

## **Foreign Policy Analysis - An Approach from Policy Theory**

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### **Abstract**

*Despite being a regular activity carried out by scientists and leaders around the world, foreign policy analysis is viewed and approached from many different perspectives. This article presents a theoretical perspective of foreign policy analysis, especially the process-based policy analysis to find out contents of foreign policy that needs to be analyzed, thereby making some recommendations for foreign policy analysis in Vietnam.*

**Keywords:** *Foreign policy, policy analysis, policy theory.*

### **1. Introduction**

Foreign policy is a form of public policy that is planned and implemented by the state. It is also a decision of the state authority and the reaction of such state towards other international relations subjects to a problem arising in the international system in a certain period of time aiming to ensure national interests. When studying foreign policy, an important goal often set by researchers and leaders is foreign policy analysis to facilitate better understanding (and even clear understanding of the nature) of a policy adopted by an international relations subject on an independent, self-directed, non-conservative, unbiased, and one-sided viewpoint (Duong Van Quang, 2021). It is necessary to understand that the difference between foreign policy analysis and foreign policy research is that foreign policy analysis is skill-oriented with high requirements for analytical skills, policy design, and offering persuasive "advice" for policymakers (Thissen, W & Walker, W., 2013). From a policy perspective, foreign policy analysis is the process of using a variety of research methods, techniques and arguments to process and identify information (Luu Thuy Hong, 2019) to meet its requirements (sometimes to amend, supplement and perfect existing foreign policies in addition to better understanding foreign policies of other actors to make forecasts for the future). In international relations, when foreign policy is understood as a political strategic choice and a reaction of an international relations actor, foreign policy analysis is considered as the process of using scientific knowledge and a wide range of methods and techniques to process and analyze information on foreign policy thereby finding out the intentions and motives of the subject for policy understanding and interpretation besides evaluation of the impact to achieve analysis goals. Consequently, foreign policy analysis has always been an indispensable requirement and a must-do of any country in the world in the digital era with the current deep globalization and international integration.

### **2. Literature review**

Policy analysis in general and foreign policy analysis in particular have been widely conducted in many research works. Vietnamese and international researchers have carried

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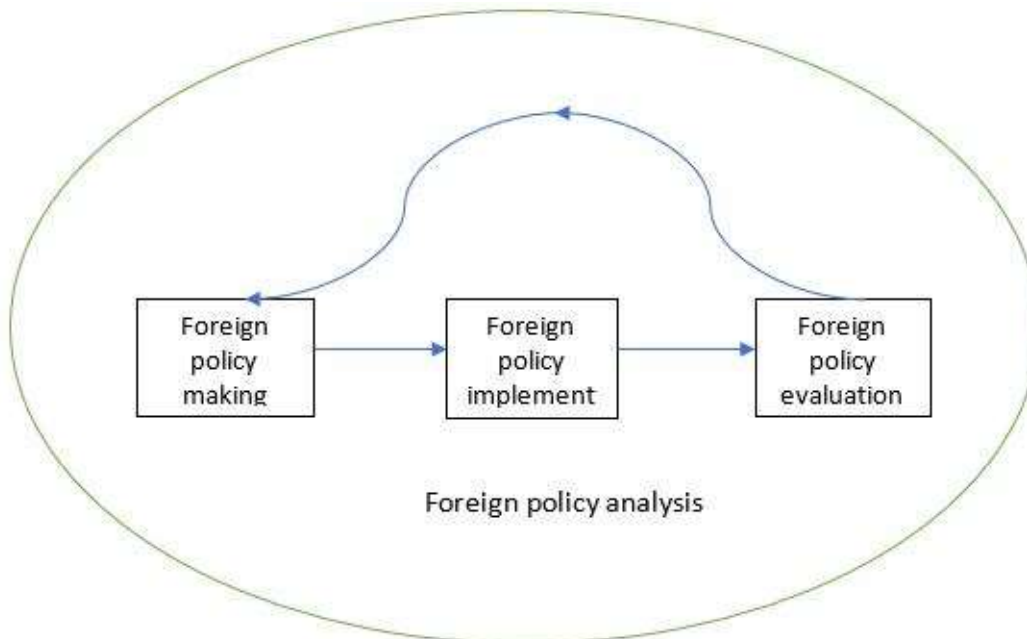
out quite a few research works on policy analysis - public policy analysis which results in a basic understanding of policy analysis. The concept of policy analysis was introduced by some authors (Stokey, Edith, Richard Zeckhauser, 1978; National Academy of Public Administration, 2000; Weimer, David L., Aidan R. Vining, 2005; Duong Xuan Ngoc, 2008; Dunn, William N., 2008; Nguyen Huu Hai, 2010; Mintrom. M., 2012; William T. Gormley, Jr., 2007; Thissen, W & Walker, W., 2013). At the same time, policy analysis skills and methods were also identified and presented by many authors (S. Quade, 1989; Eugene Bardach, 2005; John W. Creswell, 2003; Luu Thuy Hong, 2019).

