Sikkink, 1998; Crawford, 2002; Kornprobst, 2008).

When it comes to studying judgment, however, these three pathways do not suffice. Taking the existing scholarly categories – i.e. the four logics of action – for granted is not a viable research option. Metaphorically speaking, this would take them to be islands to be bridged (or, with regard to scope conditions, simply to be located but kept apart). The findings of this section, however, point towards another direction. They point towards developing something innovative – informed by these logics but transcending them at the same time – out of the clues provided by different horizons. In other words, an endorsement of eclecticism alone is not enough. We need to remain open to a transformative research agenda that develops beyond existing logics of action (in Gadamer’s language, one that may even end up fusing horizons).<sup>9</sup> The following sections embark on this endeavour, first by defining judgment and then by outlining a map for studying how actors come to make judgments.

### **Defining political judgment: the *agent’s* logics of action**

In our discipline (and not only there), uses of the concept of political judgment are characterised by an intriguing paradox. On the one hand, there are frequent references to judgment. These all strongly suggest that judgment is not just any aspect of human agency but a central – perhaps even *the* central – one. On the other hand, the concept suffers from a lack of conceptual clarification. It seems that judgment appears to be such a self-evident and pervasive aspect of political life to scholars using this term that they hardly ever bother defining it. Even psychological approaches that are full of references to judgment all too often neglect to reflect about the concept itself (Kahneman, Slovic and Tversky, 1982; Vertzberger, 1990; Tetlock, 2005).<sup>10</sup>

International Relations, and even Psychology, overlook that there is a rich literature on judgment in Political and Social Theory. These writings, going back to ancient Greek philosophy, deal with conceptualisations of judgment in great detail. This makes them an important reservoir of insights on this phenomenon. What is more, contending

conceptualisations of judgment in Political and Social Theory underpin much of the debates on logics of action in our field. Thus, not only is this literature an important reservoir of insights but it is also extraordinarily well suited for eclectic-transformative efforts to move beyond the confines of logics of action.

Political and social theorists do not agree on every nuance of the concept. But it is possible to identify four features of judgment, which take the main thrust of what these theorists have written on judgment seriously. First, *political judgment is a human faculty*. Classical thought is somewhat ambiguous on this. On the one hand, Plato writes about judgment in his texts about political leadership, such as the *Statesman* (Plato, 1925) and the *Meno* (Plato, 1961). Taken together with the caste system he outlines in the *Republic* this may very well be interpreted as a statement that only good rulers have judgment (or at least good judgment). The same may be said of Aristotle. Judgment appears in the *Nicomachean Ethics* in the shape of good judgments made by good rulers (Aristotle, 1934), and in the *Rhetoric* (Aristotle, 1995), where it is the good orator who wins over the audience to follow his judgment (but it is unclear whether the audience judges). Sophists, by contrast, welcome feedback by the audience (Sprague, 1972). They appear to have been more willing to understand judgment as a human faculty, as opposed to a unique capacity defining the ruling elite. Kant, the major Enlightenment thinker about judgment, sides more with Aristotle than with the Sophists. For him, judgment is a capacity (*Vermögen*), more precisely a talent (*Talent*) nurtured by training (*geübt*) (Kant, 1956: B171-172; 1974, Einl. II). In other words, no judgment without talent and not everyone has talent. Arendt's highly influential work on judgment, for the most part a re-interpretation of Kant's writings on judgment, makes a very strong case that judgment is a human faculty (Arendt, 1961; 2003; 2006). Whether people always exercise this judgment and how they do so is another question. In current debates on judgment, there is a far-reaching consensus that judgment is a human faculty (Beiner, 1983; Benhabib, 2001).

Second, *judging is practical reasoning by subsuming particulars under universals*. Universals are the taken-for-granted ideas that individuals employ to make sense of political life such as causal and constitutive relationships, ideas of belonging and positioning vis-à-vis others, and standards of behaviour. Some of these ideas are rather abstract (for example legal principles), whereas others are more concrete (for instance historical analogies). For the most part, universals are more or less widely shared across communities. Yet there are also some idiosyncratic universals that an individual acquires during his or her peculiar socialisation process. Furthermore, even universals that are pervasive in a community are not necessarily shared ‘all the way down’. Universals tend to be multivocal, i.e. they are interpreted differently by different actors (Beiner, 1983: 132; Ansell, 1997: 373). Taken together, universals make up the ‘tool kit’ (Swidler, 1986: 277) from which individuals draw to make sense of the world.

Particulars, by contrast, are much more specific. They are the concrete ideas through which individuals define the key features of a given political situation. The interpretations of these key features become intelligible only in light of the interpretation of the universals that actors apply to them. There are no particulars without universals. This process of applying universals to particulars can be further specified as subsuming particulars under universals. In its most simple form, *P* (particular) becomes intelligible to me because I find a category *U* (universal) that is familiar to me and I interpret *P* to be an instance of *U*. *U* contains the clues for how to make sense of *P*. My subsuming of *P* under *U* is a creative endeavour. Subsuming is not automatic and it is not a logical inference to be evaluated by an analyst as objectively sound or unsound. Instead, it is my creative linkage of the general (*U*) and the concrete (*P*) through which I come to see the latter and, thus, make it intelligible to myself.

Most cases of judgment are more complex than this because there are several *Us* and *Ps*, making judgments intricately woven webs of subsumptions. Two simplified illustrations, both taken from current British debates about renewing the Trident programme (nuclear

warheads carried by ballistic missile submarines), may clarify what it entails to subsume particulars under universals. One of the positions in favour of renewing the programme reads something like this: Threats from first uses of nuclear, chemical and biological weapons persist (universal). Effective deterrence can prevent these first uses (universal). Effective deterrence against these kinds of threats requires nuclear capabilities (universal). The renewal of the nuclear programme provides effective deterrence, and, thus, should be done (particular). Subsuming the issue of Trident under these universals makes it an issue of deterrence and a requirement of national security. One of the positions against renewing Trident may be summarised as follows: The United Kingdom is a signatory to the Non-proliferation Treaty (universal). The Non-proliferation Treaty requires nuclear disarmament from its signatories (universal). The UK ought to abide by international law (universal). Renewing the nuclear programme is a violation of the Non-proliferation Treaty and, thus should not be done (particular).

