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Chapter 6

State-Level International Relations Theories – Political Culture Theory

In Part I, we discussed system-level theories of international relations, focusing on the nature of the global system and how it shapes the behavior of states within it. Now, we turn our attention to the theories that fall under Waltz's second level of analysis—the state level. State-level theories, as noted in Chapter 1, concentrate on the individual attributes of states rather than the overall system in which they operate. The primary concern here is with the domestic, political, and cultural characteristics of a state. The key assumption is that the internal character and institutions of a state have a direct bearing on its foreign policy.

There are two primary state-level theories presented in this book; each focuses on the role of the state and its impact on international relations: political culture theory and decision-making process theory. In the first chapter, we examine the tenets of political culture theory, as well as its strengths and weaknesses. Some political culture theorists argue that the type of government a state has is a broad determining factor in its behavior and foreign policy. On a basic level, these theorists suggest that, generally, democracies tend to be inherently peaceful, while authoritarian regimes are likely to pursue more aggressive policies.

A second group of political culture theorists acknowledges that these differences between regimes can be important, but believes that it is the cultural and civilizing aspects of a society that shape and guide foreign policy. For these theorists, the traditions, customs, values, and beliefs that characterize a particular group of people also have an influence on the political behavior of that group or its governing body.

The theory presented in the following chapter, decision-making process theory, emphasizes the importance of how decisions are made and the impact of the bureaucracy itself on the government's decision-making process. The implication is that the structure of the government—with its various departments and competing interests—can have substantial sway over not just the policy-making process but the policies themselves.

In the next two chapters, we take a closer look at one of the primary actors on the world stage—the state. From this level of analysis, we examine how states and governments can influence the course of events in international relations. Types of political systems, bureaucratic structure, and unique characteristics of different cultures and civilizations are just some of the important features we will discuss as part of the state level of analysis.

Introduction

Before we begin our discussion of political culture theory, it might be helpful to answer a few fundamental questions about states and how they operate, as well as to define some commonly used terms. Though it may seem fairly basic, let us first ask, What is a state, and how does a state differ from a government?

We can all list the names of any number of states throughout the world— France, Singapore, the United States, Kenya, and so forth. All are very different, yet all are considered states. A state or country (these terms are synonymous) is a political, legal, and territorial entity. A state consists of an internationally recognized territory, a permanent population, and a government that has control over the people within its acknowledged boundaries. In theory, states are sovereign. That is, the government is the supreme authority within the state and does not answer to any outside power. This sovereignty is recognized by international law and by other states through diplomatic relations, and often by membership in the United Nations. Though this definition may sound

complex, if we refer back to our examples, we see they all fit this description. Each state has specific borders recognized by other states in the international community, and also has specific and unique political, economic, and military structures and goals.

On a broad level, the interaction of states is guided by each state's government. Government is a public institution that has the authority to create, implement, and enforce rules, laws, and decisions within a state's territorial borders. These rules, laws, and decisions maintain order within society as well as project and protect the state's interests abroad. The number of branches within any particular system of government can vary but commonly consists of at least a leadership branch, a bureaucratic or administrative branch, and a judicial branch.

Governments present themselves and their interests to the international community using foreign policy. Foreign policy consists of the decisions and strategies used by governments to guide their interaction with other states in the international system. Typically, foreign policy promotes the political, economic, and military interests of the state. The way foreign policy is made depends, in large part, on the type of government that exists in any given country.

Returning to our discussion of political culture theory, this paradigm actually contains two distinct aspects. First, we will look at the regimist perspective, which emphasizes the nature of a state's government—democratic or authoritarian—as a vital factor in its foreign policy and behavior within the global system. Second, the civilizationist perspective of political culture theory acknowledges some points made by proponents of the regime category, but stresses the importance of culture and civilization in determining a state's behavior in the international system and the future of world politics.

