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Taking Waltz beyond Waltz: Socialization as an Intervening Variable in Structural Realism

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Abstract:

Rationalism, pessimism and indeterminacy are three central characteristics of Waltz's structural realism. Not surprisingly, they are also the aspects that most often come under attack by scholars aiming to either criticize or improve on Waltz's ideas. Standing out in the former group, constructivists, inspired by Alexander Wendt, advocate a minimal reading of anarchy, where the latter can engender conflict and cooperation alike, depending of what states 'make of it.' Attempts to improve on Waltz's theory, on the other hand, usually concentrate on solving the indeterminacy problem by formulating theories that should explain political outcomes more accurately while retaining most of structural realism's parsimony. The 'offensive' and 'defensive' realism schools are probably the most significant among these developments. Combining acknowledgement of the limits of neorealism with the recognition of the value and richness of this paradigm, this paper aims to reconcile the above theoretical positions (structural realism, constructivism, offensive and defensive realism) building on the work of Waltz himself. To do so we isolate Waltz's idea of 'socialization'—one of the 'transmission belts' between structure and political outcomes—and turn this concept from a constant factor into an intervening and relational variable which moves along a quantitative (high/low) as well as a qualitative (conflictual/cooperative) dimension. We then place this variable at the center of an enriched version of structural realism, where patterns of foreign policy behavior change according to the degree and type of socialization between groups of states: in the presence of high and cooperative socialization, positive perceptions and friendly behavior prevail; high and conflictual socialization, on the other hand, encourages enmity and mutually aggressive behavior; low socialization, finally, leads to higher systemic uncertainty and to cautious and defensive foreign policies. To assess the empirical validity of our theoretical claims, we conduct a brief analysis of some recent international politics situations in the light of the three behavioral categories described above.

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1. Introduction

Kenneth Waltz's writings[1] arguably represent the most valuable (and well-known) attempt to develop a systemic theory of International Relations. As widely recognized, however, such an effort resulted in an overly parsimonious theoretical framework – a model rather than a theory[2] – whose empirical validity has been frequently challenged[3]. On the theoretical grounds, several critiques have been raised, both by other realists and scholars belonging to different traditions. Two in particular are worth noting here: the first one objects to Waltz's statement that a good theory should not take into consideration the properties of the units[4]. This is not so much a critique to Waltz himself as an attempt to increase the explanatory power of his theory. The second line of argument questions the basic architecture of *Theory of International Politics*, namely the vision of a system based on structure, plus interacting units. Structure, these critics complain, is conceived only in terms of material factors (namely, power distribution) and without any reference to other, equally relevant variables such as identities, norms, or other ideational factors[5].

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[1] Kenneth N. Waltz, *Man, the State and War. A Theoretical Analysis,* New York, Columbia University Press, 1959; Kenneth N. Waltz, *Theory of International Politics*, Reading, Addison-Wesley, 1979.

[2] Angelo Panebianco, *Relazioni internazionali*, Milano, Jaca Book, 1992, p. 85.

[3] See, among others, the various contributions within Robert O. Keohane (ed.), *Neorealism and Its Critics*, New York, Columbia University Press, 1986. Paul W. Schroeder, *Historical reality Vs Neo-realist theory*, "International Security", Vol. 19, 1, 1994, pp. 108-148.

[4] See for instance Colin Elman, *Horses for Courses: Why* Not *Neorealist Theory of Foreign Policy?*, "Security Studies", Vol. 6, No. 1, 1996, pp. 7-53.

[5] The most articulated critique is probably Alexander Wendt, *Social Theory and International Politics*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1999. For a recent attempt to amend and expand the concept of

Waltz deserves credit for his later attempts to address such critiques[6], but the basic problem still remains: a purely systemic model is necessarily indeterminate. One can infer from it broad propositions and predict general phenomena, but only limited inference can be made on states' behavior. In order to gain some explanatory power, other variables need to be added. This is the research path undertaken by the so-called neoclassical realism, an approach that accepts Waltz's structural methodology, but layers in other variables to account for particular events[7]. Contributions in this camp are valuable attempts to amend Waltz's model, but they all deserve further scrutiny (and development). At the end of the day, neoclassical realists explicitly craft second-level theories – usually in a view to explain foreign policy phenomena – something that Waltz would blame as reductionist.

An alternative approach – unfortunately less explored than the former – focuses on a slightly different conception of system and structure. In Waltz's famous definition, "a system is composed of a structure and of interacting units"[8]. A truly systemic theory, then, must take into consideration only structural elements. What is left aside in such a framework is the interaction generated by the units in the system. As recognized in different ways by Glenn Snyder and Barry Buzan, variables representing the interaction among units transcend the second level of analysis, even if they are not included in the definition of structure. Hence, Snyder explored the potential of process variables, for which he coined the term "relationships"[9], while Buzan focused on the interaction level, where he defined as "interaction capacity" the "absolute quality of technological and societal capabilities across the system"[10].

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structure, see Jack Donnelly, *Rethinking Political Structures: From 'Ordering Principles' to 'Vertical Differentiation' – and Beyond*, "International Theory", Vol. 1, 1, 2009, pp. 49-86.

[6] Kenneth N. Waltz, *Reflections on "Theory of International Politics": a Response to My Critics*, in Keohane, *Neorealism and Its Critics*, pp. 322-345; *International Politics Is not Foreign Policy*, "Security Studies", Vol. 6, No. 1, 1996, pp. pp. 54-57; Kenneth N. Waltz, *Evaluating Theories*, "American Political Science Review", Vol. 91, No. 4, 1997, pp. 913-917; Kenneth N. Waltz, *Structural Realism after the Cold War*, "International Security", Vol. 25, No. 1, 2000, pp. 5-41.

[7] See Randall L. Schweller, *The Progressiveness of Neoclassical Realism*, in Colin Elman and Miriam Fendius Elman (eds.), *Progress in International Relations Theory. Appraising the Field*, Cambridge (MA), MIT Press, 2003, pp. 311-347.

[8] Waltz, *Theory of International Politics*, p. 79.

[9] Glenn H. Snyder, *Process Variables in Neorealist Theory*, in Benjamin Frankel (ed.), *Realism. Restatements and Renewal*, London, Cass, 1996, pp. 167-192.

