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## Leader Influence in Role Selection Choices: Fulfilling Role Theory's Potential for Foreign Policy Analysis

Journal:	<i>International Studies Review</i>
Manuscript ID	Aug-20-ISREV-AE-0215.R1
Manuscript type:	Analytical Essay
Key Words:	Leaders, Roles, Individual Level
Abstract:	<p>While it has been well-documented when and how leaders matter in foreign policy, there is still no clear roadmap on how to connect and investigate the different possibilities that leadership studies offer for the benefit of role theory development. Thus, this article lays the foundation for a dialogue between role theory and leader-based approaches to foreign policy. We approach this as a 'glass half full' as leaders are present in role theory, but not properly integrated in terms of theorisation and methods to study their influence on the overall selection of roles. We present a range of possible ways to study the beliefs and personal characteristics of leaders and other motivational approaches that inform and shape their role selection process. A better integration of the individual level can give foreign policy scholars and practitioners a more complete picture of why governments decide to prioritise certain roles over others. Introducing a way forward in establishing a more robust connection between leaders and the roles of the state also provides scholars with a more complete toolkit to analyse and unpack agent-structure relations in foreign policy.</p>

Dear Editors and Reviewers,

We appreciate the opportunity you gave us to undertake revisions on our manuscript “Leader Influence in Role Selection Choices: Fulfilling Role Theory’s Potential for Foreign Policy Analysis.” We have followed the advice of the two reviewers and believe the resulting revision is greatly improved over the original submission. We explain the changes we have made below, following the helpful decision letter from the editors.

First, we have clarified the process that informed our choice of the three scenarios we use at the outset of the paper. We came up with these scenarios in a more abductive way as we reviewed theoretical notions on role continuity and role change at the same time as we observed through different empirical applications of role theory that change is not always a radical process and may occur through more modest adjustments to the role being performed by actors. We think of the three scenarios as encompassing the range of available options a leader faces when making foreign policy choices. This is described in more detail on page 7, and pages 16-17, see also footnote no. 6).

Second, we have followed R1’s advice to clarify that leaders cannot remove themselves from adopting a role and engaging in role relationships. Even when a leader’s choice is that her/his state withdraws from the international scene—something that resembles a foreign policy strategy of hiding perhaps, then the leader is actually adopting an isolate role on behalf of her/his state. Our claim, which is grounded in symbolic interactionist role theory ontological principles, is that social life for actors is always role based even when they adopt more isolated and inward-looking positions, such the role of an isolate or internal developer. This is explained on page 17.

Third, we also follow the advice of R1 to bring incorporate these three scenarios in a more explicit way into the different sections of the paper. We agree with R1 that the scenarios should be fleshed out and married in a stronger way with our theoretical and methodological discussions. Thus, we added paragraphs within each approach to leaders we discuss in the paper in which we join the three scenarios with the role concepts and the leader-based approaches we use through the paper such as, OCA, LTA, motives approach, image theory and populism in foreign policy. Please see pages 21-23, 27, 28, & 29.

Fourth, we thank R2 for his/her point about clarifying which approach is better equipped to advance research at the interplay of leaders and roles. We elaborate a bit more on the need to include these individual-based theoretical and methodological approaches

for the further development of role theory. At the same time, we would like to keep open this choice as much as we can for readers to see the potential of each approach for role theory research development. We believe that each leader-based approach has potential to bring something into the role theory research agenda; a choice that shall be driven by the type of research questions being asked. That said, we also mention in a rather general way that LTA through its defined “types” of leadership can offer a more parsimonious and compact way to trace leaders’ role choices, while OCA needs additional methodological steps to marry a leader’s beliefs and role selection for state made by the leader (see footnote no. 11 in p. 23). This discussion can be found on pages 5-6, 25-26, see also footnote no. 12 in p. 26.

Fifth, we believe that part of our previous point in which we highlight some methodological contributions of the leader-based approaches discussed in the paper works in tandem with R1’s recommendation to engage more strongly with the methodological contribution of the leader-based approaches. Moreover, we also capture R1’s feedback as we now have elaborated more directly on the methodological contributions of LTA and OCA to the methodological side of role theory. The work of Hansel and Moller is a welcome recommendation toward this end. We thank the reviewer for reminding us of this valuable work. We have incorporated this discussion on pages 25-26.

Sixth, we have elaborated on symbolic interactionist role theory and its compatibility with leader-based perspectives, such as LTA and OCA, while also distinguishing it from role theory approaches that do not rely on symbolic interactionist principles. The latter suffer from over determinism as roles are mainly provided in a top-down way by the existing structure without many possibilities for changes conducted by agents; in this case individual leadership. Symbolic interactionist role theory allows for the consideration of role changes starting in a bottom-up way, which is the core of this article. This is discussed on pages 15-16.

Finally, we have retaken the discussion of the examples given in the introduction in our conclusion as well as related them to the three scenarios that are also brought up in this final section of the paper. We have incorporated this discussion on pages 30-32.

Overall, we believe we have addressed the suggested changes to the paper based on the editors’ and the two reviewers’ helpful recommendations. As a result of these revisions, we believe the final paper is greatly improved over the previous version.

## **Leader Influence in Role Selection Choices: Fulfilling Role Theory's Potential for Foreign Policy Analysis**

### **Abstract**

While it has been well-documented when and how leaders matter in foreign policy, there is still no clear roadmap on how to connect and investigate the different possibilities that leadership studies offer for the benefit of role theory development. Thus, this article lays the foundation for a dialogue between role theory and leader-based approaches to foreign policy. We approach this as a 'glass half full' as leaders are present in role theory, but not properly integrated in terms of theorisation and methods to study their influence on the overall selection of roles. We present a range of possible ways to study the beliefs and personal characteristics of leaders and other motivational approaches that inform and shape their role selection process. A better integration of the individual level can give foreign policy scholars and practitioners a more complete picture of why governments decide to prioritise certain roles over others. Introducing a way forward in establishing a more robust connection between leaders and the roles of the state also provides scholars with a more complete toolkit to analyse and unpack agent-structure relations in foreign policy.

*Keywords:* Leaders, roles, individual level, Leader Trait Analysis, Operational Code Analysis, motivation approaches.