Furthermore, foreign policy analysis have been also discussed in many studies. Baris Kesgin introduced the concept and features of general foreign policy analysis (John T. Ishiyama and Marijke Breuning, 2011; Duong Van Quang, 2021), or Valerie M. Hudson, Christopher S. Vore gave an overview of foreign policy analysis on a historical basis from the past to the present and the future (Mershon International Studies Review, Volume 39, 1995). Some studies on the relationship between policy analysis and international relations bring foreign policy making and the relationship between foreign policy and bureaucratic systems, governments, and globalization, etc., into focus (Chris Alden, Amnon Aran, 2016). Meanwhile some authors analyzed foreign policy from a comparative perspective (Marijke Breuning, 2007) or carried out foreign policy analysis through foreign policy research from the perspective of theory, subject and case analysis (Steve Smith, Amelia Hadfield, Tim Dunne, 2016; Walter Carlsnaes, Philip A. Schrod, 1993). Approaches to policy analysis (Smith, Hadfield & Dunne 2012), especially the research "Foreign Policy Analysis: Classic and Contemporary Theory" (Valerie M, Hudson and Benjamin S. Day), 2020 investigated different levels of analysis.

However, the author found that no research analyzes foreign policy in terms of policy theory in a general and systematic approach. The article will systematize and clearly analyze approaches to foreign policy analysis from the perspective of policy theory to find out contents and requirements in foreign policy analysis as a public policy based on the policy process to provide a clearer and more comprehensive perspective in foreign policy analysis.

### **3. Research methodology**

Besides being an urgent need, foreign policy analysis is also a difficult, complicated, highly technical and professional work because of its interdisciplinary manner. Many approaches to foreign policy analysis bring about different manners and methods to study foreign policy analysis methods. Foreign policy analysis that focuses on policy making analysis will use three levels of analysis: the system level, the state level, and the individual level (Do Thi Thuy, 2018) as an analysis of the influencing factors. Foreign policy analysis that concentrates on policy content will usually be analyzed according to 3 basic contents of foreign policy: goals, subjects and measures to realize such goals. Analysis of the foreign policy process will be conducted according to the policy planning, implementation and evaluation process (Luu Thuy Hong, 2019). In this study, the author analyzed foreign policy based on the policy process with 3 stages: Foreign policy making, foreign policy implementation and foreign policy evaluation (refer to the figure below). However, there are still some content and approaches in the 3-level analysis and content (or structure) analysis of foreign policy.



Qualitative methods, in which the main methods are document study and comparative method, were used by the author to study the foreign policy analysis in each stage in the policy process. Document study (documents refer to research papers on policy analysis methods and form the theoretical basis that enables the author to inherit, supplement the arguments) is used in the whole study of policy process analysis. Comparative method refers to the comparison of documents and research works on public policy, analysis of public policy, foreign policy, international relations and foreign policy analysis, theories of policy analysis from the perspective of policy, international relations. Furthermore, it includes comparison of goals and results of foreign policy implementation in many countries in the world. This method aims to find out the rules and difference of foreign policies, thereby providing orientations in foreign policy analysis from the perspective of policy theory (especially in foreign policy implementation and evaluation stage).

