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**Understanding decision-making dynamics in normalizing of  
international relations: A case study of the rational actor model in  
the U.S.-Libya relations**

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**Abstract:**

The normalization of relations between countries is a complex process involving negotiations, strategic decision-making, and consideration of national interests. The Rational Actor Model, a widely used framework in international relations, assumes that states act rationally to maximize their interests. However, critics argue that this model oversimplifies decision-making and neglects domestic politics, historical legacies, and other factors. This study aims to understand the Rational Actor Model's effectiveness in explaining the motivations, strategies, and outcomes of normalization. It employs a case study (The normalization of the U.S.-Libya relations which took place in 2006), data sources, and Key research questions explore the model's adequacy in accounting for decision-making processes, the influence of domestic politics and historical legacies, its limitations, and implications for policy and conflict resolution. The findings will deepen our understanding of the complexities of normalization and inform policymakers, diplomats, and researchers in developing better strategies. By addressing the limitations of the Rational Actor Model and exploring alternative frameworks, this study seeks to provide insights into decision-making dynamics and promote conflict resolution, cooperative international relations, and a more comprehensive understanding the process of normalizing relations.

**Keywords:** Rational Actor Model, Normalization of Relations, decision-making.

**فهم ديناميكية صنع القرار في تطبيع العلاقات الدولية: دراسة حالة لنموذج الفاعل العقلاني في العلاقات  
الليبية الامريكية**

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**المخلص**

تعتبر عملية تطبيع العلاقات بين الدول عملية معقدة تنطوي على المفاوضات، واتخاذ القرارات الاستراتيجية ومراعاة المصالح الوطنية. يفترض نموذج الفاعل العقلاني الرشيد، وهو إطار يُستخدم على نطاق واسع في العلاقات الدولية أن الدول تتصرف بشكل عقلاني لتحقيق أقصى قدر من مصالحها. ومع ذلك، يرى النقاد أن هذا النموذج يباليغ في تبسيط عملية صنع القرار ويتجاهل السياسات الداخلية والموروثات التاريخية وعوامل أخرى. تهدف هذه الدراسة إلى فهم فعالية نموذج الفاعل العقلاني الرشيد في تفسير الدوافع والاستراتيجيات والنتائج المتعلقة بعملية التطبيع. وتعتمد على دراسة حالة (تطبيع العلاقات بين الولايات المتحدة وليبيا والذي حدث في عام 2006) ومصادر البيانات تستكشف الأسئلة البحثية الرئيسية عن

مدى كفاية النموذج في تفسير عمليات اتخاذ القرار، وتأثير السياسات الداخلية والموروثات التاريخية، وقيودها، والآثار المترتبة على السياسة وحل النزاعات. ستعمق نتائج هذه الدراسة فهمنا لتعقيدات عملية التطبيع وإرشاد صناع السياسات والدبلوماسيين والباحثين الى تطوير استراتيجيات أفضل من خلال معالجة قيود الفاعل العقلاني الرشيد واستكشاف اطر نظرية بديلة، تسعى هذه الدراسة إلى تقديم رؤى حول ديناميات صنع القرار وتعزيز حل النزاعات والعلاقات الدولية التعاونية وفهم أكثر شمولاً لعملية التطبيع.

**الكلمات المفتاحية:** نموذج الفاعل العقلاني، تطبيع العلاقات، صناعة القرار.

## 1.1 Introduction

The process of normalizing relations between any two countries is a complex and delicate process influenced by political, economic, and social factors. The Rational Actor Model (RAM) is a prominent theoretical framework used to analyze such processes. RAM assumes that states act in a rational manner to maximize their interests, considering costs and benefits. It provides insights into the motivations, actions, and strategic calculations of the involved parties. RAM suggests that countries engage in normalization when it aligns with their national interest, driven by economic, geopolitical, stability, or prestige factors. However, RAM has limitations, assuming perfect information, rational choices, and unitary actors, while decision-making is influenced by domestic politics, public opinion, bureaucracy, and history. To capture these complexities, other theoretical perspectives like psychology, sociology, and institutionalism should be considered. This study aims to assess RAM's applicability and limitations in understanding normalization between two countries. Through case studies and interdisciplinary approaches, it seeks to deepen our understanding of motivations, strategies, and outcomes, providing insights for policymakers and researchers. RAM is a valuable starting point, but it must be complemented by other frameworks for a comprehensive understanding of the complex dynamics involved.

