FIGHTING OVER WAR: THE BUREAUCRATIC ROLE IN CREATING WAR-TERMINATING BARGAINS

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By

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The bargaining model of war assigns a central role to information, which enables belligerents to reduce mutual uncertainty. Although no two wars are identical, *ceteris paribus*, an enhanced ability to receive and interpret battlefield information should lead to a more rapid termination of the crisis. However, the U.S.’s experience with limited and protracted wars, despite its informational advantages, suggests this is not the case. How does a state determine its offers in the bargaining process to terminate a war once it becomes clear its exogenous ideal point is no longer attainable within an acceptable cost range? The area of war termination within the bargaining model of war has received growing attention, but remains challenged to account for prolonged wars, negotiated settlements, and delays in Bayesian updating. An under-explored factor in this line of inquiry is the role of the national security apparatus that supports the foreign policy executive in decision-making. My central hypothesis is that the bureaucratic advisory process affects state behavior in predictable manners. To explain these conditions, this dissertation develops a typological theory of the bureaucratic processes that create a state’s bargaining position.

The principle challenge for the executive is controlling the biases that unavoidably enter into the advisory process; all participants are biased in some manner. The processes used to control them can either help the executive approximate a rational actor, or lead to demands based on outdated or incorrect information. The dependent variable in this dissertation is the
characterization of a state’s bargaining position described by two elements: the extent of the demands placed on an adversary, and how closely those demands are supported by current battlefield conditions. I will test the above hypothesis through conducting structured, focused comparisons of four cases in a building block approach. This dissertation will contribute to the expanding inquiry into domestic factors in the bargaining model of war by focusing on intra-governmental competition and assessing its relationship to aggregating preferences and updating beliefs.
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Chapter 1: Introduction

The bargaining model of war assigns a central role to information which enables the parties to reduce mutual uncertainty on resolve and capabilities.\(^1\) This reduction of uncertainty allows the belligerents to update beliefs about the likelihood of achieving post-war aims and changing them accordingly to avoid unnecessary future costs. Although no two wars are identical, *ceteris paribus*, an enhanced ability to receive and interpret battlefield information should lead to a more rapid termination of the crisis. This suggests that an information-rich foreign policy process should better enable a state to terminate its wars once the likelihood of military defeat or victory has become clear. However, the US’s experience with limited, protracted wars, despite its informational advantages, suggests this is not always the case.

Following World War II, the United States established the most extensive national security apparatus in the world. The National Security Act of 1947 integrated the political, military, and intelligence functions into a coherent process that was intended to provide the President with the best options in times of crisis.\(^2\) The specialized intelligence assessment capabilities, the newly-created Air Force, and the National Security Council staff were tailor-made for improving battlefield performance and assessment. Despite the informational advantages provided by these modifications, performance in Korea and Vietnam indicated the U.S. was no better able to arrive at a crisis-terminating settlement.

Clausewitz drew a distinction between limited and unlimited wars: those which require the complete destruction of the enemy’s forces and means to resist were unlimited. In limited wars, a political aim exerts a greater influence on battlefield objectives since the demands made

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are not as costly to the other side and survival is not at issue. Routine modification of these aims should characterize limited wars, given that the demands do not include the complete destruction of the means to resist. The U.S.’s experience in crises after World War II points to a problem in the process that converts information into beliefs about what constitutes an acceptable war outcome. Although the US had improved its ability to collect and assess wartime information, it was still challenged to appropriately update its beliefs on achievable aims. This creates a puzzle for a theory that places a premium on information in accounting for war termination: Why has the expansion of information available to policymakers not led to a corresponding drop in the length of time and costs associated with limited wars?

International relations scholars have incorporated domestic-level variables in bargaining theory to account for anomalies in the unitary rational actor model typically used to examine the issue of crisis bargaining. Some of these include regime type, domestic audiences, domestic coalitions, and military innovation. Less attention has been paid to the role of the security institutions themselves in forming aggregate preferences within the bargaining model of war framework. Part of this is due to the fact that regardless of how preferences are aggregated within the state, the central insights of bargaining theory still hold. However, this perspective is primarily concerned with the belligerents’ original preferences and capabilities. These works treated outcome preferences as exogenous to the war and considered war itself a failure in

7 See Goemans, “Fighting for Survival”; and a brief overview in Reiter, “Exploring the Bargaining Model of War.”
bargaining efforts. When dealing with information endogenous to the war, such as modifications to preferences, changes in relative capabilities that change cost/benefit calculations, and assessments of battlefield outcomes, the centrality of domestic institutions in reaching a war-terminating bargain looms larger. Therefore, in order to account for a state’s ability to define its bargaining position while under the pressures of war, an examination of the state’s decision-making process is warranted.

A defining characteristic of modern national security systems is the presence of specialized bureaucracies that are more enduring and have more stable preferences than any one presidential administration. A competition to define interests and threats arises due to differing experiences and positions across the bureaucracies. The foreign policy executive relies on the assessments of these bureaucracies to develop policies. However, as each group views the international setting through its own lens, perspectives on threats, interests, and policies are expected to differ. In the midst of a crisis, the foreign policy executive must narrow the field of net assessments to guide policy decisions and determine the state’s cost/benefit assessment for continuing the war for a given set of objectives. Therefore, how these differing perspectives are resolved within the government directly influences the character of the state’s bargaining space for a crisis-terminating offer.

This dissertation seeks to provide an explanation why some administrations are able to accurately assess information that is revealed on the battlefield and through diplomatic channels and arrive at war-terminating agreements, while others fail to perceive mounting costs,

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deteriorating bargaining positions, and fleeting windows of opportunity to end hostilities. I advance a typology of bureaucratic “rules of the game” that determines the likelihood a government will arrive at a bargaining offer that reflects current conditions. The elements of the typology will drive how closely a government is able to approximate a “rational actor” that accurately perceives costs and benefits which better enables termination.

**Contributions**

Interpreting war as a bargaining process has generated important insights on state behavior in times of crisis. The approach’s emphasis on the role of information handled by a rational, unitary actor, however, has created some anomalies in its predictions. In some cases, examining the war through a second image approach is necessary to understand these anomalies. The growing emphasis on bargaining based on endogenous wartime information in the international relations literature points to the necessity of opening the black box of the state to understand how this information is handled.

Although the bargaining literature has made some allowances for the effects created by non-unitary actors in war, it is challenged to provide explanations for several foundational weaknesses. For example, if battles provide information on the distribution of power among the belligerents, why does the likelihood a war will end not increase as the length of the war increases? Some recent literature finds an inverse relationship between war duration and likelihood of settlement, which is at odds with bargaining model predictions. Why do stalemates not communicate to the belligerents that the current distribution of benefits is

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11 This is primarily accomplished through examining audience costs, both in the traditional approach (backing away from commitments during escalation) and a revised approach (the executive making decisions that the selectorate does not agree with). For a discussion of this revised approach, see Slantchev, “Politicians, the Media, and Domestic Audience Costs.”

equivalent to the distribution of power? Why are belligerents ever unable to agree upon settlement terms, since side-payments should theoretically open a large number of options? All of these questions indicate a more detailed exploration of domestic decision making processes in war is called for. At the very least, this dissertation argues that the bargaining model’s perspective on the role and effects of information is incomplete; Fearon’s “ability to cope” with information may play a larger role in terminating a war than the bargaining model acknowledges.\textsuperscript{13}

This dissertation will assist in expanding inquiry into domestic factors by focusing on intra-governmental competition and assessing its relationship to aggregating preferences and updating beliefs. These are the two critical elements in bargaining with endogenous wartime information: a state requires demands within reason that are also based on current conditions to successfully bargain with the opposing belligerent. This approach will also break from the traditional gain/lose office construct that has been applied to incorporate democratic pressures into the issue. Although useful, its explanatory power is limited to situations in which a competitive election is looming. An under-explored area in the bargaining approach is the heavily bureaucratized national security apparatus that provides the assessments and recommendations the executive is dependent upon. These organizations can generate an astounding amount of data and information on battlefield events. Yet the availability of the information by itself has not led to more rapid crisis termination as the standard bargaining model would predict. This dissertation will seek to contribute to understanding variation in strategies and preferences in outcomes within like-regimes.

\textsuperscript{13} Fearon, “Rationalist Explanations for War,” 393.
**Argument and Hypotheses**

I begin with the assumption that a state’s ability to handle information will drastically affect its ability to terminate a war, since the endogenous bargaining literature places a premium on “new” information. This information is “new” when compared to that which was available prior to the war. The changing conditions of the battlefield demand reassessment of prior beliefs in light of new information. Therefore, this paper focuses on how organizational processes aggregate the preferences of the players into a coherent policy for a bargaining offer. This argument proceeds in several parts:

First, many of the major players in the process will be agents of organizations that perform specified functions in the national security apparatus. Individual organizations tend to produce optimistic recommendations for their preferred courses of action. Policies and recommendations are viewed through organizational lenses that distort information in ways that tend to support the importance of those organizations to national security. In short, organizations create biased interpretations of information and generate options that tend to over-estimate benefits associated with their preferred policies while under-estimating their costs. In addition, there are also political appointees in the system that are not beholden to organizational preferences and are instead influenced by their personal interests, experience, and responsibilities to the executive.

Second, the foreign policy executive creates bureaucratic “rules of the game” that determine the number of competing interpretations of battlefield information and policy recommendations that are considered at the highest decision level. If the president uses one

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predominant advisor (who is assumed to be biased) in making a final decision, the president must invest a great deal of effort to discern the “true” information that is masked by the advisor’s bias. This can be done by playing the devil’s advocate role or by investing the time to become an expert in the field in which he is being advised. As the number of biased advisors “in the room” with the president at the time of decision increases, it is logical to assume it becomes more difficult to overcome multiple biases and arrive at a decision. In fact, increasing the number of biased advisors can actually improve decision-making, provided two conditions are met. First, advisors cannot be biased in the same manner; they must have unlike-biases. Second, advisors must present their information in a group setting, with the president, so that other biased advisors are also informed. A multi-stage revisiting of information (i.e., debate) will further improve decision-making for the executive and enable the state to approximate a rational actor.

Third, deviations from these practices that enable approximating a rational actor will have varying effects on state behavior in war that are predicable (see typological chart in Chapter 3). An executive that consults only a single advisor, or multiple advisors with like-biases, is more likely to reflect those biases in a final decision. Decision-making is also more likely to suffer when information is considered in a single-stage process where the framing effects created by the biased advisor become more dominant. Processes that aggregate information and preferences prior to presentation to the chief executive are likely to result in overly-optimistic policies. Individual organizations’ optimistic estimates survive because each is reluctant to challenge the others’ perspectives for fear of generating reciprocal resistance. This “go-along-to-

get-along” approach fails to question basic assumptions and information from the war that undermines current beliefs will be discounted, while confirming evidence will be trumpeted. In another deviation, a predominant advisor who suppresses dissenting views prior to their arrival at the president’s desk is likely to create bureaucratic turf wars, where the advisor with access attempts to preserve it while other organizations attempt to expand their own. In these situations, updating of beliefs will be driven by the outcome of bureaucratic battles, rather than rational consideration of battlefield information.

Finally, these decision-making rules will have direct influence on the state’s ability to terminate a war. Presidential decisions in war are inevitably based on information provided by advisors and representatives of bureaucracies. They provide the information input to the system; the president does not directly observe battlefield outcomes. In order for the state to act rationally, new information must be assessed and integrated quickly. If this process is effective, the state’s leadership can recognize transient opportunities and understand when demands should be lowered.

The dependent variable in this dissertation is the characterization of a state’s bargaining position described by two elements: the extent of the demands placed on an adversary, and how closely those demands are supported by current battlefield conditions. Both of these will be driven by the rules of the game discussed above, which are described by two independent variables. First is the degree of plurality of perspectives in the advisory meetings with the executive on the conflict. This will be the primary determinant in a state’s ability to update its beliefs. Second is the aggregation rule used to determine the extent of the demands made for termination with competing recommendations.
Given the argument and variables described above, this dissertation makes the following hypotheses. Detailed discussion can be found in Chapter 3:

**Hypothesis 1:** As the number of alternative interpretations of endogenous wartime information provided to the foreign policy executive increases, the likelihood that the rational bargaining position is encapsulated across those interpretations also increases.

**Hypothesis 2:** The processes that are used to resolve these alternative interpretations of endogenous wartime information will determine if the executive is able to discern the rational bargaining position or arrives at a decision based on bureaucratic biases. This will influence both the extent of the state’s demands and the state’s ability to update appropriately.

**Hypothesis 2a:** Resolution processes that are characterized by aggregation of institutional preferences are more likely to result in overly-optimistic demands that are unacceptably high for an opponent, preventing earnest bargaining.

**Hypothesis 2b:** Resolution processes that are characterized by narrow selection among institutional preferences are more likely to result in demands determined by competition between advocates.

**Research Strategy and Design**

For analysis, I will focus on post-World War II US cases for the following reasons. First, the 1947 National Security Act and subsequent modifications established the most comprehensive foreign policy bureaucracies in existence. Now operating with well-established procedures (with the potential exception of the new Department of Homeland Defense), the bureaucracies have survived multiple presidential administrations. Second, focusing on a single
state’s system places an emphasis on accounting for variation within a single regime type, which has been an under-explored topic in bargaining theory.

I will test the above hypotheses through conducting structured, focused comparisons of four cases. The cases will focus on the U.S.’s attempts to terminate the conflicts under study. This will include instances of decision-making earlier in the war; an unsuccessful attempt to terminate a conflict is as valuable to this dissertation as a successful one. Studies of war termination that concern themselves only with the closing stages of the war will miss important dynamics of domestic processes. The typological theory described in Chapter 3 consists of four spaces; each case study occupies one of these spaces. This is a building block approach, with the intent of identifying the conditions leading to each of the posited outcomes. This study will be structured around the following questions:

**At the Bureaucratic Level:**

- Are bureaucratic interpretations of battlefield information biased? Do recommendations for preferred policies over-estimate benefits while under-estimating costs?
- Does the participation of multiple bureaucracies result in multiple interpretations of battlefield information?
- Under what conditions do bureaucracies reevaluate their recommendations and assessments?
- How do the bureaucratic rules of the game influence initial bureaucratic assessments?
- How do they influence revisions?

**At the State Level:**

- How closely related are battlefield outcomes to belief revision?

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20 Ibid., 78.
• What is the influence on decision-making of multiple interpretations of battlefield info?
• How are competing interpretations of battlefield information reconciled? What are the effects of the selected reconciliation approach?
• If battlefield outcomes are not the primary driver of belief revisions, under what conditions do these revisions take place?
• Do re-evaluations improve understanding, or result in further bias?
• What are the origins of settlement terms? How does a state determine which are negotiable?
• Are side-payments used extensively to find acceptable settlement terms?
• How does a state recognize appropriate conditions for a potential offer?

Although the bargaining literature typically focuses on the dyadic interaction of the belligerents in providing its explanations for various outcomes, this dissertation focuses on one side of the interaction for two reasons. First, the endogenous bargaining literature continues to move toward more comprehensive treatments of domestic processes that affect war outcomes. Second, this theory attempts to provide an accounting of variation within like-regimes. Although “good” processes may not necessarily lead to “good” outcomes (i.e., successful termination with all objectives achieved), the underlying assumption in many of the bargaining models is that rational behavior will lead to better outcomes. Therefore, this study examines what enables a state to best approximate rational behavior in demanding circumstances.

Some clarification is called for to describe the limits of this approach to the dependent variable within the context of bargaining approaches. Where many bargaining models of war attempt to describe the conditions that lead to termination through examining traditional variables such as duration, costs, benefits, and information, this approach explores how well a
state can use the information it has at its disposal; it is a more in-depth exploration of one side of a dyadic interaction. In “seeing” the war and making strategic decisions based upon battlefield conditions, there are two major points at which information can be lost in the process. First, information can be lost at the point of collection because it is not observed. For example, a state may be unaware of the locations of some enemy units simply because their intelligence systems and reconnaissance units are not arrayed to detect them. This causes a difference between the complete and true conditions of the battlefield (T), which can never be fully known, and the best possible understanding of them (T').

The second point at which information can be lost is at the point of interpretation. Here, the executive and the advisors attempt to make sense of available information and create policy and decide upon termination demands. There are three possible responses to information handled here: it may be inappropriately discounted, it may be given unwarranted importance, or it may be correctly interpreted. As more information is correctly interpreted, it is more likely the executive will appropriately match demands to conditions and gain a better appreciation of actual costs and benefits associated with the options under consideration. An ideal decision process is only expected to minimize the difference between their flawed understanding and T', rather than create a fully rational bargaining position. This dissertation is an argument about the self-imposed limits on rationality.

**Key Findings**

This study found strong evidence to support the above hypotheses as well as the general assertion that improving a state’s ability to handle new information also improved its ability to terminate a war. Processes that are used to incentivize a competitive analysis of raw data – sometimes termed a “multiple advocacy” or “team of rivals” process – generated more useful
information than those that relied upon the perspectives of relatively few advisors. The combination of independent variables affected the processing of information in predictable ways.

The origin of bias in advisors is not as important as whether or not the decision system can implement effective controls. Multiple biases can improve the decisions of the executive under certain conditions. First, the group of advisors cannot be similarly-biased. Different preferences for decisions will generate alternative interpretations of information, and incentivize reliance on different sources of information. Second, each advisor’s interpretation of that information must be challenged by the dissenting advisors “in public.” This ensures all players have the opportunity to benefit from new information. A decision strategy that narrowly selects from the options presented further encourages the best use of available information for advocates on all sides as they attempt to ensure their perspectives dominate the outcome.

Deviation from these conditions results in predictable outcomes. As the degree of plurality of perspectives is reduced, so are the sources of information. The likelihood that decisions will be based upon biased assessments is enhanced and degrades a state’s ability to properly interpret battlefield information. Similarly, the tendency to seek an aggregated policy with the preferences of multiple advocates represented will lead to overly optimistic termination demands as similarly-biased advocates reinforce each others’ assessments. When decisions are made hastily and in a single-step process that does not revisit assumptions and assessments, the bias of the dominant player tends to frame decisions. Framing was also observed in decisions based on previous policy statements, even when they were no longer appropriate. Once these decisions were made, players were reluctant to ignore sunk costs and change course. Uncontrolled processes aggregated preferences prior to presidential consideration and provided the president only a single option, which became the default policy. All of these deviations
resulted in decisions based more heavily on internal dynamics and demonstrated weaker
collections to the conditions of the battlefield.

**Dissertation Plan**

This dissertation will proceed in four additional sections. In Chapter 2, I will review the relevant literature on bargaining theory and identify weaknesses in its attempt to account for deviations from rational behavior. The bargaining model of war has provided important insights, but has been delving into domestic politics to a greater degree to account for these deviations. The role of certainty vs. uncertainty in war initiation, the causes of Bayesian updating delays during the war, and the origins and non-substitutability of termination demands remain fertile ground for exploration. This chapter will lay the groundwork for my theory.

In Chapter 3, I provide a comprehensive treatment of a theory that accounts for variation in a state’s ability to base its war-termination demands on available battlefield information. As discussed, it will center on the bureaucratic “rules of the game” which either provide the foreign policy executive with the tools needed to end a war, or provide it with misleading information that prevents convergence on an appropriate war-terminating bargain.

Chapters 4 through 7 provide single case studies of each posited type of bureaucratic process that aggregates preferences and information. Each case study will discuss the historical context of the decisions in the closing phases of the war, and assess any potential missed opportunities for termination earlier in the conflict that can be attributed to information mishandling. The focus of each case study will be on the interactions of the bureaucracies and key advisors that support decision-making, guided by the structure questions listed above. In the conclusion, I will summarize my findings and identify further research opportunities.
Chapter 2: Politics and War Termination

Clausewitz’s famous dictum that war is “the continuation of politics through other means” is actually a paraphrase of a section title from Book 1 of On War, which states: “War is merely the continuation of policy by other means.” The paraphrase, and to extent the actual wording, indicate a wall between “normal politics” and war. This was a break he did not intend to imply, as the bulk of his writing indicates. Clausewitz died before completing the intended revision of his work, which would more clearly emphasize several points. Books 7 and 8 were written late in his life, and provide a more comprehensive statement of his perspective on themes he intended to integrate into revisions of On War. Critically, he re-states his concept on the relationship between war and politics:

“We maintain… that war is simply a continuation of political intercourse, with the addition of other means {emphasis added}. We deliberately use the phrase “with the addition of other means” because we also want to make it clear that war in itself does not suspend political intercourse or change it into something entirely different. In essentials that intercourse continues, irrespective of the means it employs.”

This revision (though not necessarily a revision of Clausewitz’s concept of the relationship between war and politics) mirrors the one that has taken place in international relations literature in recent decades. Earlier works emphasized the role of bargaining prior to war and paid less attention to the bargaining that takes place within war to reach a political settlement. In short, it ignored the role of war as a bargaining tool, and instead treated war as a bargaining failure. It is the bargaining within war that underscores the more intimate connection between politics and war that was missing in most academic treatments, but was central in Clausewitz’s work.

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Bargaining within war, however, requires that states party to the conflict integrate information that is more recently developed than preferences held before the war began. Furthermore, the value of this information may be transient and it may undermine prior beliefs. A state’s ability to process this information effectively will better enable it to tailor demands and seize opportunities. Yet even if a state is more effective in modifying its demands, how does it determine what demands are non-negotiable and which are not?

This chapter will identify the major themes and theories associated with war termination and bargaining theory as well as identify existing gaps. It will demonstrate that relatively recent theoretical developments indicate that more detailed examinations of domestic decision making are warranted. Specifically, this will provide insight that is not available through a rational, unitary actor approach that assumes abundant information which is rapidly integrated into a coherent perspective. This review will first examine the role of information in rationalist models that account for the success or failure of the bargaining process prior to war. Next, it will assess the sufficiency of the current literature in explaining belligerents’ inability to terminate a war quickly once it begins. Third, it will examine the dominant themes that attempt to account for irrational positions during war by the state. Finally, it will assess the ability of bureaucratic politics to fill existing gaps which continues the focus on competition below the state level, completing the bargaining model’s emphasis on politics “all the way down.”

**Why Can’t States Settle and Avoid War?**

Thomas Schelling, writing in the 1960s, brought attention to the bargaining aspects of crisis management.² With the specter of nuclear war, however, his emphasis was typically on

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manipulating risk and making threats to achieve objectives while limiting escalation. This is evident in the concepts he emphasized such as deterrence, “last clear chance”\(^3\) and “balance of prudence.”\(^4\) Even when dealing with limited wars, he was chiefly concerned with establishing mutually recognized boundaries to control escalation.\(^5\) His emphasis is understandable in a time where the “rules” of Cold War engagements were still being deciphered by the superpowers and secondary players. If overreaction was the greatest evil in the bipolar system, avoiding war was the central issue to be addressed by works that were intended to inform policy.

This perspective of war as a costly lottery (where both sides pay avoidable costs due to a breakdown in the bargaining process) continued, with a full articulation presented by Fearon and Powell.\(^6\) Fearon asserts that for rational states, an \textit{ex ante} bargaining range must exist because war is always inefficient \textit{ex post}.\(^7\) Provided the belligerents have sufficient information, they should be able to discern the costs and benefits associated with going to war and arrive at bargaining positions that provide the net benefits to both sides. Failing to arrive at these rational bargaining positions only add costs since the war outcome is predictable based on relative power. Therefore, the fact that wars occur at all is a puzzle.

