‘The Cold War is what we make of it’: when peace research meets constructivism in International Relations

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Contents

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This chapter argues that one of the lineages of present-day ‘constructivist’ research in International Relations is peace research. Indeed, the ease with which constructivism-inspired research has swept over Western and Northern Europe cannot be understood otherwise. Constructivism provides the meta-theoretical support and furthered the classical peace research criticism that the Cold War was no necessity, but politically ‘constructed’.

Peace research, as well as constructivism, insists that international ‘anarchy’ does not exclude the existence of an international society. In its view, anarchy has no unbreakable logic: its effects are a construct of that international society. It does not exclude that agents can learn in international society, that its rules can be amended, and that these are, in turn, related to the constitution of the roles these very agents can play in that society. In other words, international relations are the effect of political processes, not structural or historical necessities. Peace research/constructivism does not deny that ‘power politics’ can exist. This power politics is, however, not the result of invariable laws of politics, but is the compounded effect of agents who believe in such pessimistic invariable laws of politics caught in structures reflecting these beliefs. In terms of research, this meant that the Cold War lock was a ‘self-fulfilling prophecy’ whose extent needed to be empirically established and not axiomatically excluded from research. In political terms, the potential for détente policies was to be sorted out in step-by-step and controlled confidence-building measures and arms control, not excluded through a policy which mistook the sometimes necessary *means* of containment and deterrence with the *ends* of international politics.

Arguing for this point of encounter, even if central, comes with a series of

[1] For helpful suggestions and criticisms, I am indebted to Emanuel Adler, Chris Browning, Barry Buzan, Tarja Cronberg, Olya Gayazova, Pertti Joenniemi, Dietrich Jung, Anna Leander, Andrey Makarychev, Heikki Patomäki, Alexander Sergounin, and Ole Wæver. Yet, some of their points can only be taken up in a later and longer version. The usual disclaimers apply.

caveats, however. First, it should not be mistaken to mean that everything there was and is to peace research can be subsumed under constructivism, or vice versa. Rather, it wants to remind constructivists that some of their political argument comes as a 'déjà vu' to peace researchers and that they might be well advised to also look at the rest of peace research, in particular its emancipatory tradition (Alker 1996). Inversely, peace research would gain from taking some of the particular constructivist or indeed post-structuralist insights seriously. For constructivism has been inspired by a series of developments in the philosophy of social sciences which have undermined the faith in 'data'. Since the recourse to the 'real world' to question the validity of realism was *alone* not enough, it needed to provide an ontological base for the claim of a self-fulfilling prophecy; it needed to provide a general approach which could conceptualise learning and process in a coherent manner. If constructivists should be more aware of the analytical, practical and normative agenda of peace research, peace research, in turn, should not take the 'déjà vu' as an excuse to neglect the theoretical and meta-theoretical turn in the social sciences which is necessary to their own defence.

The second caveat has to do with the presentist presentation of the main claim. I will try to address mainly IR scholars, which means, as a result, that peace research is primarily seen through the lenses of the discourse in IR, of 'realism and its critics'. Although this makes the lineage around self-fulfilling prophecies more visible, it also does some violence to the very self-conception of much peace research. I hope that this shortcoming is at least partly offset by the advantage of opening up for this encounter, and by Heikki Patomäki's (2001) article, which, written from within peace research, can be read parallel to much of the following.

The early critique of the logic of anarchy and the realist opening for process

Realists insisted that whereas politics in a domestic setting was able to show instances of progress, international affairs could not (Wight 1966; for the most forceful critique of this dichotomy, see Walker 1993). There, history was bound to return. For all his own scepticism about science, Morgenthau was read as a protagonist of a determinist realism insisting, as he was, on the balance of power, the 'self-regulatory mechanism of the social forces which

manifests itself in the struggle for power on the international scene', which was there out 'of necessity' (Morgenthau 1948: 9 and 125 respectively).

The first important step in reclaiming ground from realism consisted in showing that politics can make a difference, that *realpolitik* was no necessity. Two conceptual critiques have been particularly important. Inis Claude's (1962, and again 1989) and Ernst Haas' (1953) analyses of the balance of power had to conclude that, far from being a 'necessity' as in Morgenthau's treatment, it was void because tautological, and hence rather a normative appeal for its implementation, a 'prescription' or 'ideology'. Similarly, Morgenthau's concept of the national interest was scrutinised – with much the same result, as the young Robert Tucker's (1952) sober and all the more cruel dissection of Morgenthau's self-contradictions shows. Later and on a more theoretical level, Raymond Aron (1962: 97–102) tried to show that a utilitarian theory of politics cannot hold where the national interest (security) in terms of power would be analogous to utility (wealth) expressed in terms of money in neo-classical economics. For power is not analogous to money. Hence, national interest assessments are intrinsically indeterminate.