## Introduction

President Carlos Menem decided that Argentina should enact a faithful ally role with the US in the 1990s, when previously his country always played an active independent role. This decision meant a change of priorities in Argentina's foreign policy as it reversed course from a constant search for autonomy to dependency on the US as a global hegemon. This change was contested domestically by Menem's political opponents and within his own political party (Justicialismo/Peronist). In 2003, Prime Minister Tony Blair expended most of his reputation to support the US's Iraq war venture. The prime minister faced down members of his own party and ignored the advice of close political allies. Instead of caving into political pressure, Blair prioritized the existing traditional role of faithful ally of the US, while also deepening and adjusting it at the expense of pursuing a multilateralist role in the international system. Centre-left Presidents Ricardo Lagos and Michelle Bachelet continued to play Chile's role as a global free trader, reflecting these two democratic leaders' conformity with a pillar of foreign policy inherited from the authoritarian past. Donald Trump has tried to establish a friend role relationship with Russia in contrast to the traditional rivalry role relationship. This move has been contested by actors across the political spectrum in the US, but it has not stopped Trump from trying to create a new role relationship with Russia.

These examples demonstrate that leaders are the backbone of foreign policy decision-making who make choices about continuing existing roles, modifying such roles, or choosing new roles to play with significant others in the international system. We are used to thinking of authoritarian rulers as acting relatively unconstrained in foreign policy (even though they too have constraints), but these are all examples from well-established democratic regimes—presidential and parliamentary systems—that

maintain institutionalized checks and balances on policy choices. Thus, leaders of all regime types enjoy latitude in their capacity to select and adopt the roles that will represent their state internationally. This does not mean that leaders are always successful in securing their choices, as they will face varying levels of domestic contestation.

While it has been well-documented when and how leaders matter in foreign policy (Kaarbo 2008),<sup>1</sup> there is still no clear roadmap on how to investigate the different possibilities that leadership studies offer for the benefit of role theory development. Roles are the representations of state identity, interests and behavior in foreign policy, while leaders are the key agents to enact the roles that they have inherited, or to adjust and reinterpret them, and even to change them altogether.

This article lays the foundation for a dialogue between role theory and leader-based approaches to foreign policy. We present a range of possibilities to study the beliefs and personal characteristics of leaders that inform their role selection process. In so doing, we contribute to the further development of foreign policy role theory. Our main goal is to show how role theory can gain more analytical leverage by incorporating theoretical and methodological developments from such well-established approaches to studying leaders in foreign policy such as Leader Trait Analysis (LTA), Operational Code Analysis (OCA), and other motivational theories capturing leaders' perspectives. Despite recent contributions to the methodological pillars of role theory in foreign policy (Breuning 2017, Walker 2017, Wehner 2020), this approach remains conceptually rich but methodologically poor (Thies 2017, Walker 1987). However, our intention is not to show which of these approaches is the best possible match to role theory, but instead to show

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<sup>1</sup> For example, Juliet Kaarbo (2008) shows the added value of leader-based approaches through a careful review of the literature culminating in the development of a research agenda on leaders from a political psychology approach.

their respective potential to study how and why leaders make certain role selection choices as key actors in foreign policy.

Foreign policy role theory has successfully integrated the international system and the state level of analysis (see for example, Beasley and Kaarbo 2018, McCourt 2014, Thies 2013a, Wehner 2015). However, one of its key promises is its potential to bridge multiple levels of analysis, that is, individual, state and international levels. Yet, the individual level has not been well incorporated into the promise for role theory to span multiple levels of analysis (Thies 2010). This is so despite contributions that refer to leaders as actors in the process of role change (Wehner 2020, Thies and Nieman 2017), domestic role contestation (Cantir and Kaarbo 2016, Cantir and Kaarbo 2012), role socialization (Thies 2013, Thies and Nieman 2017, Breuning and Pechenina 2019, Guimarães and Maitino 2019), and in the enactment of master and auxiliary roles (Thies 2013a, Wehner 2015). We approach this issue as a 'glass half full' in how role theory has analysed leaders in existing works. Leaders are present but not properly integrated in terms of theorization and methods to study their influence on the overall selection of roles.

A caveat is that we do not argue that a better integration of the individual level into role theory will always be a fruitful research venture. Indeed, there may be cases in which domestic institutions and groups and even external systemic constraints are more important in the selection of a role. However, we believe that better integration of the individual level may provide a more complete picture of why governments decide to prioritise certain roles over others; and to explain reasons behind these choices when the leader in power is critical, as our above examples show. Introducing a way to establish a more robust connection between leaders and the roles of the state also provides scholars with a better toolkit to analyse agent-structure relations in foreign policy (Breuning 2011, Thies and Breuning 2012).



We build our argument and develop this research agenda on the understanding of foreign policy analysis as an actor-specific perspective (Hudson 2005), which redirects us to the basic principle of leaders as role holders and actors. This is consistent with Kal Holsti's (1970) original work that documented roles by looking at leaders' speeches, which persists in applications of role theory today. We present three rather intuitive scenarios below that help us delimit a research agenda. These scenarios are used as an initial way to think about integrating the individual and state levels of analysis in role theory. Leaders in power can bring their own personal imprint to a role that is an enduring feature of a state's foreign policy, often by changing how that role is enacted over time. This implies adjustments of the role to the person in power. Yet, sometimes leaders change the role of the state altogether by making their own personal roles into the roles of the state (Sagarzazu and Thies 2019, Wehner 2020). On other occasions, leaders adopt the role of the state as their own without much change or adjustment. These three scenarios are a result of leaders facing contexts with their own creativity to innovate in the role scripts of the state, as much as context shapes the leaders' views of how to enact a role. The latter scenario may not necessarily mean that the leader lacks capacity to innovate in the role-set of a state, but it may indicate leader conformity with the role, and how it has evolved and has been played historically. In these three possible scenarios, leaders' roles and how they interpret the role of the state are at the centre of the state's foreign policy.

