

Models of Policy Making: Overview

Roger Hilsman, a former policy maker and the author of many pieces on U.S. foreign policy, states that "the business of Washington is making decisions."¹ Our purpose in this chapter is to get a better understanding of how policy makers come together to make foreign policy decisions. For a number of reasons, this is easier said than done. First, no single decision-making process exists. Decisions are arrived at in a number of ways. They may be made by an individual, a small group, an organization, or some combination of them. In each case the procedures followed and the methods used to make the decision may vary. Second, the notion of a *decision* is itself somewhat misleading. It suggests the existence of a specific point in time at which a conscious judgment is made on what to do about a problem. Reality is often far less organized. Decisions are seldom final or decisive; they tend to lack concrete beginning and end points; and they often amount to only temporary breathing spells or truces before the issue is raised again. Decisions are also often made with far less attention to their full meaning and consequences than is commonly recognized. "A government does not decide to inaugurate the nuclear age, but only to try and build the bomb before its enemy does."²

A final factor complicating efforts to understand how policy is made is the relationship of the policy process to policy outcomes. Our intuitive sense is that if the policy process can be made to work properly, then the policy outcome should also work. Accordingly, bad policy can be attributed, at least in part, to bad policy making. Unfortunately, the link between the two is imperfect. Good policy making does not ensure good policy. In a provocative account of the U.S. experience in Vietnam, Leslie Gelb and Richard Betts argue that the irony of Vietnam is that while U.S. policy has been roundly criticized, the policy-making system worked.³ It achieved its basic purpose of pre-

venting a communist victory until domestic political opinion coalesced around either a strategy of victory or withdrawal. The political system produced policies responsive to the wishes of the majority and near the political center while at the same time allowing virtually all views to be aired. The bureaucracy selected and implemented measures designed to accomplish these ends, and these policies were undertaken without illusion about their ultimate chances of success.

In an effort to make sense out of the complicated business of making decisions, models have been developed to help explain, describe, predict, and evaluate how U.S. foreign policy is made. Models are analytical tools that are designed to serve as a simplified representation of reality. As a simplification they leave out much of the detail and texture of what goes on in the policy-making process in an effort to isolate and highlight what are felt to be the most salient features. Models can be distinguished from one another in terms of how they seek to capture and depict reality. The critical task for the foreign policy analyst is deciding how to select from the range of models available and combine them in an insightful fashion.

In this chapter we survey five of the most frequently used models of U.S. foreign policy making.⁴ The next chapter presents case studies that illustrate how these models can be used to gain insight into how U.S. foreign policy is made. Before turning our attention to the models, two final caveats need to be raised. First, we are not arguing that policy makers consciously choose one of these models and act accordingly. We are only arguing that these models can help us understand what is happening in the policy-making process. Policy makers are not ignorant of the existence of these models, but their actions are far more likely to be governed by the complexities, uncertainties, and time constraints inherent in the policy-making process. Second, these models should not be judged in terms of being right or wrong. A more useful standard is how helpful the model is for explaining, describing, or evaluating the workings of the foreign policy process for the policy you are studying.

The Rational Actor Model

The most frequently employed policy-making model is the rational actor model. At its core is an action-reaction process. Foreign policy is viewed as a calculated response to the actions of another actor. This action then produces a calculated response that in turn causes the state to reevaluate and readjust its own foreign policy. In carrying out these calculations, the state is seen as being unitary and rational. By unitary it is meant that the state can be viewed as calculating and responding to external events as if it were a single entity. There is no need for the analyst to delve into the intricacies of governmental organization, domestic politics, or personalities in trying to understand why a policy was selected. The state can be treated as a "black box," responding with one voice to the challenges and opportunities confronting it. We implicitly employ this model when we speak of Israeli goals, Argentine national interests, or Soviet adventurism.

The calculations by which a foreign policy is selected are assumed to be

rational. The basic elements of a rational decision process are (1) goals are clearly stated and ranked in order of preference, (2) all options are considered, (3) the consequences of each option are assessed, and (4) a value-maximizing choice is made. Broadly speaking, there are two ways of carrying out a rational actor analysis of policy making. The first is inductive. It is frequently employed in diplomatic histories. The analyst tries to understand the foreign policy decision by placing himself or herself in the position of the government taking the action. The objective is to appreciate the situation as the government sees it and to understand the logic of the situation. The second approach is deductive. It is best exemplified by game theory and is frequently employed by military strategists and deterrence theorists. Here it is assumed that "a certain kind of conduct is inherent in a particular situation or relationship."⁵ Rather than relying on actual events to support its analysis, the deductive approach relies on logical and mathematical formulations of how states should (rationally) behave under given conditions.