[10] Barry Buzan, Charles Jones and Richard Little, *The Logic of Anarchy: Neorealism to Structural Realism*, New York, Columbia University Press, 1993, p. 79.

Snyder and Buzan's relationship/interaction level stands in an intermediate position between the second and third level of analysis: these variables are in fact systemic, but not structural. Building on this insight, it is therefore possible to increase the explanatory power of the model without reducing the level of analysis. In other words, this kind of variables would entail "some sacrifice in parsimony", but theorists in return would "predict and explain more of the specifics of behavior and outcomes than is possible by reasoning solely from system structure and unit attributes"[11]. Admittedly, Snyder's and Buzan's contributions require deeper analysis[12], However, they have already traced a path that, we believe, should be followed by future research attempting to update Waltz's model. Our intent is hence to preserve yet amend the neo-realist focus on third level variables. In particular, we argue that before more variables are added to the Waltzian model, more precision can be attained by developing the concept of 'socialization'.

In what follows, we will start by recalling Waltz's argument on process variables. Although frequently neglected in most readings (and critiques) of *Theory of International Politics*, socialization and competition are important parts of the model. We will see, however, that even Waltz's treatment of thse two variables is far from satisfactory, as he fails to contemplate the possibility that they might filter systemic pressure – eventually leading to unexpected outcomes. In part three we will elaborate on the definition of socialization and on its impact on units' action. Borrowing from a growing literature[13], we will suggest an amendment to Waltz's model that includes socialization as a variable whose value varies along two dimensions: high/low, and positive/negative. Finally, in the fourth part we will present four cases of dyadic interstate relations in which socialization plays a role in shaping the foreign policies of the states involved.

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[11] Both quotes are from Snyder, *Process Variables in Neorealist Theory*, p. 192.

[12] For a discussion of Snyder's operationalization problems, see for instance Andrea Locatelli, *Lo stato dell'arte sulla teoria delle alleanze. Una riflessione sull'analisi dei rapporti inter-alleati*, "Quaderni di Scienza Politica", Vol. 15, No. 2, 2008, p. 151.

[13] An excellent introduction is Kai Alderson, *Making Sense of State Socialization*, "Review of International Studies", Vol. 27, No. 3, 2001, pp. 415-433.

2.   Process variables in Waltz's theory

Waltz's discussion of socialization and competition is admittedly quite superficial [14]. His main goal is to show that in a system's structure can affect the behavior of the units without any direct action. Apparently, he is more interested in showing the existence of systemic pressures, than in investigating the two processes. This is particularly unfortunate, since process variables happen to be an important bridge between Waltz's main independent variable (system polarity) and observed outcomes (balance of power and lack of cooperation).

Socialization is a process whose origins are to be traced to the interactions between agents. Once a group (i.e. a system) is formed, the web of interactions produced by the units spontaneously creates a context whose rules transcend the intentions and logic of the players. Borrowing the example of Edward Albee's characters, George and Martha, their actions cannot be understood just as "a set of two-way relations, because each element of behavior that contributes to the interaction is itself shaped by their being a pair"[15]. In other words, through socialization the system shapes units' behavior by labeling given actions as acceptable or deplorable . If we consider this argument in the light of Waltz's main thesis, this becomes an important step in his critique to reductionist theories. As the examples of the two teenagers illustrates, socialization leads to convergence around (or better, conformity to) given norms[16], regardless of the units' features and intentions. We might then say that states in International Politics are forced by socialization to behave similarly, or better, to play by the same rules. It is crucial, therefore, to sort out which behaviors and rules are generated by the international system.

This is where competition supposedly comes into play. Here too, however, Waltz seems distracted by other concerns. In the first place, he fails to provide a definition of competition, focusing instead on its effects: "competition generates an order, the units of which adjust their relations through their autonomous decisions and

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[14] Waltz himself seems to recognize this by declaring his intent to "[explain] each of them in elementary terms". Waltz, *Theory of International Politics*, p. 74.

[15] Waltz, *Theory of International Politics*, p. 75.

[16] Incidentally, we find here a potential Trojan horse in Waltz's model. Contrary to what he and other realists have claimed, even such a scant reference paid to norms and rules is enough to open the door to ideational factors as explanatory variables. In particular, by claiming that "socialization brings member of a group into conformity with its norms" (Waltz, *Theory of International Politics*, pp. 75-76), he implicitly accepts the notion that states are not just egoistic utility-maximizers, but they also follow the logic of appropriateness. For a deeper critique see Wendt, *Social Theory and International Politics*, ch. 3.

act"[17]. What kind of order is left to the reader's interpretation. Borrowing from the economic metaphor of the market, Waltz claims only that "competition spurs the actors to accommodate their ways to the socially most acceptable and successful practices". As a result, "orderliness is in the outcomes and not necessarily in the inputs"[18]. We should then infer that being the international system a competitive arena, where incentives and penalties are placed on given actions, States will be led to act in ways that maximize their chances for survival. In other words, they will play by the rules of *Realpolitik*.

In sum, according to Waltz, the end result of socialization and competition is to insinuate "the fundamental norms of 'security egoism' and balance of power politics into the behavior of states"[19]. As it should be evident, therefore, process variables play a critical role in Waltz's model: they are the two main "transmission belts"[20] between structural effects and agents' behavior. What is less evident is how they work or, to put it differently, whether they can be treated as variables.

In particular, two main problems arise: first, while Waltz's use of analogies (mainly from the economic sphere) gives a broad idea of the processes, it is of little help when it comes to translating system effects into state behavior. What is the end result of socialization and competition? How do states get socialized? Why do socialization-induced norms sometimes change? Waltz's general answer is that agents will tend to develop similar attributes and norms of action because they imitate the most successful units in the system[21]. Trial and error is therefore the main mechanism at play, which in turn implies that states have some sort of learning capability[22].

But still, what holds for economics is not necessarily true for international politics. While firms can easily measure others' success and follow suit, states just cannot. First, because the very definition of success is questionable: as Waltz himself

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[17] Waltz, *Theory of International Politics*, p. 76.

[18] Both quotes are from Waltz, *Theory of International Politics*, p. 77.

[19] Alderson, *Making Sense of State Socialization*, p. 416.

[20] Anders Wivel, *The Power Politics of Peace: Exploring the Link between Globalization and European Integration from a Realist Perspective*, "Cooperation and Conflict", Vol. 39, No. 5, 2004, p. 13.

