

## UNITED STATES FOREIGN POLICYMAKING: INSTITUTIONS AND THE PROCESS

Muhammad Usman Amin Siddiqi \*  
Dr. Khalid Manzoor Butt \*\*

***Abstract:** Process helps determine substance. Understanding the dynamics of foreign policymaking would enable us to make predictions as to what is most likely to be decided in a particular set of circumstances. Foreign policy is not of government, it is of the state; and therefore, involves other institutions and agencies than the executive branch, or broadly speaking, the government. That makes it an intricate task to analyze the foreign policymaking process of any country in general and that of the US in particular because of the complexity of its governmental machinery, owing to the concept of limited government through separation of powers and checks and balances. Complexity of the governmental machinery not only makes it difficult to locate the origin of a policy directive but also makes its passage lengthy and complicated. No matter how a particular policy gets originated, in order to get implemented, it has to make its way through various institutions and agencies of foreign policymaking, each of which has its own motives, mindset, and most importantly, degree of authority. In order to make this process comprehensible, this paper evaluates the role of different institutions in foreign policymaking, explains different models of foreign policymaking, and summarizes the evolution of the patterns of foreign policymaking in the US.*

**Keywords:** Foreign policymaking, US presidency, US Congress, National Security Council, National Economic Council, Department of Defense, State Department, US Intelligence Community, Foreign Policy Models

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\* Muhammad Usman Amin Siddiqi is Lecturer, Department of Political Science, GC University, Lahore (Email: write2siddiqi@live.com).

\*\* Dr. Khalid Manzoor Butt is the Editor-in-Chief of The Journal of Political Science, and In Charge, Department of Political Science, GC University, Lahore.

## Introduction

Process helps determine substance. Who decides influences what will be decided. It is, therefore, important to understand the process of foreign policymaking in order to comprehend the product of that process – decisions. “A theoretical examination of foreign policymaking process would help us understand how events fit in general pattern of things happening around.”<sup>1</sup> It also makes us aware of the similarities and differences among different decisions, taken by different actors in foreign policymaking machinery in different times; and therefore, makes us able to make predictions as to what would be decided in a particular set of circumstances. Now, why the foreign policymaking process of the US in particular? Simply, because it matters. US foreign policy has its consequences for the whole world, because of the position the US enjoys in the global politics today, which makes this topic significant to be studied.

The first name that comes to our mind, when we think of foreign policymaking in the US is of the then president. President is considered the most powerful figure in the US. It is because of the “omnipotent presidential image, presented in media and academia, especially outside the US.”<sup>2</sup> He definitely wields maximum amount of power any chief executive can have; but his powers are limited by a number of factor as well. The Congress is normally considered second most influential institution in the foreign policymaking process of the US, because of its powers to declare war, ratifying treaties, and its control over national exchequer (necessary for execution of the policies formulated by the president). However, the reality is much more complex – reality is what Jerel A. Rosati calls it: “‘Politics’ of the United States Foreign Policy.”

One thing is needed to be made clear at the very outset of this paper and to be kept in mind all along is that foreign policy is not of government; it is of the state. Foreign policy is mainly executed by the executive branch of the government, but it usually

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<sup>1</sup> Muhammad Usman Amin Siddiqi, “The US Foreign Policy towards Pakistan: A Blame Game or A Great Game,” (M.Phil thesis, GCU Lahore, 2011), 77.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid.

involves other institutions and agencies than the executive branch, or broadly speaking, the government. That makes it an intricate task to analyze the foreign policymaking process of any country in general and that of the US in particular because of the complexity of its governmental machinery, owing to the concept of limited government through separation of powers and checks and balances.

It is difficult to locate responsibility for a particular decision, as no one can be sure about when and where a particular policy got originated. A particular policy may have been originated from the viewpoint of an advisor's consultant, a university professor, a journalist, or a congressman returning from a trip abroad. "It may also result from a cable sent by a US Ambassador in some remote country. Remember, the 'Long Telegram' sent by George F. Kennan from Moscow shaped US foreign policy for next forty odd years?"<sup>3</sup>

Complexity of the governmental machinery not only makes it difficult to locate the origin of a policy directive but also makes its passage lengthy and complicated. No matter how a particular policy gets originated, in order to get implemented, it has to make its way through various institutions and agencies of foreign policymaking, each of which has its own motives, mindset, and most importantly, degree of authority. When we say that White House or the Congress has issued a policy directive, it may have made its way through a fierce politico-bureaucratic pulling and hauling of a number of political and bureaucratic actors in various institutions and agencies of the governmental machinery. The so called decision makers at the helm have to choose from amongst already competed over and compromised options that manage to live through these clashes of institutional – and sometimes personal – interests.

An example of competing institutional interests may when government has to deal with some hijacked plane or possible terrorist hideouts in some other country; the Department of Defense would perhaps demand a surgical strike whereas the State Department would prefer negotiations as the former option may disrupt long term deals already going on with that county.

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<sup>3</sup> Ibid.

