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Towards a Theoretical Synthesis: Supplementing Two-Level Games with Role Theory

Abstract: The objective of this article is to present possibilities offered by a combination of two theories, that is role theory (Holsti, 1970; Thies, Breuning, 2012; Walker, 1981; 1987; 2004; 2017; Wehner, Thies, 2014) and two-level games framework (Putnam, 1988). Although this ‘combining’ may still cause considerable difficulties, because various IR theories are based on different ontological and epistemological assumptions, theoretical syntheses, however, are not impossible and, offer myriad research possibilities of developing middle-range ways of solving research puzzles (Jørgensen, 2018, pp. 250–252). The article consists of four parts. In the first one, the essential assumptions of role theory and the two-level game framework will be presented. The second part will present how to combine assumptions of these two theories by following the strategy of ‘domain of application’. In the third one, the results of the synthesis will be elucidated. It will be done by referring to the three factors that the two-level games framework is based on and by showing how previous studies focused on role theory could be supplemented by Putnam’s framework. The fourth, concluding part, will present final reflections as well as sketch the turf of the proposed theoretical synthesis.

Keywords: theoretical synthesis, role theory, two-level games framework, FPA

Introduction

The objective of this article is to present possibilities offered by a combination of two theories developed respectively within Foreign Policy Analysis (FPA) and International Relations, that is role theory¹ (Holsti, 1970; Thies, Breuning, 2012;

¹ It should be stressed that role theory has not always had its place in FPA, mainly due to the fact that scholars developing it tended to black-box the state and ignore the importance of domestic

Walker, 1979; 1981; 1987; 2004; 2017; Wehner, Thies, 2014) and two-level games framework (Putnam, 1988).²

Theoretical syntheses, which take many diverse forms (Moravcsik, 2003; Checkel, 2010; Sil, Katzenstein, 2010; Bennett, 2013), are quite popular within the IR discourse (Dunne, Hansen, Wight, 2013; van der Ree, 2014; Rengger, 2015; Levine, McCourt, 2018) and, as Checkel pointed out, “combining separate things to produce a more complete, better whole has become an IR cottage industry over the past decade” (2010, p. 5). Although this ‘combining’ may still cause considerable difficulties, mainly due to the fact that various IR theories are based on different ontological and epistemological assumptions, theoretical syntheses, however, are not impossible and, offer myriad research possibilities of developing middle-range ways of solving research puzzles (Jørgensen, 2018, pp. 250–252). While considering theoretical syntheses in IR, it is important to emphasize that the main value-added of FPA is that it focuses on domestic-level dynamics and *unpacks ‘the state’s black box’*.

By the term ‘theoretical synthesis’ I understand a combination of different theories that consequently offers a better explanation or understanding of a specific research puzzle. This understanding is similar to the definition formulated by Fearon and Wendt (2002, p. 68), who pointed out that “theoretical synthesis or, in other words, theoretical ‘bridge building’ means to synthesize specific arguments in hope of gaining more compelling answers and a better picture of reality.

The article contributes to the task of theoretical syntheses’ building by pushing role theory to connect with the two-level games framework of Putnam. In order to do this, I will follow the synthesis strategy of ‘domain of application’ identified by Caporaso, Checkel and Jupille (2003). This strategy is centered on the idea that two different theories might offer us a better understanding of a research problem after combining some of their insights. The combination works best when “multiple theories explain similar phenomena, when explanatory variables have little overlap, and when these variables do not interact in their influence of outcomes”, that is, when they are complementary (Caporaso, Checkel,

processes of role’s contestation. This is understandable, because treating a role as clearly defined guarantees analytical parsimony and narrative clarity, but role theorists should not ignore either the processes of contestation or the influences on the state’s role generated by its environment (Cantir, Kaarbo, 2012, p. 10; Cantir, Kaarbo, 2016; McCourt, 2020).

² The framework developed by Putnam, although usually associated with and employed by IR scholars, should be primarily treated as a theory of negotiations (and not as IR theory as such). On the other hand, role theory, originated in sociology and primary developed within FPA by explaining specific states’ behaviors based on the roles assigned to them by their political leaders, has gradually evolved into IR theory, which explains the relationship between states through formal models. Thus, it is difficult to categorize each of these theories into a particular research area; nonetheless most relevant is that they are theories frequently used by both IR and foreign policy scholars.

Jupille, 2003, p. 22). These requirements seem to be fulfilled in the case of these two theories. The result of such a proceeding is an additive theory that offers more than the two that comprise it.

The article consists of four parts. In the first one, I am going to identify the essential assumptions of role theory and the two-level game framework as well as point out how these theories were developed and applied in diverse empirical studies. In the second part, I will try to elucidate how to combine assumptions of these two theories by following the strategy of ‘domain of application’ identified above. The third part will present the result of the synthesis by referring to the three factors that the two-level games framework is based on and by showing how previous studies focused on role theory could be supplemented by Putnam’s framework³. In the fourth, concluding part, I will try to summarize my reflections and sketch the turf of the proposed theoretical synthesis.

Role theory and two-level games – state of the art

Role theory refers to the metaphor of the theater, in which actors on stage play specific roles. This theory, developed within sociology and based on symbolic interactionism (Stryker, 2006; Stryker, Statham, 1985), replaced the theater’s stage with social relations in which people have specific roles to perform. The theory was then introduced to the IR debate – mainly due to the famous K. Holsti’s publication (1970). Thus, international system that has become the stage and states that have become the actors. Some of them play e.g. the roles of world powers, whereas some – the roles of regional powers or neutral states. All actors may also play their roles according to their own definitions or interpretation of the role, yet having the expectations and sometimes even the demands of others.

