

The background of the cover is a circular globe. The globe's surface is covered in a detailed, brown-toned texture that resembles a cityscape or a topographical map. Overlaid on this globe is a large, white, irregular shape that represents the continent of North America. The title 'DIPLOMATIC MATERIAL' is centered over the white North American shape.

DIPLOMATIC MATERIAL

Affect, Assemblage, and Foreign Policy
JASON DITTMER

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*Affect, Assemblage, and
Foreign Policy*

JASON DITTMER

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For Florence, my sprout

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ABBREVIATIONS

BRUSA	Britain–United States of America circuit
CCM	Combined Cypher Machine
CFSP	Common Foreign and Security Policy
CIA	Central Intelligence Agency
CNAD	Committee of National Armament Directors
CSCE	Conference for Security and Cooperation in Europe
DSB	Defence Signals Branch
EC	European Community
ECHO	EU Directorate-General for European Civil Protection and Humanitarian Aid Operations
EEAS	European External Action Service
EPC	European Political Cooperation
EU	European Union
FCO	Foreign and Commonwealth Office
GC&CS	Government Code & Cipher School
GCHQ	Government Communications Headquarters
HUMINT	human intelligence
LSIB	London Signals Intelligence Board

MAS	Military Agency for Standardization
NSA	National Security Agency
NSO	NATO Standardization Office
OSCE	Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe
OSINT	open source intelligence
PSC	Political and Security Committee
SIGINT	signals intelligence
STANAG	Standardization Agreement
UKUSA	United Kingdom–United States of America alliance
VTC	video teleconferencing
WEU	Western European Union

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Geopolitical Assemblages and Everyday Diplomacy

A scene from *A Tale of Two Cities* conveys Charles Dickens's wary view of mob violence during the French Revolution.

Who gave them out, whence they last came, where they began, through what agency they crookedly quivered and jerked, scores at a time, over the heads of the crowd, like a kind of lightning, no eye in the throng could have told; but, muskets were being distributed—so were cartridges, powder, and ball, bars of iron and wood, knives, axes, pikes, every weapon that distracted ingenuity could discover or devise. People who could lay hold of nothing else, set themselves with bleeding hands to force stones and bricks out of their places in walls. Every pulse and heart in Saint Antoine was on high-fever strain and at high-fever heat. Every living creature there held life as of no account, and was demented with a passionate readiness to sacrifice it.¹

We have all participated in scenes like this, if with lower stakes, such as a packed crowd at a rock concert. As part of the crowd we retain our sense of a rational self, observing the scene and making decisions, and yet we are also folded into an organized, though leaderless, collectivity. The materials at hand—here, muskets, bricks, and even the lives of the mob itself—are incorporated into the whirlpool of activity and shape its capabilities. Like a flock of birds turning in formation, the decision of the crowd is instantaneous and individual decisions are sublimated to it. To decide *not* to stampede is to be stampeded.

Geopolitical assemblages can form from nothing but the bodies of bystanders and a focal point for their attention. The intense affective atmosphere described by Dickens produces political subjects who might commit violence they would never otherwise consider committing. Not all geopolitical assemblages unfold in such a brief, local context. The same phenomenon was experienced by many in the spring of 2003, as the United States, Great Britain, and others from the “coalition of the willing” prepared for the invasion of Iraq. While a diplomatic solution was still formally on the table, many *felt* that the die had been already cast on both sides of the Atlantic, as indeed we later discovered it was.² Those who did so were being affected both by media flows carrying a pessimistic discourse from various governmental elites as well as by other directly sensed shifts: perhaps we saw soldiers who were being called up, or simply perceived a thirst for (displaced 9/11) vengeance in the air.³ For those paying attention, the elements composing the state—diplomats, congressional resolutions, military equipment, citizens engaging in public discourse—were clearly aligned in a way that made war inevitable.

Or they at least made it seem that way. A similar atmosphere pervaded American public life almost exactly a decade later as the United States once again assembled a coalition to strike in the Middle East at a tyrant accused of using chemical weapons against his own people. This time however, it was Syria, and as the international coalition devoted to the rule of international law began to take shape, a similar pessimism took hold of many observers. Dickens’s revolutionaries were stockpiling their bricks. However, when British Prime Minister David Cameron went to the House of Commons seeking authorization for British participation in the intervention, he was dealt a surprise defeat, the first time since 1956 that a prime minister had failed in such an effort. The reasons for the defeat were idiosyncratic and quite parochial—a combination of domestic partisanship and the hangover from the long intervention in Iraq. What was amazing was what happened next: deprived of its key military and diplomatic ally, the United States did a volte-face with regard to military intervention. The tension dissipated, and with the deflation of the affective intensity, new possibilities opened themselves up to the state apparatuses involved. A Russian offer to mediate between the United States and Syria was accepted, and soon thereafter the United States, Great Britain, and Syria were working together (in a manner of sorts) to defeat their common enemy, the Islamic State.

All three scenarios shared a few key elements. First, bodies were arranged in space and interacted with each other in an extradiscursive fashion, each caught up with the other in a form of collective agency. Both Dickens's crowd and the two "coalitions of the willing" were capable of much more than the individuals that compose them, but equally the collective decision-making was marked by an excess that cannot be reduced to rational thought. Second, the individuals involved—whether in the crowd or among the political elites—still perceived themselves to be individuals, even as their options (and subsequent decision-making) were shaped by the context in which they were operating. Finally, the result of the event could not have been predicted from the arrangement of the actors in space beforehand. In two cases it felt like violence was coming, and it was. In the third case it felt like violence was coming, but instead roles were scrambled and a completely unforeseen outcome emerged.

