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Constructing National Interests

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While the concept of 'the national interest' has long been central to theories of international politics, its analytical usefulness has also been seriously challenged. I argue that, to be useful in accounting for state action, this concept should be reconceptualized in constructivist terms. I begin with a brief discussion of the conventional, realist notion of the national interest, lodging two criticisms against it. Then, starting from Wendt's recent constructivist interventions, I provide a constructivist reconceptualization of 'the national interest'. I argue that national interests are produced in the construction, through the dual mechanisms of articulation and interpellation, of representations of international politics. This process of national interest construction is illustrated with a sketch of the production of the US national interest during the so-called 'Cuban missile crisis'.

The concept of 'the national interest' has long been central to theories of international politics because of its role in the explanation of state action.[1] Nonetheless, its analytical usefulness has been as often contested as defended. On one side of this dispute stand critics who argue that the notion of the national interest, while seductive, also has grave flaws. According to Steve Smith, for example, the popularity of the concept is due not to its analytical power, which is suspect, but to the fact that 'it can be used to mean whatever the user wishes' and to its 'commonsensical appeal' (1986: 23–6). Others have pronounced the concept to be 'oversimplified and wrongheadedly dogmatic' (Hoffmann, 1978: 133) and denounced it as 'a weapon that saps democratic processes' because it is often used to stifle debate over foreign policy decisions and state actions (in Clinton, 1986: 495). For a variety of reasons, in short, some scholars have dismissed 'the national interest' as a moribund analytical concept with 'little future' (Rosenau, 1968: 39).[2] On the other side of this dispute are those who insist

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that the notion of 'the national interest' should remain central to explanations of state action and thus of international politics. Most prominent among this latter group of scholars are realists, who follow Hans Morgenthau in his assertion that 'the national interest' is explicitly 'the main signpost that helps political realism to find its way through the landscape of international politics' (1978: 5).

In this article, I side with those who have argued for the continued salience of 'the national interest' to accounts of state action, and hence to theories of international politics. The national interest is important to explanations of international politics, and so requires adequate theorization, quite simply because it is the language of state action — in the making of foreign policy, the 'internal language of decision is the language of national interest' (Hollis and Smith, 1990: 166). As even one rather strong critic of 'the national interest' has admitted,

> . . . [political] actors have found . . . the concept useful both as a way of thinking about their goals and as a means of mobilizing support for them. That is, not only do political actors tend to perceive and discuss their goals in terms of the national interest, but they are also inclined to claim that their goals *are* the national interest, a claim that often arouses the support necessary to move toward a realization of the goals. Consequently, even though it has lost some of its early appeal as an analytical tool, the national interest enjoys considerable favor as a basis for action and has won a prominent place in the dialogue of public affairs. (Rosenau, 1968: 34, emphasis in the original)

In other words, 'the national interest' is important to international politics in two ways. First, it is through the concept of the national interest that policy-makers understand the goals to be pursued by a state's foreign policy. It thus in practice forms the basis for state action. Second, it functions as a rhetorical device through which the legitimacy of and political support for state action are generated. 'The national interest' thus has considerable power in that it helps to constitute as important and to legitimize the actions taken by states. As Henry Kissinger recently put it — 'When you're asking Americans to die, you have to be able to explain it in terms of the national interest' (quoted in Kelly, 1995: 12). Because 'the national interest' in practice plays these vital roles in the making of foreign policy, and so in determining state actions, it clearly should occupy a prominent place in accounts of international politics.

But how should 'the national interest' be conceptualized? In this article I argue that it should be understood as a social construction. Drawing on constructivist assumptions, I argue that before state officials can act for the state, they need to engage in a process of interpretation in order to understand both what situation the state faces and how they should respond

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to it. This process of interpretation, in turn, presupposes a language shared, at least, by those state officials involved in determining state action and by the audience for whom state action must be legitimate. This shared language is that of 'the national interest'. The content of 'the national interest', I then argue, is produced in, or emerges out of, a process of representation through which state officials (among others) make sense of their international context. The 'national interest', that is, is constructed, is created as a meaningful object, out of shared meanings through which the world, particularly the international system and the place of the state in it, is understood.

In the next section I briefly discuss the conventional realist conception of the national interest, lodging two criticisms against it. The bulk of the paper then offers a constructivist retheorization of the national interest that overcomes the problems that plague this conventional understanding. In the third section I illustrate this reconceptualization of the national interest with a brief case study of the construction of US national interests in the Cuban missile crisis. I conclude the argument by discussing three important implications of this constructivist retheorization of 'the national interest'.

Problems with Realism

With realists, I agree that 'the national interest' is crucial to our understanding of international politics. In both the classic and the structural or 'neo-' varieties of realism, the national interest — or what is sometimes called 'state interest' or 'state preference' — carries a considerable explanatory burden. However, the way in which realists have conceptualized the national interest is inadequate. In this section I briefly discuss the realist conception and then point to two of its shortcomings in order to provide the starting point for a constructivist rethinking of the national interest.

On realist accounts, international politics differ from domestic politics primarily in their anarchic character. The absence of a supra-state 'Leviathan' places states in inevitable and perpetual competition — the so-called 'security dilemma' (e.g. Herz, 1951). As a result, states must necessarily be concerned with their survival. The general content of the national interest is thus determined deductively; it is inferred from the anarchic, self-help character of the international system.[3] For Morgenthau this meant that the fundamental national interest of any state was to 'protect [its] physical, political, and cultural identity against encroachments by other nations' (1951: 972). More specific threats to states are determined by their relative power in the international system. That is, the particular threats facing a state or challenging its national interest are (or should be) 'calculated according to the situation in which the state finds itself', specifically with

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reference to the structure of the system — the distribution of capabilities or the number of great powers. 'To say that a country acts in its national interest', Waltz argued, 'means that, having examined its security requirements, it tries to meet them' (1979: 134). Power and wealth supply the means necessary for states to survive, to meet their security requirements, and thus to continue to compete in a system in which other states are necessarily either actual or potential threats. Decision-makers and policy analysts are therefore advised realistically to assess the distribution of power; they should overcome their 'aversion to seeing problems of international politics as they are' (Morgenthau, 1951: 7) in order objectively to assess their national interests in light of the distribution of power. Every state, that is, must pursue its national interest 'defined in terms of power' (Morgenthau, 1952: 964) because this is the surest road to security and survival.

On this realist argument, then, the 'national interest' clearly plays a pivotal role in accounts of international politics. Through the need for security, it connects the nature of the international system, specifically anarchy and the distribution of power, with the policies and actions of states. There are, however, two problems with this realist notion of the national interest that are important for my argument. First, its content — defined as the security and survival of the state — is so general as to be indeterminate. Second and more importantly for my argument, this notion of the national interest rests on a questionable empiricist epistemology which ignores the centrality of processes of interpretation.

As many critics have noted, the deductive determination of national interests prevalent in realism has led to a conception of those interests which is 'too broad, too general, too vague, too all-inclusive' to explain state action (Sonderman, 1987: 60). The reason is simple — political realism 'deals with the perennial conditions that attend the conduct of statecraft, not with the specific conditions that confront the statesman' (Tucker, 1961: 463).[4] It tells us that states pursue, or should pursue, security and, as a means to that end, power and wealth, but it does not tell us what exactly that means that states will, or should, do because 'the dictates of power are never clearly manifest' (Rosenau, 1968: 37). As a result, realist analyses of the international system cannot 'convincingly' be related 'to specific choices in the world of action' (Rothstein, 1972: 353). The traditional realist conception of the national interest therefore cannot help us to explain the adoption by a state of particular policies over alternative means for achieving security. That is, it cannot tell us about the historically contingent content of the national interest as identified and pursued by state officials.[5] 'The injunction to "pursue the national interest" ', it seems, 'has no substantive content' (Rosenberg, 1990: 291)[6] and so is not very helpful for understanding the concrete actions of states in the international system.

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More importantly, the realist 'national interest' rests upon the assumption that an independent reality is directly accessible both to statesmen and to analysts. It is assumed that the distribution of power in the system can 'realistically' or objectively be assessed and, more importantly, that threats to a state's national interests can accurately be recognized. Morgenthau could therefore urge statesmen to overcome their 'aversion to seeing problems of international politics *as they are*' (1951: 7, emphasis added).[7] The difficulty, of course, is that objects and events do not present themselves unproblematically to the observer, however 'realistic' he or she may be. Determining what the particular situation faced by a state is, what if any threat a state faces, and what the 'correct' national interest with respect to that situation or threat is, always requires interpretation. Rather than being self-evident, that is, threats, and states' national interests in the face of threats, are fundamentally matters of interpretation. For example, US decision-makers' statements to the contrary notwithstanding, the Soviet deployment of nuclear missiles in Cuba in 1962 was not self-evidently a threat to the US. To see it as a threat to US national interests — instead of, say, as the defense of Cuba — required significant interpretative labor. (I return to this example later.) The realist approach to international politics, with its assumption that threats are self-evident, cannot explain why particular situations are understood to constitute threats to the state. It therefore also cannot explain why certain actions, ostensibly taken in response to these threats, are 'in the national interest' in the first place.

The Construction of National Interests

Alexander Wendt's recent constructivist interventions suggest a way to begin to overcome the difficulties that plague the conventional, realist conception of the national interest. Wendt has convincingly argued, against realist orthodoxy, that 'self-interested', security-oriented conceptions of state interest are not produced by or deducible from the systemic condition of anarchy: instead, 'anarchy is what states make of it' (1992: 395).[8] This is the case because both the interests of states and the identities on which those interests depend rest not solely upon the structure of the system but also upon the 'collective meanings that constitute the structures which organize' state action. What is needed to explain state interests and thus state action, Wendt reasons, is a theory that accounts for the 'intersubjectively constituted structure of identities and interests' of states (1992: 401).

Constructivism provides an approach within which to generate such a theory. It does so, specifically, on the basis of the fundamental principle 'that people act towards objects, including other actors, on the basis of the meanings that the objects have for them' (1992: 396–7), meanings that are

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intersubjectively constituted. Adopting a constructivist approach, that is, allows us to examine the intersubjectively constituted identities and interests of states and the intersubjective meanings out of which they are produced.

