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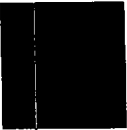
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# *Constructing National Interests*

## *The United States and the Cuban Missile Crisis*

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## Constructing National Interests

*Social facts are not things. In truth, what is to be said is that social things are not "things"; they are social things and these particular things only inasmuch as they "incarnate" or, better, figure and presentify, social significations. Social things are what they are depending on the significations they figure.*

— CORNELIUS CASTORIADIS,  
THE IMAGINARY INSTITUTION OF SOCIETY

### TOWARD A THEORY OF NATIONAL INTEREST CONSTRUCTION

To explain the historically contingent and culturally specific meaning of the national interest is to show how concrete elements of the security imaginary come together to produce representations of the state, the international system, the particular situation or threat faced by the state, and plausible courses of state action. In the case of the Cuban missile crisis, this means explaining how, that is, through what concrete processes or mechanisms, the missiles came to mean an intolerable threat to the United States such that there emerged an unquestioned national interest in their removal. It is through particular practices of representation, grounded in the security imaginary, that a set of threatening meanings came to be attached to the Soviet missiles in Cuba and the U.S. national interest in removing the missiles "came to be regarded as the only viable course of action" (Doty, 1996: 30). The myth of the Cuban missile crisis discussed in chapter 1 and the U.S. national interest discussed in chapter 2, then, are the ideological

effects of the U.S. security imaginary. In this chapter, I discuss in more detail the mechanisms—the twin processes of articulation and interpellation—through which such meanings are produced.

### **Articulating National Interests**

The term “articulation” refers to the process through which meaning is produced out of extant cultural raw materials or linguistic resources. Meaning is created and temporarily fixed by establishing chains of connotations among different linguistic elements (e.g., Laclau, 1979; Hall, 1985, 1986c, 1988). In this way, different terms and ideas come to connote or to “summon” one another (Hall, 1985: 104), to be welded into associative chains that make up an identifiable, if not a logically consistent, whole. Most of these terms and ideas already make sense within a particular society. In the postwar United States, for example, these linguistic elements included nouns like “terrorist” and “puppets”; adjectives like “totalitarian,” “expansionary,” and “defensive”; metaphors like “the market” or “dominos”; and analogies such as those to “Munich” or “Pearl Harbor.” In the process of articulation such extant linguistic resources are combined and recombined to produce contingent and contextually specific representations of the world. The security imaginary furnishes the rules according to which these articulations are forged. In the construction of the Cuban problem, for example, references to Castro and his revolutionary associates were persistently articulated to the adjective “bearded” (see chapter 5). This articulation established a particular set of meanings in U.S. representations of the Cuban problem: It connoted that these revolutionaries lacked responsibility, were uncivilized, and constituted a threat to private property and thus ultimately to the American way of life. When Castro’s beardedness was invoked, that is, it simultaneously carried with it (among other things) the connotation that Castro was irresponsible, uncivilized, and a danger to the United States. The articulation of these linguistic elements (i.e., “Castro,” “revolutionaries,” and “beards”) came to constitute a partial representation of the Cuban problem as one in which uncivilized revolutionaries threatened the liberal American way of life. In the process of articulation, that is, particular phenomena are represented in very specific ways and given very particular meanings on which action is then based. With their successful repeated articulation, these linguistic elements

come to seem as though they are inherently or necessarily connected, and the meanings they produce come to seem natural, come to seem an accurate description of reality.

Despite this apparent naturalness, however, the chains of association established between such linguistic elements are in fact contingent; that is, they are socially constructed and historically contingent rather than logically or structurally necessary. The contingent or nonnecessary character of such articulations is captured well in the term “articulation” itself. As Stuart Hall has argued,

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

The nonnecessary character of any particular articulation means, of course, that these connections can be contested, with two important consequences. First, specific articulations are never simply produced once and for all. Instead, to prevent them from coming unglued, or from being forcibly pried apart, they must always be reproduced, and sometimes quite vigorously. Second, any articulation can be uncoupled, and the resulting component parts can be rearticulated in different, and perhaps novel, ways.

Put differently, alternative representations are always possible.

An articulation, therefore, provides

a connection or link which is not necessarily given in all cases, as a law or a fact of life, but which requires particular conditions of existence to appear at all, which has to be positively sustained by specific processes, which is not “eternal” but has constantly to be renewed, which can under some circumstances disappear or be overthrown, leading to the old linkages being dissolved and new connections—re-articulations—being forged. (Hall, 1985: 113, note 2)

It is not necessary, for instance, that “beardedness” be associated with the negative characteristics of irresponsibility, uncivilized behavior, and danger mentioned above. In Cuban revolutionary discourse (again, see chapter 5), beardedness was articulated differently: The “beard,” in this context, was a positive symbol of the

revolution. It connoted the hardships endured by the Cuban guerrillas during the revolution, and it conferred revolutionary status and legitimacy onto the *barbudos*, or "bearded ones." The manifest meanings of such notions, the actual articulations or chains of connotation that define them, are rooted in particular historical and social contexts and are therefore neither necessary nor inevitable. That articulations are contingent does not, however, mean that they are completely arbitrary. Instead, they are better conceptualized as conventional. As Raymond Williams has cogently argued,

The notion [of arbitrariness] was introduced in opposition to the idea that the sign was an icon, and it is certainly true that there is in general no necessary relation of an abstract kind between word and thing in language. But to describe the sign as arbitrary or unmotivated prejudices the whole theoretical issue. I say it is not arbitrary but conventional, and that the convention is the result of a social process. If it has a history, then it is not arbitrary—it is the specific product of the people who have developed the language in question. (1979: 330; see also Eagleton, 1991: chapter 7)

All articulations are social constructions, then, but they are nonetheless precisely not arbitrary. Instead, they are the product of concrete social practices in concrete historical circumstances.