The development of role theory and its application in IR is frequently analyzed according to three stages (waves). The first wave is associated mainly with the work of Holsti (1970) and tended to focus simply on one of the concepts and processes that link *ego*, *alter*, and audience. Little attention was paid to the processes of role contestation, the relationship between different role conceptions and role demands formulated by *alter*. The development of the second wave shifted scholars’ attention towards processes of role contestation and role conflicts. The studies of that wave have been focused increasingly on interaction patterns between role dyads over extended time periods (Bengtsson, Elgström, 2011; Breuning, 2011; Harnisch, Frank, Maull, 2011; Cantir, Kaarbo, 2012; Thies, 2010; 2012; Thies, Breuning, 2012; Harnisch, Berstick, Gottwald, 2016; Malici, Walker, 2016). Additionally, scholars focused not only on domestic

³ I am aware of the fact that one should also show, how studies based on the Putnam’s idea could be supplemented by role theory, but due to the article’s length this cannot be achieved here.

context of role formation, but also on social interactions (occurring at the international level) that led to the establishing of specific roles.

Currently, scholars ask themselves about the third wave of role theory that, according to Walker (2017), is going to be focused on two-sided strategic interactions within and between *ego* and *alter* – acting as agents in world politics. Recent studies are focused on processes of *role contestations* that occur both horizontally – among political leaders (Walker, Schafer, Beielser, 2016) and vertically – between the political elite and public opinion (Beasley, Kaarbo, Solomon-Strauss, 2016; Foyle, 2004; Rathbun, 2004; Risse-Kappen, 1991). The processes of *role contestations* may also include broad processes of political contestation that are not always associated with debate regarding the specific state's role (McCourt, 2020).

The proposal developed within this article, being in line with the assumptions of the possible third wave studies, will be also focused on the process of *role contestation* (Cantir, Kaarbo, 2012) – understood as a process in which a particular role of the state in the international arena is discussed at the national level (that is state's *ego*) as well as in relation to other actors of world politics (which are described as *alter*). The process is sometimes described as *unboxing of the state's role* or *ego's unpacking* (Walker, Schafer, Beielser, 2016) and is also very much in line with the contemporary IR and FPA discourse (Cantir, Kaarbo, 2016, pp. 1–22). Applied in this paper practice of building a theoretical bridge will also follow the popular trend, in both IR and FPA, of combining explanatory variables from different levels of analysis – the individual, the state, and the international system (Morin, Paquin, 2018, pp. 330–333; Thies, Breuning, 2012). Additionally, recent studies focused on role theory try to link processes of change in the international system with changes in the roles of individual states (Friedrichs, 2021; Grossman, Schortgen, Friedrichs, 2022). Nevertheless, as the following paragraphs will show, the mere fact of taking into account the influences of the international environment does not yet mean creating a theoretical synthesis or combining role theory with IR one.

The idea of Putnam assumes that the fact of taking part in international bargain processes (Level I) influences domestic politics (Level II) and conversely, what happens within it determines the negotiation process itself. The two-level approach is usually used as a framework of analysis elucidating that within international negotiations or bilateral meetings, political leaders are involved in games that are played simultaneously at the international and the domestic level. Across the international game board sits the negotiator's foreign counterpart, whereas at his/her elbows are advisors and diplomats. Additionally, around the domestic game board behind him/her sit party and legislative leaders, representatives of interest groups and other constituents. Thus, the negotiation game appears to be extremely complex and requires great vigilance of the participants,

because what seems to make sense on the international board may turn out to be disastrous for the domestic board (Trumbore, 1998, p. 546).

Putnam identified three factors influencing the size of the win-set: namely, Level II preferences and coalitions; Level II institutions and ratification procedures, and Level I negotiators' strategies. All of them also influence the position of negotiators acting at the international level.

The idea of Putnam has been further developed and resulted in many diverse studies. The gist of positions of various social groups towards a negotiated agreement as well as the use of rigorous domestic ratification rules or procedures to improve one's bargaining position have been tested empirically in various studies (Mo, 1995; Milner, Rosendorff, 1996; Clark, Duchesne, Meunier, 2000; Leventoglu, Tarar, 2005). Additionally, some quite interesting pieces concerning the three factors that were indicated by Putnam have been published (Lisowski, 2002; Hug, Schulz, 2007; Hodson, Maher, 2014; Boyer, 2000; Shamir, Shikaki, 2005). What is more, some publications referring to the two-level games framework have extended the idea of Putnam by specifying factors influencing the size of the win-set and by introducing new ones (Knopf, 1993; Schoppa, 1993). Recently, studies have also been published that supplement the three factors with the role played today by modern technologies and social media, which consequently create digital two-level games (Bjola, Pamment, 2016; Kragh, Åsberg, 2017).

The idea presented in this article could be considered as a part of studies advancing the two-level games framework by supplementing it with other theories and it is also very much in line with the suggestion formulated by Putnam himself (1988, p. 442). Some studies following this idea have been already published (Trumbore, 1998; Shamir, Shikaki, 2005). My idea here is to combine the framework with role theory that is also in line with Moravcsik's suggestion that this framework is rather a metaphor than a full-fledged theory. In order to move from metaphor to theory, it should be supplemented with the following themes: specifications of domestic politics (the nature of the 'win-sets'), international negotiating environment (the determinants of interstate bargaining outcomes), and the statesman's preferences. Putnam's framework lacks a precise definition of how social groups can influence political negotiators and how the negotiations themselves; it also lacks a precise description of how the government and the opposition can influence and use existing negotiation procedures and institutions to influence either the negotiation process or their position in the country. There is also no indication in Putnam's idea of how the politician-negotiator himself/herself can use his/her position – there is only an indication that he/she can use it. Thus, I am going to use role theory, which will work as an operationalization of his proposal, in order to more accurately describe all three factors affecting the size of the win-set.