Wendt's constructivist argument goes some way towards reconceptualizing the national interest as the product of intersubjective processes of meaning creation. However, his analysis does not itself provide an adequate account of national interests for at least one important reason. Wendt's anthropomorphized understanding of the state continues to treat states, in typical realist fashion, as unitary actors with a single identity and a single set of interests (1992: 397, note 21).[9] The state itself is treated as a 'black box', the internal workings of which are irrelevant to the construction of state identities and interests. In Wendt's argument, the meanings which objects and actions have for these unitary states, and the identities and interests of states themselves, are therefore understood to be formed through *inter-state* interaction (1992: 401). But the political and historical context in which national interests are fashioned, the intersubjective meanings which define state identities and interests, cannot arbitrarily be restricted to those meanings produced only in inter-state relations. After all, states are only analytically, but not in fact, unitary actors. The meanings which objects, events and actions have for 'states' are necessarily the meanings they have for those individuals who act in the name of the state.[10] And these state officials do not approach international politics with a blank slate on to which meanings are written only as a result of interactions among states. Instead, they approach international politics with an already quite comprehensive and elaborate appreciation of the world, of the international system and of the place of their state within it. This appreciation, in turn, is necessarily rooted in meanings already produced, at least in part, in domestic political and cultural contexts. After all, as Gramsci argued, 'civil society is the sphere in which the struggle to define the categories of common sense takes place' (1971a: 112).[11]

In contrast to the realist conception of 'national interests' as objects that have merely to be observed or discovered, then, my argument is that national interests are social constructions created as meaningful objects out of the intersubjective and culturally established meanings with which the world, particularly the international system and the place of the state in it, is understood. More specifically, national interests emerge out of the representations — or, to use more customary terminology, out of situation descriptions and problem definitions — through which state officials and others make sense of the world around them.[12]

This claim immediately raises three questions — constructed by whom? why? and how? As to the first — the pre-eminent site for the construction of the national interest is, not surprisingly, the institution or bundle of practices

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that we know as the state. Because identifying and securing the national interest is, in the modern international system, considered to be quintessentially the business of the state, those individuals who inhabit offices in the state play a special role in constructing the meaning of 'the national interest'. As Morgenthau argued, statesmen are the representatives of the state who 'speak for it, negotiate treaties in its name, define its objectives, choose the means of achieving them, and try to maintain, increase, and demonstrate power' (1978: 108). Exactly which state institutions and offices are involved in national interest construction will of course vary across states, but it is perhaps safe to say that the national interest is produced primarily, although not exclusively, by foreign policy decision-makers.[13]

As to the 'why?' — the answer is quite simply that for 'the state' to act, 'it' must have some understanding of its surroundings and some specification of its goals. In order to make sense of international relations, state officials necessarily create broad representations, both for themselves and for others, of the nature of the international system and the place of their state in that system. And to enable 'the state' to make a decision or to act in a particular situation, state officials must describe to themselves the nature of the specific situation they face. After all, people 'act in terms of their interpretation of, and intentions towards, their external conditions, rather than being governed directly by them' (Fay, 1975: 85). In the case of the Cuban missile crisis discussed below, for instance, US officials functioned with a broad representation of the international system as one of 'Cold War'. Within it, a narrower situation description, 'the Cuban problem', defined the particular relations that obtained between the US and Cuba and thus the narrower context of the missile crisis.[14] Even more specifically, the problem faced by the US in October 1962 had then to be interpreted as the Cuban missile *crisis*, specifically, rather than, say, as a Cuban missile *nuisance* which, while annoying, demanded no US action.

Finally, and most importantly, as to the 'how?' — the construction of national interests, I contend, works as follows. Drawing on a wide array of already available cultural and linguistic resources, state officials create representations which serve, first, to populate the world with a variety of objects, including both the self (i.e. the state in question) and others. These others include, prominently, other states, but may encompass as well the decision-makers of other states, non-state actors, social movements, domestic publics, and the like. Each of these objects is simultaneously given an identity; it is endowed with characteristics which are sometimes precise and certain, at other times vague and unsettled. It might be endowed with leadership; it might be aggressive and hostile or peaceful and non-threatening; it might be potentially but not actually dangerous; it might be

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weak, strong or simply annoying. In the orthodox post-war US representation of international politics, for example, the world was populated by a very particular United States, one understood to have a special 'global leadership'[15] role, as well as, among others, by aggressive totalitarians, duplicitous communists, puppets of the Kremlin, unstable underdeveloped states, friendly dictators, freedom-loving allies and uncivilized terrorists.

Second, such representations posit well-defined relations among these diverse objects. These relations often appear in the form of quasi-causal arguments such as the 'Munich analogy' and the 'domino theory'.[16] I call them quasi-causal rather than causal arguments because the relations and causal chains they posit may or may not be empirically valid on their own terms. Their importance lies not in their accuracy, but in their provision of 'warranting conditions' which 'make a particular action or belief more "reasonable", "justified", or "appropriate", given the desires, beliefs, and expectations of the actors' (Fay, 1975: 85).[17] In providing warranting conditions, they help to specify, among other things, which objects are to be protected and which constitute threats. The domino theory, for example, establishes that 'when a small state falls victim to communism, surrounding small states will follow'. Throughout the 1960s, the nature of 'dominos' and the (putative) progressive logic of this 'theory' were invoked to provide warrants for the US to become, and then to remain, involved in the anti-colonial and civil war in Vietnam. The situation was understood to be such that, had the (constructed, not to say mythical) object 'South Vietnam' succumbed to 'Communist aggression' from (the equally constructed) 'North Vietnam', the surrounding dominos — Burma, Thailand, Indonesia, Formosa, the Philippines, New Zealand, Australia and finally Japan — would ultimately and necessarily have tumbled as well.[18] It was therefore reasonable and appropriate for the US, with its identity as the 'leader' in the global battle with 'Communism', to commit its troops to prevent the 'Communist take-over' of the 'independent' state of 'South Vietnam'.

And third, in providing a vision of the world of international relations — in populating that world with objects and in supplying quasi-causal or warranting arguments — these representations have *already* defined the national interest. Because 'identities are the basis of interests' (Wendt, 1992: 398), the interests of the state are already entailed within the representations in which the identities of and relations among the relevant actors or objects are established. Interests are entailed in these representations because they (seem to) follow from the specific identities of the objects represented and the relations posited to obtain among them. Once a situation has been described, that is, the national interest has already been determined — it *emerges* out of the representations of identities and relationships constructed by state officials. To continue the example begun above, during the Cold

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War, once a situation had successfully been represented as one in which one or more aggressive totalitarian states were threatening the collapse of a domino, US national interests had already been determined. The US, with its identity as the leader of the free world, had an obligation — to itself, to its allies and to its moral convictions — to act to forestall the toppling of that domino.

In short, the representations created by state officials make clear both to those officials themselves and to others who and what 'we' are, who and what 'our enemies' are, in what ways 'we' are threatened by 'them', and how 'we' might best deal with those 'threats'. In the case of post-war US foreign policy, for example, the Cold War representation of international politics constructed a reality in which 'we' (the US) were the 'winners' of World War II, in which the United States therefore 'bore the burden of leadership' in the 'free world' and was obliged to 'defend' both 'democracy' and 'freedom'. It was a reality in which the US was threatened — psychologically, politically and militarily — by the 'expansion' of and 'aggression' from, among others, a 'totalitarian' Soviet Union and the 'international Communist movement' it sponsored. As a result, it was a reality in which the US had a national interest in 'maintaining a position of strength' in order that it fulfill its national interest in 'containing' this deadly threat to its very 'way of life'. In this way, the orthodox US representation of international politics, the prevailing description of the Cold War situation in which the US found itself, fleshed out the skeletal, abstract conception of the national interest in survival and power posited by realists by providing a rather more detailed picture of who was to be protected, from what threat, and by what means. National interests, then, are social constructions that emerge out of a ubiquitous and unavoidable process of representation through which meaning is created. In representing for themselves and others the situation in which the state finds itself, state officials have *already* constructed the national interest.[19]

In order to clarify the type of argument being made here, it is worth mentioning that, in examining the representations through which national interests are constructed, one is asking a particular type of question. Specifically, one is addressing a 'how-possible question' which asks '*how* meanings are produced and attached to various social subjects/objects, thus constituting particular interpretive dispositions which create certain possibilities and preclude others' (Doty, 1993: 298). 'How-possible' questions are different from the conventional questions of international relations and foreign policy analysis since these ask '*why* particular decisions resulting in specific courses of action were made'. These 'why questions', as Doty explains, are incomplete. In particular, they,

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> . . . generally take as unproblematic the *possibility* that a particular decision or course of action could happen. They presuppose a particular subjectivity (i.e. a mode of being), a background of social/discursive practices and meanings which make possible the practices as well as the social actors themselves. (1993: 298, emphasis in the original; see also Wendt, 1987: 362–5)

In examining the social construction of the national interest of a state, one is thus asking not *why* a particular course of action was chosen but *how* it was possible, and indeed common-sensible, for the officials of the state to understand its national interest in one particular way, rather than in some other way.

Representations and the Construction of National Interests

To understand just how national interests are constructed requires that we examine in more detail the representations out of which national interests emerge. These representations are themselves constructed in a social process with two analytically distinct dimensions usefully labeled articulation and interpellation. I discuss each of these dimensions in turn and then illustrate how they work by examining some salient aspects of the construction of the US national interest in the so-called 'Cuban missile crisis'.

The term 'articulation'[20] refers to the process through which meaning is produced out of extant cultural raw materials or linguistic resources.[21] Meaning is created and temporarily fixed by establishing chains of connotations among different linguistic elements. In this way, different terms and ideas come to connote one another and thereby to be welded into associative chains (Hall, 1985: 104). Most of these terms and ideas — what I am calling linguistic elements or linguistic resources — are ones already extant within a culture. That is, they already make sense within a particular society.[22] In the post-war US, for example, these linguistic elements included nouns such as 'terrorist' and 'puppets', adjectives like 'totalitarian', 'expansionary' and 'defensive', metaphors like 'the market' or 'dominos' and analogies to 'Munich' or 'Pearl Harbor'. The process of articulation is one in which such extant linguistic resources are combined to produce contingent and contextually specific representations of the world. The language of the national interest furnishes the rules according to which these articulations are forged. In representations of Cold War US foreign policy, for instance, the object 'totalitarianism' was persistently articulated to, and thus came to connote, 'expansion' and 'aggression'. As a result, when 'totalitarianism' was invoked, it simultaneously carried with it (among other characteristics) the meanings of 'expansion' and 'aggression'. And when these linguistic elements were further articulated to notions such as 'puppets of the Kremlin' and 'international Communism', they came to constitute a partial repre-

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sentation of the international system. In the process of articulation, then, particular phenomena, whether objects, events or social relations, are represented in specific ways and given particular meanings on which action is then based. With their successful repeated articulation, these linguistic elements come to seem as though they are inherently or necessarily connected and the meanings they produce come to seem natural, to be an accurate description of reality.