Before we begin our discussion of either the regimists or civilizationists, as we will call them, it might be helpful to take a look at several fundamental terms. First, culture refers to a particular social group's commonly shared behavior patterns, including language, traditions, values, customs, institutions, and beliefs. Political culture points specifically to the dominant values, attitudes, and beliefs that affect the politics and behavior of individual governments. This set of common attitudes and values about politics is fostered by the collective history of the political system and becomes embedded in the national character. It is important to remember that political culture reflects the *dominant* values and beliefs of a society, which are not necessarily representative of the beliefs of all people within that society.

Political culture can be shaped by a wide array of factors—ideological, religious, social, and economic—that may influence a country's behavior. Political culture often varies dramatically from state to state, with each reflecting its own unique approach to politics and the role of government. The political culture of the United States, for example, reflects a common belief in democracy, individual rights, capitalism, and the separation of church and state, among many other things. On the other hand, the political culture of North Korea emphasizes order, obedience, deference to authority, and the sacrifice of individual rights in favor of the community as a whole.

Political culture theorists—both regimists and civilizationists—argue that a state's political culture has a substantial influence over its foreign policy. The political culture establishes broad guidelines within which leaders make foreign policy, and creates an attitudinal environment in which every political system operates. While not normally responsible for specific policies, political culture broadly affects the range of policy options available to individual leaders.

The Regimists

Political culture theorists who emphasize the importance of regimes argue that it is the inherent differences between various types of government that can, indeed, influence state behavior on the world stage and, consequently, international politics. Unlike system-level theorists—who point to the characteristics of the system as a whole as the central force in international politics—political culture theorists suggest that the domestic characteristics of state governments are key determinants of world politics.

Let's look at the two primary types of governments and how their differences affect both their respective foreign policies and foreign policy-making processes. **Liberal democracies** (or "open"

societies), in which the citizenry has a voice in government through duly elected representatives from two or more political parties, generally take a more pluralistic approach to foreign policy-making. **Pluralism** describes a political system in which decisions and policies are formulated on the basis of many different viewpoints or interests. Not just political parties, but other special interest groups (business, labor, or environmental groups, or even certain factions within the bureaucracy) can make their opinions known by contacting leaders directly or through more indirect means (media campaigns, etc.). Though the ultimate decisions on these matters do rest with a fairly small leadership circle, the people can, and often do, influence the course and content of the policy-making process.

Conversely, in **authoritarian regimes** (or "closed" societies), decisions and policies are made by an individual or small group of leaders. The people in these states generally have no meaningful impact on the political agenda or foreign policy of the country. Under this system of decision making, sometimes called **elitism,** the policies that control the actions of the state and those who live within it are created and directed by a small ruling elite. This group formulates both the domestic and foreign policy agendas. The decisions are not completely without parameters—leaders in closed societies do face political limitations, economic or military power obstacles, bureaucratic inertia or public and/or private resistance, etc.—but these are minor when compared with the variety of interests represented in a liberal democracy.

The selection taken from Bruce Russett's book *Controlling the Sword* makes the case for proponents of the regime aspect of political culture theory, emphasizing the differences between these two types of governments. Liberal democracies, Russett suggests, are less "warlike" than authoritarian or totalitarian regimes. He looks not only at empirical evidence about whether democracies go to war less often, but also at domestic factors that might make democratic states more or less reticent to engage in conflict.

Studies and empirical research into what types of nations (democratic or authoritarian) go to war and how often they go to war have shown that democracies are just as likely to engage in conflict as any other type of regime. The important difference to note here, however, is that liberal democracies rarely, if ever, make war with one another. They actually tend to bond together, forming protective, generally defensive, political-military alliances. According to Russett, the specific structure, nature, and characteristics common to democratic governments all contribute to promote a more peaceful, less aggressive foreign policy.[1]

Political culture regimists point to a number of other broader political and social ideals associated with liberal democracies that contribute to a less warlike foreign policy. Respect for human rights and the rule of law (international law, in this case), as well as the tradition of resolution through negotiation, tend to promote both peace and greater stability.

