Political Mistakes and Policy Failures in International Relations

EDITED BY ANDREAS KRUCK,
KAI OPPERMANN, ALEXANDER SPENCER

Political Mistakes and Policy Failures
in International Relations

Andreas Kruck • Kai Oppermann
Alexander Spencer
Editors

Political Mistakes and Policy Failures in International Relations

Editors
Andreas Kruck
Geschwister-Scholl-Institute
of Political Science
Ludwig-Maximilians-University
Munich
Munich, Germany

Kai Oppermann
Department of Politics
University of Sussex
Brighton, East Sussex, UK

Alexander Spencer
Institute of Social Sciences and
History
Otto-von-Guericke University
Magdeburg
Magdeburg, Germany

Cover illustration: gece33/gettyimages

Printed on acid-free paper

Acknowledgement

production of this book at Palgrave. Last but not least, we would like to thank the contributors to this volume for bringing their expertise and knowledge from a range of different fields into the study of mistakes in international politics. Without doubt, the volume itself includes objective and subjective mistakes, failures and omissions. For these, we apologise and accept the blame.

Contents

Notes on Contributors

Danae Ankel is Research Assistant and Lecturer at the Chair of International Politics and Foreign Policy at the University of Cologne.

Oliver Daddow is Assistant Professor in British Politics and Security at the University of Nottingham.

Jonathan Fisher is Senior Lecturer in African Politics in the International Development Department at the University of Birmingham.

James Hampshire is Reader in Politics at the University of Sussex.

Mischa Hansel is Assistant Professor (*Wissenschaftlicher Mitarbeiter*) of International Relations at the RWTH Aachen University.

Tim Heinkelmann-Wild is Research Assistant at the Chair for Global Governance and Public Policy and the Chair for International Relations at the Geschwister-Scholl-Institute of Political Science, Ludwig-Maximilians-University Munich.

Adam Kamradt-Scott is Associate Professor in the Department of Government and International Relations at the University of Sydney.

Andreas Kruck is Assistant Professor of Global Governance at the Geschwister-Scholl-Institute of Political Science, Ludwig-Maximilians-University Munich.

Tim Lankester was an economist at the World Bank. Later he worked in the UK Treasury and, from 1989 to 1994, and he was Permanent Secretary in Britain's aid ministry.

Tim Legrand is Lecturer at the Crawford School of Public Policy, College of Asia and the Pacific, the Australian National University, Adjunct Associate Professor at the Institute for Governance and Policy Analysis, University of Canberra and Adjunct Research Fellow at Griffith University.

Michael Lister is Reader in Politics at Oxford Brooks University.

Kai Oppermann is Reader in Politics at the University of Sussex.

Bartholomew Paudyn is Researcher and Lecturer in the International Political Economy (IPE) of financial/debt relations and the management through risk/uncertainty at the London School of Economics & Political Science.

Berthold Rittberger holds the Chair for International Relations at the Geschwister-Scholl-Institute of Political Science, Ludwig-Maximilians-University Munich.

Alexander Spencer is Professor of International Relations at the Otto-von-Guericke University Magdeburg, Germany.

Henrike Viehrig heads the Europe direct Information Centre at the City of Cologne. Previously she worked as Lecturer for Political Science at the University of Bonn's North American Studies Program.

Antto Vihma is Senior Research Fellow at the Finnish Institute of International Affairs and Adjunct Professor at the University of Eastern Finland.

Bernhard Zangl holds the Chair for Global Governance and Public Policy at the Geschwister-Scholl-Institute of Political Science, Ludwig-Maximilians-University Munich.

List of Abbreviations

AFRO	WHO African regional office
AMA	Advanced Measurement Approach
ATP	Aid and Trade Provision
AUM	assets under management
BCBS	Basel Committee on Banking Supervision
BI	Business Indicator
BIJ	Bureau of Investigative Journalism
BMJ	British Medical Journal
BNA	British Nationality Act
CDO	collateralized debt obligation
CDU	Christlich-Demokratische Union
COP	Conference of Parties
CORF	corporate operational risk function
COSO	Committee of Sponsoring Organizations of the Treadway Commission
CRA	credit rating agency
CSO	civil society organization
CSU	Christlich-Soziale Union
CUKC	Citizenship of the United Kingdom and Colonies
DAC	Development Assistance Committee
DD	distance-to-default
DESO	Defence Exports Sales Organization
DfID	Department for International Development
DoD	Department of Defense
DTI	Department of Trade and Industry