How to supplement Putnam's framework with role theory?

Before demonstrating my idea, one should also mention here that in the studies based on role theory one may also find references to Putnam's idea. Nonetheless, although the authors sometimes suggest that they are combining assumptions of these two theories, they do not synthesize them (Simon, 2019; Friedrichs, 2021). Rather, they refer to the idea that the whole *ego* and the state's role in the international system are also composed or determined by *alter* expectations – defined as significant or generalized others in international relations (operating usually at the system level of analysis) (Beneš, Harnisch, 2015). Thus, the authors refer to different levels of analysis that influence the processes of role construction or role contestation, but they do not generate theoretical syntheses. Sometimes, as it is in the case of the volume edited by Grossman, Schortgen, Friedrichs (2022), one could only find a reference to Putnam's article, but no attempt to combine his assumptions with role theory. All of these publications present analyses of selected cases based on the two theories, but do not combine them into one, additive theory.

My contribution is significantly different, as it goes beyond simply linking the two levels of analysis. My aim is thus to supplement the gaps of each theory with the elements offered by the other one. I claim that role theory operationalizes what Putnam described as Level II play, namely all the domestic forces influencing international negotiations. Putnam referred to Level II (that is domestic) preferences, institutions, and negotiators' strategies, but he did not operationalize them and thus role theory may offer a way of doing it by specifying how diverse states' roles together with different roles' perceptions (among both political elites and the masses) can determine international negotiation processes. Putnam's metaphor will be thus enhanced by identifying diverse role contestation processes. On the other hand, role theory will be supplemented by Putnam's mechanism of two-level games that identifies how *ego* and *alter* interact with each other. Without the practice described by Putnam, his metaphor and definition of win-set, role theory lacks this identification. The uniqueness of the approach presented here lies in making it possible to use diverse theories together and showing some cases to which they may be applied after synthesis. Putnam's publication underlined strategies applied while specific negotiations that have consequences in the deals reached; however, the reflection regarding two-level games as well as my theoretical synthesis may be successfully applied to any international agreement, not just those taking the form of treaties. Additionally, it can be also applied while analyzing relations not only between states, but also between states and International Organizations (IOs).

When developing his argument, Putnam firstly suggested that the possibility of negotiating an agreement is strongly linked with the size of the negotiated win-set, that is the scope of the negotiated agreement or as Putnam (1988,

p. 437) suggested – the set of all possible Level I agreements that would ‘win’ (gain) the necessary majority among the constituents. The author stressed that “larger win-sets make Level I agreement more likely, *ceteris paribus*” and that “the relative size of the respective Level II win-sets will affect the distribution of the joint gains from the international bargain” (Putnam, 1988, p. 440). As any successful agreement must fall within Level II win-sets of each of the parties to the accord, so an agreement is easier to achieve when these win-sets overlap – and the larger the win-sets, the more likely they are to overlap. On the contrary, the smaller the win-sets, the greater the risk of negotiation failure. Additionally, the larger the perceived win-set of a negotiator, the more he/she can be pushed around by the other Level I negotiators. Conversely, a small domestic win-set can be a bargaining advantage, because negotiators might refer to domestic level constraints during the negotiations and stress they although they would like to accept a proposal, it could be never accepted at home (Putnam 1988, p. 440).

These assumptions clearly explain the metaphor of two-level games mentioned above, as “each player at the international table, who is dissatisfied with the outcome may upset the game board, and conversely, any leader who fails to satisfy his fellow players at the domestic table risks being evicted from his seat” (Putnam, 1988, p. 434). Negotiators are playing a game displayed at two tables simultaneously – results from one table affect the other one and *vice versa*. Moreover, any smarter player (negotiator) can use the state of the game from the first table in the game at the second table. Negotiators are forced to be ‘Janus-faced’ as they have “to balance international and domestic concerns in a process of double-edged diplomacy” (Moravcsik, 1993, p. 15). This proposal favors neither the structural approach nor the one known in the literature as ‘second-image-reversed’ – it considers stimuli from both levels simultaneously.

Additionally, the size of any win-set depends on three factors mentioned above namely: Level II preferences and coalitions; Level II institutions and Level I negotiators’ strategies⁴. These three factors will be used in this paper to develop my proposition of linking Putnam’s framework with role theory. Therefore, I am not going to explain them in detail, but only in relation to role theory’s assumptions. That brings me also to the main terms of role theory that will be explained in the following paragraphs.

The term ‘role’ has several definitions in the literature, as each version of role theory offers a different definition (Holsti, 1970, pp. 245–245; Walker, 1992;

⁴ The negotiation process may also be affected by the so-called reverberation phenomenon – also described by Putnam (1988, pp. 454–456) – whereby the ruling elites and negotiators of one country try to influence the perception of the negotiated agreement by the constituents of the other country; pointing out, for example, the costs of non-agreement or the benefits of accepting it. This is not the focus of this article, although it also provides the future potential for extending Putnam’s framework to include role theory.