Since a lack of information is the only thing that prevents the belligerents from arriving at these bargaining positions, the rationalist perspective must rely on private information and incentives to misrepresent that information to answer to the central question: what prevents states from locating a bargain both sides prefer to war?\(^8\) The suggestion that the risk of inefficient war

\(^3\) Schelling, \textit{Arms and Influence}, 44.
\(^4\) Ibid., 259.
\(^7\) Fearon, “Rationalist Explanations for War,” 388.
\(^8\) Ibid., 382.
may provide the only real incentive to reveal this information parallels Schelling’s “manipulation of risk” concept in which the shared risk of war may incentivize settlement.

The rationalist perspective on pre-war bargaining makes several assumptions. First, it requires the assumption of a unitary actor, or at least a rational leader with substantial, if not total, control over the national security apparatus. The unitary actor assumption simplifies the second and third assumptions identified in the following paragraphs. Namely, it provides a single set of consistent preferences that are updated as new information is received. In addition, this unitary actor assumption aligns a state’s intentions with its actions; policies are purposefully executed to achieve an objective. Finally, a unitary actor approach also enables a parallel argument that when faced with similar circumstances, states will make similar choices. From a bargaining perspective, this enables a researcher to argue what a bargain “should” be and develop mechanisms to explain behavior.

Second, rationality assumes the actors have consistently ordered preferences over outcomes that they can use to guide decision-making, with costs and benefits associated with each potential course of action. Out of the available courses of action, the actor chooses the one that provides the greatest net benefit. In terms of bargaining, this assumption establishes some stability in the bargaining position that facilitates convergence between the belligerents. For example, if the first course of action does not provide the intended benefits, an actor chooses the

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9 Schelling, Arms and Influence, 92–105.
10 Fearon, “Rationalist Explanations for War,” 382. Fearon restricts his puzzle to rational, unitary actors.
12 Kenneth N. Waltz, Theory of International Politics, 1st ed. (Long Grove, IL: Waveland Press, Inc., 2010), 95–97 Waltz argues that differentiation occurs through capability distribution. This is similar to bargaining theory, where states demand more based on their capability to seize it.
14 Miles Kahler, “Rationality in International Relations,” International Organization 52, no. 4 (October 1, 1998): 923. In this case, the president acts as a “dictator” under Arrow’s Theorem and has the power to make the final decision and avoids intransitive preferences.
next closest alternative. If that actor suddenly chose the course of action that yielded substantially more costs once the ideal outcome was not achievable, a mutually-acceptable bargain would not emerge.

Third, actors must be highly adept at the efficient use of information. In other words, as new information becomes available on factors such as potential costs and benefits, a decision is based upon the latest information and not the previously held beliefs. It is not necessary to assume complete information to consider an actor rational. For example, Fearon’s rationalist explanation allows for private (incomplete) information. It is only necessary that the actor recognizes new information and considers possible alternatives to achieve its goals.\(^\text{15}\)

In order to improve the ability of states to bargain and successfully avoid war, the costly lottery perspective suggests that the primary issue that must be overcome is the information discrepancy between the two sides, or asymmetric information. The rationality assumptions described above lead to the conclusion that once credible information becomes available, it will inform subsequent choices. One potential way to accomplish this is through enhancing a state’s ability to credibly signal information to the other belligerent. While “cheap talk” may not convince an adversary of the likelihood of conflict, assuming audience costs through public commitments or creating sunk costs through troop deployment may provide bargaining leverage.\(^\text{16}\) Interestingly, Fearon finds that leaders do better through tying their hands by making public commitments. However, from a strict unitary actor perspective, only the sunk cost creation should matter (though considering sunk costs in deciding future actions is not rational in


a strict sense). In order to solve a unitary actor problem, this approach relies upon a non-unitary actor solution.

War might also be due to incomplete information in the form of mutual optimism; while neither side is fully informed about the potential costs associated with a war, both assume they can secure more through war than at the bargaining table. Therefore, there is no potential bargaining range acceptable to both sides. In a critique of this possible cause of war, Fey and Ramsay (2007) assert that the act of committing to war should correct misperceptions between optimistic belligerents and facilitate a peaceful settlement. In a rebuttal, Slantchev and Tarar show that mutual optimism creates conditions in which both sides attempt to correct the others’ misperceptions and this in and of itself may lead to war, even in environments in which there exist mutually acceptable bargains. Mutual optimism remains a convincing explanation for the outbreak of war. However, bargaining theory is silent on the sources of mutual optimism, as well as why a state would maintain its optimism in the face of mounting costly signals.

Slantchev’s and Tarar’s critique of Fey and Ramsay relies upon a formal model to show that mutual optimism is a possible mechanism that results in war, but does not address why a state will not update its beliefs, aside from asserting that “frictionless learning” is not actually possible in crisis situations. Sunk costs in the form of military deployments should cause a belief update in the belligerents since such a signal is far from requiring a “frictionless” update; deployments are costly and slow and provide ample time for updating a belief. In a fashion similar to Fearon’s hands-tying solution, Slantchev and Tarar rely upon an irrational response

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20 Ibid., 147.
(discounting costly signals) on the part of at least one belligerent to propose a solution for a rational problem (finding an acceptable bargain prior to war).

The rationalist perspective on the choices states face with a war approaching retains a central weakness. It must assume that the costs each side pays during the war and the benefits each side receives are independent of the choices made by the combatants. In other words, it conceptualizes all of the potential costs and benefits as fixed, fully predictable, and measured in a common unit so that the unitary actor can make a rational choice. This conceptualization also allows the standard model to treat the objectives of each side (the benefits) as perfectly substitutable with the addition of side payments (the common unit approach continues with the dyadic treatment of endogenous war termination discussed in the next section). Once we allow for the possibility that the actions taken in the war alter the potential costs and benefits available to both sides, it becomes more difficult to conceptualize the outbreak of war as a mere bargaining failure.

In viewing war as an alternative means to secure those interests which could not be secured through successful bargaining, the standard model also creates several empirical problems. First, by accounting for bargaining failure through private information and incentives to misrepresent, this approach implies that once fighting begins, private information on relative costs and capabilities are revealed and should lead to a rapid termination of the war. Second, by calculating expected utility for an ex post outcome based on ex ante preferences, the model implies the only relevant information for war termination resides in pre-war relative strengths

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22 For an example of how domestic processes might make an issue indivisible, see Stacie E. Goddard, “Uncommon Ground: Indivisible Territory and the Politics of Legitimacy,” *International Organization* 60, no. 1 (January 1, 2006): 35–68; Fearon, “Rationalist Explanations for War,” 382 argues that even issues made indivisible by domestic processes can still be compensated for through side payments. This is only possible if the benefits and side payments are converted to like units and benefits are substitutable.
and costs. With a focus on information exogenous to the war, the standard model is challenged to account for prolonged wars and negotiated settlements.

**Why Can’t States Settle Quickly, Once War Starts?**

A second approach to bargaining and war emphasizes the role of fighting in revealing information and coordinating expectations between the belligerents that remained unclear in the early stages of the war. Hence, this approach emphasizes the role of endogenous information, which was generated over the course of the conflict, in terminating the dispute. It also retains Clausewitz’s intended emphasis on the influence of politics throughout a war and into a negotiated peace; it is the assessment of conditions and appropriate modification of demands that characterize the endogenous information approach. Slantchev asserts that the value of the information obtained during the war outweighs that which was available before the war started, particularly when unexpected battlefield outcomes are involved.

This second-wave of research, termed the bargaining model of war, also has an advantage over the standard model in that it allows for states to change their value assessments during the course of the conflict based on the outcome of battles. The standard model requires states to make calculations based on projections of relative military power. In contrast, the bargaining model provides states with actual demonstrations of relative power that can be used to change wartime objectives. This has practical relevance, since 40% of post-1945 military

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27 Dan Reiter, “Exploring the Bargaining Model of War,” *Perspectives on Politics* 1, no. 1 (March 2003): 27–43 makes the distinction between bargaining theory, which focuses on bargaining before war, and the bargaining model of war, which focuses on bargaining during the war itself.
disputes resulted in strong states settling for something less than their primary objective when facing a weaker opponent.  

In general, this endogenous information approach sees a favorable battlefield outcome for a belligerent leading to an increase in termination demands, while an unfavorable outcome results in a lowering of termination demands.  

Over the course of the war, expectations on both sides converge and lead to a settlement.

This approach makes some minor modifications to the standard model’s assumptions to deal with the fact that war has occurred, and the belligerents continue to attempt to secure favorable outcomes. First, the model still assumes rationality, but the literature has made some allowances for non-unitary actors. This has been done with an almost exclusive focus on leaders attempting to retain office.

Second, the belligerents retain ordered preferences, though the costs and benefits change throughout the war associated with each possible course of action. This is particularly challenging as the calculation of domestic costs and benefits enter in the assessment process, given the assumption above. Battlefield events generate more concrete information than what was available before the war and is used to update wartime demands.

This approach places a premium on a war’s ability to reduce uncertainty between the belligerents; the battlefield will

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quickly reveal the missing information. Re-calculated costs and benefits should re-order preferences based on the newly revealed information, and incentivize an appropriate settlement. Theoretically, this perspective cannot account for why a state would continue to sink costs into a course of action to secure preferences that should have changed.

The bargaining model generally retains the assumption of efficient use of information by the parties to the conflict. As indicated above, the decision to continue the war is made by a belligerent that continues to see advantages. Less convincing is the bargaining model’s account for why a state would continue a war despite mounting evidence of the state objectives becoming unattainable. One possible explanation that has been offered is a higher cost tolerance on the part of the militarily inferior side. An alternative is a leader’s decision to “gamble for resurrection,” in which the leader becomes more risk-tolerant in attempting to find a winning strategy and retain office. However, these accounts lose explanatory power when applied to states that are more powerful militarily than their opponents (the militarily superior side would not require a higher cost tolerance in the first case during the war since it would not be accumulating costs at the same rate, and it would not find itself in the situation described by the second situation).

As indicated, there have been two broad categories of literature that fall under the bargaining model of war rubric (endogenous bargaining). The first can be considered a closer approximation of the standard model in that it finds the primary independent variables in the dyadic relationship between the belligerents; the information that matters is generated by their interactions. The second deviates further from the standard perspective, and incorporates more

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33 Edward D. Mansfield and Jack Snyder, “Democratic Transitions, Institutional Strength, and War,” *International Organization* 56, no. 2 (April 1, 2002): 304. Although this article dealt with pre-war risk calculations, the argument has been applied in the bargaining model in works such as: Chiozza and Goemans, “Peace Through Insecurity”; Goemans, “Which Way Out?”
independent variables from the domestic setting. This ranges from the extreme (diversionary war) to the more moderate (constraints that prevent leaders from pursuing strategies they might otherwise try). The remainder of this section will explore these two categories’ perspectives on two issues: war duration and termination demands. Both of these provide insight on a state’s ability, or inability, to successfully end a war.

Explaining the duration of any given war is a significant challenge for bargaining models. Early work prior to the formalization of bargaining theory on war duration indicated that the likelihood a war would end at any given time decreased as the total duration of the war increased; there was an inverse relationship. In other words, wars become entrenched and participants less likely to settle. Bennett and Stam responded with a study that held war termination was not duration dependent, but that the earlier model was under-specified. By including variables on military strategy, regime-type, and terrain, they were able to improve prediction on war duration. This model (which was published prior to Fearon’s 1995 article) did not address information directly. A strict interpretation of the bargaining model would hold that wars are duration dependent regardless of the other factors analyzed. As the war takes place, information about expected costs and benefits should accumulate quickly and lead to a settlement. At each point in the war, settlement should become more likely as the duration of the war increases. However, some recent work theoretically reinforces the earlier assertion that war may, in fact, become entrenched. Information accumulation by itself does not increase the

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36 Scott Wolford, Dan Reiter, and Clifford J. Carrubba, “Information, Commitment, and War,” *Journal of Conflict Resolution* 55, no. 4 (August 2011): 556–579. The article asserts that attempting to resolve uncertainty through fighting may lead to a continuation of the war.
probability war will end.\(^{37}\) A convincing explanation for this inefficient use of information is required.

From the approach that finds causality in the dyadic relationship, rather than domestic factors, Powell (2004) suggests that the bargaining environment through which negotiation takes place might influence the duration of a war.\(^{38}\) He describes the environment as a source of uncertainty—characteristics that may distort signals sent between the belligerents. If signals can be sent more quickly, provided they are received by the other side, then the war can be terminated faster.\(^{39}\) Since this environment is created by the methods the two sides use to interact, causality remains with the international system. However, this treatment of the interaction seems to point to one or both sides’ inability to send or interpret costly signals. An improvement in actor capabilities would improve the bargaining environment; it is not clear that the environment itself is an independently manipulable factor.

The dyadic approach also suggests that war duration may be linked to the outcome of early battles. With one side sustaining early losses, both sides may update their beliefs effectively to accurately perceive the distribution of capabilities and reach agreement.\(^{40}\) This is consistent with Bennett and Stam’s study that asserted power parity would likely lead to longer conflicts, while greater disparity would shorten them.\(^{41}\) Slantchev suggests parity may be a useful proxy for uncertainty.\(^{42}\) If early battle outcomes are not decisive, uncertainty may remain on the likely course of the conflict. Yet parity itself is a source of information about the critical relationship between the capabilities of the belligerents and the distribution of goods over which

\(^{39}\) Ibid.
\(^{41}\) Bennett and Stam, “The Duration of Interstate Wars, 1816-1985,” 251.
\(^{42}\) Slantchev, “How Initiators End Their Wars,” 816.
they are fighting and early stalemates should reveal information on willingness to fight and
tolerance for costs to both sides. The relative power parity should inform the belligerents that
the probability of costs associated with the war will be high, with multiple battles ending in
stalemate. The bargaining model would suggest that neither side will have sufficient power to
seize their objectives, that they will realize the distribution of goods reflects the distribution of
power, and that the war should terminate quickly. The studies mentioned above do not follow
this logic.

The domestic factor approach to the bargaining model relies upon a principal-agent
construct in which the principal (the population or other manifestation of the state) rewards or
punishes the agent (the state’s leader) on the basis of war performance. The literature that
examines the relationship of regime type to war duration provides one perspective on this
principal-agent problem. In general, it holds that leaders will avoid settlements that may result in
political repercussions, which likely prolongs the war. Leaders in semi-repressive states that are
not sufficiently strong to retain power in the event of a loss will face harsher treatment than a
leader from a free society and are likely to take more risks which will prolong their wars. In
extreme examples, a leader may resort to diversionary war to ensure his or her political well-
being through shoring up support.

Work that examines domestic politics and its relationship to war duration in freer
societies is scarce. Furthermore, there is little work that examines variation in war duration in
like-regimes. Stanley and Sawyer (2009) is an exception, and suggests that coalitions supporting
a leader have unchanging interests in a war’s outcome; arriving at a bargain requires a change in

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44 See Goemans, “Fighting for Survival.”
45 Tarar, “Diversionary Incentives and the Bargaining Approach to War.” Tarar suggests that the incentive to engage
in diversionary war is dependent upon the benefits in remaining in office; if benefits are high enough, the leader may
become more risk-tolerant.
the coalition in order to update the state’s bargaining position. In this conception, a leader may perceive a change that should be made in termination demands but is simply unable to offer a new bargain due to the likely loss of domestic support. Therefore, wars in which leaders are not able to secure their original demands will last longer. The selectorate may believe new leadership will bring the war to a close faster and a new supporting coalition for the new leadership may actually enable this outcome.

Work analyzing the specific terms of settlements is also rare, though the formal models assume costs and benefits can be easily aggregated and converted to a common unit for analysis. While this approach has provided important insights on when states should settle, it provides less insight on what states should settle for. This is because the approach suggests all goals are substitutable with the use of side payments to make up value differences between preferences over outcomes. It therefore lacks the ability to explain why one set of terms were accepted over another. That war demands are modified by the course of the conflict describes the endogenous war termination model by definition, though the closest approximation it has to this abstract conceptualization is divisible territory.

The domestic factors approach may provide more insight on the origins of wartime demands for settlement terms. Works that use a selectorate or coalition as independent variables can explain a state’s ability to bargain by looking at the preferences of those groups to infer termination demands. This provides an answer for the dyadic approach’s inability to explain

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why one set of demands may not be perfectly substitutable for another. Though equal in value from a neutral standpoint, if one offer does not meet the preferences of the coalition in power, it will not be accepted.

Viewing war as a costly process (the bargaining model of war) rather than viewing it as a costly lottery\(^49\) (the standard model in which war is a failure of bargaining) improves our explanatory power about wartime behavior by dealing more directly with the connections between war and termination demands. Earlier, this dissertation asserted that the costly lottery conception had a weakness in assuming costs and benefits were independent of the actions taken during the war. The central weakness in the costly process conception is the assumption that events distribute information equally between belligerents. Misperception in both the costly lottery and costly process perspectives is typically explained through private information and incentives to misrepresent; threats or concessions made by one side may not be trusted since it is advantageous to lie. However, once an event occurs (such as a battle that informs on relative capability), information from that event should be easily observable and integrated into beliefs on both sides even though other information may remain private (cost tolerance and the likely outcome of future battles). Domestic constraints may prevent a leader from acting on those new beliefs, but events that have occurred are understood. Psychological approaches, in contrast, attribute misperception more often to the cognitive limitations of participants.\(^50\) Even once an event occurs it may not provide the same quality of information to each, if one is better able to interpret it.

\(^{49}\) A distinction made in Powell, “Bargaining and Learning While Fighting.”

How does the Bargaining Model Account for Irrational Choices?

For bargaining models that seek to explain the decision to go to war, the origins of the state’s preferences for outcomes are immaterial. As Lake asserts, “One can think of the national ideal point simply as the sum of different individual ideal points as aggregated through some set of domestic political institutions.” With that as the starting point, the decision to bargain or go to war within the costly lottery construct can be evaluated through various mechanisms with the central insights of bargaining theory preserved. However, when the national ideal point is determined and/or revised during the course of the war based on endogenous information this process directly influences the state’s ability to reach a terminating agreement. As new information becomes available, the costly process model holds that belligerents will modify their expectations to arrive at a rational bargaining position; one that makes demands for settlement commensurate with what the battlefield has revealed.

The endogenous war bargaining literature makes a simplifying assumption about judgment errors during war: it assumes these errors are deviations from an optimal course of action, rather than systemic events. If poor decisions were a result of a systemic flaw, a convincing bargaining model would be required to identify the types of flaws that will influence decision-making. Additionally, a rational treatment would be challenged to account for why a state would not change its systemically-flawed process. Restricting itself from a more detailed examination of domestic influences, a key issue for the bargaining model is accounting for the lag in Bayesian updating. Why would a state not act upon new information and make appropriate modifications during the war?

52 For models that incorporate domestic factors, demands will also be based upon what the selectorate can support, or at least tolerate.
53 Slantchev, Military Threats, 9.
The bargaining literature has identified four explanations for this question; three are found within the dyadic interaction, and one within the domestic factors. The most common approach is to assume that asymmetries remain, even after the revelation of new information. This is a continuation of incentives to misrepresent information or keep it private during the actual conflict. Although the battles may reveal something about relative capabilities, participants may believe there is more information that has not yet been revealed, particularly regarding cost tolerance and the ability to hold the domestic coalition together, that should influence their decisions. Some work indicates the context of the battles matter in terms of how credible the information is. For example, an attacker that loses early battles may offer more conciliatory terms that are more likely to be acceptable to the defender.\textsuperscript{54} Since an attacker within the bargaining model should have believed an early victory was likely, losing the opening battles should correct those beliefs. Similarly, an outcome in a battle during a more protracted war that is surprising to both sides may incentivize a more rapid settlement.\textsuperscript{55} Such battles may indicate that a turning point has been reached in the war, and that the momentum may have shifted insurmountably to that battle’s victor, encouraging a negotiated settlement. In the absence of these conditions, the costly process approach holds that incentives to misrepresent information to the other side continue to play a role in prolonging the war. If these asymmetries remain, this explanation cannot account for how a belligerent recognizes an approaching termination opportunity in a negotiated settlement, since each side continues to assume more information remains, but hidden.

Second, although a mutually acceptable settlement may exist, the belligerents have difficulty in accepting that the other side will abide by the settlement. Even with complete

\textsuperscript{54} Filson and Werner, “A Bargaining Model of War and Peace,” 828.
\textsuperscript{55} Ramsay, “Settling It on the Field,” 855–856.
information about the current state of affairs, the commitment problem may dominate the
decision.\textsuperscript{56} The problem arises due to the shifting distribution of power, which may incentivize a
rising belligerent who negotiated an earlier settlement to demand more favorable terms in the
future. War’s grim function to eliminate this problem may be to sufficiently reduce the size of
the potential gains in the future by destroying the objectives sought in the conflict.\textsuperscript{57} Since both
sides have an interest in preserving the “size of the pie” for later exploitation, both are
couraged to settle quickly. At the same time, both realize what the other is doing, and also
have an incentive to continue the war and delay the other’s eventual rise which dominates the
previous incentive. These problems and incentives arise specifically due to the inability to
predict a belligerent’s behavior in the future, and thus provide an explanation for irrational
responses (continuing the war even though a mutually acceptable bargaining range currently
exists). This does not address how either side determines when the pie is sufficiently small.

Third, the belligerents may simply have difficulty in coordinating expectations during the
conflict. Changing wartime demands due to endogenous information may actually complicate
the participants’ ability to converge on a negotiated settlement. For example, battlefield success
may lead a belligerent to revise demands upwards, lowering the probability that its opponent can
accept the harsher terms.\textsuperscript{58} Cognitive biases (prospect theory) and pragmatic concerns like
reputation as a tough bargainer can amplify this effect; an early loser in opening engagements
may still be reluctant to accept an offer that is inferior to a previous one. In a reversal of the
earlier observation that opening failures in battles will lead an attacker to lower expectations, this

\textsuperscript{56} See, for example: Powell, “Bargaining and Learning While Fighting”; Wolford, Reiter, and Carrubba,
“Information, Commitment, and War”; and Ahmer Tarar and Bahar Leventoğlu, “Public Commitment in Crisis
\textsuperscript{57} Bahar Levento-lu and Branislav L. Slantchev, “The Armed Peace: A Punctuated Equilibrium Theory of War,”
\textit{American Journal of Political Science} 51, no. 4 (October 2007): 767.
\textsuperscript{58} Wittman, “How a War Ends,” 749.
indicates success on the part of the attacker encourages more expansive demands; a bargaining space never develops between the two. If there is a momentum change during the war, this suggests that at some point, a mutually acceptable bargaining range did exist. However, one or both sides failed to realize this, and one side’s upward revision sped past the other’s static position (out of a reluctance to accept less). This possibility does not provide an explanation why the belligerents could not recognize and seize the quickly passing opportunity in a momentum reversal; this is more powerful in accounting for early success coupled with expanding demands since a bargaining space acceptable to both sides would never develop.

Finally, domestic pressures may prevent the state’s leadership from seizing new opportunities as they arise. Although Fearon suggests leaders would suffer audience costs by backing down on threats made during escalation, Slantchev takes a more general approach. Since the audience may not punish a leader for bluffing if that is the optimal approach, he suggests audiences may instead punish on the basis of divergence from their preferred policy. In an application of the principle agent problem, citizens seek information about the performance of national leaders and evaluate on the basis of policy quality. A leader that becomes too generous in a proposed settlement offer for a crisis would potentially pay these audience costs. However, this explanation for sub-optimal decisions is more oriented toward performance throughout the war, rather than on the basis of individual decisions. A leader may gamble on one decision because of perceived benefits later, even if the audience may not approve of that particular decision. Audience costs do not provide a finely-tuned control mechanism that could account for a series of poor decisions.

