

Domestic Politics Matters in Diplomacy: A Brief Review on Robert Putnam's "Diplomacy and Domestic Politics"

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Abstract: *This review introduces Robert Putnam's article "Diplomacy and Domestic Politics: The Logic of Two Level Games" and analyzes its merits and limitations. Putnam's article is an approach to analyzing international foreign policy beyond the state-centric assumption and placing focus on domestic factions, which are pillar causes determining the 'ratification' of international agreements. Diplomacy, in Putnam's view, is not only the affairs for professional diplomats, but also a public agenda for various social groups, thus the "win-set" in negotiation of a state actor should be determined by their respective domestic situations. The review concedes that Putnam's idea is comprehensive and provides new foundations for IR research after the system-based approach, but his comprehensiveness is also a defect for his theory compared with his latecomers.*

Keywords: *two-level games, diplomacy, ratification, domestic politics*

1. Introduction

The world is intertwining with each other nowadays. Phrases like 'international relations' or 'international arena' were traditionally interpreted as an independent space for state actors competing with each other for more resources, territories and prestige, regardless of their domestic structures. All things state actors that concern are more power, more capacity and economic resilience, which is based on 'the rationality of states'. However, with the anachronistic assumption, one might not explain why some countries could refuse to get into an economic integration process, even if it could benefit the welfare of major domestic consumers, or fails to anticipate that certain state leaders can use their power to influence the majority's understanding of the perceived national interest and create a 'diplomacy revolution'. According to the monolithic state assumption, a rational state could not change 'its' preference swiftly and unpredictably, as preference could be arranged in a linear order.

The international arena, in reality, is far more complex than certain theoretical assumptions. Classical realism argues that states are analogous to rational individuals that possess the ability to calculate their wants, while idealism argues that all states obey the international norms under the constraint of international agreement or consensus. However, more and more diplomatic historical cases and realities have revealed that such optimism or rationalism originated from state leaders' preference, not the preference of "states". Reflecting Aristotle's saying, 'Politics is a major ethical practice', the structuralist approach which excludes actors' will and calculations fails to understand how state preference generated domestically through diplomats and politicians' mind and perception.

1) Middle-Range Theory on Interdependence Diplomacy

However, Robert Putnam's article "Diplomacy and Domestic Politics: The Logic of Two-level Games" (Putnam, 1988) firstly provided an approach that challenged the previous framework by discussing the connection between the domestic political process and state rationality through the process of negotiations and ratifications of international agreements. In this article, Putnam demonstrated his "two-level game theory" of diplomacy. During the 1970s, Putnam focused on the G7 Summit, and wrote a book called *Hanging Together: Cooperation and Conflict in the Seven-Power Summits* in 1987. In 1988, based on his observation of the 1978 Bonn Summit, he wrote this article to elaborate the entanglement of domestic and international politics, stressing that the domestic consensus among different countries is an important pillar of generating an international agreement. His holistic analysis highlighted the political process in international politics and broke the traditional methodology of 'unitary state model'. Especially,

he emphasized the process of ratification, believing that it can determine the final outcome of an agreement. In a word, this article analyzed more about the factors influencing the possibility of a successful ratification of international agreement.

2. Review of Putnam's Theory of Diplomacy

Before his efforts to link domestic politics with diplomatic activities, IR theories assumed that states are the same as rational individuals. Kenneth Waltz in the 1950s had tried to analyze the origin of war by reducing to a three-phase structure but he finally negated that domestic issues matter (Waltz, 2001(1954)). Three decades later, Putnam discovered that not only international arena matters, but also domestic matters. But this time, Putnam did not observe the war and conflict, but behaviors of economic cooperation. We can now reflect his thinking from his article *Diplomacy and Domestic Politics*.

