FOREIGN POLICY DECISION-MAKING IN WASHINGTON: A Sketchy Review of the State of the Art

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ΕΘΝΙΚΟΝ ΚΑΙ ΚΑΠΟΔΙΣΤΡΙΑΚΟΝ ΠΑΝΕΠΙΣΤΗΜΙΟΝ ΑΘΗΝΩΝ
ΚΕΝΤΡΟΝ ΔΗΜΟΚΡΑΤΙΚΟΥ ΠΟΛΙΤΕΥΜΑΤΟΣ

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From the time of De Toqueville, Americans have enjoyed being looked at, appraised, explained and understood by the seemingly detached, surgical attitude that only "non-involved" foreigners could presumably assume.

Before we yield America's image once more to our panelists' keen observers eyes, and while being hopeful that their diplomatic tact will be somewhat eroded by the off-the-record character of our proceedings, we should ask ourselves a few questions about our topic, "What is foreign policy decision-making in Washington?"

This question is easier to ask - as usual - than to answer. We all know that there are many types, levels, and dimensions in which decision-making might be discussed:

For instance, there are critical vs. important vs. merely routine decisions (and of course different groups of decision-makers from different levels of government become involved in each category).

There are political, military, economic, technical, cultural humanitarian and - most often - hybrid types of decisions.

There are decisions involving East-West relations vs. intra-Nato alliance decisions vs. inter-American community decisions vs. decisions vis-a-vis various portions of the so-called non-West. There are, also, bilateral (or dyadic) decisions vs. wider multilateral ones.

There are decisions relating to issue-areas which arouse great doses of Congressional, special interest group, and general

public concern vs. decisions which go by virtually unnoticed.

There are decisions which involve dramatic changes in the nation's course (such as Nixon's trip to China) vs. decisions which are incremental or decremental departures from a well-established course (e.g. how much or how quickly to escalate or to deescalate in Vietnam). We could continue on for long with such typologies, but instead let us turn to the task at hand.

I would like to take the remaining few minutes to review - superficially at best - some of the literature, produced primarily by students of international politics, on the subject of decision-making in Washington.

This is easier said than done! Directly or indirectly, just about every piece, in the vast array of fact and fiction penned by U.S. oriented political scientists, relates to the subject of decision-making.

Traditionalist treatises, whether dealing with biography, diplomatic history, or power/interest analysis of strategic/diplomatic actions, have consistently attempted to describe, explain and even to predict various important decisions selected for intensive study. Whether one reads Morgenthau, Kissinger, Hoffmann or Brzezinski -- one reads about decision-making and its ups and downs.

Modernists (another term for scientific behaviorists) have also addressed the same problem at analogous levels. They, too, have

sought to dissect the "belief systems" (or operational codes) of individual decision-makers and, also, to assess the relative impact of idiosyncratic, role, governmental, national and international system variables upon various types and levels of official decisions and actions.

Scholars such as Snyder, Bruck, Sapin, Rosenau, Ole and K.J. Holsti, Alexander George and others have all sought to navigate through the murky waters of the decision-making swamp. You see the Department of State and the Pentagon have not gained reputations--such as Fudge Factory and Puzzle Palace respectively--without considerable and hard-earned efforts on their parts.

Let us now, arbitrarily and for purposes of quick review, divide the literature to be sampled in this survey into three categories:

1) The structure, function and process school

2) The impressionistic-scientific (or realist or historical/sociological) school

3) The revisionist school

I. The structure function and process school, involves all these authors who are lumped under the sub-heading of "decision-making theorists" in most compendia and textbooks. Here one, naturally, begins with the monumental contribution made by Snyder, Bruck and Sapin.[1] Convinced that the reification of the nation-state (a characteristic of the historical/sociological approach) had been leading to impressionistic, imprecise and unuseful -- from the theoretical standpoint -- endeavors, they sought to

focus on the specific decision-makers (flesh and blood) who speak and act in the name of the State. As far as they were concerned, the so called "real" and "objective" world did not matter! What mattered was the image of the decision-makers. For only the perceptions of decision-makers were the operative forces behind their subsequent decisions.