Judgment, understood as subsuming particulars under universals, makes for a much broader concept of reasoning than found in current debates in International Relations. How an agent subsumes may resemble one of the established logics of action. In the simplified examples above, the pro-Trident stance follows the logic of consequences while the anti-Trident position follows the logic of appropriateness. But the reasoning of political actors rarely ever follows a certain logic of action in a pure form. Judgments usually move back and forth between – even intertwine – what scholars think of as logics of action.<sup>11</sup> To return briefly to the examples above, proponents of Trident also subsume particulars under universals as adherents to the logic of appropriateness would expect. They interpret the NPT (universals) very different from the opponents, and thus end up concluding that the treaty permits the renewal of the nuclear programme (particular). Vice versa, there are also opponents who proceed as consequentialists might predict. Opponents interpret the universals of 21<sup>st</sup> century threats and ways of dealing with these threats differently (universals), and thus

end up concluding that the renewal of the nuclear programme amounts to an anachronistic policy (particular).

Third, *judging is orienting oneself in a political situation*. This orientation consists of two dimensions: On the one hand, agents orient themselves substantively. The individual figures out whether something constitutes a political problem; if so, how her community is to explain the dynamics of this problem; and how it is to act accordingly. The above illustration is an example of a substantive orientation. As far as the subject matter is concerned, proponents and opponents of renewing the nuclear programme agree that this issue constitutes a political problem, but, interpreting universals differently, they reach different conclusions about explaining the dynamics of the problem and prescriptions for how to act accordingly. Most of the current literature on judgment defines judgment exclusively as making substantive judgments. Yet a careful look at Arendt's work hints that there is also another dimension of judgment. According to her account, Adolf Eichmann refused to make substantive judgments. But he did make judgments nevertheless. Eichmann judged himself to be in a role where he simply had to obey the law and orders given to him (Arendt, 1964). His self-denial of any political efficacy and responsibility amounted to a series of catastrophic political judgments.

On the other hand, therefore, agents orient themselves procedurally. The individual figures out what her relevant community is in a given situation, how she relates to other members of this community, and what she can do to make herself heard in this community. Among contemporary key authors on judgment it is especially Bourdieu who emphasizes this often neglected dimension of judgment. His *Distinction* is about struggles, deeply shaped by socialisation processes, of actors to position themselves vis-à-vis other actors. In a similar vein, he emphasizes the socialization of actors into strategic practices (Bourdieu, 1977: 76). In the political field, for example, such strategies are crucial to produce and reproduce the status of an authorized spokesperson (Bourdieu, 1991: 171-202). To return to our illustration from

above, among all people in the UK making substantive judgments about nuclear capabilities only very few arrive at procedural judgments that their input into the political process matters. For example, nobody ever listens to the public (universal). I am just a member of the public (universal). Thus, voicing my rejection of Trident is futile (particular). Vice versa, some actors make much more politically savvy procedural judgments even if they may not feel that strongly about their substantive judgments. For example, I am a political leader (universal). Political leaders must be outspoken about issues that the public sees as important (universal). Trident is such an issue, and thus, I have to take initiative (particular).

Agents cannot pluck universals for judgments – no matter whether substantive or procedural – out of the air. Agents cannot employ just any idea as universal but only taken-for-granted ideas into which they have been socialised, i.e. universals that are part of their tool kit. Carrying the tool kit metaphor a bit further than Swidler, we can distinguish between two compartments of the tool kit, containing different kinds of tools. There is a *procedural repertoire*, which contains all clues that are available to agents to position themselves. There is also a *substantive repertoire*, which contains all clues that are available to agents to take a political stance.

Fourth, judgments *range from habitual to reflective*. Kant distinguishes between determinant and reflective judgments (Kant, 1974: Einl. V). He argues that some judgments are bound by clear-cut rules for how to subsume particulars under universals. Other judgments, he stresses, are reflective. Here it is a matter of searching and finding an adequate universal for a particular as well as a plausible linkage between the two. In Kant's view, aesthetic judgments are reflective. It is Hannah Arendt who discovers the significance of reflective judgments for politics. Political judgments, she maintains, are reflective judgments because the selection of the universals and the exercise of subsuming particulars under them are anything but automatic. Conceptualizations of unreflective judgments return in the work of Bourdieu, who makes a convincing argument that agents often subsume particulars under

universals habitually. They do not reflect upon how to subsume particulars under universals. Instead, the universals, deeply taken for granted, loom so large that they leave only a small margin for actors to be creative and improvise how to subsume particulars under universals in a given situation. These improvisations are not made explicit; they stay underneath the radar-screen of discourse. Exercising political judgment is best understood on a spectrum from habitual to reflective. To return to the illustrations above, political leaders are unlikely to reflect much about their role as political leaders every time they have to make judgments, even if this is as important and divisive an issue as Trident. These kinds of judgments become rather habitual and may best be understood as a ‘feel for the game’ (Bourdieu, 1998: 77). By contrast, substantive judgments about what to do with Trident are more likely to be reflective because they deal with a subject matter that deviates substantially from the everyday political affairs in the United Kingdom.

Given these four features, political judgment may be understood as the human faculty to orient oneself in a political situation procedurally and substantially by subsuming the particulars of this situation, sometimes more reflectively and sometimes more habitually, under selected universals of political life. This definition is located at a *higher and more inclusive level of abstraction* than the entrenched scholarly logics of action. It does not preclude any of these logics but it does caution against being fixated on just one of these established scholarly categories. For example, agents may orient themselves procedurally by computing costs and benefits (rational choice variant of logic of consequences), by habitually following their political strategies (Bourdieuian understanding of the logic of practice), or, much more likely, by a more complex hybrid of the two. At the same time, they may orient themselves substantially by relying on a simple heuristic (fast and frugal heuristics variant of the logic of consequences), by exchanging arguments and agreeing with the better one (Habermasian variant of the logic of argumentation), or, again more likely, by various shades of grey located between the fully habitual and fully reflective poles of judgment.

## **Studying political judgment: a map for empirical research**

How can we study how agents make and unmake their judgments? Psychology is a discipline that comes immediately to mind when asking this question. After all, it is the only field of study in (and around) which an analytical and normative research programme on judgment has developed. While this research has been highly influential in other fields – such as Kahnemann and Tversky (1979) in Economics – it has found its way into International Relations only slowly.

Psychological approaches, often informed by experimental psychology, pursue a theoretically ambitious pathway for studying judgments. On the one hand, they share some important starting points for their research with rational choice. There is the conceptual commitment to the logic of consequences; actors are assumed to weigh costs and benefits when making their choices (Baron 2004; Hastie and Dawes, 2010). There is the ontological commitment to individualism; social embeddedness does not feature when individuals make their choices.<sup>12</sup> There is the epistemological commitment to explaining and predicting; to this end, many authors develop sophisticated mathematical models (Griffin and Brenner, 2004; Lagnado and Sloman, 2004). On the other hand, psychological approaches on judgment distance themselves from what they criticise as rational choice's simplistic assumptions of how actors come to choose. As alluded to earlier, Simon's notion of bounded rationality features prominently in attempts to conceptualise practical reasoning along more realistic lines, for instance for fast and frugal heuristics as well as for prospect theory.