EBA	European Banking Authority
ECB	European Central Bank
ECDG	Export Credits Guarantee Department
ECJ	European Court of Justice
Ecofin	Council of Economic and Finance Ministers
EDF	Expected Default Frequency
EDP	Excessive Deficit Procedure
EEC	European Economic Community
EMH	efficient market hypothesis
ERM	enterprise risk management
ESMA	European Securities and Markets Authority
ETF	exchange-traded fund
EVD	Ebola virus disease
EWP	Early Warning Procedure
FAO	Food and Agriculture Organization
FCO	Foreign and Commonwealth Office
FDP	Freie Demokratische Partei
GAO	Government Accountability Office
GBS	General Budget Support
GEC	General Electric Company
GHEW	global health emergency workforce
GOARN	Global Outbreak Alert and Response Network
HECF	health emergency contingency fund
ICOC	International Code of Conduct for Private Security Service Providers
IHR	International Health Regulations
ILM	internal loss multiplier
IPCC	Independent Police Complaints Commission
LTCM	Long-Term Capital Management
MEJA	Military Extraterritorial Jurisdiction Act
MiFID	Markets in Financial Instruments Directive
MiFIR	Markets in Financial Instruments Regulation
MoD	Ministry of Defence
MPS	Metropolitan police service
MSF	Médecins Sans Frontières
NAO	National Audit Office
NGO	non-governmental organization
ODA	Overseas Development Administration

OECD	Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development
OECD-DAC	Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development-Development Assistance Committee
OIE	World Organization for Animal Health
OLS	ordinary least squares
OR	operational risk
ORMF	operational risk management framework
PC	political conditionality
PMSC	private military and security company
PRA	public responsibility attributions
RAROC	risk-adjusted return on capital
RMBS	residential mortgage backed securities
SEC	Securities and Exchange Commission
SGP	Stability and Growth Pact
SMA	Standardized Measurement Approach
SOP	standard operating procedure
SPD	Social Democratic Party
TNB	Tenaga Nasional Berhad
TTC	through-the-cycle
UCMJ	Uniform Code of Military Justice
UKIP	United Kingdom Independence Party
UNFCCC	United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change
UNMEER	United Nations Ebola Emergency Response
UNSC	United Nations Security Council
UNSCR	UN Security Council Resolution
VaR	Value-at-Risk
WDM	World Development Movement
WHA	World Health Assembly
WHE	Health Emergency Programme
WHO	World Health Organization
WTO	World Trade Organization

List of Figures

LIST OF TABLES

Introduction: Mistakes and Failures in International Relations

Andreas Kruck, Kai Oppermann, and Alexander Spencer

We all make mistakes. Mistakes are human. Mistakes happen not only in our individual lives but also in national and international politics. While mistakes have always been at the centre stage of International Relations (IR) as a discipline implicitly, due to the fact that events attract far more attention when they are considered to have gone wrong, the conceptualization of 'mistakes' as an explicit analytical concept and focus so far has been neglected. This edited volume is concerned with mistakes in different realms of IR including foreign and security policy, international political economy and issues of international public policy such as health and development, environmental policy and migration. In particular, the book and the individual chapters address the following key questions: What is a 'mistake' or 'failure', and how does one identify and research such a phenomenon? Why do mistakes and failures occur? How are actors made responsible, and what consequences do mistakes and failures entail? When and how do actors learn from mistakes and failures?

A. Kruck (✉) • A. Spencer
Institute of Social Sciences and History, Otto-von-Guericke University
Magdeburg, Magdeburg, Germany

K. Oppermann
Department of Politics, University of Sussex, Brighton, East Sussex, UK

In pursuit of some answers to these questions, this introductory chapter first considers the concepts of 'mistakes' and 'failures' in IR and other disciplines and reflects on ontological and epistemological perspectives on how to study mistakes and failures. The second part turns to the question of what causes mistakes and failures and considers a range of theories from different fields for explaining and understanding mistakes and failures. Part three examines the notion of responsibility attribution and considers why and how actors get blamed for mistakes and failures. In these three parts, we both summarize the state of the art on the relevant questions and point out how the chapters in this volume add new insights and perspectives. Part four offers an overview of the chapters which are to follow and part five elaborates on the lessons learnt from these insights on mistakes and failures in IR.