The remainder of this paper proceeds as follows: First, we review the existing role theory literature to show how individuals have not been fully incorporated into theoretical developments despite recurrent empirical references to the role of leaders. Second, we show how the individual leader is critical and outline a theoretical framework for the three aforementioned scenarios. Third, we develop a research agenda on leaders and roles

drawing on these scenarios, including different methodological possibilities for studying the individual leader level from a role theory perspective. Finally, we conclude by discussing the promise of this research agenda and the challenges ahead.

### **A 'glass half full' in the study of leaders in role theory research**

#### *The international system and the state in role theory research*

The state as a unitary actor is still at the core of role theory research. Holsti (1970) empirically documented different roles states can play by analysing leader statements as if they represented states. This seminal contribution from the 1970s demonstrates states can enact roles beyond those induced by a anarchical system in the realist sense (balancers and enemies). In the second wave of role theory research (1980s-1990s), the state and the international system are where roles operate and unfold (Wish 1987, Walker 1987, Le Prestre 1997). Leaders' speeches, following Holsti's precedent, are still the empirical sources for state's roles played within the international system. Leaders verbalise the roles on behalf of the state, but there is no consideration for the leader's own agency in selecting or enacting roles. It is assumed that the state is the real actor. Moreover, the state and the international system come together as structure constrains the type of roles a great power, major power, or small power can enact. Material power was seen as essential to role conception, based primarily on self-conceptions from ego side (Wish 1987). During the Cold War, most of this literature was focused on great power rivalry. Jönsson (1984) studies how Soviet and American enemy images inform the role relationship of these two superpowers and the similarities in their foreign policy aid approaches for Third World

countries, Middle East crisis management, and nuclear proliferation. Role theory in foreign policy replicated the Cold War concerns of other IR theories and focused on rivalry and the confrontation of great powers.

After the end of the Cold War, the study of roles was still state and national interest based. For instance, Le Prestre started his edited volume with the statement: “Foreign policy change revolves around the redefinition of states’ roles in the international system” (Le Prestre 1997, 3). Although Le Pestre identified identity as an internal factor to states’ foreign policies, his conception of it was based on a homogenous notion similar to its material opposite, the national interest.<sup>2</sup> This volume attempted to identify changes of roles based on changes in material power and a state’s location in the international system (Le Prestre 1997, see also Thies 2013b).

In the recent third wave of role theory research (2010s-2020s), the promise of an integrative approach spanning multiple levels of analysis came to the fore as a result of changes in FPA and International Relations literatures more broadly (Thies and Breuning 2012). Role theory was argued to bridge the three levels of analysis and the agent-structure divide (Thies 2010). Breuning’s review of the literature identifies research gaps and possibilities for future work (Breuning 2011). Thies (2010) also outlines different research possibilities and the conceptual richness of role theory for foreign policy. Yet, the leader perspective is not as salient as one would expect given its necessity to crossing the levels of analysis or bridging the agent-structure divide. We note one of Breuning’s main contributions is the finding of a predominance of structure in the formation of roles (Breuning 2011, Wendt 1999). This point of departure for a leader-based approach to roles may lead us to expect that not all roles conceptions are induced by institutional

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<sup>2</sup> On the conceptual differences between identity and roles, see McCourt (2014) and Wehner and Thies (2014).

settings or are enabled and constrained by structural forces (Barnett 1993, Aggestam 2004, Wehner and Thies 2014).

Although role theorists have become more plural in their methodologies and applications beyond great powers during the third wave, the interplay of the state and system is still central to this approach. For instance, role socialisation and pre-socialisation focus on how states learn and conceive roles with direct socialisers or with cues that emanate from the social system (Thies 2012, Thies 2015, Beasley and Kaarbo 2018). Moreover, studies on master and auxiliary roles emphasize the state as playing one or many roles internationally at the expense of analysing divergent domestic voices (Thies 2001, Wehner 2015, Guimarães and Maitino 2019). Similarly, the contribution of role theory to Ontological Security also revolves around the state as the main actor (see Klose 2020). Teles Fazendeiro (2020) focuses on why role attributions and altercasting by other states are rejected by ego in order to maintain public credibility over previously adopted master roles. In this work, leader and state are treated as having similar views and interests, in which the state as level of analysis is predominant. Further, the literature on role learning and role conception within institutions does not put the leader's perspective centre stage either. Beneš and Harnisch (2015) focus on states and key national historical experiences to explain the composition of national roles that inform German and Czech Republic role play within the EU.<sup>3</sup>

Thus, systemic and state based approaches dominate early role theory research, and they still remain important in explanations of states behavior to date. However, the third wave literature grounded in symbolic interactionism and constructivism has added

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<sup>3</sup> For instance, other more empirically driven applications of role theory do not fully incorporate the leader into their theoretical frameworks. For example, on the case of Brexit and roles, see Gaskart (2014), and Oppermann, Beasley and Kaarbo (2019). On China's roles see Shih (2012).

more agency to our analyses. The agency of the state has nevertheless revolved around the internal identity components of a state's foreign policy and the belief that roles are better analytical devices as they give identity context-based action (Wehner and Thies 2014). Although leaders are still mentioned in this research, they are not central to the process-oriented explanations of role selection. Leaders' and foreign policy elites' declarations are used as material to reconstruct the role of the state as it navigates existing constraints. It is states and the system that continue to predominate in this particular set of symbolic interactionist role theory literature.

#### *Domestic role contestation and the state foreign policy*

One of the shortcomings of role theory research in the 1970s-1990s was a tendency to black-box the state. There was an overall neglect of domestic political processes and how they affected role formation and role play for the state at the international level. In the third wave, research on role contestation debunked the notion of the state having homogenous and uncontested roles to play (Wehner and Thies 2014). This journey started with work by Marijke Breuning (2011), Cameron Thies and Marijke Breuning (2012), Sebastian Harnisch, Cornelia Frank and Hanns Maull (2011) and Cameron Thies (2010) who showed the value and potential of role theory research in foreign policy. These contributions were key for subsequent research at the domestic level, including Cantir and Kaarbo (2012), whose seminal contribution urged role theorists to focus on how domestic actors contested the role conception of a state and how this hampered the process of role enactment. Wehner and Thies (2014) demonstrate contestation within Chile's and Mexico's presidential systems among the ministry of external relations and

ministry of trade in the conception and play of the role of free trader as they acceded to the APEC forum. Kaarbo and Cantir (2015) examine the role contestation between the government and opposition parties over Danish involvement in Iraq, and on the Dutch decision to provide troops as a NATO member in Afghanistan. In this research, leaders' voices are central but they are presented in tandem with opposition and coalition parties coalition that did not support providing troops to these conflicts. The focus on domestic role contestation means there is not much attention to how leaders advance a role on behalf of the state, or how the structure and power of others shape the leader's predispositions.