The Snyder, Bruck and Sapin scheme looked at the decision-making unit or team as a massive filter through which processed a myriad of variables (including the decision-makers' beliefs and roles, bureaucratic imperatives, political and societal pressures, as well as perceptions of the constraints posed by the rest of the world).

The Snyder, Bruck and Sapin construct has been considerably discussed, refined, revised and reviewed, but relatively few hard data applications of this framework have actually taken place. A major and well-known exception is Glen Paige's voluminous study on the Korean decision.[2] Now, despite the fact that there is considerable historical value to his microanalytic treatment, Paige's theoretical propositions about decision-making have not exactly caught fire. Propositions such as the size of the conference table determines the number of operatives invited to attend a decision session, or that crises tend to be reached by ad hoc decisional units, or that participating in the crisis decision-making team reinforces friendships (i.e. what he calls "positive affect" relationships), such and similar propositions appear to be too near

the "common sense" level to justify well over 300 pages of micro-analysis to derive.

Another major contribution to decision-making theory has been made by James N. Rosenau.[3] His concepts of "linkage" and "issue area" (despite the fact that they have not been rigorously operationalized) have helped us become conscious of the fact that there is no such thing as a constant (static) decision-making team -- but that such teams really vary with the type of issue area (which is another word for policy, problem or crisis). "Linkage theory", in turn, dramatizes the interpenetrability of domestic as well as international politics.

There are too many other scholars involved here, for a brief survey of this sort, to do justice to most. One should mention, for instance, Ole R. Holsti's study[4] of John Foster Dulles' belief system. Holsti finds Dulles to have a "closed" mind vis-a-vis the Soviets, and to be given to self-reinforcing interpretations of all events for his "diabolical" conception of Soviet leaders. Along similar lines, should be grouped studies on the '<u>operational codes</u>' of various leaders conducted by Alexander George, David S. McLellan and Ole Holsti.[5] At a much higher level, viewing the nation as an aggregate, K.J. Holsti has conducted a content analytical study[6] designed to classify "national roles" beyond the "crude categories", such as <u>status-quo</u> and <u>revisionist</u>, which had been used in the traditional literature.

He finds, for instance, that the U.S. enjoys playing the roles of "Regional Leader", "Regional Protector", "Defender of Faith" (quite a bit of that), "Mediator/Integrator", "Regional Sub-system Collaborator", "Developer", "Faithful ally" and "other".

The main problem with the above image and perception type studies is that by using variations of the "content analysis" technique, analysts survey published sources for traces of images, ideologies or idiosyncratic characteristics of individual leaders or mass ideological movements. But when one is studying political leaders, (e.g. Charles de Gaulle) who consciously cultivate a mystique of ambivalence, inscrutability and maneuverability, one is hard pressed to map out their "cognitive processes". They refuse, simply, to have their heads "shrunk".

There are a few more names which should not escape mention in this brief review. Lindblom and Braybrooke[7] argue, for instance, that most political decisions fall in the quadrant of "disjointed incrementalism." That is to say, most political decisions are <u>not</u> rationally and synoptically arrived at, nor are they designed to optimize society's common good. Rather, most decisions are marginal, disjointed and narrow-gauged incremental and decremental steps, aimed to "satisfice", to bring about gradual change, to stop gaps and to avert crises. What they construct is, in effect, a theoretical glorification of the time-honored British approach to management -- the science - i.e. - of "muddling through."

Amitai Etzioni, of Active Society fame[8] has tried to split the difference between the rationalist synopticists and the political incrementalists, by recommending the adoption of an intermediate decision-making approach which, he calls, "mixed scanning." Here you should visualize a decision-maker with one eye on a microscope and the other on a telescope -- but hopefully not simultaneously.

Finally, there is a huge crowd of eclectics (bridging the behavioral-traditional pseudo-war) which could be names "bureaucracy watchers." Men such as Davis Bobrow, I.M. Destler, Anthony Downs, Alain Enthoven, Alexander George, Morton Halpern, Charles Hitch, Fred Riggs, and Thomas Schelling -- using variations of systems analysis and game theory techniques -- have all written on the dynamics of bureaucratic/managerial processes and on the so-called bureaucratic/organizational imperatives. The results are both useful as well as difficult to summarize.