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60 Slantchev, “Politicians, the Media, and Domestic Audience Costs,” 448.
In order to offer an accounting for divergent beliefs, a recent series of comments in the *Journal of Conflict Resolution* took up the issue of the common priors assumption (CPA).\(^\text{61}\)

Specifically, is it necessary that a bargaining model assume both sides begin with a common understanding of the environment? Smith and Stam argue that belligerents with divergent beliefs at the start of the game more accurately portray the real world. Their primary motivation is to provide a mechanism that may account for how states with divergent beliefs might find an acceptable settlement.\(^\text{62}\) They also point out that there is ample evidence that even with identical information players can find themselves in disagreement.\(^\text{63}\) Fey and Ramsay assert that the CPA more effectively focuses attention on aspects of the problem under scrutiny, and that it is flexible enough to allow for divergent beliefs when experiencing the same event.\(^\text{64}\) This flexibility does not identify the cause of the divergent assessments, only showing that they are possible. If one assessment process is better than another, why does a rational actor not adjust its processes?

If judgment errors are minor deviations rather than systemic events, it is more difficult to account for the “ample evidence” of actors reaching divergent conclusions about the same events. Fearon’s approach to complexity in the environment holds that failure to understand freely-available information is due to differences in “ability to cope” with it,\(^\text{65}\) which is more systemic than a minor deviation. If this coping ability influences endogenous information assessment, then it is closely related to the creation of a bargaining position. A complete theory of crisis behavior requires a thorough accounting for domestic processes that come into play

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\(^\text{64}\) Fey and Ramsay, “The Common Priors Assumption,” 611.

\(^\text{65}\) Fearon, “Rationalist Explanations for War,” 393.
during that crisis, which the bargaining model neglects. If war is politics “all the way down,” then examining intra-governmental competition may provide additional insight on how information is interpreted and how the individual preference points are aggregated to a national bargaining position.

**Can Bureaucratic Politics Enhance Understanding of Endogenous Bargaining?**

In a special 1970 issue of the *Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science*, entitled “How Wars End,” three contributors assessed the explanatory power of domestic pressures in accounting for a state’s ability to terminate a war. Of the three, two placed a heavy emphasis on public opinion. The insights gained through this approach were explored earlier in this chapter. But these works are less useful in accounting for changes in bargaining positions over time frames that do not align with changes in public opinion or domestic coalitions. The process by which the belligerents internally revise their expectations and demands is under-explored.

The third article in the “How Wars End” issue of the *Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science* more explicitly examined the role of bureaucratic competition in determining a termination offer. Halperin asserts three groups of military interests (the Services, the field command, and the general staff - now referred to as the Joint Staff) and the interests of civilian leadership clash while determining the proper course of action. His approach included the role of differing treatments of information available to the government based on

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organizational influences. Surprisingly, this is a rare examination of intra-governmental competition in the study of war termination.

Using a unitary, rational-actor approach (termed Model I, in Halperin’s and Allison’s works on the Cuban Missile Crisis) provides a simplified approach to analyzing foreign policy decisions. This is the basis upon which much of the bargaining model is built. For many of the “large” questions on international politics (i.e., why do wars start, how do they end) this approach provides a parsimonious explanation and can generate important insights. However, when asking more nuanced questions (i.e., once war starts, what prevents belligerents from rapidly reaching a settlement), it may obscure more than it reveals. Neglecting to include bureaucratic dynamics from this type of question ignores that it is the bureaucracies that are the primary makers of foreign policy and compete to control government decisions and actions.

The bureaucratic politics model posits several elements of governmental decision-making are key in understanding a state’s ability to terminate a war. Most applications in the literature begin with the following propositions:

**Proposition 1**: Player preferences correlate highly with bureaucratic positions.

**Proposition 2**: Player perceptions correlate highly with bureaucratic positions.

**Proposition 3**: A player's influence in a decision-making process flows from his or her bureaucratic position.

**Proposition 4**: A decision-making process may be understood as a bargaining situation in which players "pull" and "haul" to promote their organizational interests, with the net result that governmental decisions do not reflect the intentions of any player in particular.

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70 Ibid., 93.
The first two propositions compose the most well-known element of the bureaucratic politics model, which is the assertion that “where you stand depends on where you sit.” Implicit in this statement is the idea that individuals, both career bureaucrats and political appointees, are captured by their organizations and view national security interests through the lens of the organizations. Their positions and actions during the “game” of creating policy are driven by their perceptions of national and organizational interests, which they tend to view as highly correlated.

These first two propositions also have implications for how new information is handled by the players, which is influenced by organizational identity. An organizational identity is a collection of rules that tie actions to situations, which develop from the organization’s culture. Members of the organization have been trained by predecessors and have been given a set of enduring responsibilities to fulfill for the government, which creates a distinct culture and value set. This provides the organization with a unique world-view, or lens, that influences how it receives and interprets information. These lenses can simultaneously reveal information to an organization that is not grasped by other organizations due to a different set of concerns, and blind it to other information for similar reasons.

The third proposition, which holds that influence is related to players’ bureaucratic positioning, is a result of the “rules of the game,” which determine how analysis and recommendations are brought to bear on a problem. These rules specify who participates in decision-making, who has responsibility for what decisions, and how a final decision is made.

72 Allison and Zelikow, Essence of Decision, 153.
73 My use of the word “lens” here is distinct from Allison’s (1969) “conceptual lenses” which were his three models through which he examined historical evidence for the Cuban Missile Crisis. Its use here implies organizations view external information differently based on their mission and culture. My use is consistent with Scott Sigmund Gartner, Strategic Assessment in War (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1999).
The 1947 National Security Act (along with its subsequent amendments) provides the most substantial body of legal rules for the decision game. Individual organizations will also have internal rules that affect how issues are analyzed and conclusions are reached. Of special interest here is the set of rules that control participation in the final stages of decision-making that will influence a war termination offer. These rules, which are changed by each administration, vary more significantly than legal and organizational rules and are more closely related to a state’s ability to act rationally. They will determine who can make recommendations to the president, the range of views that are presented, and the extent to which domestic political concerns enter into the process.

The third proposition also has implications for the role of the president. In Allison’s and Halperin’s conception, the president is a player in the process but has a range of interests and powers that set him apart from the rest of the players.\(^{75}\) While many works utilizing domestic politics have emphasized the role of the next election cycle, other considerations include avoiding generation of resistance that will constrain other decisions\(^ {76}\) and ensuring implementation of the current action.\(^ {77}\) The revisionist conception of bureaucratic politics, which remains dominant today, holds the president not as a player, but as a final arbiter of the policy to be implemented.\(^ {78}\) Analysis typically examines how bureaucratic competition constrains options provided to the president for decision.

Bureaucratic politics generally holds that the president retains control when his attention is focused on the issue and his personal involvement is high. On issues that do not demand the


\(^{76}\) Halperin and Clapp, *Bureaucratic Politics and Foreign Policy*, 72.

\(^{77}\) Allison and Halperin, “Bureaucratic Politics,” 76.

full attention of the president, it expects to see a higher level of posturing by the departments to secure their interests, such as budgetary decisions. Therefore, crisis situations are cases in which presidential decision-making is expected to have an explanatory advantage. However, even in crisis situations, the president is constrained by the options and analysis presented to him by the supporting departments, which can be expanded only when the president compels them to present more options. Of central importance is the fact that it is the president that determines the range of options he considers, first through the rules he establishes for bureaucratic management, and secondly through his willingness or unwillingness to choose among those that survive the bureaucratic winnowing.

The fourth proposition, that policy is the result of competition and its final version is not the ideal conception of any one of the players, is the primary focus of the bureaucratic politics literature. Policy decisions are the result of “pulling and hauling” between the players and reflect the desires of the participants. If a participant is a representative of an organization, the pulling and hauling begins with organizational preferences and ends with a policy that meets a minimum threshold where the players that have the ability to veto a policy, do not. A decision does not necessarily translate to action, however. Implementation may be imperfect and in some cases, deliberate undermining may occur when the losers of the bureaucratic battles attempt to change the game’s outcome in their favor.

It is necessary to point out that outputs of the individual organizations (recommendations, policies, or choices) are not necessarily their optimal preferences, but “satisfactory” due to internal organizational constraints (standard operating procedures and limited resources such as

79 Stephen D. Krasner, “Are Bureaucracies Important? (Or Allison Wonderland),” Foreign Policy no. 7 (July 1972): 159–179. Krasner is critiquing a shortfall in bureaucratic politics in accounting for government actions, but acknowledges presidential involvement is needed to expand options when he is dissatisfied with those presented. 80 Allison and Zelikow, Essence of Decision, 304.
time and analytical capabilities). This strategy of “satisficing”\(^{81}\) is a result of bounded rationality, where organizations or individuals make decisions to the best of their cognitive capabilities, but not necessarily optimally. The internally-created constraints of an organization, as well as its imposed limitations, compel it to stop a search for alternatives once a minimum threshold is met;\(^{82}\) the organization’s preferences have been “satisficed.” Ultimately, the decision options available to the executive are those that are created by these organizations with a vested interest in their recommendations, which were created while operating under the aforementioned constraints.\(^{83}\)

Monten and Bennett have pointed out the necessity of distinguishing between the organizational culture and bureaucratic politics model.\(^{84}\) Where bureaucratic politics emphasizes the role of budgets and subsequent responsibility after a decision is made (a logic of consequences), an organizational culture approach emphasizes the role of compatibility with current missions and culture (a logic of appropriateness). This study borrows from both approaches for the following reasons. First, it assumes organizational culture will have an explanatory advantage in accounting for the manner in which a given organization interprets wartime information. Its organizational lens provides it with a method to sift through data and provide recommendations based on its given role. The threat of sanctions against individuals deviating from organizational preferences will enhance the likelihood that those preferences will be represented. Second, this study assumes bureaucratic politics will have an advantage in accounting for the bargaining dynamics after organizational preferences are formed, based on the rules established by the executive. A strict organizational culture approach would suggest an

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\(^{82}\) Gartner, *Strategic Assessment in War*, 34.


organization would not significantly deviate from its recommended policy once a bureaucratic conflict began, since to do so would jeopardize its set of values. This study expects to see elements of both, with the bureaucratic “rules of the game” providing one more constraint under which an organization must satisfice its recommendations.\(^8^5\)

It is interesting to note that the bargaining process that begins with the satisficed outputs of participant organizations may result in decisions that cross below a given organization’s minimally acceptable outcome preference. Agreement through bargaining among diverse interests requires modification of initial demands (as explored in detail earlier in this chapter in the bargaining model of war discussion). If players reach initial bargaining positions through a satisficing strategy, they may anticipate intolerable losses in the final bargaining agreement. Players may instead resort to a strategy where they make more extensive demands to avoid those intolerable losses. It is then left to the final decision maker, the president, to discover if an organization’s preferences are strictly based on the information available, or are unnecessarily expansive.

The bulk of the literature has tended to treat bureaucratic politics as a stand-alone independent variable while attempting to explain variable outcomes, resulting in a poor track record of consistent results.\(^8^6\) It has generally been successful at showing that, in certain cases, bureaucratic politics does influence state behavior, but has been unsuccessful at articulating how much it matters and under what conditions. It still lacks convincing contingent explanations that yield testable explanations.\(^8^7\) As a result, it has generally been better at explaining mistakes than


successes. This is due to the ease by which a researcher can point to the internal strife that led to deviations in rational choices; bureaucratic politics mattered. In contrast, when a state’s actions did approximate a rational actor, bureaucratic politics did not matter since the driving factors in decision-making must have originated in the international setting. This “error-bias” in the literature when accounting for state behavior must be corrected to successfully integrate the insights of bureaucratic politics into decision-making.

A second focus area for the literature in bureaucratic politics is assessing whether “stands” can be sufficiently predicted by “seats.” These works have focused on the first two propositions listed above, and have undertaken this more modest task with the assumption that it is a necessary first step in more robust predictions. For example, Rhodes found that prior organizational affiliation was a poor predictor of budgeting decisions made by the Chief of Naval Operations (CNO). Since the CNO rises to the position through one of three sub-specialties in the Navy (aviation, surface fleet, submarine fleet), he expected to find the CNO will make budgeting decisions based on his affiliation if bureaucratic politics matter. Since he found no evidence supporting this in what he considered a critical case, particularly since it dealt with budgeting, he recommended looking elsewhere for drivers of state behavior. He suggests that “particular sets of widely shared beliefs” have more explanatory power in accounting for decisions, but did not examine how his “competitions of ideas” that led to these shared beliefs took place.

The key test for a bureaucratic politics paradigm that enables a cumulative research program must be that state actions can be explained by the interactions of organizations and

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89 Ibid., 41.
Officials.\textsuperscript{90} From this perspective, it is not necessary that organizations always capture their agents. Several works have found that position alone is not sufficient to predict the exact stands of advisors to the president.\textsuperscript{91} Yet this does not invalidate the relevance of bureaucratic politics. When research is focusing on explaining the influence of competition between organizations, an ideal match between a “seat” and an expected “stand” is not necessary for two reasons. First, we can assume the leader of an organization is not completely at odds with its core values, since that representative was specifically selected for the position. The leader will view the organization as important, and will take stands that are consistent with this view. Second, when examining the role of competing interpretations of shared experiences that generate a quantity of information too massive for one individual to assess, leaders will rely on the analytical work of their organizations to arrive at conclusions and recommendations.

Useful paradigms provide the basis for the development of theories that generate causal inferences, provide cogent explanations, and improve predictions.\textsuperscript{92} There has been little theoretical development in bureaucratic politics in terms of developing explanations for contingent outcomes.\textsuperscript{93} By treating internal competition as a constant in explaining policies, it cannot account for variation. Yet Allison indicated more was involved in his Model III than simple competition. Action channels and rules of the game were the first two of the three elements (in addition to “action as political resultant”) that define the game.\textsuperscript{94} Preston and ‘t Hart provide one example of attempting to explain how the executive can influence the nature of

\textsuperscript{90}Welch, “A Positive Science of Bureaucratic Politics?,” 213.
\textsuperscript{91}See, for two examples, Smith, “Policy Preferences and Bureaucratic Position” in McCormick, The Domestic Sources of American Foreign Policy; and Monten and Bennett, “Models of Crisis Decision Making and the 1990-91 Gulf War.”
\textsuperscript{92}Welch, “The Organizational Process and Bureaucratic Politics Paradigms,” 116.
\textsuperscript{94}As explained in the revised Model III in Allison and Zelikow, Essence of Decision, 300–304.
bureaucratic competition, which directly affects policy choice. This approach provides an advantage in conceptualizing a way to account for the variable effects of bureaucratic competition on state action. The remainder of this section will consider whether similar approaches can provide a way to account for anomalies in endogenous war termination.

For the purposes of this study, the action channel (determining who plays) will be subsumed in the “rules of the game.” Since the focus is on the inner advisory circle of the president, the rules he establishes simultaneously determines who participates and how a decision is made. This would not be the case in more regularized decisions below the president’s level, where a separate handling of action channels would be called for. The president’s role in setting the decision rules plays a crucial part in determining how severely options are eliminated in the process that brings recommendations to that level. Of those that remain, the president can either press for additional options, or act in an instrumentally rational manner and choose among the options he currently has to result in the most preferred outcome.

Earlier, this chapter discussed several issues that remain with the bargaining model of war, even with minor allowances for non-unitary actors and explanations for non-rational behavior. These issues can be grouped into two categories, both of which deal with issues that affect a state’s ability to terminate a war. First, the bargaining literature has been unable to provide compelling explanations for a state’s inability to appropriately update its beliefs about the state of the war. Specifically:

1. *Why does fighting not quickly reveal private information?*

2. *Why do battlefield events not distribute information equally to the two sides?*

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95 Preston and ’t Hart, “Understanding and Evaluating Bureaucratic Politics.”
3. Why does the massive amount of information generated by a protracted conflict not overcome the relatively small amount of information that remains private?

4. Why do stalemates not communicate to the belligerents that the current distribution of benefits equals the distribution of capabilities?

5. How can we explain the origins of optimism?

6. Are judgment errors minor deviations from rational choices as the bargaining model assumes, or indications of a systemically flawed system?

7. Why do surprise outcomes not induce changes to systemically flawed systems?

Second, the bargaining literature has not been able to provide an explanation for why states make particular demands. This is related to the first set of questions, in that demands should ideally reflect all relevant information. But, it is clear that termination bargains are not as flexible as the bargaining model would suggest. Specifically:

8. Why are termination demands ever non-substitutable, since side-payments should create multiple termination offer opportunities?

9. Why would a state continue to sink costs into a course of action intended to secure preferences that should have been changed by the course of the war?

10. How does a state determine when it has sufficient cause to lower its termination demands and not gamble for resurrection?

11. How does a state determine when it should settle, and not expand its demands based on recent success?

12. How can we account for variation in a state’s ability to modify its demands?

All of these indicate the necessity of opening the black box for answers since each implies a state can act irrationally in situations that demand rational choices.
As the primary paradigm that provides a systematic accounting of irrational action, bureaucratic politics can provide insight on these questions and fill in some gaps in the literature. Although psychological approaches can provide insight on particular cases, it faces the same problem as rational choice in attempting to construct a model of action beyond the individual level. Insights from a theory that provide an accounting of individual behavior will not necessarily account for a group. The manner in which preferences are aggregated plays a central role in situations where the recommendations from the national security bureaucracy influence final decisions.

**Conclusion**

Although works examining domestic factors within the bargaining theory construct have almost exclusively approached the issue from an audience cost and office-retention problem perspective, several have indicated increased attention to other aspects of domestic politics would be fruitful in three areas. First, relaxing the assumption of unitary actors within the bargaining model may be required to account for some outcomes. Lake suggests in an examination of the decision to go to war with Iraq in 2003 that the bargaining model alone is inadequate, primarily because it assumes states are unitary actors. In a discussion of domestic politics and wartime decisions, he claims that while special interests were not sufficient to lead inexorably to war, but they “may have made the United States more belligerent or less willing to accept agreements that it otherwise would have found acceptable.” A variety of works have pointed to the necessity of considering domestic bureaucratic influences on crisis decisions, but few have brought that perspective into the bargaining model of war.

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97 Kahler, “Rationality in International Relations,” 924.
99 Ibid., 41.
Secondly, domestic political institutions may influence a foreign policy executive’s propensity to accept risk. Goemans and Fey show that the need to retain the support of some section of the selectorate can create institutionally-induced risk preferences. Although their model still utilizes an office-retention mechanism, it suggests the need to retain the loyalty of a segment of the selectorate is sufficient to induce risk-accepting behavior. Furthermore, the need to satisfy a larger group may induce greater risk acceptance.\(^\text{100}\) For modern states, national leaders rely on institutions to implement policies and must, to an extent, accommodate their positions on issues while making consequential decisions.\(^\text{101}\) The threat of removal from office is not the sole determinant on whether or not the executive integrates input from cabinet officials; active support is required to implement policies even after decisions have been made.

Finally, bargaining models have difficulty in accounting for delays in updating beliefs. Filson and Werner provide a model that relies on gradual revelation of private information as a central component of war termination, but acknowledge that it assumes leaders can effortlessly revise demands up or down and that benefits are completely divisible. However, “A leader responsive to domestic political concerns… is likely much less flexible.”\(^\text{102}\) The extent to which inflexible domestic imperatives influence wartime decisions is clearly an area worthy of inquiry.

The trajectory of the endogenous war bargaining literature continues to take it closer to examining more of the domestic processes that can explain differences in information interpretation and termination demands. For example, why would a state hold an unwarranted certainty about their relative capabilities even in the face of disconfirming evidence?\(^\text{103}\) What

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\(^{100}\) Goemans and Fey, “Risky but Rational,” 49.

\(^{101}\) Allison and Zelikow, *Essence of Decision*, 259.


\(^{103}\) Jennifer Mitzen and Randall L. Schweller, “Knowing the Unknown Unknowns: Misplaced Certainty and the Onset of War,” *Security Studies* 20, no. 1 (March 2011): 2–35. This article argues certainty can account for war, perhaps more convincingly that uncertainty. However, the article does not deal directly with the sources of unwarranted certainty, other than mentioning personal biases.
additional insights can be gained through psychological, economic, or other decision making literature to account for deviations in expected decisions?104 Are there ways to examine domestic politics aside from audience costs and regime-type created incentives on bargaining behavior?105 The bargaining model in its current state still lacks a convincing explanation for irrational responses in war (unwarranted certainty, dismissing costly signals from the opposing belligerent) as well as non-substitutable wartime objectives when side-payments should open other opportunities.

If bureaucratic politics can account for irrational actions in some of these cases, successful integration of intra-governmental competition into the bargaining model also requires explaining rational actions in other cases. This is the primary weakness in bureaucratic politics literature; cross case comparisons are rare so there is little insight generated in explaining why a constant independent variable has varying effects. The next chapter will propose a theory that accounts for these varying effects through examining the rules of the game that aggregate the preference points of multiple players.

Chapter 3: Opening the Black Box

Putnam’s concept of two-level games challenges us to examine the factors that influence the interaction between domestic and international politics. ¹ This interaction has been under-theorized in explaining war terminating bargains. For example, how do competing interpretations of battlefield information influence policy? How do organizational preferences aggregate into a “national” position that is presented at the bargaining table? An approach that sees war as politics “all the way down” must acknowledge intra-governmental competition will affect a negotiated settlement.

Seeing the state as the intervening variable between domestic interests and the international system is an approach used by neoclassical realism. ² While it assigns causal primacy to the pressures of the international system, the foreign policy executive’s ability to interpret and respond to those pressures is a critical intervening factor. It conceptualizes the foreign policy executive, who sits at the intersection of domestic and international politics, as an imperfect transmission belt that interprets the pressures of the international system and weighs options that are acceptable within the constraints of the domestic setting. ³ In reality, the foreign policy executive is supported by an amalgamation of bureaucracies, all conducting assessments of interests, threats, and options as they view the international system through unique lenses. This is a conceptualization that bargaining approaches are beginning to acknowledge; Gartner

² Steven E. Lobell, Norrin M. Ripsman, and Jeffrey W. Taliaferro, eds., *Neoclassical Realism, the State, and Foreign Policy*, 1st ed. (Cambridge, MA: Cambridge University Press, 2009), 4.
notes that “Leaders view the world through their organizations’ lenses and thus can reach conflicting policy assessments from common experiences.”

How does a state determine its position in the bargaining process that terminates a war, once it becomes clear its exogenous ideal point is no longer attainable at acceptable cost? The more “imperfect” this transmission belt between domestic politics and international pressures becomes, the more extensive the errors in the process are expected to occur. Therefore, the state may be unable to close the war on advantageous terms with transient windows of opportunities. An approach that incorporates intra-governmental competition as central to determining a bargaining position would potentially account for both variation within like-regimes and extended wars with multiple missed opportunities for ceasing hostilities.

Using this “imperfect transmission belt” as a starting point, this chapter will posit a mechanism that accounts for variation in a state’s ability to develop an appropriate war termination offer. A traditional approach to the bargaining model of war would treat the pressures of the international system (particularly the war) as the primary sources of information to be utilized, as well as the determinant of demands that would be made at the bargaining table. The second-wave of bargaining scholarship would add the qualifier that these demands would be made after consideration of their effect on the executive’s and/or administration’s ability to remain in power after the next election cycle or after the bargain exerts its influence on the government’s domestic power base. The mechanism described here will assess the influence of competing interpretations of battlefield and diplomatic information by domestic actors with divergent interests and lenses through which they view the international system.