[21] On this point, see the pioneering work of João Resende-Santos, *Anarchy and the Emulation of Military Systems. Military Organization and Technology in South America, 1870-1914*, in Frankel, *Realism*, pp. 193-260.

[22] On learning in International Relations see among others: Jack S. Levy, *Learning and Foreign Policy: Sweeping a Conceptual Minefield*, "International Organization", Vol. 48, No. 2, 1994, pp. 279-312. Philip E. Tetlock, *Learning in U.S. and Soviet Foreign Policy: In Search of an Elusive Concept*, in George W. Breslauer, Philip E. Tetlock (eds.), *Learning in U.S. and Soviet Foreign Policy*, Boulder (CO), Westview, 1991, pp. 20-61. Dan Reiter, *Crucible of Beliefs: Learning, Alliances and World Wars,* Ithaca (NY), Cornell University Press, 1996.

admits, state goals may vary from mere survival to world dominance – the implication being that the attributes necessary to survive are quite different from the requisites for supremacy. Secondly, even admitting that states agree on what they conceive as success, it is empirically hard to single out what makes success possible. As Edward Luttwak lucidly explained, in the paradoxical logic of military competition, the key for success is unpredictability, not emulation[23]. As a result, the explanatory power of socialization and competition is necessary limited: while we can explain why the international system is made of states (instead of other polities) and why all states – with virtually no exception – have armed forces, no inference can be made on state behavior.

A second limit in Waltz's treatment of process variables is that, contrary to what the name suggests, he holds them as constants. Socialization and competition are always the same, for any state in any time, and so are their effects. They are just, in Waltz's words, "two aspects of a process by which the variety of behaviors and outcomes is reduced"[24]. He does not consider the possibility that such a variety of behaviors may be more or less reduced. Nor can he admit that the socialization-induced behaviors and outcomes might be cooperative rather than conflictual. Here we accept that competition can be treated in this way: as an underlying systemic property, it makes sense to consider it as a constant (more properly, this should be taken as an assumption rather than a proposition[25]). But we posit that socialization operates in different ways and degrees.

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[23] Edward N. Luttwak, *Strategy. The Logic of War and Peace*, Cambridge (MA), Harvard University Press, 1987.

[24] Waltz, *Theory of International Politics*, p. 77.

[25] Such an assumption is widely acknowledged by most realists. See among all Sean M. Lynn-Jones, Steven E. Miller, *Preface,* in Michael E. Brown, Owen M. Cote, Sean M. Lynn-Jones, and Steven E. Miller (eds.), *The Perils of Anarchy: Contemporary Realism and International Security*, Cambridge (MA), MIT Press, 1995, p. ix. The competitive nature of the system is indeed a more subtle issue. Taking it as a constant may be a useful analytical device, but even realists admit that the degree of conflict within the system is variable. An example is Joseph Grieco's classical discussion of relative gains: see Joseph M. Grieco, *Anarchy and the Limits of Cooperation: A Realist Critique of the Newest Liberal Institutionalism*, "International Organization", Vol. 42, No. 4, 1988, pp. 485-507; and Joseph M. Grieco, *Understanding the Problem of International Cooperation: The Limits of Neoliberal Institutionalism and the Future of Realist Theory*, in David A. Baldwin (ed.) *Neorealism and Neoliberalism: The Contemporary Debate*, New York, Columbia University Press, 1993, pp. 301-338. Finally, Elen Milner, Robert Powell and Alexander Wendt challenge this view by claiming that the use of force is not necessarily inherent in anarchy. See Elen Milner, *The Assumption of Anarchy in International Relations Theory: A Critique*, "Review of International Studies", Vol. 17, No. 1, 1991, pp. 67-85; Robert Powell, *Anarchy in International Relations Theory: The Neorealist-Neoliberal Debate*, "International Organization", Vol. 48,

To state our point more clearly, we will resort to one of Waltz's metaphors, namely that socialization makes most teenagers dress alike. Yet, socialization leads to varying degrees of convergence: sometimes teenagers seem to wear a uniform, sometimes they just buy the same pair of shoes. Out of the metaphor, while socialization selects the range of possible behaviors, it can be more or less restrictive. Moreover, trends are volatile. In the late 1970s, carrying a purse was quite common for men, but then such habit became definitely uncool. The same behavior that was previously accepted as common soon became eccentric. How can we explain this radical change? Waltz's description is evidently inadequate. Although correct in claiming that through socialization units conform to the norms generated within the system, he is silent on the process that generates such norms. For these reasons a more sophisticated treatment of socialization is required.

3. Socialization as an intervening variable

Since the publication of *Theory of International Politcs*, the concept of socialization has gained considerable weight in the study of International Relations. This is mostly due to the constructivists' interest in the diffusion and effectiveness of international norms[26]. Used in these terms, socialization is "a mechanism through which new states are induced to change their behavior by adopting those norms preferred by an international society of states"[27]. Unlike Waltz's work, this literature is mostly concerned with investigating how norms are accepted and/or forced on states. Apart from the major emphasis on the ideational factor, what is missing here is an intent to maintain the process at the systemic level. On the contrary, such an approach seems to reflect Peter Gourevitch's second image reversed, as it is more interested in the causal mechanisms that lead to the internalization of a given norm, rather than the emergence and diffusion of the norm itself. In fact, most contributions in this stream end up investigating domestic and first-level variables[28].

No. 2, 1994, pp. 313-344. Wendt, *Anarchy is What States Make of It: The Social Construction of Power Politics*, "International Organization", Vol. 46, No. 2, 1992, pp. 391-425.

[26] See for instance the fiftieth anniversary edition of "International Organization", Vol. 52, No. 4, 1998.

[27] Martha Finnemore and Kathryn Sikkink, *International Norm Dynamics and Political Change*, "International Organization", Vol. 52, No. 4, 1998, p. 903.

