

## Chapter 10

# Foreign Policy Choices

The study of foreign policy is enriched by a vast number of important websites with useful information for IR scholarship. Some of the most important sources are the websites of national governments and their various ministries and departments, such as the US State Department, the British Ministry of Defence, the French Ministry of Economy, Finance and Industry, or the Chinese Ministry of Commerce. International organizations, such as the United Nations or the European Union or NATO, also have many websites. In addition, there are websites maintained by think tanks and other non-governmental organizations. There are, as well, sites maintained by universities and university research institutions.

There is a division between foreign policy websites mostly maintained by and for practitioners (e.g. governments, international organizations, non-governmental organizations, etc.) and those mostly maintained by and for theorists and academics. In researching foreign policy it is important to be aware of this difference and consider whether we want to acquire more particular, practical information, or more general and theoretical information. This distinction is not always clear. Think tanks, for example, are concerned with practical and immediate foreign policy questions, but they also are places where foreign policy theorists find a home. They often compete with universities for theoretically inclined IR researchers. We should keep this in mind when we explore the internet resources on foreign policy choices.

## Assignments

1. Check your government's main websites (e.g. foreign ministry, defence department, international trade and commerce department, etc.) on foreign policy. What kind of information are they providing? If it is practical information about their policies and activities, as it very likely will be, ask yourself what the government is trying to tell you in providing that information. Then ask yourself: how can I best make use of this information for scholarly purposes? You might decide that it can best be used to become better informed on what the government is doing, or plans to do. If that is the case, how can you make the best academic use of the information? Which foreign policy theories are most applicable in using that information?
2. International conflict is a noteworthy feature of international relations, particularly conflict between states or groups of states. Realist IR scholars think such conflict is the defining feature of international relations: the clash of state interests. The conduct of foreign policy is seen as an activity of advancing and defending the national interest. Check some of the websites below for information which supports or undermines that conception of foreign policy.
3. International cooperation is also a noteworthy feature of international relations, particularly cooperation between states or groups of states which have had close relations for long periods. Liberal IR scholars think such cooperation and collaboration is the defining feature of international relations. The conduct of foreign policy is viewed as an activity of promoting general interests or finding common ground among states. That is often seen to involve the creation and support of

international organizations or regimes. Check some of the websites on this site for information which supports or undermines this conception of foreign policy.

## Case Study: Iran's nuclear deal

In the autumn of 2014, Iran and the group of 5+1 (US, UK, France, Russia, China, and Germany) met in Geneva to reach an agreement on the sanctions regime against Iran. Many countries worldwide imposed sanctions due to Tehran's nuclear program. The three videos linked to below portray different perspectives on the Iranian nuclear issue, corresponding to the three levels of analysis. Watch the videos and discuss the following points:

- The systemic level: how do the interests of Saudi Arabia and Israel come into play in the Iranian nuclear talks?
- The level of the nation-state: is the power structure of Iran particularly susceptible to the 'dangers' of bureaucratic politics and group-think?
- The level of the individual decision-maker: Is Rouhani more peaceful and pragmatic than his predecessor Ahmedinejad? If so, does this make a difference when striking a deal in Geneva?
- In your opinion, which level of analysis is most helpful when analyzing the prospects of a nuclear deal? Is it the systemic level, the level of the nation state or the level of the decision maker?

### Videos:

- **Systemic level** : Prospects of Iran's nuclear talks  
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=pB6O30zScO8>
- **The level of the nation state** : the power structure of Iran:  
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=6Ea6w19XTNo>
- **The level of the individual decision maker** : Rouhani's year in office as the president of Iran:  
[https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=V0rYOlp\\_a3s](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=V0rYOlp_a3s)