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The Agent–Structure Debate and America's Vietnam Options: A Reply to Professor Gavan Duffy*

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Abstract

This article responds to Gavan Duffy's critique of *Analogies at War* in his recent essay on the agent-structure debate in the *JJPS* (2001, 2: 161–175). I argue that Duffy's use of *Analogies at War* to pursue his thesis about "giving structure its due" is flawed because he (1) fails to assess the book in terms of the outcomes it seeks to explain; (2) conflates "structure" with process, perceptual, and personality variables; (3) misinterprets my assumptions while neglecting the findings of recent works that corroborate the findings of *Analogies at War*; and (4) fails to demonstrate one of his key suggestions, i.e. the importance of showing how agents and structures are mutually constitutive. The article concludes by discussing some pointers raised by the exchange for furthering the agent-structure debate.

With a view toward advancing the agent–structure debate in international relations, Gavan Duffy has written a scholarly critique of my work, *Analogies at War: Korea, Munich, Dien Bien Phu, and the Vietnam Decisions of 1965* (1992a). Duffy chose to organize his contribution to the debate around an analysis of *Analogies at War* in large part because he sees the book as a 'paradigmatic constructivist account of political agency' (Duffy, 2001: 165). However, he believes that the book went too far in privileging political agency at the expense of structures; he seeks to bring structure back into the analysis of the Vietnam decisions. The editors of the journal have invited me to respond to Duffy's argument and I am delighted to do so in the spirit of friendly and constructive scholarly debate.

To begin with, an important caveat: *Analogies at War* was not written with the aim of addressing, or contributing to, the agent–structure debate. It did not use the vocabulary associated with the debate and articulating a position on the debate was

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peripheral to the aim of exploring how the lessons of history influence foreign policy decision-makers. To be sure, the book found in favor of human agency where the Vietnam decisions were concerned, and it critiqued arguments that located the source of those decisions in international structures. Any contribution that my findings made to the agent–structure debate was thus indirect. For the purposes of this essay however, I shall relate the arguments and findings of *Analogies at War* to the ideas and vocabulary of the agent–structure debate, in order to facilitate a direct engagement with Duffy's claims.

I believe that the general point made by Duffy is a sound one: if international relations theorists in general, and constructivists in particular, accept that agent and structure are mutually constitutive, it behooves them to avoid privileging one at the expense of the other in our narratives or empirical analysis. This is especially true in an era where the 'certainties' of the bipolar Cold War international structure are gone. The most persuasive analyses are those that succeed in clarifying how agent and structure mutually constitute each other, i.e. in teasing out their mutual interaction and impact on each other. This is good advice. Duffy and I also agree on the meaning of agency. As Duffy puts it: 'At base . . . all corporate agents are peopled . . . the actions of any corporate agent depend upon the outcomes of deliberative processes among the human agents located within them' (2001: 164).

Where I disagree with Duffy is his claim that *Analogies at War* has not given structure its due. The central theme of this essay is that the book did give structure, especially international structure, its due: it was found to be indeterminate with respect to the outcome – the choice of Option C′ (see below) – I wished to explain. Duffy tiptoes around this assessment of mine about the role of international structure; more importantly, he also fails to assess the book's argument in terms of the outcomes it claims to explain. These two silences weaken his critique considerably. I shall also argue that the structures – bureaucratic politics and domestic political pressures – that Duffy focuses on, and which he claims were not given their due, are partial structures at best. They are so inextricably bound with process, personality, and perceptual variables that to tuck all of them under the rubric of 'structure' is to commit a category mistake. *Analogies at War* did assess bureaucratic politics and domestic political pressures as rival hypotheses, but did not consider them as 'structural' arguments for the reason mentioned. In any case, they were found to have less explanatory power than historical analogies in accounting for the decision outcomes of 1965. At base, I believe the Vietnam decisions and *Analogies at War*'s characterization and explanation of them are not fertile ground on which to pursue a structural argument. Unless one can come up with persuasive reasons why the choice of Option C′ (see below) need not be explained, any serious and archives-based account of the route to Option C′ will repeatedly see the hands of agency trumping the constraints of structure.

The rest of the essay will elaborate on these themes. In section 1, I reiterate the central argument of *Analogies at War* and situate the work in its intellectual context. I

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argue that the major flaw of Duffy's critique is its failure or unwillingness to assess the book in terms of the outcomes it claims to explain. Section 2 examines the notion of 'structure' in general and how it is conceived by Duffy in particular. I suggest that Duffy's notion of structure is underdeveloped and vague; it ends up being a catch-all category which includes virtually all factors – so long as they are not analogies – thought to be relevant to America's Vietnam decision-making. Section 3 assesses Duffy's 'structural' account of Vietnam decision-making and suggests that he veers so strongly to the side of 'structure' that it is hard to detect any 'mutually constitutive' role between agent and structure, much less for any structure transcending feats by agents. This extreme privileging of structure is problematic because it is in tension with his claims about the importance of showing how agents and structures are mutually constitutive. In Duffy's account, agents seem to be just doing (domestic) structure's bidding. More crucially, I argue that such an account is empirically untenable. In Section 4, I address Duffy's questions about my assumptions. I believe he misinterprets me and I highlight the findings of subsequent works that corroborate the assumptions and findings of *Analogies at War*. Section 5 concludes by discussing some pointers raised by the exchange on furthering the agent–structure debate.

1 The argument and its context

If I had to summarize the thesis of *Analogies at War* in two words, it would be: analogies matter (Khong, 1992a:148).[1] The aim of the book was to show how they matter. I did this by developing a framework – the AE Framework – that specified the diagnostic functions that historical analogies are capable of performing when they are invoked in decision-making contexts:

> Simply stated, the AE framework suggests that analogies are cognitive devices that 'help' policymakers perform six diagnostic tasks central to political decision-making. Analogies (1) help define the nature of the situation confronting the policymaker, (2) help assess the stakes, and (3) provide prescriptions. They help evaluate alternative options by (4) predicting their chances of success, (5) evaluating their moral rightness, and (6) warning about the dangers associated with the options. (p. 10)

I applied this framework to analyze the way United States policymakers used analogies as they deliberated whether and how to intervene in Vietnam. I found that taking their analogies seriously helped explain America's decision to opt for 'middle-range [military] intervention' in Vietnam. I argued that:

> [T]he AE framework, when applied to the analogies invoked by America's decision-makers, succeeds in accounting for the Vietnam decisions of 1965 at a level of precision not achieved by other explanations. Specifically, I suggest that the Korean and Munich analogies . . . predisposed them toward

[1] Unattributed page numbers hereafter will refer to Khong, 1992a.