[28] Alderson, *Making Sense of State Socialization*, p. 417. Interestingly, the same approach is used by the main (perhaps only) realist attempt to employ socialization as an analytical tool. In Ikenberry and Kupchan's words: "we conceptualize socialization as a process of learning in which norms and ideals are

Pushing the argument even further, leading constructivists like Alexander Wendt discard Waltz's focus on outcomes and behavior, opting instead for identities and interests. Socialization, they argue, is not just a rationalist process, but a social one. As a result, in their view socialization affects also units' properties, both in their material and immaterial dimensions. Following this path, socialization becomes the key to a process of mutual constitution, where the structure is defined in social terms through shared ideas and understandings, and the latter in turn define the units' identity and interests[29]. While built at the third level of analysis, this approach is in sharp contrast with Waltz's core ontological assumptions about International Politics. For this reason, while accepting Wendt's contribution as a valuable alternative to Waltz, we will not follow his lead in our attempt to amend *Theory of International Politics*[30].

We will suggest here a tentative definition of the concept of socialization and of its implications. We will explore some of the complexities inherent in our attempt, but we will refrain from developing working hypotheses. Being our conception so different from the ones just mentioned, we believe that our first goal should be clearing the ground from conceptual confusion. In the first place, we will turn to the above-mentioned contributions of Buzan and Snyder: in our attempt to treat socialization as a process variable we will maintain that socialization is a result of the interaction among states. It is therefore a systemic, but not structural variable.

We define socialization as a process involving a given number of states within the system, whose interaction refines and limits the range of foreign policy options made available by merely structural constraints.

As the reader will see, this definition is in line with Waltz's conception of socialization as a force that shapes and shoves units' behavior, but it departs from it in

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transmitted from one party to another […] we conceptualize it as the process through which national leaders internalize the norms and value orientations espoused by the hegemon and, as a consequence, become socialized into the community formed by the hegemon and other nations accepting its leadership position". G. John Ikenberry and Charles A. Kupchan, *Socialization and Hegemonic Power*, "International Organization", Vol. 44, No. 3, 1990, pp. 283-315.

[29] Wendt, *Social Theory and International Politics*, pp. 101-102.

[30] Being Wendt's ontological assumptions incompatible with Waltz's, we see no possibility to amend his model. Following Lakatos' lead, in order to make progressive contributions, we must preserve the original hard core assumptions and positive euristics. See Imre Lakatos, *Falsification and the Methodology of Scientific Research Programmes*, in Imre Lakatos and Alan Musgrave (eds.), *Criticism and the Growth of Knowledge*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1970, pp. 91-196; Colin Elman and Miriam Fendius Elman, *Lessons from Lakatos*, in Colin Elman and Miriam Fendius Elman (eds.), *Progress in IR Theory. Appraising the Field*, Cambridge (MA), MIT Press, 2003, pp. 21-68.

two important respects: first, being a relational variable, it can be applied to subsets of the whole system – i.e. dyads of states, states within a given region, etc. This allows us to account for specific state behaviors that anarchy and polarity alone cannot explain, without reducing our level of analysis. Moreover, since socialization is stickier than structure, it is a plausible explanation for the empirical puzzle: why are states sometimes slow in adjusting to structural changes? Or, put it differently, why are some states slower than other in adjusting to structural changes?

Second, considering it as a variable, we assume that socialization can take different values along two main axes: high/low, and positive/negative. Starting from the latter, we disagree with Waltz's assumption that socialization and competition necessarily force states to non-cooperative behaviors. While anarchy may well lead states to mutual suspicion, such a condition is also affected by other factors[31], such as the lessons of previous experiences (recall the weight of World War Two on the European integration process), or a history of cooperation and alignment (a case in point being the Anglo-American "special relationship"). As a result, contrary to Waltz's predictions, positive socialization selects cooperative behaviors, like norms compliance, common security arrangements, and the institutionalization of war[32].

The second point of departure from Waltz's use of the variable is that socialization is treated here more properly as a variable, meaning that its value is considered not as a constant, but it is likely to change depending on the states involved. In fact, states may experience different levels of interaction. Needless to say, within the European Union state interaction is at its apex. In particular, the European context is an example of high and positive integration. We are not discussing here the EU capability to bind member states' foreign policies; quite differently, we are claiming that a) the practice of state representatives meeting on a regular basis, b) the EU bureaucracy, c) the overarching CFSP/ESPD processes, all contribute to narrow the set of available foreign policy options for member states[33]. Where socialization is so high and positive,

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[31] See, for example, Jeffrey W. Taliaferro, *Security Seeking under Anarchy,* "International Security", Vol. 25, No. 3, 2000–2001, pp. 128-161.
[32] See on this point the brilliant discussion in Alessandro Colombo, *La guerra ineguale. Pace e violenza nel tramonto della società internazionale*, Bologna, il Mulino, 2006, ch. 2.
[33] From a constructivist perspective, socialization processes within the EU have been studied under the rubric of "Brussellization". Once again, these studies adopt a different conception of socialization, mostly in line with the definitions discussed in note 28. See, among others, Michael E. Smith,

the effects of anarchy are strongly mitigated. As a result, even maintaining Waltz's overarching model, it is possible to infer more focused predictions (and even unexpected phenomena, like institutionalized cooperation and the making of security communities).

Conversely, when states do not interact on a regular basis, or when the interactions are neither clearly positive nor negative, the relative weight of socialization as an intervening variable is limited. This is particularly the case of states (particularly small ones) that live at the margins of the system. These countries, aptly labeled by Buzan as autistic states[34], are paramount examples of the effects of anarchy. They come into the play of international politics just in momentous times, like wars, so they are particularly sensitive of the self-help logic described by Waltz. But this is just the tip of the iceberg. Low socialization, following our definition, is a relational condition that takes place among states that do not have established interactions. As a result, relevant players in the system may also be involved. When this is the case, structural pressures are hardly mediated by process variables, so the filtering effect of socialization is almost absent. Finally, similar to low socialization is what we called mixed socialization. Although states may have a history of interaction, it may be the case that such history swings from cooperation to conflict. As we will see in the next paragraph for the US-Russia dyad, where interactions do not allow to establish any clear pattern, the end result is equivalent to low socialization.

To conclude this section, a final remark is required to stress the socialization's analogy with (and distance from) Headly Bull's well known idea of "mature anarchy"[35]. According to Bull, at any given time, states are not just part of a system, but they create a society (albeit anarchical), in which the basic rules of cohabitation are founded. Anarchy, in this view, does not lead to the Hobbesian world portrayed by realists, but rather to a Lockeian world, where conflict and violence are (more or less effectively) tamed. So, the more states agree on given rules, the more the system will resemble a

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Institutionalization, Policy Adaptation and European Foreign Policy Cooperation, "European Journal of International Relations", Vol. 10, No. 1, 2004, pp. 95-136.