It is unclear, however, to what extent holding on to some of rational choice's key conceptual, ontological and epistemological assumptions is compatible with studying judgment. There is the conceptual issue that judgment – as defined above – is much broader than the logic of consequences. Narrowing judgment down to this one scholarly box only seriously misrepresents the winding roads through which actors come to orient themselves.

Among other things, it radically reduces the habitual-reflective spectrum of judgments to one single point on this spectrum as well as the many possibilities of assembling an intelligible picture of the world to the weighing of costs and benefits. There is the ontological problem of disembedding the individual from any social context. This simplification misses many aspects of judgment. Perhaps most notably it does not allow for studying procedural judgments because these are all about relations among communicators as well as between communicators and receivers. Finally, there is the epistemological constraint that the study of judgment sits uneasily with ambitions to predict. Judgment is about creativity and autonomy; it is about the peculiar human dimension of reasoning that cannot be squeezed into narrow scholarly categories, and, therefore, is not easily predictable.

Prospect theory, for example, highlights these three sets of problems. Kahneman and Tversky's conceptual move reduces judgment to the logic of consequences, albeit a sophisticated variant. They understand judgment as the process through which actors determine a reference point (editing phase) and then figure out whether, given this reference point, an expected outcome would be a loss or a gain (evaluation phase). Any other lines of reasoning are excluded although they may have a lot to do with how actors come to judge. The authors' ontology is individualistic. In their account, framing and editing has very little to do with social relationships. This is a problem for any theory of judgment but especially for Kahneman and Tversky. It makes it difficult for them to counter a standard criticism of their theory, i.e. that it lacks a theory of framing. Framing has a lot to do with social interaction. As far as epistemology is concerned, the authors engage in exactly the kind of broad generalisations on which a research endeavour that aims at prediction has to embark but which is very difficult to reconcile with studying judgment. The authors contend that actors are risk-prone in their decisions if – given their reference point – their options are in the realm of loss, and risk-averse if they are in the realm of gain. We are back at Elster's criticism. The postulate of understanding people as 'agents in a substantive sense' sits uneasily with

mechanistic conceptualisations of agency, which downplay their autonomy and, thus, end up assuming – on one level or another – that they all tick the same.

These problems encountered by ambitious theorising leave us with a research option that is *more carefully balanced between theory and empirics*. In the first place, we need to ‘follow the actors’, as Latour (2005: 12) puts it. What ultimately matters is not elegant scholarly categories but how agents, trying to cope with the world, figure out what makes sense to *them*. This does not mean that scholarship should refrain from any theorising. We require some theoretical anchoring in order to be able to follow the actors. We need what some authors refer to as grounded theory (Glaser and Strauss 1967; Locke 1996; Pouliot 2007, 364), and what this section – staying within the metaphor of following the actors – refers to as research map. The purpose of this theorising is to map the roads available to actors for their travels (and from which they may occasionally venture off) while figuring out what to do. In other words, the map is meant to *help the researcher follow the actors as they make their judgments rather than arrive at sweeping generalisations about how they supposedly always do so*. The ink with which the map is written is the social dynamics of political judgment. These dynamics are of key importance. Individuals do not act in a social vacuum when they make their judgments. They very much interact with others when trying to figure out what to do.

The map depicts four interaction patterns that profoundly shape the processes through which individuals come to judge politically. First, individuals re-enact their *history of interaction with others* to a considerable extent. When they make judgments, they pick their universals for these judgments from the tool kit. The procedural judgments contain universals taken from the procedural repertoire and substantive ones from the substantive repertoire. Both repertoires are full of taken-for-granted ideas that assumed the status of taken-for-grantedness by having been selected for past judgments again and again. To be sure, individuals do have some room to manoeuvre. Most importantly, they can select the

universals that appear pertinent to them to make sense of a situation and, interpreting them, they have some room for putting their own twist on them. Yet it is difficult for actors to escape the history of past interaction. It forms the perimeter of interaction.

Second, individuals are exposed to the repercussions of the *resonance circuit*.<sup>13</sup> The circuit connects three components: procedural judgment, substantive judgment and persuasion. Ideal-typically, there are two flows of interaction that shape procedural and substantive judgments. On the one hand, the receptive direction of flow connects – in this chronological order – procedural judgment, persuasion, and substantive judgment. The procedural judgment makes the individual open to someone else's efforts of persuasion; he judges the sender as a spokesperson worth being listened to and himself as a receiver. Thus, the receiver's substantive judgments can be moulded. In extreme cases, the receptive procedural judgment makes the receiver accept the sender's message without reflection; the judgment to listen carries the message. Yet, usually, the receptive procedural judgment merely prepares the way. It makes sure that the receiver listens but persuasion also requires a convincing message. If such communicative encounters successfully mould the substantive judgment of the receiver, the latter adapts his procedural judgment again and the sender of the persuasive message further increases her positioning. This, in turn, has positive repercussions for the sender's persuasion efforts and so on. Of course, the exact opposite effect is possible as well. Messages and their senders may become increasingly unpersuasive.

On the other hand, there is the strategic direction of flow. Here, the procedural judgment is quite different. It is not receptive but oriented towards leaving a mark on the communicative encounter. This strategic orientation is connected to the substantive judgment. There is no reluctance or waiting for others to provide an input for making judgments but the individual, seeing herself as an actor to be listened to, makes her substantive judgments with confidence and tries to persuade others with the same confidence. Depending on how these persuasion efforts resonate with the audience, the procedural judgments make the individual

revisit her substantive judgments and so on. In extreme cases, the substantive judgment is relegated to a mere filter. Substantive judgments filter the procedural judgments and provide guidance to strategic communicators as to how much change of an argument is possible in order for them to improve their performance without violating their own deeply held beliefs.

Figure 1 summarises the two ideal-typical flows of the resonance circuit. Note that these two flows of interaction are ideal-types. There is a large grey area between full reception and complete lack of reception. Especially ‘pure’ strategic procedural judgments are rather rare. Agents do require at least some measure of interaction with others to make up their mind about an issue in substantive terms. They rarely arrive at a substantive judgment simply on their own. Most resonance circuits play out in the grey area between ‘pure’ reception and ‘pure’ strategy.