The nonnecessary and conventional character of such articulations can also be seen in the connection that was forged between the U.S. conception of its national uniqueness and greatness, on the one hand, and its global and expansionary vision of its national mission, on the other. As Michael Hunt has pointed out, there were other possible connotations of, or articulations that could have been formed to, U.S. national greatness. In particular, an alternative articulation could have been made to an introverted understanding of the U.S. mission, an understanding that focused on the development of democracy and liberty within the United States itself. Just such an introverted vision of national greatness has often been associated with Thomas Jefferson.<sup>1</sup> Hunt argues that

the Jefferson who entered the Washington administration in 1790 carried with him a preoccupation with liberty that suffused his notion of a good society, of national mission, and of an appropriate foreign policy. . . . In foreign affairs a policy of aloofness was calculated to be the best way of preserving the liberties Americans had achieved and

of allowing them to develop still further as a free people. Geographic distance from a rapacious and turmoil-prone Europe already promised peace. That promise could be made secure if Americans could bring themselves "to abandon the ocean altogether . . . [and] to leave to others to bring in what we shall want, and to carry what we can spare." (1987: 22, emphasis added. The internal quotation is from Jefferson.)

Instead of an association between U.S. greatness and introversion, the articulation that was finally forged linked the vision of U.S. national greatness with an extroverted, missionary, and ultimately global U.S. foreign policy. This articulation has often been associated with Alexander Hamilton, who believed that "men are ambitious, vindictive, and rapacious" and that "conflict was the law of life" (in Hunt, 1987: 23). As Hunt says,

These hard truths in turn dictated that Americans recognize the dominant role of power, self-interest, and passion in international affairs. The still-vulnerable country should move warily until it acquired the strength essential to assert its interests and influence. The first step [according to Hamilton] was the creation of "a vigorous national government" under the direction of an elite. . . . That step was to be followed at once by the construction of a strong navy to protect commerce from jealous European powers. Given time to develop and mature, Americans could become strong, stave off demands that they serve as "the instruments of European greatness," and eventually establish their own greatness. As a force in its own right, the United States would be "ascendent in the system of American affairs . . . and able to dictate the terms of the connection between the old and the new world!" (24. The internal quotations are from Hamilton.)

The articulation of U.S. national uniqueness to this particular extroverted understanding of the U.S. role in international affairs was produced through specific, historically contingent processes, not the least of which was the increasingly global expansion of U.S. capitalism (e.g., Williams, 1962). In particular, the connection was suggested, reiterated, and finally solidified during at least three major U.S. foreign policy debates: over the 1795 Jay Treaty initiating the U.S. alliance with Britain, over the proper role of the United States in the Mexican War of the 1840s, and over the peace terms of the Spanish-American War of the 1890s (see Hunt, 1987: chapter 2). In the end, a durable vision of a liberal and "dynamic republic" that

would pursue "commercial prosperity, territorial expansion, and military security" had been constructed (38). In short, the world of international politics, the place of a particular state within it, and the consequent national interests attributed to that state are not objective facts to be discovered; instead, they are the products of contingent, historically forged articulations of linguistic and symbolic elements already present within the security imaginary of the state.

This discussion of articulation raises an important question often asked of constructivist analyses, namely, what degree of freedom exists in the forging of articulations, or, more concretely, what degree of freedom do state officials enjoy in constructing representations of international relations and thus in constructing the national interest? There is no simple or abstract answer to this question; rather, it is an empirical issue that requires a response grounded in extensive empirical analyses. Such analyses would demand an elaborate investigation of, among other things, the range of interpretive possibilities permitted by the security imaginary within a particular situation at a particular historical juncture and the constraints placed on possible articulations by extant power relations.<sup>2</sup> The larger question, however, concerns the "reality constraints" that face both state officials and analysts in the construction of their representations of international politics and so of the national interest. Recognizing the social construction of national interests does not deny that such constraints exist. Criticizing the orthodox U.S. construction of its national interest in the so-called Cuban missile crisis, for example, does not mean that one has to deny that the Soviets placed missiles in Cuba. Indeed, any interpretation of the missile crisis, to be plausible, must recognize and account for these missiles. In this sense, the existence of the missiles functions as a reality constraint on the construction of plausible narratives. The meanings articulated to those missiles, however, are contingent and contested. The reality constraint, then, is quite loose and allows a wide range of sometimes quite dramatically different representations, as the discussion in chapter 1 of the three different narratives of the events of October 1962 indicates. The meanings produced out of a state's security imaginary are therefore "not 'dictated' by real factors since it is instead this meaning that attributes to these real factors a particular importance and a particular place in the universe constituted by a given society" (Castoriadis, 1987: 128). What is at issue in the claim that national

interests are socially constructed is *meaning* and its social effects, not physical existence. As Trevor Purvis and Alan Hunt have put it, "Of course earthquakes occur, and their occurrence is independent of consciousness; but it is their construction in discourse that determines whether they are 'movements of tectonic plates' or manifestations of 'the wrath of the gods'" (1993: 492).