The implications of this indeterminacy did not escape all 'realists': they had to open up for the understanding of process and not just necessity. Wolfers (1962) proposed an approach which was not saying outright that realism was (always) wrong, but that realism was simply *a special case* which applies at one pole of the international continuum between power and indifference. Crucially, one had to find out what makes some systems drive towards the pole of power and some towards the pole of indifference. And with all but the name, Wolfers analysed the risk of power politics as a self-fulfilling prophecy. For there were situations in which power politics was the right strategy and some where strategies of re-assurance, as we would call them now, would be the correct ones. Power politics/escalation before World War I was as fatal, as appeasement before World War II. In some cases, it is the effect of worst case thinking which only produces the very worst case it is supposedly trying to avoid.

Peace research as the study of process pathologies

Starting with a section on realism exemplifies the IR lenses of the present chapter. Although presenting realism as peace research's 'other' is not

uncommon in the literature (Vasquez 1983), it is more correct to say that for early peace researchers the 'other' was war, not realism.[2] Yet there is a crucial link between war and realism which is also central for the argument about 'self-fulfilling prophecies'. For early peace research was interested in finding out the systematic reasons for being locked in the Cold War posture. In doing this, it focused on material impediments to change, such as the imperialist structures of the international system (Galtung 1971) or the military-industrial complexes in both superpowers (for a critique of the Western model, see Galbraith 1978 [1967], esp. chapter XXIX). More consequential for the link to present-day constructivism was, however, the focus on the role of realpolitik ideas in reproducing Cold War politics and the 'worst case'. As put by Herbert Kelman (1978: 166), one of the founders of Peace Research in the US (and the *Journal of Conflict Resolution*), '[i]n the search of a settlement, however, the dangers to be avoided are self-fulfilling prophecies that a satisfactory settlement is unattainable...'.

When détente seemed possible, enemy-images and systematically biased understandings of world politics were perceived to blind high politics. Yet, in contrast to classical deterrence analysis, early peace researchers tended to see this blindness not as a kind of collective action problem, i.e. as the irrational outcome of strategic interaction due to the adverse condition of anarchy. Instead, they relied heavily on insights from social psychology (Kelman 1958) and studied what appeared to be as *systematic learning pathologies* and irrationalities.

For the economy of this short reconstruction, Karl W. Deutsch will play a doubly pivotal role (for the lineage of Deutsch, and Ernst Haas, to constructivism, see also Adler 2002). On the one hand, Deutsch and his associates (1957) launched a research agenda on amalgamated or pluralistic 'security communities'. Rather than being fixed on the bipolar divide and the conditions for a simple Concert, they looked back at the conditions under which former zones of war have become zones of peace. For their focus on process, it is not fortuitous that such studies were then related to the analysis of International Organisation (Claude 1956) and Integration (Haas 1964). Since much of this experience is based on the lessons of European integration, and in particular the 'anomalous' Scandinavian/ Nordic peace (Wiberg 1993, 2000), accordingly

[2] I am indebted to Emanuel Adler for this idea and formulation.

much of the security community model was ingrained in European peace research, indeed providing an important part of its identity.

Deutsch, the scholar of cybernetics, that is the science of information, plays a second pivotal role. For systems theory and more particularly cybernetics was to provide peace research with one crucial theoretical underpinning. Indeed, it allowed peace research to systematically analyse learning pathologies in terms of perverse effects of self-referentiality. Cybernetics allowed the connection of two crucial research agendas, namely the self-referentiality of military build-up/deterrence on the one hand, and of psychological processes on the other. It looked at the systematic effects of political economy on foreign policies, as well as at the possibility of *systematic* misperception, either because of the systematic bias in decoding information (coherence versus cognitive dissonance) or because of the functional needs for upholding *Feindbilder* (enemy-images), for example, to rally domestic support and national/group identity.