## 1.2 Problem Statement:

Normalizing relations between two countries is a complex process involving negotiations, decision-making, and national interests. The Rational Actor Model (RAM) assumes states act rationally to maximize their interests, but it has limitations. RAM assumes perfect information, rational decisions, and unitary actors, while real-world interactions are influenced by domestic politics, public opinion, bureaucracy, and history. To understand the normalization process, it is necessary to critically assess RAM's effectiveness in explaining motivations, strategies, and outcomes. This involves identifying its limitations and exploring alternative frameworks that capture the complexities. Policymakers, diplomats, and scholars can benefit from a nuanced understanding of decision-making factors to develop effective strategies for successful and sustainable normalization outcomes.

## 1.3 Research Questions:

- 1- To what extent does the RAM adequately explain the motivations and decision-making processes of states involved in normalizing relations between two countries?
- 2- What are the limitations of the RAM in capturing the complexities of the normalization process, and enhance our understanding of the decision-making dynamics involved, and how did historical events shape the rational actor behavior of the U.S and Libya in the normalization process?
- 3- What lessons can be learned from the case study of successful and unsuccessful normalization processes regarding the factors that contribute to positive outcomes, and how do these findings inform the effectiveness of the Rational Actor Model in explaining and predicting normalization efforts?

## 1.4 Importance of the Study:

- 1- The study deepens our understanding of decision-making dynamics and motivations in normalization processes, going beyond rationality and unitary actors.
- 2- It enriches academic discourse by critically assessing the Rational Actor Model, exploring its limitations, and encouraging the development of more nuanced theoretical frameworks.
- 3- It has direct implications for policymakers and diplomats, helping them develop more effective strategies tailored to specific contexts.

4- The study contributes to conflict resolution efforts by identifying factors that facilitate successful normalization and promote cooperative relationships between countries.

### **1.5 Literature Review:**

There are various studies that are helpful investigating (RAM) as a theoretical framework in the field of international relations:

1- Allison, G. T. (1971). In his book title "The Essence of Decision: Explaining the Cuban Missile Crisis". In this influential study, Graham Allison applies the RAM to analyze the decision-making processes of the United States and the Soviet Union during the Cuban Missile Crisis. He examines the actors' objectives, calculations, and choices to understand their behavior and the eventual resolution of the crisis.

2- Snyder, J., & Bruck, H. W. (2004) Foreign Policy Decision-Making in Rational Terms. This study examines the application of the RAM to understand the decision-making processes of states in various foreign policy contexts. It explores how actors define their objectives, evaluate alternatives, and make choices based on rational calculations.

3- Jervis, R. (1976) in his book titled "Perception and Misperception in International Politics", utilizes the RAM to analyze how states' perceptions and misperceptions of each other's intentions and actions influence their decision-making. He explores how cognitive biases and information processing affect the rationality of actors within the RAM framework.

These studies demonstrate the varied applications of the RAM in understanding decision-making processes, crisis management, conflict escalation, foreign policy choices. They highlight how the RAM provides a theoretical framework for analyzing state behavior based on rational calculations and the pursuit of objectives.

### **1.6 Methodology:**

To understand the Rational Actor Model's role in normalizing relations between the countries, a historical method approach will be used. The following steps will be taken:

**Historical Context:** Begin by providing a comprehensive historical context of the case study of the normalization of the U.S. - Libya relations that took place in 2006, including key events, conflicts, diplomatic engagements, and efforts towards normalization. This historical background will help situate us study within the broader historical trajectory

**Data Collection:** Primary and secondary sources will be used for data collection. Primary sources may include interviews with policymakers and diplomats involved in the normalization process, as well as official documents and diplomatic correspondence. Secondary sources will include academic articles, books, policy reports, and media sources that shed light on decision-making processes and outcomes.