Observing the 1978 Bonn Summit, Putnam found that state leaders could achieve the consensus of global bailout policy, with Germany and Japan forgoing their original austerity standpoint. But when moving eyes into the domestic issues, one can find that during those years, both of the two export-oriented countries all favored austerity policy to boost their exports. However, situations have changed this time. As the author said, 'the Bonn Summit represented genuine international policy coordination. Significant policy changes were pledged and implemented by the key participants.' (Putnam, 1988, p.429) We can find that states' behaviors on certain policies do not originate from their 'inherent' rational interests, but from the subjective cooperation, exchanging viewpoints and finally coordination by every individual in the domestic political stage. Another thing the author found was every nation's real interests did not influence the negotiation on the international arena, but it made a 'reverse' that the international phase could affect their domestic issues, which was a reversal of Waltz's second image analysis.

More importantly, demonstrating his observation of a real IR practice different from our theoretical stereotype, Putnam argued that new theories of IR come from understandings of surrounding international practice, giving us a new point to refine theoretical explanations. Frustrated by 'the end of IR theory research' in today's academic circle and the distance between IR study and IR practice, it is still important to review Putnam's field research into the study and to clarify that international relations are not pure interactions between rational states, but interactions between different people, social groups and culture background.

2.1 Breaking down the 'state': Interactions of Political Actors between Domestic and International Arena

With the case of the 1978 Bonn Summit, Putnam looked into the depth of the black box beyond diplomacy on international arena. In his literature review on studying the entanglement of domestic and international politics, he argued that a more sophisticated and holistic theory should be constructed to explain the entanglement, while the previous theories focused more on static institutions or international integration. But compared with their efforts to connect these two realms, Putnam harshly criticized the traditional belief of 'state-centric' genre, which 'runs amok' (Putnam, 1988, p.432). In Putnam's understanding, state-centric theory inhibits the deeper understanding of the interaction of so-called 'states'. The phrase 'state actor' has led us to misunderstand the real spectacle of IR, because it shows a metaphor between rational individuals and independent states. The word 'actor' can behave himself with his own thinking and mind, but how about the nation state? Is the nation state an inherently and indivisibly independent object? In that case, Putnam decided to break down the 'state' with his observation on the Summit: 'What was 'the' position of the German or Japanese state on macroeconomic policy in 1978, or of the American state on energy policy?' (Putnam, 1988, p.432) Therefore, he noted that if state decision-makers could be analogous to 'state' itself, one should treat the 'state' as a plural noun, but not a single individual. Therefore, it is not the 'state actor' who plays on the international stage, but the 'decision makers' with different specialties and personalities-or we can directly call them actors as metaphor-that have been on the stage.

Putnam reduced the concise but partial IR theory to domestic and individual phase, stressing that politics is always human affairs in any arenas. Different individuals with diverse identity and interests interact, negotiate and cooperate with each other in order to achieve political resolutions. The only difference is about what kind of the stage where the political drama happens. However, most ideas in previous times assumed that the nature of the 'stage', namely domestic and international stage, could be the determinant of political behaviors. Discrimination of political stage has become the barrier to looking into the political behaviors of every individual, and creating the mythology of single rational state.

Besides, Putnam did not only stress the importance of internal affairs of the nation-state, but also questioned the traditional understanding of 'second image' with his first observation on the 1978 Bonn Summit. At first, leaders of different states had difficulties dealing with 'the domestic consensus' of their economic policies due to factional competition. But factionalism suddenly disappeared when the leaders came back from the international stage with an 'international consensus'. The outcome of a policy stemmed from the international stage instead of traditionally assumed domestic debates. Putnam called this the 'Second Image Reverse', believing that there still could be a single international stage, and the two stages are reciprocating each other, but not the relation of cause and consequence.