It is also important to bear in mind that the pattern of decision making is different in case of long term policymaking and in emergency situations. In the latter case (especially when it involves national security), decisions are normally reached at by the President and his close advisors; whereas in the former case a number of departments and their huge bureaucracies are involved.<sup>4</sup>

Furthermore, this process keeps on changing from one administration to another and has evolved through different phases of foreign policymaking – making one branch of government more powerful than the other in particular circumstances and reversing the setup in different circumstances. This paper has also tried to summarize the evolution of the patterns of foreign policymaking in the US.<sup>5</sup>

Keeping in view the abovementioned complexity of the process of policymaking, this paper has been divided into the following sections in order to make it somewhat comprehensible:

- ✓ Institutions and Agencies of Foreign Policymaking
- ✓ Process of Foreign Policymaking (Models of Decision Making)
- ✓ Evolution of the Foreign Policymaking Patterns

### **Institutions and Agencies of Foreign Policymaking**

Institutions and agencies of foreign policymaking are divided into two groups:

- ✓ Governmental Institutions and Agencies
- ✓ Societal Institutions and Agencies

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<sup>4</sup> Charles W. Kegley Jr., *World Politics: Trends and Transformation* (Boston: Wadsworth, 2006), 78. Kegley has depicted, through a picture, President Bush and his close advisors making plans for War against Iraq in the White House Situation Room in October 2002.

<sup>5</sup> This evolution of the politics of foreign policymaking in the US has been best described by Jerel A. Rosati. For details, see Jerel A. Rosati, *The Politics of United States Foreign Policy* (Belmont: Wadsworth, 2011).

## Governmental Institutions and Agencies

**The Presidency:** President of the US is perhaps the most powerful political figure on the planet, but is still not as powerful as his image is portrayed in media and academic writings outside the US, especially in Pakistan. He has a lot of powers vested in him by the Constitution of the US, but there are equal number of constraints and compulsions limiting his role in foreign policymaking. Moreover, there are several uncertain factors that affect his role in foreign policymaking. As Jerel A. Rosati puts it, “The reality is that the president faces a paradox of presidential power... The successful exercise of presidential power becomes even more problematic when one considers uncertain elements that impact the president, sometimes strengthening his hand and at other times weakening it.”<sup>6</sup>

This does not mean the president is not powerful in the making of foreign policy of the US; it is meant to clarify the abovementioned ‘omnipotent’ role of the president. The following two quotations by US presidents would make this point clearer:

The office is kinda like the little country boy found the hoochie-koochie show at the carnival, once he'd paid his dime and got inside the tent: ‘It ain't exactly as it was advertised’.<sup>7</sup>

President L. B. Johnson

[The President] is rightly described as a man of extraordinary powers. Yet it is also true that he must wield those powers under extraordinary limitations.<sup>8</sup>

President J. F. Kennedy

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<sup>6</sup> Rosati, *United States Foreign Policy*, 57.

<sup>7</sup> President L. B. Johnson, quoted in Thomas E. Cronin, “Presidential Power Revised and Reappraised,” *Western Political Quarterly* 32 (1979): 381, cited in *Ibid*.

<sup>8</sup> Theodore C. Sorensen, *Decision-Making in the White House: The Olive Branch or the Arrows* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1963), xii, cited in Rosati, *United States Foreign Policy*, 57.

Presidential powers primarily arise from Article II of the US Constitution, but his role has kept on evolving since 1789 through amendments in the constitution, legislations, the process of judicial review, and conventions.

The most important role that the constitution grants the president is of Commander in Chief of the armed forces. Notwithstanding the fact that the right to declare war is vested in Congress, the presidents have been enjoying the same privilege under his power to deploy US troops. “President Truman’s sending of troops in Korea in 1950; presidents Eisenhower, Kennedy, Johnson and Nixon decided in their respective tenures to send troops to Vietnam; the war in Persian Gulf and the invasion of Panama were the decisions of President Bush Sr.; and most recently, the global War on Terrorism is the initiative of President Bush Jr.”<sup>9</sup>

Apart from being the Commander in Chief of the armed forces, the president appoints secretary of state, who is responsible for the conduct of US foreign policy and acts in accordance with the orders of the President. He appoints US ambassadors abroad and receives ambassadors from other countries as well. He negotiates treaties with other countries, which are to be ratified by the Congress. Congress usually ratifies the treaties negotiated by the president, but there are instances when Congress has denied its approval – remember why the US was not the part of the League of Nations, which was primarily the brainchild of US President Woodrow Wilson? He offers or withdraws diplomatic relations with other countries. “The rise of summitry in recent times has further increased the role of US president in diplomatic arena, as he himself leads US delegations in summit meetings. President Nixon’s participation in SALT I in 1972; President Carter’s negotiations with Egyptian and Israeli premiers for Camp David Accord in 1978; and

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<sup>9</sup> Siddiqi, “US Foreign Policy,” 79. For details of Presidential role as Commander in Chief, that is, operational control over military and presidential war powers and presidential peace powers, see John T. Rourke, Ralph G. Carter, and Mark A. Boyer, *Making American Foreign Policy* (Dubuque: Brown & Benchmark Publishers, 1996), 172–78.

President Reagan's summits with Gorbachev to emphasize START are some examples of summits in past."<sup>10</sup>

The president of the US is not only the head of the government but also the head of the state. As head of the government he wields power over executive branch of the government, appointing the people of his choice on the key posts of the administration. This makes it possible for him to have likeminded people in the institutions and agencies of foreign policymaking, and ensures that these institutions and agencies work in line with his vision. Being head of the state adds prestige to his position and grants him autonomy compared to his counterparts in parliamentary democracies.