Cantir and Kaarbo's (2016) edited volume highlights the promise of considering individuals, yet for most contributors the central role of the individual leader is not explored in any detail. Instead, leaders and other political elites stand in opposition to the masses in vertical contestation, and leaders are one of many competing actors in horizontal contestation within government. Hagan (2016, 34-36) explores the role of French President Poincaré in the July Crisis, but mostly in terms of his political maneuvering in maintaining the French state's role as "faithful ally" to Russia, rather than consider anything about his personal characteristics. Was Poincaré simply a "structural dupe" in his work on behalf of the state, or was this role a reflection of his personal beliefs, the context, or some combination of both? Brummer and Thies (2016) identify two cases in Australia where Foreign Ministers took the initiative as "role entrepreneurs" to commit to roles that contradicted their own parties and Prime Ministers. Yet, why these Foreign Ministers held such beliefs is not explored. It is clear that they used the context to their benefit, such as acting when the Prime Minister was in transit from the UK. Thus, we should keep in mind that individuals may or may not be able to express their views on roles depending on domestic and international context. While several other contributions

entertain important differences among the elite (Koenig 2016, Beasley, Kaarbo and Solomon-Strauss 2016), only Walker, Schafer and Beieler (2016) move in the direction we are suggesting. We will return to that contribution below.

Thus, the literature on role contestation is an important step to open the black box of the state and analyse how political actors have different preferences, interests, identities and views on the state's role conception. Leaders' voices are present, but they are part of a web of domestic political and social processes. Yet, this literature suggests that a leader has the capacity to make a final resolution on what role a state should select and play despite the existing contestation (Wehner and Thies 2014). Although this literature delves into the state apparatus and ends with the idea of a homogenous role for the state, it does not cover the leader and his/her capacity to articulate new roles altogether for a state, her/his capacity to adjust them to align with their own views, or even when the leader just follows a long established role of the state.

### **Filling the glass: A research agenda on leaders and roles**

The individual level has long been present in FPA in the study of leaders and leadership theories. However, the focus on the individual has only been present at the margins in role theory, despite work on domestic contestation and its general finding that the leader in power usually makes a final decision on what role to select and play internationally (Cantir and Kaarbo 2016). More general works covering developments in role theory have also not fully integrated the individual level (Breuning 2017). Only a few studies are consistent with our proposed leader-based research agenda. For example, Walker, Schafer and Beieler (2016) refer to the role conceptions contained in Bush's and Obama's grand

strategies. They use OCA to uncover anomalies such as the personal role conception of Obama is more conflict oriented than that of Bush, although the role enactments are flipped across administrations. Further, their findings support a bureaucratic politics model over a predominant leader model across these two administrations. As they note, the sources of these differences are not always clear, and will require further in-depth process tracing to uncover (see also Brummer and Thies 2015). A second exception is Cuhadar et al. (2017), who examine whether leaders tend to change their personal traits when they occupy different institutional roles, and which traits are most susceptible to change across roles. However, leaders fill existing institutional roles such as prime minister or foreign minister, which does not allow us to examine the key traits and beliefs that shape leaders' predispositions to actually select roles for the state.

Leaders in power, when elected or when they take power by force, assume their presidential or prime ministerial office. This means that they take a corporate or institutional role whose parameters are expressed by law and constitutional duties in democratic and even in competitive authoritarian orders (Levitsky and Way 2012). Leaders in foreign policy can actively expand a state's foreign policy roles, or become a passive recipient of roles that are part of the state's foreign policy fabric. A new research agenda on the individual level makes sense as most of the role theory contributions mentioned above follow a similar methodological path as that of Kalevi Holsti (1970). They rely on leader statements, narrations, discourses and spontaneous press declarations as material used to study role conceptions. These methods of identifying roles that are then analysed at the interplay of the state and international system or within the state apparatus are present in most studies of national role conceptions *a la Holsti*.<sup>4</sup> While the

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<sup>4</sup> For reviews see Thies (2010), and Thies and Nieman (2017).



individual level has been methodologically (material used in role theory research) and anecdotally present (quotes from the leader about a role for an empirical illustration), it has not been incorporated in its full theoretical scope in foreign policy role theory research. Thus, going beyond the individual for methodological purposes in defining roles to considering individuals as having agency in co-acting with a variety of structures and other agents requires outlining a research agenda for the future.

#### *A framework for the study of leaders' role selection*

Symbolic interactionist role theory stresses the inherent capacity of the actor, in this case of leaders in power, to create and use their reflective intelligence to face diverse social contexts, find their most appropriate role for a given situation, and establish a role relationship with others (see McCourt 2014, Wehner and Thies 2014, Klose 2020, Wehner 2020). Other approaches to role theory lack the inherent agency of actors as roles are determined by the existing structural settings giving little room for role change. Change is still possible in these approaches, but it occurs when the international structure changes. Roles that originate from a material based international structure include balancer and bandwagonner (Waltz 1979), and those originating from a Hobbesian, Lockean or Kantian social structure include enemy, rival and friend, respectively (Wendt 1999).<sup>5</sup>

Thus, by adopting a symbolic interactionist approach to role theory, we emphasize that actors have agency and reflective intelligence in all contexts. Some contexts provide more latitude to the actor than others, but in all cases agency is still present. We think of

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<sup>5</sup> For a role theory perspective on the lack of agency in the seminal contribution of Wendt's three cultures of anarchy and respective roles see Wehner and Thies 2014; see also McCourt 2014.

the individual level in role theory to be occupied primarily by prime ministers and presidents, or what Putnam's two-level game would call the chief of government (COG) (see Putnam 1988). Much like the two-level game metaphor, we see the COG as the individual who negotiates between an international and domestic game. In this sense, the COG navigates through different sets of domestic constraints such as domestic political actors, bureaucracies and institutions. While the role location process need not be modeled as a game as in Thies, there are certainly elements of a bargaining process between the state as self, the specific other in a potential role relationship, and the audience who observes the interaction (Thies 2013a). The COG represents the state, but in our approach also her or himself, in interactions with other domestic actors during role contestation and in role bargaining with other COG's representing their states and also themselves. This scenario crosses all three levels of analysis: individual, state, and system. It also restores agency to the COG by recognizing her/his own beliefs, interests, and identity even as she represents the state to others in the international system.