2.2 Two-Level Games: Behavioral Theory of Negotiation and Ratification

In order to develop a theory of political interaction in 'trans-stages', Putnam selected two typical behaviors of international interactions: negotiation in the international stage and ratification in the domestic stage. In a certain country, the decision maker should be concerned about the issues happening on both stages, and reach a political resolution before satisfying different domestic factions, not only his counterpart negotiators. As the author quoted in his article, sometimes it is much harder to persuade the domestic interest group than the foreign counterparts in trade negotiations. Reducing the state rationality to multiple rationalities, diplomacy, which traditionally happened only in international relations, could happen in domestic factional relations: the process in international diplomacy, as the author said, is negotiation; the process in 'domestic diplomacy', is to win the ratification of fruitful results in the aforementioned negotiation.

In other words, a modified picture for winning a negotiation appeared after breaking down the domestic stage. Traditional negotiation only tells us that when states can have their "win-sets" (ranging from the superior interests and the bottom line) overlapped with each other, one could have the possibility to achieve the goal. But what constitutes the win-sets of 'states'? Or what constitutes the interest of the state? Putnam transferred the states' win-sets to analyze the domestic consensus on both negotiators of their countries. Under such a scenario, the core decision makers only become the agent of their domestic factions, and a diplomatic negotiation is 'conducted' by multiple domestic factions in both sides. With the modification of the actors, the picture of diplomacy has become a transnational political process. Achieving ratification is becoming the core issue in diplomacy, just as the author named in his subtitle, we are moving 'towards the theory of ratification'.

Therefore, as more individual actors come into the decision-making process, the result of an international arrangement becomes more complicated. In the section of "Towards a Theory of Ratification" in the article, Putnam suggested that the failure of ratification could be divided into two categories: voluntary defection and involuntary defection. He then stressed more on the involuntary defection, since there would be less probability for a representative of a state to conduct voluntary defection of a commitment after multiple bargaining. Involuntary defection means that negotiators have to defect their promise due to facing tough domestic stances, so the two agents are 'involuntary' to refuse to let the agreement come into effect. However, credibility of a state is important when making international cooperation, or states will face obstacles to other negotiations in the future. But in two-level games, defections would happen more frequently, since internal factors would try to block any international accomplishments which might do harm to their factional interests. Still, it would also do harm to the credibility of a central decision maker. As the author said, the decision maker failed to 'deliver' the domestic information to the foreign counterpart. The negotiators of both sides have different responsibilities, but they still have their burden to preserve their national credibility, thus raising fewer promises to each other.

From this analysis, Putnam is showing us the difficulties of collective bargaining. Since more individuals are participating in the negotiation process and negotiations will become costlier and fruitless as all stakeholders have to make sure that issues could be beneficial for all factions domestically, for no one will dare to promise more and risk their own national credibility. From this perspective, it was similar to Robert Dahl's context of 'political pluralism' while political outcome is the common 'denominator' or compromise for all bargaining factions in politics. Putnam partly transferred Dahl's idea into foreign policy negotiation.

2.3 Delving into the 'Determinants' of Win-Sets: A Paradigm of Rationalism

Having demonstrated the win-set model, Putnam constructed his theory with the explanation of the win-sets determinants, i.e., the 'preference range' of the domestic factions. With the assumption of

rational actors, Putnam argued that every faction could clearly understand the preference and put the preferences in order, which is important, especially in the context of 'heterogeneous issues'. He noted the cleavage of different preference may affect the preference range: it is harder to reach consensus when facing plural preferences ('heterogeneous issues') than facing dichotomous ('homogenous issues', or the 'yes-no' choices) preferences. In most cases of foreign policies, constituents often divide themselves into two rivalry standpoints, like whether to start a preemptive war, whether to open free trade of a certain industry or to strengthen the military cooperation against the rival. The agent on the negotiation table only needs to make a trade-off between yes and no, and tends to choose the lower cost one.