In this book I analyze the material circulations—of media, of objects, of bodies and their practices—that produce elite political subjectivities within the varying assemblages of the "international community" that has come into existence over the past few centuries. The history of the modern diplomatic system is marked by the rapid intensification of such flows, and yet relations between states continue to be conceptualized as the coming together of preexisting geopolitical subjects. I begin this volume with a rather different starting assumption: that the outside is always already inside the state apparatuses charged with "external" relations. The transnational circulation of these media, bodies, and practices brings affective potentials that subtly rework the political cognition of those engaged in foreign policy making.

This is not to advocate for the inclusion of the irrational in theories of foreign-policy formation; such arguments already exist.⁴ Instead, I point to the more-than-rational, and indeed the more-than-human, nature of foreign policy. Rather than define the realm of diplomacy as the coming together of states, or even of their embodied representatives, I argue that the "international community" is the constant becoming-together of specific media, objects, and bodies/practices from which individual political subjectivities, states, and broader geopolitical communities (like "the West" or "Europe") emerge simultaneously.

Such an approach to foreign policy and international relations has two implications. First, it opens up key concepts that remain largely

uninterrogated, such as “the national interest.”⁵ Rather than an elusive truth awaiting discovery by realist international relations scholars, or even the result of competing discursive communities (as might be argued by constructivists), the national interest is an emergent product not only of the political elites charged with formulating it but of the specific networks of transnational circulation in which those elites are already embedded. In short, the “we” of the national interest is always already *transnational* in some way. I trace the pathways in which this occurs within four unique case studies.

Second, and following from that point, my approach points to the importance of the microscaled and the baroque in specific foreign policies (such as the 2003 invasion of Iraq), and even in the emergence of alliances and other long-standing institutional arrangements. This is in contradiction to the predominantly macroscaled way in which these issues are typically framed, such as through structural forces or historical trends. A microscaled analysis of state foreign-policy apparatuses is particularly useful because those apparatuses are enmeshed in multiple alliances and arrangements, and are consequently buffeted by affective forces simultaneously. Therefore, in this volume I not only elaborate each chapter as a stand-alone case study, but also conclude by reading them against each other to assess their mutual interactions.

Still, we are at the beginning and not the end. In the remainder of this introductory chapter I elaborate my theoretical framework: one that builds up from local contexts and situations such as those described by Dickens and yet speaks to the broader world of international relations. Following that, I turn to the research design that underpins this book and its structure, followed by details of the methods deployed in each case study.

Affect, Assemblages, and International Relations

The New Statecraft

In this section I productively pull together the scholarship on the politics of everyday life with the political theory of the state. Rather than seeing these two literatures as opposed to one another in a narrow dispute over where politics is to be found, I argue that recent trends in both enable a fruitful connection. The literature on the politics of everyday life has foregrounded the importance of practices, habits, and bodies in the dynamic politics of the workplace and home (see, for instance, the con-

ceptual emergence of microaggression).⁶ These concepts are mirrored in a humanities-inflected literature on state theory that emphasizes the everyday coproduction of state effects and affects, and therefore the insights derived from the literature on the politics of everyday life can be conceptually brought to bear on the microscaled politics of the state, its bureaucracies, and the experiences of those who interact with those bureaucracies. Because these humanities-inflected approaches to the state tend to downplay the agency of materials, I also incorporate insights from science and technology studies and related fields.

Recent years have seen political geographers avoid the topic of the state—the traditional subject matter of the subdiscipline—in favor of a wider definition of the political that emphasizes everyday practices. This was first inspired by the adoption of the philosophy of Michel Foucault as the basis for a wide swath of political geography research; his emphasis on power as diffuse and relational has proven enduring within the field.⁷ This approach to power and politics has been taken in new and unexpected directions, with scholarship focusing on bodies and everyday practices coming from scholars inspired by feminist approaches and popular geopolitics (or both).⁸ Collectively, these investigations have highlighted the interplay between activities long imagined as occurring at different scales. Rather than a scalar imagination that privileges the global over the national or the local, we are presented with a world in which microscaled practices (such as domestic life, working practices, and so on) often defy the macroscaled narratives and structures that we imagine to be governing social life.⁹ “This is the theoretical opportunity then: to investigate not the large systems but the small, the irregular, and the baroque.”¹⁰ This has entailed not a turn to the minor or the obscure, but a recognition of the translocal nature of social phenomena. Larger scales are not simply the aggregate of various locals; they are emergent from the enmeshing and interaction of various local events and phenomena.

A parallel maneuver in political theory has called into question the nature of the state itself. Drawing on Foucault’s work on disciplinary power, these scholars have posited that the state does not exist as such, but is an emergent effect of a range of practices occurring at a range of sites.¹¹ For instance, the agency of the state emerges from governmental technologies and practices such as border management, taxation, census taking, market regulation, and birth, death, and marriage registration.

These banal bureaucratic endeavors underpin the seeming timelessness of the state, enabling it to cohere through time and to act. Nevertheless, the actual bureaucratic processes themselves vary extensively over time, and some of them are fairly recent additions to the ensemble of state activities. Therefore, the state appears to be a transcendental subject that orders the political world, when in reality it is the effect of that political world. The shift from examining the state itself to examining state effects in the realm of political theory is a clear parallel to developments in theoretical geography, although the latter have tended to be couched in terms of scales rather than of states.¹²

By putting these literatures in dialogue, I hope to cut a Gordian knot that has bedeviled political geography over the past twenty years. During that time, the state came to be seen as a stunted site of the political: a trap from which progressive scholarship must escape in order to understand the everyday violence of race and gender, to imagine alternative configurations of power, and to avoid capture by statist impulses toward imperialism and oppression. In disavowing the state so completely, however, political geography perpetuated a political binary—one could study state politics, or one could study everyday politics, but not both. Worse, there was the subtle implication that studying the state was politically naïve.

