constructivism and international relation
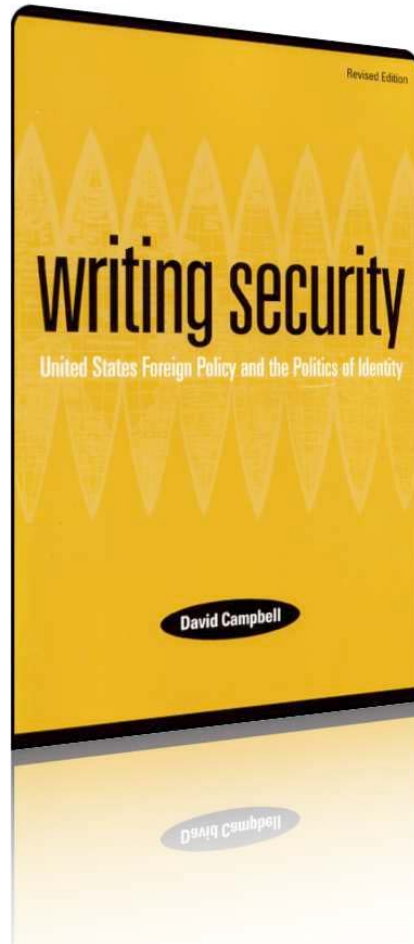

REALITY CHECK AHEAD

pols 427 international relations
professor timothy c. lim
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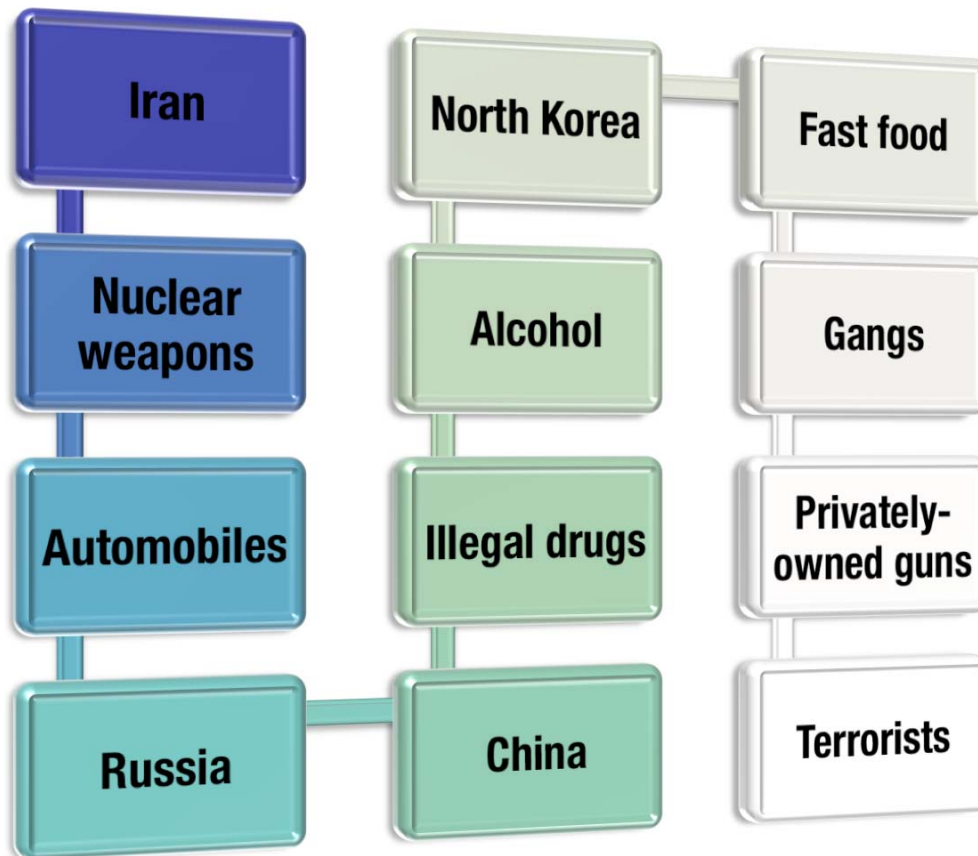
constructivist theories of **international relations**

david campbell offers a very similar constructivist
approach in his book, ***writing security***

before discussing his argument, let's begin
with a little exercise …

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Iran	North Korea	Fast food
Nuclear weapons	Alcohol	Gangs
Automobiles	Illegal drugs	Privately-owned guns
Russia	China	Terrorists

consider the list on the left: what is the **most dangerous** thing?

what is responsible for the **most deaths**?

what makes one thing **more dangerous** than another?