**\*\*Figure 1 about here\*\***

Third, judgments – substantive as well as procedural – and political situations are connected by a *co-configurative cycle*. On the one hand, judgments attach meaning to a situation. They make it a political situation – a situation to be dealt within the realm of politics – in the first place, and they provide orientation as to what to do in this situation. Depending on this orientation, actors try to intervene into the situation or not. Interventions and non-interventions, in turn, may affect changes and continuities of this situation. On the other hand, situations shape political judgments. Political actors cannot attach just any meaning to a situation but they are constrained in doing so by the very situation they face. So-called brute facts are of special salience here. An earthquake, flooding, volcano eruption, major oil spill etc. requires interpretation through political judgments. But these situations prompt linkages of different particulars and universals than, say, war or genocide. This co-configuration of situation and judgment is not something that is settled once and for all in the course of this

situation. Understanding judgment requires going beyond the static understanding of decision-making that permeates our discipline. Judging is a constant challenge. Situations prompt agents to make many judgments – some smaller and some bigger; reducing all of this to one single big decision is oversimplifying how agents figure out what to do. To make matters even more complicated, these situations rarely ever stay the same (for example, due to new brute facts or the doings of others), thus pushing actors towards revisiting, adapting and even changing their judgments.

Fourth, the judgments of individuals are shaped by a *structuration effect*. How agents figure out what to do, shaped by the resonance circuit and the co-configurative cycle, feeds back into the tool kit, thereby adding yet another layer of history.<sup>14</sup> In most cases, the resonance circuit simply reproduces the content of the tool kit that agents use as universals. In some cases, however, the interplay of the resonance triangle and the structuration effect changes the content of the tool kit. The interaction in the triangle, especially the strategic flow, may develop new universals out of already existing ones, out of particulars, or out of linkages between universals and particulars. These changes are, for the most part, not sharp breaks. New universals developing out of old ones, for example, bear a considerable resemblance with the old ones. Yet more marked shifts may occur. Various pathways are possible. When particulars become universals that originally addressed an extraordinary political situation, for example, these new universals can introduce a novelty into the tool kit that breaks markedly with the past. From a judgment perspective, it is not a coincidence, therefore, that many authors emphasise the importance of exogenous shocks as impetus for deep ideational change (Hall, 1986; Adler, 1991). Agents are likely to embrace extraordinary particulars to make sense of these shocks and keep these particulars very much at the forefront of their minds, thus letting them sink in as universals for successive judgments that break with the past.

## **Reading the Map: Following Robert McNamara during the Cuban Missile Crisis**

How does this research map fare empirically? This section asks the question whether political judgment provides an added value for explaining Robert McNamara's assertion of political agency during the Cuban Missile Crisis (16-28 October 1962). With all the thorough research already conducted on the case, examining whether political judgment delivers an added value sets the benchmark high. Furthermore, McNamara is often portrayed as a computational machine. The military used to criticise McNamara for his 'computer logic' (Kaufmann, 1964: 2). Robert Kennedy notes that this portrayal was not confined to the military. Even in his social life, 'they all call him "the computer"' (Beschloss, 1991: 402). If anything, therefore, the manner in which McNamara figured out what to do should follow rational choice, and no alternative map for studying judgment should be necessary.

The case study relies on multiple sources, ranging from *The Kennedy Tapes*, edited by Ernest May and Philip Zelikov (2002), to McNamara's writings, and from biographical pieces of McNamara's life to the extraordinarily rich scholarly literature on the Cuban Missile Crisis. The account that follows is organised chronologically. It starts with describing the tool kit of taken-for-granted ideas – the procedural and substantive repertoires – with which McNamara and the other members of the Executive Committee (ExComm) entered their deliberations on the missiles in Cuba. It continues with analysing McNamara's judgments, being shaped by and shaping the resonance circuit in the ExComm in the face of a crisis that is again and again remoulded by Washington's and Moscow's interventions with the crisis. Finally, the account addresses the legacy of the crisis by looking into structuration effects.

McNamara's substantive repertoire for making sense of politics was very much shaped by his generation's experiences. With many of his political decision-making peers, he shared a number of historical lessons. Two of these were taken from WWII: Munich served as a short-hand for the dangers of appeasement, Pearl Harbor for sudden surprise attacks by

despicable enemies. The remainder were taken from the Cold War. The Iron Curtain, the Korean War and the Berlin Crises were markers for an understanding of the US as the leader of the free world, responsible for protecting this world against communist advances (Trehwitt, 1971: 1; Weldes, 1999: 42-47). Cuba, especially the Bay of Pigs disaster, was a sore spot because the US had failed stopping this advancement in its own back yard (Stone, 1968). Related to these historical lessons, a conceptual triad occupied a central place in McNamara's thinking about world politics: balance of power, deterrence, and flexible response. When McNamara used the term balance of power, he did not have a balance proper in mind. Instead, he postulated a distribution of power in favour of the US (Kahan and Long, 1972: 581; McNamara, 1968). It was this preponderance that was supposed to deter enemies, especially Moscow, from harming the US. In turn, the key to deterrence – McNamara and many deterrence scholars held unisono – is credibility. This credibility cannot be attained by relying on nuclear capabilities alone. McNamara's lessons from Cold War crises such as Korea and Berlin was that threatening the Soviet Union with the use of nuclear capabilities lacks credibility in most cases. It was all too clear to Moscow that the US would not answer many of the usual Soviet infringements on US interests with a nuclear strike. Thus, the US needed to be capable of adapting its response flexibly to the extent of Soviet infringements. Depending on this extent, the US would have to respond with a proportionate measure that would signal resolve. If the Soviet Union would answer on its part with an escalatory measure, the US would have to be firmly committed to play this escalation game, but – for as long as possible – underneath the threshold of a nuclear attack (Trehwitt, 1971: 111, Grattan, 2006: 428; Beschloss, 1991: 401). This conceptual triad, in particular the need for flexible response was widely shared among key decision-makers, including President Kennedy.

McNamara's procedural repertoire revolved around strategies of communication. The art of making himself heard had become a second nature for him. Having made his way from a Harvard MBA, statistics teacher and – by 1960 – the first President of Ford who was not a

member of the Ford family, he had acquired unique skills for improving his positioning in decision-making circles. A particularly notable one among these was buying time. If a discussion did not go his way and McNamara sensed that he could not persuade his opponents for the time being, he used to buy time. He often did this by requesting more information on the topic (Trehitt, 1971: 120-122). Related to this, McNamara was a master of manipulating understandings of options for his purposes. Acting in seemingly impartial manner, he used to outline many options to deal with a situation, nudge the overview of the pros and cons of these options in favour of the option he preferred, and thus channelled decisions into directions that he preferred while leaving the advisee with the impression of full decision-making autonomy (Beschloss, 1991: 402). McNamara's skills in improving his positioning made him a force to be reckoned with in Washington. He was extraordinarily well positioned to make himself heard already well before the onset of the Cuban Missile Crisis. Although admiring him, Robert Kennedy considered McNamara 'the most dangerous man in the Cabinet, because he is so persuasive and articulate' (quoted in Beschloss, 1991: 405). Most importantly, President Kennedy had a very high opinion of McNamara. Kaufmann (1964: 1) notes that the President 'reportedly told visitors that McNamara was the most satisfactory member of his Cabinet.' As one of less than a handful of Cabinet members, McNamara was even welcome to participate in the social life of the President and his wife. The President's brother, Robert Kennedy, shared this appreciation for McNamara. This appreciation, of course, did not come from nowhere. As Beschloss (1991: 401) puts it, President Kennedy 'was dazzled by McNamara's toughness, quickness, fluency, competence, incorruptibility, freedom from political cant, and force of personality.'