I am not alone in the effort to rehabilitate the state within political geography. A literature has emerged which I term “the New Statecraft,” as it is principally concerned with the everyday crafting of the state. This work has taken inspiration primarily from the humanities. Joe Painter, for instance, turned to the concept of *prosaics*, as derived from Mikhail Bakhtin’s literary theory: “Prosaics highlights the intrinsic heterogeneity and openness of social life and its ‘many-voiced’ character. It challenges all authoritative monological master subjects (God, Man, the Unconscious, the Sovereign as well as the State) and their efforts to impose authoritative meanings.”¹³ This approach valorizes the mundane encounters with statist discourse that constitute our everyday lives, such as election posters, policy papers, political speeches, road signs, and so on. However, this field of discourse is always polyvocal and therefore open to a range of affective, more-than-rational forces that undercut the state’s claim to transcendent timelessness. The prosaic state is constantly becoming otherwise, as creative expressions constantly challenge its finalizability.

One implication of thinking through state effects rather than states is that it opens up the state-nonstate divide in highly productive ways.

Instead of ruling certain states “in” and other polities “out,” we can begin to think of *all* polities as exhibiting certain qualities associated with state-ness, while lacking others. Indeed, as the prosaic state illustrates, the legitimacy of even “obvious” states such as the United Kingdom relies on everyday encounters with the state to maintain the desired effect. But the concept of the prosaic state is not the only one to incorporate literary theory to state theory; Homi K. Bhabha’s concept of mimicry has been taken up by scholars considering the diplomatic performances of polities struggling to achieve international legitimacy.¹⁴ Bhabha notes that while colonial projects aim to produce modern subjectivities within the colonized, they do so within a field of power relations that relies on the construction of inalienable difference between colonizers and colonized. While colonizers officially claim to be “civilizing” the colonized, the legitimacy of the colonial intervention itself relies on a “proliferation of inappropriate objects that ensure its strategic failure, so that mimicry is both resemblance and menace.”¹⁵ In other words, mimicry of the colonizer’s culture—in this case, the performance of diplomacy—ensconces the European state as an ideal to which others should aspire; however, if the diplomacy of the “illegitimate” polity is too good it may “pass” for a “real” state, showing how permeable the category really is (or might be).¹⁶

If diplomatic practices are transmuted into texts to render them subject to literary theory, they are somewhat robbed of their creative political potential. Another humanities-inflected approach draws on the theatrical and musical language of improvisation to remedy this reductionism. Pierre Bourdieu’s concept of virtuosity identifies the ways in which actors improvise on social scripts.¹⁷ Alex Jeffrey defines improvisation as “performed resourcefulness,” asserting the centrality of embodied practice within “a context of limited possibilities.”¹⁸ That is, state elites (and those who would wish to be state elites) draw on a repertoire of discursive and material resources in their improvised performances of stateness. A multiplicity of state projects may be simultaneously performed by various actors in the same territory, each trying to deploy various state institutions, heritages, and infrastructures to their own advantage.

The abbreviated temporality of embodied performance vis-à-vis the literary text, however, begs the question of how the state appears to cohere over time in this formulation of statecraft. This question is frequently answered with reference to symbolic capital, the state’s accumulation of legitimacy, which imbues its performance with an authority

that others tend to lack.¹⁹ This assumption—as well as Bourdieu’s larger body of work on habitus, the embodied predispositions that accumulate over time within specific fields of practice—permeates the work characterized as the “practice turn” in international affairs and diplomatic studies, and has advanced thinking in those fields immeasurably.²⁰ Collectively, symbolic capital and habitus can be understood as some of the key resources from which diplomats and policy makers can draw in their efforts to improvise the state over time.²¹

But missing from these accounts is any notion of materiality *beyond* the body and its habituation. The introduction of new objects and materials to a habitus opens up new potentials—often unexpected—while also providing a new surface into which the state’s symbolic capital can be inscribed. Therefore, while the valuable contribution of these humanities-based metaphors must be acknowledged, additional inspiration must be taken from philosophers of science.

The rise of more-than-human philosophy in political geography and international relations in recent years has pushed political scholars to pluralize both the forms of politics in need of address and our notions of agency within those politics.²² This emphasis on pluralizing is important, as an emphasis on objects is not meant to displace the insights of humanities-inflected approaches; rather, the state is the emergent effect of an assemblage of discourses, performances, and objects that act back on “us” as political subjects.²³ It is the latter element—objects—that the philosophy of science offers to political theory. Some impute an essential power to objects in and of themselves, what Jane Bennett has referred to as “vibrant matter.”²⁴

Central to the thrust of this work has been a shift in the metaphysics of the state, with the more plural notion of “force relations” dethroning “social relations” as the field from which state effects emerge.²⁵ Such an approach emphasizes the ways in which human subjects both position themselves and are positioned by their locus within these assemblages.²⁶ Indeed, it is the world of objects that paradoxically outlines the boundary of the human.²⁷

The shift in emphasis to force relations is in part a shift to affect, the elusive relation of power inherent to the material world: “State power is therefore located in the interaction or *passage* between objects, implicated fully in *what* extensive alliances are assembled, and *how* these alliances are assembled (which affects are brought to the surface of an object, and

which are left behind).²⁸ Indeed, alongside the transcendent-seeming quality of state effects, we must attend to the constitutive power of state *affects* in composing the state as a geopolitical subject with agency.²⁹ It is in the slippages between what the state is supposed to be and what elements are composing it in any situated moment that instances of rupture can be exploited by those seeking to erode state effects, if only fleetingly.

I have taken developments in everyday politics and in state theory and productively brought them together to displace the notion of a coherent state in favor of a metaphysics of state effects and state affects, themselves the results of improvised practices by state elites and others. In the next section I go a step further, conceptualizing the world of states as a relational space composed of discursive and material flows that act back on the state apparatuses nominally composing the space. Agency, in this model, can be found not only in the states but also in the wider realm of force relations.

