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How cognitive frameworks shape the American Approach to International Relations and Security Studies

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Abstract

Why do American perspectives of IR continue to hold sway over an increasingly diverse discipline? What actually constitutes "Americanness" in IR? Who gets to do it? These are the central questions we explore in this essay. We address these issues in a way that is quite different from existing literature. Drawing on cognitive and behavioural insights from social psychology, we argue that there is a distinct "American Approach" to International Relations and Security Studies, and that this approach is a product of Western cognitive frames. We identify three factors that represent the American Approach's hyper-Westernized framing: individualism, a preference for causal rather than contextual analysis, and a belief in the universalism of equality. We argue that these are reinforced by two social identity processes—academic identity and national identity. The consequences of "Being American" in IR and Security Studies suggest not only problems of attention and accuracy, but an inherent failure to appreciate that Western—and particularly, American—ways of seeing and valuing the world are not universal.

Acknowledgements

Introduction

Since its publication in 1977, Stanley Hoffmann's assertion that International Relations (IR) was an American social science has provoked considerable interest and debate. This essay explores why the "American Approach"[1] to IR and Security Studies, as we term it, continues to hold the discipline in thrall. In contrast to other studies of the discipline that account for "Americanness" by associating it with the rise of the US as a superpower (Hoffmann 1977; Smith 2002) or as a result of its overwhelming physical presence (Turton 2013), we take a different approach. While we agree with Hoffmann's identification of the core features of American IR and his analysis of how these features developed historically, *we argue that the distinct characteristics of the "American Approach" rest more fundamentally on hyper-Western cognitive processes.* Despite its widespread acceptance and use in social psychology (see for example Sapolsky 2017; Kahneman 2011), the impact of cognitive frames has not been explored in international relations, nor in political science.[2]

Importantly, the values and frameworks that are conditioned by Western cognitive processes are far from universal. In this essay, we explore how these *hidden* by-products in Western cognition shape the parameters of IR research and our analysis of the world. Here, the focus is on individualism, a preference for causal over contextual analysis and a belief in the universalism of equality. These are reinforced by academic and national socialization processes.

What makes the American Approach distinct from other Western[3] approaches to IR is that it is shaped by a **hyper-Westernised framework** *of cognitive biases and normative assumptions.* Certainly, Western perspectives and cultural values overlap with American ones. But we argue that what sets the American Approach of IR apart is that (a) the U.S. sits at the far end of the Western cognitive spectrum (Nisbett 2003); (b) the U.S.'s individualist/independent orientation is the most pronounced (Hofstede 1983; Hofstede et al. 1990; Hofstede et al. 2010; Hofstede 2011; Hofstede 2017b); and (c) American academic preferences and intellectual practices reinforce these patterns.

Terminology

First, a note on terminology. Throughout this essay we refer to the "American Approach of IR." Our decision to define an American Approach therefore acknowledges that there are other methods of thought that represent different perspectives and worldviews, rather than treating American perspectives and approaches as the default category. To be clear, most scholars did not get to choose whether they would "become American" in IR. For most students of IR, this identity was foisted upon them through the process of PhD training and socialization within wider American society (as discussed in Section 3).

A core argument that runs throughout this work is that the key characteristics of the American Approach are a natural outcome of *hyper-Western* cognitive processes—these underlying cognitive processes are not universal. We use the terms cognitive processes and cognitive frameworks interchangeably to mean "tools for perception, memory, causal analysis, categorization, and inference" (Nisbett 2003: xiv).

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[1] For brevity, we use the term "American Approach to IR' as an abbreviation for an 'American Approach to IR and Security Studies".

[2] But see Surel (2000) on policy-making.

[3] Here, the West includes Europe, Canada, Australia and New Zealand.

Caveats

Given the sensitive nature of our inquiry and the possibility of having our arguments misinterpreted, we begin with several caveats. First, we emphasize that we are not passing judgment on whether the American Approach to IR is "good" or "bad". Instead, we draw attention to the fact that the cognitive frames underpinning the American Approach are not universal. We suggest that variations in cognitive frames lead us to ask some kinds of questions and not others—and by extension, they affect how we chose to answer those questions. Put simply, we argue that cognitive processes shape how we see and understand the world in particular ways, which in turn impact what we study and how we study it.

Second, in discussing differences in cognitive processes between Easterners and Westerners, it is not our intention to essentialise these differences nor to stereotype East and West as distinctive, homogenous groups. For example, we do not support the propositions put forward by Richard Herrnstein and Charles Murray (1994) in *The Bell Curve* regarding the differences in "intelligence" between ethnic groups. Instead, we emphasize that individuals can be primed to use one set of cognitive frameworks over another, regardless of their national identity or geographical location.

Cognitive frames can be taught and learned—as we see in academic socialisation processes. For example, an American IR scholar may display certain Eastern cognitive characteristics, in the same way that a Japanese IR scholar may display certain Western cognitive characteristics. These are not binary categorizations, but closer to ideal types. Given the findings of previous research, we expect considerable variation amongst scholars both within countries (Knight and Nisbett 2007) and within regions (Varnum et al. 2008).

However, we suggest that for the average scholar,[4] cognitive frames and social identities affect, in systematic ways, both the kinds of research questions that are posed (attention), and the ability to pursue the answers to these questions objectively (accuracy). We would assert equally that all nationalities have their own particular weaknesses and systematic biases built into their cognitive frames. However, the historical dominance of the American Approach and of American scholars in IR (Hoffmannn 1977; Kahler 1993; Waever 1998; Acharya and Buzan 2007), in both institutional and theoretical terms (Nossal 2000; Smith 2000; Turton 2015) means that U.S. biases and blind spots merit special attention (Crawford 2000).

Third, our intention is not to caricature and homogenise the Americanness of IR. We recognise the wide variety of methods, geographies, theories, and perspectives within the discipline. American IR is a diverse field, and embraces a spectrum of epistemological and ontological approaches, ranging from strict positivists and rationalists to a growing number of soft-positivists and non-positivists (Maliniak et al 2014). American IR's specific traits, first identified by Hoffmann and discussed in the first section of this paper, would therefore apply more to positivist/rationalist scholars and less so to critical theorists, feminists, post-modernists and constructivists, for example. The American Approach that we discuss here is one of many schools of thought that are practiced and taught in the US.

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[4] Inevitably, there will be accusations that we are stereotyping the social identity of the archetypal American IR scholar. Here, we caution that all human beings use stereotypes— these are "probabilistic assessments about characteristics of a group." Stereotypes concern the mean of the group, and we fully acknowledge that they are silent about the variance within that group. See D.L. Rousseau 2006: 63 and Y.T. Lee, L.J. Jussim and C.R. McCauley 1995.

This article is organized as follows. The first section builds on the existing literature to disentangle the distinctively *American* traits of IR. Drawing on Hoffmann's seminal 1977 article, we identify three enduring characteristics of an American Approach of IR—a "quest for certainty", positivism and generalizability, and ahistoricism. In the second section, we identify a different, but complementary explanation for how these distinctly American characteristics of IR came into being. Borrowing insights from social psychology, we show that Americans have distinct cognitive frames and hold hyper-Western assumptions and values. We argue that these frameworks affect the research questions that scholars choose to ask, the ways in which these are framed and studied, and how they see the world more broadly. We identify three key properties of American cognition that impact accuracy and attention: *individualism, a preference for causal rather than contextual explanations, and a belief in the universalism of equality.*

The *third* section of our paper considers the question of *Who* is American in IR and the process by which individuals "become American." We focus on two intertwining processes of social identity formation: academic identity and national identity. These socialization processes shape research agendas and precondition certain blind spots and biases within the discipline. In the concluding section of our essay, we explore some of the implications that arise from an American approach to IR. Finally, we discuss practical policies for addressing this gap, and suggest a future research agenda.

1. What is the American Approach to IR and Security Studies?

We focus on three interrelated features first identified by Hoffmann and later refined by others (For example, see Alker and Biersteker 1984; Waever 1998; Smith 2000, 2002; Crawford and Jarvis 2001; Tickner 2003; Friedrichs 2004; Biersteker 2009; Kristensen 2015; Turton 2015): *America's quest for certainty; its associated preferences for positivism and generalizability; and the discipline's ahistoricism* (See Figure 1 below). Taken together, we refer to research conducted in this tradition as being part of the "American Approach of IR and Security Studies" or the "American Approach". We use the term "American Approach" as shorthand for these three specific traits. We treat the American Approach as an ideal type, not as a rigid absolute.

In bringing together the three characteristics of the American Approach, Kenneth Waltz's Theory of International Politics (1979) illustrates the paradigm most clearly and beautifully.

> "If the relation between a and b is invariant, the law is absolute. If the relation is highly constant, though not invariant, the law would read like this: If a, then b, with probability x. A law is based not simply on a relation that has been found, but on one that has been found repeatedly. Repetition gives rise to the expectation that if I find a in the future, then with specified probability, I will also find b."