Despite this apparent naturalness, however, the connections or chains of association established between such linguistic elements are in fact conventional — they are socially constructed and historically contingent rather than logically or structurally necessary. The contingent character of such associations is captured well in the term 'articulation' itself. As Stuart Hall has said,

> . . . the term has a nice double meaning because 'articulate' means to utter, to speak forth, to be articulate. It carries that sense of language-ing, of expressing, etc. But we also speak of an 'articulated' lorry (truck): a lorry where the front (cab) and back (trailer) can, but need not necessarily, be connected to one another. The two parts are connected to each other, but through a specific linkage, that can be broken. (1986b: 53)

The non-necessary character of any particular articulation means, of course, that these connections can be contested. This contestability has two important consequences. First, it means that specific articulations are never simply produced once and for all. Instead, to prevent them from coming unglued, or from being forcibly pried apart, they have always to be reproduced and sometimes quite vigorously. Second, it means that any articulation can be uncoupled and the resulting component parts rearticulated in different, and perhaps even novel, ways. Put simply, alternative representations of objects and social relations are always possible. US Cold War representations have been the target of such attempts at rearticulation. For instance, dissenters from US orthodoxy, both within and outside of the US, have persistently sought to disarticulate 'the US' from 'freedom' and instead to couple 'the US' with 'imperialism' and 'aggression'.[23] To the extent that such a rearticulation is successful (i.e. persuasive), the result is a very different description of the international system, one in which the US does not exercise leadership in the global defense of freedom but instead exercises its self-interest in the imperial or neo-imperial expansion of its influence. In short, then, articulations are contingent and can be forged in different ways. The actual meanings that objects like 'the US' and 'the Soviet Union' have for people, the actual articulations or chains of connotation which define them, are rooted in part in the linguistic practices of particular

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historical and social contexts. They are the conventional product of continuous and contested social processes of meaning creation.[24]

The reason that articulations must continuously be reproduced and that linguistic elements can be disarticulated and then rearticulated in different ways is that objects, events, actions or social relations 'can be differently represented and construed'. This is so 'because language by its nature is not fixed in a one-to-one relation to its referent but is "multi-referential": it can construct different meanings around what is apparently the same social relation or phenomenon' (Hall, 1986a: 36). Objects, actions, events and relations, that is, do not simply present themselves to us in an unmediated or self-evident fashion. Instead, their meaning for us is created; it is produced by articulating different linguistic elements so as to create and render persuasive one particular description or set of associations and not another.

This, of course, raises an important question often asked of constructivist analyses; namely, what 'degree of freedom' exists in the forging of articulations and, more concretely, what 'degree of freedom' do state officials enjoy in constructing narratives about international relations and thus in constructing the national interest. Unfortunately, there is no simple or abstract answer to this question because it is an empirical one that requires a response grounded in extensive empirical analyses. Such analyses would demand an elaborate investigation of, among other things, the range of interpretive possibilities permitted by the interacting discourses or intersubjective structures of meaning available within a particular situation at a particular historical juncture.[25] The larger question, of course, concerns the 'reality constraints' that face both state officials and analysts in the construction of their representations of international politics and the national interest. Recognizing the social construction of national interests does not deny that such constraints exist. Criticizing the orthodox US construction of its national interest in the so-called 'Cuban missile crisis', for example, does not mean that one has to deny that missiles were indeed placed by the Soviets in Cuba. Indeed, any interpretation of 'the missile crisis', to be plausible, must recognize and account for these missiles. In this sense, the missiles function as a 'reality constraint' on the construction of plausible narratives. But this constraint is quite loose and may allow a wide range of quite dramatically different representations, as I show below. Clearly, then, a constructivist argument does not entail the more radical assertion that there is no 'external reality' outside of human consciousness if by 'external reality' is meant physical reality. What is at issue in the claim that national interests are socially constructed is *meaning* and its social effects, not physical existence. As Purvis and Hunt have put it, 'Of course earthquakes occur, and their occurrence is independent of consciousness;

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but it is their construction in discourse that determines whether they are "movements of tectonic plates" or manifestations of "the wrath of the gods" ' (1993: 492).

The articulation of linguistic elements into connotative chains is one part of the process of fixing intersubjective meaning and so is one part of the process of constructing national interests. The other part of this constructive process involves the interpellation of subjects.[26] Interpellation refers to a dual process whereby identities or subject-positions are created and concrete individuals are 'hailed' into (Althusser, 1971: 174) or interpellated by them. That is, interpellation means, first, that specific identities are created when social relations are depicted. Different representations of the world entail different identities, which in turn carry with them different ways of functioning in the world, are located within different power relations and make possible different interests. Second, concrete individuals come to identify with these subject-positions and so with the representations in which they appear. Once they identify with these subject-positions, the representations make sense to them and the power relations and interests entailed in them are naturalized. As a result, the representations appear to be common sense, to reflect 'the way the world really is'.[27]

In discussions of a state's national interest, a variety of subject-positions are created, including those of various states — both 'our state' and 'their state', or 'us' and 'them' (in fact, typically a variety of 'thems') — and of non-state actors. The central subject-position created in any representation of international relations or any discussion of 'the national interest' is, of course, that of the relevant state itself. Within US discussions of the national interest, for example, it is the 'United States' that occupies the central subject-position. Most fundamentally, such representations establish the existence of 'the United States' *as* a subject. Out of a political and legal abstraction designating a territory, a population and a set of governing principles and apparatuses is created an anthropomorphization, an apparently acting subject with motives and interests.[28] Moreover, these representations establish that the US is a particular *kind* of subject, with a specific identity and with the interests attendant on that identity.[29] As a result of the interpellation of this subject-position, 'the US' becomes the central object of discussions of US foreign policy and national interests — it, rather than, say, individual American citizens, is the primary object which the national interest is to secure. At the same time, 'the US' becomes the central subject of such discussions; it is not only the object to be protected but the subject charged with doing the protecting. The interests articulated in discussions of US 'national interests' are the interests of the subject 'the United States'; the warrants for action generated through these representations justify and legitimize actions taken by that subject in defense of its own interests.[30]

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In addition to highlighting the creation of subject-positions, the notion of interpellation simultaneously points to the fact that concrete individuals recognize themselves in these representations of the world (e.g. Eagleton, 1991). In the language of the national interest, the task of interpellation, of generating recognition and identification, is in part accomplished by representing the relevant state, 'the US' for instance, not only as *a* subject, but as a subject which represents an 'imagined' national community (Anderson, 1991). Representations of 'the US' and its national interest, that is, draw on a 'representation of belonging' (Tomlinson, 1991: 81). For most Americans, the subject-position 'the US' at the center of orthodox US representations of international politics brings with it a sense of belonging to an American national community. Through this representation, aided by state officials' use of 'we' in describing the policies and actions of the US state, individuals are interpellated into the language of the national interest as members of the imagined American community. The success of the interpellations forged is clear, in the case of the US, from the ubiquitous use of the term 'we' by Americans in discussing actions taken by the US state. It is striking how often Americans identify with the foreign policies and actions of 'the US', asserting quite unselfconsciously that '*We* had to show the Communists that they couldn't interfere in Vietnam', that '*We* should retaliate against the Japanese for their unfair trade practices' and that '*We* kicked Saddam's butt'.[31] Part of the common-sense status and hence the legitimacy of post-war US national interests has resulted precisely from the often unquestioned identification of individual Americans with 'the US', the imagined subject of the US national interest. This process of interpellation thus helps to explain why pronouncements by US state officials are often unhesitatingly accepted by much of the American public.

The process of interpellation is facilitated by the fact that representations of international affairs generally contain multiple subject-positions into which concrete individuals can be interpellated. Claims about the US national interest, for example, make sense to most Americans because they are interpellated into a variety of already familiar subject-positions. As noted above, they are hailed into the position of 'the US', into the imagined national community of Americanness. In addition, they are simultaneously hailed into other familiar subject-positions, including such comfortable identities as the 'freedom-loving democrat' who opposes communism, the 'concerned American patriot' who believes that 'we' should protect Americans abroad, and the 'civilized Westerner' who is appalled by the excesses of Middle Eastern terrorism. These identities help to make sense of the claims entailed in discussions of US national interests. For example, since 'we' Americans are 'freedom-loving democrats' and 'civilized Westerners', it

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makes sense that 'our' US interventions abroad are designed to advance liberty and freedom, not to promote self-interest or tyranny.

As this discussion begins to indicate, the dual processes of articulation and interpellation are of central importance in the construction of 'the national interest'. Through these processes, visions of the international system — including descriptions of one's own state, of other states and of threats — are created. These representations, in turn, *already entail* national interests. An example will hopefully make this rather abstract argument more concrete. To illustrate the way in which articulations create conventional representations that simultaneously interpellate subject-positions and bring with them particular national interests, I examine the US construction of its national interest during the so-called 'Cuban missile crisis'.

Constructing US National Interests in the 'Cuban Missile Crisis'[32]

The Orthodox US Story

Within the US, the nature of the so-called 'Cuban missile crisis' is treated as self-evident — the situation faced by the US in October of 1962 was, and still is, unproblematically understood to have been the threat created by the Soviet deployment of offensive, nuclear-capable missiles in Cuba. This deployment was seen as a clear threat to the US because it was an instance of secretive, duplicitous and dangerous aggression by a totalitarian Soviet Union against the US in particular and, more generally, against the Western hemisphere[33] over which the US, through the Monroe Doctrine, had long ago established protective custody. The US national interest was just as clear — the Soviet missiles had to be removed from Cuba. As Douglas Dillon, then Secretary of the Treasury, has since explained, 'we had agreed at the very first [ExComm] meeting' on October 15 'that the one thing we were all committed to was that the missiles must be removed'. Furthermore, he has commented

> While *everyone* at our first ExComm meeting, specifically including the President, *agreed* that the emplacement of Soviet MRBMs and IRBMs in Cuba was totally unacceptable and that they had to be gotten out one way or another, I do not recall any specific discussion then or at later meetings of the ExComm as to just why they were unacceptable. *It just seemed obvious to all of us.* (quoted in Blight and Welch, 1989: 49, emphasis added)

As obvious as this understanding was to US state officials, however, both this representation of the situation and the accompanying US national interest were in fact social constructions; as I argue below in more detail, they could have been, and actually have been, constructed quite differently. In the US,

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nonetheless, the 'Cuban missile crisis' was clearly represented, and continues typically to be understood,[34] as a case of aggression perpetrated by the Soviet Union against the US and the Western hemisphere under its protection. Despite the modifier 'Cuban', the central threatening object in this 'crisis' was, of course, the Soviet Union, defined, as seemed natural and 'obvious' both to US state officials and to much of the US public, as aggressive, secretive and duplicitous.