### Interpellating the Subjects of the National Interest

The articulation of linguistic elements of the security imaginary into connotative chains, into webs of association, is one part of the process of fixing meaning and so is one part of the process of constructing national interests. Another part of this constructive process involves the interpellation of subjects (e.g., Althusser, 1971; Hall, 1985; Laclau, 1979; Laclau and Mouffe, 1985). "Interpellation" refers to a dual process whereby subject positions or identities are created and concrete individuals are interpellated by, or "hailed" into (Althusser, 1971: 174), those subject positions.

Interpellation means, first, that specific subject positions are created when social relations are depicted. Different imaginaries and their representations of the world entail different identities. Hall described this process with respect to different representations of "the market":

The same process—capitalist production and exchange—can be expressed within a different ideological framework, by the use of different "systems of representation." There is the discourse of "the market," the discourse of "production," the discourse of the "circuits"; each produces a different definition of the system. Each also locates us differently—as worker, capitalist, wage worker, wage slave, producer, consumer, etc. Each thus *situates us* as social actors or as a member of a social group in a particular relation to the process and prescribes certain social identities for us. The ideological categories in use, in other words, *position us* in relation to the account of the process as depicted in the discourse. The worker who relates to his or her condition of existence in the capitalist process as "consumer"—who enters into the system, so to speak, through that gateway—participates in the process by way of a different practice from those who are inscribed in the system as "skilled laborer"—or not inscribed in it at all, as "housewife." All these inscriptions have effects which are real. They make a material difference, since how we act in certain situations depends on what our definitions of the situation are. (1986a: 39, emphasis in the original)

Specific subject positions are created when social phenomena are depicted; different descriptions entail different subject positions. Each subject position or identity carries with it particular ways of functioning in the world, is located within specific power relations, and is characterized by particular interests.

Within a state's security imaginary, a variety of subject positions are created, including those of various states—both “our state” and “their state,” or “us” and “them” (in fact, typically a variety of “thems”)—and other subjects. The central subject position created in any discussion of a state's national interest is, of course, that of the relevant state itself. Within the U.S. security imaginary, then, the central or nodal subject position is “the United States.” Most fundamentally, the security imaginary establishes the existence of the United States *as* a subject. Out of an abstraction designating a territory, a population, and a set of governing principles and apparatuses is created an anthropomorphization, the fiction<sup>3</sup> of an apparently acting subject with motives and interests.<sup>4</sup> Moreover, it establishes that this fictional United States is a particular *kind* of subject, with a specific identity and the specific interests attendant upon that identity.<sup>5</sup> As a result of the interpellation of this subject position, “the United States” becomes the central object of discussions of U.S. foreign policy and national interests; it—rather than, say, individual American citizens—becomes the primary object of security that the security imaginary strives to protect. At the same time, “the United States” becomes the central subject of such discussions; it is not only the most important object to be protected, but it is also the subject charged with doing the protecting. “The United States,” then, is the nodal position from which the imaginary is spoken, around which all other subject positions revolve, and into which individuals may (or may not) be interpellated. The interests articulated in this imaginary are the interests of the fictional subject “the United States” and the central warrants for action it generates justify and legitimize actions taken by that subject.<sup>6</sup>

In addition to highlighting the creation of subject positions, the notion of interpellation simultaneously points to the fact that concrete individuals recognize themselves in these representations of the world insofar as the subject positions or identities provided adequately account for their experiences. That is, these subject positions accord with individuals' self-understandings. Quite simply, people

subscribe to, that is, are drawn into or successfully hailed by, specific representations because these make sense of at least part of their experience. Imaginaries and the representations they enable describe to individuals in a recognizable way the manner in which they live their lives; they construct and entail subject positions or identities from which both perceptions of the world and perceptions of the self make sense. As a result, the representations appear to be common sense, to reflect “the way the world really is.” As a result, individuals can speak from the identities—the subject positions—entailed in the imaginary. That is, subjects “recognize themselves in the discourse” and as a result they can “speak it spontaneously as its author” (Hall, 1985: 107). It comes naturally because it accords with their (already constructed) self-understandings.<sup>8</sup>

The U.S. security imaginary accomplished the task of interpellation, of generating recognition and identification, in part by representing “the United States” not only as a subject but as a subject that represents an “imagined” national “community” (Anderson, 1991). The subject position “the United States” constitutes a “representation . . . of belonging” (Tomlinson, 1991: 81) through which people are interpellated as members of this imagined U.S. community. The success and strength of the interpellations forged are highlighted, in the case of the United States, in the ubiquitous use of the term “we” by Americans in discussing U.S. foreign policy and state actions. Americans persistently and strikingly identify with the policies and actions, especially with the foreign policies and actions, of the U.S. state, asserting quite unself-consciously that “we had to show the Communists that they couldn't interfere in Vietnam,” that “we should retaliate against the Japanese for their unfair trade practices,” and that “we kicked Saddam's butt.” Part of the strength, common-sense status, and legitimacy of orthodox postwar representations of U.S. national interests has resulted precisely from the often unproblematical identification of Americans with “we, the United States”—the imagined U.S. subject of the security imaginary.<sup>9</sup>