Sociomateriality, Diplomacy, and Transnational Affects

Having incorporated materiality and objects into my account of state effects, it is incumbent now to frame them conceptually. In this section I first outline the basics of assemblage theory, emphasizing how it adopts a flat ontology that emphasizes openness, dynamism, and self-organization. These qualities make assemblage a fascinating lens through which to consider both the state and the diplomatic system in which it is always already embedded. I do so through the notion of the body politic, which emphasizes the synchronic emergence of political subjectivities at multiple scales. It is my application of the body politic concept to diplomatic theory that enables a reconceptualization of the international community (in all its variants) as a series of material relations between state apparatuses: a political agency that is emergent both *through* and *above* the state. This agency has been woefully underexamined in the literature until now, as have the technologies (such as protocols) enabling it to emerge in the particular form we see today. I will now articulate my argument in more detail.

Assemblage theory has washed across human geography and to a lesser extent international relations, refreshingly without a conceptual monoculture taking root. Assemblages are understood to have five common characteristics.³⁰ First, assemblages are formed through relations of exteriority among constituent elements, and therefore the elements

cannot be reduced to their function within the assemblage.³¹ The characteristics of the assemblage cannot be assumed from the properties of the constituent elements; it is the capacities of the constituent elements when brought into relation with one another that matter.

Second, assemblages are productive of novelty. They are constantly becoming otherwise as elements come and go, and as elements “within” the assemblage *that are also assemblages in their own right* go through their own processes of becoming otherwise. While assemblages may seem to cohere in certain forms over time, this is more a function of the spatial and temporal scale at which they are being observed than it is a statement of the assemblage’s own persistence.

Third, assemblages are, by definition, composed of heterogeneous elements. As Manuel DeLanda highlights, “The components of social assemblages playing a material role vary widely, but at the very least involve a set of human bodies properly oriented (physically or psychologically) towards each other.”³² Therefore, while social assemblages likely include a discursive component, they cannot be *purely* discursive.

Fourth, assemblages are impossible to authoritatively delimit. Because they are open systems, with elements constantly entering and leaving, the only possibility is to attempt to describe trends in their relational space over time. The terms *territorialization* and *detrterritorialization* refer to processes by which an assemblage becomes, respectively, more or less coherent and delineated. Similarly, processes of coding and decoding designate the processes by which meaning is ascribed to assemblages or by which they become less laden with meaning—this meaning could be discursive or otherwise (e.g., the coding of living cells by DNA).

Fifth, assemblages are marked by desire. While this might imply an anthropomorphic dimension, desire instead refers to what Nietzsche described as the “will to power,” that is, “a (nonpsychical, impersonal) will or impetus to more, to the increase of power, to the enhancement, not of a self or its ability to survive, but of its own forces, its own activities.”³³ Put differently, this desire is the potential in every system for self-organization that can produce new things, new life, and new ways of being in the world.

How might assemblage thinking be used to reenvision states and their diplomatic relations? After a long functionalist history of considering the state as a “body politic,” recent scholarship has infused the term with an assemblage sensibility.³⁴ In this formulation, bodies politic in-

clude any assemblage in which human bodies participate (akin to DeLanda's "social assemblages") and which shape the political cognition of those participating in them.³⁵ These can be short-lived and seemingly divorced from the politics of states (such as Dickens's mob) or they can be a traditional institution or apparatus (such as a university or the state itself). It is notable that in this conception the state is not special; it is simply one body politic among many.

There is a heuristic divide between first- and second-order bodies politic. First-order bodies politic are individual human subjects, whose bodies are themselves assemblages that shape perception of the social categories through which difference is understood, and that rely on various material flows, such as media, food, water, and so on. Second-order bodies politic include any assemblage in which multiple humans participate, such that there is some degree of collective affective cognition. These, too, depend on material flows, and they have their own metabolisms that stave off dissolution. Crucially, first-order bodies politic are not prior to second-order bodies politic, as in social-contract theory or liberal theories of the state. Rather, first- and second-order bodies politic are mutually engaged in processes of becoming together in synchronic emergence.

When this concept of bodies politic is laid alongside traditional notions of diplomacy, it both speaks to traditional concerns (relations between states, as materialized in both the building of permanent embassies and the embodied exchange of ambassadors) and yet also points to new possibilities. It shifts attention away from *states* as bodies politic (the usual stance within international relations) toward the *diplomatic system* itself as a type of body politic, the existence of which shapes the first- and second-order bodies politic embedded within it.³⁶ There is congruence here with Foucauldian approaches to governmentality, or the conduct of conduct. For instance, it has been noted that it was the experience of the foreign by early diplomats that produced them as ideal subjects of the sovereign: their posting to a foreign capital rendered them absolutely loyal to their master.³⁷ In other words, participation in the diplomatic assemblage shaped the subjectivities of civil servants in similar ways, even if the specific loyalty varied.

However, the individual's loyalties were rarely singular. Just as elements of an assemblage can participate in multiple assemblages at once, early ambassadors rarely served only one master; while overseas representing their sovereign, they frequently also represented their religious

or local communities as well.³⁸ Nevertheless, as the state grew in political hegemony and colonized the spaces of diplomacy, narratives of alter-diplomacies were marginalized and are only now starting to return.³⁹ It is thus clear that in the early modern period diplomacy occurred through states, but was nevertheless more multifarious than that; diplomacy entailed the synchronic emergence of multiple bodies politic at once, often through the diplomacy of a single ambassador (also a body politic in his or her own right).

Stuart Elden traces this phenomenon at the negotiation of the Treaties of Westphalia, in which both the modern state and the diplomatico-military *dispositif* of Europe can be seen as becoming together.