The Concepts of Mistakes and Failures and How to Study Them

The study of situations in which something has gone wrong has, at least implicitly, always been a part of IR. Political events and decisions usually attract much greater scholarly attention if they are seen to be a failure than if they are considered a success. It is of little surprise then that many of the best-studied events are precisely those which have been linked to 'disastrous' failures or consequences. Mistakes such as the appeasement of Hitler, the Bay of Pigs invasion, the catastrophic mismanagement of diseases and pandemics (e.g. AIDS or Ebola) or the failure of banking regulations in the run-up to the recent financial crisis have always preoccupied scholars of IR. It is hardly a stretch to say that mistakes are omnipresent in IR research and that we do research and teach our students IR by studying mistakes. Many studies in IR, however, do not explicitly engage with or employ concepts such as 'mistake' or 'failure' as an analytical category but expect the consequences of the policy to be a sufficient indicator of a mistake or failure. Mistakes have rarely been the subject of systematic conceptual and comparative analysis in IR. This edited volume wants to address this gap in the literature by analysing mistakes of different dimensions in various issue areas.

As this volume illustrates, there is very little agreement on the definition of a political 'mistake' or a policy 'failure' and how to study such a phenomenon. In the literature, one encounters a number of very different

concepts including 'fiasco', 'catastrophe', 'blunder', 'crisis' or 'disaster' denoting similar things (Dunleavy 1995; Gray 1996; Bovens and 't Hart 1996; King and Crewe 2013). While some try to make distinctions between these different concepts with regard to their severity, we consider a key difference between mistakes and failures to relate to the role of agency. While the concept of mistakes is necessarily linked to agents or their choices playing a substantial role in negative outcomes, the concept of failures zooms in on the negative outcomes but is less explicit about the role of agency. Beyond this basic distinction, the volume emphasizes the unifying characteristics of the phenomena and considers mistakes and failures as 'something considered to have gone wrong'.

Overall one can distinguish two different approaches to failures: an objectivist and an intersubjective perspective. The first objectivist perspective tends to follow a foundationalist and positivist tradition that has long been dominant in policy evaluation studies (Marsh and McConnell 2010: 567). According to this perspective, policy failures are objective facts that can be independently identified and verified. Thus, policies count as a failure if they fall short of certain objective criteria or benchmarks for success (Howlett 2012: 541–542; McConnell 2010: 349–351). In the narrowest sense, the classic model of policy evaluation starts out from a policy's official objectives and considers the policy a failure if it does not meet these objectives (Gray 1996: 76). In a slightly broader sense, rationalist understandings of policy failure may also bring in the costs of a policy, the damage caused by it as well as the policy's unintended and adverse consequences (King and Crewe 2013: 4; Dunleavy 1995: 52).

A number of scholars have here emphasized the need to examine different levels of failure. For example, Michael Howlett (2012) developed a typology which differentiates between the magnitude of a failure in terms of its extent and duration and its salience in public debate with regard to its intensity and visibility (see Fig. 1.1). Thereby he articulates four types of failure including major failure (high in both magnitude and salience), focused failure (low in magnitude but high in salience), diffuse failure (high in magnitude and low in salience) and minor failure (low in magnitude and salience).

Allan McConnell (2016: 672–675) in contrast differentiates between process, programme and political failure. Process failure is here understood as failure with regard to the government's inability to produce the necessary policy instruments or formulate desired outcomes, the illegitimacy of the policy process, the existence of widespread opposition and inability of

Howlett's typology of policy failure		Salience (intensity and visibility)	
		Low	High
Magnitude (extent and duration)	Low	Minor failure (e.g. policy service contract bid failure)	Focused failure (e.g. sports crowd control (riots))
	High	Diffuse failure (e.g. anti-poverty policy failure)	Major failure (e.g. climate change (international treaty) policy failure)

Fig. 1.1 Howlett's typology of policy failure (Adapted from Howlett 2012: 544)

governments to gain support for the policy. Programme failure is characterized by the failure in the implementation of policy, the inability to produce results, the damage to the intended beneficiaries of the policy, the inability to adhere by standard policy criteria and the existence of major opposition to the aims, values and means of implementation. Political failure is considered to be composed of reputational damage, inability to keep politically difficult issues off the agenda, danger to the entire trajectory of government and opposition to the government as a whole. In all these approaches there is little critical reflection on the subjective side of the 'failure' label, but it is taken as a starting point for the explanations of why policy failures occur and what conclusions can be drawn from these explanations.