Notwithstanding the principle of separation of powers, by virtue of which law making is the prerogative of the Congress, president has an important role to play in legislation. "In the modern relationship between the legislative and executive branches, much of the legislation before Congress originates in the executive branch and is submitted by the president – such as budget of the US government, as well as programs for defense spending and foreign assistance."<sup>11</sup> Apart from this, president has the power to veto the bills passed by Congress. While the Congress can override presidential veto by two-thirds majority, this happens infrequently; because securing 16 more votes in a bi-polar house is not an easy task. President can also present the bills in House of Representatives or Senate and, sometime, can get them passed through the members of his party sitting in Congress.

Apart from the powers and roles formally conferred upon the president through constitution or legislation, there are some informal sources of presidential power. One of them is national electoral mandate. President is the only leader in the US who is elected by the whole of the United States. Members of the Congress, though have

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<sup>10</sup> Siddiqi, "US Foreign Policy," 79. For further details of presidential role as chief diplomat, especially treaty making powers and powers related to diplomatic recognition, see Rourke, Carter, and Boyer, *American Foreign Policy*, 178–85.

<sup>11</sup> Rosati, *United States Foreign Policy*, 59.

the membership of national institution, do not represent the whole of the US. Members of the House of Representatives represent the constituents of their respective districts, whereas the Senators are the representatives of their respective states. But the only person who represents the whole nation is the president. Therefore, he is often referred to as ‘voice of the people’. This informal factor contributes a lot in his powers. He is responsible to deliver what he has promised during his campaign; and for that, he must have power to do so, which the whole nation has entrusted him with.

Another informal source of presidential power is his ability to command the attention of the people. The president attracts people’s attention as head of the state. His actions and words are given media coverage, which makes him capable of molding the public opinion according to his vision. Apart from the public attention, he has access to information and expertise of whatever kind he needs, which again adds to his powers, and therefore, role in the making of the foreign policy.

Constraints that limit the powers of the president are of two types: constitutional and informal constraints. The constitutional constraints include the checks of the other two branches of the government on the presidency. For example, “requirement of ratification of treaties and presidential appointments by the Senate; finite nature of presidential tenure; limit on third time election of president; and provision of presidential impeachment.”<sup>12</sup> Presidential power is also restricted by the fact that he has to work within the laws made by the Congress. Moreover, the budget is passed by the Congress that can severely limit the powers of the president in terms of implementation of the foreign policy. For example, no president can decide to give aid to any country, if the Congress does not allocate money for that. Constitutionally, the power to declare war is with the Congress, though the presidents have been using this power under the name of their power to deploy US troops as commander-in-chief of the armed forces. The state and the local governments play important role in the foreign economic policy, and they are not under president; and thus, restrain the president’s role in foreign affairs. Judicial review – judiciary’s

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<sup>12</sup> Siddiqi, “US Foreign Policy,” 79.



power to declare congressional laws and executive decrees null and void if they violate the constitution – also restrains presidential role.

There are several factors other than constitutional constraints that limit the powers of the president. Time is one of them. Apart from the fact that he has a limited tenure and cannot be elected more than two times, his day is of 24 hours just like anybody else's. He has to do a vast variety of tasks in a day, and that limits his ability to do all things which are otherwise in his power. Another important informal constraint is information. The president has to make important decisions on various issues every day. These decisions are to be made on the basis of information that he has about respective issues. He faces two types of problems vis-à-vis information: "scarcity and overabundance."<sup>13</sup> Sometimes, especially in case of foreign policy, president does not get sufficient information; and sometimes, he gets too much of information and does not have time to go through it. Reliability of the information remains another problem that limits his role in foreign policy. Furthermore, "bureaucracy is under his control theoretically, the bloated bureaucracy is not much responsive to the President and his personal staff in practice."<sup>14</sup> Last but not least, Party system in the US restrains presidential power in two ways. The first thing is, in the US, political parties are not much organized; and therefore, president cannot force his party members in Congress to legislate according to his wishes, though he can ask them to do so but not as an order but more like a request. Secondly, president somehow has to follow the party preferences in terms of policymaking because he has to get nominated by the party at the end of the day. In his second term, a president is more independent in this regard.

Now there are some uncertain factors that may limit the role of a president during his tenure in office. Public opinion is the most important among them, as no president would dare to ignore it while making decisions. If public opinion turns against the policies of a president, it severely restrains his ability to make and implement decisions. Johnson, Nixon, Ford, and Bush senior and junior all have

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<sup>13</sup> Rosati, *United States Foreign Policy*, 61.

<sup>14</sup> Siddiqi, "US Foreign Policy," 82.

experienced the public opinion turning against them while in office. Same is the case with media. Media is surely an uncertain factor that may favor or restrain a president's role in foreign policymaking. Judiciary is another uncertain factor that may limit the power of the president. Appointment of the judges of the US Supreme Court is for lifetime, and a president may not get a chance to appoint a single judge in his tenure; and therefore, he may have to face a hostile bench during his tenure. Judges may change their positions on different matters even after their appointment; so appointing a judge does not guarantee a favorable vote in Supreme Court. Finally, global context is also an uncertain but important factor that may affect the role of a president in terms of foreign policymaking. For example, foreign policy was not President Bush's strong area when he was running for presidency; but he's famous for what he's done in the realm of foreign policy after the incidents of 9/11.<sup>15</sup>

**The Congress:** The following statement in Rourke, Carter, and Boyer's book very precisely describes the role of the Congress in foreign policymaking in the US:

At times, the US Congress acts as if it were two different organizations. There is 'Congress Combative', aggressively using its powers. At other times we see 'Congress Compliant', shying away from using its powers.<sup>16</sup>

Rourke, Carter, and Boyer's expression of Congress Combative can be best understood by observing Congress' role in forcing the successive presidents to withdraw from Vietnam; while the Congress Compliant can be witnessed in "lack of meaningful congressional involvement in the decision to commit US forces to liberate Kuwait."<sup>17</sup>

Actually, the powers related to foreign policymaking keep vacillating between the president and the Congress. The system of

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<sup>15</sup> For details of presidential role in foreign policymaking and paradox of presidential power, see Rosati, *United States Foreign Policy*, 55–94.