The rational actor model is attractive because it places relatively few informational demands upon the observer. It is also frequently criticized for essentially the same reason: It understates the complexity of foreign affairs and the reality of the policy process. Foreign policy is not just made in response to external events, but also is heavily influenced by domestic political calculations, personalities, and organizational factors. In addition, the rational actor model assumes that "important events have important causes." By doing so, it downgrades the importance of chance, accidents, and coincidence in foreign affairs. Critics also contend that the model's information-processing demands exceed human capabilities. Goals are seldom stated clearly or rank ordered. The full range of policy options and their consequences are rarely evaluated. And in making decisions the need for value trade-offs is denied more than it is faced up to. In place of the assumption of rationality, many critics advance a model based on an incremental decision-making process in which goals are only loosely stated, a limited range of options is examined, and the policy selected is one that "satisfies" (from *satisfactory* and *sufficient*) rather than optimizes.⁶

A final challenge to the rational actor model centers on its methodology. Carried out either inductively or deductively, the rational actor model relies heavily on intuition and personal judgment in interpreting actions or placing weights on policy payoffs. Graham Allison has captured this criticism in his "rationality theorem."⁷ He states that there isn't a pattern of activity for which an imaginative analyst cannot find objectives that are maximized by a given course of action.

Bureaucratic Politics

Bureaucratic politics is the "process by which people inside government bargain with one another on complex public policy questions."⁸ As this definition suggests, the bureaucratic politics model approaches policy making in a completely different way from the rational actor model. Policy making is seen as a political process dominated by conflict resolution and not problem solving.

Politics dominates the decision-making process because no individual is in a position to decide on matters alone. Power is shared, and the individuals who share power disagree on what should be done because they are located at different places within the government and see different faces of the problem. Using military force to punish terrorists looks different to a secretary of state who must balance the diplomatic pluses and minuses of such a move than it does to the military chiefs of staff whose forces would be used or to a presidential aide who is perhaps most sensitive to the domestic implications of the success or failure of such a mission.

Not everyone in the government is a participant in a particular policy-making "game." The political bargaining process is constrained by the organizational context within which policy makers operate. Fixed organizational routines define the issue, produce the information on which policy decisions are made, link institutions and individuals together, and place limits on the types of policy options that can be implemented. Furthermore, the players in the game are not equal in their ability to influence the outcome of the bargaining process. Deadlines, the rules of the game, and action channels confer power to some and deny it to others. Rules determine what kind of behavior is permitted and by whom. Can unilateral statements be made, or must the decision be cleared by a committee? Can information be leaked? Action channels link policy makers together and determine who is in the best position to leak information, make a unilateral statement, or be included in a committee that approves action. Deadlines force issues by accelerating the tempo of the decision-making process and creating pressure for an agreement. Deadlines come in many forms: a meeting with a foreign head of state, a presidential press conference or speech, the adjournment of Congress, and the beginning of a fiscal year. Congress may also establish deadlines. It established a recurring deadline in 1977 when it required that the Secretary of State report annually to Congress on human rights conditions in every state receiving U.S. development assistance.

Rarely do policy problems enter or leave the policy process in a clearly definable manner. More frequently, they flow through it in a fragmented state and become entangled in other ongoing policy issues. The result is that policy is not formulated with respect to any underlying conception of the U.S. national interest. Instead, its content is heavily influenced by the way in which the problem first surfaces and how it interacts with the other issues on the policy agenda. A recent example is the George W. Bush administration's misstep in handling its decision to withdraw from the Kyoto Protocol. Environmental Protection Agency head Christine Whitman sought to take the lead in this policy area and assured European leaders that the administration would act to control carbon dioxide emissions. Secretary of State Colin Powell also endorsed this position. Yet Bush chose to reject their advice, responding to pressure from congressional Republicans and lobbyists from the coal and steel industries. Bush's decision placed the United States on the defensive in its meetings over the next several months with European and Japanese leaders who saw it as another troubling example of the Bush administration's penchant for unilateralism, along with the decision to go forward on a national ballistic defense system and to go slow on talks with North Korea.