In the next selection, Francis Fukuyama agrees with the points made by Russett about the impact of a state's regime on the course of its foreign policy and behavior in the world community. Fukuyama contends that ideological competition has been the driving force of conflict between the major powers in the twentieth century. These wars have been fought largely to secure a dominant position for what one might call the great "isms" of the day. Clashes occurred between western political and economic liberalism and its two ideological antagonists, fascism and communism. Fascism was defeated and discredited at the end of World War II with the victory over Nazi Germany by the allied powers and, forty-five years later, communism was dealt a severe blow with the collapse of the Soviet empire.

The success of western liberalism over its two ideological opponents led Fukuyama to take the regimist position on political culture theory a step further, concluding that "what we may be witnessing is not just the end of the Cold War, or the passing of a particular period in postwar history, but the **end of history** as such: that is, the end point of mankind's ideological evolution and the universalization of western liberal democracy as the final form of human government." [2] Western liberal democracy has triumphed over its ideological rivals, and—since history is marked by the clash of ideas—history, according to Fukuyama, has come to an end.

While this victory is "incomplete" and many nations, particularly in the third world, have not yet or not fully adopted western economic and political liberalism, Fukuyama believes the course of

history will inevitably lead to the expansion and broad acceptance of these ideals. Prior to this point, the world can be divided into two major categories based on levels of liberal democratic development. Relations among liberal democratic countries in the "post-historical" stage are characterized by cooperation and stability. The non-democratic nations, classified as "still in history," continue to struggle with ethnic and nationalist conflicts. International conflict, Fukuyama argues, will revolve around these states, while relations among post-historical states—largely in the West—will be limited primarily to peaceful economic and technological competition.

Fukuyama's thesis about the triumph of liberal democracy and what this means for the future of international relations has been hotly debated. Critics disagree with Fukuyama on a number of issues. They argue that the end of the Cold War does not necessarily represent the end of political rivalries among states—either post-historical or still in history. Indeed, as we will discuss in more detail later, Samuel E Huntington believes that the post-Cold War period may well lead to greater instability and conflict in world politics.

The Civilizationists

The second perspective on political culture theory focuses on Samuel Huntington's examination of the impact of broad cultural factors on the behavior of individual states, or even groups of states that share a common culture. Samuel Huntington stresses the importance of culture in international relations. Huntington outlined this new theory of international politics for the post-Cold War world in his 1993 *Foreign Affairs* article "The Clash of Civilizations?" Unlike proponents of the regimist position, who are concerned primarily with the differences between democratic and authoritarian governments, Huntington focuses on the broader cultural attributes that both unite and divide people, states, and the world.

His view of civilization is a key component of this thesis. Huntington defines **civilization** as the "highest cultural grouping of people and the broadest level of cultural identity people have, short of that which distinguishes them from other species." Civilization, then, is composed of those elements that bind people together, such as common language, religion, customs, institutions, and identification with a particular culture. According to these criteria, states can be grouped together into eight major civilizations: Western, Confucian, Japanese, Islamic, Hindu, Slavic-Orthodox, Latin American, and African.

Now, let us see how Huntington applies the concept of civilization to his political culture theory of international relations. To begin, Huntington agrees with two points regarding the end of the Cold War in Fukuyama's article "The End of History?" First, Huntington accepts that the end of the Cold War was a turning point in global politics, setting the stage for new theories to explain recent developments in international relations. Second, he agrees, too, that this event also signaled the diminished relevance of ideology as a source of conflict between western countries. But, as we noted in the preceding section, Huntington draws the line well before Fukuyama, stating that conflicts themselves have not ended and that we are by no means at an end of history.

"The Clash of Civilizations?" lays out a theoretical framework suggesting that cultural differences have supplanted ideological differences as the most important source of conflict among peoples and states. Conflicts, Huntington contends, are most likely to develop between groups that are part of different civilizations. Likewise, cooperation occurs more frequently within civilizations rather than between them.

This argument centers on the idea that cultural differences between the eight civilizations—Western, Confucian, Japanese, Islamic, Hindu, Slavic-Orthodox, Latin American, and African—are more serious and could even be more dangerous than the traditional ideological and economic clashes characterizing past wars. Huntington asserts that advances in global communication and increasing economic and social interaction between people in different regions of the world have enhanced the awareness and importance of "civilization." In addition, modernization has eroded the relevance of local and national cultural identifications while magnifying the significance of this broader grouping.