[34] He was referring to cases like Albania and Myanmar. Barry Buzan, *From International System to International Society: Structural Realism and Regime Theory Meet the English School*, "International Organization", Vol. 47, No. 3, 1993, pp. 327-352.

[35] Headley Bull, *The Anarchical Society. A Study of Order in World Politics*, New York, Columbia University Press, 1997.

society[36]. Our view of socialization can be seen as a spring for the making of an international society. Whereas socialization takes a positive turn, it allows states to build a stronger social fabric and codify established rules of behavior aimed at excluding violence from interaction. Nonetheless, as we have seen, socialization may also be negative: in that case, state interactions may also be standardized, but short of any pacifying effect.

4.   Interstate socialization and foreign policy: four cases

The analysis presented in this section differs from an orthodox test of hypotheses for two main reasons. First, being an amendment to the whole neorealist theoretical framework, our typology uses concepts and ideas placed at a similar – though not identical – level of abstraction to the ones employed by Waltz. By their nature, these concepts and ideas are not always readily and completely operationalisable and, as a result, do not accommodate too well the rigidities of positivist methodology. In the same way one cannot 'test' an entire paradigm (like, say, neorealism or constructivism) but only theories and propositions derived from it[37]; so, we do not claim to be assessing the validity of our framework once and for all here, but rather to provide a first evaluation of its general plausibility in relation to the empirical reality.

Second, and related to the foregoing, this paper is a preliminary work intended as a basis for further developments of both the general typology and, especially, its empirical implications. So, in addition to being a 'plausibility check,' the empirical overview presented below serves the important inductive purposes of suggesting different directions in which the typology can be applied and, possibly, generating more precise and directly testable propositions for the future.

The above said, some basic methodological measures can still be taken to increase the significance of our analysis. Two of these seem particularly important: first, cases should be chosen from the same structural context; second, they should involve pairs of states characterized by similar, if not identical, power relationships. While by no means guaranteeing full control of all possible disturbing factors, these two selection criteria

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[36] A careful reader will recall that Waltz himself used the term society in his treatment of socialization, although not in reference to the international arena.

[37] On this distinction see Lakatos, *Falsification and the Methodology of Scientific Research Programmes*, and Karl R. Popper, *Conjectures and Refutations: The Growth of Scientific Knowledge*, 3rd ed., London, Routledge, 2002.

will at least put power considerations (which are crucial in Waltz's theory) in the background of our picture, so allowing us to better concentrate on the relational variable 'socialization' and on its properties and effects.

The structural context we will refer to is the post-bipolar one originating from the collapse of the Soviet empire and the end of the Cold War. Within this structure, we will focus on the relations between the sole remaining global superpower – the United States – and four of the major regional powers which, with the US, make up what Samuel Huntington has called the current 'uni-multipolar' system: the European Union, Russia, China and Iran.[38] The four resulting dyads are positioned in our typology as follows:

SOCIALIZATION	Positive	Negative
High	**US-EU**	**US-Iran**
	US-China	
Low/Mixed	**US-Russia**	

For each of these pairs we will summarize the type of socialization and the content of intersubjective structures at work, their origins and principal manifestations and, finally, their main consequences on the relations and interactions between the actors involved.

High and positive socialization: the US and the EU

The current pattern of socialization between the United States and the European Union has its roots in the Cold War. Socialization between the US and the Western part of the EU originates from the critical juncture of the end of WWII, when democracy was re-established throughout the part of the continent occupied by the Allies and a network of institutions for transatlantic cooperation—most notably the NATO alliance—was created. The process of European integration itself was a direct product of that critical

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[38] Samuel P Huntington, *The Lonely Superpower*, "Foreign Affairs", Vol. 78, No. 2, 1999, pp. 35-49. Writing ten years ago, Huntington referred to the 'German-French condominium' rather than the European Union. Given subsequent developments and for the purposes of this paper we prefer to consider the EU as a whole. In line with Huntington's argument, see also Barry Buzan, *The United States and the Great Powers*: *World Politics in the Twenty-First Century*, Cambridge, Polity, 2004.

juncture, and on the whole facilitated cooperation and coordination among Western democracies. Reiterated and institutionalized interstate collaboration together with the support for the principles of liberal democracy, therefore, can be seen as the two main causes behind the positive intersubjective structures in place between the two sides of the Atlantic. In the background, a common cultural heritage facilitated the development of positive socialization.[39]

To be sure, the history of transatlantic cooperation in the Cold War was not without problematic episodes or occasional defections—France playing a prominent role in both. But disagreements on the practical implementation of the US-led order would always occur in the framework of a common acceptance of certain values and norms that rendered conflict among these countries unthinkable. And these same values and norms have certainly played a role in allowing transatlantic cooperation in the military and economic field to continue after the end of the Cold War in the face of realist predictions of renewed mistrust and conflict in Europe.[40] The survival and expansion of NATO—granted, with a set of different tasks to face post-Cold War security challenges[41]—is perhaps the most evident example of how looking only at material variables and ignoring relational and intersubjective factors would be not only be insufficient, but even misleading in explaining current transatlantic relations.

NATO, of course, is today just one piece of the dense web of institutions and fora—including the OECD, the WTO and the G8 just to mention a few—structuring cooperation between the US and its old European partners in all areas of international relations and feeding a virtuous circle of mutual trust which renders the high and positive pattern of socialization between them remarkably stable despite adverse structural incentives.[42] Again, this is not to deny or underestimate cases of conflict or disagreement between the two sides of the Atlantic, such as the ICC, the Kyoto protocol or the war in Iraq. But these cleavages pale in comparison to those separating the US from other major powers, and are far from threatening the stability, let alone the

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[39] Samuel P. Huntington, *The Clash of Civilizations*, "Foreign Affairs", Vol. 72, No. 3, 1993, pp. 22-49; Huntington, *The Lonely Superpower*.
[40] Thomas J Christensen and Jack Snyder, *Chain Gangs and Passed Bucks: Predicting Alliance Patterns in Multipolarity*, "International Organization", Vol. 44, No. 2, 1990, pp. 137-68; John J. Mearsheimer, *Back to the Future. Instability in Europe after the Cold-War*, "International Security", Vol. 15, no. 1, 1990, pp. 5-56.
[41] Richard Holbrooke, *America, a European Power*, "Foreign Affairs", Vol. 74, No. 2, 1995, pp. 38-51.
[42] Huntington, *The Lonely Superpower*.