In putting all of the foregoing together, advocates of the bureaucratic politics model argue that policy is not, and cannot be, a product of deliberate choice. Instead, policy is either a result of a political bargaining process or the product of organizational standard operating procedures.⁹ In either case the new policy arrived at is not likely to differ greatly from the existing policy. This is because bargaining is a time-consuming and expensive process. Not only do policy makers disagree, but they are often quite deeply committed to their positions. The need for agreement pushes policy makers toward accepting a minimal decision, one that is not radically different from the existing compromise and one that will allow all sides to claim partial victory. The inflexible and blunt nature of organizational routines and procedures reinforces the tendency for policy to change only at the margins. Administrative feasibility is a constant check on the ability of policy makers to tailor policy options to meet specific problems. In sum, from the bureaucratic politics perspective, the best predictor of future policy is not the policy that maximizes U.S. national interests but that which is only incrementally different from current policy.

The bureaucratic politics model makes important contributions to understanding U.S. foreign policy by highlighting the political and organizational nature of policy making. However, it has also been the subject of extensive criticisms. First, by emphasizing compromise, bargaining, and standard operating procedures, the bureaucratic model makes it very difficult to assign responsibility for the decisions being made.¹⁰ Second, it misrepresents the workings of the bargaining process by overstating the extent to which policy simply emerges from the policy process.¹¹ Third, the bureaucratic politics model is chastised for artificially separating the executive branch bargaining process from the broader social and political context. In this view Congress and domestic political forces cannot be treated as outside interlopers in the policy process. Attention must also be given to the values of policy makers and not just the policy-making games they play. Finally, it is criticized for being too complex, a virtual "analytic kitchen sink" into which almost anything can be thrown that might be related to how an issue is resolved.¹² The result is a story that may make for interesting reading but that violates one of the most fundamental rules of explanation: All things being equal, simple explanations are better than complex ones.

Small Group Decision Making

A third policy-making model focuses on the dynamics of small group decision making. Advocates of this perspective hold that many critical foreign policy decisions are made neither by an individual policy maker nor by large bureaucratic forces. From a policy maker's perspective, small group decision making offers a number of advantages over its bureaucratic counterpart. Among its perceived advantages are the following:

- The absence of significant conflict because there will be few viewpoints to reconcile
- A free and open interchange of opinion among members because there will be no organizational interests to protect

- Swift and decisive action
- Possible innovation and experimentation
- The possibility of maintaining secrecy¹³

Three different types of small groups can be identified.¹⁴ First is the informal small group that meets regularly but lacks a formal institutional base. The Tuesday lunch group in the Johnson administration and the Friday breakfast and Thursday lunch groups of the Carter administration are prominent recent examples. Second is the ad hoc group that is created to deal with a specific problem and then ceases to function once its task is completed. In the first week of the 1950 Korean crisis, six small group meetings were held. During the Cuban missile crisis, the key decisions were made by ExCom, an ad hoc group of about fifteen individuals brought together by Kennedy specifically for the purpose of dealing with this problem. The third type of small group is permanent in nature, possesses an institutional base, and is created to perform a series of specified functions. The subcommittees of the National Security Council (NSC) fall into this category. During the Carter administration two subcommittees were established. One, the Special Coordinating Committee (SCC), was set up to deal with crisis situations when they arose. During the Iranian hostage crisis, Robert Hunter, an NSC official in the Carter administration, reported that

Throughout the hostage crisis, the SCC met at 9:00 A.M.—at first daily and later less frequently—with an agenda coordinated with the government by the NSC staff in the early hours of the morning. Discussion was brisk, options were presented crisply, and recommendations were rapidly and concisely formulated for presidential decision. . . . The crisis team, with nearly three years' experience of working together, did its job efficiently and with dispatch. . . . Subcommittees of the SCC worked on specialized parts of the problem. The State Department Iranian Working Group worked around the clock all 444 days and fed information back and forth. . . . The results of the days' labors were reported back; new wrinkles in the crisis were assessed; and the SCC was ready to act again the next morning.¹⁵

Following the terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001 the George W. Bush administration established a "war cabinet" consisting of some dozen people. Almost half had played key roles in Gulf War decisions: Vice President Dick Cheney was secretary of defense, Secretary of State Colin Powell was chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, Deputy Secretary of Defense Paul Wolfowitz was undersecretary of defense, Deputy Secretary of State Richard Armitage was a special envoy, and National Security Adviser Condoleezza Rice was a senior official at the National Security Council. Missing from this war cabinet was any longtime confidant of the president comparable to Secretary of State James Baker III in President George Bush's Persian Gulf War cabinet.

In spite of its advantages, small group decision making often results in policy decisions that are anything but rational or effective. Pearl Harbor, the Bay of Pigs invasion, and key decisions in Korea and Vietnam have all been analyzed from a small group decision-making perspective.¹⁶ The Iranian hostage rescue mission and the Iran-Contra initiative can easily be added to this list.