As we noted, Huntington believes increasing "civilization consciousness" implies that cooperation will occur with greatest frequency among states within a particular civilization. Conflict is more likely to occur between groups in different civilizations. This is because cultural issues like religion and social traditions are more fundamental and less easily resolved through compromise and negotiation. Conflict will likewise most often occur along cultural fault lines. A **cultural fault line** is found where different civilizations share a common border; this includes both borders between different states as well as the more tenuous ones found within states. According to Huntington, cultural fault lines now represent the most probable new "flash points for crisis and bloodshed." [3]

To support his theory, Huntington points to several contemporary ethnic and religious conflicts in the world. Among those flash points are the current warfare in the former Yugoslavia, where Western and Islamic civilizations meet within a confined geographic area. Christian and Muslim factions now battle for control over territory they once shared peacefully under a communist regime that suppressed these ethnic tensions. Also, the continued unrest between Israel and its Arab neighbors attests to not only the vehemence with which civilizations can clash but also the prolonged nature of these feuds. One other example might be found in India and Pakistan; both countries have been plagued by violence between Hindu and Muslim peoples within each state's own borders.

Clearly, there is no shortage of examples worldwide where one might find Huntington's clash of civilizations. But what do these clashes mean for the West and for western civilization? Taking a fairly dim view of the future, Huntington fears that conflict on a global scale—what he refers to as the "West versus the Rest"—is a possibility. Western political, economic, and cultural dominance is increasingly challenged by Confucian and Islamic states. These particular civilizations are increasingly more willing and able to assert their own economic, political, and military power against western-oriented institutions and ideals. Huntington believes that the West will have to learn to "accommodate" these rising nonwestern civilizations and "coexist" with countries "whose values and interests differ significantly from those of the West." [4]

The "Clash of Civilizations" thesis has been subjected to a remarkable amount of criticism from a variety of sources. Here, we offer an article by Stephen Walt that forcefully critiques Huntington's civilizationist theory. Walt questions the emphasis on civilizations as a source of either unity among or division between peoples. He contests Huntington's notion that civilizations are cohesive groupings, united in purpose. Huntington, according to Walt, glosses over significant economic, social, and political cleavages that exist within all of what Huntington has called civilizations. Similarly, Walt says, Huntington ignores examples of cooperation between states representing different civilizations.

But we might ask why Walt sees cooperation between civilizations where Huntington sees conflict. In a fashion reminiscent of realism, Walt argues that even in the post-Cold War environment, states remain the primary actors on the international political stage. The individual geopolitical and economic self-interests of the state supersede any fidelity toward a particular civilization. In addition, Walt suggests that economic and technological modernization and secularism actually enhance rather than prohibit cooperation between states.

In the end, Walt's argument echoes the realist view that international politics will continue to be dominated by states vying for geopolitical and economic position. Though we see many cases of this competition along the fault lines of Huntington's civilizations, contemporary history has also shown that when circumstances warrant cooperation between states and peoples, the differences of civilizations can be set aside in the interests of *realpolitic.*

The final two selections in this chapter offer examples of how political culture theory can be applied to recent events. In the short piece by Francis Fukuyama entitled "The west has won," the author defends his "end of history" thesis by noting that terrorism perpetrated by radical Islam is merely a backlash against modernity and does not represent a viable alternative to liberal democratic values. The final article by Benjamin Barber is a civilizationist critique of the utility of realism in the post-September 11 era. Barber argues that nonstate actors are motivated by dramatically different interests than states are. Therefore, traditional realist assumptions cannot be relied

upon as useful guidelines for understanding the current global war on terrorism. Instead, Barber contends, we must focus on the social, political, cultural and economic conditions under which terrorism thrives.

A Critique of Political Culture Theory

Certainly, the article by Stephen Walt provides a thorough critique of the "civilizationist" perspective of political culture theory offered by Samuel Huntington. It might be useful, however, to review here the major points both for and against what we call the regimist viewpoint of political culture theory.