Waltz's use of abstraction; his move towards laws and theories; his emphasis on causal logic and categories; and his use of discrete (not continuous) concepts all demonstrate the quest for certainty, the desire for generalizability, and the tendency to ahistoricism.

Figure 1. Hoffmann's explanation for the rise of IR and the rise of the American Approach
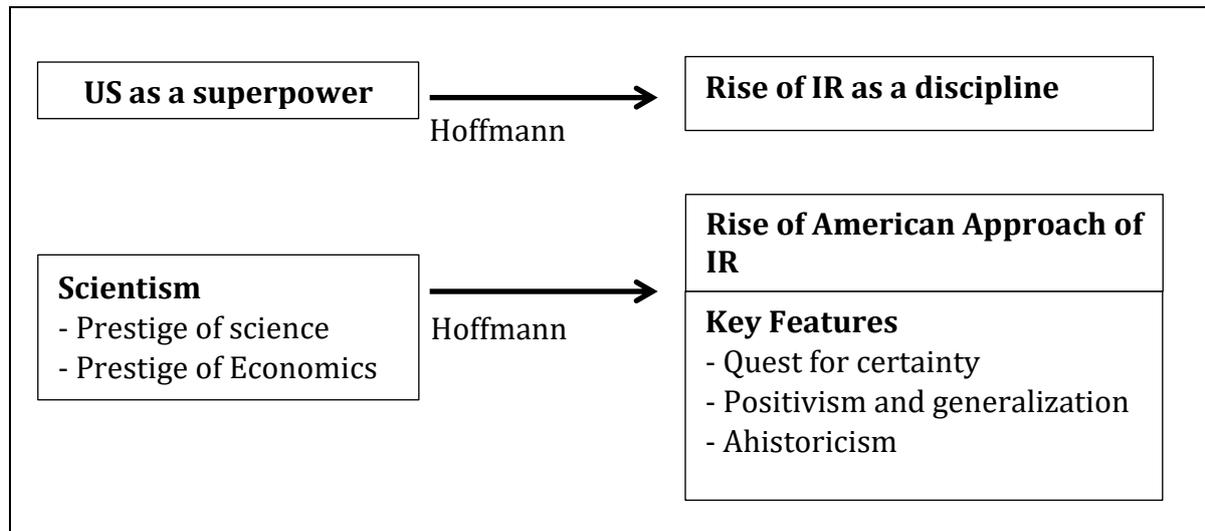
Critically, an American Approach does not necessarily imply a bias that favors America in its research results [Collaborator]; nor does it suggest that disproportionate attention is paid to America within the discipline. In fact, subscribing to an American Approach does not necessarily depend on nationality, citizenship, geography or location of training. Just as there are advocates for the English School in Canadian and Australian academia, there are also defenders of the American Approach in Germany and Sweden and the UK. With that in mind, we argue that the three characteristics that define "Americanness" in the discipline are rooted and reinforced in the US because individuals continuously experience the priming effects of America's hyper-Westernised values (See Section 3).

Indeed, the idea of an American Approach to IR may seem misplaced, given that Americans dominate the sphere to such an extent that there is a virtual monopoly in the discipline, with little viable outside competition from alternative frameworks. This is demonstrated in tangible, quantifiable terms—whether through publishing (Turton 2015), theory-making (Smith 2000), university syllabi (Hagmann and Biersteker 2014), or the sheer number of scholars (both in and outside the US) who agree that IR is dominated by America (see Table 1). Yet domination by American scholars or even American-trained scholars is separate from the domination within the discipline of the American Approach (quest for certainty; positivism and generalizability; ahistoricism).

Table 1. "The discipline of International Relations is an American-dominated discipline"[5]

	No. of participants	Disagree or Strongly Disagree (%)	Agree or Strongly agree (%)
US	745	15	63
Non-US countries combined	1432	27	65

[5] See TRIPS 2017 for a complete break-down of survey responses.

| All countries | 2177 | 22 | 61 |

1.2 The quest for certainty

Hoffmann asserted that perhaps the most striking characteristic of American IR was its "quest for certainty," which was underpinned by an inherently *scientific* approach to research. Indeed, there is a fundamental belief that IR is very much an "empirical science of laws or regularities of state behaviour" (Waever 1998: 714). Indeed, Lebow argues that this quest for certainty within the social sciences should be understood as the "ultimate Enlightenment project (2014: 12)." In this sense, the science part of social science is taken literally. There is a belief that there are laws of human nature and social organization that can be discovered through observation and study. International relations as a "science" can be seen most clearly in the fundamental belief that findings can and should be replicated, and that everything that matters can be captured through observation and measurement. It is also present in the American Approach's predilection for hypothesis testing, for objectivity, and for quantitative, formal methods.

Certainty is also associated with a belief in progress and prestige. What makes certainty the Holy Grail of American IR—what makes it peculiarly *American* rather than British or Western, for example—is the depth of belief that the world *can* be understood through scientific methods, that certainty *can* be established, and that the unknown can become known *if* the right paradigm is used (Hoffmann 1977: 45). This quest for what Hoffmann (ibid.) calls the "masterkey" is both related to and rests on notions of positivism and generalizability.

1.3 Positivism and generalizability

The goal of positivism is to take the patterns of nature and society and formulate them into general laws, building from observations of the world, much as the physical sciences do. As a philosophy of science, positivism is associated with rational choice approaches, and formal, quantitative methods of analysis. It is operationalized through the scientific method, which was derived as a method of experimentation in order to test things in a reproducible (rather than a replicable) manner (Drummond 2009). Positivism thus provides a means of *ordering and categorising* the world (Lebow 2014). As we will show in Section 2, this is an inherently Western trait, but is most pronounced in Americans. Rationalism is a closely related methodological approach that assumes the rationality of actors (Keohane 1988). It, too, is grounded in certainty, and draws on rational choice theory (Fearon and Wendt 2003: 54).

The existing literature has firmly established positivism as a key characteristic of American IR (Smith 2000: 375). Data from the TRIP surveys affirms the dominance of positivism within American IR journals (Wemheuer-Vogelaar et al. 2016; Levine and Barder 2014). The recent TRIP survey from 1980-2014 show that *82% of journal articles in the 12 most highly-ranked politics and IR journals were positivist* in their epistemology (TRIP 2017; Maliniak, Peterson, Powers, and Tierney 2018).

Indeed, there has been continued criticism that the dominance of the American Approach has rendered positivist, rationalist approaches more legitimate or "better" than others.[6] For example, Maliniak et al. (2014) find that highly ranked American IR journals publish more articles that use quantitative, positivist tools than other approaches even though 59% of political scientists use qualitative methods as their

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[6] See for example Bennett et al (2003) on the Perestroika movement in IR.

primary method, and another 14% mainly use other non-positivist methods.[7] As Chris Brown states, "Those of us who do not employ rational choice thinking are now marginalized, whether we are American or not (2001:215)." By this interpretation, knowledge is therefore only valued if it has been quantified, empirically studied, and proven to have explanatory power (Cochran 2002: 63). One of the ways this value can be demonstrated is by universalising the specific.

Generalizability is the belief that a specific paradigm can be applied elsewhere. It is a vital principle of the American Approach and of political science more generally. The quest for certainty assumes that generalizability is desirable—that we *should* generalize. Without making this explicit, *valuing generalization as a concept also implies an acceptance that sense-making occurs through ordered application of theories, facts, and laws*. It also affords greater primacy to models and theories based on economic logic, because these offer generalizability (Waever 1998). However, the Western premise of generalization—regardless of history, culture, or geography—rests upon a set of universalist "truths". It turns out that *these universalist truths are not universal at all*. Rather, they are distinctly Western and American in their social construction (see Section 2).

Paradoxically, the blind spots in the American Approach are located in the presumed neutrality of its methods. These blind spots skew not only the *kinds* of research that the discipline deems interesting, but also its geographical focus (see Collaborator, in this Special Issue), and its temporal location. Most importantly, these blind spots affect the nature of the "policy solutions" that are developed.

This is evident in the study of civil wars where the most common and widely cited studies employ large-N cross-national datasets that consciously avoid delving into the specific politics of any particular country case (see for example Collier and Hoeffer 1998, 2001; Fearon and Laitin 2003). These statistical studies search for empirical regularities that can be extrapolated from the data (using low-context methods). The same is true for Democratic Peace Theory (DPT) (Small and Singer 1976; Doyle 1983; Russett 1994) whose critics prefer high-context analysis (Farber and Gowa 1995; Oren 1995). This deep-seated belief in the Democratic Peace *as an empirical law of international relations* (see Levy 1988)—without an appreciation for history and context— arguably led to the 2003 invasion and occupation of Iraq (Woodward 2002). Meanwhile, even as DPT debates emphasized formal democracy at the national level, they consistently overlooked deliberative democracy which was a prevalent form of local decision-making in many sub-Saharan communities as well as in Native American and First Nations tribes in North America. This appears to be one of those blind spots which will be undervalued where the emphasis is placed on positivism and generalizability.