For example, we now know that when the President sneezes the bureaucracy catches cold -- if not pneumonia. We also know that some times there are bridgeless gaps between the administration's "decision" and the bureaucratic response in terms of processing, implementation and follow-through. Messages constantly suffer management and distortion whether they travel up or down the governmental pyramid. This is the well known "PFC Wintergreen effect."[9] Herb Dienerstein, for instance, argues in a recent article[10] that due to contemporary fragmentation of intelligence gathering

functions, decision-makers' images in the 16th and 17th centuries were much less distorted, managed, garbled and even ideologically polluted, than they are today.

Another interesting proposition has been advanced by a State Department functionary who wishes to remain anonymous (another way of saying he wishes to retire gracefully). His proposition involves the Knowledge vs. Responsibility pyramid. The more responsible, that is, you are -- and near the top of the pyramid -- the less you know (or you have time to absorb) about specific areas being considered. There are, of course, "super human" exceptions, he concedes, such as Henry Kissinger. It follows from all this that those who know a lot about a given issue-area are not usually "responsible" enough to have a bearing on the decision.

Graham Allison, in an outstanding recent book on the Cuban Missile Crisis[11] summarizes brilliantly the challenges and the opportunities confronting decision-making theorists today. Depending on your "model" or your "cut" or your "paradigm" you can reach valid, but often contradictory and non-reinforcing, conclusions. In order to understand a decision, you have to study the key decision-makers and their politics, as well as the organizational/ bureaucratic environment, as well as the global/systemic parameters. No single paradigm, and for that matter not all of them together, is enough to describe, explain and predict a situation. And we need at least predictive capacity to have theory. Don't we?

If one were to summarize his impressions on this first school of thought, one would say that it is made up primarily of theorists who claim to be value free, and who opt for modern methodological techniques. Their contributions, so far, to the state of the art have been modestly disappointing. These scholars have offered us useful frameworks (maps) which help us to study how policy is made or how it could be made. But the emphasis, so far has been more on process and less on substance of decision-making, more on explanation and less on prediction.

An adequately tested predictive theory of decision-making is yet to be developed.

My own modest contribution to this panel (and conference) falls within this first category of decision-making studies just discussed. I have conducted -- together with a small team of graduate students -- a survey among professional bureaucrats (in the State and Defense Departments and Congress) in order to gauge their perceptions of the impact of academicians upon foreign policy formulators/implementors.[12] The results are rather disheartening for academicians, especially those "policy types" who would like to whisper advice to the Prince. Academicians were ranked near the bottom of the totem pole compared to other "influential communities" such as the White House, Mass Media, Public Opinion, Special Interest groups -- and even Think Tanks.

But let us now swiftly and briefly move to the next two categories:

II. The second and third categories of our typology would not be ordinarily considered within the decision-making subspecialty. But, I would like to bring them into the picture - anyway - because scholars in these areas have tried to tell us a lot about decision-making in general and decision-making in the U.S. in particular.

Roger Hilsman in a recent book[13] views the decision-making process very much as an incrementalist of the Lindblom/Braybrooke variety would. He states:

> "The making of foreign policy is a groping effort at understanding the nature of the evolving world around us. It is a painful sorting out of our own goals and purposes. It is a tentative, incremental experimentation with various means for achieving these purposes. It is an unremitting argument and debate among various constituencies about all these questions and an attempt to build a consensus on how the United States as the United States should decide on these questions and what action it should take."

The few scholars who will be referred here, so as to give you a flavor of this school of thought, are representative but nowhere near exhaustive of the vast literature devoted to this area.