To put this into the conceptual language of judgment, McNamara and the other members of ExComm approached the Cuban Missile Crisis with the help of a number of unquestioned universals. As far as the substantive repertoire was concerned, McNamara shared many universals with his ExComm members, again most notably with the Kennedys:

the interpretation of the historical lessons of Munich, Pearl Harbor, Iron Curtain, Korean War, Berlin Crises, and the Bay of Pigs, as well as the conceptual triad of balance of power, deterrence and flexible response. As far as the procedural repertoire was concerned, McNamara's authority on defence matters and international affairs was a universal firmly entrenched with ExComm members, in particular the Kennedys, whose judgments mattered the most (but less so with the military). McNamara, on his part, had an astute sense of how to seize the opportunities of this strong position. His universals of buying time and manipulating options to win over an audience are particularly noteworthy.

Armed with these priors, McNamara and the other members of ExComm proceeded to figure out what the US should do amid the build-up of Soviet missiles in Cuba. Moscow's and Washington's interventions with the course of events yields four phases in which the resonance circuit played out in the ExComm. First, a Soviet intervention started the Cuban Missile Crisis in the first place. By 16 October, it had become clear to the Kennedy administration that the Soviet Union had started to build medium-range ballistic missile launch sites in Cuba. Furthermore, evidence that Moscow also delivered nuclear warheads for these missiles was mounting. McNamara's procedural and substantive judgments followed the strategic direction of the resonance circuit. He agreed with the other members of ExComm that the missiles constituted a problem to be solved. But he did not concur that it was a military problem. For him, the problem was political (in May and Zelikov, 2002: 61). He judged that the missiles (particular) did not change the balance of power (universal). But they (particular) required the US to show resolve in order to maintain a credible deterrence (universal). If the US failed to show resolve, Khrushchev would continue to challenge the US, especially in Berlin (universal). Even at this early phase in the crisis, McNamara already advocated for a naval blockade and an increased surveillance of the entire island (in May and Zelikov, 2002: 58). In McNamara's judgment, this was an option that showed resolve while avoiding an overreaction and could be further escalated depending on SU reactions to these

measures (particular). It was an application of the principle of flexible response (universal), ‘starting with a mounting sequence of threats short of nuclear war’ (Kahan and Long, 1972: 573).

Initially, McNamara isolated himself with these judgments to a considerable degree. Not only did most of the ExComm members see the missiles as a military problem but they also favoured airstrikes over any other actions including a naval blockade. Mastering the strategic direction of the resonance circuit, McNamara was an astute observer of this lack of support. He resorted to his procedural universals of buying time and manipulating options. He proceeded to request more information and time to digest this information, and he started to dissect the airstrike option. He equated the airstrike option with an invasion of Cuba – fully knowing that President Kennedy was opposed to such a large scale military involvement: He argued: ‘Full blast military involvement or no airstrikes at all. Invasion is risky’ (in May and Zelikov, 2002: 48). President Kennedy (May and Zelikov, 2002: 88), and his brother as well (May and Zelikov, 2002: 105), remained sceptical of the blockade option. By 19 October, however, they followed McNamara in quizzing the air strike option with hard questions (in May and Zelikov, 2002: 109-123). On 20 October, McNamara’s attempts of persuasion helped yield not only procedural but also the first substantive successes. Robert Kennedy became an advocate of the blockade option but demanded that this blockade should show more teeth than the one advocated by McNamara. Khrushchev would have to remove the missiles. The air strike option would be back on the table if Khrushchev would not comply. President Kennedy, Llewellyn (‘Tommy’) Thompson, Douglas Dillon, and John McCone concurred (May and Zelikov, 2002: 137). McNamara was not in a receptive mode yet. On the contrary, ‘he was more emphatic than usual’ (in May and Zelikov, 2002: 136) in stressing the need for negotiation. In his judgment, the US should offer Moscow a withdrawal of the Jupiter missiles from Italy and Turkey in exchange for a Soviet withdrawal of its missiles from Cuba. In McNamara’s reading, the principle of flexible response required providing the

opponent with a way out of the escalation game. This softer version of the blockade option was supported by Adlai Stevenson, the negotiation dimension more generally also by Dean Rusk.

The second phase of the resonance circuit started with the US intervention into the crisis. The quarantine, coupled with open surveillance, moved into its position on 23 October and it was fully operational from 24 – 30 October. This changed the character of the crisis markedly. The central question became how the Soviet Union would react to the measures and how the US could influence this reaction by managing the quarantine and open surveillance. In the ExComm, the question of how to manage the blockade became increasingly central to the discussions. In this phase of the crisis, McNamara's judgments were both strategic and receptive. On the one hand, he cautioned his fellow ExComm members about running the blockade carefully. On 23 October, McNamara was confronted with Robert Kennedy's call to pursue Soviet ships even if they had turned away from Cuba (in May and Zelikov, 2002: 207), and with Maxwell Taylor's demand to shoot off the rudder of ships trying to break the blockade (in May and Zelikov, 2002: 212). McNamara used again his procedural judgment to weaken these proposals. With regard to Robert Kennedy's suggestion, he bought time by arguing that there would be no need for an immediate decision on this matter. The next day, McNamara simply mentioned in passing that there would be no pursuit of ships turning away from Cuba, and nobody challenged him (in May and Zelikov, 2002: 233). With regard to Maxwell Taylor's proposal, McNamara quizzed the option with hard questions. What if the US would target a ship with wheat or medicine? How would world opinion react to that? The hard questions were effective. Taylor's suggestion never surfaced again. On the other hand, McNamara was also receptive to Robert Kennedy's postulate to show more military determination. On 25 October, McNamara advocated to fully prepare for an airstrike, if such an escalation was necessary (in May and Zelikov, 2002: 251-2). Two days later, McNamara made the same argument with regard to invading Cuba (in

May and Zelikov, 2002: 335). McNamara had been persuaded to amend his substantive judgment. Note that this is only an amendment and not a radical change. McNamara subsumed the airstrike and the invasion, advocated by others, under the universal of flexible response. Having all the options on the table and ready to be executed, guaranteed – in his judgment – a credible US response to the Soviet infringement on its interests; no matter what the next Soviet move would be. An escalation would be possible from negotiation to airstrike and even invasion.