## **2. RAM Model:**

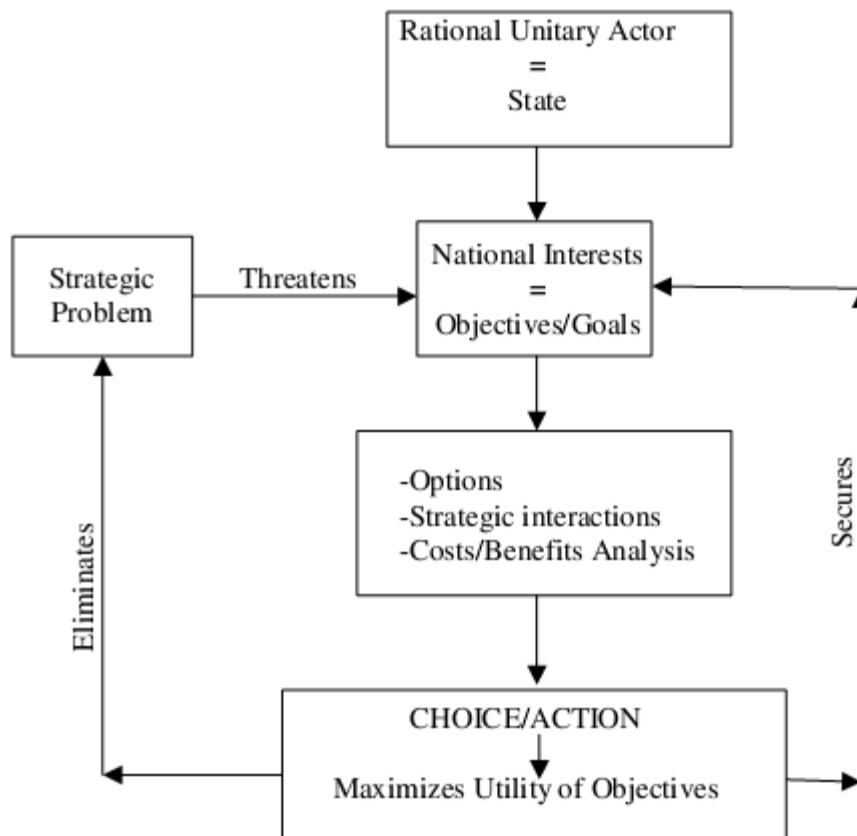
The Rational Actor Model (RAM) emphasizes the collective actions of a country and how international relations influence those actions. While there are various theoretical frameworks in foreign policy research, the RAM is widely used because it offers a straightforward way to study a nation-state's decision-making processes. It enables researchers to better understand and predict future outcomes or actions taken by a country's government. The RAM assumes that a nation's actions are a response to strategic threats and opportunities in the international environment. The decision-making process involves identifying goals and objectives, considering different options, evaluating the costs and benefits of each option, and selecting the option that best achieves the desired outcomes (Allison & Zelikow, 1999).

The RAM is characterized by order, precision, and logic, making it an appealing model for explaining foreign policy decision-making. It relies on four core concepts: goals and objectives, alternatives, consequences, and choice. Goals and objectives represent the values and interests of the decision-maker and are ranked based on their desirability. Alternatives are the available choices in a given situation, and the decision-maker must consider the consequences associated with each alternative. Choice is the final stage, where the decision-maker selects the alternative that maximizes their values and objectives (Allison & Zelikow, 1999).

Rationality is a key component of the RAM, referring to the consistent behavior of the decision-maker. The model suggests that a state's actions can be explained or predicted based on the objective situations it faces and the core concepts outlined above. National security and interests are fundamental factors in determining strategic goals and objectives. Once goals are established, the decision-maker considers available options and

their consequences, weighing the benefits and costs of each. Ultimately, the decision-maker selects the option that best aligns with their goals and objectives (Allison, 1971).