A convenient -- umbrella term -- which could be used for scholars in this category is "generalists." I have instead chosen the title "impressionistic scientists", for science, at the level of watching "international phenomena", blends with impressionism. They are historians, political scientists and other social scientists

who aggregate their findings (mostly impressionistically) at the group-actor levels. E.g. they talk about such terms as national character, and national as well as international systems; they study concepts such as culture, ideological movements, social-psychological forces, or unit-environment relationships -- including studies on the impact and the imperatives upon decision-making of technology, weaponry, population, ecology etc.

But let me, now refer to my few -- and not necessarily well-chosen -- examples of contributions of this type. How many of us think, for instance, of Hans Morgenthau as a decision-making theorist? And yet his focus has been primarily on diplomatic/strategic decisions. In his many writings he has sketched for us the profile which a rational/realist diplomat or soldier should fit. A man, i.e., who acts to maximize his country's "national interests" (these incidentally are never well-defined) within the limits of prudence, and who does not believe in the legalistic/moralistic or ideological smokescreens which he is often forced to employ. How many of us can forget Hans J. Morgenthau's "rules" for prudent diplomacy and his exhortations to statesmen to live and survive -- as best as possible -- in an imperfectible, power-dominated world.

Morgenthau, in his most recent phase[14] seems to have rediscovered "morality", as a function of his exasperated criticism of U.S. policies in Vietnam. Concerned with America's mechanistic-

messianism (or the effort to build a "Great Society" for the world), and with its vigorous anti-revolutionist (garbed as anti-communist) reactions, Morgenthau councels us to return to a European-oriented, lower-case stance, and to a Voltairian attitude of after all "cultivating our own garden."

Stanley Hoffmann[15], another great impressionistic scientist, views America's policy makers as the heirs of a dualistic past. They are the product of those immigrants who left behind them a "sinful and corrupt" European arena, and who came to the New World determined to build a new harmonious society -- and by extension a new breed of diplomatists. America's policy-makers today, according to Hoffmann, are torn between their drive for harmony and their instinct for violence. This results in cyclical excesses of American Foreign Policy which Hoffmann calls "Quietism" and "Activism." The alternatives appear to be a "world missionary America" vs. "Let us bring the boys home." There seems to be no "middle way" for this country.

Our policy-makers are impatient with "uncertainty" and "disorder." So they continue relying on their structural/engineering imagery. The call is: Let us "organize" the World for Peace! Hence our preoccupation with geometric schemata such as stability, development, containment, dominoes, balance of forces, nation-building and the like.

There are many others one could cite in thie vein. George Kennan argues for a strengthened professional diplomatic role.

Senator Fulbright cautions us not to be arrogant in power. Henry Kissinger wants us to "restore" the balance of the globe. Charles O. Lerche used to argue that Americans play foreign policy "poker", while the Russian game is "chess." George Liska wants America to enjoy her "imperial" moment in history. Zbigniew Brzezinski feels that we should set the world's example in managing the "technetronic" era. And, of course, Herman Kahn, would have us think the unthinkable.

One could go on for long citing the literature. The historians, the journalists, the impressionistic generalists -- they all help us "feel" the stuff of politics: Frustrating, shifting, indeterminate, impenetrable! Through their words echo the aphorisms of that grand, old decision-making theorist, Nicolo Machiavelli:

"It is safer to be feared than loved."

"Imitate the fox and the lion."

"Do not place your trust in mercenaries..."

III. The third school of thought will not take long to describe for it is strictly "above theory", in fact it reaches -- in its approach to "inevitability" -- a near religious certainty.

Gabriel Kolko[16] in most of his works argues, essentially, that it is a total waste of time to study bureaucratic structures, to trace informational flows, or to conduct "social origin" type studies, in order to arrive at the sources or causes of bureaucratic decision-making behavior. For Kolko, the writings of sociologists such as C. Wright Mills, or our own Snyder, Bruck and Sapin, are so much of well-meaning, scholarly, and painfully accumulated superfluities.

For Kolko, the "power elite" in the U.S. (which is an umbrella term for "big business") has complete control of all the levers of power, and is single-handedly responsible for the DEFINITION of our "vital" national interests.