The third phase of the resonance circuit started when the Soviet Union shot down a U-2 on its surveillance mission over Cuba on 27 October, and the Cuban Missile Crisis reached its peak. Again, the resonance circuit shaping his and the others' judgments had strategic and receptive dimensions. On the one hand, McNamara had no doubts at all that the new situation amounted to an escalation of the crisis (in May and Zelikov, 2002: 356). He quickly subsumed this new situation under his interpretation of flexible response. In a chilling assessment of the situation, McNamara sketched the following possible scenario: The US continues surveillance and is fired upon again. Thus, the US has to proceed with massive airstrikes and an invasion. Thus, the Soviet Union attacks the Turkish missiles. Thus, the US and NATO have to defend Turkey. There was, in other words, a slippery slope towards nuclear war (in May and Zelikov, 2002: 364-5). McNamara considered three exit routes from this escalation scenario. (1) The Soviet Union would have to be prevented from firing on US planes again. McNamara concurred with President Kennedy to announce to the Soviet Union that Washington would protect its aircraft from now on and respond to attacks (in May and Zelikov, 2002: 359). (2) McNamara encouraged pursuing negotiations with the Soviet Union. He continued to call for trading the Cuban missiles for the missiles in Turkey (in May and Zelikov, 2002: 366). (3) Even if the trade would not work out, NATO should make the missiles in Turkey inoperable. In this way, at least the escalation of the Cuban Missile Crisis beyond Cuba – with a Soviet attack on the missiles in Turkey – could be prevented (in May

and Zelikov, 2002: 367). After an ExComm marathon session, steps were eventually decided upon that were compatible with McNamara's judgments and that proved crucial to diffusing the crisis. Yet before this happened, McNamara's procedural judgments were vital in preventing a prompt retaliatory action that, in his substantive judgment, would have been seriously out of sink with his understanding of flexible response and that would have moved the world closer towards nuclear holocaust. Immediately after the news came in that the U-2 was shot down, he started to buy time to prevent an instantaneous retaliatory strike – seriously considered, for example by McGeorge Bundy – against the SAM site that had shot the U-2 down. He cautioned that it was too late in the day for this (in May and Zelikov, 2002: 357) and encouraged to think all options through carefully (in May and Zelikov, 2002: 366-368). On the other hand, McNamara relied heavily on the judgments of others, in particular the Kennedys, when it came to formulating the US's responses to Khrushchev. There were two such responses: a letter to Khrushchev, also made public (in May and Zelikov, 2002: 387-388); and an oral message that Robert Kennedy communicated to Dobrynin, the Soviet Ambassador in Washington, who in turn, sent it as a telegram to Khrushchev (Lebow and Stein, 1994: 523-526). It was the latter message that was decisive. In essence, the US offered the Soviet Union to withdraw the missiles from Turkey secretly in exchange for a Soviet withdrawal of the missiles from Cuba.

Eventually, the crisis winded down when Khrushchev announced via Radio Moscow that the Soviet Union would remove its missiles from Cuba. With the exception of the Joint Chiefs, who continued to pressure for a military solution, the judgments of the ExComm members concurred. As May and Zelikov (2002: 404) put it, '[t]he mood at the ExComm meeting was euphoric'. It still took over a month for Washington and Moscow to agree upon the modalities of the missile withdrawal and verification mechanisms. But the Cuban Missile Crisis had found a peaceful solution.

The end of the Cuban Missile Crisis, of course, did not mark an end to its influence on world politics. Several structuration effects made sure that the crisis has had its legacy. The structuration effects strengthened existing universals, most importantly the need for a credible deterrent and – in McNamara’s case – also the concept of flexible response. In McNamara’s thinking these two universals featured prominently during the US involvement in Vietnam. They did not serve him very well because the Cuban Missile Crisis was very different from the Vietnam War. But the legacy of the Cuban Missile Crisis mattered way beyond Vietnam and McNamara. Lebow and Stein (1994) make a convincing case that the reinforcement of the deterrence logic as lesson of the Cuban Missile Crisis may have had destabilising effects for the Cold War more broadly. The problems with the deterrence universal even during the Cuban Missile Crisis became all too obvious after the end of the Cold War when scholars and practitioners alike started to revisit the Cuban Missile Crisis (Allison and Zelikow, 1999; Allyn, Blight and Welch, 1989; Blight and Welch, 1989; Blight and Lang, 2005; Grattan, 2006; Lebow and Stein, 1994; Scott and Smith, 1994), with McNamara (1986; 1989; 1995) playing an important role in questioning the received wisdom.

### **The added value: tracing how actors intertwine what scholars keep apart**

The case-study strongly suggests that there is, compared to focusing on simply one logic of action, a considerable added value to the research map on political judgment. The research map *helps the researcher follow the actors more closely, yielding a more comprehensive and nuanced account of how they figure out what to do.*<sup>15</sup> This applies to each of the four components of the research map.

First, the research map *overcomes the scholarly compartmentalisation of background knowledge.* With the exception of the entrenched rational choice variant of consequentialism, all four logics of action help us identify the salience of the history of past interaction for how individuals figure out what to do. But their respective foci for what kinds of ideas derived

from past interaction matter are too narrow. McNamara's thinking was shaped by individually-held ideas, as psychological approaches to consequentialism tend to stress. But it was also deeply influenced by shared ideas. The logics of appropriateness, argumentation and practice, while neglecting the individually-held ideas, are better equipped to deal with the shared ones. Yet even when it comes to the shared ones, the analytical lines that appropriateness, argumentation and practice draw are somewhat arbitrary. As the logic of appropriateness would suggest, some of these shared ideas may be understood as norms, for example an anti-appeasement norm. Yet other shared ideas cannot be reduced to norms. They are widely accepted and rather elaborate interpretations about how politics works, for example understandings of deterrence and flexible response. The logics of argumentation and practice, given their broader focus on shared background knowledge, are helpful in this respect. But they are still too limiting because argumentation focuses on explicitly articulated knowledge whereas practice deals with tacit knowledge. McNamara clearly drew from both. At the risk of oversimplification, his procedural repertoire stayed largely implicit whereas he made those parts of his substantive repertoire explicit that seemed of key relevance to him in the context of the Cuban Missile Crisis.

