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Gap the Bridge: Science-Policy-Interactions and the Securitizing Effects of International Relations Research

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International Relations scholars have become increasingly concerned about the policy irrelevance of themselves and their theories. In this paper I will argue that analysts should be more concerned about their increasing relevance instead about their irrelevance. In using the case of the securitizing effects of Democratic Peace research as illustrative example, I will argue that researchers should pay more attention to the social and political consequences evolving from their research. The essay proceeds in four steps: First, I sketch briefly the positions and strategies usually put forward by IR Researcher; second, I criticize these from a social studies of science viewpoint; third, I introduce the example of Democratic Peace to develop the points clearer and fourth, discuss the evolving consequences of the “relevance” of Democratic Peace by drawing on the Securitization concept.

1. Common IR positions and strategies

If asked about their relationship to policy, scholars of International Relations usually start to complain that „today's scholarship [is...] either irrelevant or inaccessible. [...]“ (David Newsom 1996), or that "most of what has been written and taught under the heading of 'political science' [...] has been of limited value, if not counterproductive, as a guide to the actual conduct of policy" (Paul Nitze 1993: 3) or that "Politicians do not want to listen to ideas per se" (Steve Smith 1997: 512).

One could add innumerable examples of comments of this type by prominent scholars. To sum up, researchers are concerned about their irrelevance to policy and about the widening of a chasm between policy and science. Given this widespread diagnosis, what strategies or reactions have been developed by political science and IR to cope with the problem? A look at the IR literature reveals that three basic positions or answers to the identified problem have been offered, which I call the strategies of “Debugging”, “Hope keeps man alive” and “Detachment“.

Debugging or the “Bridging the Gap” Strategy

The *Debugging* or *Bridging the Gap* strategy as developed by Alexander George, Miroslav Nincic, and Joseph Lepgold, highlights the fact that the problem is to be found in research itself. It is argued that knowledge production should be adjusted to the needs of politicians and researchers should avoid several basic errors (like complicated language, etc.) which mainly lead to the widening of the gap. The basic rule of this strategy can be summarized as: “We can do better but we have to behave properly and adjust to the policy needs”.

Enlightenment or the “Hope keeps man alive” Strategy

Demonstrating by empirical research that science is indeed seldom used directly, Utilization Research has strengthened the irrelevance claims. But this branch of research offers analysts a rescue position. It is argued that scientific results are not used directly, but they diffuse in a complex and slow process in society and policy. Therefore usage can never be directly measured and usage or success means that scientific knowledge disappears in policy. So this strategy can be synthesized as: “Go ahead with your everyday practice, go on telling the truth, it might take some time, but finally policy will be enlightened.”

Detachment

The third reaction can be seen in the call for a clear detachment from policy, as policy is not listening anyway. This position may have been best expressed by Claus Offe, who states that the best policy advice is no policy advice.

Although further positions could be added, like the Critical Theory call for an engagement with civil society, the positions sketched represent the most popular ones (at least in IR), and therefore will serve the purpose today.

2. Alternatives: Critical engagement with relevance

Given the ongoing claims by prominent scholars and the amount of intellectual energy spent on the irrelevance question, how can one justify a position that calls for a critical engagement with relevance and its effects instead of dealing with irrelevance?

The irrelevance claim largely stems from an idealized view of the science-policy relationship.

Science is not isolated from policy. Science and policy are de facto mixed up, and there is a frequent interaction between science and policy making it impossible to draw a clear borderline between relevance and irrelevance. Drawing on the Social Studies of Science, our analysis should be based on different assumptions:

1. From a social constructivist viewpoint, no clear boundary can be drawn between non-science (policy) and science on an abstract level. The boundary between science and non-science is the result of negotiations between scientists and non-scientists, and scientists frequently draw and re-draw the boundary line as part of a strategy. Furthermore, as identified by social studies of science research, there are more and more cases where the boundaries become blurred. The answer to the “what is science?” question therefore cannot be found in abstract reasoning, but has to be judged empirically on a case-by-case basis. A clear abstract division between science and policy cannot be drawn; the diagnosis of a chasm as the starting point of analysis is therefore misleading.

2. Scientific knowledge is not a ready manufactured truth product that can be used or not, but is embodied in and evolves from a distinctive type of praxis (research). Although scientific knowledge is never finalized, scientific facts are stabilized by a process of social negotiation, in which alternative interpretations become marginalized and one knowledge claim becomes hegemonic. Certified scientific knowledge (facts) is therefore the result of a discursive closure. This indicates that it is hard to talk about scientists speaking in the name of truth, claiming superiority for scientific knowledge over political knowledge, or to argue that scientific knowledge production is free of social or political influences.