This “we” is of particular importance. The process of interpellation, at least in the United States, is facilitated by this “we,” which functions as what Cathy Schwichtenberg has dubbed a “shifty shifter.” A “shifter” is “a context-sensitive personal pronoun,” such as “you” or “we.” With such pronouns, “the ‘person’ designated by the message is always determined by the message itself.” Shifters

thus are named for their "referential ambiguity which can only be defined within, not only the context of the message itself, but the situation (the moment) in which the message is uttered" (1984: 305). The referential ambiguity of this "we" is central to its shiftiness and thus to its importance in the interpellation of subjects. When "we" are hailed into a statement about U.S. foreign policy and U.S. national interests—for example, when Kennedy argued during the Cuban missile crisis that "*we* have no desire to dominate or conquer any other nation or impose our system upon its people" (1962c: 5, emphasis added)—the referent of "we" is often deliberately ambiguous. It might, for example, refer to "we, the U.S. state," to "we, U.S. state officials," to "we, the American people," or to all of these at once. It might also, depending on the specific context, refer more broadly to "we, the Americans of the Western Hemisphere," to "we of the advanced West," or even to "we human beings." The shiftiness of the advanced West serves a variety of functions simultaneously: It helps to define the subject position that the audience is asked to assume; it helps to weld potentially disparate members of its audience into a single, unified identity; as a result, it helps to create common sense by rendering the argument being offered intelligible to that audience; and, because it helps to create common sense, it also helps to legitimize that argument.

Not only does an imaginary entail subject positions from which to make sense of the world, but subject positions are also locations from which particular representations become sensible. For example, Stuart Hall has argued that Thatcherism "has been able to constitute new subject positions from which its [Thatcherism's] discourses about the world make sense" (1988: 49). It has done so in part by appropriating to itself "existing, already formed interpellations." The entire discourse of Thatcherism, Hall argued,

combines ideological elements into a discursive chain in such a way that the logic or unity of the discourse depends on the subject addressed assuming a number of specific subject positions. The discourse can only be read or spoken unproblematically if it is enunciated from the imaginary position of knowledge of the self-reliant, self-interested, self-sufficient taxpayer—Possessive Individual Man (sic); or the "concerned patriot"; or the subject passionately attached to individual liberty and passionately opposed to the incursion of liberty that occurs through the state; or the respectable housewife; or the native Briton. . . . these imaginary positions . . . trigger off and con-

note one another in a chain of linked interpretations . . . as well as connecting one site of articulation with another: the liberty-loving citizen is *also* the worried parent, the respectable housewife, the careful manager of the household budget, the solid English citizen "proud to be British." (emphasis in the original)

Similarly, the postwar U.S. national interest constituted through the security imaginary made sense to many Americans to the extent that they were successfully hailed into an array of already familiar subject positions. As noted above, they were hailed, with the aid of the ubiquitous and shiftiness of "we," into the position of "the United States," into the imagined community of Americanness. In addition, they were simultaneously hailed into other familiar subject positions of the security imaginary, including such comfortable identities as the "freedom-loving democrat" who abhors communism, the "concerned American patriot" who believes that "we" must protect Americans abroad, and the "civilized Westerner" appalled by the excesses of Middle Eastern terrorism. These identities help to make sense of the claims, the representations and quasi-causal arguments, articulated in the security imaginary. For example, since "we" Americans are freedom-loving democrats and civilized Westerners, it makes sense to claim that "our" U.S. actions abroad are designed to promote liberty and freedom, not self-interest or tyranny. Since "we" are concerned American patriots, the United States clearly has a right to do all that it deems necessary to protect the American free way of life. It is from these and other interconnected subject positions that the security imaginary could be read or spoken unproblematically; it is from these and associated identities that it made sense.

In summary, then, through processes of articulation and interpellation, a security imaginary enables the production of representations of the world. These representations, in turn, interpellate identities or subject positions that *already* entail particular interests. National interests are thus social constructions that *emerge* out of the representations enabled by and produced out of the security imaginary of the state. National interests, that is, are an ideological effect of the security imaginary and its representations.

#### Authoring the National Interest

As I argued in the introduction, the most important site for the construction of the national interest—for these processes of articulation

and interpellation—is the institution, or bundle of practices, that we know as the state. The state plays a special role in constructing the meaning of national interests quite simply because identifying and securing the national interest is its business. Because the U.S. social imaginary has formally invested the state with the authority to conduct foreign relations, and thus with the concomitant responsibility for “discovering” the national interest, the central role of the state in the production of representations of international relations, and thus in the construction of the national interest, is generally treated as unproblematical.