existence, of the liberal international order in which both the US and the EU participate.[43]

The Eastern European case is a different one. Positive socialization here did not result mainly from sustained cooperation over a long period of time but rather from an abrupt shift in the domestic political system of these countries. The democratic revolutions that these countries underwent at the end of the 1980s determined not only a crucial shift in their dominant political values, but also, and as a result, a re-orientation of their foreign policies towards cooperation with the West. The acceptance of most of these countries in NATO and in the EU represented the culmination of this re-orientation. True, purely material factors were at work here as well. In particular, one should not underestimate the economic advantages of EU membership and the anti-Russian value that many of them attach to the Atlantic Alliance. But there is no doubt that shifting lines of amity and enmity due to the new political order and beliefs of the newly democratic Eastern European regimes played a big role in determining their new foreign policies. So much so that in some cases the enthusiasm with which these countries have supported US policies has gone well beyond what one might expect by looking only at material factors—the Iraqi war being a case in point.

Turning to the EU as a whole, the supranational organization is not yet a full player in international politics. It acts as a unit in most trade and financial matters but less so in the military sphere. The US has often displayed an ambiguous, if not schizophrenic, attitude on the issue of European integration, usually supporting it, but sometimes also betraying anxiety about a too cohesive and independent EU, especially when it comes to military issues.[44] On the whole, however, relationships between the two polities remain mostly cooperative. This is true not only for the economic field, but also for the diplomatic one—the EU participates actively in negotiations on international issues such as the Middle East peace process and the Iranian nuclear program—and in the military one in those theaters where the EU acts autonomously. The oft-cited division of labor between a more militarily-oriented US and a EU more active in peacekeeping and post-conflict reconstruction can be seen as an example of the

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[43] William Wallace, *Europe, The Necessary Partner*, in "Foreign Affairs", Vol. 80, No. 3, 2001, pp. 16-34.
[44] C. Fred Bergsten, *America and Europe: Clash of the Titans?*, "Foreign Affairs", Vol. 78, No. 2, 1999, pp. 20-34.

latter type of cooperation.[45] Finally, a more intense collaboration between the EU and the US has been established more recently in new security areas such as counterterrorism.

All in all the EU can hence be seen as a reliable partner of the US, a partner that for the most accepts US leadership in the liberal international order and increasingly participates in decisions affecting this system.[46] Caused to a significant extent by the high and positive kind of socialization between the two sides of the Atlantic, this continued cooperation also reinforces the existing social structures in a path dependent fashion, so orienting foreign policies even more towards mutual security and prosperity rather than rivalry.

Mixed (or low) socialization: the US and Russia

In part, the current pattern of socialization between the US and Russia dates back to the Cold War, when structural and ideological factors combined to generate a 40-year long confrontation which fitted the tenets of (neo)realism quite well, so contributing to its establishment as a dominant paradigm in IR during this period. The 1985-91 period marked a break in this pattern: domestic changes in the Soviet Union, and in particular the rise of Gorbachev and the emergence of the 'new thinking,' revolutionized both the domestic and foreign policy of the USSR, leading to the abandonment of socialism, the end of the Soviet empire and, ultimately, the collapse of the USSR itself, to be replaced by a looser confederation dominated by Russia.[47] Led by Boris Yeltsin—Gorbachev's successor—the new Russian state began a period of economic and political cooperation with the US and the West in general aimed at making Russia enter the global economic and political order led by the US.

Unlike the case of Eastern Europe, however, this new type of socialization between Russia and the US failed to replace the old confrontational habits completely

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[45] Wallace, *Europe, The Necessary Partner*; Andrew Moravcsik, *Striking a New Transatlantic Bargain*, "Foreign Affairs", Vol. 82, No. 4, 2003, pp. 60-73; Andrea Locatelli, *The Technology Gap in Transatlantic Relations: A Cause of Tension or a Tool of Cooperation?*, "Journal of Transatlantic Studies", Vol. 5, No. 2, 2007, pp. 133-154.

[46] James M Goldgeier and Michael McFaul, *A Tale of Two Worlds: Core and Periphery in the Post-Cold War Era*, "International Organization", Vol. 46, No. 2, 1992, pp. 467-91; Huntington, *The Lonely Superpower*; Wallace, *Europe, The Necessary Partner*.

[47] See Jeffrey T. Checkel, *Ideas, Institutions, and the Gorbachev Foreign Policy Revolution*, "World Politics", Vol. 45, No. 2, 1993, pp. 271-300; Robert D. English, *Russia and the Idea of the West: Gorbachev, Intellectuals, and the End of the Cold War*, New York, Columbia University Press, 2000.

and to provide a basis for stable cooperation in the following years. Both sides share responsibility for this. On the one hand, the US too often took a patronizing approach to the political and economic transition of post-communist countries. This was particularly the case of the Clinton administrations, which adopted a rather unilateralist style in imposing harsh economic reforms (through the IMF) in exchange for assistance—often with the complicity of Yeltsin and his government.[48] On the other hand, partly as a reaction to what was perceived as a 'neocolonial' attitude, and partly because of a resurgence of its power (especially in the energy field), under Putin, Russia has followed more assertive foreign policies, often in open contrast with both the US and Western European countries.[49] The result of all this is a situation of mixed socialization between the US and Russia, where both countries have sent, and still send, conflicting messages that have the effect of offsetting each other and, exactly like in a situation of low socialization, prevent either side from forming a clear idea and a stable set of expectations about the other.