Besides, the author used other interdisciplinary methods such as statistics and practical survey of foreign policy analysis in Vietnam. In-depth interviews, especially interviews with foreign policy researchers and analysts from the Diplomatic Academy of Vietnam, the Development Strategy Institute and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs (Foreign Policy Department) were also used by the author to make recommendations for Vietnam.

#### 4. Research results

##### *Analysis of foreign policy making*

Policy-making analysis refers to an analysis to predict the outputs of policies. From the perspective of foreign policy makers (belonging to policy subjects), policy-making analysis provides theoretical and practical basis for choosing the best policy. But from the perspective of foreign policy analysts other than policy subjects, policy-making analysis forecasts policies from which other international relations actors will make their own plans and policies to response to the foreign policy of policy subjects. For example, Chinese and Russian policy analysts analyze the US foreign policy forecast towards China or Russia in the post-Ukraine war period to work out countermeasures for their own country.

Policy-making analysis includes (1) Analysis of policy problems on the agenda; (2) Analysis of policy objects; (3) Analysis of policy structure and (4) Analysis of policy issuance time (Luu Thuy Hong, 2019).

In foreign policy, the main contents of analysis of policy problems is an analysis aiming to detect foreign policy problems (determine the issues, their characteristics, nature and scope) through phenomena and finding out the causes. Even though the cause of a foreign policy problem is also a relatively difficult and complicated content due to the lack of information, it still requires an analysis based on the information available to analysts. Analysis of the cause of a policy problem can be in an internal-external, direct-indirect, immediate-long-term direction, etc., to identify different layers of causes thereby generalizing foreign policy problems. Additionally, the analysis to select priority problems needs to go into the policy subjects' contents of interest namely political support, the nature of the problem (old, new, serious, etc., and its impact extent to national interests), whether the solution to the policy problem is clear, meets national needs, goals and resources, and is feasible or not.

Analysis of foreign policy objects. Unlike other public policies, foreign policy objects include international relations actors (state actors and non-state actors) (Hoang Khac Nam, 2018). It is extremely complicated to analyze other international relations actors as the target of the policy because of the information about the subjects. Each policy object is a subject of international relations - especially nations - which are sovereign subjects should access to accurate and complete information about the object and requires a system of information collection and processing means. When analyzing foreign policy objects, the contents that need analyzing consist of: object characteristics (geographical location, natural resources, strength - resources, position in the international system), viewpoints and policies of the objects (either in the objects' policy documents or actual international relations behavior) towards the subjects. This aims to find out the interest of the policy object and the historical characteristics of the relationship between the subject and the object.

Analysis of foreign policy structure should pay attention first to the value system analysis of foreign policy. Value standards will provide direction for specific foreign policies. The foundation of the policy value system is the guiding viewpoint and transparent policy thinking with the role of guiding goals and solutions (Luu Thuy Hong, 2019). The viewpoint of foreign policy is often seen through the viewpoint of the ruling Party and the person with the decisive role in policy making (this depends on the political institution of each country). Besides, it is essential to take into account ideology and historical lessons in the country's foreign policy value system.

Targeting analysis is the most difficult analytical task in foreign policy analysis in the policy making stage. Policy goals are diverse, multi-level and scale while foreign policy goals are various, multi-layered and more complicated because of special objects and environments. Upon conduction analysis to determine foreign policy goals, consideration should be given to identifying levels of goals: general goals (conveying values such as efficiency, responsibility, and positivity) that a country needs to achieve to ensure its survival, development and influence in the international system. Specific goals are specific expectations for a problem posed. These goals can be measured and counted with specific metrics. Policy goals are determined on the basis of: problem analysis results; needs of the subject that poses the problem; conditions for realizing the goal for example: time, resources, context, etc., that meet SMART criteria with special attention paid to the feasibility and systematicity of goals.