In the postwar era, the concrete organizations of the U.S. state centrally involved in the construction of the U.S. national interest included, most prominently, those of the national security state (e.g., Koh, 1990; Yergin, 1990), such as the presidency, the National Security Council, the Joint Chiefs of Staff, the Department of Defense, the Department of State, and the Central Intelligence Agency. These various institutional sites, though of different relative importance at different times, were all involved in the construction of the national interest. In large measure the national interest was created in both the day-to-day and the extraordinary operations of these institutions. In formulating and implementing foreign policies, whether routinely or during crises, situations were defined, alternative situation descriptions were tested, and so on, and in these activities specific representations of the world, enabled by the security imaginary, were constructed.

In addition to the foreign policy or national security apparatuses of the state itself, a set of “ideological state apparatuses” (Althusser, 1971: 142–143, *passim*) are also involved in the (re)production of the security imaginary and thus in the construction of the national interest. These apparatuses include other institutions or bundles of practices, such as schools, religious institutions, the media, cultural institutions, and the family, that are less obviously or directly connected to the conduct and the justification of foreign policy. All of these institutions, however, contribute to the construction of the national interest. In the case of the United States, for example, the media has played a critical role in disseminating and reproducing, and only occasionally in contesting, the representations produced by state officials and so the commonsense understanding of the U.S. national interest. In a democratic society such as the United States,

as many analysts have pointed out, “large numbers of journalists, consulting only their ‘freedom’ to publish and be damned, do tend to reproduce, quite spontaneously, without compulsion, again and again, accounts of the world constructed within fundamentally the same ideological categories” (Hall, 1985: 101; see also Herman and Chomsky, 1988; Hitchens, 1996). Schools also played an important role, socializing American children into U.S. nationalism, not the least through such rituals as the Pledge of Allegiance and the singing of the national anthem, but also through the dissemination of a particular interpretation of U.S. and world history.

The ideological state apparatuses include as well a subset that might be called the “intellectual apparatuses.” These include think tanks like the quasi-governmental Rand Corporation and the American Heritage Foundation; private organizations designed both to study and to lobby for particular foreign policies, such as the Council on Foreign Relations, the Trilateral Commission, and the Committee on the Present Danger; private research centers like the Brookings and Hoover Institutions; and both public and private universities.<sup>10</sup> Such institutions house what Gramsci called the “traditional intellectuals” (1971b: 5–23, *passim*), “the official or unofficial ideologues of the dominant security imaginary. The traditional intellectuals are those academics and other writers, researchers, and scholars who provide the intellectual support and the rationale for the activities of the state. In the United States, academic institutions in particular have supported the broader institutional apparatus of the national security state by providing the trained personnel necessary to staff these institutions and by supplying both the information and the analytical and technical tools needed to formulate and implement its policies.”<sup>12</sup> In the postwar era, analysis in all of these institutions proceeded primarily within the horizon of the taken-for-granted, functioning within the common sense of the U.S. security imaginary.

#### THE ROLE OF NONLINGUISTIC PRACTICES

Although the discussion thus far has directed attention to the linguistic aspect of national interest construction, it is, of course, by no means exclusively a linguistic process. Nonlinguistic practices are inextricably intertwined in the creation of the national interest as well. It does not follow from the constitutive nature of language and its role in producing national interests that national interests are *only*



linguistic constructs. Instead, articulations, including the construction of the national interest, are always "materialized in concrete practices and rituals and operate through specific [state and other] apparatuses" (Hall, 1988: 46). They are produced and reproduced through nonlinguistic social practices as well as through linguistic practices. Though the security imaginary is extremely important in explaining social phenomena and "has its own specificity, its own kind of effects, its own mechanisms," it nonetheless does not "operate outside the play of other determinations; it has social, political, economic conditions of existence" (63; see also Castoriadis, 1987: 355-356).

Linguistic and nonlinguistic practices, in other words, are inextricably connected. In producing specific representations of the world, linguistic practices contribute to the production and reproduction of the nonlinguistic practices associated with and required by those representations. At the same time, the nonlinguistic practices are themselves part of the process of meaning construction. Michel Foucault's (1977) analysis of the development of criminality and the prison provides a clear example.<sup>13</sup> As he demonstrates, the categories "the criminal" and "the delinquent" were in part the product of a set of linguistic practices that established the categories' meaning by specifying the rules that determined which individuals were to be included and which were to be excluded. This linguistic process of definition was necessary to the creation of a disciplinary society. But it was not by itself sufficient to establish the meaning of these categories. Instead, their meaning was also, simultaneously, established through concrete material practices such as the organization of space in the prison and the processes of surveillance through which the lives of prison inmates were regulated. Both the linguistic delineation of the categories "the criminal" and "the delinquent" and the nonlinguistic, material practices of the prison were necessary to establish the discourse of criminality. The relationship between linguistic and nonlinguistic practices is thus reciprocal: They are mutually constitutive and jointly productive of the meanings of the social world.