Soviet aggression featured prominently in official US representations of the 'crisis' of October 1962. In his briefing of the Mexican Foreign Minister on 22 October, Douglas Dillon characterized the Soviet missile deployment as an 'invasion of the hemisphere by a foreign power' (quoted in Abel, 1966: 117). In his speech to the Organization of American States (OAS), Dean Rusk called it 'aggressive intervention' into the Western hemisphere (1962: 721). Similarly, in the United Nations, Adlai Stevenson insisted that Cuba was an 'issue' because Castro 'has aided and abetted an invasion of this hemisphere' (1962: 730). And in the secret ExComm meeting of 27 October, Rusk maintained that 'The Cuban thing is . . . an intrusion into the Western Hemisphere' (in Blight, 1987/88: 38). That the Soviet missile deployment was aggression (rather than, say, the defense of Cuba) was, on this representation, not in doubt.

But the problem faced by the US in October 1962 was even worse. Not only was the Soviet Union acting 'aggressively' by 'invading' the Western hemisphere with its missile deployment, but it had done so in a manner that betrayed the secretiveness characteristic of 'totalitarianism'. In fact, the secrecy of the Soviet weapons deployment, rather than simply the installation of the missiles, sometimes appears to have been the major cause for the crisis. In his speech on 22 October, for instance, Kennedy insisted that 'this *secret*, swift, and extraordinary buildup of Communist missiles . . . this sudden, *clandestine* decision to station strategic weapons for the first time outside of Soviet soil' was 'a deliberately provocative and unjustified change in the status quo' (1962: 5–6, emphasis added). Highlighting the 'cloak of secrecy' (Kennedy, 1962: 5; Rusk, 1962: 720) under which the Soviet missile deployment proceeded was an intentional strategy adopted by US state officials. As Sorenson has since explained, Kennedy

> . . . worried that the world would say, 'What's the difference between Soviet missiles ninety miles away from Florida and American missiles right next door to the Soviet Union in Turkey?' It was precisely for that reason that there was so much emphasis on the *sudden* and *deceptive* deployment. Look at that speech [of 22 October] very carefully; we relied very heavily on words such as those to make sure the world didn't focus on the question of symmetry. We felt that helped to justify the American response. (quoted in Blight and Welch, 1989: 246, emphasis in the original)

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The outrage produced by the secrecy with which the Soviet missiles were being deployed was rivaled only by the affront of Soviet duplicity. In his missile crisis speech, Kennedy stressed this duplicity, arguing that the Soviet deployment 'contradicts the repeated assurances of Soviet spokesmen, both publicly and privately delivered, that the arms buildup would retain its original defensive character and that the Soviet Union had no need or desire to station strategic missiles on the territory of any other nation' (1962: 3). In his speech to the OAS, Rusk emphasized Soviet deception as well, charging that the Cubans and the Soviet Union were engaged in a 'partnership in deceit'. 'The Communist regime in Cuba', he asserted,

> with the complicity of its Soviet mentors *has deceived the hemisphere, under the cloak of secrecy* and with loud protestations of arming in self-defense, in allowing an extracontinental power, bent on destruction of the national independence and democratic aspirations of all our peoples, to establish an offensive military foothold in the heart of the hemisphere. (1962: 720, emphasis added)

On the US view, clearly, the missiles were 'offensive' in nature[35] and any claims to the contrary were Soviet 'deception'.[36]

According to this representation, then, the Soviet missiles in Cuba were offensive weapons, deployed secretively and with duplicity by an aggressive totalitarian state for the purpose of threatening the US and the Western hemisphere. The US national interest entailed in this representation was unambiguous and quite obvious to US state officials. As General Maxwell Taylor later explained, 'the President announced his objective within the hour of seeing the photographs of the missiles: it was to get the missiles out of Cuba' (quoted in Blight and Welch, 1989: 77).

The Puzzle

The question I want to ask is, how was this 'obvious' understanding of the situation, and the equally 'obvious' US national interest, arrived at?[37] After all, the situation could have been represented quite differently. The official Soviet account of the 'Caribbean Crisis' (e.g. Gromyko, 1971; Khrushchev, 1970) and the official Cuban story of the 'October crisis' (e.g. Dorticós, 1962; Castro, 1992), for example, provide alternatives to the orthodox US representation. In both cases the Soviet missile deployment was understood as a defensive measure designed to protect Cuba from anticipated US aggression. Moreover, one can imagine other narratives that would present these events, and the attendant US national interest, in ways quite different from the official narratives of any of the participating states. Yet in the US, a single representation — that of the 'Cuban missile crisis' — has 'assumed genuinely mythic significance' (Blight et al., 1987: 170). To highlight the

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constructed character of the 'Cuban missile crisis' and thus to make it clear that the US representation of that crisis does not simply reflect 'the facts', I briefly present two alternative accounts of the events of October 1962. The first alternative, which I will call the 'defensive' narrative, is an amalgam of some of the salient aspects of the stories of the 'Caribbean' and 'October' crises; the second, which I will call the 'strategic' narrative, is a partially hypothetical account constructed to illustrate the possibility of yet other representations of these events.

The stories of the 'Caribbean' and 'October' crises depict an altogether different crisis than does the US account of the 'Cuban missile crisis'.[38] This 'defensive' narrative highlights the defense of Cuba against US aggression. In this alternative account, the crisis has its genesis in a long history of US hostility toward and aggression against Cuba. The 'neocolonialist methods of imperialism' (Castro, 1981: 87) pursued by the US in the Western hemisphere and towards Cuba in particular were challenged by the Cuban Revolution of 1959 and the model of a socialist system that it presented to the other states of Latin America. As a result, the US began almost immediately to pursue aggressive policies against Cuba that were 'organized with a view to forcibly changing its internal system' (Khrushchev, 1961: 9). In 1960, for example, the US effectively cut off Cuba's supply of oil, its main source of energy, by refusing to allow American-owned refineries to process Soviet crude oil. In January of 1961 Kennedy severed diplomatic relations with Cuba. In March he eliminated the Cuban sugar quota, threatening the highly specialized and dependent Cuban economy with complete collapse. Then, in April of 1961, the US orchestrated the infamous counter-revolutionary invasion of Cuba at the Bay of Pigs. This attack was designed to trigger an anti-Castro revolt which, the US hoped, would lead to the overthrow of the legitimate revolutionary government of Cuba. Both the Soviet and the Cuban governments were well aware of the clandestine plans and activities of the US government, pursued under the label 'Operation Mongoose',[39] to overthrow the Castro government and so were convinced that 'the Americans would never reconcile themselves to Castro's Cuba' (Khrushchev, 1970: 545). As both Soviet and Cuban representatives pointed out in October of 1962 and have continued to emphasize ever since, the Soviet missile deployment was straightforwardly an attempt by the Soviet Union to protect its ally, Cuba, from this anticipated US aggression. As Khrushchev explained it later, 'We had to think of some way of confronting America with more than words. We had to establish a tangible and effective deterrent to American interference in the Caribbean. But what exactly? The logical answer was missiles.' The missiles were installed secretly because 'if the United States discovered the missiles were there after they were already poised and ready to strike, the Americans would think twice before trying to

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liquidate our installations by military means' (1970: 546–7). Contrary to US propaganda, this secrecy did not indicate that the Soviet Union intended to use the missiles aggressively. Indeed,

> Only a fool would think we wanted to invade the American continent from Cuba. Our goal was precisely the opposite: we wanted to keep the Americans from invading Cuba, and, to that end, we wanted to make them think twice by confronting them with our missiles. (Khrushchev, 1970: 549)

As Castro explained, the missiles were a logical solution because they could protect Cuba; their presence in Cuba would have 'insured us against the danger of a local war, of something similar to what the United States is doing in North Vietnam, a war that, for a small country, can mean almost as much destruction and death as that of a nuclear war' (quoted in Lockwood, 1967: 201). On this view, then, the 'crisis' of October 1962 was caused by US rather than Soviet aggression. The Soviet missile deployment in Cuba was designed to protect Cuba, and especially the sovereignty and territorial integrity of the revolutionary Cuban state, from imminent US attack.[40] As Castro explained, Cuba 'flatly' rejected

> . . . the presumption by the United States to determine what actions we are entitled to take within our country, what kinds of arms we consider appropriate for our defense, what relations we are to have with the USSR, and what international policy steps we are entitled to take, within the rules and laws governing relations between peoples of the world and the principles governing the United Nations, in order to guarantee our own security and sovereignty. ('Text of UN–Cuban notes', 1962)

From within this representation, of course, the national interest that emerges for the US is quite different from the one constructed in the story of the 'Cuban missile crisis'. On this view, the US had neither the right nor any reason to seek the removal of the Soviet missiles from Cuba.

A third, partially hypothetical, representation might provide yet another picture of the events of October 1962. One can imagine a 'strategic' narrative which focuses on the strategic balance of power between the US and the Soviet Union and interprets it, in 1961 and 1962, as tipped strongly in favor of the United States. In fact, in February of 1961 it had become public knowledge that the much touted 'missile gap' was a fraud. Defense studies conducted by the Kennedy administration had concluded that 'there is no evidence that Russia has embarked upon a "crash" program of building intercontinental ballistic missiles or that any "missile gap" exists today' (Norris, 1961). Instead of lagging behind the Soviet Union, the US enjoyed unrivaled nuclear superiority. In exposing the 'missile gap' as a myth and thus deflating Soviet nuclear strategic pretensions, the US administration

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had in effect issued a direct challenge to Soviet cold war credibility (Kahn and Long, 1972). On this view, then, the Soviet Union suddenly found itself in a very public position of strategic insecurity which, in turn, created a global situation that was both humiliating for the Soviet Union and unstable and potentially dangerous for both of the superpowers. In this context, the stationing of Soviet missiles in Cuba could have been understood in one of at least two ways, neither of which implicated US national interests and neither of which therefore required a US response, let alone a response which took the world to the nuclear brink.

First, the Soviet missile deployment might have been understood as re-establishing greater strategic parity, at least psychologically, between the two superpowers and so as producing a balance of power which was more stable and more likely to be conducive to systemic peace. As Dean Rusk argued at the October 16 ExComm meeting,

> . . . one thing Khrushchev might have in mind is that . . . he knows that we have a substantial nuclear superiority, but he also knows that we don't really live in fear of his nuclear weapons to the extent that . . . he has to live under fear of ours. . . . [W]e have nuclear weapons nearby, in Turkey and places like that. (Trachtenberg, 1985: 177)

Khrushchev later put it in similar terms, arguing that the missiles were to,

> . . . have equalized what the West likes to call 'the balance of power'. The Americans had surrounded our country with military bases and threatened us with nuclear weapons, now they would learn just what it feels like to have enemy missiles pointing at you; we'd be doing nothing more than giving them a little of their own medicine. (1970: 547)

What some analysts have dismissed as a 'superficial symmetry' (Welch and Blight, 1987/88: 13) between US extra-territorial missile deployments and the Soviet missiles in Cuba might, that is, have been viewed as the creation of a real, if primarily psychological, symmetry between the two nuclear states and a partial rectification of the strategic imbalance signaled by US superiority. On this view, US national interests were not threatened because the outcome was a more stable strategic relationship.