War is intended to be used judiciously, with a clear sense of why it is being fought, and used strategically to reinforce the balance of power. Diplomacy is to become an instrument or tool, with the negotiations in Westphalia as a model, with a congress of all states involved, and with a system of permanent ambassadors. Europe is seen as a juridico-political entity in itself, with a system of diplomatic and political security; but this is underpinned by the third instrument, each state having a permanent military apparatus of professional soldiers with an infrastructure of fortresses and transport, and sustained tactical reflection.⁴⁰

From this it can be seen that bodies politic form at scales “above” the state (e.g., Europe), but often do so *through* the objects and practices of the state. Further, an assemblage approach to diplomacy likewise highlights a feature of early modern diplomacy that has often been eclipsed. Rather than being the opposite of war, diplomacy is one aspect of a larger *dispositif*, including the military, which worked to regulate the metabolisms of Europe. Thus, my concern in this volume with military diplomacy and signals intelligence can be seen as a throwback to earlier understandings of diplomacy rather than as yet another expansion of the field.

Given all this, it is clear that diplomats are multivalent—even in this age in which diplomacy is largely viewed as a state enterprise meant to enact the national interest. Indeed, it is precisely the doubleness of diplomatic practices—simultaneously of the state and yet beyond it—that has the potential to reshape the national interest. If today’s diplomats frequently gain legitimacy from their state credentials and are therefore expected to represent the national interest, elite diplomats craft an iden-

tity that is somewhere in-between, repositioning both their government position and their interlocutors in order to get a positive result.⁴¹ It is for this reason that foreign ministries are often viewed askance by elected officials and other civil servants. Foucault defines *milieu* as the space in which affective circulations occur, as the “intersection between a multiplicity of living individuals working and coexisting with each other in a set of material elements that act on them and on which they act in turn.”⁴² It is diplomats’ very situatedness within a nonnational milieu that enables the channeling of affects from beyond the state assemblage into the very heart of power. Their bodies are yet one more variable in the “government of things” that needs to be managed by state authorities, for instance by rotating time in the capital with time overseas (a “tour” in a foreign posting is commonly three years, and a diplomat is unlikely to return to that post in their career).⁴³ At an even more microscale, diplomats’ bodies as well as geographically resonant ingredients, dinnerware, and seating cards must be carefully managed in diplomatic sites—such as Iver Neumann’s example of a state dinner—if the desired result is to be achieved.⁴⁴

However, traditional diplomacy is only one avenue through which elements of state assemblages are brought into relation. Assemblage theory directs our attention to the wide array of sites and objects that can become enrolled in the transnational body politic formed by state assemblages.⁴⁵ The web of relations connecting these sites and objects is perhaps less glamorous than that of traditional diplomacy, but is arguably a much more intensive set of material connections. For instance, the latest round of globalization has seen the intensification and acceleration of various flows, from digital data to more traditional transportation and shipping. These are not just “content” or “goods,” but also vectors for affect that can ripple through first- and second-order bodies politic, reshaping political cognition. The breathtaking expansion of these flows has had the effect of ruining the monopoly of foreign ministries on the foreign, with ministries of defense, finance, justice, and environment all taking on diplomatic roles.⁴⁶

This increased connectivity between state apparatuses relies on the harmonization of the technical practices of governmentality.⁴⁷ This harmonization has been ongoing for a long time; among the oldest examples is diplomatic protocol itself, which provides an interface between state assemblages.⁴⁸ This interface dates back to the humorously named “Protocol on Protocol,” incorporated in 1815 at the Congress of

Vienna, which was intended to provide a set of rules to avoid international conflicts over aristocratic honor and precedence. The concept of protocol is carried through all of the diplomacies of this volume's case studies. Some protocols are embodied routines and dispositions (as is diplomatic protocol), and some take the form of nonhuman objects that mediate affects. Other forms of harmonization are as contemporary as the technologies that prompt them, such as Internet protocols, the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea, and extradition treaties. Each protocol provides a means to extend a transnational governmentality across space that both expands the state's ability to act but also renders it subject to heightened flows of affect.

It would be easy to portray this process of harmonization as an inexorable flattening of difference, and narratives of globalization have often portrayed it as such. However, as assemblage theory indicates, it is not possible to assume the result of an interaction from the properties of the elements brought into relation. Therefore, the different protocols utilized in different processes result in unique relationships with difference, and therefore in different spatialities of power. These spatialities are the result of the specific histories of assemblage in each case, although those histories are not determinative of futures; rather, they are resources that can be drawn on in the various political actors' open-ended improvisations.

Flat(ter) Ontology, Scale, and Power

In this section, I articulate the high stakes of my theoretical framework. I begin by noting that traditional approaches to international relations have generally failed to predict major events; while an assemblage-influenced approach might not prove any better at prediction, it does at least explain why so many surprises await international relations analysts. The stakes are higher than the credibility of academic analysts, however. Attempts to account for the affective power of these geopolitical assemblages have often resorted to macroscaled theories of civilizational conflict or affinity that themselves reinforce already extant racist or xenophobic discourses (as in, most famously, the Clash of Civilizations thesis), with real-world consequences for those caught up in today's refugee crises and drone strikes. These discourses cannot be countered with mere deconstruction, but require constructive accounts that explain the actual empirical phenomena in question. I therefore

offer a microscaled account of power, using Bruno Latour's concepts of *puissance* and *pouvoir*, which helps us to understand the evolution of geopolitical assemblages over time. As I hope will be clear, the theoretical and political implications of this approach are weighty.