Policy solutions and measures have an association with foreign policy goals and are always needs to be determined when making foreign policy. Policy solutions are the most important content of the policy. Analysis of policy solutions requires meticulousness, precision, accuracy, and creativity because solutions aim to realize the goals (in international relations, the highest goal is to ensure national interests). For analysis to forecast or propose forecasts about foreign policy solutions, analysts need to come up with the scenarios of each solution by considering: costs (resources) and expected results (benefits) to achieve the goal, (immediate and long-term) impacts of the solution on

international relations and the reactions of other nations. Additionally, foreign policy solutions are often associated with policy tools including diplomatic, political, economic, military, media, legal (international law), and cultural tools, etc. Therefore, solution analysis needs to clarify associated tools.

A policy goal can have many different solutions, a preferred solution need to be selected. It is also necessary for policy analysts to identify the preferred solution of a foreign policy to advise their leaders. The priority solution should be selected based on the standards for a good policy with such criteria as feasibility, effectiveness, efficiency, equality, systematicity, and policy impact, etc.

Analysis of foreign policy issuance time and manner. Besides taking into account the urgency of policy problems, needs of the society and interest groups on policy problems, and influencing factors (resources, implementation team, etc.) as other public policies, upon analysis of foreign policy issuance time and manner, foreign policy analysts also need to consider national secrets, views and ideology of their leaders, and fluctuations of the international relations situation. Timely issuance will bring back high value for a foreign policy with enhanced effectiveness while minimizing negative reactions from other international relations actors. Foreign policy issuance manner also partly shows the importance of the policy for the country. Several issuance manners include informal or formal, direct or indirect issuance, issuance in writing (e.g. national security strategy, national strategy, documents, and declaration, etc.) or by statement of spokesperson, authorized person or lead the country, etc.

#### ***Analysis of the implementation organization process of the foreign policy***

Analysis of the implementation organization process of foreign policy is a regular task of many nations which are the subject of international relations and policy subjects. Analysis of the implementation stage aims to review the effectiveness of the policy when it is actually implemented and enable policymakers to consider adjusting and perfecting such foreign policy. For international relations actors other than policy subjects, there are many different goals for the analysis of a foreign policy being carried out by another country. These may include studying, learning from experience, considering the current foreign thinking of the state, analyzing the impact on its own country for timely and reasonable responses.

Foreign policy implementation turns policy intentions into actual results. Analysis of the implementation organization process of foreign policy should clarify the following basic issues:

Analysis of the apparatus for foreign policy implementation: the lead agency, coordinating agencies, relevant personnel (especially the head who is responsible for the implementation, plays an extremely important role) and resources. Foreign policy implementation apparatus depends on the political regime and political institutions of each country. For most foreign policy, the primary instrument used is diplomacy, therefore, the lead agency is usually the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. However, for specific areas of foreign affairs, there will be different co-chairing and coordinating agencies. For example, defense diplomacy in Vietnam will be chaired by the Ministry of National Defense in coordination with the Central Committee for Foreign Affairs and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, etc. Analysis of the implementation apparatus should analyze the policy implementers to know clearly their sense of responsibility, thinking and feelings in relation to other foreign partners.

Analysis of foreign policy analysis propaganda activities is currently referred to as foreign policy communication. In the context of information technology boom and scientific and technological revolution, reactions of policy objects are often official. However, some informal and unofficial reactions from domestic people or foreign publics through social networking platforms have extremely important impacts. Therefore,

analysis of propaganda activities aims to show the successes and limitations of propaganda activities that affect the success and failure of foreign policy. The success via media is of great significance in shaping domestic and international public opinion, thereby receiving the agreement and support of the public as well as leaders of other countries. It is important that policy analysts consider the specific organization and operation of the subject's foreign policy communication system and propagation and communication methods. For effective analysis of propaganda activities, it is required to analyze the relationship between communication resources and results (foreign policy propaganda is often aimed at making policy objects and stakeholders understand the policy and even support it).

Explanation of the coordination in implementing foreign policy: coordination which is regulated according to the political institutions of each country shows the relationship between state agencies with each other in realizing a common goal of ensuring national interests. However, in most countries, difficulties in coordination between agencies are unavoidable due to many reasons, including mechanisms and sectoral (group) interests. This activity analysis poses many challenges for international relations actors because of the little and rare information reaching analysts. It is normal that analysts will be more results-oriented instead of concentrating on coordination analysis. This reduces the honesty and objectivity for foreign policy analysis.