Allison's RAM provides a simplistic way to understand the relationship between objectives and actions (see Figure 1) where knowing an actor's objective offers insight into their likely behavior. It is important to consider the context, threats, opportunities, and risk tolerance of the decision-maker when analyzing their actions or making predictions (Allison & Zelikow, 1999).



**Figure 1** The Components of the RAM.

### 3.1 Case study: The normalization of the U.S. - Libya Relations in 2006

This case study investigates the 2006 normalization of relations between the United States and Libya, with a specific focus on the Rational Actor Model (RAM). The study explores how a country's actions, influenced by international relations, contribute to the pursuit of its strategic goals and objectives. RAM views the actions taken by the national government as the fundamental unit of analysis (Allison & Zelikow, 1999).

RAM conceptualizes the nation or government as a rational decision-maker with a singular set of preferences, perceived choices, and estimates of the consequences for each alternative (Allison & Zelikow, 1999). According to Allison and Zelikow, two assumptions of classical realism, namely that unitary states are the primary actors in international affairs and that states act rationally to maximize their values, align with the RAM (Allison & Zelikow, 1999).

The model posits that a nation's actions are a response to strategic threats and opportunities in the international environment (Allison & Zelikow, 1999). When selecting a response, a process of rational choice is employed, involving the identification of objectives and goals, typically expressed in terms of national security and interests. The next steps include proposing options to achieve these objectives, evaluating the costs and

benefits of each option in relation to the defined objectives, and ultimately selecting the option that best achieves the desired outcomes (Allison & Zelikow, 1999).

Travis notes that policy development and the availability of policy options are often influenced by shifts in the international context (Travis, 2000). Decision-making takes into account a strategic problem, state objectives that address the problem and safeguard national interests, a set of options to achieve these objectives, a cost and benefit analysis for each option to maximize utility in terms of the objectives, and the strategic interaction between the state and its adversary, which ultimately determines the chosen option (Allison & Zelikow, 1999; Yetiv, 2004).

As mentioned earlier, the key components of RAM are as follows: (1) Goals and objectives, where strategic goals are framed in terms of national security and national interests; (2) Options, encompassing various courses of action relevant to a strategic problem; (3) Consequences, which arise from implementing each alternative course of action and consist of benefits and costs in relation to strategic goals and objectives; and (4) Choice, whereby the rational decision-maker selects the alternative with consequences that rank highest in terms of their goals and objectives (Allison, 1971).

To analyze how the RAM can explain the decision-making process behind the normalization of U.S.-Libya relations in 2006, this study would need to examine the available data to elucidate the following: (1) the strategic problem, (2) the state's national interests articulated in terms of goals and objectives, (3) the state's options for achieving its goals, (4) the costs and benefits associated with each option, and (5) the strategic interaction involved in the decision-making process.

### **3.2 The strategic problem:**

The strategic problem at hand, as indicated by the RAM, is that the state has goals and objectives derived from its understanding of its national interests, and the attainment of these goals is intended to address a problem that poses a threat to those national interests (Allison & Zelikow, 1999).

For several decades, starting with President Reagan and continuing through the administrations of four different U.S. presidents, Libya had been a persistent issue for the United States. This was primarily due to Libya's direct and indirect threats to U.S. interests on a global scale, employing aggressive strategies such as the pursuit of weapons of mass destruction (WMDs) and support for international terrorist organizations (Crocker & Nelson, 2003).

The United States has consistently taken a clear stance on terrorism, considering it a primary threat to its national security. This position is evident in key documents such as the 2002 National Security Strategy and the 2003 National Strategy of Combating Terrorism, which emphasize the U.S.'s commitment to allocating resources to combat terrorism worldwide (Calabrese, 2004).