Two closely connected foreign policy effects follow from this relational configuration. In the first place, both states follow variable, but generally cautious foreign policies towards one another. So, while the two countries have clashed on issues such as the Kosovo and the Georgian war, NATO enlargement, the ABM treaty and the recent US missile defense plans, they find it convenient to cooperate on other important issues such as the fight against Islamic terrorism and nuclear proliferation.[50] On the whole, this is quite consistent with what one could predict from a purely structural standpoint, with Russia not necessarily adopting an aggressive stance at all times, but definitely being wary of America's hegemonic tendencies in Eurasia and ready to contrast these if necessary.[51]

Second, the lack of stable reciprocal perceptions and interpretations often amplifies the direct effect of domestic variables—and of single leaders—on the foreign policy choices of both sides. The high degree of 'personalization' of US-Russian relations in the early post-Cold War era, the sometimes radical foreign policy shifts

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[48] Angela Stent and Lilia Shevtsova, *America, Russia and Europe: A Realignment?*, "Survival", Vol. 44, No. 4, 2002, pp. 121-34; Dmitri K. Simes, *Losing Russia*, "Foreign Affairs", Vol. 86, No. 6, 2007, p. 36.
[49] F. Stephen Larrabee, *Danger and Opportunity in Eastern Europe*, "Foreign Affairs", Vol. 85, No. 6, 2006, p. 117.
[50] Stent and Shevtsova, *America, Russia and Europe*, Simes, *Losing Russia*.
[51] Huntington, *The Lonely Superpower*.

following changes in leadership—from the subservient Yeltsin to the more assertive Putin, for instance—and the recent agreements on nuclear disarmament between the recently elected Obama and Medvedev can all be seen as manifestation of this mechanism.[52]

A borderline case: the US and China

Realist literature often indicates China as the most likely challenger to US leadership in the post-Cold War global political and economic system—a challenger whose open conflict with the US and its allies is only a matter of time.[53] While based on a number of important objective elements, such as China's extraordinary economic growth and military expansion in the past few decades, these analyses seem overly pessimistic and deterministic. What realists often fail to take into account are a number of positive social structures between the US and China which render the latter's future foreign policy choices much more uncertain than they think.[54] Unlike the Russian case, however, the relevance and stability of these benign social structures push the US-China dyad very close to the positive socialization type, so making it an overall borderline case.

The origins of the current socialization patterns between the US and China can be traced back to the 1970s rapprochement between the two countries. Partly due to the geopolitical circumstances of the Cold War, and more precisely to the Sino-Soviet rivalry, this rapprochement was greatly facilitated, form the late 70s, by the domestic reforms of Deng Xiaoping, which led to the gradual abandonment of socialism in the economic sphere and its replacement with a Western-type market system. The result of this rapprochement was an intensification of China's political and economic relations with the US (and the West in general) which is still going on, and which has generated in each side increasingly positive perceptions of the other and of its intentions and foreign policies.[55]

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[52] Stent and Shevtsova, *America, Russia and Europe*, Simes, *Losing Russia*.
[53] John J. Mearsheimer, *The Tragedy of Great Power Politics*, New York, Norton, 2001. For a more regionally-oriented analysis see Denny Roy, *Hegemon on the Horizon? China's Threat to East Asian Security*, "International Security", Vol. 19, No. 1, 1994, pp. 149-68.
[54] Aaron L Friedberg, *The Future of US-China Relations: Is Confict Inevitable?*, "International Security" Vol. 30, No. 2, 2005, pp. 7-45; Jeffrey W. Legro, *What China Will Want: The Future Intentions of a Rising Power*, "Perspectives on Politics", Vol. 5, No. 3, 2007, pp. 515-34.
[55] Friedberg, *The Future of US-China Relations*.

The negative counterpart to the foregoing has several aspects. For one thing, the Taiwan issue continues to be quite problematic for US-China relations. On the one hand, the US is still committed politically and militarily to the protection of Taiwan's de facto—though not de jure—independence against the threat of a Chinese invasion. The PRC, on the other hand, sees the American position as an intolerable intrusion in Chinese domestic affairs. Equally irritating for China is the US (and Western) criticism of the authoritarian nature of the Chinese regime and especially of its human rights abuses. More generally, Chinese policy-makers have often accused the US of 'hegemonism' in both regional and international affairs, and have expressed their ambition to replace the current system with a more multipolar one in which China would play as an equal to the US in the running of global politics.[56]

These intentions have also been followed by several important facts. For one thing, China has been expanding its military might significantly in the past few decades, and is now pursuing an aggressive policy of technological advancement—of which its space program is one of the main components—which is seen with quite some apprehension in the United States.[57] On top of this, China's economic influence has been expanding beyond the East Asian region to reach areas where the US has traditionally been an important actor, such as Africa, the Middle East and Latin America.[58] All this definitely mitigates any benign view of China American policy-makers have acquired since the 1970s rapprochement.

Does this make the US-China social structures analogous to the ones existing between the US and Russia? Only to some extent. If it is true that the lack of a stable and univocal pattern of socialization renders US-China relations quite variable and sometimes contingent on domestic factors on either side,[59] the positive side of this mixed socialization seems stronger than the negative one for at least three reasons. First, despite declaration to the contrary, China still has a huge stake in the maintenance of the current US-led global economic order due to its high and growing level of

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[56] David Shambaugh, *China's Security Policy in the Post-Cold War Era*, "Survival", Vol. 34, No. 2, 1992, pp. 88-106.
[57] William C. Martel and Toshi Yoshihara, *Averting a Sino-US Space Race*, "The Washington Quarterly", Vol. 26, No. 4, 2003, pp. 19-35.
[58] Friedberg, *The Future of US-China Relations*; Legro, *What China Will Want.*
[59] Legro, *What China Will Want.*

interdependence with the other countries in it. This makes any major attempt to subvert the status quo not credible in the eyes of its partners for the time being.[60]

Second, China's cooperation with the US in the political and economic sphere is formalized in a rather dense web of institutions such as the WTO, the APEC and the ASEAN regional forum. To these one should add more recent cooperative efforts in such security areas as counterterrorism and nuclear proliferation. Finally, it must be noted how the Chinese regime's opposition to the principles of liberal democracy advocated in the West appears as more pragmatic than ideological: rather than opposing the Western idea of democracy as a fundamentally flawed concept, the Chinese leadership sees it as an objective which, however valuable, cannot be applied to their country in the short or medium run as it conflict with other objectives such as stability, sovereignty and territorial integrity.[61]

All this makes the US-China case a borderline one with a mixed pattern of socialization where, however, positive mutual perceptions and attitudes seem to prevail over negative ones. Needless to say, whether this trend will continue to the point of both countries seeing one another as friends rather than potential threats will depend greatly on their foreign policy choices in the years to come.