Second, the resonance circuit provides *a more complete account of the various modes of reasoning* employed by individual actors, including how these modes are influenced by social interaction, than any of the logics of action on their own. Consequentialism is a fruitful starting point. McNamara carefully weighed costs and benefits. At the very beginning, he asked the question of how the US would get out of this crisis with the least costs. Soon, he came to ask the more specific question of how the US could make sure that the missiles are withdrawn from Cuba with minimum costs to the US. This does not mean, however, that McNamara was the kind of computational machine depicted by widely held rational choice assumptions. McNamara figured out what to do by putting background ideas to use to which psychological variations of consequentialism as well as the logics of appropriateness,

argumentation and practice allude. He came to see the Cuban Missile Crisis, including the evolving political constellation in the ExComm, in light of these background ideas. In the conceptual language of judgment, he subsumed what was going on in the former under the latter. This subsuming was a much broader process of reasoning than envisaged by the four logics of action. Subsuming particulars under universals provided him with much needed substantive *and* procedural orientations for how to make up his mind. Neglected by other logics, the logic of practice captures his procedural orientations rather well. McNamara drew from a stock of tacit commonsense on strategies for winning over others in personal communicative encounters and applied these to the Cuban Missile Crisis. This provided him with guidance for how to play his cards in the ExComm. The logic of practice yields considerably less explanatory power when it comes to the substantive orientations. Most of McNamara's subsumptions of universals under particulars – e.g. his subsumption of the Cuban Missile Crisis under the Cold War maxim of flexible response – were very much out in the open in the ExComm. The logic of argumentation, with its emphasis on arguments anchored in explicitly articulated commonplaces is well equipped to conceptualise these kinds of subsumptions. Compared to other logics, argumentation is also much more attuned to helping researchers grasp the workings of communication through which McNamara influenced and was influenced by others in the ExComm. But without the feel for the political game sketched by the logic of practice any account of this communication remains incomplete. The research map on judgment shows a way out of this compartmentalisation, too. The resonance circuit puts together what the logics of argumentation and practice keep apart.

Third, analysing the interplay of resonance circuit and co-configurative cycle cautions us that individuals do *not just make one giant leap figuring out what to do but many steps – some bigger some smaller*. For sure, McNamara soon settled for a naval blockade. This was his most important substantive judgment. But he made many more consequential judgments

such as substantive judgments for how to categorise the crisis (first as a political, later on also as a military problem), how to run the blockade, and how to negotiate with the Soviets; and a series of crucial procedural judgments for how to have his views prevail at the ExComm. All these judgments were critically influenced by the judgments of others in the ExComm and, very much related to this, the course of events surrounding Cuba more generally. In other words, the political situation never stood still, constantly challenging McNamara, interacting with others who were equally challenged by an evolving situation, to make judgments. The logic of consequentialism, including formal psychological approaches to judgment, misses crucial dimensions of this process. It puts its emphasis on what is taken to be the continuity of a decision-making situation (this makes it more plausible to assume consistent and stable preferences) and the one big decision by a big decision-maker to shape this situation. This glosses over the many – and in overall effect – crucial orientating steps through which McNamara came to make up his mind. It even makes analysts likely to gloss over the very person of McNamara because he, being only an advisor, hardly qualifies for the role of big decision-maker. The logics of appropriateness and argumentation leave room for analysing the many orientating steps. But they provide hints for studying reflective judgments only. The logic of practice, given its focus on practice, is very well equipped to deal with successions of orientating moves. But, as discussed above, it limits these orientating moves to habitual judgments, thus neglecting reflective judgments.

Fourth, the structuration effects depicted on the research map on judgment echo what psychological approaches as well as the logics of appropriateness, argumentation and practice have written on how today's action, sedimenting into actors' backgrounds, comes to guide tomorrow's action. Among the protagonists of logics of action, there is probably no author who has placed more emphasis on this than Bourdieu. After all, he (1977, 82) argues that the habitus, as 'the product of history, produces individual and collective practices, and hence history.' The four-fold research map on judgment underlines this emphasis. But, at the same

time, it casts its net again wider by prompting the researcher not only to look at tacit background knowledge but also at knowledge that is very much out in the open. In McNamara's case, this is especially the deterrence logic, which came to be reinforced through the Cuban Missile Crisis. Once again, therefore, it is not so much that the research map uncovers something entirely new. But the map, being located at a higher level of abstraction and inclusivity than the logics of action, helps the researcher understand the process through which actors orient themselves in more comprehensive fashion. *It does not keep separate or even exclude what actors weave together in order to figure out what to do.*

## **Conclusion**

This article developed a research agenda on political judgment. It started with the observation that there are many scholars across the great divides in our discipline who concur that judgment is a key force in politics; if we want to understand how agents figure out what to do, we have to understand judgment. Taking this remarkable concurrence seriously, I proceeded with conceptualising judgment. In a nutshell, judgment revolves around orientating oneself by subsuming particulars under universals. How agents subsume eludes ambitious theorising. Subsuming is a creative endeavour that cannot be squeezed into neat scholarly boxes. Understanding subsuming is primarily a matter of empirical research rather than heavy theoretical assumptions carving up their reasoning into distinct scholarly logics of action. Then, I provided a map for empirical inquiries into how actors subsume particulars under universals; or, in other words, a map for following the winding roads that agents travel to figure out what to do. The map depicts four key dimensions of making judgments: re-enaction of history, resonance circuit, co-configurative cycle, and structuration.

I contended that this map tells us quite a few important things about studying political agency. Whether actors have political efficacy or not has a lot to do with the procedural judgments they make while the directions into which they channel their doings are critically

shaped by substantive judgments. The case-study of McNamara and the Cuban Missile Crisis supported this argument. McNamara's procedural judgments made sure that he had a strong voice in the ExComm. He not only defended but even augmented his privileged positioning among close advisors to President Kennedy. His substantive judgments in favour of a naval blockade and the cautious running of this blockade contributed to the Cuban Missile Crisis winding down instead of escalating, and to setting the stage for managing (and mismanaging) the Cold War-related crises to come.

This study has a number of implications for International Relations that are well worth mentioning. Let me confine myself to three of them, moving from the most specific to the most general. First, *more research is required on judgment*. Most notably, there is the issue of how judgments affect different dimensions of politics. The case-study of McNamara – especially the co-constitutive cycle depicted on the research map – diverged from how consequentialist theories make sense of decisions and decision-making by unpacking decision-making into many substantive and procedural moves of orientation. But, overly narrow understandings of decisions and decision-making aside, the case-study still dealt with decision-making broadly understood. There was a crisis and influential political actors met to decide how to deal with the ups and downs of this crisis. There is no need to assume though that this is the only avenue through which judgments affect politics. For example, judgments by the public may greatly affect public justifications, without which leaders cannot embark on fateful political endeavours, ranging from social welfare reform to waging war. Boltanski and Thévenot (2006) allude to this connection between judgments and public justification.