These policy failures are held to result from the presence of strong in-group pressures on members to concur in the group's decision. This pressure produces a "deterioration of mental efficiency, reality testing, and moral judgment" that increases the likelihood of the group's making a potentially defective decision.¹⁷ Irving Janis coined the term *groupthink* to capture this phenomenon. He also identified eight symptoms that indicate its presence. He divides them into three categories: overestimation of the group's power and morality, closed-mindedness, and pressures toward conformity. The full list of these symptoms is found in Box 11.1. Janis argues that the more symptoms that are present, the more likely it is that concurrence-seeking behavior will result and that defective decisions will be made. Table 11.1 presents a series of observations made by the Tower Commission report about the decision making on the Iran–Contra affair with the symptoms mentioned by Janis.

Box 11.1 The Groupthink Syndrome

Type I: Overestimations of the Group—Its Power and Morality

1. An illusion of invulnerability, shared by most or all the members, which creates excessive optimism and encourages taking extreme risks
2. An unquestioned belief in the group's inherent morality, inclining the members to ignore the ethical or moral consequences of their decisions

Type II: Closed-Mindedness

3. Collective efforts to rationalize in order to discount warnings or other information that might lead the members to reconsider their assumptions before they recommit themselves to their past policy decisions
4. Stereotyped views of enemy leaders as too evil to warrant genuine attempts to negotiate, or as too weak and stupid to counter whatever risky attempts are made to defeat their purposes

Type III: Pressures toward Uniformity

5. Self-censorship of deviations from the apparent group consensus, reflecting each member's inclination to minimize to himself the importance of his doubts and counterarguments
6. A shared illusion of unanimity concerning judgments conforming to the majority view (partly resulting from self-censorship of deviations, augmented by the false assumption that silence means consent)
7. Direct pressure on any member who expresses strong arguments against any of the group's stereotypes, illusions, or commitments, making clear that this type of dissent is contrary to what is expected of all loyal members
8. The emergence of self-appointed mindguards—members who protect the group from adverse information that might shatter their shared complacency about the effectiveness and morality of their decisions

Source: Irving L. Janis, *Groupthink: Psychological Studies of Policy Decisions and Fiascos*, 2nd ed. (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1982), pp. 174–75. Copyright © 1982 by Houghton Mifflin Company. Reprinted by permission.

TABLE 11.1 Groupthink and the Iran–Contra Affair

<i>Elements of Groupthink</i>	<i>Findings of The Tower Commission Report</i>
Illusion of invulnerability	The president "was all for letting the Israelis do anything they wanted at the very first briefing." McFarlane, p. 131.
Unquestioned belief in group's morality	The president distinguished between selling to someone believed able to exert influence with respect to the hostages and dealing directly with the kidnapers, p. 39. The administration continued to pressure U.S. allies not to sell arms to Iran and not to make concessions to terrorists, p. 65.
Collective efforts to discount warnings	"There is a high degree of risk in pursuing the course we have started, we are now so far down the road that stopping . . . could have even more serious repercussions. We all view the next step as confidence building." North, p. 167.
Stereotyping the enemy	Release of the hostages would require influence with the Hezbollah, which could involve the most radical elements of the Iranian regime. The kind of strategy sought by the United States, however, involved what were regarded as more moderate elements, p. 64.
Self-censorship	Evidence suggests that he [Casey] received information about the possible divergence of funds to the Contras almost a month before the story broke. He, too, did not move promptly to raise the matter with the president, p. 81. Secretary Shultz and Secretary Weinberger, in particular, distanced themselves from the march of events, p. 82.
Illusion of unanimity (presidential support)	"I felt in the meeting that there were views opposed, some in favor, and the President didn't really take a position, but he seemed to, he was in favor of this project somehow or other." Shultz, p. 183. "As the meeting broke up, I had the idea the President had not entirely given up on encouraging the Israelis." Casey, p. 198.
Direct pressure against dissenters	"Casey's view is that Cap will continue to create roadblocks until he is told by you that the President wants this move NOW." North to Poindexter, p. 232.
Emergence of mindguards	"I don't want a meeting with RR, Shultz, and Weinberger." Poindexter, p. 45. North directed that dissemination be limited to Secretary Weinberger, DCI Casey, McFarlane, and himself. North said McFarlane had directed that no copy be sent to the secretary of state and that he, McFarlane, would keep Secretary Shultz advised orally on the NSC project, p. 149.

Source: President's Special Review Panel, *The Tower Commission Report* (New York: Bantam, 1987).

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While the match is not perfect (for example, illusion of unanimity is better seen as an illusion of presidential support), the parallels are striking.