Second, one might have argued, as did then-US Secretary of Defense Robert McNamara, that the Soviet missiles did not change the strategic balance in any significant way at all.[41] At one point during the ExComm discussions of 16 October 1962, for example, McGeorge Bundy asked, 'What is the strategic impact on the position of the United States of MRBMs in Cuba? How gravely does this change the strategic balance?' McNamara responded — 'Mac, I asked the chiefs that this afternoon. And they said substantially. My own personal view is, not at all' (Trachtenberg, 1985:

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184). More recently, McNamara has forcefully reiterated this point of view, arguing that 'As far as I am concerned, it made no difference.' In fact, he argued, 'What difference would the extra 40 [Soviet missiles] have made to the overall balance? If my memory serves me correctly, we had some five thousand strategic nuclear warheads as against their three hundred. Can anyone seriously tell me that their having 340 would have made any difference? The military balance wasn't changed. I didn't believe it then, and I don't believe it now' (quoted in Blight and Welch, 1989: 23). According to McGeorge Bundy, 'most of us [the members of ExComm] agreed with McNamara's summary judgement at the outset, that the Cuban missiles did not change the strategic balance' (1988: 452). On this view, the Soviet missile deployment might have been understood, strategically, as irrelevant to US national interests since US nuclear and strategic superiority remained intact. As a result, according to this representation, the US had no reason to seek the removal of the missiles from Cuba. Its national interests simply were not at stake in these events of October 1962.

The orthodox US representation of the 'Cuban missile crisis' was not, then, self-evident. What has come to be understood as quite obviously the 'facts of the matter' is, instead, a particular, and an interested, construction. The story of the 'Cuban missile crisis' and the existence but marginalization of possible alternative narratives thus bring to the forefront an important puzzle — How was it possible for the events of October 1962 to be represented in the US in this one, and not another, way? It is my contention that creating the representation of what became known as 'the Cuban missile crisis' required significant constructive labor. What follows is a brief description of a few of the salient aspects of that labor.

Constructing the Orthodox US Story

The orthodox US understanding of the 'Cuban missile crisis' and the attendant US national interest hinged on the invocation and articulation of a variety of objects and quasi-causal arguments and on the attendant interpellation of many individuals, Americans and others, into the resulting representation. In particular, the 'missile crisis' was constructed out of articulations that defined the Soviet Union, the US, Latin America, the 'Western hemisphere', Cuba, the Castro government and 'the Cuban people' as particular kinds of objects. It depended as well on various quasi-causal arguments, including the pervasive invocation of the 'Munich' syndrome and the dangers of appeasement, of falling dominos and of Trojan horses. Although all of these, and other, linguistic resources were important to the construction of the 'Cuban missile crisis', three examples will have to suffice by way of illustration. The first example demonstrates the articulation

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of the Soviet Union as a particular kind of object — a hostile and expansionary totalitarian state. The second demonstrates the articulation of the United States as a defensive state that does not pursue aggression. And the third demonstrates the role played by the quasi-causal argument entailed in the Munich analogy. All of these building blocks of the 'Cuban missile crisis' and the attendant US national interest draw on a set of linguistic resources already pervasive within American culture and, especially, within the orthodox US narrative of the cold war.[42]

One of the many ways in which the Soviet Union came to be understood as aggressive, secretive and duplicitous was through the notion of 'Red Fascism', the characteristics of which were well known and widely accepted in the US long before October 1962. As Thomas Paterson has argued, what was important in this construction was 'that many Americans took the unhistorical and illogical view that Russia in the 1940s would behave as Germany had in the previous decade because of the supposedly immutable characteristics of totalitarians' (1988: 5). In this construction, the linguistic element 'Red', which had already come to designate 'Communism', was articulated to the element 'Fascism', thus defining the Soviet Union as a 'Communist' version of fascist 'totalitarianism'. That all totalitarian regimes, whether fascist or communist, were secretive, duplicitous and aggressive was considered to have been amply demonstrated by the Nazi–Soviet Non-aggression Pact of 1939. This agreement was invoked to demonstrate that the Soviet leadership, like its Nazi counterpart, would do anything to further its aggressive and expansionist aims, including entering into a treacherous treaty with its putative mortal enemy and secretly conspiring, with that enemy, to dismember a hapless victim. As Kennan explained in his memoirs, Stalin had concluded the Nonaggression Pact in order to pursue the traditional Russian program of 'territorial and political expansion' (1967: 519–20). Through the construction 'Red Fascism', then, the Soviet Union was already endowed with the characteristics of secrecy, duplicity and aggression. In 1961 Kennedy drew on this familiar understanding, arguing that 'totalitarian states' typically pursue their aggressive goals through secrecy and duplicity. 'Our adversaries', he asserted,

> use the *secrecy* of the *totalitarian state* and the discipline to *mask* the effective use of guerilla forces *secretly* undermining independent states, and *to hide* a wide international network of agents and activities which threaten the fabric of democratic government everywhere in the world. And their single-minded effort to destroy freedom is strengthened by the discipline, *the secrecy*, and the swiftness with which an efficient *despotism* can move. (1961a: 367, emphasis added)

Long before the events of October 1962, the Soviet Union had already been

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constructed as a state which would use, and in fact relied extensively on, secrecy and duplicity in the pursuit of expansion. In a 1987 interview, Paul Nitze indicated the importance of this understanding to the construction of the 'Cuban missile crisis':

> I was frankly annoyed at Gromyko having *outrageously lied about this*. It was *a question of the character of the opposition, so typical of the way in which the Soviets handle themselves*; I thought that to knuckle under to this kind of thing was unacceptable. (quoted in Blight and Welch, 1989: 141, emphasis added)

In the construction of the 'Cuban missile crisis', invoking this understanding foregrounded *Soviet* aggression. Since the character of totalitarian states was already well established, it seemed plausible, and indeed quite obvious, to assume that the Soviet deployment of missiles in Cuba was evidence of these same characteristics. At the same time, this understanding rendered it unthinkable that the Soviet Union, 'by nature' an aggressive, secretive and duplicitous totalitarian state, could be acting to defend Cuba, a small and vulnerable state. 'Totalitarians', after all, do not protect the weak; rather, they enslave and exploit them. This particular representation, that is, marginalized the alternative representation of the events of October 1962 depicted in the 'defensive' narrative and embedded in the stories of the 'Caribbean' and the 'October' crises.

This construction of the Soviet Union helped not only to define the character of the Soviet threat but, by emphasizing the vast difference between 'totalitarian' states and 'democracies', simultaneously helped to define the US and to marginalize the possibility, highlighted in the 'defensive' narrative, that the Soviet Union was acting to protect Cuba from imminent *US* aggression. The not-so-subtle contrast constituted the US, already understood within US Cold War culture to be the 'democratic' opposite of its 'totalitarian' adversary, in more detail as a subject that was neither secretive nor treacherous, and certainly not in the pursuit of aggressive, expansionary goals. The distinction between the two types of objects involved was explicit in Adlai Stevenson's 23 October speech to the UN. In that speech, Stevenson drew on a series of oppositions that defined the basic character of the adversaries: the 'pluralistic world' was contrasted to the 'monolithic world', the 'world of the UN Charter' to the 'world of Communist conformity', and 'moderation and peaceful competition' to 'aggression' (1962: 729). The characteristics of pluralism, moderation and peaceful competition were naturally articulated to the 'democratic' states, exemplified by the US, while the 'world of Communism', exemplified by the Soviet Union, was defined as aggressive, as monolithic and as attempting to promote global conformity. On this view, as Theodore Sorenson has said, the 'history of Soviet intentions toward smaller nations *was very different*

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from our own' (1965: 683, emphasis added). In this representation, then, the Soviet Union was understood necessarily to be aggressive while the US, in contrast, was necessarily peaceful.

During the 'missile crisis', the US was further distinguished from the treacherous and secretive Soviet totalitarians through descriptions of the US as a state that would only pursue 'open covenants of peace, openly arrived at' (Wilson, 1918: 333). As Kennedy said in his speech of 22 October:

> *Our own strategic missiles have never been transferred to any other nation under a cloak of secrecy and deception*; and our history, unlike that of the Soviets since the end of World War II, demonstrates that we have no desire to dominate or conquer any other nation or impose our system upon its people. (1962: 5, emphasis added)

Stevenson reiterated this point, arguing that 'the North Atlantic Treaty Organization, *without concealment* or *deceit*, as a consequence of agreements freely negotiated and *publicly declared*, placed intermediate-range ballistic missiles in the NATO area' in response to the threat posed to NATO by Soviet missiles (1962: 729, emphasis added). This emphasis on the 'secrecy' surrounding the Soviet missile deployment in Cuba and the contrasting 'openness' of US extraterritorial missile deployments helped to obscure the symmetry between the two. It was part of an attempt to generate support for US policy in the US, among US allies and in world opinion in general by pre-empting the thorny issue of the 'superficial symmetry' between the Soviet missiles in Cuba and US missile deployments abroad, particularly those in Turkey. As the US State Department explained, 'the distinction between Soviet missiles in Cuba and US missiles in NATO countries' hinged on the fact that,

> . . . our missiles abroad were established under *open and announced agreements with sovereign states.* They serve to strengthen the independence of those countries. Soviet missiles were placed in Cuba *in secret, without any public statements and without an alliance.* Soviet bases in Cuba symbolize that country's subjection to alien control and domination; they were established without the knowledge of the Cuban people and were manned by Soviet personnel. (US Department of State, 1962: 7–8, emphasis added)

The Soviet missiles in Cuba, because they both belonged to and had been secretly and treacherously installed in 'totalitarian' states, were necessarily understood as 'offensive'. This image helped to preclude an understanding either of the missiles themselves as 'defensive' weapons and of the Soviet missile deployment as a 'defensive' act or of the deployment as an attempt by the Soviet Union to rectify the severe strategic imbalance under which they suffered. Since the Soviet Union was an 'aggressive totalitarian' state and the US was a state which acts 'openly', an understanding of the Soviet missile

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deployment either as the defense of Cuba against US aggression, such as was provided in the 'defensive' narrative of the 'Caribbean' and 'October' crises, or as an attempt to rectify the strategic balance, such as might have been provided in a 'strategic' narrative, were pushed beyond the realm of the intelligible.