Hall, 1999; Hopf, 2002; Wendt, 1999; Hudson, 1999; Cantir, Kaarbo, 2016). In this article, in conjunction with the two-level games framework, 'role' is defined as social positions (as well as a socially recognized category of actors) that are constituted by *ego* (Level II preferences, institutions, etc.) and *alter's* (Level I) expectations regarding the purpose of an actor in an organized group or international system. This is an integrated definition that tries to mix both own *ego's* reflection regarding the role and repertoires of behavior, inferred from others' expectations (Thies, 2010).

Role theory has its specific terminology. In this article, only selected terms will be discussed: role conception, role contestation, role expectations, and role conflict. *Role conceptions* are an actor's perception of its position vis-à-vis others (the *ego* part of the role) and the perception of the role expectations of others (the *alter* part of a role) signaled through language and particular action (Deitelhoff, 2006; Kirste, Maull, 1996). *Role conceptions* are naturally contested because they are closely related to the roles of other actors; they are constantly changing and developing social constructs. *Role contestation processes* occur both horizontally – as political elites might disagree over a possible state's role and also diverse social groups might also disagree on this issue, and vertically – as elites and masses also might disagree regarding the state's role; especially its role in foreign policy (Cantir, Kaarbo, 2012). *Role expectations* comprise both *ego* expectations, that is domestic (formulated horizontally by political elites and diverse bureaucratic agencies as well as vertically by governing elites and masses) expectations as to what the role is and what it implies as well as *alter* expectations, that is explicit or implicit demands of others. Here, we might expect also *role conflicts*. *Inter-role conflicts* are conflicts between non-compatible, competing, or clashing role expectations about self and others between states and non-state actors. They are about domestically and/or internationally generated expectations and include mutual perceptions and assumptions about what the other expects of oneself, and about domestically generated expectations of the self-vis-à-vis the other. *Inter-role* conflicts will often also produce *intra-role* conflicts. Additionally, the latter occur when governing elites have different ideas regarding state's role than the public or when the role conflict occurs within the ruling elite (Harnisch, Frank, Maull, 2011, pp. 7–15, 256).

All these terms and relations between them (together with the two-level games context) might be illustrated with the following diagram.

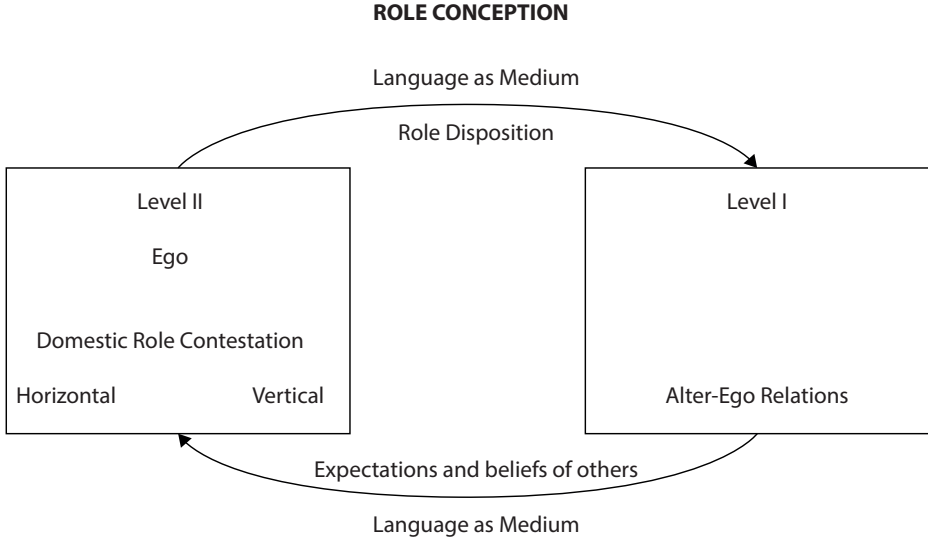


Figure 1. Role conception as a result of interactions occurring at two levels of negotiation

Source: Author’s own elaboration.

According to this framework, all the processes that are occurring at Level II are operationalized by the application of role theory and the concepts that are derived from it. After applying role theory, it is possible to identify and clearly describe all the mechanisms that are occurring at Level II during the negotiation that is taking place at Level I. Conversely, by using Putnam’s framework, it is possible to identify how *alter’s* expectations or demands are influencing the *ego’s* role conception and how they trigger role Contestation processes that would not otherwise happen. Putnam’s framework will clearly show how *ego-alter* relations concerning a particular negotiated issue take place – e.g., how social or activist groups, as well as diverse institutions operating in the state, adopt *alter* expectations or demands, and how the role conceptions they formulate determine *alter’s* attitudes.

Role-playing at two-level games. Initial results of theoretical synthesis

This section of the paper is divided into three parts related to Putnam's concept: (1) Level II preferences and coalitions, (2) Level II institutions, (3) The strategies of Level I negotiators (these will be in italics). Each of the three parts is accompanied by one or two hypotheses (in italics and bold) related to results from the way I combined role theory and the two-level games framework. On the one hand, they show how diverse processes of role contestation (caused by the society or the ruling elite) might influence the size of negotiated win-sets. On the other, they illustrate how international negotiations influence domestic politics by triggering role contestation processes.

Level II preferences and coalitions

The greater the role conflict between ego and alter's role expectations, the smaller the win-set.

The more intense the process of horizontal or vertical role contestation, the smaller the win-set.

Any agreement negotiated at the international level requires subsequent acceptance by the society of a given country, where diverse groups pursue their interests. Thus, Putnam suggested that the win-set size depends on the distribution of power, preferences, and possible coalitions among Level II constituents. As a result, each negotiator is constrained by the preferences of various social groups, such as: labor unions, lobby groups, or other activists groups, which may have homogeneous or heterogeneous interests and which influence the size of Level II win-set – that is the win-set possible to accept at the domestic level. The negotiator must also take into account the pressures and demands of domestic constituents. If the negotiator ignores them, he/she will not be able to get the negotiated agreements ratified, hence there are two games played at the same time.