Groupthink is a phenomenon that occurs irrespective of the personality traits of group members. It is not an inevitable product of a tight-knit decision group, nor is it necessarily the cause of a policy fiasco. Poor implementation, changed circumstances, or accidental factors also produce policy failures. Groupthink exists as a tendency that is made more or less likely by three sets of antecedent conditions: the coherence of the decision-making group, structural faults of the organization, and the nature of the decision context. At its core is the assumption that concurrence-seeking behavior is an attempt on the part of group members to cope with stress by developing a mutual support base. The source of the stress may be internal or external to the group. External stress is conducive to groupthink when it stems from a threat for which there appears to be little hope of finding a better solution than the one put forward by the leader. Internal stress tends to come from feelings of low self-esteem such that "participating in a unanimous consensus along with respected fellow members of a congenial group will bolster the decision maker's self-esteem."¹⁸

Because groupthink is a tendency and not a condition, it can be avoided. Recognizing that each proposed solution has its own drawbacks, Janis puts forward several measures that he feels would improve the quality of small group decision making.¹⁹ They include modifying leadership strategies so that impartial and wide-ranging discussions of alternatives will take place, establishing multiple groups for the same task, multiple advocacy, establishing a devil's advocate, and having a "second chance" meeting where decisions might be reconsidered one final time.

Three general lines of criticism have been directed at the groupthink approach to small-group decision making. First, the proposed solutions probably will not work. Consider the idea of multiple advocacy, which attempts to ensure that all views "however unpopular" will receive serious attention.²⁰ Two dangers exist here. In each case they are brought on by overloading the intellectual capabilities of policy makers and by highlighting the ambiguity of the evidence before them. One outcome is that policy makers will simply choose whatever policy option is in accord with their preexisting biases. If a wide range of options are all made to appear respectable and doubts exist about the effectiveness of each, why not "let Reagan be Reagan" or "Bush be Bush" and select the one that best fits his image of the world. The other equally undesirable outcome is paralysis. Confronted with too many policy options, all of which appear to have problems, policy makers may end up doing nothing.

Second, criticism is directed at the criteria used to establish a good decision.²¹ The standard used (vigilant appraisal) virtually duplicates the functional steps involved in making a rational decision that we presented in our discussion of the rational actor model. The point remains: If the rational actor model is an unrealistic benchmark against which to judge decision making, isn't the same true for groupthink? A final point is more theoretical in nature. The groupthink approach is grounded in a conflict model of individual decision making. According to this model, individuals often confront decision-making situations in which they feel "simultaneous opposing tendencies to

accept and reject a given course of action."²² Vigilant appraisal is realized when individuals successfully address this stress, and groupthink occurs when they do not. The cybernetic approach to policy making suggests an alternative starting point to understanding individual decision making. According to this perspective, individuals do not even attempt to resolve the value conflict and tensions involved in making such a decision. Instead, "the decision process is organized around the problem of controlling inherent uncertainty by means of highly focused attention and highly programmed responses."²³ Based on this line of argument, John Steinbruner suggests that in place of the calculating policy maker we focus our attention on three types of thinkers, each of whom avoids the need for making value trade-offs.²⁴ Any individual may exhibit these patterns of thinking or switch between them as time constraints and issues change. The uncommitted thinker has difficulty making up his or her mind on an issue and is very susceptible to the arguments and positions of others; the theoretical thinker approaches an issue from an ideological perspective; and the grooved thinker deals with a problem by placing it into a limited number of preexisting categories.

Elite Theory and Pluralism

We have already encountered the final two perspectives on policy making that we will examine, elite theory and pluralism. During the 1960s and early 1970s, these two models served as the focal point for an intense debate that raged within political science over how best to understand the process by which public policy was made. While no longer the center of attention, elite theory and pluralism remain important approaches for understanding how U.S. foreign policy is made, and we briefly summarize the arguments that they make.

Elite theory represents a quite different perspective on foreign policy making than do the three approaches that we have examined so far. It is not concerned with the details of the action taking place inside the policy process, but it also does not ignore what goes on inside of the state. Elite theory is vitally concerned with the identity of those individuals making foreign policy and the underlying dynamics of national power, social myth, and class interests. From this perspective foreign policy is formulated as a response to demands generated by the economic and political system. But not all demands receive equal attention, and those that receive the most attention serve the interests of only a small sector of society. These special interests are transformed into national interests through the pattern of office holding and the structure of influence that exists within the United States. Those who hold office are seen as being a stable and relatively cohesive group that share common goals, interests, and values. Disagreements exist only at the margins and surface most frequently as disputes over how to implement policy and not over the ends of that policy. Those outside the elite group are held to be relatively powerless, reacting to the policy initiatives of the elite rather than prompting them. Furthermore, public reactions are often "orchestrated" by the elite rather than being expressions of independent thinking on policy matters. This explains why certain policy proposals routinely fail to attract serious

attention: Ideas that do not build upon the relatively narrow range of value assumptions shared by the elite and rooted in the underlying dynamics of the socioeconomic structure will be rejected as unworkable, fundamentally flawed, or fatally naive. It also suggests that the basic directions of U.S. foreign policy will change slowly, if at all.