Most leaders come into power with a preexisting role set consisting of the state's historical roles, as well as their own beliefs and views about appropriate roles and their enactment. As mentioned earlier, there are three scenarios facing any individual leader regarding role conception and enactment in any given situation. These scenarios are depicted as social realities a leader faces when being at the center of foreign policy making. They are consistent with theoretical expectations for how roles are located in the international system. In the process of role conception and role play, roles may be expressions of long term foreign policy traditions and principles of an international actor, and/or they may be subject to change to match expectations of external others or due to domestic role contestation (see Thies 2013, Thies and Nieman 2017, McCourt 2014, Kaarbo and Cantir 2015, Wehner 2020). Role change can happen in a more radical way

(Sagarzazu and Thies 2019, Wehner 2020), or merely be subject to nuances and subsequent adjustments (Wehner and Thies 2014). When roles experience visible conflicts or one role is being undermined by another one, then change can be triggered as a gradual process (e.g. Breuning and Pechenina 2019). States or leaders that speak on their behalf can also resist change and adopt continuity of the existing foreign policy roles when confronted with diverging expectations from other actors (e.g. Teles Fazendeiro 2020). All of the aforementioned scholarship on role theory presents theoretical expectations along the lines of role continuity and role change, in which change takes at least two forms: one as adjustments to an existing role and the other as the process of dropping a role altogether from the actor's role-set. The same works rely on case studies and/or illustrative examples to document processes of domestic role contestation, or how role socialization works and how master roles interact with auxiliary roles when not directly assessing the process of role change. We therefore draw on these existing theoretical and empirical works on role theory to help us to delimit the three scenarios of role continuity, role adjustments and role change.<sup>6</sup> In the elaboration of these three scenarios, we also assume that actors have a role-based social life in which they cannot ignore the role location process. Ontologically roles are the form of social life in which actors get to know each other and interact. Even when international actors retreat from international life, then that actor is also adopting a role; in this case the role of an isolate. Thus, leaders engaged in foreign policy making will broadly choose among the following three scenarios.

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<sup>6</sup> We have assessed the existing scholarship moving back and forth from theory to empirical cases. This process is neither purely deductive nor purely inductive and can be categorized as abductive. On abduction in social science inquiry and international relations see Sil and Katzenstein (2010), and see also Friedrichs and Kratochwil (2009).

First, a leader may adopt a role that has been an enduring part of a state's role set, but change the enactment of that role. For example, U.S. President Trump may still claim the role conception of "faithful ally" within the NATO context, but he has clearly changed the enactment through actions such as shaming member states for failing to meet their expected contributions, failing to notify members of significant action such as the U.S. withdrawal from Syria, unilaterally planning to draw down US troops deployments in Germany, and so on. Second, a leader may adopt a new role for the state based on their own personal beliefs, identities, and interests. As mentioned earlier, President Trump has attempted to enact a "friend" role with Russia by expressing his admiration for President Putin, calling for Russia's readmission to the G7, and shifting blame for election meddling from Russia to Ukraine. Third, a leader could enact a role from the state's role set with no change at all. This may be because the leader agrees that this is the correct role for the context. It is also possible that the context demands the role in a neorealist way in which the material demands of structure provide little leeway for the state, or another state may be altercasting a role, which involves managing the context such that a particular counterrole to the altercasting states' preferred role seems like the best or only option. For example, President Trump has adopted a "rival" role vis-à-vis China, which is a longstanding U.S. role also adopted by previous Administrations.

While we know from the study of leaders that they do indeed matter, especially in certain circumstances (see Kaarbo 2018), we know less than we should about why leaders actually make any of the aforementioned choices regarding roles. Most of what we know assumes that something external to the leader is responsible, such as some aspect of domestic contestation or some external constraint in the environment. Indeed, domestic contestation and the context of the role location process with significant others are undoubtedly part of the explanation, but we suggest drilling down further into the

individual level to fully flesh out role theory approaches to foreign policy analysis. Much like Cantir and Kaarbo's original call for role theorists to pay attention to what we already knew about other domestic political actors from FPA (see Cantir and Kaarbo 2012), we suggest the same strategy to further elucidate the importance of the individual level in role theory. Below we turn to this task by outlining how role theory can gain from building on some key theoretical and methodological tools in the study of leaders.<sup>7</sup>

*OCA, LTA and other motivational approach for the study of leaders' role selection*

There are a number of longstanding approaches to the cognitive and motivational dispositions of individual decision makers in FPA. We have already briefly reviewed one contribution that uses OCA in tandem with role theory, which gives us some sense of its usefulness in this regard. Walker, Schaefer and Beiler (2016) examine role demands, role conceptions, and role enactment across the Bush and Obama Administrations. The Bush Administration pursued a hegemonic role conception, while the Obama Administration pursued a patron role conception. They also examine role contestation between the White House, State Department and Department of Defense. They further analyzed the

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<sup>7</sup> In this paper, we focus only on OCA, LTA, Image Theory, and recent work on the leadership style of populism as initial ways to think on the relationship leader and roles. Yet, this focus does not limit or exhaust other possibilities to advance research at the interplay of individual leaders and roles of the state. For instance, future research could also consider and apply the Big Five personality traits (neuroticism, extraversion, openness to experience, agreeableness, conscientiousness) to study drivers behind leaders to enact and conceive roles. On the Big Five see, Rubenzer and Faschingbauer (2004), Schoen (2007), and Gallagher and Allen (2014).