There is little doubt that the type of government and the larger cultural attributes of a country have an impact on the course of international politics. As Bruce Russett and Francis Fukuyama indicated, considerable evidence shows that democracies do behave differently from authoritarian regimes. The virtual absence of war between democratic regimes speaks volumes about the cooperative nature of these governments. Critics have argued, though, that peace among democracies may be the result of particular geopolitical factors rather than the influence of shared common values. Regimists do, however, provide substantial evidence—both quantitative and qualitative—that democracies more commonly resort to negotiation than do authoritarian regimes as a means of conflict resolution.

The civilizationist perspective of political culture theory outlined in Samuel P. Huntington's "The Clash of Civilizations?" is perhaps the most innovative and ambitious attempt to codify international relations theory in the post-Cold War era. His idea that conflict between civilizations will supplant ideological conflict as the dominant force in international politics offers a unique look into the domestic-level explanations of what drives the actions of states and groups of states.

The question remains, however, whether civilization consciousness is truly a uniting or dividing force among states. Are cultural, religious, and ethnic factors vitally important sources of states' actions? Can the principles of liberal democracy bring states and peoples together? Or could the actions of states be shaped more by systemic factors, compelling all governments—irrespective of regime or civilization— to act in similar manners? Or might it be some combination?

Key Concepts

Authoritarian regimes are societies in which dominant political authority and power resides in an individual or small group of leaders who are not responsible to the people under their control.

Civilization is composed of those elements that bind people together such as common language, religion, customs, institutions, and identification with a particular culture. Samuel P. Huntington defines civilization as the "highest cultural grouping of people and the broadest level of cultural identity people have short of that which distinguishes them from other species."

Civilizationist perspective, as used in this book, is one of two major divisions of political culture theory and is based on the theory set forth by Samuel P. Huntington in his article, "The Clash of Civilizations?" The civilizationist perspective stresses that the "principal conflicts of global politics will occur between nations and groups of different civilizations."

Cultural fault line is found where different civilizations share a common border; this includes both borders between different states as well as the more tenuous ones found within states. This term was coined by Samuel P. Huntington.

Culture refers to commonly shared behavior patterns, including language, traditions, values, customs, institutions, and religious beliefs of a particular social group.

Elitism exists where a small group of people control, rule, or dominate the actions of a state. This group formulates both the domestic and foreign policy agendas.

End of history is a phrase used by Francis Fukuyama to describe the triumph of western economic and political liberalism over its ideological alternatives, such as fascism and Marxism-Leninism, and the coming universalization of western liberal democracy.

Foreign policy is the strategy used by a government to make decisions and guide its interaction with other states in the international system. Typically, foreign policy promotes the political, economic, and military interests of the state.

Government is a public institution that has the authority to create, implement, and enforce rules, laws, and decisions within a state's territorial borders. These rules, laws, and decisions maintain order within society, as well as project and protect the state's interests abroad.

Liberal democracies are states in which the citizenry has a voice in government through duly elected representatives from two or more political parties.

Pluralism is a political system in which decisions and policies are formulated on the basis of many different viewpoints or interests.

Political culture refers to the dominant values, attitudes, and beliefs that affect the politics and behavior of individual governments.

Regimist perspective, as used in this text, is one of two major divisions of political culture theory. Regimists argue that democracies and authoritarian regimes behave differently in foreign affairs. Their analysis focuses on regime type as a vital factor in determining a state's foreign policy and behavior within the global system.

Sovereignty exists when the domestic government is the supreme authority within the state and does not answer to any outside power. This sovereignty is recognized by international law and by other states through diplomatic relations and often by membership in the United Nations.

State is a political, legal, and territorial entity. A state consists of an internationally recognized territory, a permanent population, and a government that has control over the people within its acknowledged boundaries.