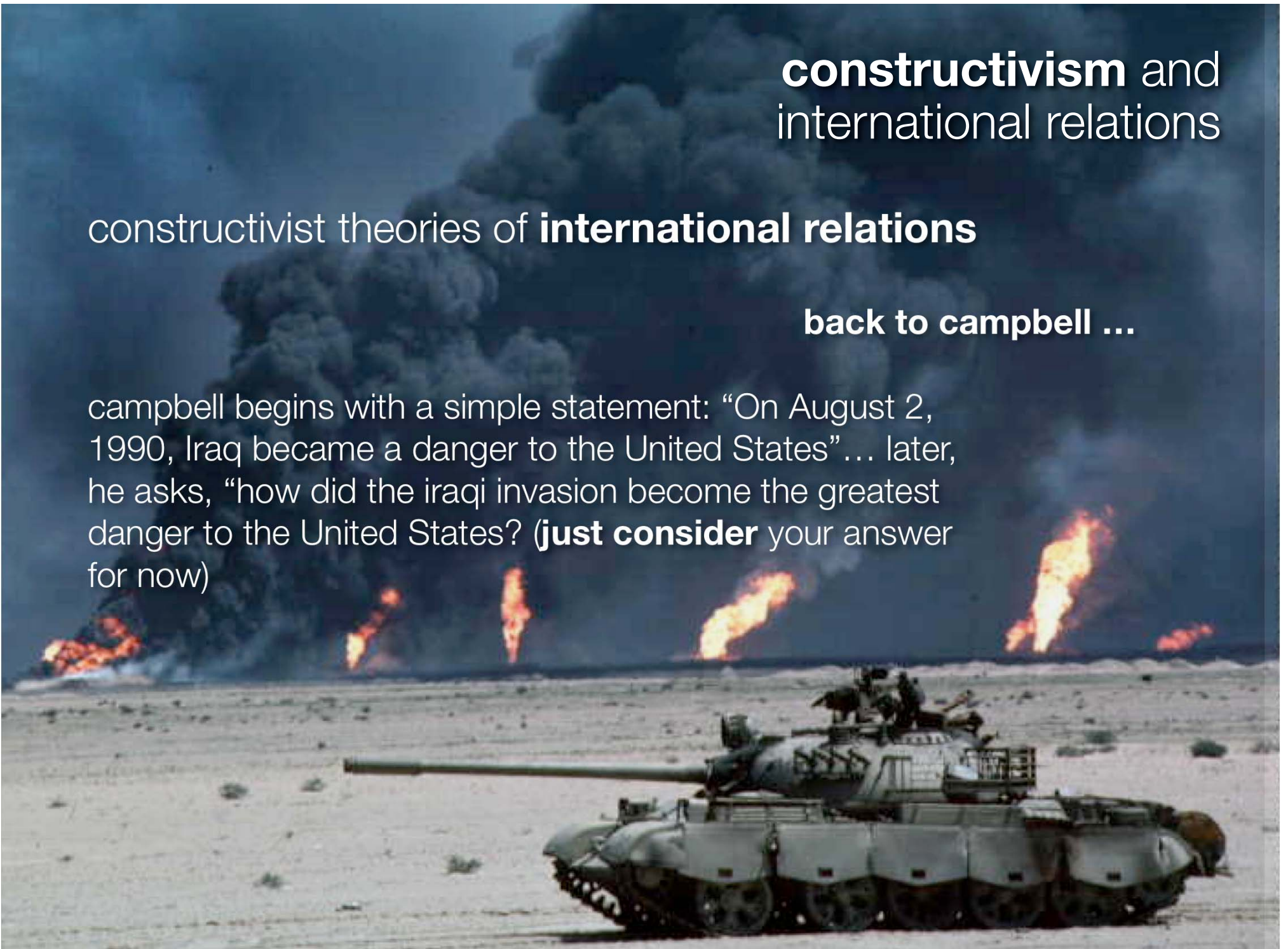we'll come back to this list later, but first back to campbell …