<sup>16</sup> Rourke, Carter, and Boyer, *American Foreign Policy*, 238.

<sup>17</sup> Siddiqi, "US Foreign Policy," 82.

checks and balances has made the two institutions dependent on each other for the use of their respective powers. “The Constitution is a fluid, often vague document that has provided to the president and Congress ‘an invitation to struggle’ over power.”<sup>18</sup>

The formal foreign policy powers constitutionally granted to the Congress are impressive and include “the power to declare war; to ratify treaties signed by the president; to confirm the appointment of high executive branch officials by a majority Senate vote; to enact the legislation that becomes the law of the land; and to appropriate the money necessary for the government to operate.”<sup>19</sup> The congressional oversight of bureaucracy, though not mentioned in the constitution, is quite a regular feature of the US political system. In short, Congressional power has two main facets: power to legislate and power to appropriate money for governmental operations; and by virtue of these two powers, the Congress has assumed the power to investigate or to oversee the executive branch of government.

The Congress has used its powers differently in different times. For example, it has not used the power to declare war very frequently, which has resulted in more powers for presidents in this regard. The Congress tried in 1973 to recapture its war making powers by passing the War Powers Resolution.<sup>20</sup> But not only the presidents have been ignoring it since then, the Congress has not tried to enforce it either. The presidents, in order to avoid Senate’s ratification, rely on executive agreements and not treaties with other countries. Even if presented, the treaties are normally ratified by the Senate, as they are prepared keeping in view the Senate’s liking. Same is the case with confirmation of appointments made by the president. Senate normally grants its approval for these appointments, but the presidents also take the concerned senators in confidence while making these appointments.

The formal constraints on the congressional powers include president’s power to veto the bills passed by the Congress and judicial review. Informally, the Congress is restrained “by its own

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<sup>18</sup> Rourke, Carter, and Boyer, *American Foreign Policy*, 272.

<sup>19</sup> Siddiqi, “US Foreign Policy,” 82–83.

<sup>20</sup> Rourke, Carter, and Boyer, *American Foreign Policy*, 238.

expectations that it is the president's job, not Congress's, to be the leader in foreign policy."<sup>21</sup>

The powers of both the institutions have grown due to the increase in activities that a state undertakes in general, and due to increase in US global role in particular. But the relative power of the presidency has grown more rapidly than that of Congress since WWII. Vietnam War, Watergate, and the decline of the Cold War consensus show the struggle between the two institutions. But overall, the presidents have been more powerful than the Congress in the realm of foreign affairs.

The factors that are responsible for this increase in the relative power of the presidency include policy focus, organizational strength, political standing of the president and the Congress, and the crisis situations. Congressional policy focus is more domestic as compared to the presidents. Internal fragmentation of the Congress results in increased relative power of the presidents in foreign policymaking. Political standing of the presidents is usually higher than that of the Congress, which grants the former a greater role in foreign policymaking. Finally crisis situations result in increased presidential role compared to the Congress that wields more powers than presidents in non-crisis situations.

**The State Department:** The State Department is charged with "providing information for, advising the president and other top decision makers in negotiating treaties and other international agreements, and in maintaining constant contact with foreign countries through its embassies worldwide."<sup>22</sup> The State Department is divided along issue lines (such as the Bureau of Business and Economic Affairs); administrative line (such as the Officer of the Legislative Affairs); and along regional lines (such as the Bureau of African affairs).

In theory, the State Department is the primary institution responsible for foreign policymaking. But its role has gradually decreased because of several factors. One of them is changes in the global system, which has brought in more and more agencies to

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<sup>21</sup> Siddiqi, "US Foreign Policy," 84.

<sup>22</sup> *Ibid.*, 85.

assume important foreign policy roles. For example, the Treasury Department, the Department of Commerce, National Security Agency, National Security Council, and National Economic Council also play important role in foreign policymaking along with the State Department, which no longer “dominates the process of gathering and transmitting information about other countries and global issues to the President.”<sup>23</sup>

Two more factors that affect the role of the State Department in foreign policymaking are the desires of president and the skills of the Secretary of State. Sometimes presidents want to play important role in foreign policymaking; and therefore, appoint less popular and less skilled Secretaries of State. For example, President Kennedy wanted to take the lead in foreign policy, and therefore, appointed the relatively mild Dean Rusk as his secretary of state. The same desire to personally control foreign affairs led President Nixon to appoint William P. Rogers his secretary of state. Henry Kissinger has recalled that Nixon considered Roger’s “unfamiliarity with the subject (of foreign policy) to be an asset because it guaranteed that policy direction would remain in the White House.”<sup>24</sup> Likewise, the skills and temperament of the Secretary of the State determine his role in foreign policymaking. If a Secretary of State is more skilled and popular, especially compared to president’s National Security Advisor, he would definitely wield more power in foreign affairs than the one who is less skilled relative to National Security Advisor of the time.