The rise of assemblage thought in the social sciences has not been without its critics. For some, the use of assemblage simply overcomplicates social processes, or culminates in a thick description of a phenomenon.⁴⁹ For others assemblage is a distraction from the “real” leftist project of political economy.⁵⁰ For yet others, the debate lies in the nuances of various relational, materialist theories such as DeLanda's assemblage or Latourian actor-network theory.⁵¹ Its uptake in the world of international relations has been rather slower than in other fields, but nevertheless a strong toehold has been gained.⁵² It shares with the Bourdieu-inspired work of the practice turn a disdain for the individualism of rational-choice theory, the determinism of Marxism, and the binary of structure-agency. Bourdieu's concept of the field superficially resembles the assemblage, but crucially the field is shaped by *social* relations rather than *force* relations.⁵³ The inclusion of the nonhuman in assemblages distributes agency through the field in a way that Bourdieu could not foresee. However, I am not arguing for a new hegemony of assemblage thought in international relations, diplomatic studies, or political geography. Assemblage theory can happily coexist with other schools of thought. However, assemblage thought is useful in highlighting the diversity of human and nonhuman actors implicated in any political moment, in inspiring us to think differently about classic topics, and in providing a conceptual language that speaks to a more-than-human world where change—of regimes, of technologies, of climate—is constant.

The inability of the discipline of international relations to anticipate macroevents such as the collapse of the Soviet Union, the War on Terror, and the Arab Spring has been well documented. Of course, “knowing the future” is a high standard to which to hold any discipline. However, given that international relations privileges systemic-level analysis and the continued belief in “law-like regularities,” this failure should lead to a reconsideration of the discipline's theoretical bases.⁵⁴ Of course, the constancy of surprise is a strong indicator of the nonlinear outcomes one expects from assemblages exhibiting complexity.

Indeed, a belief in reductionist models of the political has bedeviled the social sciences for a long time, but this is particularly manifest when

considering the politics of states, which are tremendously complex bodies politic and yet have often been reduced to billiard balls in space or other simplistic models.⁵⁵ By assuming the state as the foundation of “actorness” in international affairs, these models ignore the collective agency that forms when these bodies politic are linked together in an assemblage of circulating materialities and affects. This results in an inability to account for the empirical evidence of this collective agency, which like a poltergeist can be seen to be acting back on its constituent parts: states, their foreign-policy apparatuses, and the buildings and people that compose them.

One such attempt to explain away the collective agency of assemblages is civilizational thinking. While the idea of civilizations has a long and complex genealogy, there has been a resurgence of interest—sometimes critical, sometimes not—in the topic among scholars of international relations in the last two decades, fueled by both the War on Terror and the rise of China.⁵⁶ The renaissance of civilizational thinking at the turn of the millennium is of course diverse, including a divide between substantialist approaches (in which civilizations simply *are*) and processual or relational approaches (which see civilizations as the result of various geopolitical projects).⁵⁷

Of course, the fact that substantialist authors feel compelled to argue their case implies that, in truth, all civilizations are embedded in discourse. Indeed, the rise and fall of civilizations in recent times can be seen to result not from imperial decadence or crop failure, but from changing discursive fashions. For instance, “the West” became popular during the Cold War in opposition to “the East” of the Soviet Bloc.⁵⁸ The uncomfortable merging of the West with the primarily religious civilizational essences invoked by Samuel P. Huntington might have led to the obscurity of his theory on the clash of civilizations were it not for the 11 September 2001 attacks, which seemed to give his ideas basis in fact. This boost for the idea of the West lasted but a short while, as the clash-of-civilizations thesis undercut the George W. Bush administration’s attempts to build a coalition against Al Qaeda that incorporated non-Western countries.

Alongside the West—never fully replacing it—another civilization has taken form: the Anglosphere. Like the West, the Anglosphere is not a new idea; rather it is a resurrection of racialized colonial terms such as *white dominions* and *Anglo-Saxon world*. After World War II there were

many attempts to preserve the wartime alliance between the United States and United Kingdom, and proponents often invoked the linguistic and broader cultural relations between the two.⁵⁹ More recently the historian Robert Conquest and the businessman James C. Bennett have argued for a notion of the Anglosphere that draws energy from the Internet and its network ontology.⁶⁰ They argue that this has intensified a sense of collectivity among English speakers around the world, who can now communicate with each other more easily than ever. They even include English-speaking groups in otherwise non-Anglophone countries, although the core of the Anglosphere is the “special relationship” between the United States and the United Kingdom. Indeed, a statistical analysis of U.S.-led military interventions in the second half of the twentieth century discovered a strong correlation between the English language and participation in American coalitions: “When push comes to shove, the English-speaking peoples tend to flock together.”⁶¹ How to make sense of this empirical phenomenon?

Advocates for the Anglosphere argue that culture is a homogenizing force, productive of commonality. In the case of the Anglosphere, the drive toward commonality has been largely progressive, with the British hegemony of the 1800s seen as ending the slave trade, and the American hegemony of the 1900s seen as ending the twin totalitarianisms of Nazism and communism. Thus, the Anglosphere of the 2000s can end “singularity, or the habit that states have of acting alone.”⁶² The progressive globalist framing of the Anglosphere clearly connects this “civilization” to whiteness and other cultural drivers.⁶³ Here and elsewhere, culture can be seen as a reductionist mode of analysis that flattens out difference into “singularity” to explain macroscaled geopolitical patterns.⁶⁴

Civilizational thinking is just one iteration of a general problem in the analysis of international affairs: a desire to locate power in a scalar hierarchy in which “the global” or “the national” dominates “the local.” Rather than a push toward singularity or the macro, an assemblage analysis highlights the importance of the heterogeneous and the micro. The indeterminacy of assemblage processes means that the macro is not simply the aggregation of the micro, but instead the effect of a range of elements—understood as existing in a flat ontology rather than a scalar imagination—that have come together in unique, historically contingent ways. Even seemingly timeless macro concepts such as the “national interest” which are understood to structure international

relations are in truth multiplicitous and far from straightforward. “Political economies and structures emerge as relational products assembled through multiple routes, actors, histories, contingencies, resources, socio-materialities and power relations.”⁶⁵ In short, the national interest is hardly something dictated by physical geography or economic necessity; it becomes materialized through a series of assemblages (think tanks, political parties, universities, embassies, lobbying groups, media networks, and so on) interacting with one another and coalescing (for a time) around a certain set of policy documents. As has been seen many times over, unexpected circumstances or a change of government can lead to a reshuffling of these assemblages, with a new national interest emerging from their interaction.