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> military intervention in Vietnam. In particular, the lessons of Korea had an especially powerful influence on Vietnam decision-making because they not only predisposed the policymakers toward intervention but also predisposed them toward selecting a specific option among the several pro-intervention options. The Korean analogy, in other words, shaped the *form* as well as the fact of the US intervention. (p. 11; italics original)

By 'the form as well as the fact of the US intervention' I meant the selection of Option C′ and the rejection of the anti-intervention (A' and B′) and the other (harsher) pro-intervention (D′ and E′) options.[2] Option A′ favored cutting US losses and withdrawing; B′ favored keeping US forces at present level (75,000 troops). Option C′ recommended 'expand[ing] substantially US military pressure against the Vietcong by sending 100,000 troops' (see figures on pages 52, 139, 163 and 186); Option D′ called for using the 'Strategic Air Command power to bring enemy to his knees'; and Option E′ asked Johnson to mobilize the reserves, go on a war footing, and declare a state of emergency. The main purpose of the book was to explain why Johnson and his advisers settled on Option C′ instead of the others (p. 52).

Readers familiar with the book will remember that I placed great store in explaining the selection of Option C′. Since there was already a voluminous literature on the US intervention in Vietnam, the justification for another work has to be its ability to shed new light on a well-documented event. *Analogies at War* sought to focus on alternative causal variables (to the dominant explanation focusing on containment, for example) as well as explain 'the fact' *and* 'the form' of US intervention. The book tried to accomplish both these goals by focusing on historical analogies as a critical causal factor and by seeking to explain not just the decision to intervene, but the choice of Option C′. The latter is akin to Graham Allison's attempt to explain Kennedy's choice of the naval blockade from the menu of options (including surgical air strike and invasion) presented to the Executive Committee during the Cuban Missile Crisis (Allison and Zelikow, 1999). The issue here is not just analytical precision. In Allison's case, once Kennedy and his advisers rejected the 'do nothing' option, discussion centered on which of the military options had the best chance of achieving US objectives. The selection of the final option, or the sequence in which one picks them, bears heavily on the outcome of the crisis. Similarly, my attempt to explain the choice of C′ and the rejection of the harsher pro-intervention options (D′ and E′) is also crucial because many have argued that if only the US had been willing to use greater force earlier, as in D′ and E′ (and as George Bush did during the 1990–1991 Gulf War), the US would have been able to force the Vietnamese communists to a negotiated settlement earlier (p. 55, esp. notes 22–24; see also Khong 1992b), the implication being that a negotiated settlement in the late 1960s would hold better than the one obtained in 1973, when the US was exhausted.

[2] Like *Analogies at War*, I will focus on the ground war options considered by the Johnson administration in the first half of 1965.

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Duffy's critique of *Analogies at War* does not address this central explanatory claim of mine, much less attempt to provide a more convincing explanation for C′. Nor does he give any reasons why C′ should not be explained. I believe his critique would have been more convincing had he either made an argument about why C′ need not be explained, or, if such an argument is not possible, provide a better explanation than the one found in the book for the selection of Option C′.

Several points about the way the problem was set up should also be mentioned. First, the existing theoretical and historical literature then had made plausible arguments – sometimes based on chapter-long case studies, sometimes based on anecdotal evidence – about the influence of the lessons of history on foreign policy decisions pertaining to the origins of the Cold War, the Korean War, Vietnam, and other major crises (p. 50, note 8). What was absent in my view was a systematic statement about what precisely do analogies do and the way they influence decision outcomes. Without such a general statement I felt it would be difficult to convince skeptics who argue that analogies are used primarily for justification and advocacy. Hence I proposed the AE framework as a way to fill the gap.

Second, having devised such a framework, I thought it important to apply it to an important case to show that it has explanatory power. The choice of studying one case (several observations) in depth, with the use of archives and interviews, was based on my sense that existing writings on the topic had breath but lacked depth. Historians and political scientists have cited numerous examples of how the lessons of history might have influenced foreign policy decisions negatively, but few have seen fit to explore the causal path by which such historical analogies influence decision outcomes (pp. 7–8, notes 21–23). I surmised that the argument that analogies matter would be more convincing if I could show the decisive role analogies played in a crucial case. America's Vietnam decision-making was picked as the crucial case in part because of its intrinsic importance, but also because, taking Harry Eckstein's advice, it was a hard or 'least likely case' for my thesis (pp. 48–49). It was a hard case in that the frequent, emotional, and indiscriminate way in which America's Vietnam policymakers invoked analogies in public throughout the 1960s suggested strongly that those analogies were used for justification (rallying the American people) and advocacy. If, despite this prima facie reason for thinking that analogies were justificatory devices, it is still possible to show that they affected the internal deliberations and calculations in significant ways, the argument that analogies mattered would be greatly strengthened.

Third, if the existing literature neglected to explore how analogies exerted their impact on the decision-making process, it did focus on characterizing the manner and outputs of such analogical reasoning. The overwhelming consensus on the latter was that policymakers tended to misuse history and that led them to make inferior decisions. I agreed with this finding and the other major purpose of *Analogies at War* was to try to explain why this was so. Relying on the findings of cognitive social psychology, I suggested that psychological processes such as the availability and

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representativeness heuristics partly explain why policymakers chose certain analogies, while phenomena such as top-down processing and perseverance caused them to latch on to their preferred analogies despite disconfirming evidence. My analysis of the psychology of analogical reasoning led me to conclude that it would be difficult for historians or anyone to teach future policymakers how to use history better. Since Duffy does not critique this portion of my work, I will make only limited references to it in this essay.

2 International structure and United States military interventions

The dominant explanation for America's decision to intervene in Vietnam is containment. The leading historical account puts it this way: 'the United States involvement in Vietnam . . . was a logical, if not inevitable, outgrowth of a world view and policy, the policy of containment, which Americans in and out of government accepted without serious question for more than two decades' (Herring, 1979: x). Political scientists keen to move the causal chain one step backward are prone to ask what brought forth the policy of containment, and the nature of the international system – or bipolarity – is the most widely accepted answer.[3] For proponents of the systemic or structural argument, America's decision to intervene in Vietnam cannot be considered in isolation from its other Cold War-inspired military actions. They claim that given structural constraints – bipolarity – the United States would respond to similar challenges similarly. As Kenneth Waltz, perhaps international structure's most able proponent, put it: 'In a bipolar world there are no peripheries. With only two powers capable of acting on a world scale, anything that happens anywhere is potentially of concern to both of them' (1979: 171).