In order to proceed, this chapter will explore the role of information in war, with particular attention to how bargaining theory posits information should influence a war’s

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4 Scott Sigmund Gartner, *Strategic Assessment in War* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1999), 163.
settlement. In addition, it will highlight why the rational, unitary actor is insufficient to account for how a state handles this vital information during a war. Next, it will describe in detail the theory, variables, and typological space created by this approach. Finally, it will provide a brief discussion of two other approaches to decision-making in the literature for the purposes of comparison during the case studies. These two models will be the predominant president model and the psychological model. Having already established why the rational, unitary actor approach will be insufficient to explain certain outcomes, these models provide an alternate explanation for why a particular decision was reached, and how the consideration of information may have influenced outcomes.

Some Terminology Clarifications:

This brief section will clarify some terminology. First, the term, “strategy,” is frequently used in international relations literature in connection with game theory, and typically is used to explain a single choice, or series of choices, based on an adversary’s anticipated actions. An alternate usage can be found in the “grand strategy” literature, which connects all of a state’s capabilities with a coherent plan under which it interacts with other states. These are not the approaches this paper takes. Its usage here can be traced to Clausewitz’s definition, which treats it as a plan that links the use of force to outcomes desired by political leadership.\(^5\) It is intimately connected to wartime actions and the desired goals at the war’s end.

Betts (2000) explored reasons why strategy may not have an effect on the outcome of war independent of aggregate power. While considering the question of whether or not strategy is an illusion, he notes, “Strategy is most important when it provides value added to resources,

functions as a force multiplier, and offers a way to beat an adversary with equivalent resources or to minimize the cost of defeating an inferior.\footnote{Richard K. Betts, “Is Strategy an Illusion?,” \textit{International Security} 25, no. 2 (October 2000): 6.} For the purposes of this paper and its proposed mechanism, it is not necessary to prove that strategy has an impact beyond the aggregate power available to a given side. Instead, it is only important to establish that strategies are used to chart a planned course through a conflict that maximize the benefits of all resources available while attempting to minimize costs. With respect to information handling, the importance of strategy becomes apparent in the process that assesses success by establishing a conceptual benchmark.

In order to discuss a state’s ability to measure its progress, this paper will use the term strategic assessment, or net assessment. Importantly, this is conceptualized as an ongoing process that is expected to be flawed, with a delta between a state’s aggregate understanding and the actual state of affairs, if the actual state can be measured at all.\footnote{Gregory M. Herek, Irving L. Janis, and Paul Huth, “Decision Making During International Crises: Is Quality of Process Related to Outcome?,” \textit{The Journal of Conflict Resolution} 31, no. 2 (June 1987), 221. This article points out that all individuals’ understanding of a strategic situation is bound to be flawed due to informational ambiguities and the cognitive limitations of the participants. The key to improving decision-making appears to be a deliberate attempt to limit these errors, rather than conducting an endless search for a “right” answer.} A net assessment implies that an account is taken not only of the progress made toward the political objectives of the war, but also of the anticipated costs to reach them. This is consistent with bargaining theory’s approach, which expects belligerents to weigh both the costs and benefits of initiating or continuing with a war, while struggling to obtain useful information from the opposing side.

**War, Strategy, and Information.**

The constant features of both anarchy in the international system and incentives to misrepresent private information for leverage are unable to provide a mechanism that explains the outbreak of war in one instance and its avoidance in another.\footnote{James D. Fearon, “Rationalist Explanations for War,” \textit{International Organization} 49, no. 3 (July 1995): 410.} A model that attempts to
explain variance along these lines must not only address the fact of asymmetric information, but also how that information is used to support decisions. A strict rationalist approach would expect that information that becomes available through actions on the battlefield will be understood by both sides in a similar cost/benefit framework. An increasing body of work undermines this assumption.\(^9\)

Exogenous bargaining theory conceptualizes war as an event that places all combat power available to each side on one field of battle and allowing a war of attrition to take place. With this construct, bargaining theory can treat war as a strict measurement of costs and benefits and provide a short-cut to understanding the balance of power between the two belligerents while formulating its central puzzle on war initiation. The endogenous bargaining models, however, improve on this simplification through viewing war as a process and acknowledging that battles take place over time on multiple fields with varying levels of combat power and asymmetric effects on strategic goals.

Given this complex set of circumstances, establishing a strategy for the conduct of a war simplifies the problem of wartime assessment while maximizing the utility of resources available. Importantly, it is virtually impossible for two opposing states to have the same strategies or strategic goals. If they are fighting to occupy one piece of terrain, one side is seeking to expand its territory while the other is seeking to prevent that occurrence, or retain the territory for itself. Even if neither side possessed the territory to begin with, each is expected to

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\(^9\) See, for example, Michelle R. Garfinkel and Stergios Skaperdas, “Conflict Without Misperceptions or Incomplete Information: How the Future Matters,” The Journal of Conflict Resolution 44, no. 6 (December 2000): 793–807, which asserts long-term incentives to go to war may dominate short-term incentives to settle. Branislav L. Slantchev, “The Power to Hurt: Costly Conflict with Completely Informed States,” The American Political Science Review 97, no. 1 (February 2003): 123–133, holds that inefficient fighting can occur with completely informed states, provided they retain the ability to inflict additional costs on their opponents in the future. For an example of institutionalization of wartime policies that perpetuate fighting even when wartime assessments indicate settlement is in order, see Elizabeth A. Stanley and John P. Sawyer, “The Equifinality of War Termination: Multiple Paths to Ending War,” The Journal of Conflict Resolution 53, no. 5 (October 2009): 651–676.
leverage its relative capabilities to maximize its possibility of success. Therefore, its strategy (how it undertakes tactical actions and engagements) will differ to achieve its strategic ends (the goals established by political leadership).

The idea that each side will employ different strategies exacerbates the problem of strategic assessment for both. Since one state may alter its strategy to adjust to changing conditions in ways it had not anticipated at the war’s onset, it is impossible that its opponent can accurately predict it. Therefore, any net assessment that looks to the future will always have flaws, and an “accurate” assessment can only hope to minimize errors sufficiently to allow strategic success.

Effective bargaining depends upon the ability of actors to predict the behavior of the others. This is frequently recognized in the literature as a barrier to war termination, since a losing side may re-initiate hostilities at more favorable times. This problem of behavior prediction resides not only with what a belligerent may do during an unstable peace, but also within the war itself, as both sides attempt to predict battlefield actions and what costs and benefits those actions may generate. War as a successful bargaining process (in terms of reconciling divergent beliefs in relative power) will depend upon forcing states to reach similar conclusions on the utility of continuing to fight. Yet the idea of a successful strategy for either side relies upon altering the cost/benefit ratio for its user in a manner that differs from the opponent. A strategy may become apparent over the course of multiple battles, but it is not necessarily something that a state will signal prior to the war or in its early stages.

The utility of information from a unitary actor perspective lies in its ability to update beliefs in the cost/benefit calculation during the war. This simplified idea is complicated by strategies employed to alter this calculation while providing a road map to the goals being sought
in the war. Not only must one side evaluate its own prospects for success, but also the prospects of the opposing side’s strategy, which is subject to change. Managing the multiple facets of strategic assessment requires the participation of specialists to inform the foreign policy executive.

**War, Strategy, and Information II: Enter the Bureaucracy**

Chapter 1 established that the ability to reach a termination agreement is contingent upon a state being able to update its beliefs about the costs and benefits of continuing a war, which will alter its bargaining position. In fact, changes in offers are central to the bargaining process, since the bargaining problem is created by initially incompatible demands from the two sides, and one or both sides must make modifications to their offers if an agreement is to be reached.\(^\text{10}\)

The previous section established that a simple cost/benefit calculation does not suffice in practice, since the use of military strategies in war is intended to alter the cost/benefit calculation for its employer; there are multiple paths to a victory in war. Were this not the case, the actions of a belligerent would be predictable, and limit the “fog of war.” This section introduces the idea that it is impossible for all information to be collapsed into a single utility function that is accurately perceived by both sides. The central issue at the bargaining table is that a war and its settlement will involve multiple issues, where two belligerents will have differing priorities, and therefore differing utility functions.\(^\text{11}\)

Given the complexity of the battlefield, governments are forced to rely on bureaucracies to carry out specialized tasks, coordinate action, and concentrate individuals with specific skills.

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\(^{11}\) Ibid., 234.
for the tasks.\textsuperscript{12} James Q. Wilson asserted that “War is the greatest test of a bureaucratic organization.”\textsuperscript{13} Can bureaucracies, armies or otherwise, rise to meet this challenge? Wilson also noted that despite the terrible lessons of World War I, along with the specter of war returning to Europe, the governments of France and Germany drew diametrically opposed lessons from the first war, while preparing for the second.\textsuperscript{14} The French chose to emphasize their defensive capabilities, which limited their mobility on the battlefield. In contrast, the Germans sought to improve their mobility on the battlefield in an effort to avoid a repeat of the trench warfare stalemate. The interpretation of battlefield information in this case did not prove to be a straight-forward affair, even with the luxury of time to consider and analyze the meaning of the events that took place a decade prior. This is particularly notable since both sides experienced the same event first-hand (trench warfare) and were well aware of the associated costs, yet both reached divergent conclusions on the proper course of action for the future.\textsuperscript{15}

As is well-recognized in any study of bureaucracy, a division of labor among specialized organizations does not guarantee success for the government in any endeavor. As the French government learned in the previous example, having the requisite expertise in a particular area does not necessarily lead to an improved understanding of the costs and benefits associated with future actions. Their plans for war were developed by experienced military officers, to include the plans for economic mobilization for total war.\textsuperscript{16} In short, the process of assessment and plan implementation was carried out by a coherent group. Therefore, interpretation of new conditions on the battlefield should have been simplified and French decision-making should have

\footnotesize{\textsuperscript{12} Graham Allison and Philip Zelikow, \textit{Essence of Decision: Explaining the Cuban Missile Crisis}, 2nd ed. (New York: Pearson, 1999), 143.} \\
\footnotesize{\textsuperscript{13} James Wilson, \textit{Bureaucracy: What Government Agencies Do And Why They Do It} (New York: Basic Books, 1991), 14.} \\
\footnotesize{\textsuperscript{14} Ibid., 14–15.} \\
\footnotesize{\textsuperscript{15} Although some of this was driven by differing national goals, geography, and alliances, the differences that developed between the German approach to war and the French approach is striking.} \\
approximated a unitary, rational actor. Bargaining theory lacks a mechanism to account for bad decision-making when a unitary actor is provided with good information. International observers keeping watch over German rearmament\(^\text{17}\) provided more information to the French than can reasonably be expected under other circumstances, yet the French badly misunderstood the costs and benefits associated with their Maginot Line response to the German threat.

If a single, expert bureaucracy cannot generate an appropriate response to a threat, the problems of coordination between multiple bureaucracies, reconciling differing priorities, and manipulation of information for the benefit of individual organizations greatly complicates the issue for a foreign policy executive. The type of information being processed by the bureaucracies is important, since organizations will be concerned with different sets of information based on their lenses. Or, they may be concerned with the same information though using different indicators to assess progress.

Much of the work in the bargaining tradition followed Fearon’s lead, and deals primarily with relative power and willingness to fight as key sources of information that belligerents may lack. More specific types of information, such as military capabilities and technology, potential ally actions, and public support for a war, can be considered sub-categories of these two major categories. Based on the literature review of bureaucratic politics, organizations that look at these sub-categories of information (respectively, military and intelligence organizations, diplomatic organizations, and domestic political advisers) and provide advice to the executive are more likely to equate their sub-category with the over-arching concepts of relative power and willingness to fight. In other words, they are more likely to see gains in their area of concern as having a disproportionate effect on relative power and/or willingness to fight in comparison to other organizational areas.

\(^{17}\) Ibid., 49.
Given that organizations will have concentrated areas of concern within an environment of diverse interests, Gartner suggests they will rely on a dominant indicator of the state of affairs. It concerns an organization’s attempt to simplify a complex situation to a measurable variable that will facilitate a strategic assessment of progress. Once a war begins, decision-makers at all levels are unlikely to suffer from a lack of information; they are more likely to suffer from a deluge of data.\textsuperscript{18} Framing this issue within the standard bargaining model approach, this requires national decision-makers to determine what information changes the assessment of relative power and willingness to fight in the aggregate sense, if any. While any organization may use a variety of measurements, there are relatively few that become established as authoritative for use outside of the organization, such as when advice is being given to a foreign policy executive. The difficulty in this lies in the fact that any change in strategy would typically call for new measurements. Organizational behavior suggests this dominant indicator is less likely to change since it was formulated with the organizational interests in mind and, at some level, justifies the organization’s actions within the national strategy.

Emphasis of a single, dominant indicator also fails to capture the dynamic contest for strategic progress between the belligerents. Since the bargaining model emphasizes both costs and benefits, an effective strategic assessment should capture both for each side – there should be a total of four variables being assessed, assuming that costs and benefits are the manner that strategic decision makers weigh their options. It is clear that a single indicator can only highlight one. For example, a measure of “newly-established indigenous friendly security forces” (in Iraq and Afghanistan) indicate benefits to Side A, while a “body count” measurement (in Vietnam) would indicate costs to Side B. These simplified indicators lack the information to measure benefits to Side B (in the first case), or the costs to Side A (in the second case). An

\textsuperscript{18} Gartner, \textit{Strategic Assessment in War}, 7.
offer from Side A to terminate the conflict will consist of three of these variables: benefits to Side A (demands), benefits to Side B (concessions) and a manipulation of costs to Side B (an offer to limit further costs to encourage cooperation and/or a threat of escalation of costs to discourage bad behavior). The task of manipulating this combination of variables is more difficult than merely assessing the meaning of a particular event on the battlefield.

At this point, we can make several observations based on expected bureaucratic behavior and the problem of assessing a “noisy” battlefield for an individual organization, before introducing the complication of multiple bureaucracies. First, organizations that assess the progress of a war are likely to fall victim to the same conceptual shortcuts that proponents of the bargaining model do, in that they utilize a relatively simple measure of progress to assess a complex and evolving situation. These measures will flow logically from existing bureaucratic structures and interests, rather than drive any bureaucratic changes, even when the situation requires modification to what is measured. This tendency to view the world within the context of existing organizational purposes can create a “bureaucratic bias,” or specific policy preferences for officials that are distinct from an administration. Therefore, when asked to develop a measure of progress for the war, a bureaucracy is likely to employ a “satisficing” approach to search for a suitable measure, where the search ends once it identifies an alternative

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that is acceptable to the organization. The tendency to view the war in terms of bureaucratic interests, whether deliberate or incidental, will simplify a complicated interaction.

Second, organizations will tend to highlight indicators of strategic progress, while minimizing evidence of set-backs. The task of selecting a measurement mechanism, described above, is likely to serve bureaucratic interests, and lead the organization to view the evolving relative power balance between the two belligerents in terms of a zero-sum game. Once the indicator is selected, a great deal of organizational effort will center on showing improvement on that indicator. By highlighting progress that serves the political objectives at issue in the war, the organization makes an assumption that the progress comes at the cost of the other belligerent’s progress; they assume their success must be their opponent’s failure. However, given the previous discussion on strategy and differing political objectives, it is possible for both sides to be making progress simultaneously. The bureaucratic bias is likely to ignore this in favor of highlighting progress indicators, rather than supporting a true strategic assessment.

Finally, organizations are likely to employ an internal strategy within the context of the national strategy to maximize the benefits it receives from supporting the achievement of the ultimate political objectives. The organization’s selection of progress indicators begins this process, which continues with resistance to changing assigned tasks. Battlefield information that indicates under-performance is likely to be minimized, while organizations continue the search for justification of its actions which will provide them with enduring benefits after the

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24 Wilson, *Bureaucracy*, 222.
war. Searching for indicators of success will be preferable to forcing innovation which may result in modification of the organization’s assigned tasks and its preferred indicators.\textsuperscript{25}

These three bureaucratic tendencies in the face of a noisy battlefield will distort individual organizations’ understanding of the strategic conditions and ultimately the recommendations they provide on a possible course of action (such as a termination offer). \textit{In general, an individual organization will tend to over-estimate the benefits of their preferred course of action, while under-estimating its costs as a result of these three bureaucratic tendencies.} The practical question is how a government can go about resolving these distortions. Two alternatives exist. A government can seek to improve the organizations themselves to minimize poor performance. This is generally consistent with organizational preferences, provided these improvements are along the lines of enhanced budgets and autonomy. However, none of the issues described above originate from small budgets or excessive oversight. An alternative is to determine whether or not it is possible to arrange the process that resolves divergent perspectives to control bureaucratic bias and improve understanding.

Stephen Cimbala observes that “the policymaker who is determined to terminate a war according to criteria derived from policy objectives must impose the outline of a war termination plan on a fluid diplomatic and military field.”\textsuperscript{26} The challenge for the foreign policy executive in dealing with multiple, flawed understandings of the strategic situation is deciding how to aggregate information that will be used to assess the state’s strategic position and make a termination offer within a timeframe appropriate to the current conditions. Two distinctions emerge here between conflict termination and a mere ending to hostilities. First is the connection to political objectives. In this, a concept of termination is similar to the concept of

\textsuperscript{25} Ibid., 223.
strategy; the objectives give the fighting meaning and must be addressed to some extent in order to bring about a meaningful end. Second is the relevance of timing an offer with existing conditions. The phrase “fluid diplomatic and military field” highlights the transitory nature of information required to calibrate a termination offer. With a key organization reluctant to report indicators of a degrading bargaining position, the executive will be poorly prepared to proceed.

The information being discussed here is, at its core, intelligence. Several works have pointed to sources of intelligence failures that are analogous to the problems above. Confirmation bias, bet-hedging in the face of ambiguity, narrow searches for alternative explanations, and grooved thinking based on past experience and areas of expertise are all possible responses to a glut of information that must be sifted, organized, analyzed, and presented to political consumers of intelligence. Jervis (2010) argues that controlling the potential errors in the intelligence process requires avoiding unwarranted consensus, undertaking hard questioning of assumptions and the meaning of gathered information, and identifying disconfirming evidence. Implementation of these recommendations requires that organizational interests be exposed to potential critique and, at times, be brought into direct conflict with other organizations’ interests.

**Conflicting Interests and Decision-Making.**

Hermann, et al. (2001) describes three models for resolving conflict among a decision-making group. Each had a tendency to result in a particular solution outcome, based on the way

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in which the group dealt with the conflict. These approaches to dealing with conflict were to avoid it, resolve it, or accept it. Attempting to avoid conflict occurs in situations in which the individuals value their membership in the group, and attempt to preserve their status. The touchstone they use to develop this model is groupthink, which is routinely associated with poor decision-making. As a result of the process, a tendency to settle on a dominant solution (one proposed by a prominent member of the group early in the process) emerges. A deliberate attempt to resolve the conflict among the group results in bargaining, with resulting outcomes ranging from an integrative solution (option agreed upon by all due to preference shift) to deadlock (inability to arrive at a solution). Finally, an attempt to accept group conflict as part of the process can create a subset solution – an agreement to disagree – in which the outcome is a preference held by some members of the group, while the other members do not achieve their preferences.

Although decision units have been studied extensively since Allison’s *Essence of Decision*, approaches such as the one above offer an advantage by directly linking the decision-making process to outcomes. There are several reasons why testing hypotheses on process may be fruitful. First, decision-making dynamics cannot be predicted on the basis of international pressures and domestic structures alone. When given a crisis situation, the quality of the decision-making procedures can be directly linked to the quality of the decisions. Therefore, investigating variation in decision making within similar regimes requires investigation of the procedures.

30 Ibid., 147–150.
Secondly, studying decision-making from an individual leader’s perspective may link an individual’s thought processes, biases, and perception to outcome, but this requires an ad hoc approach to events. In this approach, decision structures and formal rules for decision making are treated as constants to focus on the key participant. However, this ignores the influence of the advisory process in foreign policy, which can be significant. Although the executive is not a blank slate upon which the wishes of advisors can be written, more systematic understanding can be gained by limiting the role of the president’s biases.

Third, the manner in which information is presented to the executive can greatly change the perceptions on what the “right” choice is. However, when examining the behavior of advisors as isolated actors there is no mechanism to prevent them from inflating costs of an undesirable option to prevent the executive from choosing that course. The established process used to bring the recommendations of multiple advisors together will channel the pressures of the domestic and international setting to the executive and influence the character of foreign policy behavior. How those pressures are presented in the decision-making forum will impact how they are perceived.

Finally, depending on the process structuring, veto players can severely limit the options available to a decision maker, even in war termination.\textsuperscript{38} This can be accomplished either through preventing forwarding of an option to the final decision group, or through the previously mentioned option of cost inflation to prevent consideration by the executive due to the non-compensatory principle of poliheuristic theory. If an executive is attempting to build a bargaining position that is shared by potential veto players, then options can be limited much more quickly.

If the decision making process utilized by the foreign policy executive’s inner circle influences the character of the decisions, then theorizing on those processes must consider how conflicting perspectives are resolved. An approach such as Hermann, et al. (2001) enhances this understanding, but it stopped at consideration of option management across the participants and eschewed consideration of information processing.\textsuperscript{39} Since the bargaining model of war holds information to be central in the settlement of conflict, the processing of that information becomes a critical variable in understanding foreign policy decision making and the creation of an acceptable bargaining position to be used at the negotiation table.

\textbf{Theory and Hypotheses}

What is the influence of intra-governmental competition on information processing that eventually leads to a termination offer? This dissertation has argued that in order to maximize the benefits a state gains through a costly war, it must modify its demands from its original position at the war’s initiation based on information that emerges over the course of the conflict; this is an argument consistent with the current literature on the bargaining model of war. If it

\textsuperscript{38} David E. Cunningham, “Veto Players and Civil War Duration,” \textit{American Journal of Political Science} 50, no. 4 (October 2006): 877. Although this dealt with civil wars, the concept remains applicable if the process is structured so that a veto prevents consideration or implementation.

\textsuperscript{39} Hermann et al., “Resolve, Accept, or Avoid,” 135.
does not, it can continue to accumulate costs while losing opportunities to secure those interests that are still within its reach. The chief advisors to the president are members of diverse organizations and frequently reflect the biases of those organizations that they represent. Even in cases where they do not reflect those biases, organizational roles will require that they be concerned with different aspects of the crisis. Each possesses a comparative advantage in analyzing certain types of information in a complex situation. With an information-rich foreign policy process, it is inevitable that differences of opinion among key advisors will arise. Since the structure of the decision making process is related to the quality of the decisions, a key aspect of this process will be its handling of disagreements and eventual aggregation of preferences among the players into a set of bargaining demands. This section describes this dissertation’s typological theory of decision-making during a war as a state seeks to bring about a conflict termination.

The dependent variable in this dissertation is the state’s bargaining position for a war-terminating settlement. A state’s bargaining position can be characterized by two key elements: the extent of the demands placed on an adversary, and how closely those demands are supported by conditions on the battlefield. Appropriately matched demands constitute a rational bargaining position arrived at through effective Bayesian updating. This paper posits that arriving at a rational position within a timeframe that matches the offer to current battlefield conditions will enable a state to more effectively terminate a war. As offers are increasingly divorced from current conditions or become more extensive in terms of demands, the state’s ability to terminate begins to deteriorate.