1.4 Ahistoricism

Within International Relations and the social sciences more generally, the privileging of Western political evolution has shaped the way concepts and causal mechanisms are developed, as well as the analytical values and frameworks employed to explain "the world" and its relationships (see collaborator in this issue). The shift to ahistoricism needs to be examined in this light.

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[7] The 14% consists of pure theory, legal/ethical analysis, policy analysis. Quantitative methods is the dominant method for 25% of scholars. Formal and experimental methods make up 3% of the total (see TRIP 2017).

What is distinctive about the American Approach itself requires some contextualization and differentiation from its broadly Western roots. The study of IR, as it developed in Western Europe, emphasized a more historical tradition as compared to its subsequent flourishing in the U.S. In her critique of the formation of Western social science, Dorothy Ross argues that, "The alternative to a social science based in nature is one based in history..." (1993: 100). Yet even though IR developed out of a historical approach, its foundations in the West have always implied a selective approach in deciding which countries were worthy of scholarly study and which ones were not. Not all history was created equal in European IR (Acharya and Buzan 2007).

In its earliest incarnations, IR was historically oriented, but it concerned itself primarily with Great Powers (Angell 1909, Carr 1939, Morgenthau) and this has also continued to be true of how IR is practised in the US. Even those American IR scholars who come from a more historical tradition have been criticized for their broad brush strokes over large parts of the world (see for example Huntington 1997; Kaplan 2005) and for assuming a linearity to political development that mimics a Western enlightenment trajectory, exemplified by Fukuyama's End of History (1989). In other words, because some countries or regions are perceived to be detached from Western power, they were previously excluded from IR.[8]

While not strictly ahistorical, the hegemonic bias of Western-centric histories (Acharya and Buzan 2007; 2017) have successfully silenced other histories in IR. "Context" is explored only if it is deemed relevant to the US, Western powers, or contemporary events. This is not a value judgment on our part, but an observable fact (Buzan and Little 2010). History is therefore "thin" rather than "thick".

Later, even as the discipline expanded and evolved in Western Europe, the way in which it engaged with history remained limited. Western Europeans did not so much discount history as continue to privilege some histories over others. In doing so, some elements of European history that do not conform to the "progressive" narrative were pushed aside, and removed from IR altogether (ibid). This is particularly evident in Western scholarship on post-colonial and occupied spaces (Acharya and Buzan 2007, 2017; Biswas and Nair 2009).

For countries that have experienced colonialism, Western scholars tend to provide historical context from the point at which they are colonized or when they first encounter the West (see Reid 2011). Typically, context does not extend (or is not seen as relevant) to the deeper, richer history of places and tends to neglect the nefarious ways in which the West has historically behaved.[9] For example, it is striking that books on Liberia— a quasi-American colony—frequently begin with the arrival of the freed slaves from the US (see for example Ellis 2007; Pham 2004; Ciment 2013; Cheng 2018).

History, before slavery or colonization, is inclined to be truncated or ignored (Schoenbrun 2006). This is because it tends to be "muddy, difficult to conceptualize and categorize and often all rather violent, and not in a positive, constructive way, but in a cyclical, 'nasty, brutish, and short' kind of way" (Reid 2011: 153). History becomes foreshortened. This tendency is prevalent in Western IR scholarship on post-colonial

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[8] Zomia provides a useful example of this in that it defies the modes of categorisation and inquiry that characterise the American Approach (Scott 2009).

[9] For example, in his reappraisal of early European-African relations, Herman Bennett in African Kings and Black Slaves (2018) demonstrates how Portuguese and Spanish traders interpreted the legitimacy of African kingdoms according to Roman civil and canon law. Sovereignty was accorded by these European traders only to those kingdoms that conformed—which ultimately determined whether or not that population could be enslaved.

South America (e.g. Mignolo 2012, Acemoglu et al 2013) and post-conflict-Africa (e.g. Clapham 1998; Reno 1998). Put differently, the American Approach discounts the *longue durée* and instead interprets historical context through the lens of the *courte durée* (Braudel and Wallenstein 2009). Proximate causes are favoured as *a priori* explanations while long-term drivers of change are obscured.

After WWII, as the center of political power shifted from Western Europe across the Atlantic, the study of international relations moved definitively away from a historical approach and towards social *science*. There is a clear break here towards an American Approach, distinct from its European roots. As Hoffmann notes, this happened as the US rose to become a global superpower. As Americans came to dominate economically, militarily, and politically, the study of IR and Security Studies shifted towards scientism, and the discipline's roots in history were set aside in favour of a more positivist approach.

Initially, history is not rejected from IR as much as positivism is embraced. Historical approaches were crowded out rather than being deliberately excluded. Social scientists quested for generalizable laws and rules that would apply irrespective of time and place. A social science approach accepts that there may be small variations around a given law or theory, but at heart, it is premised on the notion that there are laws of human nature.[10] The specific and the particular are not important because the aim is to create abstract models, which only require a system's most salient features. This view of social science de-emphasizes the importance of context, of history. As the generalizability of the social sciences separated itself from the specific and individual nature of the humanities, IR migrated from the latter to the former. *The discipline moves from high-context analysis to low-context analysis.*

We argue further that the problem of ahistoricism is not just confined to a bias of presentism (Fitzpatrick 1987). It is also part of a wider pattern that negates the relevance and importance of unpacking causal complexities and identifying deeper dynamics of change and continuity.

2. Cognitive frames

While we agree with Hoffmann that powerful political, economic and social dynamics contributed to the rise of the American Approach, we offer a complementary explanation for these unique features. We argue that the defining characteristics of the American Approach—and consequently, IR more broadly—are actually by-products of distinctly Western cognitive frames. *These cognitive frames are not universal, as is largely assumed across the Anglo-American literature in IR.* Identifying their existence reveals the implicit biases of the discipline and also exposes how universalizing these assumptions harms the analysis and practice of international relations.

In a positivist framing of Hoffmann's (1977) discussion on the influence of the US in IR, the dependent variable is the degree of scientism adopted by IR scholars (as captured by the quest for certainty, positivism and generalizability, ahistoricism). This approximates the penetration of the American Approach in the discipline. The key independent variables are the prestige of science and the prestige of economics.[11] The existing literature makes the case that these independent variables continue to be

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[10] An extreme modern-day version of this belief is manifest in the interdisciplinary study of Social Physics (Pentland 2015).

[11] This is not how we would normally choose to narrate or model the rise of the American Approach of IR. We frame the discussion in these terms for those who prefer positivist methodologies.

correlated with the dominance of the American Approach (Hoffmann 1977; Crawford and Jarvis 2001; Turton and Freire 2016).

We make a different argument. Our explanation turns to a hidden z factor that explains the degree of scientism in the American Approach of IR as well as two of the independent variables (prestige of science, prestige of economics) that other scholars use to explain the prevalence of the American Approach. *This hidden z factor is Western cognitive frames.* See Figure 2.