When the domestic interests are heterogeneous, the negotiator has to balance between different factions and diverse interests at the same time. Nonetheless, the problem of interest becomes more intriguing in such cases, since the negotiator can take advantage of such a situation, not only within domestic politics, but also at Level I suggesting that the particular type of international agreement cannot be accepted because of conflicting interests of diverse domestic activists groups.

When the lack of international agreement means to maintain the *status quo*, the costs of not reaching an agreement or breaking off negotiations are low, therefore when constituents may face low costs from no-agreement, they will be more skeptical of Level I agreements (Putnam, 1988, p. 442; Lisowski, 2002).

As a result, each interest group may have different ideas about the role of the state both in the bargaining processes and in the international system as a whole. It is worth of noting here, since sometimes the negotiations might lead to a specific agreement that changes the state's role in relation to the negotiations' partner, but also to others not involved in the negotiations. What is more, also negotiators themselves in order to influence their negotiating position at Levels I and II may use in their rhetoric conceptual categories that originates from role theory such as *role conception*, *role demands*, *role conflict*, etc.

When supplemented with the assumptions of role theory, it can be supposed that if the Level I negotiated agreement implies the imposition of a new state's role that is not accepted at Level II (that is, the agreement brings a change of the dominated role conception), then the chances of its adoption are reduced. If the role that the public sees and supports for the state does not resonate with the vision of the role dictated by the international agreement, the chances of its adoption are low due to *role conflict* and consequently *role contestation processes* caused by negotiations. Political decision-makers, who are at the same time negotiators, will not accept the agreement for fear that the attempt to impose a change in the role of the state will not meet with acceptance and, as a consequence (in democratic states⁵) will lead to the loss of power at the domestic level. Thus, the greater the difference between the role accepted by constituents and that implied by the Level I agreement, the smaller the win-set's size. However, this situation can improve the negotiating position of political leaders at Level I, as they can stress that the international agreement cannot be accepted at Level II for the role that constituents see for their state is different from that proposed by the agreement.

What is more, the negotiators can also turn over the game boards and indicate to Level II interest groups that it is the Level I negotiators (other states, allies or international organizations) who are trying to impose a different role with which they do not agree. In this case, the negotiators can build their support at Level II using the negotiation situation from Level I suggesting that it is the Level I negotiators who are trying to impose a new role on the state and society. The negotiators can show that the *role conflict* arises from pressures from Level I and the very process of *role contestation* that occurs horizontally and vertically arises from the very fact of taking part in international negotiations. Additionally, they have the opportunity to portray themselves as defenders of a previous role, accepted by domestic society.

⁵ Role contestation processes occur in democratic states only, therefore one should indicate here that ideas regarding role contestation refer to democracies only and my synthesis can also be applied to democratic states or international organizations, in which role contestation might occur.

As an example of these processes, one could indicate the horizontal and vertical role contestations that have arisen in the U.K. regarding Britain's participation in the war against Iraq in 2003, since this case was analyzed according to role theory (Gaskarth, 2016). Unlike the situation of previous intervention in Bosnia, Kosovo, or Sierra Leone, the war in Iraq triggered processes of vertical role contestation in the U.K., with the British public protesting against the war. The British rejected both the role of 'reliable ally' of the U.S. and great power. At that time, there was huge public anxiety in the U.K. that was leading to new activism against war among the British public (Gaskarth, 2016, p. 108). One can, of course, suggest that the protests had no impact on the government's final decision anyway. Nevertheless, they were a signal that the public did not agree with the role being pursued by the U.K. authorities and would like to see it changed. The government, in order to fulfill its alliance obligations to the U.S., could not take these protest voices into account. Moreover, in order to maintain its negotiating position in talks with the U.S., it had to take care to calm them, as they could hinder agreement.

What is more, the processes of vertical role contestation in the U.K. triggered the horizontal ones, as the Liberal Democrat leadership with support from a minority of Labour and Conservative members decided not to support the intervention. What is more, an additional very important move should be mentioned here, namely the decision to have Parliament vote on going to war. Previously, this was not practiced, due to traditions of bipartisanship and the need for consensus to strengthen Britain's position internationally, parliamentary disagreements on foreign policy issues were muted. In the case of the Iraq war, however, it was decided to discuss the role of the U.K.

In the section below I will try to show how the proposed theoretical synthesis can explain this case. Role theory seems to be insufficient while trying to express different role contestation processes occurring in relation to international negotiations. It seems that the assumptions of the two-level games could well complement the mentioned analysis of the U.K.'s role at that time by showing how the British-American (special) relationships influenced role contestation processes at the domestic level and *vice versa*. One should ask here, to what extent the special British-American relations (Level I) influenced the processes of *role contestation* at that time and, based on my theoretical synthesis, I suggest that Putnam's assumptions would give an answer. It might be assumed that political leaders used the Level I situation in order to gain support at Level II by stressing the need to be a 'reliable ally'. Nevertheless, without the Level I process, it would not be possible for the public to formulate new roles for the U.K. (like global development superpower – also mentioned in the above-cited study). Thus, the domestic processes of role contestation should be considered as a result of Level I.

What is more, while applying my theoretical synthesis, one should note that, political leaders also had to take *the vertical role contestation* process into

account – as they were forced to refer to diverse state's roles more consciously and with reference to Level I.