It is in particular this *Feindbild* literature (the word appears first in other languages than English), prominent in particular in Europe, which is a forerunner of present constructivism-inspired scholarship in IR, and in its insistence on self/other politics also of post-structuralist IR. Similar to those studies of 'belief systems', which focus more explicitly on social components (Little 1988), this literature is more encompassing than the literature on sheer misperception (Jervis 1976), which tends to be more cognitively oriented (see also Frei 1985). Yet, by focusing on the ideational components of social constructions, it has a less materialist ontology than Marxist inspired peace research approaches.

'Autism' and the social learning pathology of deterrence practices

Deutsch's communicative approach starts from the self-referential characteristics of systems and looks for the way information is processed within a system to respond to disturbances (Deutsch 1966). As such, the approach, although not being 'functionalist' in an IR sense, has a theoretical functionalism to it as any system theory has.

When applied to international politics during the Cold War, this way of looking at politics in terms of complex information management has important consequences. The usual way of presenting the Cold War consisted in an

action-reaction scheme. Whether intended or not, the security dilemma pushed international 'powers' to be on their guard and react to whatever advance of the other side. Whether intended or not, such relentless 'being on guard' produces a spiral in the arms race. It is a process which is basically outside-in driven.

Instead, basing politics on the structure of communication process comes to a different result. Dieter Senghaas, a student of Deutsch, called an extreme closure 'autism' (Senghaas 1972: 38–62), i.e. a pattern of communication which is not only self-referential, as practices generally are, but has an inbuilt logic which makes adaptation to the environment extremely difficult. Expressed the other way round, when dispositions, both institutional and perceptual, clash with the context of their application, it is not the dispositions, but the processing of reality that is adapted. In cybernetics, this would be considered a learning pathology.

Deterrence theory survives only via the expectation of the worst-case. Deterrence policies *predispose* to a particular stereotyped understanding of the world which reproduces autonomously the perceptions of threats. Thus, the arms race is not an action-reaction between perceptions/actions of agents, but the product of self-generated moments of inertia and autonomously produced threat-perceptions. Escalation is less a collective action problem of individually rational agents and more an inertial effect of two autistic systems. Super-power relations were decreasingly the product of their interaction and increasingly the result of the juxtaposition of their internal dynamics. In other words, deterrence thinking is connected to a process pathology which risks locking the international system into a self-fulfilling prophecy of a worst-case perception relentlessly reproduced.

'Feindbilder' and individual learning pathologies

This pathological self-referentiality was also understood at a more individual level which concentrated on social groups linked with and dependent on the practices of deterrence, such as some politicians, academics and military lobbyists.

Feindbilder provide the analytical link between the social and the individual level. From the literature, Weller (2000: 87–93) has distilled five basic approaches to the understanding of 'enemy-images' in peace research,

which are not mutually exclusive: (1) stereotypisation, (2) selective perception, (3) dichotomisation of the social world (reduction to friend-foe relations), (4) an effect of psychological projections from oneself onto others, and (5) socially functional insofar as they allow for example, the strengthening of unity of a population to legitimate government, arms race and diversionary warfare.

All five enemy-image approaches link up with the study of social pathologies, the first three methodologically, the last two in terms of the collective level of action. The first three derive their explanation from the cognitive economy of mental processes usually understood in cybernetic terms (Steinbruner 1974) just as much as Deutsch and Senghaas used it on the social level. The last two refer to social psychology and a functional theory of society, respectively. Hence, whereas enemy images refer to both the individual and the social level of explanation, they share an interest in a functional/system analysis of mental and social processes respectively.

This link of peace research to social psychology and the study of prejudice and stereotypes has also been very important in shaping its normative component (for the following, see also Weller 2001). For it allowed perceptions to be criticised as 'distorted' and not 'reality-suitable' (*realitätsunangemessen*), inertial to change or cognitively dissonant with 'real' politics.

Finally, assuming the interrelationship of the material and ideal world, it hence allowed the more forceful and open criticism of the tendency to create self-fulfilling prophecies of such enemy-images, as done in the programmatic statement of the project at the *Hessische Stiftung für Friedens- und Konfliktforschung* (Nicklas and Gantzel 1975).

Constructivism and reflexivity on process

However, peace research's focus on process and the theme of a self-fulfilling prophecy does not yet link up with present constructivism. For this, we have to take into account the intellectual developments in the social sciences from the 1980s, including IR. As this last section will show, many of the constructivist empirical insights come as little surprise to peace researchers (and many liberal writers in IR); yet different constructivist streams provide a more solid meta-theoretical anchorage, theoretically more varied and arguably more refined explanations.