Figure 2. The hidden z factor: Western cognitive frames
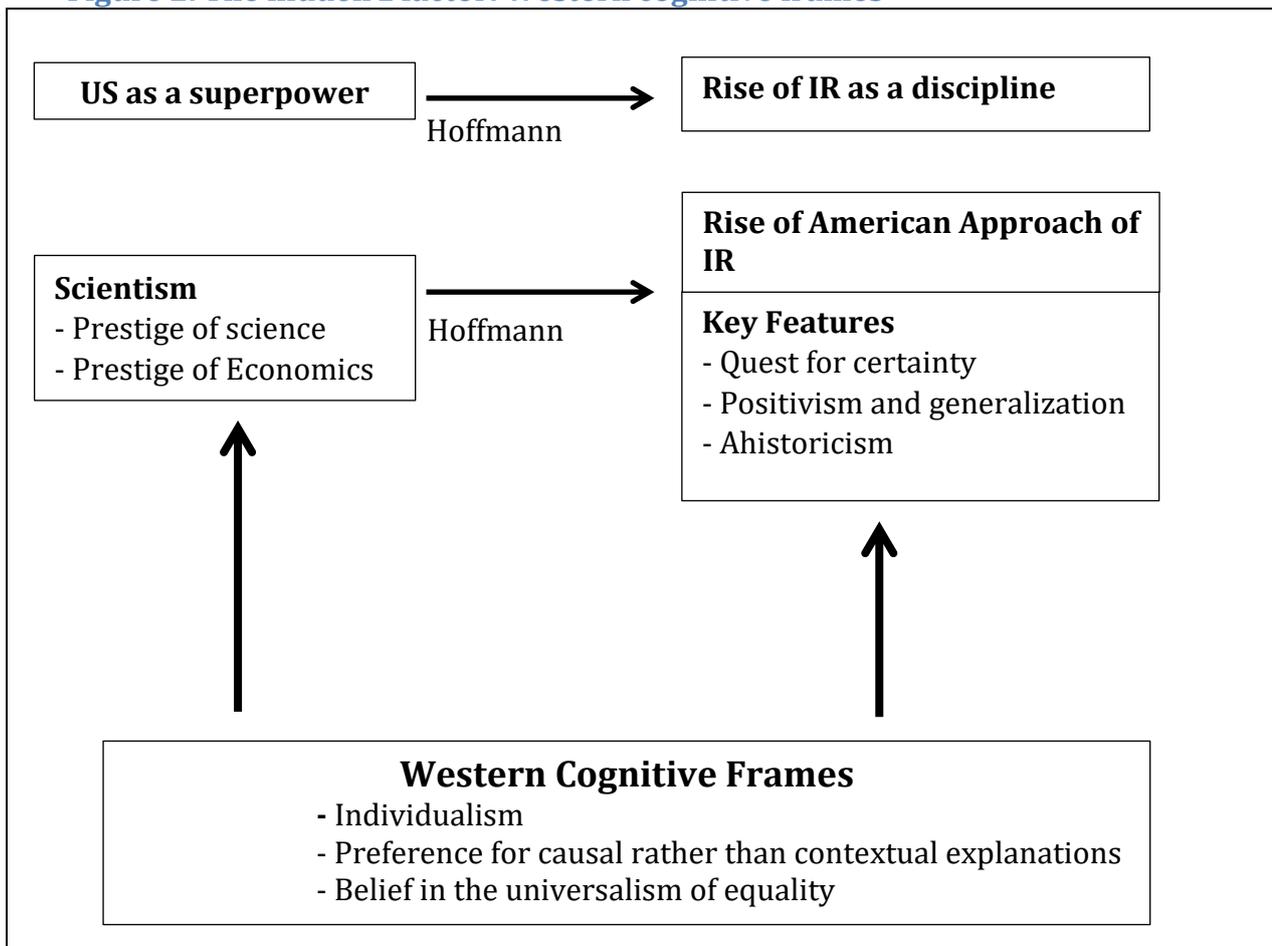
In this section, we trace the "what" of American IR back to its philosophical values and normative assumptions, illustrating how they reinforce hegemonies and existing traits. To do this, we adopt a social psychology approach using cognitive frames, drawing deeply on the seminal work of Richard Nisbett and his many collaborators. To date, cognitive frames have not been applied to international relations, nor to political science. Nevertheless, based on how useful they have been in other disciplines, we anticipate that they will have utility for revealing the cognitive biases inherent in our discipline— especially in illuminating key normative assumptions that we believe to be hidden to most scholars trained in the West, and particularly in the US.

2.1 What is a cognitive frame? How has it been used?

Cognitive frames are the tools that allow us to explore the world; they are used "for perception, memory, causal analysis, categorization, and inference" (Nisbett 2003: xiv). In IR and Security Studies, these frames in turn depend upon *Western* values and

assumptions. In the West, including in the U.S., there is a general assumption that the history and development of IR can be explained as part of a continuous tradition, stretching back to Ancient Greece (Lebow 2008) and extending forward to the future. These epic accounts of international thought idealize the past in order to legitimize the present (Kurki and Wight 2007: 8). And while the origins, historical traditions and historiography of American IR, and IR more generally, have been examined by a number of scholars (see for example Smith 2000; Crawford and Jarvis 2001; Waever 1998), the role of cognitive frames has not been included in these debates.

A range of fields including anthropology, business management, law, and economics to gender studies, linguistics and communication have made extensive use of cognitive frames. Variants of cognitive frames have been used within the field of business management, to illuminate how different societies (and individuals) conduct and manage their business models (Trompenaars and Hampden-Turner 2008; 2011). Cognitive frames have also been applied to educational research to demonstrate how attention to context shapes the educational outcomes of American and Asian university students (Masuda et al. 2008), its impact on online learning (Tapanes et al. 2009), and even how researchers create and conduct questionnaires and surveys (Schwarz and Oyserman 2001) and conduct fieldwork in different contexts (Schwarz et al. 2010). Some of the most interesting applications of cognitive frames have found that occupation forms the cultural basis for cognitive differences. For example, Uskul et al. found that farmers and fishermen are more holistic than herders (2008).

Looking at IR and security studies through the lens of social psychology and cognitive frames might seem unusual, with the worry that doing so offers only deeply stereotyped and somewhat binary arguments. However, the results have been far more subtle and nuanced than that. To illustrate, the social psychologist Robert Sapolsky builds on the cognitive frames work to examine how cultural differences produce different moral systems in his exploration of war and violence (2017). Within political science, cognitive frames have also been used to make sense of the rise (and fall) of states and regions (see for example Gries 2004; Katzenstein 2005). Yet despite its potential explanatory power for analysing relations between countries, the application of cognitive frames has yet to be integrated into IR or security studies.

2.2 The origins of cognitive frames

It is remarkable that both Ancient Greece and Ancient China emphasized reciprocal obligations in their philosophical traditions. It was not until much later during the Renaissance and Reformation eras that East and West parted ways more decisively, as the West developed the notion of an independent self (Lebow 2018). Concepts such as rationalism and individualism that we now associate with the Ancient Greeks were in fact advanced during the 19th century—with an eye to upgrade and distance Greece from Asia.

Broadly speaking, these two philosophical traditions can be separated into Western preferences for more *analytical* thought and Eastern preferences for more *holistic* thought (Peng and Nisbett 1999). Using a range of different experiments, Richard Nisbett and his colleagues, have shown conclusively that Westerners employ profoundly different cognitive frameworks compared to Easterners (i.e. those who come from Asia). These cognitive frames are internally consistent and self-reinforcing.

Nisbett's research suggests that Western cognitive processes tend to be analytical and logical, with greater attention placed on "objects", and less attention placed on context (See Figure 3). Categories are assigned and there is a preference for

using rules to explain and predict behaviour (Nisbett et al. 2001: 293). On the other hand, Easterners show greater consideration to contextual factors and relationships, especially when it comes to assigning causal attribution. In short, Westerners show preferences for simple mono-causal explanations whereas Easterners assume there is complexity and contradiction.

Figure 3. Continuum of cognitive frameworks: Ordering the world and processing information[12]

US   **West**   **East**

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Analytical	Holistic
Greater attention to objects	Greater attention to relationships
World composed of 'things' (discrete objects)	World composed of substances
Greater attention on controllability of the environment/external factors	Less belief in the controllability of the environment/external factors
Focus on objects as preferred patterns of explanation for events/behaviours	Focus on context, relationships and environment as preferred patterns for explanation of events/behaviours
Preference for categorisation to order the world	Preference for relationships to order the world
Use of formal, logical rules	Use of experience
Individual	Communalism
Independent	Interdependent
Causal	Contextual

In the East, considerable value is placed on in-group harmony, meaning that debate is discouraged (Nisbett 2003: 37). Instead, the Middle Way is preferred. In contrast, in the West there is a tradition of debate and logical analysis that dates back to the Greek institution of the public assembly (Cromer 1993) and moves through the Enlightenment.

In Figure 3*, it is important to note that the US sits at the extreme end of the Analytical continuum.* To illustrate, Kitayama et al. (2009: 248) have shown experimentally that:

"North Americans are more likely than Western Europeans (British and Germans) to (a) exhibit focused (vs. holistic) attention, (b) experience emotions associated with independence (vs. interdependence), (c) associate happiness

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[12] Adapted from Nisbett (2003: 64-5)

with personal achievement (vs. communal harmony), and (d) show an inflated symbolic self."

The US therefore demonstrates the most "Western" tendencies (such as a high degree of individualism) while those in Japan and China demonstrate the most "Eastern" tendencies. This is not a value judgement but rather, an observation that *American cognitive processes are demonstrably distinct from those of other Westerners, and that these processes underpin the American Approach to IR.*
We find that the key characteristics of the American Approach, and the uncritical application of the scientific approach more generally, are both rooted in an **American cognitive frame which (i) privileges individualism over collectivism; (ii) emphasizes causality over contextuality; and (iii) idealizes equality.**
However, in asserting that there exist differences in cognitive processes we do not wish to engage in simplistic stereotyping, nor do we wish to overemphasize these differences. We are sensitive to the claim that the "differences between Eastern and Western styles of thinking are not real or are overstated" (Ho Mun and Yan 2007: 383). Here, we emphasize again that these are *ideal types*, and that there is considerable variation within countries, cultures and regions (Kityama et al. 2006; Knight and Nisbett 2007). Indeed, individuals themselves can change orientations over time. Individuals can be primed at a particular moment to adopt a contextual or an analytical mindset. For example, Oyserman and Lee's (2008) meta-analysis finds that different primes of social orientation can produce shifts in cognition.
Furthermore, we also recognise that there is a potential for methodological bias in studies that seek to extrapolate cognitive differences between various cultures (Ortner 2003). We note that these differences shift and evolve as they move eastwards away from the US which has the most "Western" mindset, as we discuss later (Nisbett 2003). Rather than discreet categories, it is more useful to consider these differences as existing on a continuum—frameworks that can be learned and unlearned, and activated or left dormant (as discussed in Section 3.1).