High and negative socialization: the US and Iran

That with Iran is one of the longest and most bitter stand-offs the US has ever had with any other nation. To explain this conflict, the structural variables highlighted in the Waltzian paradigm are, by themselves, insufficient. For a better understanding of the relations between the US and Iran one needs to consider the negative intersubjective structures in place between them, which lead each side to see the other in a consistently negative light and as a true enemy rather than just a potential security threat with which to deal with caution.

The pattern of socialization in place between the US and Iran originates from the Iranian revolution of 1979. The revolution had an explicitly anti-US character in a geopolitical as well as a cultural sense. On the one hand, the revolution reacted to the

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[60] Jianwei Wang and Zhimin Lin, *Chinese Perceptions in the Post-Cold War Era: Three Images of the United States*, "Asian Survey", Vol. 32, No. 10, 1992, pp. 902-17; Friedberg, *The Future of US-China Relations*; Legro, *What China Will Want*.
[61] Legro, *What China Will Want*.

political and economic domination that the US exercised on the country through the regime of Reza Shah Pahlavi. At the same time, the revolt was cultural and ideological, and it was directed against the secularism, materialism and corruption that from the West were penetrating Iran and the whole Middle East.[62]

The revolutionaries' response to these sins was the establishment of a cleric-dominated theocratic regime based on Islamic ideas and laws. Among the key principles inspiring this regime there were a disengagement from the bipolar logic of the Cold War—'neither with the East, nor with the West'—and a radical opposition to the United States, a 'Great Satan' with whom any negotiation or compromise was impossible and that had to be expelled from the region. The hostage crisis following the revolution was both the most spectacular expression of this hostility and a key moment in creating the image of Iran as a sworn enemy of the US.[63]

As a result of the revolution and Iran's new behavior in the international arena, US policy-makers started forming an idea of the new regime as fundamentally irrational, radical and rogue. Regionally, Iran's aggressive stance towards Israel and its support for groups such as Hezbollah were particularly problematic for the US, which began to respond with a policy of intransigence, support for Iran's enemies—as in the 8-year long war between Iran and Iraq—and attempts to overthrow the revolutionary regime by assisting domestic opposition groups or acting directly through covert operations. Needless to say, all this contributed even more to each side constructing the other as an 'existential threat,' so alimenting the vicious circle of hatred and mistrust which is still in place.[64]

More recent events have added to this negative pattern of socialization. Among these are Iran's political and material support for more organizations that the US classifies as terrorist, such as Hamas, its role in the factional politics and conflicts of Iraq and, above all, its recent nuclear program—which the regime still claims is for

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[62] William O Beeman, *Iran and the United States: Postmodern Culture Conflict in Action*, "Anthropological Quarterly" Vol. 76, No. 4, 2003, pp. 671-91, Mahmood Sariolghalam, *Understanding Iran: Getting Past Stereotypes and Mythology*, "The Washington Quarterly", Vol. 26, No. 4, 2003, pp. 69-82.
[63] Beeman, *Iran and the United States*; Sariolghalam, *Understanding Iran*.
[64] Fawaz A. Gerges, *Washington's Misguided Iran Policy*, "Survival", Vol. 38, No. 4, 1996, pp. 5-15, Sariolghalam, *Understanding Iran*.

civilian purposes. On the US side, G.W. Bush's inclusion of Iran in the post-9/11 'axis of evil' stands out for its symbolic importance.[65]

Two factors, finally, indicate that this confrontation is not likely to end any time soon. The first is the almost complete lack of direct diplomatic contacts between the US and Iran. This leaves the media as the most important channel of communication between the two countries and, as a consequence, enormously increases the probability of both misperceptions and the radicalization of political discourse. The second is the deep cultural nature of Iran's hostility towards Western ideas and values and the cohesiveness of the main political factions (conservatives, reformists and radicals) around a number of key foreign policy issues that are particularly irksome for the US, such as the support for Hezbollah and the non-recognition of the state of Israel.[66] This means that while intra-regime domestic political change—such as the one that characterized the Kathami presidency (1997-2005) or the one that would have followed from Moussavi's victory in the recent presidential elections—can mitigate the conflict between the US and Iran somehow, they are not likely to bring about fundamental and lasting alterations in the type of socialization, and therefore in the relations, between the two countries.

Conclusion

The aim of this paper is to develop an otherwise neglected aspect of Waltz's systemic model. Following the pioneering works of Glenn Snyder and Barry Buzan, we tried to increase realism's explanatory power by working on socialization as a process variable. Our main point is that Waltz's treatment of process variables as a "transmission belt" of structural pressures failed to consider socialization as an intervening variable shaping state behavior. In our preliminary study we tried to codify the value of socialization along two dimensions: high/low, positive/negative. So, while Waltz's implicit assumption is that socialization is always negative and constant, we claim that this is only one possible scenario. As illustrated in the case of the transatlantic partnership, repeated interaction may temper the effects of anarchy, leading to behaviors that Waltz's model alone cannot easily explain.

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[65] Sariolghalam, *Understanding Iran*.
[66] Mehran Kamrava, *Iranian National-Security Debates: Factionalism and Lost Opportunities*, "Middle East Policy", Vol. 14, No. 2, 2007, pp. 84-100.

This is just an introductory step in the study of socialization. In particular, two issues need to be explored further. One possible research path involves the determinants of socialization. What empirical indicators should be used to measure socialization? In other words, what makes socialization positive or negative, high or low? In principle this is not a tough question, as one may intuitively consider formal meetings and established patterns of cooperation as indicators of high and positive socialization. The point is rather to find general criteria that leave no room for arbitrariness in measuring measure socialization. Only if this requisite is met can this contribution be really progressive[67].

A second path involves the dependent variable, i.e. the phenomena that socialization can account for. In this work we have generally referred to the broad character of diplomatic relations between dyads of states. Future research might focus on empirical cases, like bargaining in crisis situations, or investigate classes of phenomena, like the inclination to cooperate, the concern for power and/or security, and the propensity to abide by international law. If highly (and positively) socialized states really show a higher propensity towards cooperation than states that do not experience a consistent level of socialization, then it is likely that our contribution will be progressive.

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[67] Lakatos, *Falsification and the Methodology of Scientific Research Programmes*.

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