In the military arena, when US allies or friends are seriously challenged by 'the other' side (i.e. Russia and China) or its proxies, the US is likely to intervene militarily. Waltz himself refers to the examples of Korea and Vietnam as instances of this kind of structure-induced behavior (1979: 170–175, 187–192). The beauty of this argument is that it is parsimonious and powerful. It is parsimonious because one need only have knowledge about the number of poles in order to gain knowledge about the dynamics of the system. It is powerful because structure appears to provide a master key to the central tendencies of major powers. It also implies that there is less of a need to analyze the idiosyncrasies of individual administrations, either the personalities that comprise them or the domestic political pressures they face. If the structure or bipolarity is constant, it does not matter who the decision-makers are; when faced with the a similar challenge, the decision-makers will do basically the same thing, or different Presidents will react similarly to similar foreign policy challenges.

[3] Kahin (1986) and Berman (1982) are two political science accounts of America's Vietnam decision-making that do not explicitly focus on the constraints of bipolarity.

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The problem with this international structural view and the hypotheses derived from it is that they are at odds with the facts. Consider using structure to think about US military interventions during the Cold War in general, and Vietnam in particular. If the international structure was constant between 1945 and 1989, we should observe it having similar effects on different decision-makers for the entire period. Translated, it means that under conditions of bipolarity, the United States is likely to intervene militarily whenever a friend is perceived to be threatened by Soviet or Chinese-backed communists. Korea (1950), Guatemala (1954), Lebanon (1958), Cuba (1961), Dominican Republic (1965), and Vietnam (1965) would all seem to confirm the influence of this structural imperative, until one recalls instances in which the US did little or nothing when friends were threatened or even overthrown by forces friendly to 'the other' side: China (1949), Vietnam (1954), Hungary (1956), Cuba (1959), Laos (1961), and Nicaragua (1979). Same structure but no military response. If one had to guess which of the 12 Cold War contests above would beget US military intervention, tossing a coin would allow one to do as well as having 'knowledge' about how structure induced US policy.

The anomalies associated with structure are especially telling in the case of Vietnam. The structural argument should be at its strongest in giving us insights about the 1950s, i.e. the height of the Cold War. With China turning communist and her signing an alliance treaty with Russia, the bipolar contest was becoming increasingly disadvantageous and dangerous to the United States. The systemic or structural dictates should be so strong that the US would be hypersensitive to any additions (of communist allies) to the other side and be willing to go very far to stop it. Yet when confronted with the reality of Dien Bien Phu, with the French garrison about to be over run by the Vietminh, the Eisenhower administration balked from intervening despite French pleas. That decision against intervention in 1954 sealed the fate of northern Vietnam – it became communist – and America's Cold War adversaries gained a significant ally.[4] If systemic imperatives cannot 'dictate' US military intervention at the height of the bipolar contest, when can it?

It was structure's failure to shed light on Eisenhower's decision against intervention in 1954 that alerted me to the possibility that the correlation between 'structure'

[4] In *Myths of Empire* (1991), Jack Snyder critiqued an early version of my argument about the Korean analogy's influence on the decisions of 1965. Referring to how the Eisenhower administration had used the 'no more Asian land wars [as in Korea]' argument to avoid intervening in Vietnam in 1954, Snyder questions the way the Korean analogy was used to argue in favor of intervention in 1965. For him, 'an analogy that can justify any policy [Vietnam 1954] and its opposite {Vietnam 1965] has limited explanatory value' (p. 279). In *Analogies at War*, I provide evidence to show that the lessons US policymakers drew from Korea were different in the 1960s than in the 1950s. In 1954, Korea was the 'unmentionable victory', by 1960 both the foreign policy elite and the American public had come to view it as a mentionable victory. Hence, while 'no more Koreas' captured the sentiment of the mid 1950s, 'we won in Korea and saved the South from communism' reflected the sentiment of the early 1960s (before the crucial decisions of 1965). That explains why the lessons of Korea evoked caution in the 1950s and (not all out) intervention in the 1960s. See *Analogies at War*, pp. 76–78, 113–115.

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and the 1965 decisions may be spurious. Even if one restricted one's focus to the 1960s, holding constant international structure (bipolarity) and the political party in power (Democrats), there is an increasing chorus of opinion that John F. Kennedy would have taken a different path than that of Lyndon Johnson's. Robert McNamara, who until recently had refused to pass judgment on this controversy, wrote in his Vietnam memoirs that, '[h]aving reviewed the record in detail, and with the advantage of hindsight, I think it highly probable that, had President Kennedy lived, he would have pulled us out of Vietnam'(1995: 96). If McNamara is right, the structural argument – whether focusing on international or domestic structures – becomes even more dubious. Same structural constraints/opportunities, but diametrically opposite war and peace choices.

A possible rejoinder to my critique of structure is that structure sets the basic parameters within which US decision-makers have to respond. I agree, but my point is that those parameters, when one thinks about them, are extremely permissive: they range from doing nothing to military intervention. Perhaps what structure really dictates when a US ally is threatened by communism is that a National Security Council meeting will be called. The policies that are the outcome of those meetings – contrast Eisenhower's April 1954 with Johnson's 21 July 1965 National Security Council meeting – are seldom explicable by structure.

My doubts about the ability of international structures to shed light on United States behavior reflected the sentiments of scholars who looked to perceptual and psychological variables to account for state behavior (Jervis, 1976; Larson, 1985; Shafer, 1988). These scholars were keen to move away from Waltz's notion of structural constraints because their research showed that, while structural constraints were present, meaningful choice was almost always available. By the late 1980s it became even more apparent that the fixation on structures had blinded us to processes and political agents that were decisive in the ending of the Cold War.

3 Agents and structures in Vietnam decision-making

Constructivism's ascendancy was fueled in part by this inability to anticipate the end of the Cold War and is seen by many today as an indispensable corrective to the purely structural approach. Its emphasis on political agency – the ideas, schemas, interpretations, and linguistic turns – in 'the world of our making' has struck a responsive chord and given constructivism a prominence that promises to enshrine it as the dominant approach to international relations.

Among constructivists, there are many hues. At one end, is Alexander Wendt, who insists on replacing Waltz's structure of the distribution of power with a notion of structure conceived in terms of the distribution of ideas. My reading of Wendt's position on the agent–structure debate, which he did much to start for international relations, is that he is more interested in specifying structure's impact and how it might constitute the agent (by which he normally means states). Wendt's concluding chapter argues that 'in analyzing what states think it makes sense to start with the

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culture of the international system and work top-down, rather than start with unit-level perceptions and work bottom-up' (1999: 372). Such an approach, I believe, may reveal the constraining and constituting effects of ideas such as sovereignty, but it is unlikely to have much to say about the cognitive beliefs held by agents and their impact on foreign policy.