This construction of the US drew as well on the self-styled image of the US as the 'leader' of the Western hemisphere and the 'free world' and as the global champion of 'freedom' and 'democracy'. The pivotal position occupied by the US in the international system, and its attendant 'responsibilities' and 'obligations' — in short, its national interests — were taken for granted within US orthodoxy. They were encapsulated in the notion of 'US world leadership' in which the object 'the US' was successfully and firmly articulated to the characteristic 'world leadership'. This representation of the US place in the post-war world had already been forcefully expounded by Henry R. Luce in 1941. In *The American Century*, Luce promoted a global US role both during and after World War II, insisting that Americans should 'accept wholeheartedly our [US] duty and our [US] opportunity as the most powerful and vital nation in the world and in consequence . . . exert upon the world the full impact of our [US] influence, for such purposes as we [the US] see fit and by such means as we [the US] see fit' (1941: 22–3). Shortly after the conclusion of World War II, Truman asserted privately that 'the Russians would soon be put into their places' and that 'the United States would then take the lead in running the world in the way that the world ought to be run' (quoted in W.A. Williams, 1962: 240). Publicly Truman declared in late 1945 that 'Whether we like it or not, we must all recognize that the victory which we have won has placed upon the American people the continuing burden of responsibility for world leadership' (1945: 549). The authors of NSC 68 claimed similarly that in the aftermath of World War II 'the absence of order among nations' had become 'less and less tolerable', from which they concluded that 'this fact imposes upon us [the US], in our own interests, the responsibility of world leadership' (US National Security Council, 1950: 390).

Although these were 'obligations which no one asked us [the US] to assume' (Steel, 1970: 7), such leadership responsibilities were persistently portrayed as thrust upon the United States by its victory in the Second World War.[43] The leadership role of the US was understood to rest, in part, upon its achievements in defeating the Axis powers in World War II. For example, in defending the US presence in Southeast Asia in the 1960s, President Johnson argued that,

> . . . there are those who wonder why we [the US] have a responsibility there. Well, we [the US] have it there for the same reason that we [the US] have a

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> responsibility for the defense of Europe. World War II was fought in both Europe and Asia, and when it ended we [the US] found ourselves with continued responsibility for the defense of freedom. (1965: 395)

The assumption of US victory has been prominent in American analyses of World War II and of the post-war era. For example, Gaddis asserts that 'collaboration with the Soviet Mephistopheles *helped the United States and Great Britain achieve victory over their enemies* in a remarkably short time and with surprisingly few casualties, given the extent of the fighting involved' (1982: 3, emphasis added). That World War II was a US victory has typically been taken for granted, although sometimes, as in Gaddis's case, Soviet 'Mephistophelean' assistance is grudgingly acknowledged. A central assumption of post-war representations of the United States was therefore that the US had 'won' World War II and this assumption carried part of the weight of claims to legitimacy for US 'world leadership'.

This view can, however, be contested and its contestability highlights its constructed nature. The notion that the US 'won' World War II has been disputed, in particular by Soviet writers (e.g. Marushkin, 1970; Sivachev and Yakovlev, 1979). In their view, not only was the Soviet role in World War II decisive, but the United States suffered the 'surprisingly few casualties' mentioned by Gaddis precisely due to the enormous effort of, and the enormous casualties suffered by, the Soviet population. As is well known but generally ignored, the brunt of allied fighting and the overwhelming bulk of allied casualties in World War II were borne not by the US, nor by the soon-to-be 'free world', but by the Soviet Union. As one scholar has suggested, we would do well to recall the 'strategic arithmetic of 1944–5' — there were 80 German divisions along the eastern front where the Red Army was fighting, and only 20 on the western front where the American army was fighting (Halliday, 1990: 9). On this interpretation, the Soviet Union might well be credited with victory in World War II. Should the Soviet Union thus have claimed 'world leadership'? For most Americans, of course, certainly not. Yet, within the US, the articulation of 'world leadership' to 'the US' has been justified as the natural consequence of its having emerged victorious from the battle with fascism.

This representation of US 'world leadership' formed a leitmotif for post-war US national interests. The US responsibility for world leadership provided a warrant for the claim that the US had the legitimate duty to defend and promote freedom and to establish a stable world order. This particular construction of the US also had at least three important consequences for the US national interest, and thus for US actions, in the 'Cuban missile crisis'. First, it legitimized, and indeed mandated, an activist US response to the missile deployment — pursuing the removal of the

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missiles through whatever means were deemed necessary — because it was part of the 'leadership' role of the US to protect the free world, and especially the Western hemisphere, from totalitarian aggression. Second, it marginalized other understandings of this 'crisis', for example as an overreaction by the US either to a Soviet attempt to protect Cuba from further US aggression or to a Soviet attempt to begin to redress their embarrassing strategic inferiority. After all, 'we' who are democratic and open, who 'stand for freedom' and for 'the independence and equality of all nations' (Kennedy, 1961b: 396, 397), do not engage in aggression against our smaller, weaker neighbors. The orthodox US representation of the 'missile crisis' thus precluded any understanding of that crisis as brought on either by US aggression against Cuba or by the US attempt to maintain its already immense strategic superiority.

Third, the construction of US 'world leadership' made sense of and legitimized a perilous policy of nuclear confrontation. Through the construction of world leadership as a task thrust upon a US that was democratic, moderate and peaceful, and that had 'intentions towards smaller nations' that were very different from those of its totalitarian adversary, a particular US identity was created and individuals were interpellated into it. On this representation, it seemed sensible to view the situation in October 1962 as one in which 'we' (peaceful, democratic and moderate Americans) were risking all to defend the Cuban people, and ultimately the rest of the Western hemisphere, from totalitarian aggression. The brinkmanship engaged in by the US was therefore neither nuclear aggression, as the defensive narrative might have it, nor an attempt to maintain US strategic superiority, as the strategic narrative might insist. Rather, this brinkmanship was forced upon 'us', who are otherwise peaceful and moderate, by the aggressive actions of an ever-expanding totalitarian foe. The construction of a particular 'we', then, helped to make common sense of the national interest and the particular policies pursued by US state officials in the 'missile crisis'.

The representation of the 'Cuban missile crisis' and of US national interests hinged on more than these articulations of the Soviet Union and the US. They were also constructed and made sensible with the aid of the seemingly ever-present 'Munich analogy'. Like the notion of Red Fascism, the Munich analogy drew on the putative similarities among all totalitarian states. On this particular quasi-causal argument, the missiles could not be tolerated, quite simply, because a policy of inaction by the US would constitute 'appeasement' of an aggressive totalitarian adversary.

In the postwar US, the Munich analogy came to provide a prominent quasi-causal argument warranting immediate and decisive measures to oppose totalitarian aggression. This analogy entails the argument that any

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aggressive step, however small, taken by a totalitarian enemy will, in the absence of resistance, be followed by further aggression. This subsequent aggression will thus undermine the credibility of the US, which is pledged to stop rather than appease such aggression. This decreased credibility, in turn, will lead to the inevitable escalation of aggressive actions by the adversary. As Sorenson argued in his discussion of the 'missile crisis', 'Such a step [installing Soviet missiles in Cuba], if accepted, would be followed by more' (1965: 683).[44] When the aggression escalates, the danger to the US and the free world will eventually become so great that they will be forced, in the interest of their own preservation, to respond. By then, however, the magnitude of the threat will have increased significantly and the resulting war will be all the more ferocious. Better, therefore, to respond with force rather than weakness, and sooner rather than later. Better, that is, to fight than to appease.

Not unexpectedly, the Munich analogy was repeatedly invoked during the 'missile crisis'. For example, Kennedy argued in his speech on 22 October that the Soviet deployment 'cannot be accepted by this country' because 'the 1930s taught us [the US] a clear lesson: Aggressive conduct, if allowed to go unchecked and unchallenged, ultimately leads to war' (1962: 5–6). On this argument, it was not possible for the US to tolerate the Soviet missile deployment in Cuba. Such a policy would have been interpreted by the adversary as weakness. It would therefore have undermined US credibility, which in turn would have prompted further Soviet aggression in the Western hemisphere, creating an even more dangerous situation to which the US would be forced to respond in the future. As a result of this logic of escalation, the US was compelled to act promptly and forcefully. In part through the articulation of 'Munich' and the dangers of 'appeasement' to any US decision to ignore or tolerate the missiles in Cuba, any such alternative understanding, whether based on the defensive narrative, a strategic narrative or some other representation of these events, was rendered infeasible and the US national interest in forcing the removal of the missiles from Cuba was both constructed and legitimized.

Conclusion: Common Sense and 'the Real'

In conclusion, I want briefly to discuss three implications of a constructivist retheorization of the national interest. First, standard discussions of legitimation in analyses of international politics treat legitimation as a process separate and distinct from the determination of national interests. Perhaps the classic argument to this effect was made by E.H. Carr. In his realist critique of 'utopianism', he asserts that 'politics are not (as the utopian

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pretends) a function of ethics, but ethics of politics' (1964: 64). By this he meant, as he later explained, that the realist is,

> . . . enabled to demonstrate that the intellectual theories and ethical standards of utopianism, far from being the expression of absolute and *a priori* principles, are historically conditioned, being both products of circumstances and interests and weapons framed for the furtherance of interests.

'Thought', he went on to argue, is relative to 'the interests and circumstances of the thinker' (1964: 68, 69; see also Morgenthau, 1978: 92). In other words, 'thought' — or ethics, theories or rhetoric — is both produced by interests and used to justify the pursuit of those interests. Whether such 'thought' is produced cynically, with state officials aware of the difference between their rhetoric and the interests underlying their actions, or sincerely, with state officials believing in their own rhetoric, the argument remains one in which rhetoric mediates between 'real' state interests, already given by the structure of the international system, and the actions taken by states. In contrast, on the argument that I am making here, the construction of legitimacy is, from the outset, an inextricable part of the process of national interest construction. National interests are not formulated, or deduced from the structure of the international system, and then endowed with legitimacy; instead, their legitimacy is conferred in the process of their construction. Creating representations of particular situations, which entail particular national interests, involves the articulation of linguistic elements and the interpellation of individuals into subject-positions that *already* make sense. The production of national interests is thus simultaneously the creation of consent.[45]

Second, in this process of construction, a particular understanding of the national interest comes to be common sense. By common sense I mean what Antonio Gramsci called the 'diffuse and unco-ordinated features of a generic mode of thought' (1971b: 33, note) or what Stuart Hall has referred to as 'categories of practical consciousness' (1986a: 30). Social constructions become common sense when they have successfully defined the relationship of particular representations to reality as one of correspondence. That is, they are successful and become common sense to the extent that they are treated as if they neutrally or transparently reflected reality. In this way, social constructions are reified or naturalized and both their constructed nature and their particular social origins are obscured. The creation of common sense is thus 'the moment of extreme ideological closure' (Hall, 1985: 105) which sets limits on the possible and 'becomes the horizon of the taken-for-granted: What the world is and how it works, for all practical purposes' (Hall, 1988: 44). It is in part through the dual process of articulation and interpellation that the naturalness, the common sense character, of particular

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representations, and the exclusion of other representations, is effected. Articulations provide the raw material of common sense by linking together diverse linguistic elements into representations of the world. The process of interpellation contributes to the creation of common sense because it hails individuals into subject-positions from which those representations make sense.