3. One can also highlight the fact that science and policy are not isolated universes by paying attention to the discursive spaces that are shared by scientific and policy practitioners. There are different fora (e.g. policy oriented journals, conferences, talk shows, newspapers, advisory institutions) where academics and politicians meet on a regular basis. And as claimed by the knowledge society concept, these forms of interaction are even increasing: scientific expertise is increasingly in demand in contemporary western societies. Two examples might best highlight this development: 1) The massive request for academic expertise in the aftermath of 9-11, when almost every IR specialist was put in front of a microphone to provide his interpretations. 2) The advisory structures in German Foreign and Security Policy, where one can observe not only a central restructuring of advisory institutions, but also the establishment of new types of institutions (like the Forum Globale Fragen).

4. Furthermore policy discourse seems to be crowded with academic knowledge constructs (interpretations, metaphors, storylines, etc.). It seems not to be the case that this is the consequence of a process of diffusion, as academic constructs easily and quickly enter the public and policy domain. Consider the story of Huntington's Clash of Civilizations thesis as an example. These constructs not only indicate factual relevance. They are also platforms of frequent interaction as politicians and (!) academics are called upon to comment, discuss and interpret these constructs as they enter the public domain.

All this means that, instead of searching by abstract reasoning for causes of irrelevance or retreating back to a position where everything will become relevant sooner or later, we should focus on what we can observe (the interaction) and proceed from there to develop an understanding of what it means to be relevant and what effects result from this relevance. The irrelevance diagnosis as well as the strategies of *Debugging*, *Enlightenment* or *Detachment* are, although not completely wrong, misleading. What we need is an alternative strategy to cope with science-policy interactions. In the next step I will introduce the example of Democratic Peace research and its relation to policy. With this discussion I hope to shed further light on the value of my assumptions and demonstrate why we need to study interactions and effects.

3. Illustrative example: DP, the history of a research program in policy

Although the case of Democratic Peace research and its relationship to policy seems to be an easy case, there is a lot to learn from its story. Democratic Peace research (DP) is a research devoted to the claim that democracies do not wage war on another, and was one of the most prominent research areas of IR in the 1990s.

As long ago as 1989, Jack Levy concluded that "the absence of war between democracies comes as close as anything we have to an empirical law in international relations" (Levy 1989: 622). In 1995 Nils Petter Gleditsch further fixed the status of the DP claim. "Double Democracy is a near perfect *sufficient* condition for peace – the only such condition known to us" (1995: 318, emphasis in original). The DP claim as "law" or "sufficient condition" is commonsensical today, and as the above cited statements highlight, the destiny of the whole IR enterprise has been closely related to the destiny of DP, as DP is the only fact IR has to offer. The example of DP not only shows us an optimal example how a social scientific fact comes into being in IR but also demonstrates how scientific and policy discourses become intertwined.

The making of a scientific fact

While DP was seen up to the 1970s as a liberal utopia that originated in the Kantian vision of perpetual world peace, in 1986 Doyle's Kant interpretation made a scientific engagement with the claim possible. Combined with the newly developed analytical statistical tools of quantitative research on the causes of war (*Kriegsursachenforschung*) and the evolution of huge war databases, the liberal utopia was relatively quickly transformed into an "empirical law". While there was much debate on the validity of the fact in the late 1980s and early 1990s, as all critical cases had been debated at length and the statistical tools had been refined, opposition to the fact was marginalized. As Skinner and Schwarz noted in 1999 "A 'no' answer [to the question of whether a democracy would wage war against another democracy] is now unassailable dogma in the halls of academe" (1999:1).

The "law" of DP would not have been created without the development of statistical analytical tools and without public and political support, as the creation was based on the expensive funding of war and democracy databases and the discursive closure in IR could not have been possible without the massive support for and acceptance of the claim in policy discourse.

Discourses intertwined

About the same time as the discursive closure in the academy, the “law” entered the policy domain. The U.S. foreign policy establishment learned about the DP in the late 1980s. By 1991 it was already a “currently fashionable notion” among “policymakers and commentators” (Rothstein 1991: 45, 43). When President Clinton was elected, he declared DP to be one of the basic principles of his foreign policy and security strategy. Although Clinton used the fact as imperative to unify idealist and rationalists interested-based claims and to create a consensus among foreign policy actors, the DP came under political fire. This created the effect that not only politicians did use research results directly from the research frontier to back their arguments (see e.g. Talbott 1996:49, Fn 2, Harper 1997: 120) – which meant a more intimate relationship between research and policy, but the whole academic enterprise of DP research became politicized. As Stephen Walt argued in *Foreign Affairs*, the existence of DP was no longer a question of truth but of political priorities:

"Some Americans find these academic debates frustrating. But ask yourself which you would prefer: a world where some great powers were democratic and others were not, but where the United States was clearly number one, or a world where all the major powers were democracies but the United States was number three, four or perhaps even lower. [...] how you answer this question will tell you which side of the democratic peace debate you are on" (Walt 1999: 151).