2.3 By-products of the American cognitive frame
Americans share core analytical values and cognitive frameworks in their scholarship (see section 3, Self and Other). These values and frameworks bias their interpretation of international events and relations. Due to space constraints, we focus on three by-products of the American cognitive frame that have profound implications for American IR: i) individualism as an organising principle of *American* society; ii) a preference for causal analysis over contextual analysis; and c) a belief that equality is universally desired and aspired to. The key differences between Western and Eastern cognitive processes shape the values and assumptions that people hold. Table 2 illustrates some of the most salient variations.

Table 2. Summary of differences in values and assumptions between East and West[13]

Values & Assumptions	
West/Analytical	**East/Holistic**

Insistence on freedom of individual action	Preference for collective action
Belief in universality of rules that govern behaviour	Preference for specific approaches that account for particular context and nature of relationships
Individuals are deemed equal and equality is desirable	Equality is not assumed nor necessarily desirable
Individual distinctiveness	Preference for in-group harmony
Preference for egalitarianism and achieved status	Acceptance of hierarchy and ascribed status

We discuss the first three of these differences below, but taken together, they reveal how an American cognitive frame could lead to blind spots in IR and Security Studies. While Asians are more likely to be familiar with a Western/Analytical cognitive frame, Westerners are less likely to be familiar with an Eastern/Holistic frame. As we show, these blind spots can focus our attention toward or away from particular topics, and frame the ways in which we conduct research.

Individualism

Hofstede's seminal survey work on cultural dimensions illustrates that Americans are unusually individualistic (Hofstede 1983; Hofstede et al. 1990; Hofstede 2011). Originally conceived as a survey of IBM employees to measure how culture affected values and behaviour, Hofstede used his results to construct four dimensions for mapping out cultural differences. One of these dimensions is individualism-collectivism (100 to 0), measuring "the degree of interdependence a society maintains among its members." This measure:

> has to do with whether people´s self-image is defined in terms of "I" or "We". In Individualist societies people are only supposed to look after themselves and their direct family. In Collectivist societies people belong to "in groups" that take care of them in exchange for unquestioning loyalty (Hofstede 2017b).

With one of the highest individualism scores in the world (91 out of 100), Americans clearly stand out in this respect (Hofstede 2017b).[14] Indeed, the primacy of the individual is so deeply ingrained into American society that it is taken as given (Elazar 1972; Bellah et al. 2007). The Pew Research Center's Global Attitudes Project similarly found that Americans are more individualistic than the publics in other Western countries such as Britain, France, Germany and Spain (Kohut et al. 2011). This contrasts with more collectivist countries, where the natural unit of analysis is just as likely to be the family (Trask 2009: 30). The corollary of this feature of American life is that it potentially leads IR scholars to overstate the importance of individual agency, and to undervalue the significance of structural factors in their research.

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[14] See also Harry Triandis 1986, as well as R. Inglehart and C. Welzel 2005. On how researchers use this term, see C. Harry Hui and Harry C. Triandis 1986.

This strong sense of individualism, especially as expressed through economic individualism (Feldman 1982; Bozeman 2007), is further reinforced through Western institutions of capitalism and electoral democracy. At their core, both of these taken-for-granted institutions employ a rational actor as decision maker in their operational models. This strong sense of individualism contrasts sharply with societies that are more collectivist in nature. For example, China scores 20 on Hofstede's Individualism-Collectivism scale, revealing a strong preference for harmony over personal freedom (Hofstede 2017a). In the West, this desire for societal harmony has an alter ego, and is expressed negatively as conformity.

Table 3. Hofstede's Individualism-Collectivism Scale (2017b)[15]

Country	Score
Guatemala	6
Indonesia	14
Pakistan	14
Burkina Faso	15
Ghana	15
Albania	20
Bangladesh	20
China	20
Ethiopia	20
Vietnam	20
Egypt	25
Kenya	25
Saudi Arabia	25
Ukraine	25
Mexico	30
Nigeria	30
Zambia	35
Turkey	37
Brazil	38
Jamaica	39
Lebanon	40

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[15] This is a geographically diverse sample of countries. The full set of country scores is available on the website. See Hofstede 2017.

Iran	41
Argentina	46
Japan	46
India	48
Israel	54
Czech Republic	58
Estonia	60
Iceland	60
Poland	60
Finland	63
South Africa	65
Germany	67
Ireland	70
France	71
Denmark	74
Belgium	75
New Zealand	79
Canada	80
UK	89
United States	91

Highly collectivist = 0
Highly individualist = 100
0-50 = Collectivist
50-100 = Individualist

Americans' extreme emphasis on individualism suggests that even the most basic conceptions of "national interest" are different from other Western countries. This problem is compounded when American socio-cultural values, such as equality and rational choice, are taken as a baseline for non-Western countries,[16] and the "success" of those countries is measured as if the underlying scale was value-neutral and universally shared.

For those who come from societies that are more individualistic and independent,[17] it is difficult to accept that a significant proportion of the Chinese

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[16] For example, see rankings by Freedom House, Polity IV, and the Fund For Peace's Fragile States Index.

[17] Even within the U.S., Dov Cohen and Richard E. Nisbett 1997 have shown that the South and West of the country hold different norms of violence related to a culture of honor than the North and East of

populace—if not the majority—would approve of a political vision that emphasizes "the communitarian requirements of order over individual preferences of freedom,"[18] even though this is consistent with Hofstede's cultural dimensions and other findings on Asians' cognitive processes (Nisbett et al. 2001; Nisbett 2003; Peng and Knowles 2003).[19]

This opposes a core assumption that most Westerners take for granted: "People are oriented toward personal goals of success and achievement; they find that relationships and group memberships sometimes get in the way of attaining these goals (Nisbett 2003: 48-9)." Yet in fact, through a large body of social psychology experiments, both Richard Nisbett and Kaiping Peng convincingly demonstrate that the opposite is true for East Asians. *Asians prioritize harmony in their social relations over personal success; feeling good is directly linked to being in harmony with the group and meeting group expectations.*

Hence, a Chinese reading of the Arab revolutions in Tunisia, Egypt, Libya, Syria, Yemen, and Bahrain would contrast sharply with a Western reading because East and West do not share cognitive frames, nor do they hold similar normative social values. Put differently, Chinese leaders' cultural socialization would make salient the fear of chaos and disharmony while a Western and American reading of these events would highlight the political emancipation of individuals.

Yet the failure to acknowledge that national interest is in part culturally constructed has made it difficult for Americans to even imagine that the Chinese Communist Party's fear of state disintegration could be genuine (for example, during the Tiananmen Square protests (Ba 2003: 630-4)), and not just a convenient pretence for clinging to power. Accepting that such a blind spot exists has real consequences for how we theorize about major power relationships.

Causality vs. contextuality

Social psychologists have convincingly demonstrated that not only are Westerners more inclined to individualism, but that their cognitive and analytical frameworks focus less on context, relationships, and the wider environment than Easterners (Nisbett et al. 2001; Nisbett 2003; Ji et al. 2000). Moreover, Americans have been shown to hold hyper-Westernised cognitive frames. In a series of experiments conducted with American and Asian (Chinese, South Korean and Japanese) subjects, Nisbett and his colleagues found that Easterners attribute behaviour to external factors and Americans to internal factors (Morris and Peng 1994; Nisbett 2003). Asians are also significantly more likely to pay attention to the context and the connections between objects and their environments (see for example Nisbett and Masudo 2003: 11165-11168). In other words, "Asians appear to attend more to the field and Westerners more to salient objects" (ibid). Furthermore, compared with other Westerners, Americans were found

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the United States. In one experiment, they showed that employers from the South and West were more likely to respond in an understanding way to a job applicant who had killed someone in an honor-related conflict than those in the North. In the second experiment, Southern and Western newspapers that had been sent information about a stabbing following a family insult wrote stories that were "more sympathetic toward the perpetrator and presented his actions as more justified than northern papers did." These results only applied to honor-related violence, not all violence or crime.

[18] Michael D. Swaine and Ashley J. Tellis 2000: 137), as cited in Alice D. Ba 2003: 632).

[19] Chinese scores also differ sharply from the United States in other dimensions. Power Distance: China (80), US (40); Long Term Orientation: China (87), US (26); Indulgence: China (24), US (68). See Geert H. Hofstede 2017b; Geert H. Hofstede 2017a).

to focus more on objects than contexts. In other words, Americans tend towards more pronounced causality than contextuality (Kitayama et al. 2009).But what does that mean in practice and what implications does this have for American IR?