A state’s demands at the bargaining table can range from a minimally-acceptable outcome to an ideal point. An ideal point can be conceived of as a straight aggregation of all
demands resident in the domestic institutions that influence the foreign policy executive on wartime decision-making. A minimally-acceptable outcome would be the point below which the executive fails to secure an outcome that satisfies the most basic requirements for the war as determined by the domestic processes, and therefore fails to create a winning political coalition. An offer at the bargaining table that is close to an ideal point will be more difficult for an opponent to accommodate. A minimally-acceptable offer may be more feasible for the opponent, but may create complications for the executive domestically in terms of policy implementation and ensuring continued support of institutions in future policy issues, including seemingly unrelated domestic issues. The processes used to integrate competing demands into a national position will determine where in the spectrum a developing offer will fall.

The second element of the characterization of a state’s bargaining space concerns Bayesian updating. How rapidly a state can update its beliefs on what constitutes an appropriate bargaining position determines how relevant its demands are relative to current conditions. If net assessments are outdated, generally inflexible, or are intentionally or unintentionally distorted by supporting organizations, a state may miss opportunities to conclude the war or modify strategies or demands appropriately.

In the modern state, bureaucratic politics are intimately connected to the creation of a state’s bargaining position. How the state’s executive controls the processes that provide net assessments on the war and determine a national position at the bargaining table will either provide it with demands and recommendations relevant to the current situation or burden it with inappropriate demands based on old information (such as beliefs held prior to the war). This dissertation makes two hypotheses about bureaucratic politics and a state’s bargaining capabilities.
**Hypothesis 1**: As the number of alternative interpretations of endogenous wartime information provided to the foreign policy executive increases, the likelihood that the rational bargaining position is encapsulated across those interpretations also increases.

The first independent variable in this study will be the plurality of perspectives represented at the advisory meetings with the foreign policy executive. In cases where multiple perspectives are represented within the decision-making circle of the executive, new information is more likely to be considered. This enhances the probability that a decision will be based on relevant information. In contrast, when bureaucratic competition limits the presentation of divergent perspectives in the advisory meetings, or options are shut down early in the process by bureaucratic representatives, the competition to protect access and influence will dominate the process and prevent new information, particularly costs associated with a preferred action, from being considered. Therefore, the final position is much less likely to be appropriately based on relevant information; the state ceases to effectively update its beliefs.

In cases where organizations face an unfamiliar issue, they will normally default to examining the issue in terms of their own interests, which normally drives the stand they will take on an issue. Changing a “stand” normally takes an extraordinary amount of effort by participants that desire a change.\(^{40}\) This suggests that organizations will view war-termination demands in terms of their own interests, given the small number of occurrences over their experience horizon, and will be unlikely to change their recommendation.

This hypothesis holds that no single bureaucratic advisor to the executive is likely to be able to formulate a completely rational bargaining position from the perspective of the state, since their bias will lead them to view the issue from the bureaucracy’s perspective. However, a single advisor may possess a portion of a rational bargaining position; a wider variety of perspectives will provide more of these pieces. Similarly, as battlefield events change what should constitute a rational bargaining position, a single advisor’s perspective is likely to lag behind events. Increasing the number of perspectives will yield a higher chance the new rational position is encapsulated.

**Hypothesis 2:** *The processes that are used to resolve these alternative interpretations of endogenous wartime information will determine whether the executive is able to discern the rational bargaining position or arrives at a decision based on bureaucratic biases. This will influence both the extent of the state’s demands and the state’s ability to update appropriately.*

**Hypothesis 2a:** *Resolution processes that are characterized by aggregation of institutional preferences*\(^4\) *are more likely to result in overly-optimistic demands that are unacceptably high for an opponent, preventing earnest bargaining.*

**Hypothesis 2b:** *Resolution processes that are characterized by narrow selection among institutional preferences are more likely to result in demands determined by competition between advocates.*

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\(^{41}\) This is similar to “logrolling” in Jack Snyder, *Myths of Empire: Domestic Politics and International Ambition* (Ithica, NY: Cornell University Press, 1993).
The second independent variable in this study will be the resolution process that the executive uses to arrive at a position to bring to the bargaining table. Domestic organizations that support the foreign policy executive will hold differing perspectives on what constitutes an acceptable war outcome, based on their view of the national interest through their own institutional lenses. They may have divergent priorities in a termination offer, or may hold differing perspectives on the extent of a demand on a common priority. For example, the Department of Defense may want a steeper reduction in the size of a defeated state’s military as part of the bargain than the Department of State.

This hypothesis holds that in attempts to resolve differing positions on the termination offer, two extreme approaches can be taken. First, an executive can take a straight aggregation of demands to the bargaining table, including the most stringent positions on common priorities (such as the highest demand for reduction in military strength for a defeated state). This is the approach described in Hypothesis 2a. While this will be difficult or impossible for the opponent to accommodate, this approach may ensure widest support for policies across the various organizations that support the executive. Therefore, these organizations have no incentive to reevaluate their demands as new information is received that may call the aggregate bargaining position into question. According to bureaucratic politics, the president will be reluctant to dismiss the perspectives of key individuals or organizations because of potential consequences afterward.\footnote{Halperin and Clapp, \textit{Bureaucratic Politics and Foreign Policy}, 215.} Therefore, the natural tendency will be to accommodate a larger set of interests across the organizations.

A second approach an executive can take is to arrive at a narrow set of preferences. This is the approach described in Hypothesis 2b. This may jeopardize support in execution of policies where these goals do not fully reflect organizations’ priorities. However, it can create a simpler
set of demands for the bargaining table. As the “space” for diverse interests narrows in the bargaining position, bureaucratic competition intensifies. The outcome of these competitions will determine the final termination demands. Yet the final interests and recommendations that are represented can only reflect those that were “in the room” when the decision was made. In cases where access to the executive is limited, an agent acting on the president’s behalf will narrow the number of options/interpretations for consideration. This will intensify the intra-governmental competition. In these cases, the outcome of bureaucratic battles will determine the state’s bargaining position rather than battlefield information.

First Independent Variable: Degree of Plurality

The idea of achieving a consensus on a major issue has appeal for citizens of democratic governments. It demonstrates that individuals were able to arrive at a decision that embodies the desires of free people. Although seemingly pointing to a different ideal, the concept of plurality holds that differences of opinion may remain, frequently the result of competing centers of power such as interest groups. The ideal of consensus emphasizes what the participants agree upon and holds this as the basis for action. The idea of pluralism highlights that there may be unmet preferences within the decision-making body after action is taken. Both traditions may be present in the same democracy, yet focus on different aspects of collective decisions. This section will discuss the variable of plurality in the deliberations with the executive on a final decision.

An emphasis on consensus within decision-making groups implies agreement on the fundamental questions of what the issue in front of the group concerns, how it should be

44 Ibid., 635.
evaluated, and how it should be addressed in terms of policy choices. Yet the areas just mentioned that must be assessed by representatives of different organizations will result in a variety of disagreements. The discussion of bureaucratic tendencies earlier implies this robust agreement is not only unlikely, but should be impossible. Instead, it is more likely consensus can be reached on certain elements of a decision while disagreement remains with the others. To draw contrast with the plurality of perspectives, this dissertation will evaluate the cases for evidence of unanimity, rather than consensus. Focusing on unanimity provides a distinct advantage over parsing the types of consensus (issue, value, policy) that might be achieved. Participants may present the executive with a unanimous position, despite disagreements that may remain among the group (low consensus). Dissent may be suppressed due to group dynamics and a unanimous position can be achieved through some method other than working toward an ideal and robust consensus. Unanimity will be held as the polar opposite of plurality for this reason.

Pluralism holds that any substantial question potentially has a variety of plausible but conflicting answers, which can depend upon the perspectives of the participants. This is consistent with the assumption that representatives of bureaucracies with diverse interests will arrive at differing assessments when presented with an unstructured problem. This approach to pluralism is frequently applied to understanding decisions on issues where the electorate and/or interest groups are involved in a public debate. However, the concept applies equally to situations in which a small group is grasping for a policy recommendation. At some level, this

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46 See, for example, Dimitri Landa and Adam Meirowitz, “Game Theory, Information, and Deliberative Democracy,” *American Journal of Political Science* 53, no. 2 (April 2009): 427–444. They hold that open debate provides more information that can be utilized in arriving at a decision through democratic processes. However, incentives to misrepresent still exist. As a remedy, they suggest better institutions to enhance deliberative outcomes.
diversity of perspectives is necessary to conduct any kind of an information search to inform the group on the aspects of the decision.\textsuperscript{47}

A consensus may represent the will of the many, but we have established that all participants in a crisis are expected to have poor understandings of the situation. A single perspective may be challenged by organizational bias or limited previous experience with the issue in question. In contrast, multiple perspectives will bring more information into consideration. A group of decision makers is more likely to be exposed to new information more quickly than a decision-maker operating alone.\textsuperscript{48} Maintaining pluralism in problem solving for a group will provide only the initial conditions from which to improve decisions, however, though providing a better basis by which to challenge assumptions. In the next section, I will discuss the resolution strategy for competing explanations which will bring group dynamics into the equation. How those group dynamics are structured will determine whether understanding and options are improved or flawed even further.

When examining the case studies, I will be describing the degree of plurality or unanimity of perspectives on options intended to bring about a successful termination to the conflict in question. I will do this by identifying the alternatives considered in final deliberations before a decision is made on a course of action. The hypothesis identified above holds this final stage as essential; options and conflicting information that are filtered out by veto players prior to the final stages do not enhance plurality. Although this is expected to occur regardless of the final resolution method, what matters is whether or not a competing explanation or alternative exists to challenge what might otherwise become a unanimous position.

Second Independent Variable: Resolution Strategy

This independent variable begins the exploration of various group dynamics as well as the process that will determine whether or not useful information that is resident in competing perspectives will produce as better final policy. Participants in decision-making during a crisis are expected to have preferences for an outcome and make recommendations consistent with those preferences. The origin of these preferences may be from selfish perceived benefits from conflict as Snyder suggests in *Myths of Empire*, or they may originate from divergent world views generated by organizational bias. Regardless of the origins, a foreign policy executive must reconcile these preferences to arrive at a policy for implementation.

When presented with $N$ recommendations, each consisting of a set of actions intended to achieve a goal with anticipated costs and benefits, an executive must determine which combination of recommendations he will attempt to implement. In the extreme, the executive can attempt to implement all recommendations through an aggregation approach, provided they are not mutually exclusive. The broader the set of recommendations to be implemented, the greater the degree of consensus that can be expected as more interests become resident in the policy. As the set of recommendations that will be implemented narrows, the desires and interests of some of the participating members are excluded. This exclusionary approach will trigger a greater degree of bureaucratic opposition to the sub-set of $N$ recommendations that is available for consideration.

Condorcet’s jury theorem states that majorities are more likely to select the “better” of two alternatives when there is uncertainty about the options, resulting in a rational position. Yet this assertion is based on the assumption that the voters act “sincerely,” or base their votes on...
their highest expected payoff. As they cast their votes, the alternative with the “best” payoff for the majority emerges and is assumed to be the rational position. But this mechanism is called into question by two issues. First, the information that is required to make a rational decision is distributed unequally among the participants. This information must be shared with the group at large in order to better inform the decision-making process. Second, the members of the decision-making body are self-interested agents with preferences over the decision. In short, the members of the decision-making body have private information and incentives to misrepresent that information based on their self-interest.

Consensus among the committee cannot be regarded as a good in and of itself, if the consensus results in an irrational position. For example, assume that the organizational bias of each member of a decision-making committee causes them to over-estimate the benefits and under-estimate the costs associated with their preferred course of action. Assume further that they each prefer their given alternative due to the benefits they perceive after the crisis has passed. If the committee reaches a consensus position through mutual agreement and multiple recommendations are implementable, the executive is left with a policy option that radically distorts the cost-benefit calculation. The aggregation approach now provides two incentives to keep information private. Looking inward, an agent of an organization has an incentive to withhold information that may undermine his preferred course of action. In the group setting that arrives at a final position, all agents are encouraged to withhold criticism of another’s preferred policy (particularly in the extent of the costs and benefits) in the interest of avoiding a reciprocal criticism of their own preferences. Ultimately, this not only results in an overly-

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optimistic policy, but also provides no check on estimates except for the foreign policy executive’s personal judgment.

What matters for the quality of a policy is not that a consensus is reached, but that the process used to seek a consensus results in a better, rational position. The literature suggests that an essential element of this process is an effective information structure. This structure requires a non-homogenous team that values disagreement, avoids gate-keeping, discourages illusions of invulnerability, and avoids insulation.

The central issue for the foreign policy executive is encouraging the revelation of private information among his advisory committee. This requires either overcoming internal incentives for the organizations (requiring organizations to play “devil’s advocate” for their recommended policy) or overcoming group incentives to refrain from disagreement (forcing agents of organizations to “trouble-shoot” another’s recommended policy). Approaching the issue from a devil’s advocate methodology may enhance understanding of costs and benefits with a given policy, but it is highly unlikely to result in an alteration so extensive that another policy becomes preferable, for two reasons. First, a devil’s advocate is a temporary role that a participant fills, after which he or she returns to their normal role in their organization. Upsetting the preferred policy of the organization may result in adverse consequences for that person. Second, forcing a participant to play the role of devil’s advocate implicitly acknowledges that the individual does not actually believe in the recommendations being made, and therefore may not argue them as effectively as a “true believer.” As an alternative, the foreign policy executive may play the role of devil’s advocate, and ask probing questions of the organizational agents to obtain better

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52 Ibid., 14.
information (i.e., What if this benefit does not materialize? What if this cost is more extensive? What if the enemy does not behave as anticipated?). However, this is a time- and thought-consuming alternative and assumes a level of expertise by the president. Advisors are there to provide their expertise and possess more detailed information than the president. Therefore, the president is unlikely to be able to overcome incentives to misrepresent information and/or organizational bias in a sequential, two-way exchange with each of the advisory committee members.

As an alternative, a foreign policy executive can structure the process to generate sincere dissent among advisors and ensure this dissent is made public to the group. If properly managed, disagreement can improve understanding of the situation and provide higher quality options. Schweiger, Sandberg and Ragan (1986) compared three alternatives for managing group decision-making: dialectical inquiry (debates on different sets of options), devil’s advocacy (debate on a single set of options), and working toward consensus. While both dialectical inquiry and devil’s advocacy improved decision-making, dialectical inquiry was superior in creating quality assumptions associated with the options. In this study, associated costs and benefits are assumptions built into the recommended policy; an enhanced understanding of these is crucial to rational policy in this context. Furthermore, the study noted that dialectical inquiry may also create new options not yet considered.

A key issue for the president will be encouraging open deliberations and disagreement among a relatively cohesive group. While some of this is resident in the bureaucratic dynamics,

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55 David M. Schweiger, William R. Sandberg, and James W. Ragan, “Group Approaches for Improving Strategic Decision Making: A Comparative Analysis of Dialectical Inquiry, Devil’s Advocacy, and Consensus,” The Academy of Management Journal 29, no. 1 (March 1, 1986): 51–71. This study used the term “dialectical inquiry” to describe a situation where advocates have at least two distinct and opposed sets of preferences and resolve differences through intense debate. The surviving preferences are assumed to have passed a “tough test” for validity. Importantly, the debate is conducted among interested and informed parties who have a stake in the outcome, rather than naïve participants.
the president must avoid a “least common denominator” approach among the group to implement acceptable, but not optimal, policies, as well as to avoid an aggregation approach that generates an alternative that maximizes rewards among the group. Some of this requires establishing the “rules of the game” to maintain fair competition and regular policing of the system.56

In the case study chapters, I will be describing the resolution approach as characterized by aggregation or narrow-selection. The process itself will be driven by the president’s preferred resolution approach and the degree of plurality (discussed in the previous section) in the final deliberations on policy. For example, an executive that seeks a high degree of plurality in recommendations but selects narrowly will lead to the ideal multiple advocacy or adversarial proceedings. In contrast, a president that allows important decisions on war termination to be made at lower levels and is not exposed to competing interpretations will encourage a logrolling process that minimizes his role. For this independent variable, I will compare the preferences of the players during the decision process to the final set of termination demands to determine to what degree the preferences were aggregated, and to what degree the process created “losers” where preferences were excluded. I anticipate narrowly selected termination demands will create a more adversarial dynamic among the group where disagreement will encourage more realistic assessments by individual organizations prior to deliberation and speed the revelation of new information.

**Dependent Variable: The Characteristics of a State’s Bargaining Position**

This section will explore the dependent variable of this dissertation, which describes the state’s bargaining position. Consistent with the endogenous wartime information literature in the

56 George and Stern, “Harnessing Conflict in Foreign Policy Making,” 494.
bargaining model, it holds that information that becomes available through the course of fighting is used to develop a bargain acceptable to both sides.\textsuperscript{57} For one of those sides, developing an acceptable, or rational, bargain is a problem of assessing the wartime conditions and proposing a set of demands. This process that develops the state’s bargaining position deals with potential courses of action, each with assumptions on associated costs and benefits. When both sides’ positions are brought to the bargaining table, the expected benefits from settlement must outweigh the projected benefits from continued fighting for both sides.\textsuperscript{58}

The interaction of the two independent variables will create distinct decision processes, which will ultimately determine the key characteristics of the state’s bargaining position. These are the extent of the demands placed on the adversary and how well those demands are supported by the endogenous wartime information. If the system is unable to overcome the incentives to misrepresent information among a decision-making committee’s members, the rationality of a state’s bargaining position will begin to deteriorate. Demands will become too excessive in relation to battlefield conditions due to optimistic assessments of costs and benefits associated with various options. In contrast, an adversarial approach or dialectic inquiry will improve understanding of an option’s assumptions: its cost/benefit ratio and appropriateness to the current conditions.

Although the independent variables can influence other aspects of a state’s decision-making throughout the course of a war, focusing the study on a set of war-terminating demands provides an advantage over other decisions in wartime. Actions aimed at terminating a war provide a stopping point from which to assess the accuracy of a state’s assessment of battlefield information. In addition, from a political standpoint, the ending of the war will have a more

enduring effect on the foreign policy executive than decisions made earlier in the war. Perceptions of success or failure at the war’s end will strongly influence a president’s domestic support. Therefore, the executive has a strong incentive to maximize the benefits associated with a costly war and ensure they are achievable. If the actions were unsuccessful at bringing about a close to the hostilities and needlessly prolonged the conflict, process-tracing in the case study may reveal sources of inaccurate information or the origins of excessive demands.

For analysis, I will focus on post-World War II US cases for two reasons. First, the 1947 National Security Act and subsequent modifications established the most comprehensive foreign policy bureaucracies in existence. Now operating with well-established procedures (with the potential exception of the new Department of Homeland Defense), the bureaucracies have survived multiple presidential administrations. Second, focusing on a single state’s system places an emphasis on accounting for variation within a single regime type, which has been an under-explored topic in bargaining theory. With well-established institutions, the greatest degree of variation will be generated by the president’s use of the interagency process and the National Security Staff, assisting in isolating the variables.

The following diagram matches this study’s independent variables against predicted outcomes and cases. Several cases of each posited outcome are listed. The detailed discussion of the outcomes that follows will expand upon how the interaction of the two independent variables (IV1 and IV2 on the chart, respectively) create the bargaining position (the dependent variable, or DV on the chart), as well as identify the cases to be explored in detail in the remainder of this dissertation.

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60 This is rendered as a typological theory, an approach borrowed from Andrew Bennett, “Causal Mechanisms and Typological Theories in the Study of Civil Conflict” in Jeffrey T. Checkel, ed., *Transnational Dynamics of Civil War* (Cambridge University Press, 2013).
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**Outcome 1: Demands consistent with battlefield information.**

This first situation is one in which there is a plurality of recommendations to the executive on appropriate actions. Rather than attempt to find a compromise position among the dissenters, the process instead makes changes to potential solutions by updating expectations on the costs and benefits. Since this approach generates “winners” and “losers” in the policy process, open debate and resistance are expected to occur. Bureaucracies will generate information based on analysis that undermines policies they do not want to implement. This analysis is routinely brought into decision meetings. As new information accumulates, a greater degree of certainty is achieved on the course of action to be implemented.

A plurality of options generated by the decision-making committee places a wider variety of information on the table for consideration by the group. However, all members are expected to have incomplete and biased information which will influence their recommendations or
voting. Perspectives on the appropriate state of affairs at the war’s end are influenced by the participant’s organizational lens. This is a combination of what aspects of the war that organization has expertise in, as well as what a given course of action will mean for the organization after implementation.

Resolving these competing perspectives is not an imperative; the executive can choose to implement one or several of the recommendations while accepting the policy’s costs and benefits as estimated by the interested parties. In the present scenario, the executive chooses some subset of the alternatives for implementation. However, this does not imply the executive relies upon a single organization’s assessment of the state of the war. Instead, this approach in conjunction with the variety of options and diverse views under consideration requires each organization to be cautious in its assumptions for the preferred policy since it will have to defend its position in front of the group.

The combination of the two independent variables is expected to create an approach that uses multiple revisions of the strategic assessment before a final policy is implemented. This ensures new information is integrated and the sequential consideration of alternatives results in a more optimal policy. A system where rebuttal to an assertion or critique is routine provides a better basis from which to form a final policy. Krishna and Morgan (2001) describe a model where a decision-maker sequentially consults two biased experts. When the experts are biased in

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62 The literature shows that a sequential approach is more likely to lead to a better outcome as new information is revealed and integrated. See Rebecca B. Morton and Kenneth C. Williams, “Information Asymmetries and Simultaneous Versus Sequential Voting,” *The American Political Science Review* 93, no. 1 (March 1999): 51–67 for an example in elections. Austen-Smith and Feddersen, “Deliberation, Preference Uncertainty, and Voting Rules” applies this argument to committee decision-making with the same result. Landa and Meirowitz, “Game Theory, Information, and Deliberative Democracy” find that deliberation can reveal higher quality information, but that incentives to reveal private information remain problematic, which is consistent with this dissertation’s assertions. James N. Druckman, “Political Preference Formation: Competition, Deliberation, and the (Ir)relevance of Framing Effects,” *The American Political Science Review* 98, no. 4 (November 2004): 671–686, argues that an effective way to overcome biased framing effects is through elite heterogeneous discussions. This underscores that bias can remain in a single-stage approach to decision-making, since the framing effect becomes more dominant.

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the same manner, no improvement in the revelation of private information is achieved. However, they find that when experts are biased in different directions, sequential consultation can result in higher quality decisions; a system of debate overcomes incentives to withhold private information and decisions are further improved.63

I argue that this combination will provide the highest possibility that beliefs on the state of the war are appropriately updated. The process airs options and disagreements over policy choices in front of the president, who becomes familiar with the arguments and basis by which progress is to be measured once demands are decided upon. It implies a more narrow set of demands will be derived from these processes, which will be easier to communicate to the adversary and measure progress. This situation also enables dissenters to raise objections or competing explanations for events while “at the table” with the president.

When examining the case study for this outcome, I expect to find evidence of multiple revisions of estimates of costs and benefits associated with the policy that is eventually implemented. This is consistent with the notion of “convergence” in the endogenous bargaining literature.64 Furthermore, the process of debate should both encourage caution for bureaucratic representatives in terms of net assessments and revealing of private information.