Terrorism and the proliferation of WMDs were the two major issues in U.S. foreign policy concerning Libya. Both were perceived as significant threats to U.S. national security and led to major military operations, such as the occupation of Afghanistan and the war in Iraq. The U.S., particularly under the Bush administration, responded to rogue states with strong rhetoric and decisive actions in the war against terrorism and WMDs (Calabrese, 2004).

In a testimony before the Senate Foreign Relations Committee, Assistant Secretary for Verification and Compliance Paula A. DeSutter highlighted the President's strategy to use all available tools, including diplomacy, economic pressure, and military force, to halt the spread of WMDs. The U.S. government demonstrated a strong commitment to the goal of nonproliferation in order to protect national security interests and innocent lives (DeSutter, 2004).

Robert J. Art, in his work on the Strategy of Selective Engagement, argued that the combination of rogue states, terrorists, and WMDs posed one of the greatest threats to U.S. interests. He emphasized that the proliferation of WMDs increased the potential for other rogue states or terrorists to acquire such weapons, and it could also embolden rogue state leaders to act against U.S. interests (Art, 2000). By presenting Libya as a strategic problem that threatened U.S. national interests, the Bush administration directed the nation's focus toward addressing this problem. The objective was to eliminate the Libyan threat in order to safeguard U.S. national interests, specifically in relation to terrorism and WMDs.

### **3.3 Objectives/Goals:**

According to the RAM, the state's goals and objectives aligned with its national interests were threatened by the strategic problem mentioned earlier (Allison & Zelikow, 1999).

During the leadership of former President George W. Bush Jr., the United States faced increased threats to its interests both domestically and internationally, with Libya being a particular concern (O'Brien, 2011). The Bush administration set forth several goals regarding Libya, including ending Libyan support for terrorism, holding responsibility for and compensating the victims of the 1988 Lockerbie bombing, assisting with the Lockerbie investigation, preventing Libya from acquiring weapons of mass destruction (WMDs), and containing Libya's regional ambitions if they conflicted with U.S. interests.

The September 11, 2001 attacks emphasized the urgent need to ensure the safety of U.S. soil and its civilian population, making these concerns a top priority for President Bush and his administration. In his State of the Union address in 2002, President Bush stated that the security of the nation was the first priority and that preventing regimes that sponsor terrorism from posing a threat with WMDs was the second goal (Bush, 2002).

On September 17, 2002, the White House released a document titled "The National Strategy to Combat Weapons of Mass Destruction," reaffirming the president's commitment to securing the homeland and protecting the U.S., its forces, and its allies from the growing threat of WMDs (White House, 2002). The administration also launched the Proliferation Security Initiative (PSI) in May 2003, aiming to prevent the proliferation of WMDs and missile technology through various means, including economic sanctions, interdiction, and, if necessary, military action (Bolton, 2003).

The security of the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) region has been a longstanding goal for U.S. presidents, primarily due to the region's role in global oil production and its economic significance (Vakhshouri, 2011). Libya, in particular, presented economic opportunities for the United States, such as the demand for aircraft and transportation equipment, as well as major construction projects. However, U.S. sanctions prevented American firms from capitalizing on these opportunities, allowing European counterparts to secure contracts in Libya instead (Crocker & Nelson, 2003).

At a time when anti-American sentiment was rising in the Muslim world and the U.S. faced accusations of waging a war against Islam, it was in the U.S.'s interest to successfully transition Libya out of the category of rogue states, provided that Libya demonstrated positive changes in its behavior (Crocker & Nelson, 2003).

Addressing the outstanding issues between the U.S. and Libya became a goal in order to safeguard U.S. national interests. In his 2004 State of the Union Address, President Bush highlighted Libya's voluntary decision to disclose and dismantle its WMD programs, including a uranium-enrichment project for nuclear weapons (Bush, 2004). The success of negotiations with Libya in comparison to the failure of diplomacy with Iraq was emphasized, indicating that credible words and effective diplomacy were crucial in dealing with different threats (Bush, 2004). The disarmament of Libya served as an example to other nations worldwide.