Focusing on the object through a causality-based framework narrows down the scope of vision to proximate factors—while ignoring the wider (less certain) context. This can be understood as a natural consequence of the American cognitive frame. The cognitive focus on the object—*rather than the wider relationships or contexts in which it occurs*—results in blind spots within the discipline. These objects may be states, international organisations, leaders, political parties, armed groups, institutions or even non-state actors. American research is therefore attentive to salient objects, in an attempt to categorise entities that "matter" and then to generalize from those contexts.

Directing attention toward discrete objects at the expense of the wider field profoundly shapes our worldview. That a discipline called International *Relations* should be cognitively biased in favour of categories of "things" rather than *relationships and contexts* is somewhat ironic.

To demonstrate this cognitive difference, Ara Norenzayan, Edward Smith, Beom Jun Kim, and Richard Nisbett (2002) showed Figure 4 to Korean, European American, and Asian American subjects. Subjects were then asked which of the two groups the Target Object resembled the most. (Readers should make their own judgments before continuing on.)

Figure 4. Which group does the Target Object most resemble?
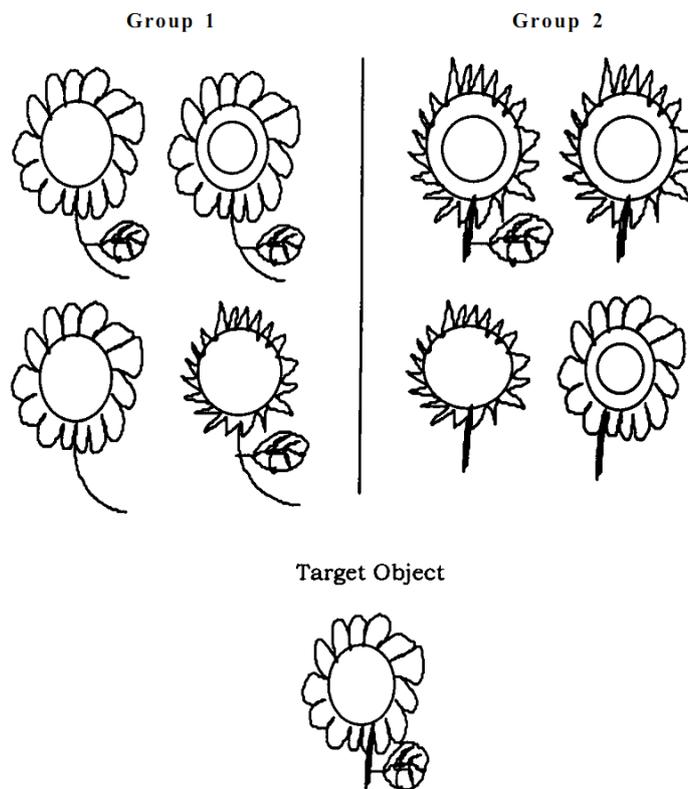
It turned out that Koreans were more likely to categorize the object into Group 1 (60% of the time) whereas European Americans were more likely to categorize the object into Group 2 (67% of the time). While the Target Object looks more like the objects in Group 1, the flowers on the right in Group 2 share one clear property: they all

have straight stems. European Americans are much more likely to find these types of rules and use them to categorize the Target Object.

This preference for causal approaches, categories, and principles helps explain the Western cognitive preference for decision rules. It is notable that IR subject areas are frequently cast as binaries: State/Non-state, Democratic/Authoritarian, Weak states/Strong states, Liberal/Illiberal, Global North/Global South.

The Western tendency to categorize is also apparent in how we interpret events and analyze the individual's role in those events. Western perceptions of Paul Kagame illustrate this point. When Kagame "ended" the Rwandan genocide and became President of Rwanda, he was hailed by the West as a democratic innovator—a leader in the heart of Africa who would be a role model for liberal democracy and market capitalism (Kinzer 2008). However, in constructing Kagame as a democratic torch-bearer, the West could not see beyond the "presentism" of the genocide and the colonial era. With Kagame, the West ignored many important contextual factors including Kagame's military past, Rwanda's unstable relationships with its neighbors, and the deeper pre-colonial political, social, and cultural dynamics that remained in flux after the genocide. Attributing Kagame's authoritarian shift to his disposition ignores many important contextual factors.

This is an example of what psychologists term the "Fundamental Attribution Error," whereby a behaviour is attributed to the disposition of the person instead of the situational factor (Ross 1977). Compared to Asians, Westerners are more susceptible to making the Fundamental Attribution Error because Asians are more likely to notice situational factors (Incheol and Richard 1998; Norenzayan, Incheol, et al. 2002; see also the Introduction to this Special Issue). Returning to the Kagame example, a holistic interpretation of the gradual authoritarian shift in his governance would see it as a product of the larger environment. Conversely, a more categorised, object-centred interpretation would consider authoritarianism to be caused by the disposition of the person (Kagame) rather than as emanating from the context or situation.

Assumptions surrounding equality

One of the most interesting differences between Eastern and Western lies in how the two groups think about equality. In the West, *equality between individuals* is considered a Utopian ideal. While the notion of equality is usually seen as dating from the French Revolution of 1789, synonymous with the slogan "Liberty, equality, and fraternity" (Rousseau 2008), its historical pedigree dates back to the writings of Aristotle, Plato, and St Thomas Aquinas (Rawls 2009). Equality is a fundamental principle of the United Nations, as exemplified in the 1948 Universal Declaration of Human Rights. It forms a cornerstone of how Westerners think about justice (Cohen 2009), citizenship (Marshall 1963), gender (Cohn 2008), and the quality of life (Nussbaum and Sen 1993).

Although there is recognition that equality (and equity) are difficult to achieve in practice, it remains a powerful ideal that Westerners assume is universal. Put simply, more equality means that we all do better (see for example Wilkinson and Pickett 2009). The assumed virtue and inviolability of equality permeate Western thought, as well as institutional and academic practices, especially in the U.S. This is written into the DNA of the country: the Declaration of Independence states unequivocally that "all Men are created equal, that they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable

Rights, that among these are Life, Liberty, and the Pursuit of Happiness."[20] In the US, equality is deeply entrenched in legal and political ideals yet, paradoxically, in practice is more akin to an "egalitarian fantasy" (Piliavsky 2018) which privileges some groups of people over others (Young 2001), often depending on the colour of their skin (Bonila-Silva 2017).[21] Notwithstanding the uncomfortable reality, equality remains a valuable prize and aspiration. America's individualistic, independent traits are intertwined with the ingrained assumption that equality is sacrosanct.

"Americans have a distinctive set of beliefs about equality. In particular, they have a stronger taste for political than for economic equality. These beliefs have deep cultural roots." (Verba and Orren 1985: 2). The primacy afforded the notion of equality within the literature on IR and security studies is illustrated by Michael Walzer's work *Spheres of Justice*, which argues that the principles of fairness which should govern distribution within different spheres, including money, power, health and even love, must be determined by the dominant values citizens hold toward each type of goods (Walzer 1983).

But equality is not a universal value. It is a product of particular, Western-centric cognitive processes and traditions. In other parts of the world, equality is *not* seen as something to be desired, celebrated or assumed (Nisbett 2003: 49). It is not afforded the same fundamental right and primacy as it is in the U.S. In Eastern thought and practice, for example, ascribed status and hierarchy are preferred values (Trompenaars and Hampden-Turner 2011). Equality as an end state is to be avoided rather than promoted (Munro 1977). The Western value of equality is not universally admired, nor does it necessarily "travel" well, despite the Western assumption that equality amongst citizens fits neatly with other cultures' worldviews. This has profound implications for how IR analyzes individual and state behaviours.

Within both the American Approach and global institutions of governance, there is an expectation that democracies should strive for equality. But what a hyper-Western cognitive framework fails to take into account is that, outside the West, and outside the US, *not all people want to be equal*. Indeed, in many societies a hierarchical status quo is preferred. Similarly, not all individuals wish to occupy a higher position within a hierarchy; some are content to hold a subordinate position (Nisbett 2003: 49) or one of dependency (see Ferguson 2013).

Accepting these propositions has implications for how we analyze enduring forms of patrimonial and clientelist forms of governance. Viewed through a Western cognitive framework, regimes such as that of Zaire's Mobutu Sese Seko would be equated with inequality and corruption.

Unequal clientelist practices are seen as laying the foundations for protracted conflict, human rights abuses, authoritarianism, and informal modes of rule (Stearns 2012). Again, a Western perspective might see Mobutu as contributing to inequality and poverty (Gupta et al. 2002). Yet if patronage is considered through an alternative, Eastern frame of analysis, then it can be seen as a means of stability and prosperity for some, but not all. It preserves order by ensuring the maintenance of hierarchical structures. Crucially, the relationship between client and patron is not based on rights and equality, as in the Western model, but on more communally-oriented duties and obligations (Chabal 2009). *The failure to recognize these alternative, non-Western frames*

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[20] Declaration of Independence: A Transcript, https://www.archives.gov/founding-docs/declaration-transcript

[21] With thanks to one of our anonymous reviewers for drawing our attention to this.

of reference as legitimate has untold effects on how the West conducts its international relations.