A central argument in this volume is that when foreign-policy apparatuses of the state enter into assemblage with one another, whether through traditional diplomacy or in more bureaucratic encounters associated with the international relations of the late twentieth century, they open themselves up to transnational affects that rework the basis on which national interest is calculated. So why would states do this? I answer this via Latour’s twin concepts of power, *pouvoir* and *puissance*. States (or more accurately, elites within state assemblages) enter into assemblage with each other in order to enact their collective agency as actualized power (*pouvoir*, a “concrete ensemble of relations”), to increase their own capabilities (or sense thereof).⁶⁶ This necessarily opens them up to the immanent power to affect and be affected (*puissance*), from which state elites attempt to insulate the state apparatus through techniques such as rotating diplomats between the capital and overseas. Nevertheless, the excess of *puissance* means that attempts to tame these transnational affects will always be at best partially successful. In other cases, such as the foundation after World War II of what is now the European Union (EU), the whole point of entering into assemblage is to rework state assemblages through technical means rather than traditional political ones, thus initially privileging *puissance* over *pouvoir*.

One criticism of assemblage theory has been that its flat ontology was equally flattening of power relations. In the abstract this is true; without a scalar imagination on which to prop up an a priori understanding of power and its location, power is simultaneously everywhere and nowhere. However, on empirical examination of a particular assemblage, the flux of power in particular spaces and times is usually perceptible,

if perhaps only afterward. “Part of the appeal of assemblage, it would seem, lies in its reading of power as multiple co-existences—assemblage connotes not a central governing power, nor a power distributed equally, but *power as plurality in transformation*.”⁶⁷ Therefore, the flat ontology of assemblage is perhaps better understood as merely flatter than most; the constant becoming of the assemblage means that in certain times and spaces some elements of the assemblage will matter more than others, but in another configuration or constellation their importance will recede. The perception of this flux and flow is a matter of research method and researcher sensibility.

Research Design

In this book I attempt to trace geopolitical assemblages, such as civilizations or “the international community,” that emerge “above”—and through—the state, with the purpose of producing an account of the collective agency that is attuned to the microscale of practices and objects rather than resorting to the reductionism of macroscale structures. I offer a counterhistory of British foreign-policy making in which the focus is not on what the British state decided to do “in the world,” but rather on how “the world” was already *inside* those policy-making processes as a result of Britain’s historic leading role in forging geopolitical assemblages. The structure of this book reflects my desire to juxtapose a range of dimensions of foreign policy (diplomacy, intelligence, and defense) as well as a range of transnational assemblages, some of which are bureaucratic organizations and some of which are not. As Martin Müller argues, “Following traces, collecting evidence and charting who connects with whom and through what does not mean that analysis must remain within the boundaries of one particular organization.”⁶⁸

I begin with a case study of the nineteenth-century British Foreign Office and its relations with paper and other materialities, through which British foreign policy was created and enacted around the world. I then turn to intelligence cooperation between the United Kingdom and the United States during World War II, which over time emerges as the UKUSA (or “Five Eyes”) alliance in which signals intelligence is freely shared among the countries sometimes referred to as the Anglosphere. From there, I examine the period after World War II, in which interoperability and standardization are inculcated within NATO, considering how national militaries are turned into a coherent multinational force that is

understood by many as the institutionalized military of the West. In the final case study I fast-forward to the recent past to examine the processes through which European Common Foreign and Security Policy (CFSP) is produced—not with an eye to how EU states shape that policy, but rather to how participation in that policy making reworks those states. Collectively, these case studies highlight how Britain has, over time, become enmeshed in multiple geopolitical assemblages that are productive of both *pouvoir* and *puissance* (the global diplomatic system, as well as assemblages that are perceived as the Anglosphere, the West, and Europe). Each of these processes provides an affective nudge to British policy makers, which collectively is perceptible at the macroscale. The cases I have chosen are insufficient to document every aspect of this complex, constantly-becoming-otherwise world of relations, but “all that we can do is attempt to capture snapshots of a constantly developing situation in the hope that it can reveal answers to the questions that we have, and illuminate the central features and interconnections in international relations.”⁶⁹

I selected these particular case studies (diplomacy, intelligence, defense, and the CFSP) not only because they represent the ways in which foreign policy has fragmented across various distinct parts of the state (or the supranational organization, in the case of the EU), but also because of the way in which these fields have been theorized in the literature. In each case, the literature has foregrounded the state as an actor, and a rational, autochthonous one at that. For instance, much international relations theory seeking to explain diplomatic action foregrounds the national interest as the rational basis for foreign policy.⁷⁰ The literature on intelligence cooperation similarly frames the exchange of intelligence through the language of *quid pro quo*, highlighting an economic rationality at the heart of the practice.⁷¹ The literature on NATO interoperability is highly technical in orientation and focuses on the achievement of *pouvoir* without considering *puissance* (and of course uses neither term).⁷² Finally, the literature on the CFSP generally sees it as the result of diplomatic negotiation without ever considering the way in which the policy repositions the collective subjects that compose it.⁷³ I do not spend much time reviewing these literatures not because the work is without insight, but rather because my starting assumptions are different, and also because I want to juxtapose these fields to generate conceptual and empirical insights, whereas these literatures tend to focus only inward at the phenomenon they take as their object.