Duffy applauds the move away from being fixated on structure and he pays more attention to agency, although he refuses to throw the structural baby out with the bathwater. More than Wendt, he seems willing to allow for 'system transforming feats' by the agent, even as he emphasizes, like Wendt, how agent and structure are mutually constitutive. Finally, at the other end are those who believe that structures are pure constructions, and there is nothing real – all constructions are equally arbitrary and, at best, positivistic students of international politics can study the competing constructions, and research why certain ones win out and with what implications.

I believe I am somewhere between Duffy and the 'pure constructionists'. I believe structures are 'real' and they do constrain political agents; however, I view structure as a rather loose constraint; more often than not there is sufficient room for interesting alternatives (or diametrically opposite options!). This is where the agent's interpretations come in. Given the same international structure – say bipolarity – decision-makers' interpretations seem to matter greatly. The same would be true of the relationship between domestic structures and political agents. While the interpretations of decision-makers matter, it is not the case that anything goes. In other words, not all social constructions are equal. The prisoner who imagines his cell to be a meadow will soon run into a brick wall if he tries to live out his construction. Structures do matter sometimes.

The thrust of Duffy's critique of *Analogies at War* is that the book privileges agency at the expense of structure. The analysis that leads Duffy to the above conclusion is a detailed examination of the arguments of Deputy Undersecretary of State, George Ball. An earlier version of Duffy's paper deconstructed in painstaking detail Ball's arguments about the inadvisability of intervening in Vietnam to reveal their internal logic, coherence, and persuasiveness (Duffy, 2000). As we all know today, Ball's arguments proved to be remarkably prescient: the United States, like France in the 1950s, could not win (at an acceptable cost) against the Vietnamese communists. Duffy surmised that if reasons and arguments as compelling and prescient as those advanced by Ball were heard and rejected, something else significant must have forced Ball's colleagues' to reject his advice.

For me, the something significant was the set of historical prisms – the Korean analogy in particular, but also Munich – through which Lyndon Johnson and his senior advisers viewed the conflict in Vietnam. These analogies interpreted the situation, stakes, probability of success, and dangers in such ways that made them believe it was essential and possible and for the US to intervene. The salience of these analogies also predisposed them to reject Ball's argument, based as it was on the

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analogy to the French experience which culminated in their defeat at Dien Bien Phu in 1954. Thus among the analogies at 'war' with one another during the crucial deliberations of 1965 were Munich, Korea, and Dien Bien Phu; the analogy that triumphed in this 'war' of ideas was Korea, which essentially said, 'Intervene but do not go all the way (for fear of Chinese intervention)' i.e., Option C′.

For Duffy, the something significant was structure, i.e. Ball's arguments and logic would have won the day without the interference of structure. Structure compelled them to jettison reason, and that is why, in trying to explain the decisions of 1965, it is important to give structure its due. This is a plausible argument although I believe it ultimately fails for two reasons. First, Duffy's notion of structure is so broad and vague that it subsumes everything under it: process, personality, perception, and arguably, historical analogies! If everything that can potentially influence the decision outcome is incorporated into one's notion of structure, then the structural argument is unfalsifiable. Second, if one focused on the most widely accepted notion of structure relevant to my explanadum – international structure conceived as bipolarity – it will be found to be inferior to the analogical explanation because it cannot explain why, given the same structure, the US behaved in a diametrically opposite way in 1954, when President Eisenhower abstained from intervening in Vietnam, and allowed the northern part of Vietnam go communist.

That Duffy's notion of structure is a catch all category that is ultimately unfalsifiable can be seen from his corralling and branding as 'structural' the four non-analogical explanations I considered in *Analogies at War* (pp. 190–205). For Duffy, the four 'countertheses' or rival explanations I considered – containment, political-military ideology, bureaucratic politics, and domestic political pressures – are 'structural countertheses' pertaining to 'structural features of the political context at the time of the Vietnam escalation decisions' (p. 10). That is all he says about why these countertheses are 'structural' in character. Of the four countertheses, only containment, in my view, is a structural explanation in the sense that for those who view the international structure (or period) of 1945–1989 as bipolar, containment may be construed as its policy manifestation. The other three have superficial structural characteristics but they are so bounded up with process and personality factors that it is unclear whether it is structure, process, or personality that is doing the (causative) work. Bureaucratic politics is often more about differing perceptions, processes of pulling and hauling, and contrasting personalities than it is about the distribution of power among bureaus. Hawkishness or dovishness has more to do with one's formative experiences (e.g. standing up to the local bully saved my bike), reading of history, and the specific issue than 'structure'. The President's need to anticipate Congressional reaction is the result of the separation of powers – a structural feature of the American political system – but his ability to rally Congress or ignore it depends also on his assessment of the Congressional mood, his personality, as well as his relationships with Congressional leaders. My understanding of the underlying mechanism or 'what is really doing the causing' in these rival

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hypotheses suggest to me that 'structure' plays a trivial role in each of them. To label them as 'structural countertheses' is a misnomer. In contrast, containment is a counterthesis with a non-trivial structural feature. It says that in a bipolar structure, containment becomes a policy imperative, thus any President will have strong incentive to prevent Vietnam from falling under the control of the communist side. Its clarity is only matched by its falsity: given bipolarity, Dwight Eisenhower, at the height of the bipolar contest, most definitely chose to let the northern part of Vietnam go communist.

Even though containment's predictions about US actions on Vietnam are wrong, it at least has two redeeming characteristics: it can identify the structure (bipolarity) that is doing the causing and it can specify the result to be expected (military intervention). None of the 'structural countertheses' in Duffy's bag come close to identifying the relevant structure and predicting its policy impact. The 'resultant' of the bureaucratic politics hypothesis, for example, depends more on the pulling and hauling of bureaucratic players than their institutional roles – hence it is more process and personalities than structure. If one were to rely on bureaucratic structure – say the famous 'where you stand depends on where you sit' proposition – to predict where Dean Rusk and Robert McNamara stood on Vietnam, one would get it quite wrong. As National Security Advisor McGeorge Bundy pointed out to McNamara, 'the secretary of state was looking to a solution through military means and . . . the secretary of defense, was looking to negotiations' (McNamara, 1995: 159). In the second edition of *Essence of Decision*, Allison and Zelikow distance themselves from this key structural feature of Model III, decrying that, 'No paragraph from the first edition attracted more criticism than this one.' The proposition, they now say, is only likely to be illuminating on issues 'such as budgets and procurement decisions' (Allison and Zelikow, 1999: 307).