Nixon’s handling of the termination of the Vietnam conflict provides an example of this first set of circumstances. Nixon originally intended to replace the formal machinery of the NSC that had been weakened under Kennedy and ignored by Johnson, to ensure that the process provided options and competing analysis to the president, rather than a bureaucratic concurrence. However, the resulting “paper-mill” may have undermined this goal and slowed organizational

responses to developing crisis, at least within the formal NSC structure. An alternate forum, the Washington Special Action Group, provided this desired analysis in crisis situations and still maintained the intention of multiple advocacy. A key issue in classifying the proximity variable for this model is whether Nixon’s withdrawal from the open debates and Kissinger’s domination of the option narrowing still constitutes a “close” classification for the narrowing of options. I argue that due to Kissinger’s position as the sole advisor to the president for foreign policy, this narrowing still took place at the highest levels, and Nixon continued to receive information on alternatives through memoranda. Kissinger’s handling of the war-ending negotiations was closely linked to battlefield events and can generally be considered an example of rapid Bayesian updating.

**Outcome 2: Excessive demands unsupported by battlefield information.**

The second set of conditions suggests that while there is a plurality of recommendations for consideration, the process creates an aggregation effect in which multiple interests are accommodated in the final policy. With an incentive to avoid upsetting an accommodation that includes an organization’s interests, a representative of that organization is unlikely to introduce information that calls assumptions into question. What is expected to result is an overly optimistic strategic assessment where indications of success are trumpeted, while indications of set-backs are dismissed.

Like Outcome 1, this situation begins with multiple recommendations for various possible courses of action. The difference in the second independent variable, the resolution

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67 Ibid.
approach, creates an outcome vastly different, however. Information availability (from a high degree of pluralism) is not sufficient to ensure a good decision, particularly in group settings. In fact, requiring a consensus position when confronted with a great deal of information reduces the group’s ability to effectively process the information. This is exacerbated by the fact that this approach changes the decision-making process from an iterative process that re-evaluates old positions in light of new information to a single-step process. This setting results in more frequent errors. A single-step process may also result in poor decisions in the future due to the members being unable to evaluate the extent of others’ biases through incorporation of new information. From the executive’s perspective, this structure does nothing to control biases or incentives to misrepresent information in the participants.

A critical aspect of this dynamic is to question how diverse the players in the process actually are. A plurality of perspectives and world-views assumes distinct epistemological and perceptual frameworks among the participants. Yet the members of the group under consideration here all share a very similar background, were appointed or held over by the same president, and operate in similar daily interactions. When members of a decision-making group have a strong shared identity, they are more likely to avoid conflict out of fear of damaging the group’s well-being. This suggests that a consensus is the most likely result.

This outcome is consistent with the classic bureaucratic “pulling and hauling” that creates a policy acceptable to the stakeholders. The compromise position may be one in which all receive a minimally acceptable reward, or one in which multiple participants receive all of what they desire in a policy. In either case, any Bayesian updating that occurs will be to justify more

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71 Michael Rabinder James, Deliberative Democracy and the Plural Polity (Lawrence, KS: Univ Pr of Kansas, 2004), 58–59.
72 Hermann et al., “Resolve, Accept, or Avoid,” 142.
expansive demands. The group dynamic will resist downward revision, even when the situation with the war warrants it, as participants are reluctant to relinquish their benefits from the agreed-upon course of action. As a result, benefits will be perceived as plentiful, costs as scarce, and alternative policies non-existent. Demands for a settlement will be unsupported by the actual state of the war.

Truman’s decision-making processes in the Korean conflict illustrate this set of conditions. Originally skeptical of the NSC system and generally holding it at arm’s length (likely to ensure he did not discourage the exchange of ideas and to preserve executive prerogative), he nonetheless saw it as an essential addition to the government to aid in decision-making and he closely reviewed information originating there. However, he did not restrict the decision-making process to the confines of the NSC, and frequently sought advice elsewhere. Once the Korean War broke out, Truman initially expanded the level of activity at the NSC, which tapered off after the first year. The NSC became a consensus organization that provided the president with an agreed-upon recommendation despite the readily available opposing views. In short, it was used to ensure decisions had been considered from all angles, but still came to a consensus to present to the president.

By the time the critical decision to expand the war and move beyond the 38th parallel arrived, which would end the war on more favorable terms, many of the dissenting voices in the process such as George Kennan had been sidelined. Although the Joint Chiefs of Staff advocated a short expansion above the parallel, the consensus/maximization approach that had emerged gave power to hawkish advisors, as well as to General McArthur, to advocate for a

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74 Ibid., 417.
further expansion. Consistent with the model proposed here, the Administration was well-informed about battlefield events and was able to update beliefs. However, the tendency to maximize war-termination demands that became built into the process created unacceptable outcomes for the opposing belligerents, who refused to settle. Instead, the Chinese signaled their intentions, were not heard, and reinforced North Korean troops. This approach stands in contrast to Eisenhower’s approach in the final months of the conflict. Eisenhower’s approach to decision making enabled him to review options, assessments, and dissenting opinions over the course of a record number of cabinet and NSC meetings held over his presidency on crises that included the Korean War. He sought out strong personalities and encouraged them to present opposing views in both the NSC and the cabinet meetings.77

**Outcome 3: Inflexible demands unrelated to battlefield information.**

This third outcome holds that the advisory team to the president must reach a unanimous position, but the diversity of views is strictly curtailed at final decision meetings. Therefore, the advocating organization retains a substantial advantage in advancing its policy aims. Since there is only one strategy being implemented, the probability of that participant being accommodating to others’ aims is low. Retaining influence and access is highly important, and this dominant participant will resist the introduction of dissenting perspectives, since that would undermine standing in the group. For the outside organizations, success depends upon weakening the dominant participant’s standing to create space for consideration of alternate policies. What results is a struggle for access and influence that becomes the determining factor in updating beliefs, rather than an actual strategic assessment of wartime conditions.

76 Ibid., 323–328.
This scenario’s first independent variable is a unanimous position. In contrast to a consensus position such as in Outcome 2, this unanimity is arrived at by eliminating options prior to final deliberations, rather than in a setting that would allow various bureaucratic concerns to be aired. This independent variable of selection of a narrow subset of policy alternatives in conjunction with a requirement for a unanimous position results in intense bureaucratic competition as agents attempt to secure policies that support organizational imperatives. For the “outside” organizations (those that are not at the decision table with the president), this requires them to forcefully advance their preferred policies at lower levels. For the “inside” organizations, this requires them to protect their access and influence with the president. Therefore, they will be reluctant to acknowledge errors and are more likely to continue advocating the same demands to terminate the war.

The effect on information processing in this situation is severe. With a strong advocate for a given set of actions dominating the final deliberations, framing effects become extensive. Framing implies a deviation from a rational position since it changes how information is interpreted, even in cases where the data are not deliberately changed with the intention of misleading. Yet establishing the frame of the discussion is still manipulation. Individuals with higher status in a decision-making group with appropriate resources can be adept at information manipulation and set up the decision on terms more advantageous to them. There is also evidence to suggest that framing can change a decision-maker’s propensity to accept risk. This type of manipulation and framing deliberately leaves out some information in favor of that supporting a particular action, and may include efforts to marginalize or exclude some members

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80 Druckman, “Political Preference Formation,” 672.
of the group that may undermine the policy under consideration.\textsuperscript{81} Therefore, this situation leads to the poorest probability of appropriate updating of beliefs based on endogenous information. Furthermore, it is likely this situation will prevent consideration of alternate means (strategies) to secure preferred ends.

To analyze these conditions, I will examine the Johnson Administration’s handling of the Vietnam War. Evidence of framing and manipulation will present as a relatively inflexible set of policy options with only minor adjustments to assessments of costs and benefits.\textsuperscript{82} In addition, there should be extensive evidence of information being withheld at lower levels at the behest of the dominant advisor. With only a single expert providing advice, it is not likely that Bayesian updating will occur rapidly enough.\textsuperscript{83} Termination demands will remain relatively constant, with little change in strategy.

During the Johnson Administration, the president’s infamous “Tuesday Lunch Meetings” became the heart of the national security process, where the president heard the opinions of only those that he wanted to hear.\textsuperscript{84} Participants worked to coordinate their advice ahead of time, and avoided going to the president with a divided opinion. Johnson had eliminated both the formal and informal machinery that provided honest assessments of events in developing policy, effectively ensuring options were narrowed far from the executive’s office.\textsuperscript{85} As predicted by the model here, bureaucratic competition was intense to frame issues and interpret intelligence. Secretary McNamara also worked to cut lines of communication between the Joint Staff and the


\textsuperscript{82} Maoz, “Framing the National Interest: The Manipulation of Foreign Policy Decisions in Group Settings,” 95.

\textsuperscript{83} Krishna and Morgan, “A Model of Expertise,” 756.


president to safeguard his influence.\textsuperscript{86} Agreed-upon approaches such as graduated overt pressure against North Vietnam failed to deliver results to support demands at the bargaining table, while analysis that highlighted shortfalls in strategy was suppressed.\textsuperscript{87}

**Outcome 4: Excessive demands unrelated to battlefield information.**

The fourth situation holds that when preferences are aggregated in isolation from the executive, bureaucratic infighting is minimized, but expectations for the outcome are unrealistically high, while updating of beliefs based on endogenous information is virtually non-existent. Organizations with a stake in the outcome are given a “free hand” due to the isolation from a decision-maker that can override their demands. The resulting process provides all participants their desired outcome, provided the conflict proceeds as expected. Endogenous information is unlikely to cause participants to revise their expectations downward due to organizational imperatives.

Some of the dynamics of this outcome are similar to Outcome 2, where interests are aggregated across interested parties. The independent variable of degree of plurality, however, creates a situation in which the executive’s role in creating a policy is minimized. There is likely to be a smaller number of organizations whose interests are represented, since the decision-making is isolated from the other members of the president’s advisory team. Since they are not involved, they are unlikely to perceive any organizational interests at stake, and will not provide much information in support. In this respect, this outcome may approximate Allison’s Model II where a large organization takes primary responsibility for a policy.\textsuperscript{88}

\textsuperscript{86} McMaster, *Dereliction of Duty*, 91.

\textsuperscript{87} Monten and Bennett, “Models of Crisis Decision Making and the 1990-91 Gulf War,” 319–321.

\textsuperscript{88} Allison and Zelikow, *Essence of Decision*, 143–196.
Information processing in this situation will be similar to Outcome 3 in terms of the role of framing and information manipulation. These are actually likely to be more extensive, due to the simplified task for the agent with fewer interested parties at the foreign policy executive’s decision meetings. Perhaps most significantly, the dominant agent in this situation has a greater degree of control over the participating group members; manipulating this aspect can provide more influence than framing in a group setting.\textsuperscript{89}

Examples of this fourth situation are mercifully rare in U.S. foreign policy experience, with the exceptions of the Bay of Pigs invasion and Operation Restore Hope in Somalia, both of which occurred due to unique circumstances. Although these events do not fit this paper’s focus on limited war termination, the processes and outcomes do fit the model’s predictions and the events are historically unique events, preventing use of another example. Evidence in support of this outcome will include a single course of action with low participation rates across the president’s advisory circle. Changes in beliefs due to endogenous information will be non-existent as optimistic assessments on costs and benefits predominate.

Operation Restore Hope began as a humanitarian intervention in Somalia initiated by President George H. W. Bush to provide military and logistical leadership for a UN-sponsored mission to provide aid under the moniker UNITAF. Most of the development of this plan under the Bush Administration had been developed at the deputy level in the interagency process, due to higher level resistance to consideration of military intervention.\textsuperscript{90} UNITAF had a restricted objective and was only intended to facilitate the delivery of aid and was generally considered a success.\textsuperscript{91} It remained in effect until Clinton came into office. UN Security Council Resolution

\textsuperscript{89} Hoyt, “The Political Manipulation of Group Composition,” 776–778.
\textsuperscript{91} Johnson and Tierney, \textit{Failing to Win}, 218.
814 established the second phase of this operation, which was termed UNOSOM II. The resolution was aimed at creating a secure environment and allowed for “appropriate action” to degrade the capabilities of hostile parties. President Clinton’s staff was instrumental in writing the language for the resolution, expanding goals for the operation, even while reducing the extent of US participation.\footnote{John Hillen, \textit{Blue Helmets: The Strategy of UN Military Operations}, 2nd ed. (Brassey’s UK Ltd, 2000), 212.} Although the mission for the US changed to include direct action, there were no principal meetings on the strategy in Somalia until after the events of October 3\textsuperscript{rd} and 4\textsuperscript{th}, 1993, which led to the death of 18 Americans.\footnote{Charles A. Stevenson, \textit{SECDEF: The Nearly Impossible Job of Secretary of Defense} (Washington, D.C.: Potomac Books Inc., 2007), 98.} Clinton’s angry reaction is noteworthy in light of this model’s predictions. While convinced that the official policy had changed without his consent, he raged, “How could this happen? No one told me about the down-side.”\footnote{David Halberstam, \textit{War in a Time of Peace: Bush, Clinton, and the Generals} (New York: Scribner, 2001), 262.} The entire event is generally characterized by a lack of questioning of assumptions, failure to update beliefs based on new information, and unrealistic expectations for outcome.

\textbf{Competing Explanations.}

In order to account for the two key elements of the bargaining position, the extent of demands and their appropriateness based on the state of the war, this dissertation has presented a model that deviates significantly from the standard approach of a unitary actor. This section will identify two alternatives that have been described in the literature to account for these elements which will be used to assess alternative explanations in the case studies. Both of these approaches allow for some latitude in the unitary actor approach; while recognizing other factors other than the chief executive’s opinion will influence decisions, they assign primary responsibility to a principal agent acting on the state’s behalf. They therefore approximate a unitary actor and then proceed to evaluate how “rational” the agent acts, or is allowed to act, in
seeking an optimal policy. A “predominant president” approach will be used as an alternative to explain the selection of strategy to attain the preferred goals of the chief executive.\textsuperscript{95} To explain delays in Bayesian updating, the literature commonly uses a psychological approach to account for poorly processed information due to cognitive limitations of decision-makers. These two models will be briefly explored here before application to the case studies.

A predominant president model indicates where the majority of the decision power resides. This is distinct from a dominance model, which indicates where exclusive decision power resides. A predominant president may want to update beliefs and strategies about a war but does not have free reign because of other political pressures. In Stanley (2009) for example, the state’s leader is assumed to desire a change in approach to the war, but the leader must wait until there is a change in the supporting constituency to make it feasible.\textsuperscript{96} This is consistent with Putnam’s (1988) two-level games, where a leader retains the final decision authority at the international game table, but must consider the domestic game table. A dominance model may assign 100\% of the decision-making authority to the chief executive; a predominant model may only result in a 51\% share of authority for the president. The other 49\% remains an important consideration for the executive in the handling of the war.

\footnotesize{\textsuperscript{95} This term is modified from the “predominant leader” described in Hermann, et al., “Who Leads Matters.” Another approach to this role is the presidential dominance model found in Monten and Bennett, “Models of Crisis Decision Making and the 1990-91 Gulf War.” However, the presidential dominance model holds that crises align the interests of the president and bureaucrats to approximate a unitary rational actor. The term “predominant president” is used here to indicate that while the president retains final control, he may still be compelled to balance other political pressures outside of bureaucratic interests. This approach is consistent with the newer bargaining literature that uses a gain-or-lose-office construct to incorporate factors outside of the endogenous wartime information into decision-making. While approximating a unitary actor, this is not completely rational from the perspective of the war bargaining; it is only rational from the perspective of the leader under domestic pressures. \textsuperscript{96} Elizabeth A. Stanley, “Ending the Korean War: The Role of Domestic Coalition Shifts in Overcoming Obstacles to Peace,” International Security 34, no. 1 (July 2009): 48.}
Importantly, this model does not problematize the processing of information; available information immediately updates beliefs.\textsuperscript{97} Information is considered scarce in this model and the leader must deliberately choose to seek more or decide based on what is currently available. Once a decision is made, however, the introduction of disconfirming evidence is not sufficient to induce a change in strategy. The political risk associated with a downward revision of goals even in the face of evidence of failure can induce greater risk propensity to secure those goals.\textsuperscript{98}

This predominant president model creates several empirical predictions. First, the determining factor in the quality of an initial strategy decision will be directly related to the president’s willingness to engage in an information search as it will be scarce. This search generates accurate information on the costs and benefits associated with that strategy, both in terms of the war and the domestic setting. Second, if information becomes available after the strategy’s implementation that points to a degrading situation, the executive’s ability to change course will depend upon his or her ability to build or maintain a supporting coalition. Sunk costs associated with the initial commitments will complicate this change. This is the primary determinant of the state’s inability to successfully update based on new information. Finally, the substance of the war terminating agreement will reflect the preferences of the coalition the president was depending upon. This is distinct from reflecting the preferences of advisors or bureaucracies; the concerned coalition forms a political base that retains the ability to influence the executive’s political future.

\textsuperscript{97} Hermann, et al., “Who Leads Matters,” 92. This article holds that a leader can range from being sensitive to political context to insensitive, which primarily influences information search. Available information, both supportive and contradictory, is brought into the decision-making process.

Where the predominant president may want to take advantage of alternatives but is unable to, the cognitively limited decision-maker cannot perceive these alternatives in the first place. The psychological accounting for Bayesian delays in situations of abundant information asserts decisions are distorted by systematic perceptual biases that economize thought processes.\textsuperscript{99} This perspective asserts actors are bounded in their rationality by the limits of their cognition. Where the central model of this dissertation is dealing with the motivated biases of bureaucratic agents supporting the executive, this psychological model is dealing with the unmotivated biases of decision-makers struggling to make sense out of a noisy battlefield and international environment.

The most damaging aspect of cognitive limitations on the integrity of decision-making is the tendency to engage in a selective information search built around expectations of what should matter in decision-making. This information search strategy will therefore likely be guided by an early version of the eventual policy, which leads to two serious problems. The first is a confirmatory bias, in which the leader more readily recognizes what is expected to be seen.\textsuperscript{100} Whether it is evidence of support for the favored policy under consideration or evidence of a currently enacted decision being successful, an information-abundant environment will usually provide some evidence that can be held as proof. The second problem arises from the first, and is more applicable in assessing endogenous information. This is the winner’s curse, in which evidence of success induces further risk-taking while ignoring mounting costs.\textsuperscript{101} Both of these tendencies also serve to limit a decision-maker’s ability to weigh the trade-offs between two

\textsuperscript{100} Matthew Rabin and Joel L. Schrag, “First Impressions Matter: A Model of Confirmatory Bias,” \textit{The Quarterly Journal of Economics} 114, no. 1 (February 1999): 38.
\textsuperscript{101} Gary Charness and Dan Levin, “The Origin of the Winner’s Curse: A Laboratory Study,” \textit{American Economic Journal: Microeconomics} 1, no. 1 (February 2009): 207.
options, particularly when there are already sunk costs associated with an earlier policy that should be changed.  

The psychological model generates the following empirical hypotheses. First, the quality of the decision will be directly related to the decision-maker’s familiarity and orientation to the issues at stake at the time of the crisis outbreak. This is due to the importance of “feel” for the situation that allows a higher quality of assessment. Second, decision-makers will discount evidence of a course of action failing in the course of the war, primarily due to the personal stakes involved. The failure to update beliefs appropriately will be caused by this tendency to engage in this defensive avoidance. Finally, the substance of the war-termination agreement will be primarily based upon the chief executive’s personal assessment of the interests at stake and acceptable costs. With multiple advisors presenting diverse information, the executive will tend to give more weight to those he agrees with, and the course will change only after overwhelming evidence accumulates to the contrary. These three predictions suggest a war termination agreement will be extremely difficult to arrive at based on endogenous information. The exogenous preferences of the president will have more explanatory power than the information that emerges from the war in accounting for the settlement terms.

The predominant president model will rely upon coalitional interests in explaining an initial selection of a strategy given a limited amount of information. Change will only be possible if it does not result in a coalition too small to secure the executive’s political future. The psychological model will be strongest in accounting for poor decisions despite readily

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103 Jonathan Mercer, “Rationality and Psychology in International Politics,” International Organization 59, no. 1 (January 2005): 95. This work suggests that psychological explanations can account for more than just mistakes in international relations; eliminating psychology from rationality also eliminates important information humans rely upon to make quality decisions. Therefore, a higher degree of orientation to the problem and the ability to trust certain information enhances the ability to solve the issue.
available information. Domestic political considerations will not dominate decision-making. Supporting the psychological model as a hindrance to Bayesian updating will require linking inaccurate assessments to information that was dismissed due to these shortcuts.

**Conclusion.**

This chapter has described a model that accounts for the formulation of a bargaining position for the termination of a limited conflict as described by two characteristics. These characteristics are the extent of the demands placed on an adversary, and how appropriately those demands are based upon endogenous wartime information. The growing emphasis on bargaining based on endogenous wartime information in the literature points to the necessity of opening the black box of the state to understand how this information, which is held as central to bargaining approaches, is handled.

This dissertation has made two hypotheses. First, as a greater number of perspectives are considered by the executive, the more likely it is that the rational bargaining position is encapsulated across those perspectives. Secondly, the bureaucratic rules of the game will determine if, while resolving those competing alternatives, the executive is able to discern that rational position or arrives at policies biased by bureaucratic preferences. Four case studies, one of each posited outcome, will be used to test these hypotheses in a building-block approach.
Chapter 4: Nixon in Vietnam

A Demonstration of Adversarial Proceedings

The Nixon Administration inherited a crisis in the Vietnam conflict. The war had been “Americanized” for four years with a gradual expansion of commitments intended to compel the North to settle with little progress to show for it. Costs associated with the conflict had long since passed levels that the Johnson Administration would have deemed acceptable in its first year in office. The 1968 Tet offensive by North Vietnam, although very costly to the North in military terms, had been a propaganda success in shocking the U.S. public at the seeming lack of any stability gains in South Vietnam even after great efforts and sacrifices by the U.S. At the conflict’s end, only marginally improved terms were reached to formally end the conflict over those proposed in 1969.¹ However, the process used to conclude the war was effective at integrating critical information, updating beliefs, and improving the rationality of the US over that which was achieved during the Johnson Administration.

The time period to be analyzed in this case is between 1969 and 1973, with a focus on the last two years. Kissinger began secret negotiations with the North Vietnamese in August of 1969 in Paris at Nixon’s direction. There was almost no progress achieved during the first two years of negotiations; the bargaining positions initially taken by the US and Hanoi left no overlapping bargaining space.² While Nixon was demanding a cease-fire throughout Southeast Asia linked to a timetable for withdrawals for both sides, a return of prisoners of war, and a peace conference,

Hanoi was demanding an unconditional withdrawal of the US and the removal of the South’s president, Nguyen Van Thieu. The North did not openly acknowledge they had troops in the South. The agreement reached in 1973 contained modifications to all of these positions on both sides. From bargaining perspective, such an agreement would be deemed a success since each side revised its expectations to reach a final document. At worst, the peace agreement was a temporary fiction that allowed the US to withdraw and claim victory while preparing to continue the conflict through air power after expected violations of the agreement took place.

Congressional action prevented reprisals by the passing of the War Powers Resolution of 1973, which restricted the president’s ability to use force without Congressional approval. South Vietnam ceased to exist two years after the agreement was signed with no options left to the US to prevent its fall.

This case should be considered a “most-likely” case for the theory posited in this dissertation.\(^3\) As discussed in more detail later in this chapter, the foreign policy system was deliberately designed to bring alternative views into decision meetings with the national security advisor and the president. In terms of the dependent variable discussion, there was therefore a high degree of plurality in critical decision meetings. This type of adversarial proceeding is expected to bring in more information to the process and better enable Bayesian updating. The system was also intended to generate choices for the president to make while deliberately avoiding bureaucratic consensus, or policy made through concurrences.\(^4\) In terms of the second dependent variable, there should be a narrow selection among the options presented for each critical decision, rather than a lowest-common-denominator approach intended to appease

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various interests. Through the process of competition among advisors, the costs and benefits of each choice should be clarified and this decision approach (narrow selection) implies the president will choose the most rational course of action among those available.