The "we" of the imagined U.S. community, for instance, is the product of both linguistic and nonlinguistic practices. It is constructed not only out of words and ideas about the imagined U.S. community, about its uniqueness and its greatness, but also out of nonlinguistic practices such as the waving of U.S. flags at parades, the singing of

the national anthem at sporting events, the establishment and patrolling of borders around the territory of the United States to distinguish it from other national territories, the establishment of bureaucratic procedures for granting or denying U.S. citizenship, the surveillance of other states from U-2 aircraft, and the global deployment of U.S. military forces. Nonlinguistic practices, including citizenship rites, border patrols, visa procedures, airborne surveillance, and the like, also contribute to the creation of the meaning of the U.S. community by placing boundaries on the meaning of "nation." As the examples of the Pledge of Allegiance and the singing of the national anthem make particularly clear, all practices are simultaneously both linguistic and nonlinguistic. Both of these activities include clearly linguistic components (in the form of the words spoken or sung) that contribute to the construction of U.S. identity and nonlinguistic components (the acts of standing and raising one's hand to one's heart) that are also part of what "being American" means. Similarly, the U.S. security imaginary offered a fundamentally racist vision of the United States, of the Third World, and of the relations between the two. This racist vision was constructed, in part, out of such linguistic elements as the terms "backward" and "advanced" (e.g., Dory, 1996). But U.S.-Third World relations were constructed not only in linguistic articulations of racism and ethnocentrism but also in routine, interventionary activities through which the United States could "set the limits of diversity" (Henry Kissinger, in Morris, 1977: 241). These practices include, for instance, the covert activities of the CIA, which in the case of Chile in the early 1970s were designed to bring down the Allende government. It was this complex of linguistic and nonlinguistic practices that helped to make sense of Kissinger's otherwise astounding claim, in discussing the democratic election of Salvador Allende in Chile, that "I don't see why we have to let a country go Marxist . . . just because its people are irresponsible" (240-241) and that allowed the United States to intervene in Chilean politics. As these few examples can only indicate, it is the complex of linguistic and nonlinguistic practices that both contributes to the construction of meaning and further reproduces the social relations entailed in particular representations. Nationalism just *is* (in part) the waving of U.S. flags and the securing of U.S. borders against undesirables; "backward" societies just *are* (in part) those subject to the interventionary practices of the "advanced" societies.

Despite the undeniable importance of nonlinguistic practices, the objective in this book is to demonstrate that linguistic practices *also* have real and independent effects. They are not reducible to non-linguistic practices, and they therefore deserve independent examination. These linguistic practices deserve attention not because they are the only relevant or important practices but because, despite their importance, they are typically given short shrift in explanations of U.S. foreign policy and of international politics more generally. It is thus my intention not to show that national interests are only linguistic products but, instead, to show that the policies and practices of states, including those of the United States, have linguistic conditions of existence as well.

#### ANALYZING NATIONAL INTERESTS

I have argued thus far that the national interest is socially constructed. It is enabled by the security imaginary and emerges out of representations that are themselves constructed, in part, through processes of articulation and interpellation. Through the articulation of meaning and the interpellation of subjects, a particular meaning of the national interest emerges and comes to be commonsensical and legitimate. The final, outstanding question to be addressed is this: How does one investigate the linguistic aspects of the construction of the national interest?

An obvious place to begin is with descriptions of the national interest. In the case of the United States, such descriptions appear in discussions, debates, and pronouncements about the U.S. national interest, U.S. national security, and U.S. foreign policy in general. Since the state is the central site at which the national interest is defined, the most important language is that of state officials. The primary locus of analysis is therefore statements in which foreign policy decision makers explain the goals of U.S. foreign policy, discuss the means deemed possible or necessary for accomplishing those goals, and offer arguments to explain and defend both the goals and the means. These statements about the national interest should be taken seriously in explaining U.S. foreign policy because they provide clues to the content of U.S. national interests, to the commonsense appeal of these national interests, and to the legitimacy that the national interest confers. Statements made by individuals who are members of the ideological state and intellectual apparatuses are important as

well, since these individuals often take part in the reproduction of the security imaginary and thus in the construction of the national interest. Finally, popular statements about foreign policy that appear in the mass media cannot be neglected, since these generally reproduce, and only rarely contest, the orthodox meaning of the national interest, and in either case, they reveal the meaning attributed to the U.S. national interest and to U.S. foreign policy.

These different forms of communication take place both in public and in private. Public statements are those to which access is not restricted, such as statements made by U.S. state officials to, among others, the media, the public, other officials and representatives of the U.S. state, and sometimes foreign leaders. These statements include speeches and press conferences, open public hearings, government or semigovernment (for example, Rand Corporation) publications, and even leaks of information to the press. Private communications are those for which the audience is more restricted. These include closed congressional hearings; private discussions in the White House, such as the meetings of the ExComm during the Cuban missile crisis, in the National Security Council, or among the Joint Chiefs of Staff; classified documents such as NSC 68 (U.S. National Security Council, 1950); Policy Planning staff documents; war plans; and the like. All of these linguistic artifacts, whether public or private, reveal the process of national interest construction. By investigating statements about the U.S. national interest, one can identify the objects of security that the United States was determined to defend as well as the characteristic features assigned to those objects. One can identify the different subject positions entailed in the security imaginary and the characteristic features assigned to them as well. One can also identify the different quasi-causal arguments that both define the relations among the various subjects and objects and provide warrants for possible foreign policies and actions. In short, by revealing the way in which the world is understood, these linguistic artifacts can show how the national interest is constructed and what specific content or meaning is attributed to the national interest at a particular historical moment. Examining such linguistic artifacts for the Cuban missile crisis can help us to understand both how and what the Soviet missiles in Cuba were made to mean, such that the U.S. national interest required their removal.