differences between the operation of role demands, conceptions, and enactment at the macro and micro-level. At the macro-level, they conduct analyses using the Conflict and Mediation Event Observations (CAMEO) data that captures cooperative and conflictual events.<sup>8</sup> At the micro-level they use OCA to capture the strategic orientation and historical control traits of Presidents and Secretaries of State and Defense. They find that the role contestation process is governed by a bureaucratic politics model rather than a predominant leader model (Walker, Schafer and Bieler 2016). This approach usefully incorporates elements of crossing all three levels of analysis, but OCA can potentially generate a number of testable propositions relative to our three scenarios. We can draw on measures of philosophical beliefs in OCA, including the nature of the political universe as more cooperative or conflictual, control of historical developments, locus of control, role of chance, etc. We can also examine instrumental beliefs, including the utility of means for exercising political power (punish, threaten, oppose/resist, appeal/support, promise, reward) and others, which may also help inform role conception and role location. Holsti (1970, 293) separated his roles into conflict (liberator supporter, anti-imperialist agent, defender of the faith, bastion of the revolution, and regional protector) and collaborator (regional-subsystem collaborator, mediator-integrator, developer, active independent, and bridge). It stands to reason that if a leader's view of the nature of the political universe is more conflictual or more cooperative, then he might choose more conflictual or more cooperative roles, such as those proposed by Holsti (1970). Leaders might also be classified into the OCA typology (Holsti 1977, Walker 1990) and expectations for choosing status quo roles, innovating in enactment, or choosing new roles similarly derived.

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<sup>8</sup> See <http://eventdata.parusanalytics.com/data.html> for the data and description.

Thus, a fruitful relation between OCA and role theory starts from specifying the set of philosophical and instrumental beliefs of a specific leader and which of these type of beliefs matter more for changing a role altogether, adjusting the role performance, or keeping the existing role of the state without variation. Further research should explore these possibilities, although some preliminary and overarching assumptions can be made over the relationship role-beliefs of the leader. For instance, if core and permanent beliefs of a leader (philosophical beliefs) clash with the role or role-set of a state, then we expect the leader to introduce new roles into the role-set of a state that reflect the philosophical beliefs. If the leader's philosophical beliefs do not diverge from the role conception of the state, then the leader will tend to follow and enact the role of the state in external relations without much variation. If there is a rather moderate difference between these beliefs of the leader and the role of the state, then the leader may decide to keep the role and adjust it towards his/her own core beliefs. Additionally, looking at the instrumental set of beliefs of a leader, which are end-means to achieve the leader's political goals, also adds another layer of complexity to trace leader influence in role change, role continuity, or role adjustments. Whether a new role will be incorporated or not, whether role continuity is more strategically convenient or just adjusting an existing role with few variations will also depend on tracing the instrumental leader's beliefs such as the best approach to strategy and his/her belief on the capacity to control historical development (see Walker 1983). If the leader believes that he or she can control historical development and possesses the ideational and material resources to do so as strategic choices, then the leader will tend to bring her/his own way of enactment, and possibly new roles altogether to face a political situation in external affairs. If control of historical development is low and there are no new resources from the leader's perspective, then the leader might tend to keep and enact the role of the state without substantial variation over time.

Likewise, LTA, pioneered by Margaret Hermann (1980), also offers similar potential to help us predict which of the aforementioned scenarios a leader will choose in the role location process. The personality characteristics examined by LTA usually include things like belief in the ability to control events (BACE), need for power (PWR), conceptual complexity (CC), self confidence (SC), ingroup bias (IGB), distrust of others (DIS) and task focus (TASK). Cudahar et al review LTA findings and note that trait stability should be used as a variable, with some findings that, for example, conceptual complexity may vary over time within individuals and not in others. They also note the common argument that external shocks may produce changes in LTA or OCA measures. Finally, they observe that some leaders are more sensitive to their environment, which likely results in some of the observed variability in personality traits (Cudahar 2017, 43). Cudahar et.al (2017) are specifically interested in exploring whether personality traits change when leaders change institutional roles, as a result of new role demands. Their examination of three Turkish leaders finds that personality traits are largely stable across role changes from prime ministers to presidents (Özal, Demirel, and Gül).<sup>9</sup> Yet, we could also think about how such traits might affect a leader's role conception. A leader with a high belief in ability to control events might be more likely to offer a new role on behalf of the state, rather than one that had long endured in a state's role set. A leader high in conceptual complexity might be more likely to change the enactment of a long established role, or be open to a new role altogether. A leader high in ingroup bias or with high distrust of others may have a difficult role contestation process domestically and a difficult role location process internationally. We may pay attention to shifts in LTA measures that may portend a shift in role, the sensitivity of leaders to the environment, and the role of

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<sup>9</sup> An additional analysis is conducted in the case of Gül as he also served as foreign minister, see Cudahar, et.al. (2017).



external shocks in moving LTA scores and disrupting established roles and their enactment.

While using individual traits can prove useful to trace how roles can change, are adjusted to the leader's predispositions, or kept without much variation by the leader as seen above, LTA also offers another potential feature, which is to establish what roles a specific type of leadership style is likely to conceive, enact, and play based on the leadership types from Hermann and Holsti's list of national roles. Hermann (2005) presents eight leadership styles of leaders: expansionist, evangelist, actively independent, directive, incremental, influential, opportunistic and collegial. These leadership styles originate in different iterations of traits that are brought together in sequences of two pairs and triplets to establish whether leaders respect or challenge existing constraints (BACE & PWR), how open the leaders are to information (SC & CC), and the leaders' motivation to seek office (IGB, DIS & TASK): problem or relationship focused.<sup>10</sup>

Types of leadership styles in LTA also offer an additional way to trace role change, adjustment, and lack of change.<sup>11</sup> For instance, leadership styles that challenge constraints and are closed to information are more likely to initiate role change (expansionist and evangelist) while their motivation on problems or relationships will

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<sup>10</sup> On the specific methodological steps and on how the combinations of factors (respect or challenge constraints, openness to information and motivation to office) produce different ideal type of leadership styles depending on whether leaders show a high or low scores in traits vis-à-vis the control group, see Hermann (1980; 2001; 2005). These same works provide conceptualisations and characterisations for these leadership styles. On a different approach to the study of constraints in LTA, see the work of Keller (2005).