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back to campbell …

campbell begins with a simple statement: "On August 2, 1990, Iraq became a danger to the United States"… later, he asks, "how did the iraqi invasion become the greatest danger to the United States? (**just consider** your answer for now)
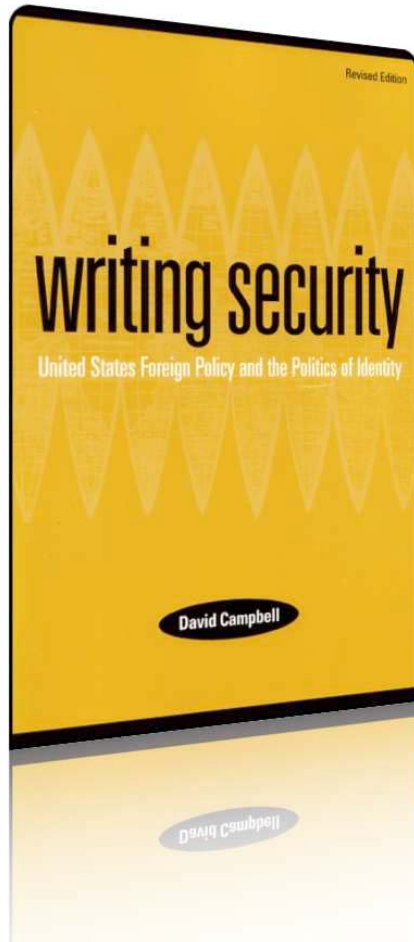
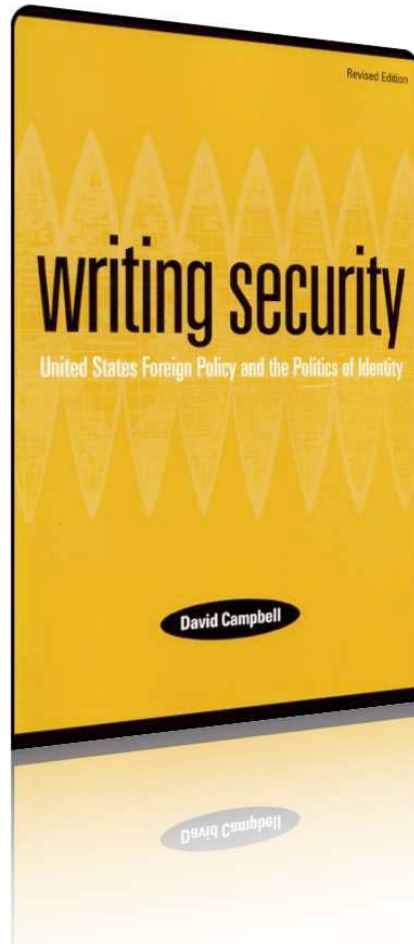## constructivist theories of **international relations**

- campbell tells us that the designation of iraq as dangerous—in the 1990s and again in the early 2000s—was **not based** primarily or even mostly on set of **objective conditions** or facts

- that is, it was **not** iraq's invasion of kuwait, or its use of chemical and biological weapons, or the "evilness" of saddam hussein … so, then, **why was iraq a danger?**

Revised Edition

writing security

United States Foreign Policy and the Politics of Identity

David Campbell

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the **simple** answer?

because of the *meaning* we gave to iraq and
its actions

in this respect we can say, "danger is an effect
of interpretation"

writing security
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David Campbell

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it's important to understand that this view is **very different** from the views embedded in theories we have considered earlier in the quarter, especially neorealism and marxism ... both of these are committed to an **epistemic realism,** which in turn, "sanctions two analytic forms": a **narrativizing historiography** in which things have a self-evident quality and a **logic of explanation** in which it is the purpose of analysis to identify those self-evident things