This case should also be considered a “most-likely” case for bargaining models that incorporate domestic pressures in explaining the actions of the foreign policy executive. The US was weary of war in Vietnam and the policies of the previous administration led to the early end of Johnson’s political career once he declined to run for reelection. Having campaigned on a promise to end the war, Nixon should have easily assembled a supporting coalition for ending the war on the best possible terms immediately available, though without having to resort to a rapid withdrawal that would signal defeat. Nixon’s first National Security Study Memorandum (NSSM) focused on the situation in Vietnam.\(^5\) When the study was completed, it reinforced the worst fears of the skeptics of the war: the South’s government was incompetent, the Vietcong continued to grow in numbers, the North was unlikely to be deterred from their objectives, and the Army of the Republic of Vietnam (ARVN – the South’s army) was unable to counter the military threat without continuing support from the US.\(^6\) This gave little hope to improving the situation in the short term. Public opinion was solidly against continuing the war to improve these conditions. Domestic-pressure bargaining approaches would hold that these conditions demand the new regime sue for peace. Rather than settle with his newly formed supporting coalition, Nixon continued the war for several years and was conducting risky negotiations (from a domestic political standpoint) as the next election neared.


There are clearly objections to be raised on the Nixon Administration’s handling of the Vietnam conflict. For example, many would argue that the marginal improvement in settlement terms were not worth the more than 20,000 American lives lost during that period. Or, the additional pressures brought against the North intended to improve negotiating leverage did not justify the damage done to the political viability of Laos and Cambodia. As indicated above, the life expectancy of the peace may have been short in the opinion of those within the administration. Yet the focus of this case study questions whether or not the process used to aggregate biased analysis by multiple presidential advisors better enabled the US to act as a rational actor. From this perspective, critical questions include: Were battlefield events properly interpreted and used to update beliefs when appropriate? Were the demands at the negotiation table supported by the political and military conditions at the time? Were political goals sought by the US properly translated into military objectives that would advance those goals? Were costs and benefits associated with various courses of action perceived at the time of decision? Did the advisory process properly inform Nixon on the domestic as well as international constraints on his negotiating position?

The options available to the Nixon Administration to conclude the war are examined here. The options available to the Johnson Administration to avoid the problems in the intervening four to eight years are discussed in Chapter Six. At the time Nixon assumed responsibility for the war, it may already have been impossible for a rational bargaining position to also be widely viewed as a morally just position. In terms of costs and benefits, the US had paid costs to an inordinate degree for few benefits with even fewer within sight by continuing military efforts. A rapid withdrawal was not feasible from a reputational standpoint, but there

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were options available to reduce troop commitment and limit further US casualties. Doing so would have endangered the struggling Government of Vietnam (GVN) and its people. The opportunity to fully resolve these mutually exclusive objectives (limiting US costs while supporting the GVN at a reasonable level) was likely lost as early as 1964, which is discussed later.

In order to proceed, this chapter first provides a historical narrative of the administration’s efforts to bring the North to the table for good-faith negotiations. Simultaneously, it identifies the key decisions the president was faced with for further analysis. The preferences of the key advisors on each of the decisions are also explored. Next, the chapter examines the dominant “rules of the game” that provided the bureaucratic context for the decisions. This is followed by a structured assessment of the case through the questions identified in the introductory chapter and the hypotheses developed in Chapter 3. Finally, I assess the explanatory power of the alternate explanations identified in Chapter 1 in accounting for the observed outcomes.

**Context of the War, Key Assessments, and Decisions**

In the closing weeks before the 1968 election, the Johnson Administration attempted a bombing halt to induce the North to resume good faith negotiations. No real progress had been made in the months leading up to an agreement for such an arrangement, which was finalized on October 27, 1968. President Thieu of South Vietnam saw this as a political move – an attempt by Johnson to secure his place in history, while staving off defeat for the Democrats in the upcoming election. This critique is backed up by the president’s own actions: while ordering the halt without any agreement on what would be discussed in negotiations or support from the GVN, Johnson recommended to General Creighton Abrams, the commander of US forces in
Vietnam, that he “keep the enemy on the run.”\textsuperscript{8} If it was necessary to keep pressure on the enemy to improve negotiations at the table, it is difficult to account for the bombing halt without considering the role of the election. The South publicly undermined the upcoming talks and was likely stalling to influence the American election, believing that support would be more robust from a Nixon presidency.\textsuperscript{9}

Upon taking office, Nixon considered the Vietnam war his most pressing concern. Immediately before his inauguration, Kissinger commissioned a special task force to consider options on Vietnam going forward. Nixon intervened early, and deleted consideration of a complete withdrawal from Vietnam within a year or two.\textsuperscript{10} He believed that Korea set a precedent for the proper way to influence a war’s outcome, particularly with outside communist influence. The credible threat of drastic military action would achieve more than gradual pressure.\textsuperscript{11} At the same time, Nixon’s staff created a list of twenty-eight questions that were submitted to the various relevant government agencies to generate an assessment on the situation. This process differed from practices in the Johnson Administration in one key aspect: each agency provided an assessment on each question rather than arriving at a consensus position before the report was forwarded to the White House.\textsuperscript{12} The answers formed the basis for NSSM-1, which found that bombing had not been effective in bringing about a settlement. Nixon’s and Kissinger’s first inclination was to force the North back to the bargaining table through more intensive bombing; bombing which would be more extensive than that over the previous four years in attempt to overcome the issues described in NSSM-1. Over the course of the next

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{8} Ibid., 30–31.
\item \textsuperscript{10} Tad Szulc, \textit{Illusion of Peace: Foreign Policy in the Nixon Years} (New York: Viking Press, 1978), 23–24.
\item \textsuperscript{11} Porter, \textit{Peace Denied}, 80.
\item \textsuperscript{12} Szulc, \textit{Illusion of Peace}, 24.
\end{itemize}
several years, experience on the battlefield interpreted through the lenses of the various government agencies made it clear that negotiations were not simply the next phase after intense military activity; success was achieved through a close connection between the battlefield and the negotiating table.

There were five key decisions over this four year period that will be discussed here. The first demonstrates a limited understanding of the political and military situation as well as what would lead to a successfully negotiated settlement. The subsequent decisions demonstrate the interplay between events on the battlefield that are interpreted by advisors and the revisions of offers made at the bargaining table.

Consistent with his desire to utilize coercive power more effectively in Vietnam, Nixon’s first critical decision centered on ways to expand or intensify the war. Simultaneously, both he and Kissinger were also aware of the need to improve domestic support for his policies which could undermine their bargaining position at crucial stages. An article Kissinger wrote for *Foreign Affairs* makes the assumption that support for the GVN could be sustained indefinitely, provided the US could adopt a low-casualty military strategy.13 Kissinger describes a central problem for the US policy in military objectives having little relation to desired political outcomes for the war; military strategy was divorced from its political purpose.14 He also finds flaw in the approach to Vietnam until that point in the assumptions on what constituted “acceptable losses” for the North.15 These are criticisms leveled directly at the decision-making processes that had been followed in the previous administration. Despite a desire to avoid these types of mistakes, the consideration of ways to intensify the war in 1969 indicates a similar pattern.

14 Ibid., 214.
15 Ibid., 212.
In March of 1969, the JCS developed a memorandum for the White House that described military options in Vietnam. In it, the Chiefs identified five options, all of which were listed as “actual or feigned” operations: airborne/amphibious operations in North Vietnam, airborne or amphibious operations against supply lines in Cambodia and Laos, expanded air and naval operations, subversion of the North’s political control, and nuclear escalation. The memorandum went forward without the perspectives of the Chairman or the Secretary. Two days later, the secretary submitted a memorandum concerning military responses to enemy activity in South Vietnam. In it, Secretary Laird states that he sees no real options to reduce communist activity in the South, given the extensive resources that have already been expended. In the end, he recommended military demonstrations of capabilities while continuing to pursue negotiation options in Paris, though without any real additional military pressure.

An initial offer was made by the US later that month, through Moscow, with fairly lenient terms being offered for a cease-fire, a role for communists already in the South in a reunification election in five years, and withdrawal of forces from both sides. However, nothing was heard back on the proposal for eight months; the Soviet Union was unwilling to risk its relations with North Vietnam since the North was insisting on immediate removal of the current regime in the South as a condition. Political pressure in the US demanded that Nixon begin removing troops from Vietnam, but the administration did not want to do that unilaterally. They required a way to retain the military initiative while reducing capabilities. The way to do

this was through transferring responsibility to the Army of the Republic of Vietnam (ARVN) while withdrawing US forces but retaining airpower in the theater of war. This became known as “Vietnamization,” which communicated that the South would be more responsible for its own security.

Despite a halt in the bombing and effective unilateral withdrawal for the US as the president came under increasing pressure to continue to announce the next reduction in troops, the North failed to modify their basic position, which linked all military and political issues. Withdrawal by the US would not be sufficient to end the war unless it was accompanied by the removal of the South’s government. On September 12, 1969, a National Security Council meeting considered further options to avoid an effective surrender to the North’s demands. Termination of the war on favorable terms, not merely its end, was required. The key outcome of this meeting was the creation of a task force to consider military options if talks failed to improve. The planning operation was dubbed “Duck Hook.”

In September of 1969, two deputies of Kissinger’s, Anthony Lake and Roger Morris, replied to a memorandum being developed by the military for options on Duck Hook. They critiqued the lack of real alternatives, and wanted more details on the costs and benefits of several potential courses of action. They additionally note that the contingency plan should make clear the president should consider if he was willing to use nuclear weapons before embarking on implementation. In early October, Kissinger submitted a memo to the president to discuss the state of plan development. He did not mention the use of nuclear weapons outright, but did note the need to destroy a target of strategic importance without having to

19 Ibid., 92.
continuously bomb to get the desired psychological effect from the strike; a decisive blow was needed. Later discussion of the effort by participants omits the extent to which a nuclear option was considered. Nixon’s memoirs discuss increasing the pressure on the North, but fail to mention any specifics of Duck Hook. Similarly, Kissinger’s writings note the options of mining ports and destroying “twenty-nine targets of military and economic importance,” but do not mention nuclear weapons.

On October 8, the secretary of defense submitted a memorandum to the president that assessed the plan being developed by the Joint Chiefs of Staff (JCS) for implementing Duck Hook. Due to the infeasibility of achieving a total military victory through any combination of actions, the plan was presented as a way to force the North to negotiate. The actions would both interdict the flow of supplies and equipment as well as affect the North’s leadership psychologically.

Laird questions in the memo whether or not there were suitable military objectives that would achieve these ends, and cites multiple problems: the relative ease with which the North can reestablish its supply lines; the risk of provoking other nations, particularly the Soviet Union, by mining operations; the potential break-down of talks with Hanoi; the negative reaction expected on the domestic front; the high collateral damage to civilian population; and the combat losses to the US. Laird concludes his memo with: “Therefore, the Plan would involve the U.S. in expanded costs and risks with no clear resultant military or political benefits.”

The president ultimately decided to cancel Duck Hook, though he carried on with a nuclear alert designed to signal to Moscow and Hanoi that his earlier threats of force with “great

consequence,” which was likely intended to salvage credibility in the eyes of adversaries and increase bargaining leverage. In his memoirs, Nixon cites three reasons for declining to escalate at that time. First, American casualty numbers were at new lows. Second, he thought that the recent death of Ho Chi Minh could create bargaining opportunities as new leadership came the helm. Finally, after a discussion with a British expert on guerilla warfare, he felt that it would risk domestic and international condemnation without rectifying the political problems that existed in the South’s government.

Perhaps sensing a closing window of opportunity, Nixon initiated a significant change to military efforts in April of 1970 by authorizing an incursion into Cambodia to destroy logistics and bases that were being utilized by the North as they infiltrated the south. The campaign was generally successful and resulted in a significant reduction of communist activity in South Vietnam. However, it also reignited anti-war sentiment in the US as the Vietnam conflict appeared to be spreading across the region. Congressional action prohibited the use of US ground forces in Cambodia through the Cooper-Church amendment, which was passed in January of 1971. This first step led to other Congressional restrictions on the conduct of the war not only in Cambodia, but Vietnam as well. Further measures in June and July of 1973 mandated the cessation of all bombing in Cambodia. Nevertheless, the administration looked for a way to replicate that success in terms of reducing enemy activity across borders. A similarly conceived invasion of Laos by the ARVN, supported by US airpower, was undertaken at the very end of 1970 and ended badly for Saigon. Its troops were mauled and retreated within

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two months. Kissinger attributes the weakness in the planning process to the lack of a dissenting opinion in critical decision meetings with the president; a consensus approach was adopted due to each cabinet member’s concern over domestic reaction.28 This disaster was an indication that the process of Vietnamization held little hope of fully succeeding. Two months later, the US began to lower demands at the bargaining table based on information that was emerging from the recent engagements.29

This second critical decision for the administration concerned what could realistically be achieved at negotiations given the information emerging from the battlefield. In October of 1970, Nixon had made a speech that included by way of omission what would become a major concession in the negotiations in 1971: he failed to insist upon removal of all North Vietnamese troops from the South as a pre-condition for US withdrawal.30 On May 31, 1971, Kissinger flew to Paris with a new proposal. Its critical element stated that the US would set a deadline for the withdrawal of all US forces in exchange for a cease-fire and the release of all American POWs with no mention of the North’s troops. Kissinger refused the North’s demands for the removal of Thieu’s regime.31 Although the North did not accept the proposal outright (thinking they could gain more concessions for the release of the POWs), Kissinger had made the first move in creating flexibility to locate a bargain.

Kissinger again lowered demands in an October 1971 offer, with a six-month withdrawal window for the US, a cease-fire and peace conference, as well as new elections in the South after Thieu resigned. The North failed to respond, and appeared to be gearing up for an offensive,

28 Kissinger, White House Years, 996.
presumed to begin with the dry season in February 1972. In an effort to salvage the efforts, Nixon decided to “go public” with the news of the negotiations in a speech on January 25, 1972 over Kissinger’s objections.\textsuperscript{32} This seemed to delay the offensive, but did not prevent it. After a series of bitter public denials over specific terms in the press, the North launched an offensive at the end of March, seemingly to remove the South’s government.\textsuperscript{33} Although this round of talks failed, they were an important step in clarifying the positions on both sides; the North had presented a proposal, rather than a series of demands that were subject to change at each new round of negotiations.\textsuperscript{34}

From the US perspective, it had given in on all it could be reasonably asked to do to locate a bargain; the only matter that it did not acquiesce on was the removal of Theiu.\textsuperscript{35} This negotiation was undertaken in the shadow of the failed Laos incursion. Despite the flaws that are apparent in the US’s decision-making process in that case,\textsuperscript{36} the event plainly revealed a fundamental truth: the negotiating position of the US was not supported by the conditions of the battlefield or the state of the GVN and ARVN. It also created another problem on the battlefield in that Hanoi had reason to be more confident in their operations against the South which would be assuming a greater responsibility for its well-being as US forces withdrew. From the North’s perspective, time was on their side.

On March 30, 1972, the North launched a major offensive on three fronts, which became known as the Easter offensive. The North had initiated the military offensive feeling they were in a better strategic position with new Soviet equipment. Yet at the time they launched the

\textsuperscript{32} Hoff, “A Revisionist View of Nixon’s Foreign Policy,” 119.
\textsuperscript{33} Szulc, “How Kissinger Did It,” 34.
\textsuperscript{34} Bundy, \textit{A Tangled Web}, 299.
\textsuperscript{35} Berman, \textit{No Peace, No Honor}, 110.
\textsuperscript{36} Kissinger cites: a decision reached by consensus that eroded the impact of the operation, the lack of a devil’s advocate in the process, military objectives poorly suited for the desired political effects, and insufficient US ground forces. See: Kissinger, \textit{White House Years}, 996–1010.
attack, the South and the US were well-prepared to counter it through both ground forces and airpower. Although the timing of the attack had surprised the South and the US, early preparation allowed recovery. The administration had to devise a response that would not completely derail negotiations, nor alienate China and the Soviet Union which were both being courted for support in bringing political pressure against Hanoi.

Nixon responded to the new offensive by dispatching Kissinger to Moscow in an attempt to get Brezhnev’s support. Kissinger’s key offer during this meeting was to request the removal of the troops that entered the South after the offensive began; it was the first time the US had given any explicit indication that it would not demand the removal of the troops that had already been in the South prior to March 30. Earlier “offers” of this condition had been made through omission in lists of conditions, only. Before the Soviets’ involvement could have any real influence, the Nixon Administration had to consider a counter-offensive to salvage the badly deteriorating military situation in the South. Negotiations would not succeed if the North held all of the cards.

The NSC was to meet on May 8, 1972 to discuss military options; Kissinger’s deputy, Alexander Haig, believed the president would order bombing of the North along with mining of Haiphong Harbor to retaliate for the offensive. Kissinger conducted a preparatory meeting two days before with NSC staffers, a CIA representative, and China and Soviet experts. Opinions on the plan ranged from support to neutrality; no serious objections were raised. Kissinger agonized over the decision and wondered if the ARVN would collapse regardless. Despite his reservations, Kissinger understood the need to take action and the NSC coordinated with the Pentagon.

37 Bundy, A Tangled Web, 351.
At the full NSC meeting, the president heard from CIA Director Richard Helms, the Secretary of State William Rogers, Secretary of Defense Melvin Laird, Secretary of Treasury John Connally, and Vice President Agnew. Helms, Rogers, and Laird all argued against the two actions. Connally openly disparaged the Secretary of Defense’s position, and forcefully advocated both the bombing and mining. 39 Kissinger himself was advising against increasing military activity at the time of the summit; it risked domestic outcry in conjunction with the Soviets cancelling the upcoming Moscow Summit, or at the very least create a poor public relations situation in which the president would be attending a fancy meeting while bombing the Soviets’ ally. 40 Over the objections of the CIA, the Departments of State and Defense, and the commander of forces in Vietnam, General Creighton Abrams, the president dedicated a large number of B-52 bombers to Operation Linebacker, which targeted cities of North Vietnam in retaliation. 41 Nixon assessed he could risk losing the summit, but not the war. 42 Being concerned that military planners would proceed with a relatively mild bombing plan, Nixon provided a memorandum to the NSC ensuring there was no mistake that he desired an intense campaign; failing to do so would accumulate risk on the war’s outcome, while failing to secure the benefits of the bombing. 43

Well aware of the risks and potential costs associated with his options, Nixon implemented both the mining and the bombing of the North, which was code-named Linebacker, while going forward with the already-scheduled Moscow Summit in May. At the summit, Kissinger suggested to the Soviet Foreign Minister that one, bombing of the North might be stopped prior to the return of POWs, and two, that the US might support a tripartite election in

39 Ibid., 40.
41 Kimball, The Vietnam War Files, 30.
the South that could result in a coalitional government, which the US had previously rejected. Both of these positions were at variance with public positions the US had taken. Kissinger was moving the US closer to the bargaining position of the North. The Moscow Summit and the recent opening of China may not have resulted in additional political pressure on Hanoi, but their lack of protestations of the bombing campaign launched by the US likely signaled the North that they were on their own during the campaign.

Briefly, Nixon again considered the use of nuclear weapons in retaliation for the spring offensive. On April 25, 1972, the president brought the possibility up with Kissinger in a meeting. While rejecting the option of conventional bombing against dikes due to the high casualties that were expected to occur from drowning, Nixon suggested he would prefer to use a nuclear bomb and asked if the security advisor had that option “ready.” Kissinger dissented with that option, and cited a military commander (whose name was not included in the transcript) that would not support the option. In the end, Nixon settled for the threat of nuclear weapon use, rather than the use itself as a potential bargaining chip. This was a position he reiterated in the May 8 meeting of the National Security Council, while also stating that they obviously were “not going to use nuclear weapons.”

By August it was apparent to both sides that they had reached a military stalemate, while the administration remained committed to proceeding with troop reduction. This led to the US’s fourth critical decision in what to offer next at the bargaining table. The central issue remained the disposition of the South’s government, which was affected by the disposition of the North’s troops in the South after the agreement was reached. The North still maintained there were no

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44 Szulc, “How Kissinger Did It,” 43.
45 Bundy, A Tangled Web, 352.
47 Ibid., 217.
communist insurgents in the South. The terms reached with the North’s negotiator consisted of: a cease-fire, withdrawal of American troops within sixty days, return of POWs on both sides, a National Council of Reconciliation and Concord in place of a coalition government, and the dropping of the demand for Thieu’s removal. These terms were generally what the US had been hoping for. In August of 1972, Kissinger sought input from the Ambassador to South Vietnam on these emerging terms of settlement, and asked if the terms should be revised to ask fewer concessions from the North being concerned that he might asking too much. Bunker confirmed he thought the terms were fair and what could reasonably be hoped for, to include the emerging consensus on the government.\footnote{48 “Memorandum of Conversation Between Ambassador Ellsworth Bunker, Dr, Henry A. Kissinger, and Peter W. Rodman, NSC Staff.” (The White House, August 31, 1972), \url{http://www.nixonlibrary.gov/virtuallibrary/releases/jul11/declass12.pdf}.} Haig later warned the terms would not be acceptable to Thieu.\footnote{49 Nixon, \textit{The Memoirs of Richard Nixon}, 692.}

The president’s advisors differed on whether achieving the agreement would be easier before or after the election, which was expected to go for Nixon by a large margin. Haig advised waiting until after the election to ensure a break-down did not affect its outcome. Afterward, he could claim a mandate at the bargaining table with support for his handling of negotiations. Kissinger believed keeping the North under pressure to settle would be beneficial, since they would believe they could get better terms.\footnote{50 Ibid., 701.} Nixon proceeded to pressure the South to accept the current agreement, though he had initially sided with Haig’s assessment. Predictably, Thieu was not receptive to the agreement and demanded a removal of the North’s troops and strict enforcement of the demilitarized zone. Although Thieu also rejected the political conditions of the settlement, fearing it would greatly reduce his ability to control the South, Nixon gave instructions to Kissinger to proceed; this was the first time the US was negotiating conditions without the consent of the South. All of these issues remained problems for Thieu, and talks
between him and Kissinger fell apart shortly before the security advisor was to go to Hanoi to initially approve a settlement. As talks dragged on past the election, the North appeared to sense a greater freedom to make demands. In retaliation for the delay, the North publicly released details of the proposed settlement terms.

By December of 1972, Hanoi appeared to be backing away from an agreement even though battlefield conditions were deteriorating for the communists. After offering a series of concessions, they would retract their offer. This pattern was repeated for several months as they bargained to gain time as they attempted to improve their battlefield situation. Despite sensing an agreement was within reasonable reach, the US could not get commitments from the North to specific terms. Their reluctance resulted in the “Christmas Bombings,” also known as Operation Linebacker II.

In mid-December, Nixon felt action was needed to bring the North back to the negotiation table; they had effectively withdrawn from negotiations and were encouraged by the obvious rift between Saigon and Washington. Nixon received input from several key advisors in this decision. Laird was opposed to resuming extensive bombing. Nixon was also reluctant to have his initial decisions in his second term expand the war he was attempting to end. Kissinger advocated limited bombing in Hanoi and Haiphong with fighter-bombers. Haig asserted that only a massive effort would convince the North to resume talks in earnest.\(^{51}\) Nixon accepted Haig’s assessment, and the Christmas Bombings became one of Nixon’s most controversial decisions in the war. However, the North requested resumed talks on December 26. By December 29, Hanoi retracted all changes it had been demanding over the previous two months.