Second, there are *limits as to what narrow theorising can do* to explain how human beings figure out what to do. We should not be too surprised if we find that agents creatively intertwine what we may consider incommensurable perspectives and if they intermingle these with all kinds of aides that our established scholarly categories fail to capture altogether.<sup>16</sup> In principle, therefore, the recent diversification of approaches to political agency, especially the

introduction of logics of action other than consequentialism to our field, is good news. After all, it could serve as a reminder for us that there are many different pathways through which agents come to make up their minds and it could improve on our scholarly equipment to understand these pathways. The widespread scholarly fixations on these logics, however, are counterproductive. All too often, scholarship engages in fine-tuning established logics – in a ‘baroque’ research enterprise, as Elster and Hylland (1986: 2) put it – rather than in eclectic attempts to borrow from different scholarly frameworks and in transformative attempts to move beyond their confines. Both – eclecticism and transformativism – are needed in order to help us follow the actors as they figure out what to do.<sup>17</sup> This points, *inter alia*, towards studying judgment. But, of course, by no means should the eclectic and transformative study of political agency stop with studying judgment.

Third, *understanding the discipline as sets of incommensurable paradigms is counterproductive*. Our discipline has become so accustomed to think of sharp boundaries separating contending perspectives that it consistently overlooks commonalities across these perspectives (Fearon and Wendt, 2002: 68). It relieves scholars from the arduous task to look beyond the narrow cluster of scholarship of which they are part and engage with different perspectives by assuming that, at the end of the day, any such engagements are futile. Yet this task is not only arduous but also absolutely crucial for our field. Engagements across different perspectives are the precondition for scholarly debates worth being labelled as such and exchanges of insights in our discipline. Perhaps most importantly, such engagements can serve the purpose of what might be called (meta-)theoretical triangulation. If scholars from different perspectives arrive at similar knowledge claims, we can be (for the time being, at least) more confident about them than if these claims are found within a single perspective only. Understanding the constellation of perspectives in our field as crisscrossing horizons, therefore, is a more adequate and useful working epistemology. It pushes us towards searching for overlaps across different perspectives. At times, we may fail in uncovering any

overlaps; at other times, we may be more successful. But simply assuming that there are none is all too simple. Many overlaps await inter-perspectival inquiry. There is no need to confine ourselves to judgment, logics of action, and even agency. We just have to invest more efforts into looking for them.

## NOTES

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<sup>1</sup> Of course, this question, being so fundamental to the study of world politics, is also addressed under many different headings such as the agent-structure debate (Wendt, 1987; Wight, 2006), and the scrutiny of ‘microfoundations’ (Finnemore and Sikkink, 1998; Checkel, 2001). Yet these debates, too, are connected to discussions on logics of action.

<sup>2</sup> See Sewell (1992) for this definition of political agency as political efficacy.

<sup>3</sup> Note that the interpretation of incommensurability in our field is much more absolute than the one proposed by Kuhn (1977: xi–xii).

<sup>4</sup> There are ‘softer’ and more formal variants (Kydd, 2008: 429–430) of rational choice but they do share these assumptions in common. Evolutionary game theory constitutes a departure from these assumptions (Maynard Smith, 1972) but it is only slow in making inroads into our field.

<sup>5</sup> Some authors also employ the concept of schema, which is assumed to work similarly to heuristics (Fiske and Linville, 1980; Lau and Sears, 1986).

<sup>6</sup> But several authors, while staying within the study of argumentation broadly conceived (Bjola and Kornprobst, 2010), interpret this logic more broadly. Most notably, the advocacy literature (Keck and Sikkink, 1998; Finnemore and Sikkink, 1998) proceeds in this manner.

<sup>7</sup> For determinism versus judgment see also Joas (1996: 15, 235).

<sup>8</sup> Perhaps the most ‘middle’ of these middle path arguments is Frank Schimmelfennig’s theory of rhetorical action. The choice mechanism is consequentialist but the means to attain goals revolve around ideas. Shaming, for example, becomes an important means to pursue one’s interests (Schimmelfennig, 2000).

<sup>9</sup> See Schneider (1998) for the difference between eclectic and transformative theory.

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<sup>10</sup> If they do reflect about it, the concept tends to remain vague, for example when it is likened to a ‘capacity of certain intelligent organisms’ (Martin, 2006: 14) or even contradictory, for instance understood as encompassing decisions (Baron, 2004: 19) or as providing an input for them (Koehler and Harvey 2004, xv) in contributions to the same edited volume.

<sup>11</sup> Of course, many ways of how actors subsume eludes the four logics of action altogether. Subsuming particulars under universals is a broader conceptualisation of reasoning than the four logics taken together.

<sup>12</sup> There are some attempts to correct this problem (Choi, Choi, and Norenzayan, 2004) but their view of social context is rather thin.

<sup>13</sup> I borrow the term ‘resonance’ from the social movement literature (Benford and Snow, 1988).

<sup>14</sup> I borrow the term ‘structuration’ from the agency-structure debate (Giddens, 1984; Wendt, 1999).

<sup>15</sup> Studying this one case, of course, cannot provide sufficient empirical evidence to refute any of the logics of action. This includes rational choice, which I consider to be the approach most challenged by my findings. But rational choice is about explaining general tendencies with a set of parsimonious assumptions. Studying the reasoning of just one person (McNamara) in a particular set of circumstances (Cuban Missile Crisis) says very little about general tendencies. I do think, however, that my findings are suggestive. They echo a *caveat* that Goldgeier and Tetlock (2008: 477) put very well: ‘Parsimony is not a trump value. Theories should be as simple as possible, but no simpler.’

<sup>16</sup> There are many dimensions of agency that continue to elude our established categories. Perhaps most notably, we still tend to juxtapose reason and emotions. A growing literature counters this trend (Marcus, Neuman and MacKuen, 2000; McDermott, 2004; Lebow 2005).

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Judgment, as conceptualised in this study, leaves room for including emotions. Subsuming particulars under universals often has an emotional dimension to it.

<sup>17</sup> This is, of course, not a call to immediately cease all attempts of fine-tuning existing logics of action. Looking in depth at particular details of the processes through which actors figure out what to do can help us to get a better grasp of these processes. But it is a postulate not to neglect research on the breadth of these processes and, at a minimum, to situate the fine-tuning in the broader range of aspects constituting them.

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