### **3.4 Options:**

In the previous section of this study, it was shown that the United States had specific national interests, which included homeland security, preventing Libya from acquiring weapons of mass destruction (WMDs), and limiting Libya's regional ambitions if they posed a threat to U.S. interests. To achieve these goals, the U.S. had several objectives, such as ending Libyan support for terrorism, holding Libya accountable for the Lockerbie bombing and assisting with the investigation, and eliminating Libya's WMD programs.

The U.S. administration considered different options to accomplish these intertwined goals. One option was to continue tightening sanctions on Libya. Former President George W. Bush supported this approach and expressed his intention to maintain sanctions until Libya admitted its involvement in the Lockerbie bombing and compensated the victims' families. The Bush administration renewed economic sanctions against Libya and extended the Iran-Libya Sanctions Act. Some officials, including Defense Secretary Donald Rumsfeld, advocated for democratization and human rights as part of the negotiations and argued against lifting UN sanctions solely for a Lockerbie settlement (Jentleson & Whytock, 2005).

Another option discussed was a policy change or regime change in Libya. The U.S. had previously targeted Libya with an air raid in 1986 to force policy and regime change. However, after the collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991, the U.S. shifted its focus to policy change rather than regime change. The negotiations with Libya for the Lockerbie settlement and the surrender of the two suspects emphasized that the terms were about policy change, not regime change. Reassurances were given to Libya to prevent policy concessions from being used as a means to undermine the Libyan regime. Undersecretary of State John R. Bolton favored regime change through military force but was kept out of the negotiations (Hirsh, 2005).

The third option discussed was reconciliation and normalizing relations with Libya. Representative Tom Lantos visited Libya and called on the Bush administration to lift the ban on American travel to Libya as a

first step toward normalization. Progress was made in the WMD negotiations, with British Foreign Office Minister Michael O'Brien's trip to Libya in 2002 being a key development. A deal was proposed where a resolution on WMDs would lead to the normalization of relations, and Libya responded positively. Former Secretary of State Colin Powell expressed optimism about Libyan reconciliation and believed it was in the U.S.'s interest to reintegrate Libya into the international community (U.S. Department of state, 2004).

Each of these options had costs and benefits, which were carefully considered by administration officials.

### **3.5 Cost and Benefit Analysis:**

The U.S. administration led by President Bush stated that tightening sanctions on Libya would compel them to compensate victims of terrorist attacks, cooperate in counterterrorism and nonproliferation efforts, and address concerns related to national interests and international security (Gardiner, Philips & Brookes, 2003). They believed that lifting sanctions at that time would be a mistake as Libya still posed a threat. The Director of the CIA, George Tenet, informed Congress that Libya was pursuing offensive nuclear, chemical and biological weapons capabilities and had renewed contacts for this purpose since the lifting of UN sanctions. Despite these concerns, the U.S. maintained its position on WMDs (Center, 2000).

Opponents of sanctions, such as Ronald E. Neumann, argued that while economic sanctions could be effective when imposed multilaterally and sustained over time, they had not resulted in significant changes in Libyan policy by the mid-to-late 1990s. International support for isolating Libya had waned, and many countries had welcomed Libya back into the global community, reestablishing diplomatic relations and engaging in economic activities (Neumann, 1999).

Moreover, continuing to tighten sanctions would harm American companies, as an increasing number of them expressed dissatisfaction with the negative effects of sanctions on their operations. The U.S. Chamber of Commerce, for instance, lamented the loss of contracts and the shifting of profits to other companies. Therefore, tightening sanctions did not guarantee that the Libyan regime would comply with U.S. demands, particularly regarding nuclear disarmament.

Transitioning from a strategy of regime change to policy change had its benefits. It allowed for a better balance between desired outcomes and the means to achieve them. The Libya case demonstrated that policy change could be achieved without regime change, as long as the Libyans received repeated assurances that concessions on terrorism and WMDs would not lead to pressure for regime change (Jentleson, 2006).