[1] Many institutional transnationlists introduced in our analysis of system-level theories, such as, Immanuel Kant and Woodrow Wilson, have been strong advocates of the positive contribution made to the stability of the international system by liberal democratic regimes. Kant, in his work *Perpetual Peace,* published in 1795, argued that the accountability of democratic leaders to the people for their decisions makes them more cautions about taking steps that could lead to armed conflict. Understandably, the people tend to be equally cautious in supporting a bellicose foreign policy, since they would be called upon to do any fighting should the need arise.

[2] Francis Fukuyama, "The End of History?" *The National Interest.* No. 16 / Summer 1989, p. 4.

[3] Samuel Huntington,"The Clash of Civilizations?" *Foreign Affairs.* Summer 1993. p. 29.

[4] Huntington, p. 49.

Chapter 7

Decision- Making Process Theory

In the introduction to Part II, we discussed how state-level theories examine the impact of domestic factors on the course and conduct of foreign policy. This chapter focuses on decision-making process theory, a state-level theory that emphasizes the role of bureaucratic organizations and how the process of decision-making within these organizations, and within a government as a whole, can affect its foreign policy and international relations.

As this notion suggests, decision-making process theory disassembles the state bureaucratic structure, taking a targeted look at specific component parts to understand how decisions are made. The idea here is that different factions of a large bureaucracy are likely to approach problems or issues from different perspectives and with different preconceptions and priorities. These different perspectives result from the fact that each faction or department has unique responsibilities. A pattern of decision-making is established based on the priorities that stem from these individualized responsibilities. Thus, bureaucratic agencies address issues from different points of view, or, as the saying goes, "Where you stand is largely determined by where you sit." Certainly, international conditions and forces surrounding an event or crisis have an impact, but, according to decision-making process theorists, the inner workings of the bureaucracy—bargaining strategies, departmental priorities, and the like—cannot be disassociated from an assessment of foreign policy or international relations.

Bureaucracies and Decision Making

Before we proceed in our discussion of decision-making process theory, it might be helpful to answer two important questions. First, what is a bureaucracy, and, second, what do we mean by decision-making? A **bureaucracy** could be defined as a network of interconnected departments and organizations designed to manage and administrate the operations of a state. Authority for different aspects of this administration and management is diffused throughout the various offices. That is, a single department generally takes the lead over a unique and specific area of policy or governance, though several departments usually have input into any given decision.

Decision-making theorists believe that the manner in which government bureaucracies arrive at these decisions is a critical part of both foreign policy and relations between states. The method that a state or bureaucracy uses to reach decisions is called **decision making.** Decision making is the process by which government officials select a policy to pursue from a range of options. A key part of this process and a defining feature of large bureaucracies is their dependence on **standard operating procedures (SOPs).** SOPs are accepted routines or patterns used by bureaucracies to organize and simplify the decision-making process. Standard operating procedures are utilized to handle problems or make decisions on a wide array of issues that confront governments on a daily basis—from internal personnel decisions to matters of international trade and diplomacy. Bureaucracies use SOPs because time, resources, and information in the decision-making process can be in short supply. Presumably, these standardized procedures simplify the decision-making process and help preserve the orderly function of government.

While standard operating procedures are aimed at making government more efficient and methodical, they have a profound impact on the type and quality of decisions made as well as on the policies adopted by governments. By relying on a set of specific procedures, a bureaucracy can limit the range and variety of policy options available to decision makers. Hence, both bureaucracies and leaders tend to depend on past policies or procedures in handling new problems. New policy decisions generally conform to those made in the past. A new, nonconforming policy would not only send a mixed message about a government's foreign policy platform and complicate the implementation process but would also disrupt the orderly workings of bureaucratic policy formulation. Therefore, if it is impossible to find a policy that is compatible with

established SOPs, bureaucracies conduct a narrow search for alternatives and solutions that will require minimum change from accepted practices.

New policies, then, are often the result of what is called **incrementalism.** That is, a bureaucracy allows only incremental or marginal alterations in existing policy to prevent major changes from established norms. This "new" policy may not be the best available alternative but is, instead, a broadly palatable option resulting from bargains and compromises between competing individuals and bureaucratic organs or factions. To a certain extent, the nature of a bureaucracy—with its competing departments jostling for position—creates a measure of rivalry, territoriality, and one-up-manship among the various offices. This translates into a cautious pattern of decision making, designed to avoid risk-taking both in the process itself and with respect to the final decision or policy.