The second intersubjective perspective sees 'failure' not to be an inherent attribute of policy but rather considers it a judgement about policy. Here, policy outcomes do not speak for themselves but only come to be seen as successful or unsuccessful because of the meaning imbued to them in political discourse. Policy mistakes and failures are understood as 'essentially contested' concepts (Gallie 1955). Since there are no fixed or commonly accepted criteria for the success or failure of a policy, such judgements are always likely to be subjective and open to dispute (Bovens and 't Hart 1996: 4–11). This holds no less for efforts at evaluating policies against the benchmark of officially stated objectives, which will often be vague, diverse and conflicting and which may have been formulated more for their strategic or symbolic functions than as a realistic guide to policy-making: 'The goals of policy are often not what they seem to be, and it is a mistake to take stated purposes too literally' (Ingram and Mann 1980: 20).

Policies that are seen as successful by some may thus well be dismissed as failures by others. Such opposite judgements can come, for example, from differences in the timeframes or geographical and social boundaries of assessing the impacts of a policy as well as from cultural biases or diverging evaluations of available alternatives (Bovens and 't Hart 1996: 21–32; Marsh and McConnell 2010: 575–577). They may also be driven by uneven levels of expectation or aspiration (Levy 1994: 305). Most notably, however, the designation of (foreign) policy as success or failure is inescapably intertwined with politics (Brändström and Kuipers 2003: 279–282; Bovens et al. 2001: 10). Policy evaluations will thus be influenced by the values, identity and interests of the evaluator and may reflect underlying power relations in the political arena or in society at large (Ingram and Mann 1980: 12; Marsh and McConnell 2010: 566–568).

In particular, labelling a policy or decision a 'mistake' or 'failure', i.e. its social construction, is an intensely political act (Gray 1998: 16). It makes for a powerful semantic tool in political discourse to discredit opponents and seek political advantage (Howlett 2012: 547). Accusations of policy failure are likely to provoke political conflict over the interpretation of a policy where the result depends on the extent of intersubjective agreement in this regard, in particular among powerful political and social actors (Boin et al. 2009: 82–85). Political discourse, in this sense, can be seen as a struggle between competing claims which either attribute the 'failure' label to political decisions or reject such a label.

A number of authors have pointed out that the constitution of a policy failure and the attributed notion of blame (see below) is down to a contest of competing frames of interpretation ('t Hart 1993; Brändström and Kuipers 2003; Boin et al. 2009). As Arjen Boin and others point out in this respect: 'Contestants manipulate, strategize and fight to have their frame accepted' (Boin et al. 2009: 82). Therefore, emphasizing the socially constructed and political nature of a 'failure', Bovens and 't Hart (1996: 15, emphasis added) consider a fiasco as 'a negative event that is *perceived* by a socially and politically significant group of people in the community to be at least partially caused by avoidable and blameworthy failures of public policymakers'.

Closely intertwined with the question of what constitutes a 'failure' is the question about how to do research on the subject. While the objective perspective will try and find indicators of the failure of a policy with reference to objective benchmarks of success, the intersubjective perspective will be rather interested in how something comes to be seen as a 'failure'

regardless of whether this policy is 'really' a failure or not. As a result, both will examine very different material for their research: The objective approach will examine numbers, statistics, statements by experts/eyewitnesses or similar evidence of success or failure of a policy, while the interpretivist will examine representations in political debates, media reporting or similar discourses and practices.

Despite these seemingly unsurmountable ontological and epistemological differences between these two perspectives, scholars have recently started to bring objectivist and intersubjective approaches together by both arguing that subjective non-material aspects do play a vital role in the labelling of events and conceding that a 'failure' is not totally independent of material events as there are limits to what can be constructed into a failure (Oppermann and Spencer 2016; Kruck 2016). Even traditionally objectivist scholars agree that the assessment of a failure is often the result of political struggle. As Allen McConnell notes: 'A policy fails, even if it is successful in some minimal respects, if it does not fundamentally achieve the goal that proponents set out to achieve, and *opposition is great* and/or support is virtually non-existent' (McConnell 2016: 672, emphasis added).