4. The effects of DP

With this example in mind that demonstrates the intimacy between science and policy and my relevance claim, what consequences followed from the prominence of DP in policy? Proponents of an Enlightenment approach would argue that as DP offers us access to the causes of peace knowledge about DP will lead to a more peaceful world. This is best expressed by Bruce Russett, a leading figure in the Democratic Peace business. He states that:

“understanding the sources of democratic peace can have the effect of a self-fulfilling prophecy. Social scientists sometimes create reality as well as analyze it. Insofar as norms do guide behavior, repeating those norms helps to make them effective. Repeating the norms as descriptive principles can help to make them true. Repeating the proposition that democracies should not fight each other helps reinforce the probability that democracies will not fight each other. A norm that democracies should not fight each other thus is prudentially reinforced, and in turn strengthens the empirical fact about infrequent violent conflict” (Russett 1993: 136).

I argue that DP in policy had rather the contrary effect, which did not contribute to a more peaceful world. Quite apart from the fact, that DP draw in the form of the distinction between peaceful democracies and aggressive/war prone non-democracies a new demarcation line through the world (which served as good replacement for the east-west confrontation, see Lake 1993), DP as a guide for action contributed to the securitization of democracy, democracy export and promotion and therefore to a greater insecurity. Securitization is a term developed by the Copenhagen School of Security Studies (COPS) to describe a speech act that contributes to the construction of a security issue. Although this paper is not the place to discuss the Copenhagen School in detail, I will give a brief account, of what is meant by securitization. Following speech act theory the meaning of a concept for the COPS lies in its usage. The quality of security is the staging of existential issues in politics to lift them above politics. In security discourse, an issue is dramatized and presented as an issue of supreme priority; thus by labelling it a security issue, an agent claims a need for and right to treat it by using extraordinary measures (Buzan et al 1998). Hence the term securitization.

As scientists claimed that there exists a scientific certified causal relationship between peace/war and democracy and as this “law” was accepted in the public policy discourse, democracy became a security issue. Democracy promotion, a task that was originally associated with “altruistic

actors” like human rights NGOs or UNESCO became a task of military strategists. Classical security actors like NATO now have the task of promoting democracy at the top of their agenda (see e.g. NATO 1999). Using the DP argument, democracy promotion could be put on the security agenda. The promotion of democracy was no longer simply a desirable goal, but “a requirement of American interests” (Scholarz 1992:25) or “the essence of the [U.S.] national security rationale” (Talbot 1996:49). As the White House argued in 1996 “while democracy will not soon take hold everywhere, it is in our interest *to do all we can* to enlarge the community of free and open societies, especially in areas of greatest strategic interest” (White House 1996, emphasis C.B.). By this way of arguing it became possible to justify extraordinary measures like the use of force to foster democratization.

And indeed, the list of cases where war was legitimized with the argument that if the opponent could be democratized this would lead to a more peaceful world, or that it is necessary to intervene as there would be no democratization in a country and therefore no peaceful relations with that country, is long. The most prominent example from the Clinton Administration might be the Haiti intervention. According to Deputy Secretary of State Talbot, it was “President Clinton’s desire to defend democracy and his obligation to protect American borders [...which] justify the use of military force” (1996: 48). Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu justified his use of force against the Palestinians with the same arguments. And last but not least, think of U.S. President George W. Bush without the argument that the democratization of Iraq contributes to American security. None of this means, that these wars might not have happened without DP, which would be a very deterministic view of the role of knowledge in policy. But the securitization of democratization policy became possible with DP and this, finally, made the use of force for democratization more likely.

5. Conclusions

In the paper I have called for a re-examination of the science-policy-relationship which involves setting aside the irrelevance claim in order to find alternatives to the misleading strategies of Debugging, Enlightenment and Detachment. As there is not a widening chasm between science and policy but increasing interactions, I have argued for a focus on the meaning of relevance and on the effects of this relevance.

Bruno Latour noted in an essay published 2003 that “it is only if you are absolutely convinced that science and society do not mix that you can mix them so thoroughly as to produce the mess in which we are stewing today” (Latour 2003: 38). This expresses very well what I want to show by pointing to the example of Democratic Peace. As we can see scholars claiming a separation between science and policy and value freedom for their “scientific law” in fact interacted closely in their law production with politicians, leading to the “mess” of the securitization of democracy.

The conclusion to draw is, that we should pay close attention to the actual relevance of our research, and should reflect and incorporate the effects that might result from our research from the moment we start it. What we do need is debate about what an alternative strategy to cope with the problems identified here might look like in practice.

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