<sup>11</sup> A potential benefit of the types of leadership present in LTA is that it provides a more compact and parsimonious way to trace leader's role choices. At the same time the leadership types can be taken themselves as role types. The types of leadership thus provide an ideal way to start the research venture at the interplay of LTA and roles.

indicate their different ways and means to create a new role. Leadership styles that challenge constraints and are open to information (active independent and directive) will still seek role change if deemed necessary but will pay more attention to the demands of their own group or political context if the leader is a problem focused motivated actor (active independent). A directive leadership style, as more relationship focused, will pay more attention to the demands of the other. A directive leadership style will also be more likely than an active independent to follow a role of the state but adjust its enactment if it helps to maintain the state's international reputation. A directive leadership style will also keep the role once in office if such a role enhances the status of the state and that of the leader (Hermann 2005).

Types of leadership styles that respect constraints in general (incremental, influential, opportunistic and collegial) are less likely to trigger role change, reflecting their personal priorities. The types of leadership style that are closed to information (incremental and influential) will tend to keep the existing role and if necessary adjust them to their own interests reflecting their goals. Incremental leaders will seek to secure the state's economy and security in a rather step by step manner, but if the incremental approach clashes with immediate and costly political obstacles, then the leader will tend to follow the roles of the state without variation as these leader's motivations are more problem focused. Influential leaders will adjust the role to his own view or keep roles of the state without much variation if these roles are instrumental to keep cooperative relationships with other states and still allow for win-win situations. Finally, the opportunistic and collegial leadership styles are more likely to keep roles and at most adjust roles to their personal views whenever the context is favourable. An opportunistic leader that respect constraints, is open to information and problem focused, will be more context sensitive to adjust a role to her own view. If the leader envisages an opportunity

in its assessment then she may adjust a role while it is being enacted. This leader will also be more likely to feel constrained by role contestation. A collegial leader will prioritise consensus seeking and will follow the role demands of others domestically and internationally. A change in roles is less likely as this leadership profile respects constraints; thus keeping the role of the state without much variation is more likely. Adjustment is only an option if the leaders' own perspective also empowers others and the risk is that the role reflects the voices of others than his/her own (Hermann 2005: 184-203).

Methodologically, both OCA and LTA rely on content analysis that produces quantitative scores. While the type of material used to conduct content analysis of leaders in LTA needs to be spontaneous in order to reduce eventual biases that can distort or cover personality traits (Hermann 2005), the OCA approach relies on both prepared and spontaneous material. For OCA even prepared discourses and speeches by advisors will reflect the set of beliefs of a leader (Schafer and Walker 2006). The same textual material to determine leader's traits or set of beliefs can also be used to trace and extract the set of roles that the leader prefers for the state. Thus, from the same material one can deduce the overall conformity of the leader with existing roles of the state and trace preferences for role change or role adjustment and continuity. Hansel and Möller (2005) provide an example of the methodological steps needed to determine and extract the roles of the state using content analysis of material from the foreign policy elites of India; that is, prime ministers, external affairs ministers, foreign secretaries, and national security advisers. In the appendix of their article, they explain and provide different set of measures and cross-checks of material that can be used when working with these individual's speeches to define the type of roles of the leader and those of the state. Similarly, the same type of content analysis can be used to define the broader shared role of the state by including

other relevant foreign policy actors as Hansel and Möller (2005: 98) do in their work. These roles broadly shared by the foreign policy apparatus of a country can then be contrasted with the views of the leader over role preferences. When roles as viewed by the leader, and as viewed by foreign policy actors are established, then we can observe which views are predominant. If the leader's views seem predominant to either change, adaptation or maintenance of a role, then one should move into examining the reasons behind such choices, in which OCA and LTA can shed valuable light.<sup>12</sup>

While both OCA and LTA are perhaps two of the most well established and popular ways to study leader's influences in foreign policy within the field of FPA, there are also several other approaches to motivation that may be usefully combined with role theory. David Winter's (1987) work has focused on three basic motives, including achievement, affiliation, and power. Winter (2005, 56) reports a number of significant correlations between motives and outcomes of U.S. Presidents. Power is positively correlated with higher rated greatness, war entry, and the active positive dimension of Barber's typology (president invested energy in the position). Need for affiliation is positively related to higher likelihood of a scandal and concluding arms limitation treaties. Achievement is positively related to the active negative dimension of Barber's typology and historian's ratings of a president's idealism (Barber 1992). We might similarly examine how motives are related to certain types of roles in past leaders to predict future role conceptions. Motives might come into play as two COGs interact in the role location process at the level of the international system. Winter (2005, 572) is quick to note, however, that motives are situation-dependent, while cognition and

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<sup>12</sup> As mentioned earlier, we do not suggest one approach is better than the other. The choice of which leader-based approach to combine with role theory should be a methodological choice driven by the research question at hand.

personality traits are trans-situational. The motives of the leader that may inform role location and enactment must therefore be situated in the environment. Indeed, the role location process may be the most interesting place to examine the motives of two COGs—if they both have high needs for affiliation or achievement, they might work closely to broker a deal to adopt and enact roles leading to successful role relationship. Yet, in mixed-motive interactions, a COG with a need for power may attempt to force a role on her/his counterpart with a high need for affiliation may ultimately accept, despite its otherwise suboptimality. In terms of our three scenarios, we might expect a leader with a high need for power to be more likely to offer her/his own roles over traditional roles for the state, while a leader with a high need for achievement may be more likely to modify existing roles to perfect them for foreign policy interactions, and an individual with a high need for affiliation may prefer to avoid domestic contestation or conflict with other leaders and leave existing roles in place.

Cottam (1977, 31) takes a broader approach to define motivation as ‘a compound of factors that predispose a government and people to move in a decisional direction in foreign policy.’ Cottam is particularly interested in explaining imperialistic foreign policy through images. While he notes that many of the motivational factors are presented in nonindividual terms (e.g., ideological, cultural or religious messianism, bureaucratic or military vested interests, grandeur, etc.), he also argues that leaders’ domestic and external power drives are important factors, much like Winter’s need for power. Further, Cottam argues that an individual’s worldview is derived from the historical experience of his national community, the defense and grandeur interests of said community, other intensely held political values, the individual’s role interests, and the individual’s idiosyncratic socialization patterns. It is the leader who is therefore incorporating information from multiple levels of analysis into their worldview. Cottam (1977, 60)

suggests that an individual's worldview will lead him to perceive the world in terms of basic images, such as enemy, complex, allied, colonial and imperial. These images help us understand the motivation for foreign policy decisions.