**The Department of Defense (DoD):** The primary function of the DoD is to maintain the military forces, to wage or deter war, and to protect national security. The role of the DoD has continuously increased both in foreign policy formulation and implementation since its creation in 1947. It was created after the WWII by the combining the Departments of War, Army, and Navy. It is often called the Pentagon because of the shape of building it is headquartered in. The DoD uses largest portion of the US budget

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<sup>23</sup> Ibid., 86.

<sup>24</sup> Henry Kissinger, quoted in Rourke, Carter, and Boyer, *American Foreign Policy*, 284.

every year and possesses the largest number of civilian personnel of any of the foreign policy bureaucracies.

The primary reason for the increased role of the DoD following the WWII was the threat of Soviet aggression. During initial years of the Cold War, the policymakers were of the opinion that success of the US would depend upon its ability to counter the Soviets militarily, which meant deploying more and more military troops abroad and the development of a full range of military forces at home for use in times of conflict.

**The National Security Council (NSC):** The following statement depicts an inherent competition between National Security Council and the State Department:

There's been a persistent tendency for presidents to come into office saying they will give power to the secretary of state and downgrade the NSC. But it never works in that way.<sup>25</sup>

The National Security Council came into existence in 1947 in reaction chaotic national security policymaking during Roosevelt administration. President Roosevelt, having his informal style of management, often by passed the formal chain of command and relied on various officials in bureaucracy irrespective of their ranks.

Initially NSC consisted of the president, the vice president and the secretaries of state and defense. The purpose was to bring key decision makers (vis-à-vis national security) together and provide them with a small independent staff to coordinate the collection and dissemination of information, analyses, and alternatives. The primary goals set for the NSC were: a) to give advice to president regarding matters of national security; b) to make long-term planning; and, c) to cooperate and integrate the process of national security.

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<sup>25</sup> Editorial Research Reports, *Making Foreign Policy* (Washington DC: Congressional Quarterly, Inc., 1988), 25, quoted in Rourke, Carter, and Boyer, *American Foreign Policy*, 292.

The role and size of the NSC have changed considerably since its creation. The position of Special Assistant to the president for national security affairs was created in 1953. Robert Cutler was appointed as first special assistant by President Eisenhower to coordinate policies of foreign policy bureaucracies. The title of special assistant was replaced with that of National Security Advisor in Kennedy administration.

The major change in the structure of NSC also came during Kennedy administration, when it changed from council members to National Security Advisor and his staff. Since then, the national security advisor has often overshadowed the secretary of state. "During the years of President Nixon, the National Security Advisor, Henry Kissinger, was much more influential than Secretary of State, William Rogers. Likewise President Carter's National Security Advisor, Zbigniew Brzezinski, was more active and influential than the Secretary of State, Cyrus Vance."<sup>26</sup>

During Nixon administration, National Security Council assumed operational role as against its advisory role. For example, Henry Kissinger secretly arranged Nixon's trip to China with the help of Pakistan and remained engaged in secret negotiations with the North Vietnam for the US withdrawal. Therefore, the National Security Advisor is considered a rival to Secretary of State.

**The Foreign Economic Bureaucracy and NEC:** Lloyd Bentson, Clinton's Secretary of the Treasury, once said, "Everyone's been saying for a long time that foreign policy is becoming economic, but like everything, it's taken a while for the message to sink in around here. It just shows you how important the economic issues are internationally, and that's a situation secretaries of state don't work at very much."<sup>27</sup>

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<sup>26</sup> Siddiqi, "US Foreign Policy," 88.

<sup>27</sup> Lloyd Bentsen, quoted in David E. Sanger, "Passing the Buck; War, Peace, Aid, all Issues are Trade Issues," *New York Times*, January 15, 1995, accessed September 03, 2011, <http://www.nytimes.com/1995/01/15/weekinreview/passing-the-buck-war-peace-aid-all-issues-are-trade-issues.html>.

The Departments of Treasury and Commerce do not readily come to mind while thinking about the departments involved in foreign policymaking. But now, foreign economic bureaucracy plays a greater role in the foreign policymaking due increased global economic interdependency and the increased expenses of global engagements. On the global stage, the Department of Treasury is responsible for US international monetary policy and for concerns about the international debt owed to US banks. The Commerce Department oversees trade and technology issues.

President Bill Clinton passed an executive order creating another department: the National Economic Council (NEC). Like the NSC, the NEC is also led by an advisor to the president – the National Economic Advisor. It was formulated primarily for “coordinating and integrating economic policymaking process; to ensure pursuance of president’s economic policy decision; to ensure that president’s economic agenda is being implemented; and to advice president on economic policy.”<sup>28</sup> NEC specifies the increasing significance of foreign economic policy and has augmented the role of foreign economic bureaucracy in US foreign policymaking.

**Intelligence Community:** The Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) is usually considered synonymous with the term intelligence community. But the intelligence community includes a diverse set of actors. National Security Agency is another super-secret agency charged with “collecting information from telecommunications and other type of signal intelligence (SIGINT) from around the world.”<sup>29</sup> CIA was created in 1947 to coordinate intelligence activities under the Director of Central Intelligence (DCI). The DCI is the primary advisor to the president on intelligence issues. CIA is also charged with information gathering and analysis and some types of covert activities.