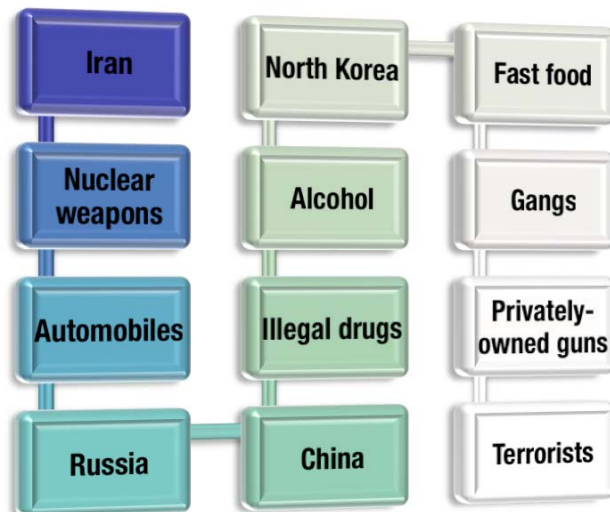**what does all this mean? (discuss)**

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campbell **does not deny** that there are "real" dangers in the world (i.e., things that can hurt and kill people); however, "not all risks are equal, and not all risks are interpreted as dangers"

Iran	North Korea	Fast food
Nuclear weapons	Alcohol	Gangs
Automobiles	Illegal drugs	Privately-owned guns
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▪ consider the list we looked at earlier and consider how the **determination** of "danger" was entirely dependent on our very subjective interpretations of what constitutes a danger
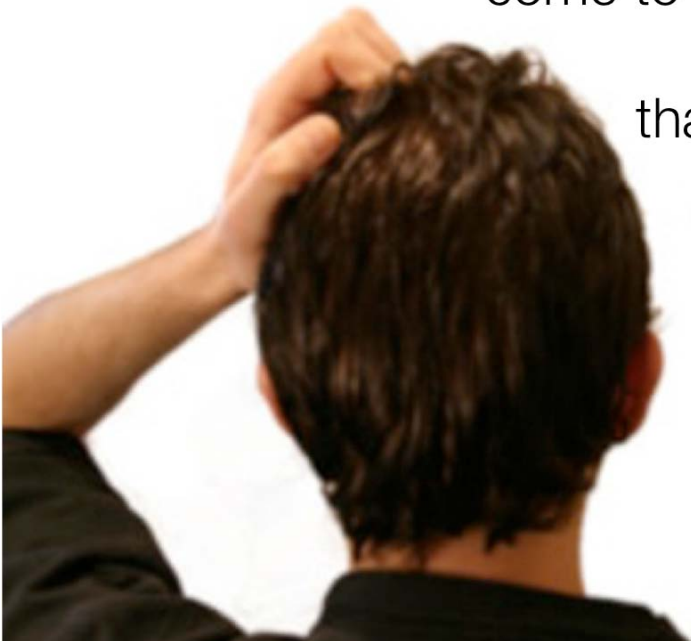
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campbell also tells us that the "role of interpretation in the articulation of danger is not restricted to the process by which some risks come to be considered more dangerous that others. An important function of interpretation is the way that certain **modes of representation** crystallize around **referents marked as dangers"**
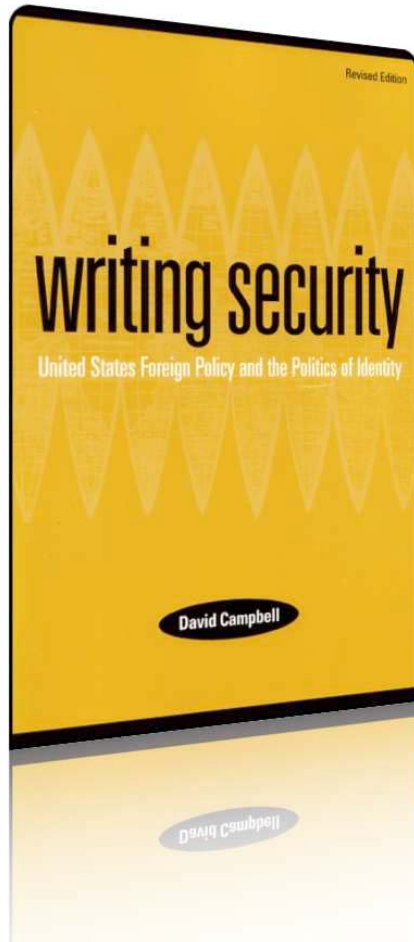
which is to say ... **what?**