Pursuing regime change had its costs and could be counterproductive. It could waste time in preparation, planning, and finding a third party to facilitate the change. Complicated procedures for secure communication and negotiations between parties could fail if information leaked to the media, especially considering the media's hostile stance toward the Libyan regime. John Bolton opposed regime change, as he believed it was difficult to manage, unproductive, and time-consuming, and he preferred military action to eliminate the Libyan regime, similar to President Reagan's approach in 1986. Keeping regime change as an option could harden positions and hinder the possibility of reaching an agreement (Jentleson, 2006).

Reconciliation and normalized relations with Libya had several benefits. Ending Libya's WMD program would be seen as a significant nonproliferation achievement and a success of U.S. policies in the Middle East. The U.S. government's efforts to combat proliferation worldwide would also benefit. Reconciling with Libya and reforming its regime through alternative means rather than coercive war would send a message to the international community that the U.S. had multiple strategies to manage rogue states and would reward positive behavioral changes (Calabrese, 2004). Cooperating with Libyan authorities would assist U.S. counterterrorism efforts and help dismantle international proliferation networks. Libya had provided significant assistance in uncovering the global black market in nuclear material and know-how. Establishing diplomatic relations with Tripoli was a small price to pay for closing one of the most significant proliferation networks in recent memory.

Reconciliation and normalized relations with Libya also offered other benefits. Access to military basing rights, such as the Uqba Ben Nafi Air Base (formerly Wheelus Air Base), would provide the U.S. with power projection capabilities in a strategically significant region. Positive relations would grant access to Libya's hydrocarbon market, with forecasts of doubling Libyan exports in the next five years. American oil companies that had frozen assets in Libya since 1986, such as Marathon and ConocoPhillips, stood to benefit. Lastly, Libya's acceptance of responsibility for the Lockerbie bombing and agreement to compensate the victims' families with a total of \$2.7 billion would provide a definitive solution to this issue and benefit the U.S. government.

### **3.6 Strategic Interaction:**

This RAM category incorporates the concept of strategic interaction, initially introduced by Schelling in 1960 and later applied by Yetiv in 2004. To elaborate further, Allison and Zelikow in 1999 stated that "each nation's optimal decision depends on its expectations of the other's actions. Strategic behavior aims to influence another actor's decision-making by shaping their expectations of how their actions relate to one's own" (Allison & Zelikow, 1999)

In the decision-making process, the anticipated reactions of the Libyan regime, Libyan people, and Libyan military played a crucial role. The U.S. administration believed that their decision would maximize utility in terms of their objectives.

Concerning the Libyan military, it was perceived to be in a weakened state due to three decades of arms embargo, which significantly diminished its capabilities. However, the morale of the military was not affected by the embargo. Additionally, there were expectations that the Libyan military would welcome the normalization of relations with the U.S. Therefore, considering the anticipated condition and behavior of the Libyan armed forces, it was expected that the benefits of normalized relations with the U.S. would be substantial, and opposition within the Libyan military would be minimal, thus increasing the expected utility.

Regarding the Libyan people, former Assistant Secretary of State for Near Eastern Affairs, David Welch, expected that they would perceive the existence of goodwill and a strong willingness on the Libyan side to develop bilateral relations. Furthermore, the U.S. administration presumed that the Libyan population would be supportive of and not hesitant to embrace the achieved normalization. Based on this belief about the response of the Libyan population, the U.S. administration was aware that opposition to normalized relations would be minimal. As a result, the perceived costs of normalization would decrease, while the expected utility would increase.

Regarding the former Libyan president's response, the U.S. administration anticipated extreme caution from him due to his general lack of trust in the West, particularly the Americans. He consistently exhibited fear, hesitation, and caution, especially when it came to declaring Libya's abandonment of weapons of mass destruction (WMDs).