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<sup>28</sup> Siddiqi, “US Foreign Policy,” 90.

<sup>29</sup> Ibid. For a brief but comprehensive information on National Security Agency, see Connie Colwell Miller, *The National Security Agency: Cracking Secret Codes* (Minnesota: Capstone Press, 2008), 4–29.



Since the end of Cold War, the intelligence community has come under increasing pressure to shrink both in terms of budget and personnel. Moreover, CIA personnel have been demoralized by such scandals as the “discovery that one of their own, Aldrich Ames, had long spied for the Soviets and by revelations about the CIA’s financial support of a Guatemalan military officer known for terrorist tactics who was involved in at least two murders.”<sup>30</sup>

**Other Departments and Agencies:** A number of other departments are also involved in foreign policymaking. For example, various divisions of Justice Department (e.g., Immigration and Naturalization Service and Drug Enforcement Agency) have personnel stationed abroad; Department of Agriculture maintains an office of International Affairs and Commodity Programmes; Labor Department has a Bureau of International Affairs; Department of Energy has continuous involvement in building nuclear warheads; and the Bureau of International Affairs and Aviation and Coast Guard are the divisions of the Department of Transportation.

A large number of independent agencies have, in one way or the other, national security responsibilities or some kind of international activities. Such agencies include NASA, Agency for

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<sup>30</sup> Rourke, Carter, and Boyer, *American Foreign Policy*, 290. The credibility of the CIA was further tarnished in late 1995 by the revelation that it had spent over \$20 million, consulting psychics in an effort to foretell the future. In one instance, while Henry Kissinger was secretary of state en route to Riyadh, Saudi Arabia, a CIA employed psychic broke into a cold sweat during a séance and screamed, “No! No! No!” He told alarmed agents that he saw a Libyan assassin shooting at Kissinger, missing him but killing his wife, Nancy. The CIA sent a flash warning to the US embassy in Riyadh. When Kissinger and his wife landed, they were rushed into a waiting limousine, which then sped pell-mell to King Faisal’s palace. No Libyan assassin materialized, but according to a retired CIA official, “we almost killed Kissinger” by careening along at speeds of up to 90 miles an hour amid the screeching brakes of startled Saudi drivers and the bleating of panic-stricken Saudi goats. Ibid. For more details on CIA and a comprehensive history of its operations, see Tim Weiner, *Legacy of Ashes: The History of the CIA* (New York: Doubleday, 2007).

International Development, the Arms Control and Disarmament Agency, the Federal Maritime Commission, the Inter-American Foundation, the Selective Service System, the Peace Corps, the International Trade Commission, the Export-Import Bank, and the United States Information Agency.

### **The Societal Institutions and Agencies**

**Interest Groups:** There are a number of societal agencies and institutions that play significant role in foreign policymaking in the US. Their role is indirect in nature, but they do influence the real decision makers at the helm of affairs. Interest groups are perhaps most important among them. Interest groups can be broadly divided into two categories: the ones people join voluntarily like labor unions, and the ones having involuntarily association like ethnic groups. These groups can also be divided into categories like economic, ideological, ethnic, religious, gender based, and issue oriented interest groups. Interest groups can also be divided along national or transnational lines.

Interest groups influence policymaking and implementation by setting up their agenda. But the extent of their role in shaping foreign policy depends upon a number of factors like their strength, membership, tactics, access, and so on. Interest groups are “important channels, through which citizens, businesses, and groups can present their collective views and demands forcefully to the government.”<sup>31</sup>

**The Mass Media:** Thomas Jefferson’s statement depicts significance of mass media in the policymaking:

The basis of our government (is) the opinion of the people. Were it left to me to decide whether we

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<sup>31</sup> Siddiqi, “US Foreign Policy,” 93. For influence of interest groups on the US foreign policy, see Howard J. Wiarda, *The Crisis of American Foreign Policy: The Effects of a Divided America* (Maryland: Rowman and Littlefield Publishers, 2006), 19–20. Also see Eugene R. Wittkopf, et al., *American Foreign Policy: Pattern and Process* (Belmont: Thomson, 2005), 302–4.

should have a government without newspapers, or newspapers without a government, I should not hesitate to prefer the latter.<sup>32</sup>

Information is power. Information enables people to know what is going on. It helps decide what policy or decision is to favor or to oppose. Therefore, those who control the information can control what others know about events happening around them. This ability to control what the public is told and to provide an analysis gives those who control information and analysis great influence over the opinions that most citizens have. The media controls this critical flow of information.<sup>33</sup>

There is, however, another view of the press. “Some analysts charge that the press is biased in favor of its own political perspective, is irresponsible in its zealous reporting, is often cozy with politicians, and is harming society by overemphasizing the negative.”<sup>34</sup> John Quincy Adams once wrote that journalists are “assassins who sit with loaded blunderbusses at the corner of streets and fire them off for hire or for support at (anyone) they select.”<sup>35</sup>

The media is a business, and businesses seek to make profit. There are several ways that financial concerns may influence what gets reported. International news are disseminated by just a few sources. Every news agency, newspaper, or TV channel does not have a system to collect international news due to the high cost of such coverage. It means those rare sources of news have influence over what people get as news. This increases the chances of systemic bias in the news. Another important thing to keep in mind is while media is considered as a government’s watchdog; it can also play the role of government’s lapdog – reporting what government wants it to report.