Similarly, the argument that Johnson went to Vietnam to protect his Great Society is more about domestic political processes than structures: given what Johnson wanted (agency in the driving seat) – 'the woman he loved, the Great Society' – he perceived (another agency act) that some in Congress might not give it to him if he 'lost' Vietnam (Berman 1982).[5] The separation of powers meant that Johnson had to consult Congress, but whether that consultation would nudge him in the direction of intervention or withdrawal depends on a host of other factors: the intensity of his desire for Great Society legislation, the Congressional mood, and his ability to persuade Congressional leaders.

Finally, if it is possible to put everything into the 'structural' bag, why not include historical analogies too? In the book, I occasionally refer to them as 'knowledge structures', but I focused much more on their cognitive/diagnostic properties than their structural attributes (pp. 25–46). For historical analogies are just one of

[5] *Analogies at War* (pp. 200–205) critiqued this domestic politics argument on the grounds that it had little documentary support.

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many possible forms that cognitive structures can take. The real question is what analytic leverage is obtained by 'structuralizing' our explanatory variables? I saw no gain in analytic leverage and hence was content not to dwell on the cognitive 'structural characteristics' of analogies.

What would persuade me to give international/domestic structure pride of place in my analysis of the Vietnam decisions? Although Duffy did not pose this question to *Analogies at War*, I believe it is a legitimate and interesting query. I believe if one of the following two conditions existed, I would have had to incorporate structure in a central way into my explanation. First, a theoretical specification of structure that separates it – at least for analytical purposes – from the interacting units that supposedly constitute it (structure). Testable hypotheses are then derived from such a theory and they are successfully tested against the empirical data. Waltz's notion of structure succeeded in separating the (international) system from the units comprising it. That was why he was able to come up with hypotheses on how structure constrains states. Hence his structural explanation had to be taken seriously. While it passed the first two hurdles of adequate theoretical specification and the proper inferring of hypotheses (from the theory), it failed the empirical test. Applying the same standards to the bureaucratic politics approach would require one to identify the relevant bureaucratic structure (one's Department?) and then specify how it constrains or constitutes agents. The pulling and hauling integral to the bargaining of bureaucratic politics certainly does not do it because it is singularly unable to anticipate which bureaucrat's pulling would win the debate. The proposition 'Where you stand depends on where you sit' was the one that came closest to being a testable hypothesis; its main problem, as I indicated earlier, is that it is empirically false.

Alternatively, structure would also need to be weighed more heavily if there is a good theory about how structure constrains and constitutes agents' lessons of history. The traditional answers to the question where do agents get their lessons of history from are: the last war, formative experiences, and traumatic events. In *Analogies at War*, I proposed a more psychological answer that focused on the availability and representativeness heuristics. The former is akin to the last war argument in focusing on recency and the latter is akin to a 'goodness of fit' argument that focuses on superficial similarities (pp. 212–226). What would a structural theory of the origins of the lessons of history look like? That agents' repertoire of historical analogies is severely constrained by the international system? Or that their repertoire varies with polarity? How about the Secretary of State will subscribe to lessons internalized by the State Department while the Secretary of Defense will adopt those internalized by Defense? None of these 'structural theories' appear plausible or useful to me. Structure will be at a loss to explain why Robert Kennedy was part of the Executive Committee during the Cuban Missile Crisis and why he counseled against enacting 'a Pearl Harbor in reverse'. Knowledge of the mindsets and career experiences of the specific agents admitted into the decision-making circle, together

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with the nature of the brewing crisis, are more promising 'predictors' of the analogies likely to be invoked than any of these structural hypotheses.

4 Presumptions and assumptions

Having spelt out what I consider to be the main omissions and flaws in Duffy's critique of *Analogies at War*, I now turn to his analysis of my 'implicit' assumptions or presumptions. I address the assumptions in the order he presented them.

Assumption 1

The Vietnam decision-makers were cognitive misers. Duffy takes exception to this assumption because the Vietnam decisions were 'momentous' ones and therefore the policymakers had 'compelling incentive not to satisfice'. A common error that analysts of momentous decisions make is to assume that their foreign policy issue took center-stage and had the focused, undivided attention of the decision-makers. That would be a risky assumption to make. One of the pleasures of doing research in Presidential libraries is the chance to peruse the daily itineraries of the President, and one normally gets appalled by the limited time they have on the issue that one believes should have had their undivided attention. Vietnam was only one of hundreds of issues that the Johnson administration had to deal with on the international and domestic scenes, as any reading of the memoirs of Johnson and his advisers would indicate. When Vietnam began to command more attention and time, as in 1964–1965, the policymakers were deluged by an avalanche of memorandums, intelligence assessments, Congressional correspondence and testimonies, not to mention appearances before Economic Clubs and fact-finding trips to South Vietnam. In the face of such massive streams of information and the urgent need to assimilate them, it would be extremely unusual, according to the cognitive psychologists, for the Vietnam policymakers not to revert to mental short cuts or heuristics. Hence my inclination to stick with the assumption that policymakers would resort to cognitive short cuts – not just analogies but also a host of other judgmental heuristics (pp. 212–227).

Assumption 2

Duffy claims that I assumed that contributions to the internal discourse uniformly served diagnostic purposes and never the ends of justification and advocacy. I made no such assumption, as the following passage early in the book indicates:

> The cogency of the AE view does not depend on denying the use of analogies in justification and advocacy: in fact, it allows it, for policymakers who are influenced by the lessons of history in arriving at their decisions can be expected to use those same lessons to advance their policy preferences . . . Secretary of State Dean Rusk, who used more historical analogies than most . . . spoke of 'advocacy with integrity' by which he meant his willingness to

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> use the very lessons of history that informed his thinking about Vietnam to persuade his colleagues . . . Rusk challenged his critics to find any instance in which he 'thought one thing and said other'. (p. 16)

All I needed was that there be an element of diagnosis; the nature of the issue is such that it is difficult to completely disentangle the diagnostic, justificatory, and advocacy purposes of analogies – they can all be at work at the same time. The burden for someone who argues that analogies have diagnostic roles is to come up with a framework for what they do: I did that in the form of the AE framework. The cogency of such a framework is assessed by the degree to which it gives us insight into the policy choices. Moreover, I also argued that the skeptics and those who argue that analogies were primarily used for justification would be in a strong position if analogies used in public, which had a strong justificatory ring to them, were not used in private. Yet, as my archival research indicated, the analogies invoked in public were also invoked in private meetings, including the critical and secret April–July deliberations.