In his book, "At the Center of the Storm," George Tenet reported an encounter where the Libyan president expressed his desire to "clean the file" and improve relations with the U.S. He repeatedly emphasized his eagerness to resolve all contentious issues between the two countries, starting from the Lockerbie incident to the issue of WMDs (Tenet, 2007). This provided further evidence of his commitment to enhancing relations and resolving outstanding matters. Consequently, the U.S. administration expected the costs of normalized relations with Libya to decrease and the anticipated benefits to expand.

### **3.7 Other Considerations:**

The Bush administration was influenced by several factors in their decision to view normalized relations with Libya as more beneficial than costly. Firstly, they hoped that other countries, such as North Korea and Iran, would follow Libya's example. Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice stated that Libya's decision to renounce support for terrorism and eliminate weapons of mass destruction (WMD) programs could serve as a model for Iran and North Korea. The administration believed that encouraging similar strategic decisions in these countries would contribute to international peace and security (U.S. Department of state, 2006).

Secondly, there was a desire to strengthen control over oil-producing countries in the Middle East and Africa, including Libya, Libya ranked ninth globally in terms of oil reserves and held the largest proven oil reserves in Africa. The U.S. administration recognized the importance of African oil to the American market and sought to enhance U.S. economic and energy security interests by accessing Libya's oil resources. They believed that developing these resources would diversify the U.S. oil supply and reduce dependence on oil from the Arab Gulf region.

Thirdly, the administration aimed to build a global anti-terrorism strategic base following the events of September 11. They developed a national strategy against terrorism and proliferation of WMDs and shifted military focus from traditional European areas to regions like North Africa. The U.S. sought to establish small-scale, rapid reaction bases in these regions to effectively respond to the threat of terrorism. Strengthening cooperation with Africa, particularly North Africa and the Horn of Africa, was seen as crucial in combating terrorism and preventing its expansion in an environment characterized by regional conflicts, porous borders, and potential WMD proliferation (Ghanmi, 2006).

Normalized relations with Libya also offered the potential benefit of gaining access to military basing rights, such as the former Wheelus Air Base. This strategic facility with extensive operational capabilities and a



significant runway length could provide substantial power projection for U.S. forces in a region of rising strategic significance. Considering these factors, the Bush administration believed that the expected usefulness of normalized relations with Libya outweighed the anticipated costs, leading them to view it as a favorable decision.

### **3.8 Choosing the Option:**

The U.S. was convinced that normalized relations with Libya would be more beneficial than the costs and alternative options. Imposing sanctions on Libya had previously proven ineffective in ensuring disarmament, and it was believed that a change in Libya's regime would be futile given the tight control it held over the state (Blakely, 2010). The anticipated responses of the Libyan army, the Libyan population, and the regional support for Libya's regime made the option of normalized relations appear less risky.

Furthermore, the chaotic global environment, the scarcity of reliable intelligence, and the lack of information led the U.S. to conclude that the international community could not effectively pressure Libya. Waiting for the normalization process was not seen as a viable alternative. Therefore, the normalization option was deemed the most advantageous for the U.S. administration in terms of achieving its goals and protecting its interests.

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## **4. Conclusion**

The conclusion of the study emphasizes that the process of normalizing relations between two countries is intricate and necessitates a nuanced comprehension of decision-making and motivations. The Rational Actor Model, which is typically employed to explain normalization processes, was critically evaluated in this study, revealing its limitations. While the model provides a useful starting point, it falls short in fully elucidating the motivations and decision-making of states during normalization efforts. Its reliance on assumptions of rationality and unitary actors neglects the impact of domestic political factors and historical legacies.

To overcome these limitations, the study advocates for the inclusion of alternative frameworks such as social constructivism or institutionalism. These frameworks take into account the social context, norms, and identities, thereby offering a more comprehensive understanding of state motivations and strategies in normalization processes.

The implications of this study are significant for policymakers, diplomats, and researchers involved in normalization efforts. Recognizing the influence of domestic politics and historical legacies can guide the development of more effective strategies for successful normalization. Furthermore, the findings contribute to conflict resolution by providing insights into mechanisms for de-escalation, trust-building, and cooperation between countries.

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