Within this broad consensus, elite theorists disagree on a number of points. First, disagreement exists over the constraints on elite behavior. Some see few, if any, constraints on the type of policies elites can pursue. Others see a more open policy process that is subject to periodic "short-circuiting" by the public, as perhaps was the case with the nuclear freeze movement. Disagreement also exists over how conspiratorial the elite is. Some elite theorists pay great attention to the social backgrounds and linkages between members of the elite class while others deemphasize these features in favor of an attention to the broader and more enduring forces of a capitalistic economic system that drives U.S. foreign policy to be expansionist, aggressive, and exploitive.²⁵

Both the Reagan and Carter administrations were the subject of conspiratorial-style elite analyses. In the case of the Carter administration, the object of attention was the presence of large numbers of Trilateral Commission members in high policy-making positions. The Trilateral Commission was organized in 1973 to foster closer cooperation between the United States, Western Europe, and Japan on policy problems. Nineteen of its sixty-five members served in the Carter administration, including Carter, National Security Adviser Zbigniew Brzezinski, Secretary of State Cyrus Vance, Secretary of Defense Harold Brown, and Vice President Walter Mondale.²⁶ In the Reagan administration the object of attention was on the links between Reagan appointees and the Committee on the Present Danger, a group established in the 1970s to heighten the public's concern about the continuing threat to U.S. national security posed by the military power of the Soviet Union. Among committee members who served in the Reagan administration are Reagan, Secretary of State George Shultz, National Security Adviser Richard Allen, Director of Central Intelligence William Casey, and Representative to the United Nations Jeane Kirkpatrick.²⁷

In sum, elite theory is a valuable source of insight into U.S. foreign policy making because it stresses the ties that bind policy makers together rather than the issues that separate them. In contrast to elite theory, pluralism is regarded as the orthodox interpretation of how the U.S. policy-making system works. Just as with elite theory, no single comprehensive statement of the argument exists. Still, six common themes can be identified:

1. Power in society is fragmented and diffused.
2. Many groups in society have power to participate in policy making.
3. No one group is powerful enough to dictate policy.
4. An equilibrium among groups is the natural state of affairs.
5. Policy is the product of bargaining between groups and reflects the interests of the dominant group(s).
6. The government acts as an umpire supervising the competition and sometimes compels a settlement.

Pluralists acknowledge that power resources are not evenly distributed throughout society. However, they hold that merely possessing the attributes of power (wealth, status, etc.) is not equal to actually possessing power itself.²⁸ This is because the economic and political sectors of society are held to be separate. In addition, power resources may be substituted for one another. Large numbers may offset wealth; leadership may offset large numbers; and commitment may overcome poor leadership. Pluralists would point to the grassroots movement within the United States to force South Africa to end apartheid as evidence of the validity of their case. What began as a movement on college campuses to force companies to disinvest from South Africa and later took the form of daily, peaceful demonstrations at the South African embassy gradually succeeded in sensitizing policy makers and the American public to the problem, with the result that in 1985 U.S. policy toward South Africa began to show signs of change. More recently, the change in U.S. policy on Cambodia, in which support for the rebel forces (including the Khmer Rouge) was dropped in favor of talks with Vietnam, can also be linked to shifting political power of domestic political forces on this issue.

Theodore Lowi has suggested a major flaw in the pluralists' argument.²⁹ Pluralists assume that competition between groups produces policy makers who compete over the content of policy. What happens when policy makers do not compete over policy but instead are so fragmented that they rule over separate and self-contained policy areas? Lowi suggests that these conditions better describe the operation of the U.S. government than does the pluralist model and that when this happens the government is not an umpire but a holding company. Pluralism then exists without competition as interest groups capture different pieces of the government and shape its policies to suit their needs. New groups or the poorly organized are effectively shut out of the decision-making process. Just as important, interest group liberalism reduces the capacity of the government to plan because it is unable to speak with one voice or examine problems from a national perspective.