Bovens and 't Hart (2016) explicitly focus on this interconnection between objective and subjective characteristics of a failure or what they refer to as reputational or performance evaluation and hold that the overlap between intersubjective and objective elements can tell us something about the severity or kind of failure we are encountering. They hold that if both the political (subjective) and programmatic (objective) assessments are negative, we are able to talk about a major failure or 'fiasco'. If the subjective interpretation is negative and the objective positive (or at least not negative), we could consider this a 'tragedy'. Vice versa, if the subjective interpretation is positive and the objective assessment negative, they consider this to be a 'farce'. Only if both the subjective and the objective evaluations are positive, can we speak of a success (see Fig. 1.2).

These objectivist, intersubjective and middle-ground perspectives are all also visible in this edited volume. A number of chapters take an objectivist perspective and analyse how their empirical event can be objectively considered a mistake or a failure (Lankester, Chap. 11, this volume; Kamradt-Scott, Chap. 9, this volume). In this vein, the chapter by Tim Heinkelmann-Wild, Berthold Rittberger and Bernhard Zangl (Chap. 8, this volume) refers to policy performance as an indicator for failures in the realm of EU financial policy. Similarly, the chapter by Antto Vihma

Fig. 1.2 Bovens' and 't Hart's logics of evaluation (Adapted from Bovens and 't Hard 2016: 4)

Two logics of evaluation		Performance Programmatic assessment	
		+	-
Reputation Political assessment	+	Success	Farce
	-	Tragedy	Fiasco

(Chap. 12, this volume) also points to the modest results of the Copenhagen climate conference as an indicator for failure.

The volume however also includes chapters which take a middle-ground position: These chapters point to objective negative consequences of a policy or a decision but at the same time hold that a failure or a mistake is not a natural fact but something which is widely *seen* to have gone wrong and very much depends on the audience, readers or those being addressed by a policy (Kruck, Chap. 6, this volume; Fisher, Chap. 10, this volume). For example, Michael Legrand and Michael Lister (Chap. 2, this volume) argue that (objective) genuine errors and misapplications of counter-terrorism policy can, due to the precautionary logic of counter-terrorism, lead to unintended consequences where a 'suspect community' subjectively perceives the occasional objective errors as representative of how things 'really' are.

Finally, on a more intersubjective side, a number of chapters clearly focus on the representation and construction of 'mistakes' and 'failures'. For example, Mischa Hansel, Henrike Viehrig and Danae Ankel (Chap. 4, this volume) examine how foreign policy failures are portrayed in German media reporting and who actively participates in this framing regardless of whether the event was 'truly' a failure or not. James Hampshire (Chap. 13, this volume) shows that mistakes are greatly shaped by indeterminacy and contingency with regard to the criteria by which a policy is evaluated, the intentions of the policy-makers and the timeframe in which the 'negative' consequences are evaluated. This indeterminacy makes it very hard to objectively categorize a policy as failure. Also along this intersubjective line, Kai Oppermann and Alexander Spencer (Chap. 3, this volume) argue that the social construction of failure occurs through the clash of competing

claims in political discourse, and Oliver Daddow (Chap. 5, this volume) holds that failure is down to a hegemonic interpretation of a policy which flows from narrative contestation. Thus, the chapters in this volume represent a broad range of conceptual perspectives on the study of mistakes and failures in IR, underlining the analytical usefulness of both objectivist and intersubjective approaches while also pointing to opportunities to catch the middle ground between these opposite perspectives.

Why Things Go Wrong: The Causes of Mistakes and Failures

Understanding why mistakes happen or why some policies or decisions come to be seen as mistakes will be of interest to many concerned with the topic of mistakes in IR. For one thing, knowledge about the causes of mistakes is intrinsically linked to any attempts at learning from mistakes in order to avoid them in the future. Similarly, such knowledge is critical for attributing responsibility for mistakes and thus for holding political leaders to account. While the interest in the causes of mistakes cuts across the divide between objectivist and intersubjective approaches to studying mistakes, scholarship in the two traditions explores this question from different angles. From an objectivist perspective, the issue at stake is quite straightforward: 'Why have things gone wrong?' Adopting an intersubjective perspective on mistakes, to the contrary, suggests a rather different take on the question: 'How was it possible that things have come to be seen as having gone wrong?'

Beginning with the objectivist angle on the question, the theoretical toolbox in IR and Foreign Policy Analysis explicitly or implicitly points towards a broad and diverse range of possible causes of mistakes in IR. These causes relate to four different levels of analysis: individual decision-makers, the decision-making process, domestic politics and the structure of the international system.