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most simply, campbell argues that we have created certain words, labels, categories, etc. that, **by themselves**, denote serious danger
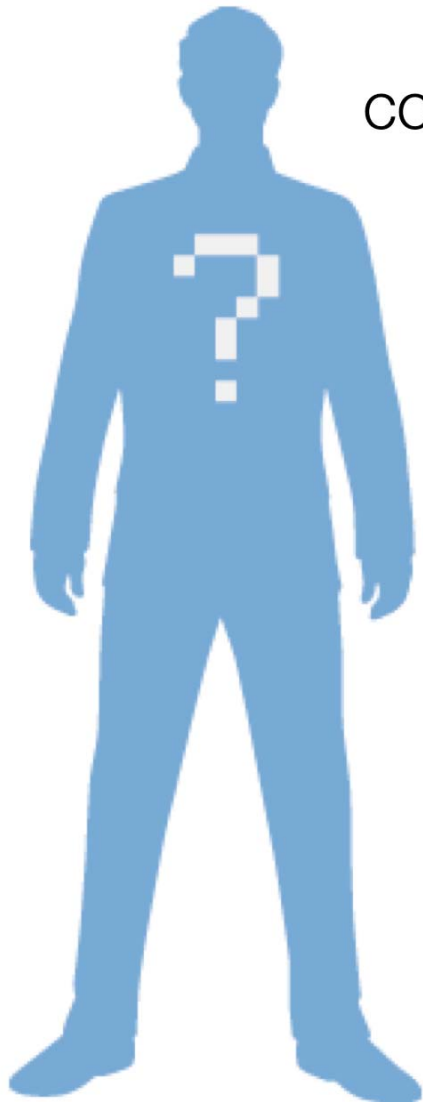
… alien, foreign, sick, unstable, socialist, communist, dark, dirty, and so on: all have been pivotal to the **articulation of danger** in the American experience

REALITY CHECK

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a related, but separate, aspect in the articulation of danger is the articulation of an **identity**—both for "others" and or outsiders and for oneself

- **key point.** identities are never preformed, God-given, or inherently stable; instead, they are **socially constructed** and reproduced

this is **true** for individuals and for larger collective identities, such as **states**

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for **states,** the articulation of a coherent identity is a difficult, but essential task; **maintaining** or **reproducing** cohesive identity over time is equally difficult and essential

- **consider this:** what would a state be **without** an identity? would a state even be a state? could it be?

- for campbell the answer is …**no**

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as campbell (abstrusely) puts it, the "paradox inherent to their being renders states in **permanent need** of reproduction: with no ontological status apart from the many and varied practices that constitute their reality, states are … always in the process of becoming. For a state to end its practices of representation would be to explore its lack of prediscursive foundations; **statis** would be **death**."

got it?

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despite his arcane language, campbell's point is fairly simple: states exist because their people **identify with them**; this identification creates legitimacy, allegiance, unity and purpose

people **know** what their state represents; they know that others must share this sense of identity—if most "americans" suddenly stopped feeling american, the united states would fall apart …

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the big question, then, is **how** is state identity
constructed and reproduced?

- there are many ways, but one of the **most important** is through
the articulation of danger through interstate relations

- on this point, campbell tells us that interpretations of danger
are not necessarily directed toward repelling some objective,
external threat, but are **directed inward,** toward the constitution
of a state's identity

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… and this brings us to the **concept of security**

campbell argues that security is a **unceasing project** of the state: it is part of a process that help to guarantee the state's continued success as an impelling identity … as col. jessup might say:

> you want the truth? well here it is: you need men like me because *we articulate danger!* we make it possible for AMERICA to survive as an idea!

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roxanne doty presents us with an additional constructivist
perspective in her article, "foreign policy as social constructivism"

she also poses a **seemingly simple question,**
"why did the US invade Panama?" (in 1989)

we could easily ask this questions of other
conflicts or interventions: vietnam, grenada,
chile, cambodia, and so on

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"why did the US invade ___grenada___?"

- there are, of course, **many different ways** to answer this question; we also can easily surmise what the standard answers might be from **"materialist" perspectives** such as realism and marxism …

- **key point.** materialist explanations take for granted that the **invasion itself** (and only the invasion) needs to be explained

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"why did the US invade _____?"

- a constructivist (especially a "post-modern" one), by contrast, might ask: **how did the possibility** of an invasion—and not some other course of action—emerge and take shape in the first place?