Summary: Integrating Models and Additional Possibilities

The scope of activity involved in making U.S. foreign policy is so vast that no single model can hope to capture all of it, and few models try.³⁰ Instead, models draw our attention to a select set of assumptions about what is central to the policy-making process. Simplifying the policy process in this way inevitably creates problems, and, as we have seen, each model has certain inherent limitations. The task facing the student of foreign policy making is to blend these models together to produce a picture containing the maximum amount of insight and a minimal amount of distortion on the nature of the policy-making process without overwhelming him or her with data demands. Typically, there are four ways that this integration can be attempted. The first is to shift from model to model as the focus of the analysis changes. For example, from the rational actor perspective, the decision to send U.S. troops to Korea in 1950 is a single decision. From the bureaucratic or small group perspective, a number of separate decisions can be identified.³¹ A distinction can also be

made between the sociopolitical aspects of policy making and the intellectual task of choosing a response.³² The pluralist and bureaucratic politics models help us understand why policy makers act as they do once they are "in place," but they tell us little about how they got there or the values they bring to bear in addressing a problem. To answer these questions, we might want to turn to insights from elite theory or the rational actor model.

A second way to integrate policy-making models is to recognize that some models are more appropriate for analyzing some problems, or issue areas, than they are for others. The general argument is that the more open the policy process and the longer the issue is on the policy agenda (such as is typically the case for structural and strategic issues), the more useful will be the bureaucratic and pluralist models. The more closed the process and the quicker the response, the more useful will be the rational actor, elite theory, or small group model.

A third way to integrate these models is to shift from one to another as the policy problem develops over time. Thus, the elite or rational actor model might be especially helpful for understanding how the United States got involved in Vietnam; the small group or bureaucratic politics model might be most helpful for understanding key decisions during the course of the war; and the pluralist or bureaucratic politics model might be most helpful for understanding the actual process by which the United States withdrew from Vietnam.

A final way of integrating these models is based on the values guiding one's analysis. We have already suggested that while the rational actor model may be deficient as a description of the policy-making process, it is still valuable if your purpose is to evaluate the policy process. One must be careful in using models in this way, for embedded in each are assumptions about how policy should be made that are not always readily apparent. For example, implicit in the rational actor model is a belief in the desirability of a strong president and the ability to act quickly. The model does not place great value on widespread participation in decision making or in a system of checks and balances.

The decision-making models we have examined in this chapter are not the only ones being used. We conclude by introducing two additional models that have attracted a great deal of interest of late. The first is social constructivism.³³ Instead of asking how a given outcome came to be, it seeks to understand how it was possible to imagine certain courses of action and relationships as being possible in the first place. It asks what social practices enabled people to act, frame policies as they did, and wield the power that they did. For example, shortly after following Ronald Reagan into the White House, the George Bush administration invaded Panama and overthrew the government of Manuel Noriega. The social constructivist approach would be most interested in understanding how it came to be that Noriega was redefined from being an anticommunist ally to being a drug dealer, thus making this invasion a viable option in the minds of policy makers.

A second new decision-making model enjoying support today is prospect theory.³⁴ It takes exception to the assumptions of the rational actor model, asserting that individuals do not weight all outcomes and select the

strategy that will offer them the highest expected utility. Instead, individuals tend to value what they have more than what they do not have; they stay at the status quo more often than one would predict; and they tend to be risk averse with respect to gains and risk acceptant when it comes to losses. This implies that leaders will take more risks to defend their state's international position than to enhance it and that after a loss leaders will have a tendency to take excessive risks to recover their positions.