In cases such as the one indicated above, political leaders may take the advantage of negotiations occurring at Level I and even trigger role contestation at Level II. By using specific discursive strategies, they may exaggerate the costs of accepting or rejecting an international agreement. In this case, one should imagine a situation where one can force the idea that not going to war will deteriorate U.K.'s role and its perception. Britain will lose its status as a reliable ally. In this way, games that are being played at two boards (domestic and international) are interconnected and the negotiators can improve their bargaining position at Level I. Additionally, the negotiators can also improve their position at Level II by pointing out specific role demands formulated at Level I that should be accepted.

To conclude, the greater the conflict between role conception (defined at Level II) and role demands (formulated at Level I), the smaller the win-set's size and consequently, the international agreement is less likely *ceteris paribus*. Moreover, the greater the conflict regarding the role conception at Level II (between diverse interest groups or political parties); in other words – the more the role conception is contested horizontally (by governing elites and political opposition) and vertically (that is by elites and masses), the smaller the win-set and, as a result, less likely is the agreement.

Level II institutions

The more intense the process of role contestation, the smaller the win-set.

According to Putnam, the size of the win-set depends also on Level II political institutions, that is various and sometimes quite complex ratification procedures, such as the need for an absolute or qualified majority for the adoption of a negotiated treaty or the need to hold a referendum. Party discipline can also facilitate ratification procedures and at the same time weaken the negotiators' relative bargaining position – in such cases, they are not able to claim that domestic pressures preclude some disadvantageous deals at Level I; other negotiators may try to impose specific provisions by pointing out that there is a partisan discipline at Level II that guarantees ratification (Putnam, 1988, p. 449).

When discussing ratification procedures in democracies one should consider three main possible scenarios that may influence Level II win-sets. First, we can imagine a situation in which the parliament accepts the negotiated agreement, which is then rejected in a constitutionally required referendum, because the citizens are against the agreement. Second, it is also possible that the ruling elite does not get the required majority in parliament, such as three-quarters or three-fifths of the vote. Occasionally, ratification requires convincing some parliamentarians from opposition parties, and it brings its fair share of difficulties.

This is often the situation in the U.S., where the system of checks and balances occasionally forces the need for agreement between Republicans and Democrats, and this is especially true when the President represents a different party than the one with the majority in Congress. Finally, one can also imagine a situation where, in the absence of party discipline, the ruling party itself does not push through a negotiated agreement.

In all these scenarios, however, we can observe a domestic process of *role contestation* that occurs either horizontally or vertically, or both. In all these cases, political leaders can use the game played at the international level to gain support at the domestic level as well as they can also use the two-level games conversely in order to improve their bargaining position. In all of these cases, the negotiator may try to use processes of vertical role contestation or the suggestion that the agreement will not change the role of the state, or will change for the better. He/she may also try to use the Level I game to present themselves as defenders of the old role against changes demanded by *alter*. Negotiators can also use public opposition to improve their Level I position by indicating that they would accept the terms of the treaty, but the public would not. He/she can also turn the game board over and, while trying to convince the public, opposition, or political colleagues, suggest: "Look, the whole world is looking at us, therefore we should take the responsibility and embrace the new role required, rather than focus on domestic quarrels". Indeed, one can also imagine an opposite scenario, in which the negotiator disagrees with a treaty proposed at Level I and tries to suggest that the new role demands are unacceptable.

When doing this, negotiators can refer to a new possible role their country could play in the international system after accepting (or not accepting) a treaty. By stressing new role expectations formulated by the international community, the negotiators can influence the state's ego and in this way reformulate the role imagined for the state by the domestic political elite. However, one may suggest that if the negotiators can convince their party members to accept the negotiated agreement by pointing to the new (in their view better) role that the state is to play in the international system, the chances of the agreement's implementation are higher and the win-set size is larger. Thus, the more muted the role contestation process, the larger the win-set. In such cases, negotiators use the processes occurring at Level I in order to change the ruling elite's attitude towards the state's role – that is some of the institutions at Level II. Additionally, the change at Level II (new vision concerning the state's role) is used at Level I by pointing out the hard work the negotiator had to do to convince his party members of this position. He can then confidently say: "See how much I had to do to satisfy my colleagues; they have accepted a new role for our country, although some of the opposition and even the public are not convinced".

Due to the article's lengths restrictions it is impossible to refer to examples of all three situations here, but a situation that can be evoked here and which

triggered very intense processes of role contestation (especially at the institutional level) is the example of the United Kingdom in the period just before and after the Brexit referendum. The processes of role contestation (both horizontal and vertical) were already taking place before the referendum itself, but they intensified most after it, when negotiations on the terms of leaving the EU had to start.

This case is very well presented by Spencer Whyte (2022), identifying four roles that emerged in British political discourse at that time: *hard active independent*, *soft active independent*, *regional sub-system collaborator*, and *bridge*. All of them were indexed by referring to K. Holsti's (1970) ideas and after analyzing excerpts from 10 articles, speeches, and debate transcripts (along with other informational sources) from 2016 to 2019 (Whyte, 2022, p. 72). As the author stressed, according to role theory, all of them should be considered as roles that the UK could or should play, in other words – possible role conceptions and not the actual foreign policy behavior. Nevertheless, even though the aforementioned roles have been well identified and described, and even though they have been defined on the basis of processes of internal contestation as well as on alter (US and EU) expectations, their final characterizations remain rather embedded in the domestic context.