Assumption 3

I agree with Duffy that diagnosis, justification, and advocacy do not exhaust the uses of historical analogies. Nowhere did I state that other purposes were inconceivable; they were simply not relevant to the framework I was developing. Of course analogies can be used anaphorically. My aim was to make and elaborate the case for their diagnostic use. I focused on the skeptics' argument about justification and advocacy because they were prominent in the literature in which I worked. It is possible, as Duffy pointed out, that Lodge might have used the Munich analogy to warn Johnson about Republican criticism if Vietnam was 'lost' during his watch. Duffy implies that this fear of domestic criticism – akin to the flak Truman received for failing to win in Korea – may have been an important influence in Johnson's decision to intervene in Vietnam. But there is little archival evidence about the influence of such fears about domestic backlash; the archival evidence is much stronger on the international repercussions of 'losing' Vietnam. For example, at a Camp David meeting with his principal advisers in March 1965, Johnson rejected negotiations with the North Vietnamese and inched toward sending ground troops when he told his advisers, 'To give in = another Munich. If not here – then Thailand' (handwritten notes of McGeorge Bundy, cited on p. 178). If this is not Johnson relying on the Munich analogy to assess the international (not domestic) stakes involved and the international (not domestic) consequences of giving in, what is? Moreover, the 'fear of domestic backlash' hypothesis would also lead one to expect Johnson to choose the harsher pro-intervention options (D′ and E′), for, if he is worried about the domestic costs of not going in, he should be even more fearful of the domestic costs of going in but not winning. Yet he rejected D′ and E′ and stuck with C′. Domestic public opinion was permissive in the first year of the war, meaning that Johnson could have done what George Bush did in the initial moments of the

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Gulf War (C′, D′, and E′ rolled into one). But he never seriously contemplated going down that route because of his memories of Korea (pp. 146–147).

Assumption 4

'Explicit denials of analogical diagnosis' by policymakers do not seem to affect my confidence about their (analogies') diagnostic functions. This is less an assumption on my part than perhaps a difference in how we interpret policymakers statements. I am less willing than Duffy to accept their statements at face value; I try to match their statements with their behavior whenever possible. Thus Duffy accepts at face value Robert McNamara's statement about how 'analogies are false in logic, although significant in psychology', and interprets it as an 'explicit denial of analogical diagnosis'. Far from it! In fact, McNamara's remark to the historian Henry Graff is an apt way of summarizing one of the key claims of *Analogies at War*. The book documented many instances where policymakers explicitly acknowledged the logical pitfalls of reasoning by analogy but who then blissfully proceeded to attack or recommend an option based on analogical reasoning! The reason why they did this was precisely the reason given by McNamara: analogical reasoning is significant in psychology. Chapters 2 and 8 of the book delved into the reasons why analogies were significant psychologically and suggested that it was their ability to serve as cognitive short cuts as well as their tendency to persevere in face of conflicting information that made them so attractive and indispensable to the decision-makers.

Dean Rusk had made a similar point. He acknowledged that 'historical analogies can be inaccurate when applied to new situations' and that 'one must always think hard about the differences'. But Rusk was also sure that 'One must always think about historical precedents – we are all shaped by the experiences through which we have lived' (cited in pp. 182–183). Rusk knew exactly what he was talking about. His recognition that analogies can be inaccurate notwithstanding, he was one of the most avid users of the Korean and Munich analogies. Rusk's colleague, Walt Rostow, approached analogical reasoning in a similar fashion. After succeeding McGeorge Bundy as National Security Adviser in 1966, he wrote a revealing memorandum to Rusk and McNamara in which he recommended bombing POL (Petroleum and Oil Lines) targets in North Vietnam. Rostow based his recommendation on 'an experience in 1944 [bombing German POL targets] which may bear on the decision before us'. The 1944 bombings were a success and '[w]ith an understanding that simple analogies are dangerous, I nevertheless feel it is quite possible that the military effects of a systematic and sustained bombing of POL in North Vietnam may be more prompt and direct than conventional intelligence analysis would suggest' (cited in pp. 209–210). Rusk and McNamara are right. We all know how imprecise and dangerous analogies are but we go on using them all the time. In fact, in Rostow's case, his qualifications about their dangers notwithstanding, he was willing in the same breath, to override 'conventional intelligence' in favor of his analogy-based recommendation to bomb North Vietnamese POL sites. As Duffy himself notes,

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McNamara, for all his realization that analogies are false in logic, did not point out the logical inconsistencies of his boss and colleagues when they invoked them. Either he felt similarly spellbound like them, or he was resigned to the psychological hold that these analogies had on the President and colleagues like Rusk and Rostow. The following observation from McNamara's memoirs, neglected by Duffy, sums up my point: 'The reader may find it incomprehensible that Dean [Rusk] foresaw such dire consequences [World War III] from the fall of South Vietnam, *but I cannot overstate the impact our generation's experiences had on him (and, more or less on all of us). We had lived through appeasement at Munich; years of military service during World War II fighting aggression in Europe and Asia* . . . ' (1995: 195; italics added).

Duffy also takes me to task for mischaracterizing Ball's comparison of the French experience in 1954 and the US situation in 1965 as analogical reasoning. For Duffy, Ball's argument was not analogical because it was 'closely reasoned and carefully considered . . . ' (Duffy, 2001: 170). I agree that it was closely reasoned and carefully considered, but that does not mean that it was not analogical. As I defined it early in the book, reasoning by historical analogy involves making 'an inference that if two . . . events separated in time agree in one respect, then they may also agree in another' (p. 7). Ball argued that the French fought against the Vietminh in the 1950s and they lost; the United States, like the French, was facing the same enemy in the 1960s; therefore, like the French, the United States was likely to lose. McGeorge Bundy certainly saw this line of argument as analogical, as indicated by the title of the memorandum he wrote to refute it.[6] George Ball did not object to that characterization.

To arrive at his premonition that the United States would lose without reasoning by analogy (to the French experience), Ball would have to have a general theory about conditions under which US military interventions would fail. If he had such a theory, there would be no need to refer to the French experience in the extensive way he did, since the French episode, along with others, would be used to illustrate the absence of conditions necessary for success. Ball did not have such a general theory. His argument about the difficulty of winning was based on 'a review of the French experience': he devoted fifty lines of his nine-page memorandum to the French experience, arguing that the similarities of the situation confronting France in 1954 and the US in 1965 outweighed the differences. Ball argued that despite US perceptions of itself as saving the South Vietnamese from communism (in contrast to the French aim of reinstating colonialism), once US ground troops were dispatched, they would be construed by the Vietnamese and others as being like the French. The Vietnamese would fight, and defeat, the United States in the same way, and for the same reasons, that they defeated the French. The conclusion that the

[6] Memo, McGeorge Bundy to the President, 'France in Vietnam, 1954, and the US in Vietnam, 1965–A Useful Analogy? 30 June 1965, National Security Council History, Troop Deployment, National Security File, Lyndon Baines Johnson Library, Austin, Texas.