Notes

1. Roger Hilsman, "Policy Making Is Politics," in Charles W. Kegley Jr. and Eugene R. Wittkopf (eds.), *Perspectives on American Foreign Policy: Selected Readings* (New York: St. Martin's, 1983), p. 250.
2. *Ibid.*, p. 251.
3. Leslie H. Gelb with Richard K. Betts, *The Irony of Vietnam: The System Worked* (Washington, D.C.: Brookings, 1979).
4. A short summary of additional models can be found in Thomas L. Brewer, *American Foreign Policy: A Contemporary Introduction*, 2nd ed. (Englewood Cliffs, N.J.: Prentice-Hall, 1986), pp. 26-54.
5. Patrick Morgan, *Theories and Approaches to International Politics: What Are We to Think*, 3rd ed. (New Brunswick, N.J.: Transaction, 1981), p. 110.
6. Herbert A. Simon, *Administrative Behavior: A Study of Decision Making Processes in Administrative Organization*, 3rd ed. (New York: Free Press, 1976).
7. Graham T. Allison, *Essence of Decision: Explaining the Cuban Missile Crisis* (Boston: Little, Brown, 1971), p. 35.
8. I. M. Destler, *Presidents, Bureaucrats, and Foreign Policy: The Politics of Organizational Reform* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1974), p. 52.
9. As originally presented by Allison in his *Essence of Decision*, two separate models were used to explain foreign policy making through organizational routines and governmental politics. Subsequently, Allison combined them into one model as is being done here. See Graham T. Allison and Morton H. Halperin, "Bureaucratic Politics: A Paradigm and Some Policy Implications," *World Politics*, 24 (1982), 40-79.
10. Robert L. Gallucci, *Neither Peace nor Honor: The Politics of American Military Policy in Vietnam* (Baltimore, Md.: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1975), p. 153.
11. Robert J. Art, "Bureaucratic Politics and American Foreign Policy: A Critique," in Robert J. Art and Robert Jervis (eds.), *International Politics: Anarchy, Force, Political Economy, and Decision Making*, 2nd ed. (Boston: Little, Brown, 1985), p. 471; Stephen D. Krasner, "Are Bureaucrats Important? (Or Allison Wonderland)," *Foreign Policy*, 7 (1972), 159-79; and Jerel Rosati, "Developing a Systematic Decision Making Framework: Bureaucratic Politics in Perspective," *World Politics*, 33 (1981), 234-51.
12. Jonathan Bendor and Thomas H. Hamman, "Rethinking Allison's Models," *American Political Science Review*, 86 (1992), 301-22.
13. Robert L. Wendzel, *International Politics: Policymakers & Policymaking* (New York: Wiley & Sons, 1981), p. 439.
14. *Ibid.*, p. 438.
15. Robert E. Hunter, *Presidential Control of Foreign Policy: Management or Mishap?* Washington Paper #191 (New York: Praeger, 1982), pp. 35-46.
16. Irving L. Janis, *Groupthink: Psychological Studies of Policy Decisions and Fiascos*, 2nd ed. (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1982).
17. *Ibid.*, p. 9.
18. *Ibid.*, p. 256.
19. *Ibid.*, pp. 172, 262-71.
20. Richard K. Betts, "Analysis, War, and Decision: Why Intelligence Failures Are Inevitable," *World Politics*, 31 (1978), 61-89.

21. Carol Barner-Barry and Robert Rosenwein, *Psychological Perspectives on Politics* (Englewood Cliffs, N.J.: Prentice-Hall, 1985), p. 247.
22. Irving L. Janis and Leon Mann, *Decision Making: A Psychological Analysis of Conflict, Choice, and Commitment* (New York: Free Press, 1977).
23. John D. Steinbruner, *The Cybernetic Theory of Decision: New Dimensions of Political Analysis* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1974), pp. 66-67.
24. *Ibid.*, pp. 125-36.
25. Compare Gabriel Kolko, *The Roots of American Foreign Policy* (Boston: Beacon, 1969), with C. Wright Mills, *The Power Elite* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1956).
26. Charles W. Kegley Jr., and Eugene R. Wittkopf, *American Foreign Policy: Pattern and Process*, 2nd ed. (New York: St. Martin's, 1982), p. 252.
27. John Spanier and Eric Uslaner, *American Foreign Policy and the Democratic Dilemmas*, 4th ed. (New York: Holt, Rinehart & Winston, 1985), p. 143.
28. Robert A. Dahl, "A Critique of the Ruling Elite Model," in G. William Domhoff and Hoyt B. Ballard (eds.), *C. Wright Mills and the Power Elite* (Boston: Beacon, 1968), p. 31.
29. Theodore J. Lowi, *The End of Liberalism: Ideology, Policy, and the Crisis of Public Authority* (New York: Norton, 1969).
30. One model that does try is the decision-making model presented by Richard Snyder, H. W. Bruck, and Burton Sapin in "Decision Making as an Approach to the Study of International Politics," in Richard Snyder, H. W. Bruck, and Burton Sapin (eds.), *Foreign Policy Decision Making* (New York: Free Press, 1963).
31. See, for example, Glenn D. Paige, *The Korean Decision, June 24-30, 1950* (New York: Free Press, 1968).
32. Glenn H. Snyder and Paul Diesing, *Conflict among Nations: Bargaining, Decision-Making, and System Structure in International Crises* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1977), p. 355.
33. Roxane Lynn Doty, "Foreign Policy as Social Construction: A Post-Positivist Analysis of U.S. Counterinsurgency Policy in the Philippines," *International Studies Quarterly*, 37 (1993), 297-320.
34. Jack Levy, "Prospect Theory, Rational Choice and International Relations," *International Studies Quarterly*, 41 (1997), 87-112.