And although the statements of politicians on the basis of which they were described refer to the international situation, it seems that role theory alone is insufficient in this case. That is why, I claim that this case study might be advanced by applying the synthesis of role theory and two-level games framework. If the very fact of the Brexit negotiations and how they specifically determined the roles contested in the U.K. were taken into account, the whole analysis would prove more insightful. It would then be possible to identify which roles emerged in political discourse as a direct result of the negotiations themselves, and which roles were excluded from the discourse precisely because of the negotiations. Moreover, by incorporating insights of Putnam's framework into analyses based on role theory, it would be possible to identify which roles have been 'created' by politician-negotiators for the negotiations themselves or for the purposes of creating their image within domestic politics. The analysis, based on role theory, could be further advanced if the processes of role identification were enriched by analyses of British politicians' statements at the EU forum – this would allow one to determine how processes of internal contestation determine U.K. identification at the EU level. In addition, if the analyses of politicians' statements to the British public included references to the position in the EU on the basis of Putnam's analyses, it would be possible to determine whether the processes of role contestation are not triggered for the negotiations themselves and improving the negotiating position at Level I. Consequently, it would be possible to show what Putnam called the reversal of the game board and indicate how the roles identified at Level I and Level II affect each other.

To conclude, the more the role is contested by the Level II institutions and by diverse activist groups, the less likely is the achievement of the agreement. Thus, to enlarge the win-set, negotiators should, as far as possible, calm down the processes of role contestation, or present possible role changes as beneficial for the state and citizens, as the more intense the process of role contestations, the smaller the win-set.

The strategies of Level I negotiators

The better the negotiator is at convincing constituents to state's role change, the larger the win set.

The more intense the process of role contestation the negotiator can trigger, the smaller the win-set.

As Putnam (1988, p. 450) pointed out, the larger the win-set, the easier the acceptance of the agreement at Level II, but also the weaker the bargaining position of the negotiator. This is a kind of tactical dilemma of each negotiator who just wants to increase his/her chances of adopting and ratifying the agreement, but at the same time does not want to weaken his/her position at Level I. The greater chances for an agreement, the larger the win-set size, however, the negotiator can also ensure that the agreement is ratified not only by increasing its size, but also by securing Level II support before negotiation processes start or by side-payments. Thus, we can identify two factors that might influence the bargaining situation of the negotiator. Firstly, the very position of the negotiator, whose popularity at home and abroad increases his/her chances of convincing his/her public. Additionally, his/her strong international position influences the size of the win-set as such and also the possibility of accepting it abroad. The society of state B will more readily accept an agreement (even if inspired by state A) if a politician from state A has a strong international reputation. Therefore, the ruling elite should ensure that negotiators have a good, trustworthy reputation, even at the international level. Secondly, the factor that influences the possibility of treaty ratification are side-payments that should count not as direct gains, but as those factors that make final ratification possible.

As I am focusing on role theory assumptions here, the meaning of side-payments, typical for game theory, is not relevant here. Much more important is the position and popularity of the negotiator who can participate in the role contestation process, both horizontally and vertically. What is more, the negotiator has the opportunity to trigger or intensify role contestation processes and in this way improve his/her bargaining position. If the negotiator has rhetorical skills and can convince his constituents and other politicians of the negotiated agreement and thus the new role of the state, his/her position within Level II will be better and he/she will be able to gain more at Level I as well. Nonetheless, as in all other cases, the negotiator can always turn over the boards on which he/she

is playing and if he/she does not want to accept the agreement proposed at Level I, he/she can trigger or reinforce the role contestation processes at Level II and thus reduce the win-set.

Here, not only *role conception* or *role conflicts*, but also *role contestation processes*, which can be simply intensified by negotiators' strategies, are stressed. Therefore, one may suggest that the better the negotiator is at convincing constituents to state's role change, the larger the win set. Additionally, the more intense the process of role contestation he/she can trigger by negotiating the agreement, the smaller the win-set. The issue of negotiator's strategy actually combines the elements mentioned for the other two factors (Level II preferences and coalitions as well as Level institutions). It is the negotiator, who is also a political player at Level II, who can use his skills both to build a vision of role conflict between international role demands and domestic role conception as well as to elicit processes of role contestation that occur both horizontally and vertically.

One may discuss here the JCPOA negotiations example which was analyzed according to role theory (Friedrichs, 2021, pp. 82–126). In fact, the mentioned author focused on the possible roles played by the U.S. during the negotiations and particularly after the implementation of both the Joint Plan of Action (JPA) and then later the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA). President Obama did not have an easy task at that time, because the Iran deal was not perceived well either by the American public or by U.S. Congress. It certainly marked a shift in the role the U.S. plays in the Middle East, a place of particular importance to the country. This case seems to be quite interesting here, as the U.S. President had to convince not only the American public, but also congressional representatives and sometimes also his advisers to change the U.S. international role. He had to employ an efficient strategy to convince the Republican-controlled Congress and calm public sentiment – which was opposed to Iran and any negotiations with this state. Consequently, while analyzing the negotiations regarding the Iran deal Friedrichs (2021) identified diverse *intra-* and *inter-role* conflicts both between congressmen and between the Obama administration and Congress. Moreover, the author tried to elucidate how the role played by the U.S. at the international level influenced its possible domestic role. Nonetheless, according to the idea presented in this article, I claim that this case, although well-advanced, can be improved by emphasizing how the U.S. international role and relations with its allies triggered role indicated by congressmen at that time. The study presents a very interesting and insightful set of roles identified by American politicians – members of the Senate and the House of Representatives.

This analysis would however benefit if, using Putnam's framework, one could show whether any of the proposed roles were possible simply because this specific deal was discussed. Role theory reveals its shortcomings in such analyses and

therefore, the two-level games framework is a good supplement to it. Thus, the proposed synthesis could be applied in this case.