On the individual level of analysis, a particularly rich history of scholarship has put mistakes in IR down to cognitive biases and limitations of decision-makers. Perhaps the foremost example of such studies in IR is Robert Jervis' (1976) work on 'misperceptions'. Here, mistakes happen because decision-makers misperceive and misrepresent the intentions and behaviour of other actors in the international arena. For example, such misconceptions arise because decision-makers interpret incoming

information about international events through the filter of pre-existing beliefs and try to maintain consistency between new information and their established views (Jervis 1968). Actors in IR (and elsewhere) are therefore primed to see what they expect to see. Decision-makers who hold an image of another country as an 'enemy' will likely interpret the actions of that country as hostile or deceitful and respond accordingly even if these actions were intended to be friendly and sincere (Herrmann and Fischerkeller 1995). Along similar lines, the over- and underestimation of hostility have been linked to the outbreak of international wars, including World Wars I and II (Jervis 1988). Attribution theory, in turn, points to a general tendency of decision-makers to ascribe hostile or harmful behaviour of others to their motives and personal characteristics while downplaying the role of situational factors. In contrast, decision-makers are much more ready to excuse their own behaviour in terms of external constraints and (often wrongly) expect others to recognize these constraints as well. It is easy to see how this 'fundamental attribution error' (Gawronsky 2007) can lead to misjudgements in IR.

Closely related, research in cognitive and social psychology has explored a range of decision-making heuristics which individual decision-makers employ to reduce uncertainty but which also imply certain biases that might result in mistakes. For example, decision-makers are prone to assess the likelihood of an event in terms of how easily they can retrieve examples of the same type of event from memory ('availability heuristic'). However, this will often not reflect the true probability of the event but rather the familiarity of the decision-maker with this class of event or the salience of previous examples of such events in their minds (Tversky and Kahneman 1982: 11–14). Similarly, decision-makers may rely on particular historical analogies to make sense of their decision context not so much because the analogies resemble that decision context but more because they are top of their heads (Oppermann and Spencer 2013). Prospect theory, in turn, suggests that mistakes in IR may be caused by the tendency of decision-makers to give excessive weight to (and prepare for) events with very low probabilities and that they are overly risk acceptant when they seek to recoup losses but unduly risk averse when realizing gains (Kahneman and Tversky 1979).

Another strand of research on the individual level of analysis traces mistakes less to the cognitive limitations and strategies of decision-makers but foregrounds the role of their emotions. Specifically, the argument is that emotions such as anger, fear, happiness, sadness, stress or disgust affect

how decision-makers process information and make judgements (McDermott 2017). Emotions thus shape how decision-makers respond to their environment and might trigger behaviour that, from an objectivist perspective, fails to realize their goals or interests. Along similar lines, mistakes might happen because decision-makers are predisposed to avoid or ignore value trade-offs in their decisions in order to shield themselves against the emotional strain which such trade-offs entail (Jervis 1986: 333–334).

On the level of the decision-making process, the causes of mistakes have mainly been put down to either social-psychological dynamics in small decision-making groups or the rigidities of organizational routines. As for the former, the most prominent example, by far, is Irving Janis' (1982) work on 'groupthink'. This concept describes a mode of decision-making in cohesive groups of decision-makers that prioritizes concurrence seeking and consensus within the group over a critical and open debate about the promise and drawbacks of different options. The tendency for groupthink is facilitated by a range of structural and situational context factors, such as the insulation of the group, a lack of impartial leadership, high stress as well as low self-esteem of group members, for example, as a consequence of previous failures. The symptoms of groupthink involve an overestimation of the group, including a sense of invulnerability and moral superiority, the closed-mindedness of group members as well as self-censorship. These symptoms, in turn, result in defective decision-making which facilitates mistakes and failures. Prominent examples of foreign policy failures which have been linked to groupthink mainly include cases in US foreign policy, such as the lack of preparation for a Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor in World War II, the escalation of the Korean War, the attempted 'Bay of Pigs' invasion of Cuba in 1961, the Vietnam War (Janis 1982) as well as the abortive mission to rescue US hostages in Iran in 1980 (Smith 1985) and the 2003 Iraq War (Badie 2010). However, others have rejected the notion of an intrinsic causal relationship between groupthink and foreign policy failures and argued that some symptoms of groupthink may actually lead to successful foreign policies, for example, in the case of the US-led liberation of Kuwait after the Iraqi invasion in 1991 (Yetiv 2003).