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<sup>32</sup> Thomas Jefferson’s letter to Edward Carrington, January 16, 1787, quoted in Rourke, Carter, and Boyer, *American Foreign Policy*, 350.

<sup>33</sup> Siddiqi, “US Foreign Policy,” 93.

<sup>34</sup> Rourke, Carter, and Boyer, *American Foreign Policy*, 350.

<sup>35</sup> John Quincy Adams’ diary entry, September 7, 1820, quoted in *ibid.*

**Public Opinion:** Public opinion is a mixture of the opinions of various groups. At times, public opinion is passive, whereas at other times, it plays an active role in shaping government policy. Firstly, public opinion translates into who gets elected and makes policies. Secondly, the fear that public opinion may not get you elected next time also shapes the policies according to the wishes of the people. But a number of studies show that general masses normally do not have interest in and information about foreign affairs; and therefore, public opinion should not be considered while making foreign policy. But, as we have observed, the foreign policy is becoming more and more economic in nature, being implemented on taxpayers' money, so public opinion is bound to be kept in mind while making foreign policy.

### **Process of Foreign Policymaking**

There is no concrete process that policymakers specifically follow while making foreign policy. As we've already discussed in the beginning, a particular policy may originate from the memos of an ambassador or speech of a congressman in Senate or House of Representatives or an intelligence report or even from lecture delivered by a university professor. Then this policy initiative makes its way through different departments and agencies having varying degrees of influence in policymaking, and finally gets translated into presidential address or congressional law. Therefore, we explain how policy is made by building models. Now we take some models and try to understand US foreign policymaking through these models.

**The Rational Actor Model:** It is the most frequently employed policymaking model. At its core is an action-reaction process. "The state can be treated as a 'black box', responding with one voice to the challenges and opportunities confronting it."<sup>36</sup> Foreign policy is viewed as a calculated response to the actions of another actor. This model assumes that policymakers are rational and they search for value maximizing options. They make only

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<sup>36</sup> Glenn P. Hastedt, *American Foreign Policy: Past, Present, Future* (New Jersey: Pearson, 2006), 247.

those choices which will help them secure their goals and objectives rationally set in advance.<sup>37</sup>

In this model, a policymaking process consists of following steps:

- ✓ The government clarifies its objectives
- ✓ After clarifying, the objectives are prioritized
- ✓ After prioritization, available policy options are listed
- ✓ Then the results of implementation of each policy are examined
- ✓ A policy initiative is selected on the basis of cost-benefit analysis of the available options

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. The analyst does not need to consider the dynamics of the departments and agencies and the psyche of the people involved. By rational, it is meant that the policymakers involved evaluate the situation and the policy options in absolutely rational way based on cost-benefit analysis.

**The Bureaucratic Politics Model:** Bureaucratic politics is the “process by which people inside government bargain with one another on complex public policy questions.”<sup>38</sup> This model views policymaking in a completely opposite way from the rational actor model. “Policymaking is seen as a political process dominated by

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<sup>37</sup> James E. Dougherty and Robert L. Pfaltzgraff, Jr., *Contending Theories of International Relations: A Comprehensive Survey* (New York: Harpe & Row Publications, 1981), 480.

<sup>38</sup> I. M. Destler, *Presidents, Bureaucrats, and Foreign Policy: The Politics of Organizational Reform* (New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1974), 52, quoted in Rourke, Carter, and Boyer, *American Foreign Policy*, 248.

conflict resolution and not problem solving.”<sup>39</sup> “The foreign policy is a result of bargaining among the components of bureaucracy.”<sup>40</sup>

The major assumptions of this model are:

- ✓ The interests of the nation are the result of bargaining between and among its bureaucratic departments and leadership.
- ✓ The ways and means to achieve a goal are different among policymakers even if they do share a goal. This is because of their background and personal and organizational interests.
- ✓ A policymaker has to gain consensus of other members even if all the authority is vested in him. This consensus is largely dependent upon the abilities of the policymaker, which include charisma, personality, skill of persuasion, and ties with other members.
- ✓ There is tussle between different key players and each want to overcome the other. In such a situation, mix decisions are formulated, not intended by any one of the players.
- ✓ The decisions depend on the power and skills of the key players.
- ✓ The top leadership has to choose from amongst the already contested and compromised policy options.

As no individual is in a position to make decisions alone, politics dominates the whole process. Each one of the key players see the problem differently owing to their personal and organizational interests. Sending military troops to a country that is harboring terrorists looks different to a secretary of state, who must keep in mind other diplomatic issues at stake with that country, than it does to the chief of armed forces whose forces would be used, or to a presidential aide, who is perhaps more sensitive to the domestic implications of the success or failure of such a mission.

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<sup>39</sup> Siddiqi, “US Foreign Policy,” 96–97.

<sup>40</sup> Dougherty and Pfaltzgraff, *International Relations*, 481.