### AS REGARDS "MERE RHETORIC"

This explicit focus on the language used by decision makers and others in discussing the national interest is apt to provoke at least one indignant response: that such language does not represent real national interests but is instead merely rhetoric designed to persuade various audiences to support particular state policies and actions. Because such a criticism, if true, would vitiate the entire argument presented here, I want to respond to this charge before turning to a detailed account of the construction of U.S. national interests in the Cuban missile crisis.

The public rhetoric of national interests, it will surely be argued, is expressly intended to persuade and thus stands in an uneasy and indeed dubious relationship to the actual national interests pursued by state officials. In commenting on the Truman Doctrine speech (Truman, 1947), for instance, John Lewis Gaddis has argued that the "gaps between rhetoric and reality in U.S. foreign policy have often been large; indeed, such gaps might be said to constitute a defining characteristic of this country's diplomacy" (1974: 386). George Kennan also thought that the language of the Truman Doctrine misrepresented the true interests of the United States and that the same sort of misrepresentation plagued U.S. foreign policy throughout the cold war (1967: 321-322). According to political realists, there is a ubiquitous tendency for a gap to exist between rhetoric and reality. It is therefore considered to be "a characteristic aspect of all politics, domestic as well as international, that frequently its basic manifestations do not appear as what they actually are—manifestations of a struggle for power. . . . That is to say: the true nature of the policy is concealed by ideological justifications and rationalizations" (Morgenthau, 1978: 92). In response to the charge that the language of the national interest is merely rhetoric designed to justify policies made for reasons of state and that examining such language can tell us little or nothing about "real" national interests, I offer three counterarguments.

First, examining the language of the national interest, whether found in speeches, policy documents, memoirs, or other sources, helps to explain why claims about the national interest are believed. Even the most outrageously cynical statements are powerful because they make sense to at least some in their audiences. They accord with implicit understandings of the world, of the objects that populate

that world, and of accepted forms of reasoning. Even exaggerated "rhetoric" thus provides a good indication of what makes sense in a particular political environment at a particular time. It provides us with insight into what Morgenthau called the "political and cultural context" (1978: 9) out of which the national interest is constructed. As Michael Hunt has argued,

Public rhetoric is not merely a screen, tool, or ornament. It is also, perhaps even primarily, a form of communication, rich in symbols and mythology and closely constrained by certain rules. To be effective, public rhetoric must draw on values and concerns widely shared and easily understood by its audience. A rhetoric that ignores or eschews the language of common discourse on the central problems of the day closes itself off as a matter of course from any sizeable audience, limiting its own influence. If a rhetoric fails to reflect the speaker's genuine views on fundamental issues, it runs the risk over time of creating false public expectations and lays the basis for politically dangerous misunderstanding. If it indulges in blatant inconsistency, it eventually pays the price of diminished force and credibility. (1987: 15)

For all of these reasons, as Hunt continues, "Public rhetoric is tainted evidence for the historian seeking a widely shared ideology only when it violates these rules and falls unpersuasively on the ears of its ostensible audience." If we want to understand the structures of meaning on which concrete national interests depend, we can find ample evidence in the rhetoric that state officials and others employ to describe foreign policies and state actions.

Second, it is undeniably true that at least some statements about national interests are intended, perhaps even primarily, to persuade and to mobilize a particular audience or set of audiences. The Truman Doctrine speech provides an obvious example. It was explicitly intended to persuade a war-weary U.S. public and a skeptical, isolationist U.S. Congress of the need for the United States to take over Britain's role of supporting friendly governments in southern Europe, specifically in Greece and Turkey. In his memoirs, Dean Acheson described the prevailing attitude within the State Department toward the role of such speeches:

In the State Department we used to discuss how much time the mythical "average American citizen" put in each day listening, reading, and arguing about the world outside his own country. Assuming a man or

woman with a fair education, a family, and a job in or out of the house, it seemed to us that ten minutes a day would be a high average. If this were anywhere near right, points to be understandable had to be clear. If we made our points clearer than truth, we did not differ from most other educators and could hardly do otherwise. (1969a: 375)