Third, the empiricist character of realist conceptions of the national interest is not accidental but is in fact integral to the production of 'common sense'. The creation of common sense occurs, that is, because representations of the world that are constructed are treated as if they were directly observable and natural. In essence, the creation of common sense depends upon the explicit invocation of an empiricist epistemology — and in particular of a correspondence theory of language and meaning in which words and concepts point unproblematically to their ostensible empirical referents. By authoritatively defining the 'real', dominant constructions of the national interest remove from critical analysis and political debate what are in fact particular, interested interpretations, thus endowing those particular representations with 'common sense' and 'reality'. During a considerable part of the post-war era, the equation of the common sense understanding of the US national interest with 'the real', a rhetorical strategy duplicated by realism and its assumption of given national interests, was nightly endorsed by Walter Cronkite in his famous signature line at the end of the CBS Evening News. He concluded each program with the words 'And that's the way it is' — what he should have said was 'And that's the way it's been constructed.'

Notes

1. An earlier version of this article was delivered at the 1993 Annual Meeting of the American Political Science Association, The Washington Hilton, 2–5 September 1993. I would like to thank Sanjoy Banerjee, Jean-Marc Blanchard, Bud Duvall, Jim Mahoney, Nicholas Onuf, Dan Reiter, Diana Saco, Martin Sampson, Ann Tickner, Alex Wendt, the members of the International Relations Colloquium at the University of Minnesota, the anonymous reviewers at the *European Journal of International Relations* and especially Mark Laffey for comments on various earlier versions of this argument.
2. For a recent survey of criticisms of the concept, see Clinton (1994: Chapters 2 and 4).
3. More recently it has been argued that there are 'two faces of state action', one international and one domestic, and that additional state interests should be deduced from the location of the state in domestic society (Mastanduno et al., 1989: 461). While this analysis adds state interests related to the 'second image' to the traditional realist model, these interests are still treated as given and as

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deducible from structures external to the state, rather than as socially constructed.

4. This limitation was, of course, touted as an advantage by Waltz, who argued that an 'elegant' systemic theory of international politics will explain 'what pressures are exerted and what possibilities are posed by systems of different structure', but cannot, and should not strive to, explain 'just how, and how effectively, the units of a system [i.e. states] will respond to those pressures and possibilities' (1979: 71).
5. At least two recent literatures might be thought to provide a more substantive account of national interests. The first addresses the role of 'ideas' (e.g. Goldstein, 1993; Goldstein and Keohane, 1993) and the second addresses the role of 'epistemic communities' (e.g. Haas, 1992) in the making of foreign policy. While both of these literatures provide a progressive problem shift within realist theory by tackling the problem of policy indeterminacy, they do not themselves address the question of the national interest. Instead, they consider the question of policy alternatives *within* the confines of a single national interest without providing any information on the origins of those interests themselves.
6. To see that two realists can come to quite dramatically opposed conclusions about the national interest, one needs only to examine Hans Morgenthau's (1969: 129) and Henry Kissinger's (1969: 130) conflicting prescriptions concerning US involvement in Vietnam.
7. A variation on this problem also undermines the otherwise useful discussion of the national interest by Clinton (1994). Despite his welcome emphasis on argumentation and 'good reasons', Clinton grounds his analysis in an objective notion of the 'common good' which particular national interests approximate more or less well (Chapter 3, especially pp. 51–5).
8. Another useful demonstration of the inability to deduce state interests and actions from system structure can be found in Haggard (1991: 406–10).
9. It is to avoid the pervasive anthropomorphization of the state that I use the more traditional term 'national interest' rather than the currently fashionable 'state interest'. Anthropomorphizing 'the state' helps to obscure, for example, the importance of processes located primarily within domestic society in the construction of national interests, of state action and thus of outcomes of international politics. Of course, the term 'national interest' also brings with it unwanted baggage, specifically the ideas that what is in the interests of 'the state' is also in the interests of some 'nation' and that there is a single interest which can be attributed to all members of a national community. By using the term 'national interest', I do not mean to endorse either of these connotations.
10. Furthermore, once one recognizes that interests and identities are constructed, as Wendt does, there is no theoretical reason to assume that the process of construction occurs only, or even most importantly, at the interstate level. Unless one makes a prior, substantive commitment to a state-centric analysis, it makes more sense to assume that this constructive process occurs in many places,

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including in the domestic context from which the linguistic and cultural resources of most state officials are drawn.

11. These claims are not meant to reproduce the traditional distinction between 'unit-level' or 'domestic politics' and 'system-level' or 'international politics' as alternative sources or loci of explanation. I would want, with others (e.g. Walker, 1993), to reject these as distinct 'levels of analysis' and instead to understand the distinction itself as a discursive strategy that allocates power and helps to construct a particular (realist) world. My critique of Wendt therefore does not imply that the national interest is 'really' to be explained with reference to 'domestic' rather than to 'systemic' factors.
12. And it is not just the content of interests, national or otherwise, that are constructed. The very notion that 'interest' motivates action and so should be referred to in explanations of behavior and social outcomes is itself a relative novelty. It is with liberalism and the rise of capitalism that 'interest' first came to be understood as the motivating force driving the actions of individuals. That 'interest' as a general category, regardless of its content, should be of central importance to social analysis is thus itself a social construction rather than a natural fact. The laborious ideological process of establishing the primacy of 'interests' is described by Albert Hirschman (1977) in his description of the victory, accompanying the 'triumph' of capitalism, of the 'interests' over the 'passions' as the motivation for human action.
13. For a more elaborate discussion of the specific agents involved in the construction of post-war US national interests in particular, see Weldes (1993).
14. For a detailed analysis of the US construction of 'the Cuban problem', see Weldes and Saco (1996).
15. While it is admittedly somewhat annoying to the reader, I often use inverted commas to highlight linguistic elements that are typically treated as obviously referential but that are in fact contestable social constructions.
16. For extensive discussions of the logic of these arguments see Weldes (1993). Critical analyses of the 'Munich analogy' and the dangers of appeasement can be found in Lanyi (1963), Rystad (1981–2), Richardson (1988), and Beck (1989). The so-called 'domino theory' is discussed in Ross (1978), Slater (1987) and Jervis and Snyder (1991).
17. Claiming that these quasi-causal arguments may not be 'empirically valid' or 'accurate' does not undermine or contradict my own constructivist position. Rather, I am arguing that these empirical claims may be false on their own terms — that is, even if one treats such constructions as given. For example, even if we accept the construction of some states as dominos, the domino theory turns out to be false. As Jerome Slater (1987) has argued, in no case has the logic of the theory, that one small states' 'collapse' would precipitate the collapse of others, been fulfilled.
18. This is roughly the sequence of collapse envisioned by Eisenhower in his famous articulation of the ' "falling domino" principle' (1954). Other US officials saw the sequence of falling dominos (or rotting apples and the like) somewhat

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differently, but always with the same net effect: the US must step in to stop the collapse (or rot or whatever). See, for example, Bullitt (1948), Acheson (1969b) and US Senate (1947).

19. While national interests, like all social facts, are social constructions, they belong to a specific class of social facts — that of interests — that are of particular importance to the modern explanation of social phenomena because the notion of interest, as Connolly has argued, 'is one of those concepts that connects descriptive and explanatory statements to normative judgements'. This is so because reference to interests 'carries . . . into political discourse' the presumption 'that people [or states] ought to be able to do what they choose or want to do unless overriding considerations intervene' since 'the sort of wants' designated by the term 'are exactly those deemed to be somehow important, persistent, basic or fundamental to politics' (1983: 46). It is for this reason, as I argued earlier, that the 'language of the national interest' is the 'internal language of decision' in the making of foreign policy in that it both refers to the goals pursued by state officials in foreign policy and functions to generate the legitimacy of and support for that foreign policy. (For a brief description of the complex history of the term 'interest', see Hirschman, 1977: 31–42.)
20. The term 'articulation' is discussed in Hall (1985, 1986b), Grossberg (1992) and Eagleton (1991). For a brief suggestion that the notion of 'articulation' might be useful in studies of international relations, see Jacobsen (1995).
21. My claim that national interests are social constructions obviously rests on an understanding of language as constitutive or productive of meaning. This model of language is common, in one form or another, to a wide range of 20th-century philosophy and theories of social inquiry. As Laclau and Mouffe have argued, if perhaps a bit strongly, 'the entire development of contemporary epistemology has established that there is no fact which allows its meaning to be read transparently' (1987: 84). Although often associated with so-called 'post-structuralists' like Michel Foucault or 'deconstructionists' like Jacques Derrida, this conception of language as constitutive is by no means limited to them. See Shapiro (1981) for a useful overview of some contemporary developments in theories of language and meaning of particular use to analysts of politics. See also Gibbons (1987).
22. It is because the raw materials out of which representations, and thus national interests, are constructed are cultural and linguistic that it is not possible to explain state identities and interests purely in terms of interactions among *states*, as Wendt attempts to do. Such cultural and linguistic resources, after all, are found, prominently, within states.
23. This rearticulation occurs, for instance, in the work of some revisionist historians such as W.A. Williams (1962) and Kolko (1980).
24. This notion of 'articulation' — defined as a continuous and contested process of meaning creation — refuses the assumption that dominant representations are determined, whether in the first or the last instance, by 'the economic', by any other specific structure of social relations, such as patriarchy, or by putative physical or material 'facts'. At the same time it also refuses the complete

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arbitrariness of the connection between linguistic elements. As Raymond Williams has cogently argued,

> The notion [of arbitrariness] was introduced in opposition to the idea that the sign was an icon, and it is certainly true that there is in general no necessary relation of an abstract kind between word and thing in language. But to describe the sign as arbitrary or unmotivated prejudges the whole theoretical issue. I say it is not arbitrary but conventional, and that the convention is the result of a social process. *If it has a history, then it is not arbitrary — it is the specific product of the people who have developed the language in question.* (1981: 330, emphasis added)

I am grateful to Mark Laffey for drawing my attention to this passage.

