

# PS-6100 Theory & Practice I

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## Models of Foreign Policy Decision-Making

### Bureaucratic Politics Model

This was developed by Allison in his 1968 paper on the Cuban Missile Crisis.

What organisations make foreign policy? Within the US, the Departments of:

- State
- Defence
- Treasury
- Energy
- Homeland Security

Basically, MOST federal departments are involved in foreign policy; some to a greater extent than others. Beyond them there are also executive agencies which are sorta part of the cabinet or have special access to the White House:

- CIA (director of central intelligence)
- NSA (national security advisor)
- DIA (defence intelligence advisor)
- and so on and so on

They all have particular purposes, but oftentimes their domains overlap or are at odds with one another (defence and state have a famous rivalry). They all have unique bureaucratic cultures and idealised images of themselves, foreign policy, and what their role in policy should be.

Heads of State have different approaches to these different departments, and oftentimes intra-government politics have weird effects on Foreign Policy. The politics of wheeling-and-dealing and cold-shouldering departments which the leader *dislikes* can often be quite different from what a realist or a neoliberal would expect or want.

*Satisficing* is an important term to define: it is when a choice is not optimal, but satisfactory to every individual policy department, rather than what even the leader wanted.

This differs from the protocol-risk model, because the ultimate goal of this court-politics model is to satisfy demands within the organisations of the government. Protocol-Risk models focus more on how the state minimises the amount of uncertainty and risk by relying on established channels and procedures in the absence of perfect information.

Speaking of which....

### Procedural Model

States in an anarchic environment are incentivised to *minimise risk*. Perceived risk is variable, and the uncertainty of a risky situation can increase if states take non-standard operating procedures to handle a crisis or even day-to-day governing.

The chain of information is part of these standard procedures, and in the game of telephone going up some information can either be misreported or misinterpreted, so it's not 100% fool proof.

Organisations also operate *slowly*. Sometimes, circumventing established channels can decrease risk if only because faster speed is better than waiting and seeing.

### **Pluralist Social Model**

Civil society tries to influence foreign policy through whatever means they can – either as lobbyists, activists, or challenging the government electorally, &c. Example? AIPAC, the American-Israel lobby, which funds politicians in both major US political parties to influence US politics on behalf of Israeli interests.

This model is completely contrary to realist conceptions of states as unitary actors, even if states seek to control their society or should try to.

### **Two-Level Game Theory**

Developed by Putnam in the '80s, presents a theory that states negotiate with one another but they also have to manage domestic coalitions. The interplay between multiple negotiating tables becomes very complex, but it explains how international agreements are reached – states maximise their chances of getting a favourable "win" and seek to find compatible "wins" with other states.

The "size" of the "win-sets" makes it more likely to come to an agreement with others, but awareness of the other negotiator's "win-set" can give one side an advantage. Lots of mind-games are played here, trying to convince the other state into taking a worse agreement for themselves but one which is better for the first state.

Because negotiations are often iterative (you can expect to be negotiating with other nations in the future), your reputation is at stake if you are unable to fulfill your end of the bargain. The risk of cheating remains nevertheless, but states can cultivate a perception of "deliverability," which is "having clear expectations of others and only promising what you can conceivably and verifiably deliver."

### **Rational Actor Theory**

Maximise benefit and minimise cost to a state's particular values or goals. Here's the process:

1. Identify State interests
2. Identify threats, foreign intentions
3. Identify solutions
4. Consider costs, benefits, and messaging of each solution
5. Choose and implement a solution
6. Collect information on success or failure
7. Repeat

This approach developed from economic analysis, in which businesses do this process to compete with one another. However, POLITICS IS NOT A FUCKING BUSINESS. The bureaucratic organisational model is evidence enough that this is not a perfect theory. Also, businesses usually have better information on their *own* capabilities than states often time.

Furthermore, when a business goes bankrupt, the people in the business move on (some of them get hung out to dry, but generally speaking they don't die). When *states* fail entirely at their job, they *cease to exist*. Therefore, the higher the stakes of the game, the less likely that leaders are going to behave rationally, and more likely they are to rely on "traditional wisdom" and personal experience when in a time crunch.

### **Cognitive Psychological Models**

Policy is made by humans, and humans are fallible. Groupthink, confirmation bias, protagonist syndrome, &c. affect how policy is made by the key political figures in any nation, even democracies. Thus, Jervis (1968) speculates that the personality of a particular leader makes a significant difference: the foreign policy of a Nixon would be significantly different from a Carter.

He offers 5 safeguards against cognitive biases:

1. Be aware that nobody makes unbiased interpretations of new information; rather, we are inevitably influenced by theories we expect to be verified.
2. Examine your attitudes to see if they contain supporting beliefs which aren't actually logically linked.
3. Make your assumptions, beliefs, and predictions which follow from them as explicit as possible.
4. Prevent individuals and organisations from letting their task, future, or identity become tied to specific theories or images of other actors.
5. Always have a devil's advocate in the decision-making process.

The example Jervis used was the nonsensical way that the US prosecuted the war in Vietnam: they had all the information they needed to prove that their strategies weren't working. Nonetheless, American leadership refused to acknowledge the truth because it was incompatible with what they understood about themselves. Information which contradicted their beliefs arrived in such ways that they never had to meaningfully reckon with their ongoing failure. People seek to be psychologically consistent and avoid cognitive dissonance – the way that people change is when drastic changes happen that make their previous thinking obviously inadequate. (This is known as *motivated bias*.)

Critical theorists and social constructionists would take this focus and run with it, studying how these perceptions of self and other are crafted, and what effect those would have on politics. Scholars of authoritarian politics pay a great deal of attention to this, since personalised states and autocratic dictators suffer extensively from poor information and constant ego-stroking.