3. "Becoming American" in IR and Security Studies

We now turn to the questions of Who is American in IR? and How is Americanness constructed? Long-term exposure to American culture, American values, and American narratives broadly suggests that those who live within the U.S.'s borders can be expected to share an American national identity. But this sense of Americanness can also manifest itself as an in-group identity and can help explain more favorable treatment of the in-group as well as the negative portrayal of out-groups— leading to problems of research accuracy. American national identity, in the way that it is constructed and practised, can also constitute the roots of bias and specific blind spots in IR.

Marilyn Brewer (1991: 476) has argued that identity is constructed as a series of concentric circles, with personal identity at the very core, followed by layers of social identities. Brewer's concept of personal identity is defined as "those characteristics that differentiate one individual from others within a given social context." In contrast, she states that social identities "are categorizations of the self into more inclusive social units that *depersonalize* the self-concept, where *I* becomes *we*."

In this discussion, we set aside the inner core of personal identity to focus on two of the outer layers of social identity: American scholarly identity and American national identity. We trace the construction of these two American identities. First, we discuss how an individual is socialized into becoming "American" through PhD training in the U.S. Second, we turn to the social psychology literature to consider how the construction of in-groups ("Collective Self") and out-groups ("Collective Other") affects the nature of Americanness in IR scholarship.

3.1 American by training

Becoming a scholar is not simply about the production of knowledge; it also encompasses a process of socialization into the profession. This includes learning about what kinds of knowledge are considered valuable and which are not (see [collaborators]). In these respects, U.S. PhD training in IR sits at the heart of this discussion because it is the primary site of national academic identity creation.

Through the socialisation process, PhD students become part of the larger IR community, learning to conform to particular norms, values and expectations.[22] The PhD process reveals the kinds of scholarship that are valued and should be emulated; the types of questions that are judged to be "interesting"; the forms of data that qualify as evidence; and the tools that are permitted to be used for conducting research. In America, the subfield of IR is firmly rooted in political science, and a core element of political science training across American PhD programs is fluency in quantitative methods.

While there may be variation in American PhD curriculum for IR scholars, virtually all programs require at least one quantitative methods course. The distinctive traits and cognitive frameworks that constitute American IR are both embodied and reinforced through quantitative methods training. This serves to operationalize positivism and its close cousin, rational choice. It simultaneously expresses and

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[22] Austin, Ann E. "Preparing the next generation of faculty: Graduate approach as socialization to the academic career." *The journal of higher education* 73, no. 1 (2002): 94-122.

propagates American values through the discipline. When PhDs enter the academic system and become professors themselves, these frameworks and values became even more deeply embedded. The American (and Western) system becomes self-reinforcing and homeostatic.

Despite the common emphasis on quantitative methods in political science, not all American-trained IR scholars adhere to positivism. Clearly, there is ample room for methodological pluralism amongst American scholars who specialize in IR. Receiving PhD training in the US does not preordain one's path as a scholar, nor does it imply that all American IR scholars value these approaches equally. Scholars retain methodological agency. Nevertheless, it would be naïve to believe that scholars give equal weighting to all methods and that we are invulnerable to homophily (favoring research that is most similar to our own). Lamont (2009: 8) comments that:

> "Evaluators, who are generally senior and established academics, often define excellence as 'what speaks most to me,' which is often akin to 'what is most like me,'" with the result that the 'haves'—anyone associated with a top institution or a dominant paradigm—may receive a disproportionate amount of resources."

For those who choose to reject the basic tenets of rational choice, the dominance of American approaches to IR will make the path into academia that much more fraught. As Lamont points out, "the hegemony of the rational approach has translated into a redefinition of standards of excellence for everyone in political science, thus influencing how scholars define their goals and intellectual trajectory (2009: 97)." Rejecting the American norms of a discipline dominated by those who are American-trained will marginalize and isolate the work of those who do not abide by the disciplinary consensus. Rejecting this consensus is possible, but difficult, given that IR's gatekeepers (including journal reviewers, grant panellists, and search committee members) broadly adhere to rational choice approaches. Innovators who push too far beyond the boundaries of the methodological consensus are typically shifted to the periphery of the discipline.

The role of immigrants

For simplicity, we treat scholars who completed their PhDs in the U.S. as being "American" in IR— irrespective of whether a scholar actually holds U.S. citizenship, and independent of how well integrated a scholar might be in American society. This offers a straightforward, if imperfect, decision rule for thinking about how many of us within the discipline would be considered cognitively "American" (as discussed in section 2), as well as being exposed to the national identity effects (as discussed in the next section). For many IR scholars, their national identity is American and their national academic identity is also American: they were born in the US; they have lived in the US for their entire adult lives; and they completed their PhD training in the US.[23] Here, Americanness is straightforward.

Yet being American in IR is not binary. Given that American graduate approaches attract many international students, and many Americans themselves are first- or second-generation immigrants, the degree to which these cognitive frameworks are

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[23] In theory, it is possible that the cognitive frameworks and the national identity effects would not apply, but this would be unusual, given the overwhelming evidence from Richard Nisbett's broad body of work in this area.

accepted will vary greatly amongst U.S.-trained IR scholars. Consider, for example, the role of debate and argumentation that is ingrained in American social science training, and even in many Western systems of primary and secondary education.

In contrast, Nisbett found that Asians do not share a universal format for communicating. Nisbett (2003: 196) suggests that the reluctance to engage in debate and argumentation is so foreign to Asian culture that it is built into the very nature of their communication and rhetoric. Hence, undergoing a period of American PhD training socializes Asian immigrants to observe and analyze the world in a more Western way, and subjects them to "independence cues" (rather than interdependence cues) on a regular basis. We can get a sense of the effects of this kind of socialization from the work of psychologists Wendi Gardner, Shira Gabriel, and Angela Lee (1999).

In an experiment that examined cultural priming cues, Gardner et al. were able to show that both American students and Hong Kong students could be primed to feel more collectivist or individualist depending on the cues they had been shown—based on a very short experiment.[24] Without such a prime, the Americans rated individualist values more highly than collectivist values, and the opposite was true for the Hong Kong students, who rated collectivist values more highly. This tells us that living in and being exposed to American society (while attending graduate approach) is extremely important for the process of "becoming American in IR".

If these are the effects of one experiment, then we can anticipate that years of exposure will prime individuals to become more American and Western through their cognitive capacities, and that these effects will be stronger or weaker depending on the period of exposure to the other culture (Hong et al. 1997; Kitayama et al. 2003; Peng and Knowles 2003). For Hoffmann, the complementary skills and analytical abilities that came out of the immigrant scholars' community were a fruitful feature of America's emerging IR landscape. He noted that the development of IR as a discipline in the U.S. was characterized by the immigrant scholars who served as "conceptualizers" for the field.

> These were scholars whose philosophical training and personal experience moved them to ask far bigger questions than those much of American social science had asked so far, questions about ends, not just about means; about choices, not just about techniques; about social wholes, not just about small towns or units of government (1977:46).

Here again, the concept of complementary cognitive frameworks and differing core assumptions about innate values can help explain why immigrants played an important role in the field. Hoffmann (1977: 46-7) referred specifically to the fact that these early IR scholars were asking *big questions about social wholes*, and that they cared deeply about *history and context*. In essence, immigrants like "the wise and learned Arnold Wolfers [Swiss], Klaus Knorr [German], Karl Deutsch [Czech], Ernst Haas [German],

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[24] Students were primed in one of two ways. First, they read a story about a general who had to choose a warrior for the king. The "independent" cue had the king choose the warrior based on merit. The "interdependent" cue had the general choose a warrior who would benefit his family. In the alternate method, students had to look for "independent" words (I, mine) or "interdependent" words (we, ours) in a paragraph. Students then had to assess their individualist and collectivist values. The experimental element came when students had to read a story where Lisa refused to give Amy directions because she was engrossed in a book; the student was then asked whether Lisa was being selfish. See Wendi L. Gardner, Gabriel Shira and Angela Lee, Y. 1999.

George Liska [Czech], and the young Kissinger [German] and Brzezinski [Polish] (ibid.)" were approaching the world as contextualists rather than causalists.[25]

We gain further insight by turning to the work of international business professors Charles Hampden-Turner and Alfons Trompenaars (Hampden-Turner and Trompenaars 1993). The two professors conducted surveys with 15,000 business professionals from around the world.[26] They found that the answers of Anglo-American countries (and sometimes the Netherlands and Sweden) tended to cluster together at the independent end of the spectrum, while Asians (Japan, Korea and Singapore) were clustered together at the interdependent end of the spectrum. Citizens from France, Italy, Germany, and Belgium tended to give intermediate answers in the middle. These results suggest that part of what these immigrant scholars brought to the study of IR were different cognitive frameworks and values that underpinned the ways in which they thought the world. These were different enough to challenge prevailing (Anglo-American) thinking, but not so different that they threatened to upend Anglo-American thinking altogether.