However, it is much more sophisticated when it comes to the so-called 'heterogeneous issues'. As Putnam said, the agent has to balance different 'ranges of objection'. For example, to what extent of the time does the trade union agree to the austerity policy? Maybe at a certain period there would be more than two selections of the policy, for the original 'yes' and 'no' groups have been divided into different factions such as radicals and moderates. Thus, as the author said, the decision maker could try to win the moderates on both sides to get the consensus and finally make the agreement 'more ratifiable' (Putnam, 1988, p.445). But in this situation, Putnam assumed that everyone in their factions could clearly know their own preference order and they would not change their preference without any external influences. Such conditions need to get a further discussion below. Besides the factionalism of preference in the domestic politics, Putnam also highlighted that multiple issues could also affect the ratification rates, namely the 'synergistic linkage'. Especially in the global situation of interdependence, more negotiators have been using this tactic to win at least one ratification of agreement by creating a 'political option'.

3. Conclusion: Irrational Factors and the Uncertainty of Human Behavior

Generally, Putnam's article raised a middle-range theory of diplomacy with his holistic and multiple aspects of analysis. The holistic part of his article could be found on his reasoning with different aspects, not only arguing that domestic politics could play a major role in shaping international consensus, but also that the international arena could also affect and even change the domestic politics. This was what he called the 'intertwining' of diplomacy. By demonstrating the mutual influence of two arenas, Putnam analyzed the determinants of win-sets in domestic politics based on the rational model in economics. With his comprehensive unveiling of the diplomacy in the international community of interdependence, Putnam provided a micro-aspect of understanding interdependence by focusing on political process, which is complementary to Keohane and Nye's macro theory that hinged on global institutions and international arena (Keohane & Nye, 2011(1977)).

The core idea Putnam stressed about in the discussion of the 'state' and the 'social' preference is also termed by Andrew Moravcsik as 'liberal theory of international relations' (Moravcsik, 1997). In his article 'Taking Preference Seriously: A Liberal Theory of International Politics' (1997), he termed that theory stressing 'preference' as the core idea determining international politics belongs to liberalism theory of IR, including 'ideational liberalism', 'commercial liberalism' and 'republican liberalism'. Compare these two articles, one could find that the research path of Putnam is similar to the 'republican liberalism', indicating that domestic institutions and practice could aggregate demands and transform them into a certain foreign policy (Moravcsik, 1997), and thus determine the Level 2 'win-set' as Putnam termed. However, Putnam's article emphasized the domestic political structure, institutions and personal strategies but neglected the normative way to differentiate those 'motives' of different coalitions, which is emphasized in Moravcsik's article. He noted that social interest groups in the Level 2 could 'capture' government representatives in the Level 1 and ask them to 'act the ends for them' (Moravcsik, 1997). Empirically, Putnam failed to differentiate the interests of 'elites' and 'commons' in the domestic politics (i.e., the regime type) and their different bargaining power to influence the Level 1 actors' negotiating behaviors and policies. In comparison, Moravcsik made a primary comparison of regime type that an elitist government could have an incentive to represent the long-term interests more than popular governments (enlarging the level 2 win-set). In other words, regime type of negotiating actors would create a large difference of win-set range in international negotiation politics.

Nevertheless, though Putnam provided his breakthrough theory of foreign policy decision making in 1988, his theory is too complicated through introducing the analysis of "win-set" although in a great coherence. On the foreign policy theory development, James Fearon also raised a new term called 'audience cost', which is a variation that affects the foreign policy decision making. In his theory, 'audience' means social groups or parliamentary groups watching the action of the government, and audience cost refers to the risk that the government has to pay in order to insist on its diplomatic policy with less flexibility so as to maintain its own authority. The higher the audience cost is, the tougher the

government's policy is, which means a shorter win-set. Fearon's idea simplistically summarized Putnam's idea and developed Putnam's analysis model into a parsimonious theory.

In a word, though Putnam's research on diplomacy left defects of theoretical parsimony compared with latecomers' approach, he was one of early researchers that went beyond the state-centric paradigm, showing a 'portentous development in the fields of comparative politics and international relations' (Putnam, 1988, p.459). Besides, it was one of prominent studies in analyzing the interaction between state level and domestic politics and expanding a new research trend on foreign policy and paving foundations for the understanding of the two-level games.

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