While groupthink traces mistakes in IR to pathologies in small-group decision-making, the organizational process approach starts out from the policy-making process inside government bureaucracies (Allison and Zelikow 1999). Specifically, the approach suggests that decision-making

in government departments is shaped by relatively stable and rigid routines, so-called standard operating procedures (SOPs). These SOPs are central to how organizations operate and are functional in reducing the complexity of decision-making. In particular, they enable boundedly rational decision-makers to come up with consistent responses to recurring types of decision problems (Simon 1957; Cyert and March 1963). Such organizational routines are therefore not only unavoidable in government policy-making; in the overwhelming majority of cases they also represent an efficient use of cognitive and bureaucratic resources and result in 'good enough' decisions. In exceptional cases, however, these same routines can have unintended consequences and thus cause mistakes and failures in IR. This is mainly because of the inflexibility of organizational routines, their lack of responsiveness to the particularities of specific cases and their difficulty in accounting for interdependencies between different decisions. Cases in point relate to military planning in the run-up to World War I (Levy 1986) and naval strategies between the World Wars (Steinbruner 1974: 79–80), the US system of defence readiness levels in the wake of Pearl Harbor (Wohlstetter 1962: 394–395) and during the Yom Kippur War (Sagan 1985: 122–128) as well as a number of 'near misses' during the Cuban Missile Crisis (Allison and Zelikow 1999: 208–217; Sagan 1985: 118–121).

Moving on to the level of domestic politics, objectivist approaches trace mistakes in IR either to domestic constraints on decision-makers that prevent them from pursuing successful policies or on domestically driven interests of decision-makers. The focus on domestic constraints is particularly evident in works on two-level games (Putnam 1988) in which the key benchmark for success or failure becomes whether or not decision-makers are able to devise policies on the international level that do not flounder over obstacles in the domestic arena. From this perspective, mistakes happen when decision-makers are unable to implement domestically what they have agreed to internationally, either because they have misjudged their domestic constraints or because these constraints have changed. A similar argument follows from veto player approaches which trace the failure of decision-makers to implement their preferred policies to the number and preferences of domestic veto players (Tsebelis 2002). Prominent examples for such 'involuntary defections' (Iida 1996) in IR are widespread, including the failures of US President Woodrow Wilson to secure Senate support for the League of Nations in 1920 and of President Bill Clinton to achieve domestic ratification of the Comprehensive Test

Ban Treaty in 1999. European integration is also beset with these kinds of mistakes, from the rejection by the French National Assembly of the European Defence Community in 1954 to the unsuccessful referendums on the European Constitutional Treaty in France and the Netherlands in 2005 and the failure of the UK government of Prime Minister David Cameron to win public support for its 'remain' position in the 2016 British EU membership referendum.

A different argument on the level of domestic politics starts out not from the constraints of decision-makers but rather zooms in on how their domestic interests drive them towards making mistakes. The classic example here is Graham Allison's (1971) bureaucratic politics model. From this perspective, government decision-makers are motivated primarily by securing and expanding their bureaucratic interests, in particular their budget and turf. Foreign policy thus emerges as the result of bureaucratic struggles inside the government, rather than as an attempt to find the best possible answer to foreign policy problems. Mistakes in IR that have been explained along these lines include the abortive mission to rescue the American hostages in Iran in 1980 (Smith 1984) and the US decision to invade Iraq in 2003 (Smith 2008).

On the highest level of analysis, in turn, objectivist studies of the causes of mistakes in IR may point to the structure of the international system. The prime exhibit for this line of argument comes from the neorealist school of thought for which a state's foreign policy is driven by its relative power position in the international system (Elman 1996). Specifically, the international power position of states implies a set of systemic imperatives and opportunities to which they respond in order to secure their survival. Mistakes, however, can happen if the incentives and pressures from the international system are complex, ambiguous or in flux. For example, some neorealists maintain that multipolar systems are more war prone than bipolar systems, partly because there is less clarity about threats and more scope for miscalculations. Also, significant changes in the balance of power can make states misread structural incentives from the international system and lead to conflict and war (see Mearsheimer 2007: 78–82). Along these lines, Robert Jervis (1994) has suggested that the post-Cold War international system has become structurally more complex, making mistakes in IR increasingly likely.