For Kolko, the Vietnam war is a normal, perhaps inevitable, outcome of our policies -- as long as the U.S. defines its interests in terms of maintaining raw-material-producing dependencies in the Third World. From this objective, allegedly, flows our consistent post-War opposition to all "national independence" revolutions. Vietnam, of course, is worth the price, not for what it has to offer in terms of markets or raw materials, but because it serves as a gigantic demonstration of our counter-revolutionary resolve for all those others who might be similarly tempted.

For a scholar like Kolko, it appears that no amount of change in idiosyncratic, role and bureaucratic/organizational variables can have a significant impact on our policies, so long as the "Power Elite" (protected by and protecting our capitalist system) is firmly entrenched.

Richard Barnet, William Appleman Williams and many others -- have written a great number of variations to the same theme.

* * *

And so, after a full circle we are back where we started.

Decision-making whether in Washington, Tokyo, Athens, Accra, Moscow or Brazilia, is almost as difficult and elusive a concept as Peanuts' happiness.

Perceptions vary as often as do the observers and their mind-pictures of reality.

It is my pleasant task, now to yield the floor to you gentlemen -- so that we may confuse the picture even further.

ΔΗΜΟΚΡΑΤΙΚΟΥ ΚΕΝΤΡΟΥ ΕΔΗΚ

Notes

[1]Richard C. Snyder, H.W. Bruck and Burton M. Sapin eds., Foreign Policy Decision-Making: An Approach to the Study of International Politics, (N.Y. Free Press, 1962).

[2]The Korean Decision: June 24-30, 1950, (N.Y. Free Press, 1968).

[3]James N. Rosenau, The Scientific Study of Foreign Policy (N.Y., Free Press, 1972).

- Ole Holsti, [4]"The Belief System and National Images: A Case Study" Journal of Conflict Resolution VI (1962) pp. 244-52.

[5]See Alexander L. George, "The Operational Code etc," International Studies Quarterly, Vol 13, No. 2, 1969; David S. McLellan, "The 'Operational Code' Approach to the Study of Political Leaders: Dean Acheson's Philosophical and Instrumental Beliefs," Canadian Journal of Political Science Vol IV, March 1971; and Ole Holsti, "The 'Operational Code' Approach to the Study of Political Leaders: John Foster Dulles' Philosophical and Instrumental Beliefs," Canadian Journal of Political Science Vol IV, March 1971.

[6]See "National Role Conceptions in the Study of Foreign Policy," International Studies Quarterly, Vol. 14, No. 3, p. 233.

- Lindblom + Braybrooke - [7]A Strategy for Decision, (N.Y., Free Press, 1963).

[8]The Active Society, (N.Y. Free Press, 1968).

[9]See the novel Catch 22 by Joseph Heller.

[10]"The Future of Ideology in Alliance Systems" in D.S. Sullivan and M.J. Sattler eds., Change in the International System, (Columbia 1972).

- Graham Allison — [11]See his Essence of Decision, (Boston, Little, Brown, 1972).

[12]See Theodore A. Couloumbis et al., "The Influence of the Academic Community on Foreign Policy Formulators," paper presented before the Annual Conference of the International Studies Association, Dallas, Texas, March 15-18, 1972.

- Roger Hilsman [13]The Politics of Policy Making in Defense and Foreign Affairs, (N.Y., Harper and Row, 1971).

Said - New Actors - Formulating
Haggard - Models of Convergence
Van Atta - Communications
Mowlana - Bureaucracy
Sutrke

Clarke - Conflict
Arab - Organization
Wilson - Law

Individual
Role
Bureaucratic
National
Systemic

• Linkages
• Penetration

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[14] See his A New Foreign Policy for the United States (N.Y., Praeger, 1969).

[15] See his Gulliver's Troubles (N.Y., McGraw Hill, 1968).

[16] Roots of American Foreign Policy: An Analysis of Power and Purpose (Boston, Beacon Press, 1969), See also his Politics of War (New York, Random House, 1968).

ΔΗΜΟΚΡΑΤΙΚΟΥ ΚΕΝΤΡΟΥ ΕΝΩΣΗ ΕΔΗΚ