**The Small-Group Decision Making Model:** This model assumes that most of the foreign policy decisions are made a small group of individuals and do not involve large bureaucracies. These groups can of different kinds. The perceived advantages that this model assumes of decision making by small groups are:

- ✓ Absence of significant conflict due to less viewpoints to reconcile
- ✓ Free and open exchange of ideas among participants they do not have to pursue their organizational interests
- ✓ Swift and decisive action
- ✓ Innovation and experimentation
- ✓ Possibility of maintaining secrecy.<sup>41</sup>

Three categories of such groups can be identified: First is the informal small group that meets regularly but lacks a formal institutional base; for example, the Tuesday Lunch group in the Johnson administration. Second is the ad hoc group that is created to deal with a particular problem and ceases to function once its task is completed. During the Cuban Missile Crisis, the key decision 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; for example, the sub-committees of the National Security Council.

**The Presidential Model:** The presidential model is similar to the rational actor model. This model assumes that the political party, public opinion, interest groups, and media are all behind the president. It focuses on the president and his immediate, high-level advisors in the White House and the Cabinet. It assumes that people are often willing to grant the president more freedom to decide foreign policy than domestic policy. It also assumes that the perception of national interests is subject to their ideologies, interests, and perceptions of the president and his close advisors.

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<sup>41</sup> Robert L. Wendzel, *International Politics: Policymakers & Policymaking* (New York: Wiley & Sons, 1981), 439.

## Conclusion

Apart from the abovementioned models of foreign policymaking, two more theories of decision making are also important to mention here. One of them is elite theory. It assumes that the foreign policy is made in response to the demands of people. 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 interests are converted into national interests “through the pattern of office holding and the structure of influence that exists within the United States.”<sup>42</sup> Elites are considered as a stable group sharing interests and vision to attain those interests. They may, sometimes, have marginal differences over the implementation of the policies but not over the goals and objectives of foreign policy. The people other than elites just respond to the policies and do not propose or make policies.

In contrast to elite theory, pluralism is regarded as the orthodox interpretation of how the US policymaking system works. Just as with elite theory no single comprehensive statement of the argument exists. Still, six common themes can be identified: “a) power in society is fragmented and diffused; b) many groups in society have power to participate in policymaking; c) no one group is powerful enough to dictate policy; d) an equilibrium among the groups is the natural state of affairs; e) policy is the product of bargaining between groups and reflects the interests of dominant group or groups; and, f) the government acts as an empire supervising the competition and sometimes compiles a settlement.”<sup>43</sup>

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.”<sup>44</sup> This is because the economic

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<sup>42</sup> Siddiqi, “US Foreign Policy,” 98.

<sup>43</sup> *Ibid.*, 99.

<sup>44</sup> Robert A. Dahl, “A Critique of the Ruling Elite Model,” in *C. Wright Mills and the Power Elite*, eds. G. William Domhoff and Hoyt B.



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."<sup>45</sup> Pluralists would point to the grassroots movement within the US to force South Africa to end apartheid as evidence of validity of their case.

Foreign policymaking in the US and the role of different institutions and agencies has evolved over the years. After analyzing the role of various institutions in US foreign policymaking and the models of decision making, we can make generalizations about the evolution of US foreign policymaking patterns.

Since World War II, the president and the Congress has been struggling for more and more powers in the realm of foreign affairs. This struggle resulted in a pattern of policymaking: the Congress dominated the foreign policymaking in non-crisis situations and in the times of peace, whereas the presidents have enjoyed relatively more power in crisis situations and in the times of war. It is because the president can offer unity of command and speedy decisions in the times of war. Furthermore, the whole nation is usually united during war times, and therefore, the Congress ignores its internal rifts and grants absolute authority of war struggle to the president. Finally president's role Commander in Chief of the armed forces ensures more powers for him during the times of war.

The end of WWII heralded the new era of Cold War politics, and the relative role of president in foreign policymaking increase compared to that of the Congress. It was "due to the commonly perceived threat of Soviet communism that united almost the whole nation in discerning the looming danger of Soviet expansion; and therefore, entrusted the presidents with the responsibility of making strategies to counter and contain the Soviet threat."<sup>46</sup>

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Ballard (Boston: Beacon, 1968), 31, quoted in Hastedt, *American Foreign Policy*, 256.

<sup>45</sup> Ibid.

<sup>46</sup> Siddiqi, "US Foreign Policy," 100.

Since the end of WWII, four shifts can be identified in US foreign policymaking patterns. The presidents enjoyed almost absolute powers in foreign policymaking from the end of WWII to the defeat in Vietnam War. The relative role of the president in foreign policymaking declined following the defeat in Vietnam, as the concerns about security were overpowered by the economic concerns. As security was now being labeled as ‘low policy’ and the economy became the ‘high policy’, as a result of over-stretched economic commitments in Vietnam, the Congress assumed relatively more powers in foreign policymaking and started challenging presidents in their respective foreign policies on the basis of the cost of their ventures abroad.

Following the Soviet collapse, the role of Congress came to where it was before WWII, that is, the Congress dominated the foreign policymaking in the times of peace. President Bush Sr. and President Clinton had to face relatively powerful Congress. Though the US emerged as the sole superpower, and the presidents had greater opportunities to lead the world; but, in fact, they had to face greater political risks at home with a cautious Congress to check their activities abroad.

With the dawn of September 11, 2001, US presidents have again become more powerful in foreign policymaking than the Congress. Still, this shift is in the making, and the final pattern of US foreign policymaking is yet to be revealed in the coming years, as President Obama is not as much powerful in foreign policymaking as President Bush Jr. has been.