In contrast to explanations of the causes of mistakes and failures in IR that take an objectivist viewpoint, looking at the topic from an intersubjective angle changes the perspective entirely. Mistakes and failures are no

longer seen as objectively given but rather as socially constructed in political discourse. It follows that studying the 'causes' of mistakes turns into questions about how social constructions of mistakes in IR become possible and what facilitates or hinders such constructions. These questions can be addressed on three levels of analysis: the authors of 'mistake claims' in political discourse; the content of the discourse itself; and the audience of the discourse. From all three perspectives, the social construction of policies, actions and decisions as mistakes is facilitated by 'unsettled' discursive contexts, in which no interpretation of these policies, actions and decisions has attained dominance and in which their meaning remains contested (Krebs 2015a: 32–36). Since claims of mistakes and failures in such contexts will likely meet with counterclaims rejecting allegations of mistakes and failures, the critical issue is which attempt at meaning giving gains the upper hand in political discourse.

On the level of an actor-centred and resource-based understanding of discursive power, the resonance and reception of claims of mistakes and failures depends on the power and standing of the authors of such claims. Specifically, social constructions of mistakes in IR will more likely gain traction if they can rely on the judgements and interpretations of actors who have the capability to shape public and media discourse. This in turn is conditional on a range of immaterial and material resources, including the authority, personal credibility and reliability of the speakers, as well as their expertise, rhetorical skills and access to the media and public relations budgets (Aronczyk 2008; Hülsse 2009). Similarly, claims of mistakes and failures are more likely to become dominant in political discourse, if actors who seek to reject such claims lack some or all of these resources. As a case in point, the interpretation of Germany's abstention in the UN Security Council on the 2011 military intervention in Libya as a major diplomatic mistake initially resonated strongly in political discourse, partly because the main actor who stood against a broad coalition of highly respected German and international voices and who tried to counter such an interpretation, German Foreign Minister Guido Westerwelle, was widely regarded as a weak and incompetent foreign minister who lacked in political capital and authority (Oppermann and Spencer 2016).

As for the level of the content of political discourse, the attention shifts to the plausibility and persuasiveness of 'mistake claims'. Here, the scholarship on policy failures in public policy points to a range of factors which make assertions of mistakes in IR more or less convincing. For example, social constructions of mistakes critically depend on the argument that

there would have been (better) alternatives. If this case cannot be made, mistakes look as if they had been unavoidable. Without an element of choice and agency, 'things that have gone wrong' will likely be put down to 'fate' and cannot be convincingly construed as a mistake (Ingram and Mann 1980: 14). Similarly, arguments about mistakes and failures should be more powerful in political discourse if they can point to warnings that have been ignored. This suggests that a failure was foreseeable which makes it more difficult to invoke 'misfortune' or an erratic turn of events (Bovens and 't Hart 1996: 73–92). Moreover, the resonance of 'mistake claims' tends to be stronger if they can refer back to stated objectives of a policy and make a plausible case that the policy has fallen short of these objectives or led to unintended (and undesired) consequences (Dunleavy 1995: 52; Howlett 2012: 541–542). The ability to support allegations of mistakes with historical analogies (Khong 1992) or metaphors (Oppermann and Spencer 2013) can also contribute to the plausibility of such allegations. Finally, the social construction of mistakes is inextricably linked to the allocation of blame and responsibility (see below). Such constructions are not usually successful, if mistakes and failures cannot be causally linked in political discourse to the actions or inactions of responsible agents (Gray 1998: 8–9).

On the level of the audience of political discourse, the social construction of mistakes and failures may be helped or hindered by pre-existing intersubjective understandings (Van Ham 2002: 262). Such predispositions within the audience, for example, regarding the appropriate standards for success and failure in politics or the trustworthiness and responsibility of political elites, define the boundaries of what can legitimately and successfully be portrayed as mistakes in political discourse (Krebs 2015b: 813). In other words, 'mistake claims' must have 'verisimilitude' in light of the intersubjective understandings in the audience of what counts as mistakes and they must fit into the canonicity of culturally embedded expectations in this regard in order to resonate.

If anything, this overview of the very broad array of different perspectives on what causes mistakes in IR and on what facilitates the social construction of such mistakes serves to indicate how central these questions are for scholarship on mistakes in politics. It is little surprise, therefore, that many chapters in this volume also implicitly or explicitly speak to the 'causes' of the mistakes under study.

On the 'objectivist' side of the debate, a number of chapters zoom in on the decision-making process. Adam Kamradt-Scott's (Chap. 9, this volume) account of the mistakes of the WHO in dealing with the 2009 'Swine