The agreement with Iran was treated, mainly by Israel (the strong Israeli lobby in the U.S. is also important while considering Putnam's framework perspective⁶), as a definitive change in the balance of the above-mentioned relations. After incorporating Putnam's idea, there would be possible to identify which roles were discussed as a result of Israeli's engagement in the Level I negotiations and which were triggered (both by congressmen and the U.S. President) in order to show the U.S. position towards the negotiated agreement.

The U.S. President was however able to make clear that the desired alternative of tougher sanctions was simply not available – that is keeping properly for such a role was no longer an option. He was then able to mute role contestation processes that occurred vertically (between elites and masses) and vertically (among congressmen), as that was an important condition for accepting this deal.⁷ Nonetheless, President Obama and his administration have put great effort into making this happen; special tweet channels have even been created to communicate the benefits of the agreement and to frame the possible role change as a great achievement for United States diplomacy (Bjola, Manor, 2018). A lot of effort has gone into making the case for role change and suppressing the processes of role contestation – especially those occurring horizontally – between congressional representatives. The case demonstrates that the more the processes of role contestation are muted, the better the chances of agreement. However, in this case the position and actions taken by the chief negotiator are of paramount importance.

Cases in which the negotiator and his/her colleagues does not agree with the treaty and his/her colleagues (as well as the public) follow him/her are also worth mentioning here. The negotiator does not have to convince them, but still may use the processes occurring at Level I in order to strengthen his/her position at Level II. While presenting the agreement to his/her party colleagues, the negotiator has a chance to portray himself/herself as a tenacious politician who defends his/her country and keeps acceptable to those in power. He/she defies the expectations formulated by those who, from Level I, want to change that role. The negotiator can successfully exaggerate his/her position as the one who has protected the role that the policies of the various parties see for the state and

⁶ The fact that a state negotiating an international agreement must also take into account the interests of third parties, among others its other allies, was noted by Knopf (1993), who supplemented the assumptions of two-level games framework through this argument.

⁷ Because of the U.S. President's decision, the agreement was not considered a treaty requiring ratification. Because Congress was divided, President Obama opted out of obtaining the support of 2/3 of the Senate. Nevertheless, he still needed the approval of 50% plus 1 of the members of each house of Congress because the Iran deal itself required the passage of a number of implementing bills.

presents himself/herself as the one who builds unity and consensus among politicians of all options. Consequently, the negotiator has the opportunity to show that by not accepting the treaty he/she has defended not only the public's interests, but also its view of the state's role in the world politics.

Conclusion

The presented article was aimed at developing Putnam's two-level games framework by supplementing it with role theory assumptions. By referring to role theory, my aim was to bring Putnam's framework closer to the domestic constraints of international bargaining processes. I decided to focus on some ideas of role theory to stress not only institutional, but also societal constraints of international negotiations and this was possible due to the terms such as *role conflict or horizontal and vertical role contestation processes*.

The presented synthesis offers a new theoretical combination (presented in forms of three types of hypotheses) that may be further applied in diverse empirical studies focused on international negotiation processes. It offers a shift in Putnam's metaphor toward a more evolved theory of bargaining by pointing out how diverse domestic processes described in role theory categories influence Level I win-sets and *vice versa*. These processes may be described and explained according to role theory that shows not only relations between political institutions, but also between the governing elites and masses. In this way, role theory operationalized all the processes that occurred at Level II and that were only vaguely described by Putnam, as he for instance did not clarify, how to identify the influence of social groups on the international bargain process. Additionally, Putnam's outline was also supplemented by the assumption that Level II processes do not only limit, but also expand the win-sets.

The synthesis also enhanced role theory that was quite often described as theoretically rich but methodologically poor. By merging it with the two-level games framework, one might indicate how role conception, role conflict or role contestation processes influence state's foreign policy. Role theory is supplemented by the two-level games with a more concrete and rigid framework in which the specific processes involved in a state's role are framed properly in terms of variables influencing foreign policy decisions. Thus, the proposed synthesis shows more clearly, how *alter* influences *ego* and how the relations between them impact state's foreign policy. Without Putnam's framework, role theory would only offer an indication that *ego* and *alter* influence each other; the assumptions of two-level games, however, show how this happens by referring, among other things, to the preferences of various social groups or functioning

institutions. Thus, both the term *alter* and its influence on role conception and role contestations were specified based on Putnam's idea.

The turf of the new synthesis is all those international negotiations conducted by states (and IOs), in which we can see the processes of role conflict (between *ego* and *alter*), changes in the role of the state on the international arena as a result of negotiations or other perceptions of its role formulated by the other participants in the negotiations (be they allies or international organizations). Additionally, the proposed synthesis can be applied in all these cases, in which negotiators turn over the game board and use role demands formulated at Level I in order to trigger role contestation processes and role conflicts at Level II.

The ideas developed in the article can be applied to many other different cases – covering not only negotiations as such, but also any international treaty or agreement, as well as conflicts that should be resolved through agreements. For instance, one might apply it to analyze the revision of states' roles within an international organization with particular emphasis on the role change or the role demands. The only constraint is that the proposed synthesis has to be applied rather to systems, within which processes of role contestation occur or assumptions of different activist groups about the role of the state have any meaning for politicians and governing elites. Additionally, one can also apply other terms that originate from role theory, like for instance: *role enactment*, *role strain* or *role competition* and in this way develop Putnam's framework. The only limitation in such a case will be only the scholar's creativity.

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