States and Foreign Policy

Decision-making process theorists view foreign policy and international relations largely as a by-product of these inner workings and the interaction of various state bureaucracies. The development of the decision-making approach to the study of foreign policy and international relations actually began in the 1950s as scholars became interested in applying the methodology of the traditional "hard" sciences to the study of human behavior. The "behavioralist school" of political science emerged as scholars began to rely more on the use of empirical research and quantitative analysis in developing and testing theories of international politics. Emphasizing the decision-making process of governments fit in quite well with this new, more scientific approach to the study of international relations and incorporated a number of features that had, up to that point, been largely overlooked.

The excerpt from Snyder, Bruck, and Sapin's book, *Foreign Policy Decision Making,* represents one of the first systematic approaches to the study of the decision-making process. Snyder and his colleagues developed a method for examining various components that influence the decisions taken by governments. The authors set up diagrams of "relevant factors" that might influence a state's behavior in a given situation. The premise here is that once the situation is defined, the path or policy a state chooses can be predicted by determining the factors that are relevant to the choice.

The diversity of viewpoints and responsibilities within a bureaucracy almost inevitably leads to conflict. Making a decision is not merely a progression of selecting goals, accumulating information, analyzing the various choices, and selecting a policy that most optimizes those goals. Policies are the result of diplomatic bargaining and compromise that take place within and between government agencies and bureaucracies. Also, being part of a bureaucracy can affect an individual's perceptions of the decision-making process and their role within it. The structure, purpose, and objectives or duties of these organizations can influence the decisions made by individuals working within them. These conditions tend to direct their attention away from purely international objectives and toward internal, domestic, and intra-bureaucratic concerns.

There is a subtle but crucial distinction between this notion and the premise of the theories in the following chapter that specifically address the role of individuals. It might be said, without oversimplifying the difference between these ideas, that the discussion here revolves around how bureaucratic organizations affect individuals. The next section presents theories on how individuals affect government decisions.

According to decision-making process theorists, then, there are a number of factors that influence a state's foreign policy and international relations. First, individuals operating within a large bureaucratic organization are constrained by position, loyalties, and duties within their individual departments and the bureaucracy as a whole. Second, the standard operating procedures (SOPs) used to guide the functions and decisions of the bureaucracy can limit the range of policy options. Decisions or policies are made largely to conform to existing SOPs and are often the result of compromise between various factions (usually competing) within the bureaucratic organization. Finally, as a result, policy follows a fairly pedantic, incremental course

that can be predicted based on precedent and on an analysis of the decision-making mechanism itself.

One of the classic works of theory using this framework is Graham T. Allison's study of the Cuban missile crisis. In the excerpt, taken from Allison's article "Conceptual Models and the Cuban Missile Crisis," the author isolates three distinct models for explaining foreign policy decisions: the rational actor model, the organizational process model, and the bureaucratic politics model. According to the **rational actor model,** decision makers carefully define and identify foreign policy problems, gather all available information about the foreign policy options, weigh all possible alternatives, and select policies that are most likely to promote the state's national interests.

By contrast, the **organizational process model** focuses on the routines, standard patterns of behavior, and institutional perspectives of particular agencies and their impact on foreign policy decisions. It assumes that all governments generally rely on standard operating procedures, are relatively predictable, and favor only marginal changes in existing policy. The **bureaucratic politics model** emphasizes the struggle between various agencies of the government and its impact on the decision-making process. This model contends that the formulation of policy is largely the result of the competition among government agencies, representing diverse views. Such a competitive process means that foreign policy is often based more on domestic political struggles than on objective calculations of the national interest.

The point of Allison's highly regarded study is that each of the three models produce different explanations and each provides its own unique insights into the foreign policy decision-making process. While each model has particular strengths and weaknesses, Allison concludes that a complete understanding of any foreign policy situation must take into account several different institutional, political, and international factors.