The choice of Britain was both pragmatic (in that it is where I was based during this research) and a reflection of the historical nature of these assemblages. Britain has leveraged its period of historical hegemony into a lasting legacy of “centrality” within many geopolitical assemblages. However, every state’s foreign-policy apparatus is embedded in these assemblages to some degree. It is the intensity of Britain’s connections that marks it as a particularly suitable subject through which to examine the interconnection of multiple assemblages. The choice to produce a counterhistory of British foreign-policy making therefore reflects my belief in the importance of the past as a force in the present. While the past is hardly determinative of the future, it exists as a set of material resources in the present that shape the future’s conditions of possibility.

In recent years, scholars have paid attention to the methods through which assemblages can be studied. Indeed, adopting assemblage ontology has implications for the ways in which we conceptualize research. Nick Fox and Pam Alldred argue that “the research-assemblage . . . comprises the bodies, things and abstractions that get caught up in social inquiry, including the events that are studied, the tools, models and precepts of research, and the researchers.”⁷⁴ In short, and in parallel to earlier debates about ethical research and reflexivity, the researcher will affect that which is being studied (and vice versa). Further, the emergent outcome of research can ripple through wider social arenas, particularly if it is turned into policy. A reflexive approach to methodology offers the opportunity to reterritorialize the research-assemblage in ways that can lead to positive interventions in the world itself: “This micropolitical approach enables designs and methods to be engineered from the bottom up, and as interest in materialist approaches to social inquiry increases, offers a strategy for developing methodologies—both to understand the world, and to change it.”⁷⁵

The recognition that research methods can reshape the field of investigation has been recognized within critical international relations as well. Claudia Aradau and Jef Huysmans conceptualize methods as both *devices* and *acts*. Conceptualizing methods as devices foregrounds their role not as tools for observing truths, but instead in experimentation: “The device of extraction enacts worlds in the sense that it is an active force that is part of a process of continuous production and reproduction of relations, an endless process of bringing worlds into being.”⁷⁶ Conceptualizing methods as acts highlights the ways in which the

experimental spaces enacted through “methods as devices” can be stabilized into new orders, which disrupt and replace the old. “Understood in this sense, critical methods not only rupture knowledge, but also have the capacity to effect political rupture.”⁷⁷ My research was designed to have this critical potential; to articulate the emergence of geopolitical assemblages is not simply an exercise in documentation or description. Rather, it is a *device* that makes this assemblage visible in a world that still largely attributes political agency in international affairs to the state, and not to the decentralized, rhizomatic networks of geopolitical assemblages beyond the state. This *act* holds open the possibility of reflection prior to political action, through which affects can be sensed and accounted for.⁷⁸ As William Connolly notes, we cannot escape the world of affect and achieve a disembodied rationality, but we can slow down and take note of the material contexts in which decisions are being made before rushing into mistakes.⁷⁹

Methods

This research has been conducted via two methods: archival research and interviews. The challenge of accessing apparatuses of the national security state is real, particularly when dealing with contemporary issues. Access to currently serving foreign policy professionals in major states is notoriously difficult to negotiate, although the literature indicates that some exceptional results have been achieved.⁸⁰ For events in the distant past, it is easier to access archival sources and other accounts, such as memoirs. Interviews are often impossible as participants have passed on. For events in the recent past, interviews with retired national-security officials are appealing in that they often have in-depth knowledge and few competing time pressures. Some archival materials may be available, depending on the sensitivity of the issue. For contemporary events, it becomes necessary to rely entirely on interviews with serving or retired professionals, although some leaked documents may be available (as was the case with the intelligence-cooperation case study).

The cases I examine fall rather neatly into this schematic. I investigated the case study of the nineteenth-century British Foreign Office entirely through archival and secondary sources, namely Hansard (the U.K. Parliamentary record) and the U.K. National Archives. Approaching materiality through textuality has its own challenges, not least because of the way in which foreign-policy archives have been curated. For instance,

the Foreign Office archives have been organized around foreign-policy issues, and little record of everyday life in the Foreign Office can be found in the National Archives.⁸¹ “Just as we need to take into account and render transparent how the ethnographic researcher affects his or her reconstruction of associations, so do we have to grapple with the visibilities and invisibilities produced through the archive.”⁸² For this reason, parliamentary reports were particularly useful, as everyday life in the nineteenth-century Foreign Office is better represented in reports about budgets and facilities than in Foreign Office documents. I consulted early diplomatic memoirs to provide some hint of the lived experience.

My research on UKUSA intelligence cooperation was primarily archival, drawing from both declassified sources in the U.K. National Archives at Kew, the U.S. National Security Archive at George Washington University, and also leaked documents derived from the Edward Snowden affair. Despite the latter, my account contained substantial gaps, and so I supplemented the archival research with four interviews with retired intelligence officials in both the United States and United Kingdom as well as with one journalist who specialized in intelligence matters. These interviews provided insight into the embodied experience of participation in intelligence cooperation and the relationship between first- and second-order bodies politic. Per their request, the interviewees remain anonymous.

For the case study on NATO interoperability and standardization, I draw on archival research conducted at the U.K. National Archives and in the NATO Archives in Brussels. This allowed me to tack between national and institutional perspectives on the topic in ways that were highly productive; further, in the past specific documents were moved from the U.K. National Archives to the NATO Archives, indicating again how the specific history of archives can impact research design. My archival research was supplemented by two interviews with currently serving officials engaged in the negotiation of interoperability at NATO headquarters in Brussels.

The final case study, on the production of the CFSP in the wake of the Treaty of Lisbon, relies entirely on seven elite interviews. These interviews were conducted with retired and currently serving Foreign Office officials who engaged in the production of Europe policy, as well as European External Action Service and European Commission personnel who shape the production of the CFSP. I also interviewed “outsiders,”

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