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United States could not win was inferred from the French experience, not a general theory, and that is why it was analogical reasoning.[7]

Where I agree with Duffy, however, is that Ball was prescient. More than anybody else, Ball realized that his analogical inferences were precisely that: inferences. In fact, he wanted to test it with 100,000 troops. Ball's awareness of the tentative nature of his guess is what elevates him, in my eyes, to the status of a truly formidable policymaker. More than most of his colleagues, Ball realized the contentiousness and speculative nature of his claim that the US could not win; more than all of them, Ball also acted like a social scientist – he suggested to the President, that he test his (Ball's) hypothesis by fighting with 100,000 troops for three months. If in this 'trial period' the US could not win, the US should look for a way to disengage. Subjecting one's analogical inferences to such empirical tests is exactly what those conscious of the logic pitfalls of analogical reasoning recommend (pp. 247–249). Politicians of course have great difficulty testing such hypotheses with human lives – but not subjecting the July deployment to Ball's three-month test merely meant sinking deeper into the Vietnam quagmire and increasing the eventual number of casualties.

Assumption 5

I think Duffy misreads me on the issue of actors' motivations. I was not interested in deciphering their 'true motivations', so there was no need for me to infer their motivations from the record. Whatever their motivations, and however mixed they might be, I assumed that first and foremost, the actors saw themselves as protectors of America's national interests and security. I believe this is a safe assumption to make because even the skeptics – those who question the analytic roles I attribute to analogies – are not saying that Lyndon Johnson, Dean Rusk, or McGeorge Bundy were pursuing their own selfish interests at the expense of America's security. The skeptics also see United States policymakers as acting to protect America's national interests, but they see the decision-makers as having conflicting notions of what those interests are (as in bureaucratic politics) or having to factor in domestic political considerations (such as protecting the Great Society) as they deliberate. I have no problems with these secondary or qualifying assumptions, because they are essential to the models they build to explain Vietnam decision-making. The test of how helpful these assumptions are is how well they explain the outcomes we are interested in.

My assumption of policymakers seeing themselves as the guardians of America's security leads me to the following 'model': When confronted with a situation such as Vietnam (in 1954 as well as in 1965), where a third world nation is at risk of turning communist, United States policymakers during the Cold War would ask: How does

[7] Memo, George Ball to the President, 'Keeping the Power of Decision in the South Viet-Nam Crisis', 18 June 1965, National Security Council History, Deployment of Troops, National Security File, Lyndon Baines Johnson Library, Austin, Texas.

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this impact on our national interests? Need we act? If not, what are the costs? If yes, what are the dangers?[8] What the international structure caused them to do was to ask these questions. The answers provided, in the case of Vietnam, depended heavily on the historical prisms through which they chose to view the unfolding situation. When analogies such as Korea and Munich were invoked, they suggested answers to these questions that favored intervention, though not on a massive scale. The underlying mechanism by which analogies influence policy choice is their being invoked, and once invoked, they provide answers to the above questions. Skeptics who assume systemic, bureaucratic, or domestic political motivations tell of different underlying mechanisms through which their preferred variable affects policy choice. As Duffy acknowledges, I contrast the explanatory powers of these different narratives to that of historical analogies in Chapter 7 of the book. Readers can judge for themselves whether my claim that my approach has more explanatory power is convincing.

What I find intriguing about Duffy's critique of my so-called assumptions is the extent to which he implies that they must reflect or capture reality. My assumptions about the decision-makers as cognitive misers and analogies having diagnostic capabilities are theoretical assumptions that simplify reality. By definition, such assumptions do not and cannot capture the whole reality. They are useful in building the framework that allowed me to tease out the underlying mechanism by which historical analogies affect foreign policy decision-making. Such theoretical assumptions, as Kenneth Waltz taught us long ago, are neither true nor false (1979: 10–12). The issue is whether they help us build models that can explain the things we want to explain. If my assumptions are off, the AE framework will not be able to shed much light on the selection and rejection of the Vietnam options.

Finally, although Duffy has chosen *Analogies at War* for sustained critical attention in the service of his larger argument about the importance of giving structure its due in the structure–agent debate, I believe it is vital to go beyond the book. Since the pioneering works of Stanley Hoffmann, Ernest May, Richard Neustadt, Robert Jervis, and Deborah Larson are already well known (pp. 7–8, notes 21–23), I shall briefly point to a few recent works that have advanced the 'learning from history' research program in theoretically elegant and methodologically sophisticated ways.[9] Among these is Dan Reiter's work on how small powers rely on the lessons of the last major war to decide whether neutrality or alliance best protects their national security. Reiter also found that systemic threat was a much less

[8] See Robert McNamara (1995: 101), for a very similar list of 'basic questions' that confronted the decision-makers on Vietnam. McNamara claims that Johnson inherited these questions but that no one came up with the correct answers. *Analogies at War* claimed that the historical analogies they invoked gave certain answers to these questions and these answers, correctly or incorrectly, predisposed them toward Option C′.

[9] Works by Jarosz and Nye (1993), Shimko (1994), Rose (1994), Williams (1996), Peterson (1997), Houghton (1998) also provide evidence for the importance of the lessons of history in foreign policy decision-making.

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powerful predictor of states' choices than the lessons of history (1996: 2–4, 203–207). Christopher Hemmer's *Which Lessons Matter* proceeds on the premise that previous works have been weak in analyzing why policymakers pick certain analogies and avoid others and he goes on to provide a model of how US decision-makers pick the lessons of history to diagnose and make policy choices. Hemmer's model explicitly factors in domestic analogies and he refines the argument that analogies have diagnostic roles by demonstrating that policymakers pick analogies 'based on the similarity between what is known about the current situation and the factors that were seen as causally important in driving the outcomes of previous events' (2000: 148). Finally, David Houghton's book on the lessons of history and the Iran hostage crisis finds that historical analogies to the Entebbe and Mogadishu rescue missions 'critically affected' the Carter administration's decision to mount a rescue operation. Like Hemmer, Houghton also seeks to explain why these analogies were so salient and he finds the answer in the availability and representativeness heuristics (p. 17; cf. *Analogies at War*, pp. 212–219). Houghton's analysis leads him to the conclusion that 'the analogies used . . . were not mere rhetorical flourishes designed to convince others of the desirability of various options after the fact . . . the vast majority of the analogies drawn were done so by individuals with personal experience of the event cited, and were not simply 'grabbed' indiscriminately from the history books for advocacy purposes alone' (Houghton 2001: 18).