Images, and the motivations behind them, may help us to understand how leaders approach their counterparts in other states. They may help underpin the selection of roles to enact, and those from a state's role set that are unlikely to be enacted by a particular leader. New leaders may approach bargaining with other COGs from an image perspective, since they have not had prior experience negotiating role relationships. Thus, if a leader adopts a traditional image of the other based on their historical relationship, then we may have a good guide to the kinds of roles s/he is likely to try and adopt with them. A leader of a great power may still view former colonies through a colonial image, which may lead her/him to adopt roles such as developer, regional leader, regional protector, or stabilizer. The dynamism that may lead to change in such roles will come if the role partner can change the image held by the other away from colonial to something more akin to partner or ally. Images held by the self and other can therefore help understand if role continuity, adjustment or change is likely.

Leadership style may also be an important component of the individual level of analysis. One form of leadership style garnering much attention lately is populism. According to Mudde and Rovira Kaltwasser (2014: 377), there are four main conceptual approaches to populism, including style, strategy, pathology, and discourse. Populism as a style is characterized by emotional appeals for simple solutions to complex problems. As a strategy, populism involves a personalistic leader who seeks unmediated, direct support from unorganized followers. As a pathology, populism is seen as a disease affecting democracy that leads to increasingly autocratic solutions. Populism as a discourse focuses on a set of ideas in which the corrupt elites act in opposition to the pure

people. Thies (2017), and Sagarzazu and Thies (2019) explored roles associated with a populist that fits all of the aforementioned approaches, President Hugo Chávez of Venezuela (see also, Wehner 2020). Thies (2017) generated theoretical expectations for the types of roles that Latin American states might be expected to seek based on their pro- vs anti-core orientation and autonomous vs. dependent status. Venezuela as an autonomous, anti-core state was expected to adopt roles such as anti-imperialist agent, bastion of revolution-liberator, regional leader, patron, and so on. Considering populism as a ‘thin-centred ideology’ (Mudde 2004, 543) requires a host ideology to fill in the substantive gaps, such as left or right wing ideological orientation (see for example Wehner and Thies 2020). Holsti (1970, 296) notes the ideological sources of many of his roles, including many of those adopted by Chávez for Venezuela. Thies’s analysis of Chávez confirms that he adopted many of these roles for Venezuela, but also adopted others that were “the personification of the state in the form of Chávez,” such as missionary, example, martyr, and savior (Thies 2017, 11). Sagarzazu and Thies (2019) dig deeper into Chávez’s deployment of the anti-imperialist agent role and find that he uses it more frequently when the price of oil is high, thus providing the necessary means to fund his misiones at home and Bolivarian Revolution abroad to combat the U.S. and other imperialistic forces. We should therefore expect populists will likely adopt different roles from their non-populist predecessors, those roles may be somewhat predictable depending on the companion ideology they adopt with their populist style, and there may be a very close connection between the leader’s sense of his/her own role and that of the state. Populists may also face a high degree of domestic contestation over their new roles from traditional elites. Populists may also have to renegotiate existing role relationships with other states to either adopt new roles or modify the enactment of existing roles.

Incorporating what we already know from the FPA literature about personality and decision making should help us to answer a variety of questions related to the leader in the role location process. How do personality and role interact? How do individual leaders and other domestic politics actors interact? How do individuals interact with other individuals as COGs at the international level? Crossing these three levels will require considerable additional theorizing that is beyond the scope of this paper. What has been sketched out above is only meant to be suggestive of directions for future theoretical and methodological research.

## **Conclusion**

Why did Carlos Menem adopt a new role for Argentina by choosing to be a faithful ally of the US? Why did Tony Blair fight his party to maintain the traditional faithful ally role with the US during the Iraq War? Why did Michele Bachelet and Ricardo Lagos maintain the global free trader role inherited from Chile's authoritarian past? Why did Donald Trump seek a friend role with Russia, which has long been a traditional rival of the US? While interpretations of their role choices abound at the state and system levels, we suggest delving deeper into the personality of leaders as a way to understand why they made these choices as individuals interacting with other domestic and international political actors. Role theory's promise of crossing multiple levels of analysis or truly bridging the agent-structure divide requires that we fully understand aspects of the individual that influence their decision making.

In this short space, we have proposed a research agenda that incorporates the individual level of analysis in foreign policy role theory in order to fulfill role theory's



integrative and multilevel promise. While individual leaders' speeches are often analyzed to identify a role on behalf of the state, the importance of the actual leader and her/his agential capacity in selecting that role are not placed at the centre of the stage. Our symbolic interactionist approach requires the individual be put front and center in tandem with the environmental context. What factors lead particular individuals to advocate for particular role conceptions out of those that may be available in a state's role set, or what leads an individual to innovate in the enactment of an existing role, or choose a new role altogether? How does the individual interact with his domestic political arena and international counterparts in the role location process? The complexities of a multilevel analysis abound, and it makes a great deal of sense why most analysts simply choose the state level to identify national role conceptions, or the interaction of the state and the international system to analyze role relationships.

Our view is that we have much material to draw upon in FPA to inform our integration of the individual level of analysis into role theory. The study of cognitive and motivational characteristics of personality are long established in the FPA literature. Assessing leaders for their operational codes or one of the LTA indicators may give us some insight into the behavior of individuals when it comes to choosing the status quo on roles, innovating in role enactment or choosing a new role altogether. Research on individual motivations or images may similar help to guide our analyses. Finally, leadership style, such as new work on populism and foreign policy may also help us understand what kinds of roles some leaders are likely to adopt. Incorporating the individual level into role theory is not simple, as it adds another level and layer of complexity to the analysis. Not all explanations will demand such complexity, but for those that do, we hope to have laid the foundation of a research agenda toward that end.

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