Foreign Policy Decision-Making Models

Graham Allison: 3 models of decision-making
1. Rational Actor or Unitary Government
2. Organizational Process Model
3. Governmental Politics Model

All models are based on a different level of analysis. We must use all three models to obtain a complete treatment of any policy case. Each model should be understood as a snapshot that captures only part of a complex total picture.

I. Rational Actor or Unitary Government Model
   Assumptions:
   1. unitary optimizing actor
   2. government as black box
   3. government processes information according to the rules of optimizing rational action
   4. complete information
   5. The internal structure of decision-making are based on rationality and thus the same:
      a. clarify goals
      b. prioritize goals
      c. list alternative policies
      d. investigate the consequences of policy implementation
      e. select policy

6. Disadvantages of Rational Actor Model
7. advantages: stresses interactions among states useful when little or not information about enemy available crisis situations—time constraints do not allow for complex evaluation

II. Organizational Process Model: reflects the constraints that organizations place on decision makers’ choices
1. assumes goals and objectives are well established
2. limits choices based on standard operating procedures (SOP)
3. opening up of black box to look at evaluate key organizations/agencies
4. each organization has a charter detailing its function/mission
5. series of programs are developed to carry out missions
6. dependent on budget (financial funding)
7. SOP enhance efficiency and performance
8. satisficing rather than optimizing
9. disadvantages
10. advantages:
   emphasizes available options in constraining circumstance
   highlights important domestic political influences on foreign policy
decision-making
III. **Governmental Politics Model** (also called government bargaining or bureaucratic politics model)

1. unit of analysis: key individual decision-makers
2. key individuals in critical positions have great influence in deciding on organizational action
3. differing perceptions and priorities
4. differing organizational positions and commitments: “Where you stand depends on where you sit”
5. informal and formal networks of power and communication
6. Governmental action: resultant of a political bargaining process among key players
7. bargaining and compromise results in satisficing not optimizing decision-making: selection of first alternative that has support of a key group of individuals
8. personal ambition may lead to personal power considerations when making decision
9. animosities and friendships among key individuals
10. personal opinions on issues may diverge from public policy position taken
11. advantages: a. model adds important detail about domestic politics
   b. helps explain the roles of key individuals
   c. helps explain why individuals are at times working at cross purposes, contrary to the interests of the government at large
   d. helps explains why policy sometimes appears irrational from a unitary government perspective

disadvantages: a. difficult to study and analyze
   b. too many variables, some unknown
   c. Model III needs to be placed into the context of Model I and II