Analysis of the inspection and supervision of the foreign policy implementation: Supervision of external activities starts from the policy implementation to the end of the policy to ensure more serious and accurate implementation. Analysts need to review such activities and content as the subject of inspection and supervision of the foreign policy implementation (usually the inspection and supervision of the overall operation will be assigned to departments with inspection and supervision functions such as inspectors, leaders, and individuals managing the implementing agencies), the capture of information and the subject's inspection and supervision process, the subject's report on inspection and supervision conclusions, etc. Generally, the analysis of inspection and supervision of foreign policy implementation is associated with policy implementation summarization and evaluation periodically (the end of the year or the end of a policy implementation period) or randomly (due to the sudden change of factors leading to the termination or suspension or change of foreign policy).

#### ***Analysis of foreign policy evaluation***

Foreign policy evaluation takes place during and after the policy implementation stage. Analysis of foreign policy evaluation aims to consider and evaluate the impact of policy implementation results to make recommendations on foreign policy review, adjustment, improvement or renewal for domestic analysts. Analysts other than foreign policy subjects analyze and evaluate foreign policy in order to evaluate the impact on their country, forecast future foreign policy trends of the policyholder and work out response plan to that policy. For such nature, analysis of foreign policy evaluation plays a significant role. In international relations, policy reviews and comments are always the top concern for policy analysis.

Upon analyzing evaluations, policy analysts will focus on different approaches, including 1-achievements and limitations when implementing policies and the reasons; 2- results achieved compared to goals; 3- Impact of the policy on the country, international relations and other regions and countries.

The evaluation of policy impact is always brought into focus regardless of the approach used. Impacts of a foreign policy refer to its impacts on different objects in both international society and the development of international relations. A foreign policy impact analysis need to clarify the following levels:

State - level analysis: clarifies the positive and negative impacts on the existence and development of the state as the foreign policy subject including its people (role, position, and lifestyle of the people), the existence of the political regime (political institutions - changeable institutional values), economic regime, and national identity (cultural and social values), etc. At the same time, it also analyzes the positive and negative impacts on other countries, with the focus on states that are objects of foreign policy.

System - level analysis: Analysis of policy impacts on international relations that can be found at different scales such as:

Impact on international society: the philosophy of international relations is changed (relevant viewpoints can be formed and become the norm in international relations as a result of the implementation of foreign policy). At the same time, it can change international society in the following manners:

Positive: impacts that are in line with the set goals and general trend of international relations

Negative: impacts that are contrary to the set goals and general trend of international relations

Peripheral: unexpected impacts for policy decision-makers include positive and negative externalities (Luu Thuy Hong, 2019).

Due to its impacts on the nature and extent of international relations, the implementation of a foreign policy by a subject (state) can form alliances, comprehensive strategic partnerships, strategic partnership or lead to competition or even war in international relations.

Impact on the formation of new subjects of international society in international relations: the implementation of a foreign policy of a state can create alliances and links to form international organizations and groups of countries that contribute to the formation of new subjects.

Impact on the division of international society as well as the change in the global force correlation: The implementation of a foreign policy of a state can create alliances and links to form international organizations and groups of countries that contribute to the formation of new subjects.

## **5. Conclusion and some recommendations for foreign policy analysis in Vietnam**

The State and society of Vietnam have paid considerable attention to foreign policy analysis. A relatively large number of agencies, departments, institutes and universities have been involved in policy analysis. According to the policy process, the agency that is regularly mentioned for foreign policy analysis in Vietnam is the Central Committee for Foreign Affairs - Communist Party of Vietnam, the Government (of which the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Vietnam takes the main responsibility), the Vietnam Union of Friendship Organizations in addition to scientists at various departments, institutes, training and research institutions under state or non-state agencies, and (only a few) journalists and businesses, etc. Despite its diversity, foreign policy analysis in Vietnam is still not systematic and professional. For example, each agency uses a different analytical style (different approach) according to the culture and approach of the analyst, analysis agency, and specific order. Therefore, it is important that Vietnam unify and finalize its regulations related to foreign policy analysis, especially units that are highly consultative for the government and external agencies of the political system.