  - a constructivist, in other words, wants to understand the non-material or ideational **foundation** of military actions and other **practices** of international relations

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developing this understanding requires us to
address ***how-possible* questions**

as doty puts it, "when we post a ***how-possible***
question … we must inquire into the practices
that enable social actors to act, to **frame** policy
as they do, and to wield the capabilities they do.
Perforce more critical, this mode of questioning
takes us to relations of power—power in its
productive aspect that why-questions neglect"

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- **but,** why do we need to ask how-possible questions in the first place? isn't it enough to know why an "outcome obtained"?

short answer: no

why-questions are **incomplete.** for example, military power alone can never fully explain a decision; after all, the u.s. doesn't invade every county to which is military superior, nor does it attack all those with which it has a grievance

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consider **other why-questions**

- why did the US invade Iraq and Afghanistan and **not** North Korea and Pakistan?

- why does the US continue to treat Cuba as an **irreconcilable enemy**, while reconciling with Vietnam, China, and Russia?

- why are some nuclear powers—or wannabe nuclear powers– **dangerous,** while others are benign?

traditional materialist theories simply cannot **adequately** answer such questions

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- adequate or complete answers to such questions requires an **alternative** approach

- doty introduces just such an approach, which she labels the …

discursive practices approach

an alternative framework: **discursive practices approach**

this is a complicated and abstract approach, but the **crux** is this …

language constructs reality; it "produces" meaning, identities, objects, and possibilities through discourse*

*discourse is defined as a system of statements in which each individual statement makes sense, produces interpretive possibilities by making it virtually impossible to think outside of it

REALITY CHECK

an alternative framework: **discursive practices approach**

in this view, **language itself** (and not necessarily individual
actors or collective actors) is the center of analysis: language
is **not merely used by actors,** but has a power of its own to
produce results that do not necessarily coincide with individual
motivations, perceptions, and intentions

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international relations

an alternative framework: **discursive practices approach**

what are the basic elements of the discursive practices
approach used by doty? she discusses three …

presupposition
(background knowledge)

predication
(attribution of specific qualities)

subject positioning
(relationship of subjects and objects)

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an alternative framework: **discursive practices approach**

"taken together, these **textual mechanisms** … produce a 'world' by providing positions for various kinds of subjects and endowing them with particular attributes"
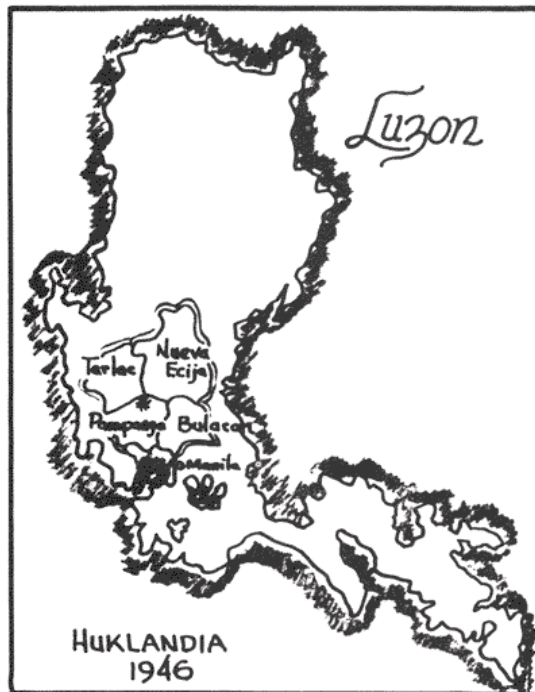
an alternative framework: **discursive practices approach**

doty then uses these mechanisms to analyze US policy toward the **Philippines** in the 1950s … she shows us how US counter-insurgency policy was/is fundamentally a product of language

more specifically, she wants to show us how **dominant discourses** about the US, international relations, the Philippines and the Third World created the parameters for US policy, which itself was reflected in a new "counterinsurgency discourse"

Luzon

Tarlac Nueva Ecija

Pampanga Bulacan

HUKLANDIA 1946

an alternative framework: **discursive practices approach**

instead of going through doty's analysis, let's apply her framework to a study of a more contemporary event: the ongoing counterinsurgency operation in iraq