The paradoxical success of peace research-cum-constructivism

There is a certain paradox in this sweet, if silent, success of peace research through its new constructivist host. For its more quantitative wing had been put on the defensive, and appears at odds with present-day constructivism. Yet the less quantitative traditions, such as much of Galtung's writings and the German tradition, could argue that the End of the Cold War confirmed both peace research approaches and the détente policies they inspired (Wiberg 1992).

Some peace research faced a series of critiques. The quantitative nature of much peace research in the US (Correlates of War) and its imitators came under scrutiny again in the 'methodological turn' (Little 1991) of the 1980s. Although quantitative peace researchers have been much less simplistic than often decried (for a balanced defence, see Vasquez 1987), the very assumptions underlying huge cross-historical comparisons met with increasing incredulity in some parts of the scientific community (Suganami 1996). In parallel, the early peace research tradition, including also part of Galtung's writing, was relying on behaviouralist assumptions – the diminution of violence through social justice based on objective human needs (see in particular Burton 1985, 1986) – which were being increasingly challenged (Patomäki and Wæver 1995), albeit perhaps not the idea of a utopia itself. Finally, the normative peace research tradition, so strong in Europe, seemed to rely on a clear picture of what 'reality really is' like, as compared to distorted perceptions others have, and how a more peaceful history could evolve if only we followed certain recipes – all of which belied a certain empiricism and West(/Euro)-centrism. Hence, the varieties of peace research came under combined attack for their positivism, their empiricism and their *unreflected* normative character.

Yet the end of the Cold War worked as a catalyst. It seemed to give an immediate plausibility to the critiques of realism: peaceful change was possible. The starting point for understanding the meeting of peace research and constructivism in an IR perspective lies in the critique that neorealism was actually unable to even conceive of this type of peaceful change (Patomäki 1992; Kratochwil 1993; Koslowski and Kratochwil 1994). This critique relied on the rehearsal of the 1980s by writers who would be called post-structuralists today. Ashley (1986 [1984]) and Walker (1987) had started the critique by showing the biases of neorealist theorising, Ashley (1987) later arguing that

realism itself has been the (status quo) culture of an international society of diplomats.

Such a critique explicitly connected the level of observation with the level of action and hence comes to one of the crucial parameters of constructivism. For in my understanding (Guzzini 2000), constructivism is a meta-theory that can be characterised as:

(1) Being particularly sensitive to the distinction between the level of action (proper), the level of observation and the relationship between the two (usually theorised in terms of power);
(2) Having an epistemological position which stresses the social construction of meaning (and hence knowledge);
(3) Having an ontological position which stresses the construction of social reality.

Such a position emphasises two major inspirations of recent theorising, namely the interpretivist and the sociological turns in the social sciences. Taking the interpretivist turn seriously means starting from the idea of meaningful action and hence from the difference between social sciences, which need to interpret an already interpreted world, and natural sciences, which need not (Schutz 1962 [1953]). Theorising must therefore conceptualise the level of common-sense action apart from second-order action (or: observation). Most importantly, it must analyse their relationship. Again setting the social world apart from the natural, our understandings of people and their action can make a real difference to the latter. For instance, being identified as an opportunist state representative influences options in future negotiations. Moreover, human beings – but not natural phenomena – can become reflexively aware of such attributions and influence their action in interaction with them. This 'looping effect' (Hacking 1999: 34) is one of the reasons for the importance of 'identity' in constructivist writings, theoretically and empirically – and for the study of self-fulfilling prophecies.

Taking the sociological turn seriously implies that meaningful action (and hence also the knowledge of both agent and observer) is a social or inter-subjective phenomenon. It cannot be reduced to cognitive psychology or to choice based on interests. Instead, the sociological turn emphasises the role of the social context within which identities and interests of both actor and acting observer are formed in the first place. It also focuses on language as the model case of intersubjectivity, both on the epistemological level and in its practical

performative function (Kratochwil 1989; Onuf 1989; for a discussion, see Zehfuß 1998). Finally, it means that the relationship between the two has in itself to be problematised, i.e. the relationship between the social world and the social construction of meaning (incl. knowledge).