And such rhetoric is targeted not only at domestic constituencies. Kennedy's speech of October 22 during the Cuban missile crisis, for instance, was designed not only to influence the U.S. public and the U.S. Congress but also to persuade the Soviet leadership, and especially Khrushchev, of the folly of the Soviet deployment of nuclear missiles in Cuba and to rally OAS members in support of the U.S. quarantine. Statements such as the Truman Doctrine speech and Kennedy's missile crisis speech (1962c) are thus clearly rhetorical in the sense that they expressly aspire to entice their audiences, whether domestic or international, into one belief or another. However, the linguistic content of these avowedly rhetorical statements about the national interest is not unique to such public utterances. Precisely the same language and arguments—in short, the same rhetoric—appear in documents not intended for public consumption. The transcripts of the meetings of the ExComm during the Cuban missile crisis provide a case in point. Both Kennedy's public speech and these private discussions about the U.S. national interest in, and the suitable response to be made to, the Soviet missile deployment exhibit strikingly similar language and arguments. NSC 68 provides another telling example. As Gaddis has pointed out, "Portions of it sounded as though they had been intended for the floor of Congress, or some other conspicuous public platform. . . . This is not what one would expect in a top secret document destined not to be made public for a quarter of a century" (1982: 107). Finally, precisely the same language, the same arguments, and the same understandings of U.S. national interests are also reproduced in many ostensibly objective scholarly interpretations of the cold war and of U.S. foreign policy.<sup>14</sup> In all of these different venues—in public speeches, in private discussions among state officials and other decision makers, and in academic treatises—the same metaphorical and analogical, that is, explicitly rhetorical rather than merely literal, language is used to describe U.S. national interests. Central arguments about those inter-

ests have routinely been made on the basis both of metaphors, such as falling dominoes, spreading malignancies, and rotting apples, and of analogies, such as those to Munich, and the attendant dangers of appeasement, or to Pearl Harbor, with the attendant fear of a bolt from the blue. Thus, although certain statements, conventionally understood as rhetorical, may cynically be designed to manipulate particular listeners or readers, the same language is found in sources to which the cynical intent to manipulate is less easily attributed. Such rhetorical flourishes, in other words, are ubiquitous in the construction of the postwar U.S. vision of the world, of the place of the United States in that world, and thus of U.S. national interests.

Third and finally, the criticism that the language of national interests is "mere rhetoric" and so cannot help us to understand state action rests upon an unsustainable distinction between rhetoric, on the one hand, and truth or objectivity, on the other. Gaddis's surprise at the language deployed by the authors of NSC 68 is a function precisely of this common but ultimately untenable distinction. The term "rhetoric" is typically used to refer either to simple decoration (i.e., "mere rhetoric") or to "strategies and tactics" deployed "to assure persuasion of another in the pursuit of narrowly self-interested goals" (LaCapra, 1985: 36). That is, rhetoric is viewed, most commonly, either as ornamental or as intentionally and self-interestedly manipulative. But all language, whether it is intended to express the truth or to persuade and manipulate, is in fact rhetorical. As Dominick LaCapra has explained, "Rhetoric is a dimension of all language use rather than a separable set of uses or a realm of discourse" (17).<sup>15</sup> The reason is simple: All language use is in fact an attempt to persuade, that is, to provide "good reasons," "warrantable beliefs," and "plausible conclusions" (McCloskey, 1985: 29). The distinction between rhetoric and truth is thus essentially misconceived. Both the public and the private statements in which national interests are constructed are parts of a process of defining and constituting a world. They are part of a process of communication and persuasion in which state officials, in particular, define for their relevant publics, for other policy makers, and for themselves the nature of the world and the character of the objects in that world. And they are part of a process of providing good reasons, warrantable claims, and plausible conclusions about the national interests and state actions that are possible, or sometimes even necessary, within that world.

For all of these reasons, then, examining the language through which national interests are constructed is not the grave problem that might be expected. Instead, it is precisely the language of national interest that provides the specific, historically contingent content of those national interests that, according even to Morgenthau, determine state policy and action. The language of the national interest is the content and meaning of the national interest. It is in this language that objects, threats, and relations are understood and persuasively presented as real and that warrants for drawing political conclusions from that reality are provided. Maintaining a rigid distinction between rhetoric and reality, far from helping us to understand the content of the national interest and thus state action, actually precludes the systematic examination of the construction of national interests. National interests truly are saturated with rhetoric, but, as I have tried to argue here, there is nothing "mere" about their rhetorical character.

The next three chapters provide a detailed analysis of the construction of the U.S. national interest in the Cuban missile crisis. These chapters together demonstrate how representations of the Soviet missiles in Cuba, representations grounded in the postwar U.S. security imaginary, were constructed through the twin processes of articulation and interpellation in such a way that the missiles took on a particular set of meanings; as a result, a particular national interest in forcing the removal of those missiles emerged as both commonsensical and legitimate. In these chapters I examine the language, or "rhetoric," of U.S. national interests in order to determine how the situation faced by U.S. decision makers was defined, what elements of the postwar U.S. security imaginary were invoked and mobilized in the definition of the U.S. national interest, and why the policies adopted seemed reasonable and even necessary. Chapter 4 focuses on cold war U.S. representations both of the Soviet Union and the threats it posed to U.S. national interests and of Latin America as a central object of cold war U.S. national interests. Chapter 5 narrows the focus to the immediate context of the missile crisis, examining U.S. representation of the Cuban problem and of the Castro regime in particular. Chapter 6 then investigates in more detail the construction of "the United States," the central subject of the U.S. security imaginary and its attendant representations. Taken together, these chapters argue, on the one hand, that the myth of the Cuban

missile crisis discussed in chapter 1 could have been constructed differently and that the obviously self-evident threat to the U.S. national interest discussed in chapter 2 could have been understood differently. They also attempt to show, on the other hand, how the dominant constructions were produced and why alternatives, which were theoretically or logically possible, were easily marginalized.