25. For an example of such an investigation, in which a formal analysis is provided of the range of interpretive possibilities available for US state officials in their construction of the Korean war, see Milliken (1994).
26. The notion of 'interpellation' was introduced by Lacan (1977) and then explicitly connected to ideology by Althusser (1971). For other useful discussions of interpellation, see Hall (1985), Laclau (1979) and Laclau and Mouffe (1985).
27. I am not implying that all individuals are successfully interpellated into the dominant representations. For a fascinating account of individuals who came to refuse what were once firm interpellations into the US nuclear strategic discourse, see Everett (1989). However, for a variety of reasons, many or even most individuals are in fact successfully interpellated into the dominant discourse. Why particular individuals resist interpellation while others do not may have a variety of explanations, from peculiarities of individual socialization and education, to individual psychology, to the presence of alternative discourses which these individuals find more persuasive. While this is an interesting question for further research, addressing it is beyond the scope of this article. For one interesting take on this issue, see P. Smith (1989).
28. The anthropomorphization of the state in much current US international relations theorizing is thus no accident, nor is it peculiar to international relations theory. Instead, it reflects the anthropomorphization of the state which animates the language of US national interest used by US state officials (and others) in the practice of US foreign policy. The habit of anthropomorphizing 'the state' in US international relations theory thus reproduces US state officials' views of the world, thereby both legitimizing US state policy and helping to fix attention on to the issues of problem-solving rather than of critical theory (see Cox, 1981).
29. The importance of state identity and processes of state identity construction, especially for the US, are discussed in detail by David Campbell (e.g. 1992 and 1994).
30. From a realist perspective, of course, this seems obvious. But it is not. The central object of the national interest, even within the US, does not have to be 'the US'. As many critics of the concept 'national security' have pointed out, the

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object to be protected by policies 'in the national interest' can be both larger and smaller than 'the state'. Larger objects might be global, such as human rights or the environment. Smaller objects might be individuals, in particular their economic, ecological and personal security interests. See, for example, Barnet (1988), Buzan (1983) and Matthews (1989).

31. The use of 'we' to mean 'the US' and, specifically, actions taken by the US state is pervasive in American culture. It can be observed in public fora such as newspaper editorials and television interviews in which journalists, politicians and 'ordinary' folk routinely refer to 'the US' as 'we'. In discussion with colleagues about this phenomenon it has become apparent that university students are also widely prone to use this locution. An interesting research question concerns the extent to which this intimate identification of individual citizens with the state and state policy is unique to the US. On the basis of anecdotal evidence provided by friends and colleagues from diverse cultural backgrounds, including in particular Canada, India and New Zealand, this intimacy looks to be a peculiarly American phenomenon or, at least, to be more prevalent in the US than elsewhere. If this is true, then the interpellation of individuals into the language of national interests in other states either is accomplished on other grounds or is not accomplished as successfully as it is in the US.
32. What follows is a very abbreviated example of the kind of analysis required to demonstrate the construction of national interests. For a much more elaborate analysis of the construction of the 'Cuban missile crisis' and thus of US national interests in that crisis, see Weldes (1993).
33. The notion of the 'Western hemisphere', especially one that is protected by the US under the auspices of the Monroe Doctrine, is also a social construction, but one that I do not have the space to discuss here. See, for example, van Alstyne (1971) and Weldes (1993: 453–66).
34. Academic representations typically reproduce the orthodox US narrative of the 'Cuban missile crisis'. See, among others, Abel (1966), Allison (1971), Blight and Welch (1989) and Garthoff (1988).
35. Even the putative 'offensive' character of the Soviet missiles was in fact a US construction rather than a self-evident fact. The US defined the Soviet missiles as 'offensive' by using the *capabilities* of the weapons, which could strike deep into the US and Latin America, as the criterion of offensiveness. For the Soviet Union, in contrast, the character of the missiles was defined in terms of their projected *use*. Since the missiles had been deployed to defend Cuba from US attack, the missiles were considered to be defensive rather than offensive (Khrushchev, 1962: 186).
36. This 'deception theme' was highlighted by Brockriede and Scott in their analysis of Cold War rhetoric. They argue that in Kennedy's speech 'the detailed account of Soviet duplicity . . . put the mildness of American response in brighter relief [and] probably gave the administration the advantage in communicating with friendly nations and neutrals' (1970: 84). This analysis misses an important point. It represents the US response as mild *in fact* and neglects the possibility

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that the US response was *constructed as mild* by the rhetoric itself. After all, from a perspective emphasizing Cuban sovereignty and the history of US aggression against Cuba, the US 'quarantine' of Cuba, far from being 'mild', was an act of war. Furthermore, the course chosen by the US administration could be, and has been, interpreted as quite aggressively setting the Soviet Union up for humiliation. As James Nathan put it:

> . . . instead of facing Soviet Foreign Minister Gromyko with the evidence [of the missile deployment] while the Russian was giving the President false assurances that the missiles were not being installed, the President blandly listened without comment. Whether or not the Russians believed that Kennedy must have known, the effect of the charade was an absence of serious negotiations. Instead of using private channels to warn the Russians that he knew and intended to act, Kennedy chose to give notice to the Russians in a nationwide TV address. After that, a Soviet withdrawal had to be made in public and almost had to be a humiliation. (1975: 268; see also Steel, 1969: 18)

37. This is not to deny that differences of opinion among US state officials existed. In fact, US officials disagreed over both the extent and the exact nature of the crisis. As the published ExComm transcripts indicate, some US officials, notably the so-called 'hawks', certainly thought the problem more devastating than did those who came to be labeled 'doves'. These same officials also disagreed vehemently over the most appropriate policy response to the missile deployment, ranging in their views from the dovish 'negotiate with Khrushchev' to the hawkish 'invade Cuba' (see, for example, Trachtenberg, 1985; Blight, 1987/88; Blight and Welch, 1989; Garthoff, 1962). Nor is it to deny that one might interpret Kennedy's public pronouncements during the 'missile crisis' as significantly more hawkish than the statements he made in private at the ExComm meetings. But these differences, which have been amply analyzed elsewhere (in addition to the sources just mentioned, see, among others, Abel, 1966; Acheson, 1969a; Allison, 1971; Bundy, 1988; Schlesinger, 1965; Sorenson, 1965), are not the subject of this analysis. What I am interested in is an issue which has received virtually no attention — the surprising unanimity, among a diverse set of state officials encompassing *both* 'doves' and 'hawks', on the existence of a crisis for US national interests understood 'obviously' to require a response from the US. Put another way, I am interested not in US policy choices but in the prior definition of the problem to which these policy choices were to be a response.
38. The stories of the 'Caribbean' and 'October' crises can be told together because their conception of the crisis itself, specifically its causes and its character, are the same. It is these similarities that are highlighted in my brief rendition of this alternative account. Nonetheless, the Cuban 'October crisis' also demonstrates at least one important difference from the Soviet 'Caribbean crisis'; specifically, it provides a significantly different portrait of the resolution of these events. The story of the 'Caribbean crisis' typically ends on a positive note, albeit a different

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one than in the US narrative. On this view, the crisis was resolved peacefully because the US agreed, as the result of the Soviet missile deployment, not to invade Cuba. The outcome was thus not only a victory for peace, but a vindication of Soviet foreign policy and a triumph both for socialism and for the Cuban revolution (e.g. Major General I.D. Statsenko, quoted in Pope, 1982: 248). The 'October crisis', in contrast, ends on an ambiguous and at least partially sour note. On this view, while the crisis did preserve Cuba and the Cuban revolution from an imminent US invasion, it also highlighted the pawn-like status of Cuba in Cold War international politics (e.g. Castro, 1992: 339).

39. Operation Mongoose is described in various US government documents recently published by Chang and Kornbluh (1992). That the Cuban government was aware of these plans was evident in the speech made by Cuban President Dorticós (1962) during the 'missile crisis' and reasserted by Cuban representatives to the 1989 Moscow Conference on the crisis (Allyn et al., 1992).
40. At least two US state officials prominent in constructing the orthodox 'Cuban missile crisis' have in recent years acknowledged that there might be something to the 'defense of Cuba' argument. In 1989, Robert McNamara announced that 'if I were a Cuban and read the evidence of covert American action against their government, I would be quite ready to believe that the US intended to mount an invasion' (quoted in Blight and Welch, 1989: 329). Similarly, McGeorge Bundy has since acknowledged that 'Khrushchev certainly knew of our program of covert action against Cuba, and he could hardly be expected to understand that to us this program was not a prelude to stronger action but a substitute for it' (1988: 416). Bundy is therefore now willing to admit that,

    In retrospect it seems likely that Khrushchev was also trying, although clumsily, to take account of our warnings [against an offensive weapons deployment] by offering assurances that all his deployments, of whatever sort, were defensive. Since we found it impossible to accept this reading, we assumed too easily that his assurances reflected only a vicious deception. (414)

41. McNamara, who offered this analysis of the strategic situation in October 1962, nonetheless saw the 'Cuban missile crisis' as a significant threat to the US. Rather than interpreting the threat as an upsetting of the existing strategic balance, as did some of his colleagues on the ExComm, McNamara understood the threat to be largely a matter of the credibility of the Kennedy administration with the American public (e.g. Trachtenberg, 1985: 186 ff.)
42. By now, many critical analyses of the orthodox US 'Cold War narrative' exist. Particularly intriguing examples are Carmichael (1993), Campbell (1992) and Dalby (1988, 1990).
43. The claim to US global leadership also has its roots in the allegedly unique character of the United States as a nation. The exceptional character of the American nation has persistently been understood to confer upon the United

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States certain rights and responsibilities; in fact, it has legitimized a global US mission. According to Kennedy, for example, the US had the 'right to the moral leadership of this planet' (quoted in Lundestad, 1989: 527). This view was, of course, not specific to Kennedy. As Geir Lundestad has recently written, 'Americans traditionally have seen themselves as a unique people with a special mission in the world.' As a result, 'While other states had *interests*, the United States had *responsibilities*' (Lundestad, 1989: 527, emphasis added).

44. Problems with the logic and the empirical adequacy of this quasi-causal argument are discussed by Richardson (1988) and Beck (1989).
45. I do not intend to imply either that all individuals are convinced by this particular process of legitimation or that all individuals think the resulting 'common sense' is sensible, only that many or even most individuals do, most of the time. (See note 27 on p. 308) It should also be noted that *whose* consent is wanted or pursued varies over time. Before the 'rise of the masses', popular consent to foreign policies was not a central concern for decision-makers. Since the 'rise of the masses', however, popular consent to foreign policy has become increasingly important.

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