3.2 Self and Other

There is a second important social identity for IR scholarship that concerns in-group and out-group effects: that of national identity. Does belonging to the world's most powerful in-group systematically bias how American IR scholars do their work and their conclusions? We argue that the construction of the Collective Self (Brewer and Gardner 1996; Ashmore et al. 2004) is vital to issues of both attention and accuracy. In this forum and others, we find evidence to support this view (see also [collaborators]; Tsygankov 2008).

In the IR community of scholars, sharing an American identity is likely to manifest itself in distinct ways, for example, in mapping out which countries are friends or enemies (see [collaborators]); which wars are just or unjust (Falah et al. 2006; Kelsay 2007); which opposition groups are terrorists and which are freedom fighters (Halkides 1995; Stillman 2003); and in selecting the institutional frameworks through which we choose to evaluate the "Collective Other" (Hunt and Benford 2008). Where we choose to draw the line between the Collective Self and the Collective Other is of vital importance (Neumann 1996).

From social psychology, we know that the act of self-categorization into a group is in itself powerful enough to lead us to evaluate members of our in-group more positively (Billig 1976; Brewer 1979). As Tsygankov notes, it is easier to justify and legitimize violence towards an out-group if our theories "assume superiority of the Self and its moral community, and inferiority of the Other" (2008: 764). To dissect how an individual researcher makes these decisions about who belongs to the in-group and who belong to the out-group, we turn to David Rousseau's model of constructing threat at the individual level:

> Individuals construct identities for their state; they also construct
> subjective identities for other countries in the international system. If
> the individual believes that the two states share a common set of

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[25] This is consistent with Nisbett's (2003: 85-6) comments about the development of big-picture holistic ideas in continental Europe as compared to the narrower Anglo-American approach.
[26] The countries surveyed included: U.S., Canada, Australia, Britain, the Netherlands, Sweden, Belgium, Germany, France, Italy, Singapore, Japan, Korea, Spain.

beliefs, values, or traits (such as religion, economic structure, political structure, ethnicity, or history), the individual is more likely to believe that the two states share an identity. This sense of shared identity decreases the perception that the other state is a threat (Rousseau 2006: 65).

Rousseau makes note of several features in his model which are relevant to our discussion. First, this construction is not fact-based. It relies purely on the perceptions of the individual. Second, the comparison that an individual makes between two national identities is specific to that country-pair: "The latent dimensions John Smith uses to evaluate Japan will in all likelihood not be the same dimensions he uses to evaluate Saudi Arabia. This implies that the construction of *Self* may change dramatically based on the *Other* in question" (Rousseau 2006: 68).[27]

Most importantly though, Rousseau notes that salience played a critical role in constructing threat perception.[28] Whether or not an individual perceived a shared identity between the U.S. and the comparison country depended on the specific beliefs, values, or traits that were salient at that moment. Yet salience was also *easily manipulated* in Rousseau's lab experiments. He found that reading two newspaper articles could affect whether a person perceived another country as friend or foe (Rousseau 2006: Ch5). Further, priming individuals by giving them newspaper articles (on democratic progress and capitalism) that emphasized their elements of shared identity also increased the likelihood of cooperation and reduced the salience of relative gains (Rousseau 2006: Ch5).

Given how easy it was to manipulate threat perceptions for low-information individuals by priming particular facets of national identity, it is important to ask whether these findings apply to IR scholars. Here, Rousseau offers some reassurance: individuals who were more knowledgeable about the international system constructed more complicated portraits of other countries and were less susceptible to the simplistic priming in his study. At the same time, he also argues that mass media plays a powerful role in priming citizens to view particular countries as friendly or threatening, simply by making certain elements of national identity more or less salient. Turning to China as an example, Americans' collective threat perception can be manipulated (Rousseau 2006: 83-5), for example by focusing on the dynamism of the Chinese economy (Self), its treatment of political prisoners (Other), local village elections (Self), or its industrial espionage program (Other).

As IR scholars, how can we limit the effects of this bias? At heart, this speaks to how we construct the Collective Self and the Collective Other. Part of the solution lies in exposure to other societies and cultures. In American IR, it is possible to become a successful IR scholar without ever leaving the United States. This insularity has become acceptable, even desirable, as the perceived objectivity and impartiality of quantitative and formal research gradually gained prestige in the discipline.

But the American shift to positivism has also imposed a cost—IR scholars now have seen less of the world that they study than the scholars of Hoffmann's time. This shift will have strengthened the sense of the Collective Self. To address this concern, American IR scholars can choose to invest more deeply in the countries they study: by

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[27] The issue of shared identity was nicely illustrated when British Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher, who was herself confronting the terrorism of the IRA in Northern Ireland at the time, labelled South Africa's ANC a terrorist group. See Joanne Katz and David Tushuas 2008.

[28] For a related discussion on similarity judgments, see Amos Tversky 1977.

taking the time to understand local histories, landscapes, myths, and day-to-day politics. An immersive approach to research gives researchers greater empathy for the Other. The ways in which Self and Other are constructed can thus become more of a two-way street, such that empathy and understanding work in both directions, blunting the influence of national biases.

Conclusion

This essay has explored both the "what" and the "who" of the American Approach of IR. In doing so, it has used a social psychology perspective to highlight the biases of Western cognitive processes that are embedded within the discipline. The differences between Eastern and Western cognitive frameworks have major implications for how we describe, process, analyse and criticize the world around us. By drawing attention to the fact that Western thought processes pay little attention to contextual nuances and relationships, we have demonstrated how some of the by-products of these blind spots matter for scholarship and for foreign policy (see earlier discussions of Paul Kagame, Mobutu Seko Sese, the Arab Revolutions).

The consequences of being American in IR suggest not only problems of attention and accuracy, but an inherent failure to appreciate that Western—and particularly, American—ways of seeing and valuing the world are not universal. When IR scholars— immigrants and American nationals alike—receive training in American PhD programs, they are also being further socialized into describing the world in a particular way, analysing it with a particular set of assumptions, and applying particular types of solutions that are consistent with these taken-for-granted values.

How can Western cognitive biases embedded so deeply within IR be tackled? The first step is to recognize that we use cognitive frameworks to make sense of the world and that these frameworks color our approach to IR. But understanding the problem does not solve it. Meaningful solutions must involve changes to PhD training as the primary site of socialization into the discipline. We recommend three steps.

First, scholars should recognize that academic institutions are propagating *Western and American*—rather than universal—cognitive frameworks of analysis. Moreover, the American Approach of IR represents a hyper-Westernized perspective; this means that it is even more different from other areas of the world, as compared to other Western countries. One way to compensate for this type of blind spot is to demand greater honesty about the effects of an American and/or Western bias in our scholarship. We can begin by sensitizing ourselves to other value systems, and thinking through, as this forum does, how different cognitive frameworks inform both the questions we ask, and the subjectivity of our analysis. By acknowledging and examining how our own cognitive frameworks limit and constrain our analysis, we can begin to see how other countries and cultures might interpret certain situations or events completely differently.

Second, Asian and other cognitive frameworks should also be taught (see [collaborators in this Special Issue]). Synthesising alternative philosophical traditions beyond that of the Ancient Western World would also add nuance and richness to the dominant cognitive frames employed by American IR scholarship. These could include the philosophical traditions and worldviews of the periphery, such as those encapsulated by the African concept of *Ubuntu* as well as those from Asia.

Third, this training could also extend to how history is taught not only at the higher education level but also further down the education ladder. The causal vs. contextual approach we highlighted in the section above is illustrated by divergent

approaches in teaching history. In Japan, teachers emphasise the chronological dynamic of history, and how current events can be seen as responses to past events. "Teachers encourage their students to imagine the mental and emotional states of historical figures by thinking about the analogy between their situations and situations of the students' everyday lives. The actions are then explained in terms of these feelings (Nisbett 2003: 127)." The ability to empathize—even with your enemy—is deeply valued. This stands in contrast to how history is taught in the US, where teachers "begin with the outcome, rather than with the initial event or catalyst. The chronological order of events is destroyed in presentation. Instead, the presentation is dictated by discussion of the causal factors assumed to be important." (2003: 128).

This essay is intended as a provocative call for future research on IR's cognitive biases and the implications for our discipline. As such, there are many areas that we hope will be explored in the future, including the impact of cognitive frames on our understanding of Human Rights, Rule of Law, Conflict Resolution, Transitional Justice, and Post-conflict Statebuilding. The cognitive biases identified in this paper also extend to policymaking, and we hope that these effects will also be examined in future research.

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