A Critique of Decision-Making Process Theory

Certainly, it would be difficult to charge proponents of decision-making process theory with overlooking the details and minutiae of government that are a part of how decisions might be made. In fact, realists have criticized the inclusive approach of decision-making process theory for focusing too much on the details of the foreign policy-making process, thus losing the broader analytical and theoretical implications of history and events. By attempting to incorporate such a broad range of factors into their analysis, decision-making process theorists are often accused of describing the interaction of states, as opposed to providing a true theory of international relations—or, as the classic argument goes, not seeing the forest for the tress.

In response, Allison and other decision-making theorists challenge the realist assumption that states base their foreign policy decisions on a rational cost-benefit analysis of the relative risks and potential gains associated with particular policy options as too narrow. They argue that while the rational actor model is valuable, it is also limited on its own and fails to provide an adequate explanation of international relations.

For example, the rational actor model suggests that decision makers behave in a similar fashion, seeking to maximize strategic goals and objectives. The implication here is that governments use the best information available and select the policy that is most likely to maximize the national interests. Decision-making theory proceeds several steps farther, suggesting that all decisions must be analyzed and understood within the context of how governments really operate. Government bureaucracies function under conditions that often involve limited time, resources, and information—all of which are incompatible with the realist's rational-actor model. If we wish to understand why particular policies were selected over others, decision-making theorists insist we must first understand the process by which these choices were made. In short, process affects outcome.

Decision-making theory has also been attacked for being western-centric. Critics contend that decision-making theory is useful primarily for explaining the pluralistic foreign policy process of western democratic governments. It does not, however, present an accurate model for studying the more centralized, hierarchic decision-making process of non-western, non-democratic states.

Decision-making theorists counter that every type of government, from the most rigid authoritarian regime to pluralistic democracies, have large bureaucratic structures with competing interests. Bureaucratic politics and adherence to standard operating procedures are not limited to democratic regimes but represent vital parts of the decision-making process in any type of government.

In the end, the manner in which governments make decisions about relations with other nations, particularly regarding decisions on war and peace, are basic to the study of international politics. It is critical, therefore, to understand how those decisions are reached and how they are actually implemented. In order to do this, we must examine the relationship between the process and the decisions that are produced from it. Decision-making theory focuses on the complex policy-making process and the governmental and bureaucratic settings in which those decisions are made.

Key Concepts

Bureaucracy is a network of interconnected departments and organizations designed to manage and administrate the operations of a state.

Bureaucratic politics model is one of three conceptual models devised by Graham Allison to explain and predict the foreign policy behavior of states. The bureaucratic model focuses on the struggle between various agencies of the government and its impact on the decision-making process. This model contends that the formulation of policy is largely the result of the competition among government agencies, representing diverse views. Such a competitive process means that foreign policy is often based more on domestic political struggles than on objective calculations of the national interest.

Decision making is the process of identifying problems, devising alternative policy options, and selecting which one of the alternatives to pursue.

Incrementalism is a tendency of decision makers to make only incremental only incremental or marginal alterations in existing policy in order to prevent major changes from established norms.

Organizational process model is the second of the three models devised by Graham Allison to explain and predict the foreign policy behavior of states. The organizational process model focuses on the routines, standard patterns of behavior, and institutional perspectives of particular agencies and their impact on foreign policy decisions. It assumes that all governments generally rely on standard operating procedures, are relatively predictable, and favor only marginal changes in existing policy.

Rational actor model is associated with the realist theory of decision making and the first of three models used by Graham Allison to explain and predict the foreign policy behavior of states. According to the rational actor model, decision makers carefully define and identify foreign policy problems, gather all available information about the foreign policy options, weigh all possible alternatives, and select policies that are most likely to promote the state's national interests.

Standard operating procedures (SOPs) are accepted routines or patterns used by bureaucracies to organize and simplify the decision making process. Standard operating procedures are utilized to handle problems or make decisions on a wide array of issues that confront governments on a daily basis—from internal personnel decisions to matters of international trade and diplomacy.