Foreign policy making, amending, supplementing and perfecting always need multi-dimensional information and perspectives (from different sources of information that are

both scientific, practical and critical). Therefore, besides official information from government departments, institutes or political systems specializing in policy analysis, most countries around the world have built and used their think-tank network. Think-tank network is a system of policy research, analysis and advocacy organizations to provide policy information for advice, defense, support, and connection between academia and policy makers and implementers. Think-tanks can be organizations of the political party, the government, economic groups, or NGOs, etc. In Vietnam, there are quite a few think-tanks that exist and operate with many different types, but not many of them are recognized by the world. As reported, there are about 10 think-tanks ranked in Vietnam most of which work on economic and economic policy: Institute of World Economics and Politics (IWEP); Diplomatic Academy of Vietnam (DAV); Vietnam Institute of Economics (VIE); Institute for Economic and Policy Research (VEPR); Vietnam Institute of Americas Studies (VIAS), Central Institute for Economic Management (CIEM), Vietnam Institute for Economic & Policy Research (VEPR), Institute of World Economics and Politics (IWEP), Center for Health System Research (CHSR), Hanoi Medical University, and Institute of Policy and Management (IPAM) under VNU-University of Social Sciences and Humanities). The list above shows that Institute of Policy and Management (IPAM) is the only think-tank that is involved in policy in general (including social policy and possibly foreign policy) while Diplomatic Academy of Vietnam (DAV) is the only think-tank that specializes in foreign policy. To improve foreign policy analysis capability, besides Decision No. 97/2009/ Decision-TTg 2009 of the Prime Minister, it is recommended that Vietnam perfects its institutions and mechanisms to create a good legal framework for the establishment of a foreign policy think-tank network. The think-tank network on policy in general and foreign policy in particular (with a focus on the diversification of think-tank types and origins) is operated and developed towards the direction of independence, criticism and self-control.

Moreover, the process-based foreign policy analysis in Vietnam is being divided into two broad areas: 1- analysis of foreign policies of other countries towards the world and Vietnam to advise Vietnam's policies towards such countries; 2- analysis of Vietnam's foreign policy to give advice for policy making, amendment and improvement. In which, most of the results of publicly available foreign policy analysis that is accessible to read and research exist only in studies from grassroots works and topics in foreign affairs agencies, theses and dissertations at domestic master and doctoral training institutions on international relations. Additionally, these works and documents are only suggestive foreign policy advice, do not have sufficient value and quality to give practical directions and solutions. Meanwhile foreign policy analysis works and documents used by the state to make and implement foreign policy are "secret", "confidential", not public or difficult to access. Therefore, it is highly necessary for Vietnam to perfect its institutions and institutions related to foreign policy analysis, which partly emphasizes the openness, "secret revelation" to enable access to scientists to take advantage of good scientists in foreign policy consultations.

Besides, foreign policy analysis (especially that with the application of the above methods) requires a good human resource. Particularly for Vietnam, training and research on foreign policy analysis are paid attention by large training institutions such as Diplomatic Academy of Vietnam, Faculty of International Relations, Academy of Journalism and Communication, Faculty of International Studies, University of Social Sciences and Humanities, VNU Hanoi and VNUHCM - University of Social Sciences and Humanities, etc., when developing their subject-based training programs (which are still relatively new and primitive). This contributes to the formation of human resources for policy analysis at the beginning, but not enough to meet the needs of foreign policy analysis. It is vital to develop a separate training major for professional and in-depth training of bachelors in foreign policy analysis.



It is said by some experts (interviewed by the author for the article) that the foreign policy analysis in Vietnam is quite passive (analysis is only conducted when there is a new foreign affairs problem. The analysis thinking is only based on experience with efforts to use analytical frameworks for analysis and based on analysis levels (of which the system level - the state level are commonly used). To improve the quality of foreign policy analysis, especial attention should be paid to changing strategic thinking about foreign policy analysis. Particularly, there should be clear orientation on scientific approach and methodology in foreign policy analysis, politics, mechanism, and policies for proactive foreign policy analysis for smart and effective response and making policy decisions to achieve national interests.

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