Hence, when Alexander Wendt (1992) published his 'Anarchy is what states make of it: the social construction of power politics', he dressed up a basic peace research idea in new and arguably more coherent theoretical and meta-theoretical clothes (Wendt chose Giddens' social theory for this). Wendt provided a predominantly, but not pure, idealist ontology to base the 'social construction of reality' on, something not done in earlier peace research (for an assessment of his approach, see Guzzini and Leander 2001). It comes as no surprise that he then conceived of the international system as a society with different 'cultures of anarchy', including Hobbesian Realpolitik, which have a tendency of a self-fulfilling prophecy (Wendt 1999). Again, the realist case was a special case in a wider approach, and again research was to centre on questions of process, such as moving from the least to the most peaceful cultures (on change and process in Wendt, see Drulák 2001 and Sárváry 2001), identified, again, in security communities.

Sketching the variety of IR research inspired by constructivism and peace research

Taking the interpretivist and the sociological turn seriously opened up many more paths for IR research than just Wendt's, some of them constructivist and close to peace research themes and claims. The following can be no exhaustive list. The underlying theme of all approaches is how to create the conditions for a de-escalation or de-militarisation of conflicts, removing the inertial obstacles of predominant constructions of social reality.

Emanuel Adler's constructivism (Adler 1997) has had two inter-connected research interests which, almost textbook-like, link up the emphasis on the social construction of knowledge with the construction of social reality. In his earlier work (Adler 1987), he studied the influence of political enterpreneurs and their ideas in shaping the policy process and initiating change (see also Checkel 1997). This theme was picked up in a study together with Peter Haas on epistemic communities, more resolutely asking questions about the power of ideas-enterpreneurs, reflexively applied to all knowledge producers (Adler

and Haas 1992). To complete the picture, Adler together with Michael Barnett (1998, Chapter 1–2) explored the concept and the policies around 'security communities' trying to get it out of its originally objectivist and Euro-centric formulation.

Related to the last item, some constructivists have been concerned with the role of language in the process of change. Coming from a critique of instrumental rationality, Harald Müller (1994, 1995) has emphasised the role of communicative rationality in negotiation processes (see also Risse 2000). Such an approach can also be connected to questions of rhetorical action (Schimmelfennig 2001) and their potential for entrapment, which might force actors to change policies, as part of more general studies on norm-diffusion and socialisation (representatively, see Klotz 1995).

In a related manner, the 'Copenhagen School' of security studies has concentrated on the performative function of language for understanding processes of 'de/securitisation'. It does not understand security as an 'objective' phenomenon which could be deduced from some power calculus, nor as an arbitrary 'subjective' phenomenon. By concentrating not on what exactly 'security' means and is, but rather on what uttering 'security' does (Wæver 1995; Buzan, Wæver *et al.* 1998), it argues that whenever security (or the national interest) is invoked, i.e. when issues are 'securitised', particular issues are taken out of regular politics and made part of a special agenda with special decision-making procedures and justifications attached to it. '(National) Security' mobilises intersubjectively shared dispositions of understanding, political action and legitimation. In reverse, and this shows the initial puzzle which prompted the conceptualisation, if issues are taken out of national security, if they are 'de-securitised', then politics can return to its place. Wæver's initial case study was German détente policy as a conscious de-securitisation strategy. It accepted the borders for changing their political meaning. Several issues were actively 'de-securitised' by being taken out of high politics, such as to allow more exchange between the two German states and for allowing a possible change in the GDR.

Finally, the symbolic construction of social reality, which peace researchers had handled with the analysis of enemy images, has been picked up by another type of constructivism-inspired discourse analysis. The latter focuses on the construction of collective identities, be it national identities and 'other'-identities (Neumann 1995, 1999), or on the construction of the national interest

(Weldes 1999). It does not look as much at whether or not enemy images fit reality, nor whether they are reducible to lacking empathy, but on how they get inscribed into existing discourses/ scripts and hence into patterns of understanding and legitimation. Campbell's (1992) earlier study, although self-avowedly not constructivist, seems related, exploring the relationship between foreign policy and identity construction, reversing the idea that foreign policy follows an already constituted identity.

Via the themes of process, learning, self-fulfilling prophecies and reflexivity, the present chapter has shown the lineage that at least some constructivism-inspired scholarship in IR shares with peace research. It hopes to contribute to this mutual awareness, inviting constructivists to take these roots seriously and to learn from them.

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