Like the works of Hoffmann, May, Jervis, and Larson, these recent contributions – based on different cases across different time periods – provide strong corroboration for the argument that historical analogies have powerful causal influence on policy. Moreover, works that have explicitly pitted the analogical argument against that of system structure in explaining policy choices have found structure to have much less explanatory power than the lessons of history. Thus, while I am happy to defend the role I accorded to historical analogies in my work, it is necessary to emphasize that my arguments are consistent with the findings of past and recent works on the 'lessons of history' and 'policy' connection. Given that there exists a body of work that strongly supports the assumption that analogies have diagnostic and causal roles in foreign policy decision-making, the burden of (dis)proof shifts to those who remain skeptical.

5 Conclusion

'Men make history, but they do not make it under circumstances chosen by themselves . . .' (Marx and Engels, 1978: 595). This famous line from Marx has charmed many a social scientist with a philosophical bent. The essential philosophical difference between Duffy and me, I think, is that for all the talk about agent and structure being mutually constitutive, he believes much more strongly in the second half of Marx's observation, while I am a firm believer in the first half. The reason why I tend to privilege the first half is because my reading of history suggests that even when placed in circumstances not of their choosing, men and women retain

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meaningful choices. There is no better illustration of this than the two critical decisions made by two different Presidents regarding Vietnam. Both Eisenhower and Johnson stood watch over America's security in international circumstances not of their own choosing: a bipolar world in which rivalry and competition with Russia–China was the order of the day. Eisenhower chose not to intervene in 1954 while Johnson decided to in 1965. Same international political structure but diametrically opposite choices. One saved many lives; the other expended millions. If that is not agency trumping structure, what is?

Duffy is of course entitled to emphasize the later part of Marx's observation: 'they do not make it [history] *under circumstances chosen by themselves, but under circumstances directly encountered, given and transmitted from the past*' (Marx and Engels 1978: 595, italics added). As I have indicated, the fact that men find themselves in circumstances not of their own choosing does not preclude meaningful choice. *Analogies at War* also dealt with the latter half of Marx's observation, 'the circumstances directly encountered, given and transmitted from the past', by examining the historical analogies invoked by the decision-makers. Examining their historical analogies is one approach to deciphering the circumstances given and transmitted from the past. The result of my examination was that there was a multiplicity of ways in which the Vietnam decision-makers reconstructed the past to make it relevant to Vietnam, from George Ball's Dien Bien Phu analogy to Dean Rusk's fixation on the lessons of the 1930s to Lyndon Johnson's being haunted by the ghost of MacArthur. Moreover, the creative though ultimately costly, way in which Johnson combined the Munich and Korean analogies to arrive at Option C′ suggest an act of agency that no structural interpretation of the forces of the past can capture.

In the end, what I find most puzzling about Duffy's account of the Vietnam decision, coming as it does from one of the most thoughtful critical constructivists, is how it resolves the tension between structure and agency. If I had resolved it on the side of agency, Duffy's seems intent on resolving it on the side of structure. I would have thought that a major contribution of constructivism is to bring us back to an analysis of agency, which is one of the things I attempted in *Analogies at War*. Or I would have expected Duffy to explore the interstices of structure and agency and show how mutually constitutive they are in ways that I may have underemphasized in my work. Still, I hope I have responded in the friendliest and most respectful spirit, for such discussions, I believe, do further our understanding of constructivism, analogical reasoning, as well as Vietnam decision-making during the 1960s.

I believe our exchange has succeeded in surfacing some pointers on how the agent-structure debate may move forward. First, there is utility in being clear about one's point of departure and being able to justify it. Is structure or agency being privileged, or is it their mutual constitution that is being assumed? Although *Analogies at War* was not set up to deal with the agent-structure problem, its point of departure is undoubtedly on the side of human agency, since it dealt with the cognitive beliefs of decision-makers. In one of the most perceptive contributions to

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the agent-structure debate, Roxanne Lynn Doty points out that even the structurationist solution to the problem has to allow for the fact that 'agents could act otherwise' and this implies that 'there remains a realm of human subjectivity and intentionality that escapes the dictates and determinative forces of structure' (1997: 373). *Analogies at War* provided evidence of agents who thought (George Ball) or who acted otherwise (Eisenhower), and therefore questioned the existence or power of structures that compelled Johnson to choose Option C′. Once that 'realm of human subjectivity' is opened, it becomes possible to introduce the perceived 'lessons of history' that Johnson and his advisers deemed relevant to assessing the Vietnam problem. Analysts with strong structural leanings who are uncomfortable with my point of departure may legitimately ask that I address the structural factors at work and indicate their relationship to my agents. *Analogies at War* did that when it contrasted the policy of containment with analogies as explanations for the 1965 choices (see pp. 57–58, 71–73, 95–96, 190–197, 204). I concluded that 'containment is best understood as an overarching constant in postwar period. Given containment, we can always expect American policymakers to be concerned about communist power gains anywhere' (p. 95). But that is about it; whether the United States will actually act depends on the interpretations of the stakes and dangers by the policymakers.

Second, the above exchange also demonstrates the importance of being specific about what one means by structure and agency. On the meaning of agency, Duffy and I are of one mind. We differ markedly on what we mean by structure and what should be included under that rubric. *Analogies at War* focused on international structure because it was the most important rival hypothesis, and also because recent formulations of the concept (by Waltz) made its hypothesized causal/constraining powers testable. The other rival hypotheses, such as bureaucratic politics and domestic political constraints may have superficial structural attributes, but, as I have tried to show above, it is their process, perceptual, and personality attributes that seem to be doing much of the 'causing'. Given this situation, it becomes imperative to resist roping all domestic political variables under the rubric of 'structure': structure becomes a catch all or residual category whose explanatory power derives from smuggling process and personality variables through the backdoor.

Last but not least, the above exchange also suggests that future advances in the agent–structure debate may be best achieved via empirically grounded analysis. Theoretical speculation and revision remain necessary, but they are more likely to capture the interest of international relations scholars if they speak to important empirical problems and puzzles. Duffy performs a useful service by anchoring his contribution to the debate in an analysis of the Vietnam deliberations; a recent essay by Maja Zehfuss (2001) on constructivism and identity is also extremely suggestive in this regard. If we can agree on what we mean by agents and what structure includes or excludes in the Vietnam context, then our disagreement about how to characterize the agent–structure relationship and their relative policy influence are in principle

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resolvable. We might produce different stories about the forces that led to the decisions of 1965; perhaps one might privilege the agent, the other their mutual constitution (with the emphasis on structure). The beauty of such theoretically informed narratives is that readers can check them against the historical and documentary record and decide for themselves which account is more illuminating.

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