By that time, its military capabilities to defend itself against further air attacks was almost completely depleted.\textsuperscript{52}

Talks resumed in January, and Kissinger felt the US was in a much better position to obtain a final agreement. In addition to the North’s renewed willingness to compromise, Thieu was encouraged because of the South’s stronger military position. Although the bombings were effective, Nixon had also run out of domestic political leverage. He felt it necessary to conclude an agreement before his second inauguration to avoid Congress from denying funding for further support of the South.\textsuperscript{53} The final conditions of negotiations were reached on January 13, 1973, with its official acceptance by both sides ten days later.

**Bureaucratic Conditions and Rules of the Game**

From a bargaining model of war perspective, the modifications to the bargaining positions of both sides are understandable. War served to clarify the limits of what each side could hope to achieve through further fighting. To the North, it became clear they could not force the removal of Thieu, at least in the timeframe that the US remained committed to its ally. Later, the North realized bargaining a final agreement was in its best interests as military missions brought more pressure to its capital. For the US, the major concession came in the form of relaxing the requirement to remove communist troops from the South; it could not force Hanoi to order it and the decreasing levels of American troops prevented the US from doing it itself. However, more anomalies emerge when viewing these events through bargaining models that incorporate domestic pressure on the US side. Although a precipitous withdrawal was not feasible for Nixon upon assuming office, he was not under a great deal of pressure to expand the

\textsuperscript{52} Bundy, *A Tangled Web*, 362.

\textsuperscript{53} Ibid., 363.
war as he did. In fact, it may have benefitted him to seek an end to the war early in his first term. Later, domestic pressures appeared to influence the timing of events, though not necessarily the substance of decisions. For example, launching the Christmas Bombings was risky from a political standpoint but appears to have been instrumental in securing the North’s commitment to specific settlement terms. What facilitated the administration’s ability to approximate a rational actor in its dealings at the bargaining table and on the battlefield?

The theory described in Chapter 3 suggests that two elements in the decision making process were critical. First, the president was routinely exposed to competing assessments of the military and political situations. Secondly, the president did not attempt to make decisions based on a compromise among the assessments he received. Competing input helped clarify costs and benefits of each action, and Nixon made a narrow choice among the alternatives he was given. Despite Kissinger’s central role in the administration’s foreign policy, Nixon frequently decided to follow the advice of other participants, such as in the case of the retaliation for the North’s Easter invasion while proceeding with the Moscow Summit. The case of the Christmas Bombing provides an example of the president narrowly selecting among the options he was given: rather than a restricted bombing effort (which would have been a compromise position), he opted for a more expansive bombing campaign that ultimately achieved the results he was seeking.

The National Security Council (NSC) was created in the National Security Act of 1947 for the purpose of advising the president on the integration of policies related to national security matters. In its early years, the Secretary of State held the preeminent position in terms of advising the president; the role of the national security assistant was to coordinate meetings and
paperwork among the key players of the NSC.\textsuperscript{54} Eisenhower was the first to make extensive use of the national security advisor, and elevated the position to a special assistant to the president. Other changes he implemented included extensive staffing mechanisms and sub-groups to the NSC to study issues in greater depth and to monitor policy implementation. After the Kennedy Administration dismantled many of the formal staffing functions of the NSC and instead relied upon more informal relationships,\textsuperscript{55} Nixon came to office with the intent of reviving Eisenhower’s staffing mechanisms. Kissinger, as the national security assistant (elevated again from special assistant) implemented a system that made more extensive use of written options for the president, partly as a result of Nixon’s dislike for extensive face-to-face interaction with groups.\textsuperscript{56} The new approach centralized control of the system at the White House, and placed Kissinger in a dominating role.

The national security assistant position is unique in the NSC, particularly when its occupant assumes a policy-making role. The assistant has no ties to a large bureaucracy and does not require Congressional confirmation as the other members do; his role is intended to serve only the president. Nixon took advantage of this and, as all presidents do, structured the NSC to suit his desires through his National Security Decision Memoranda (NSDM). The second NSDM provided Kissinger with the power to set the NSC agenda and gave his staff the power to review proposals for presentation in the formal NSC meetings.\textsuperscript{57} Importantly, the


\textsuperscript{55} A practice continued under Johnson, which is discussed in Chapter Six.


NSDM specified that it was the responsibility of the NSC staff to ensure all viable options were considered in those proposals, along with expected costs.\textsuperscript{58}

Although the shift from a cabinet-focused advisory system to a staff-focused one reduced the power of individual secretaries, the NSC forwarded any input from the secretaries to the president. Those memos were forwarded with a cover memo that made recommendations to the president on how to interpret the attached information, but did not shield the executive from dissenting opinions.\textsuperscript{59} Although the system was staff-centered, the cabinet retained significant influence. For example, Laird’s recommendations to the president on the bombing of Cambodia prevailed over that of Kissinger’s in 1973.\textsuperscript{60} The framing effects did not have as extensive an influence as a cursory look at the system would indicate; despite his privileged access, Kissinger failed to secure his preferred policy in several key instances.

These conditions were not a unique occurrence in the Nixon White House; a similar diversity of opinions also existed on the domestic side of the staff. Daniel Patrick Moynihan, for example, had worked in the Kennedy Administration, but was brought in by Nixon to work on his new Urban Affairs Council even though Nixon frequently disagreed with him.\textsuperscript{61} Robert Haldeman, a key domestic aid in the administration, worked to ensure Nixon heard multiple points of view on issues and structured the system to allow for robust debate.\textsuperscript{62} Whether the system was a deliberate choice by Nixon or whether it was the creation of the aides that served him is immaterial – the outcomes were similar. It appears the structure of the foreign policy system was more by presidential design while the domestic side was more due to the decisions of

\textsuperscript{58} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{62} Ibid., 21.
key aides. Clearly, the system failed to restrain poor choices by the time of the Watergate break-in, though this was not a policy choice that was carried out after open debate. It was this type of debate that enabled the rational bargaining position.

**Structured Assessment**

This section examines the case using the structured questions listed in Chapter One. According to this dissertation’s theory, the practices followed in Nixon’s decision-making support system in the Vietnam War should have created the greatest possibility of new information being integrated into the process and improving decisions. In order to assess this, these questions focus on how effectively the system exposed relevant information, questioned assumptions, assessed costs and benefits, and determined the best course of action. The previous section reviewed five key decision points for the administration: the options to expand the war in 1969; the decision to lower demands at the bargaining table in May of 1971, debating how to respond to the North’s Easter Invasion of March 1972, the decision to lower demands in October 1972, and the launching of the 1972 Christmas Bombings which preceded the final settlement. The manner in which each of these events was decided sheds light on how the process affected decisions and assessments.

In each of the major decision points, the president did have access to multiple interpretations of conditions as well as a variety of options to implement. Consistent with bureaucratic politics, some advisors did reflect the biases of their organizations; in other cases, they did not. One of the early disagreements between Kissinger, Laird, and Rogers was the pace at which US troops would withdraw from Vietnam. This was a background condition for all of the critical decisions examined here. What Nixon termed “Laird’s plan” consisted of accelerated Vietnamization and more rapid withdrawal; this was supported by Rogers. Kissinger advocated
moving more slowly since the transfer of responsibility was not proceeding well; it was not clear
the ARVN would stand on its own. After briefly considering increasing troop levels to improve
bargaining leverage, Nixon settled on accelerating the transfer, but continuing at the current level
of US military operations.\footnote{Jeffrey Kimball, \textit{The Vietnam War Files: Uncovering the Secret History of Nixon-Era Strategy} (Lawrence, KS: University Press Of Kansas, 2004), 21–23.} This mollified critics of the war since it appeared to speed the
conflict’s close, but also allowed the administration to preserve bargaining leverage with the
leaders in the North, who were not yet amenable to negotiations. Although this was not one of
the decisions examined in this case, this early debate demonstrated the pattern that would follow
in most of the subsequent decisions: the president was aware of dissent, considered alternative
interpretations of costs and benefits, and chose a course that optimized net gain.

The first critical decision (options to expand the war under Duck Hook) provides some
examples of bureaucratic biases. In this instance, the Joint Chiefs of Staff provided
recommendations through the secretary of defense that basically reflected their activities over the
previous five years: increased bombings, though more directly aimed at key areas in North
Vietnam. These options were forwarded without serious consideration of the pros and cons
associated with each; this was a problem from Haig’s perspective and he went on to request input
from Laird and the Chairman. In effect, the options were presented as merely alternatives with
identical costs to achieve the desired outcome. Laird argued other measures would be necessary,
to include bombing or ground operations in Cambodia to sever supply lines and presented these
measures as costs, rather than potential courses of action that would yield benefits.\footnote{Melvin P. Laird, “Memorandum for the President: Air and Naval Operations Against North Vietnam” (The Office of the Secretary of Defense, October 8, 1969), 6, http://www.nixonlibrary.gov/virtuallibrary/releases/dec08/100869_Laird.pdf.} This was a
strange sequence, since the JCS had earlier forwarded a memorandum that recommended
escalation measures well beyond what the president had requested when considering responses to
communist activity in the South. The decision to continue with troop drawdown described above, however, began to limit options outside of bombing for large-scale US operations.

Laird’s perspective in these memos is not fully predictable based on his bureaucratic position. Instead, he was advocating for more military demonstrations with the continued transfer of responsibility to the South. He similarly dissented when options to retaliate for the Easter Invasion were being considered.

However, Laird’s preference is understandable from a resource-expenditure perspective; the US experience with Vietnam over the previous several years indicated progress came only with high costs. If he viewed these costs as not commensurate with the benefits he perceived for the Department of Defense (DoD), a more cautious approach to these problems is rational. This is the very argument he had made just six months before, when he provided a detailed listing of the costs expended by the DoD in attempts to force the communists out of South Vietnam. In addition, he argued that the North might be attempting to provoke a response out of proportion to the agitation. His preference for caution and signaling the enemy with demonstrations of resolve while bargaining is therefore understandable. As a manager of military resources, he would be held responsible, to a degree, for their mismanagement.

Rogers’s perspective in the Easter offensive response is more predictable from a bureaucratic politics perspective since he was concerned it would lead to the cancelation of the Moscow Summit; Kissinger had similar concerns in addition to risking public condemnation. Even one of Nixon’s military advisors, General Creighton Abrams, was advising against a response focused in the North, since it would divert some of his resources that were being

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employed in the fight in the South. Nixon used the advice of John Connally to guide his decision – he advocated a forceful response. Connally’s perspective resulted not from a bureaucratic bias but from his assessment of domestic politics.\(^67\) Several of Nixon’s advisors over-estimated costs in this case in manners consistent with their biases. Specifically, they inflated costs of alternatives they did not prefer while ignoring the potential costs associated with their own preferences.

At the advisor level, there was some evidence of reevaluation of initial recommendations and assessments during these five key decision points. During the final rounds of negotiations in 1972, Haig had been advocating continued talks, while delaying any expansion of military efforts to improve bargaining leverage, fearing Nixon would pay a domestic cost. However, Hanoi’s continued reluctance to commit to any final terms eventually convinced him that only a massive military response would successfully change conditions at the table.\(^68\) Similarly, Laird was an early advocate of air strikes sanctuaries in Cambodia,\(^69\) but was skeptical of the utility of options to expand the war by striking targets in the North. Certainly Kissinger, as the chief negotiator for the US, revised his assessments of what could be reasonably hoped for over the course of the bargaining as he lowered US termination demands. These instances suggest that preferences were not strictly created by bureaucratic influences.\(^70\) Instead, advisors justified their changing assessments based on conditions on the battlefield. However, as discussed, biases remained a part of these assessments in the advisory process.

These instances of changes in assessments also indicate that the rules of the game did not exert an outsized influence on the presentation of initial assessments. In other words, no players


\(^{69}\) Ibid., 252.

\(^{70}\) Or, more generally, stands created by sits. Kissinger and Haig did not belong to a well-established organization that might have “captured” them yet they had an interest in maintaining their access and influence.
moderated or changed their recommendations due to any penalty they might have perceived during the execution of the advisory function. There was, however, evidence that making their dissent public (outside of the advisory circle) would have resulted in the ending of their careers. Both Rogers and Laird had reservations about the legality and utility of invading Cambodia (distinct from the bombing mentioned above) as well as lower level staffers, but their objections were never aired beyond the president’s advisory group, likely due to these fears.\(^{71}\) Nixon could have easily changed the dynamics involved in receiving the advice he needed had he removed key advisors due to the stands they took on issues. Although there were resignations, and Nixon briefly considered removing Laird and Abrams after their recommendations on Easter offensive retaliation,\(^ {72}\) the degree to which a plurality of views remained in advisory meetings is notable.

How these views were reconciled prior to a decision is complex. Ultimately, the president was made aware of dissenting perspectives and recommendations that he did not enact. The role that Kissinger played in the decision-making process sometimes obscures this. Kissinger is at times portrayed as power-hungry and motivated by retaining his access and influence.\(^ {73}\) Yet his recommendations to the president accurately reflected the opinions of other cabinet members, even as he was advocating a different course. In the cases where the final debate took place in front of the president, Nixon alone reconciled the divergence through the course of action he chose. There was no effort to coordinate the multiple assessments among the advisors before that.

Battlefield outcomes were closely linked with belief revision and indicate integration of relevant information. The Administration was able to identify both favorable and unfavorable

\(^{71}\) Szulc, Illusion of Peace, 279–281.
\(^{72}\) Kimball, The Vietnam War Files, 218.
conditions for the offers being made at the bargaining table. The downward revision of demands that Kissinger made by 1971 was a recognition of unsupportable demands. An NSC review of the situation in Vietnam indicated that there was little hope of securing the removal of the North’s troops from the South’s territory, which led to Kissinger’s dropping that condition from negotiations subtly at first, and then more overtly with the Soviets.\textsuperscript{74} After the Easter offensive, the Linebacker operations became critical in forcing the North to resume talks, which were conditions the Administration were able to recognize as favorable. Once airpower blunted the attack and shifted the momentum back to the South before the stalemate developed in the summer, the stage was set for a successful Christmas Bombing campaign which was relatively short. By the time it was launched, Linebacker II exploited the weakened state of the North’s army and forced resumed talks.\textsuperscript{75}

The linking of battlefield events to negotiation was by design; the administration’s handling did not approach the talks as a post-hostility activity. Kissinger believed that it would be impossible to extract reasonable concessions from North Vietnam without bringing them to a stalemate on the battlefield. He believed separating force from the negotiations would lead to problems similar to those experienced in Korea, where negotiations were taking place while the US was in defensive positions, rather than continuing to apply military pressure.\textsuperscript{76} Nixon also purposefully avoided an approach of gradualism that would be ineffective.\textsuperscript{77}

Aside from the battlefield, the administration was also cognizant of the domestic political pressures in their decision-making, though it did not alter the substance of the major decisions.

\textsuperscript{74} Tad Szulc, “How Kissinger Did It: Behind the Vietnam Cease-Fire Agreement,” \textit{Foreign Policy} no. 15 (July 1, 1974): 41.
\textsuperscript{77} Ibid., 59.
For example, Nixon was pressing for a settlement at the time he launched Linebacker II, fearing Congressional action would begin to undermine the strategic position of the US through funding reduction. In addition, routine announcements of force reductions became expected, though a new massive ground offensive was never under consideration in the decisions points examined here. Nixon’s declining to escalate the war early in his tenure may have been due in part to domestic political considerations, though he cites other reasons for it. The evidence examined here indicates that the majority of the information used to make decisions originated from the battlefield and the negotiating table rather than domestic influences or electoral pressures.

Nixon’s first decision on whether to escalate the war provides the clearest example of a decision reached through repeatedly revisiting the available options and information. The process started in early March 1969 with the JCS memorandum that examined options to increase pressure on the North. Laird’s subsequent assessment pointed out that little could be hoped to be gained along those lines at that time given that so many resources had already been committed. Consideration of escalation continued through September as US forces further reduced while the North remained committed to the removal of Thieu’s regime. Duck Hook became the focus for these options, and Nixon even considered the use of nuclear weapons. Laird and Rogers again raised their objections in October before Nixon ultimately decided against the Duck Hook operation by November. At this point, it was the rational decision. A conventional escalation of the war did not become the best alternative until the North committed itself to a largely conventional operation in the Easter offensive which made it more vulnerable to an air campaign.

These reevaluations, along with those that took place in the third (Easter offensive response) and fifth decisions (Christmas Bombings) served to improve understanding of the costs
and benefits of each option and controlled the bias of participants. For example, Abrams’ reluctance to divert bombers to striking the north was based on his parochial interests in advancing the war in the South. The NSC staff provided a more strategic perspective, and even Kissinger ultimately agreed with the decision to proceed with both mining and bombing despite his concerns on the Moscow Summit.

Nixon and Kissinger held the termination demand decisions for themselves. Nixon consulted with Republican leaders and floated his trial balloon on the North’s force reduction in his press conference, but the NSC staff and the Cabinet were absent from open deliberations on what the US position should be over successive rounds of negotiations. The Cabinet departments did have representation on the negotiation team that worked with Kissinger, but the national security advisor was clearly in the driver’s seat on specific offers. The final terms of the agreement in 1973 basically reflected the US’s demands being offered in 1972. This Seven Point Plan was tested by Nixon in a January 1972 speech, similar to his testing of the conditions being offered in 1971 with an earlier speech. The last concession given by the US in the final round of negotiations in 1973 was a more rapid withdrawal of US forces and the substance of the earlier agreement was secured through further military engagements. The US recognized these conditions were achievable as the North began to commit to and discuss solid terms, rather than rejecting them outright. As the North began to achieve further success on the battlefield (such as in the initial stages of the Easter offensive) it would back away from these commitments.

Through experience at the negotiating table, the US recognized talks made progress as the

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78 These points were: Ending of communist infiltration (rather than the North’s complete withdrawal), South Vietnam would determine its own political future, a cease-fire throughout Indochina, a timetable for withdrawal under international supervision, guarantees for the independence of Cambodia and Laos, honoring of the Geneva Accords, and immediate release of prisoners of war from both sides. See Henry Kissinger, *Ending the Vietnam War: A History of America’s Involvement in and Extrication from the Vietnam War* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 2003), 210.
North’s position on the battlefield deteriorated. Its lack of remaining defenses in early 1973 against further bombing sealed the final termination conditions.

The final element of this case in terms of the structured questions concerns the use of side payments at the negotiation table. A rational actor model suggests side payments should enable a wide range of settlement options to avoid costly wars. Practically, this large set of possible terms is more limited by the state’s original incentives for going to war, domestic political considerations, and commitment problems. In general, more extensive use of side payments should indicate a higher degree of rationality at the bargaining table as participants recognize value in terms other than their original demands and realize potential costs in continuing in attempts to secure them. Although there were some issues the US refused to negotiate over (the removal of the Thieu regime, for example), side payments were used to locate a mutually acceptable agreement (the National Council of Reconciliation and Concord to settle political issues in the South). The timing of US withdrawal, economic aid offered to the North, the disposition of infiltrators before the Easter offensive versus those that entered after, and allowing the replenishment of military equipment for the North were all issues that were not central to the war, but were areas in which trade-offs enabled an eventual settlement to be reached. From the US perspective, it secured its central purpose: an independent South Vietnam able to call on its allies in times of crisis. That the US was not able to answer the call two years later serves as a reminder that enforcement of a termination agreement does not end with its signing.

**Hypothesis Assessment**

This section returns to the hypotheses made in Chapter 3 and assesses them in light of the evidence examined in this case study. Earlier, this chapter argued that the two independent variables under study could best be characterized as a high degree of plurality of assessments in
advisory settings, and a narrow selection among options based on a cost/benefit analysis. These hypotheses focus on how these two variables lead to the predicted outcome.

**Hypothesis 1:** As the number of alternative interpretations of endogenous wartime information provided to the foreign policy executive increases, the likelihood that the rational bargaining position is encapsulated across those interpretations also increases.

Increasing the number of assessments provided to the president in an advisory setting provides two advantages in enhancing the probability that the state will arrive at a rational bargaining position. First, bureaucracies and advisors will be incentivized to incorporate newly emerging information in their recommendations. Realizing that other players have a freer hand in raising new information, an individual will be less reluctant to do it themselves. This may be due to a desire to properly frame the information that may be brought out by another player if it may be damaging to a preferred course of action, or from the other side, use it to bolster a preference if it is supportive. Most benignly, it can be due to a desire to improve decision-making in a setting where debate is the norm. Second, it may incentivize moderation of biases since individual players know prior to the advisory meeting that they may be challenged by another player given the accepted practices. Specifically, it will lower inflated expectations of benefits while raising artificially low estimates of costs. Any biases that remain in estimates and assessments will be challenged in the ensuing debate.

This case study provided three key examples of consideration of military measures and two key examples of termination demand revision. The plurality of perspectives is more easily identifiable in the military option debates. During the termination bargaining, Nixon and Kissinger had a freer hand and did not expose those decisions to Cabinet or staff scrutiny to the
same degree. Part of this may be due to Nixon’s exposure of certain aspects of the bargaining position to the public as “trial balloons” to ascertain their acceptability. Such trial balloons were not appropriate for determining military means. In those three decisions, there were clearly a diversity of assessments and recommendations in each, as already discussed.

**Hypothesis 2**: The processes that are used to resolve these alternative interpretations of endogenous wartime information will determine if the executive is able to discern the rational bargaining position or arrives at a decision based on bureaucratic biases. This will impact both the extent of the state’s demands and the state’s ability to update appropriately.

The initiation of the process that considers options begins with the competing assessments described in the above hypothesis. With a variety of assessments, it is more likely that a rational bargaining position is available for the executive to select. However, its inclusion does not necessarily result in its selection; how the president chooses among options will also alter the quality of information presented. Chapter 3 describes an expectation of seeing decision-makers revising their estimates of costs and benefits when exposed to competing points of view, particularly when players are able to critique another’s preferred option and its corresponding assessment. Over successive rounds of consideration, cost and benefit estimates will be revised in light of new information and the rational position will emerge gradually.

Kissinger’s central role in the foreign policy decision-making sometimes obscures the fact that the NSC Staff worked to obtain alternate views of decisions the Administration faced. This began with NSSM-1, and continued with each of the military options it considered. A glaring exception to this practice was the process used prior to the invasion of Laos. As

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79 Siniver also faults the decision-making in the Cambodia invasion. However, it was not damaging to the war effort until that experience framed the decision-making for Laos. Once that occurred, the Administration recognized
already pointed out, Kissinger’s perspective did not always carry the decision. In a sense, Kissinger assumed two roles in this process: one as a policy advocate and one as a coordinator of critical information and perspectives that the president required. He would later argue that the national security advisor should be restricted to the second role. However, as long as the first role does not interfere with the second, the decision-making of the executive should not be affected.

Nixon clearly made narrowly selected options after reviewing alternative interpretations in this case study; there is no evidence of relying upon a “lowest common denominator” approach to arrive at a decision acceptable to the majority of his advisors. The debate that took place in the second and third military decisions described here all resulted in an outcome that was advocated by only a minority of the participants. In the first military option decision (Duck Hook) there was more of a consensus against expansion, which the president ultimately agreed with. In that case, the list of options was more narrow; it appeared to take place in a “yes” or “no” context and would require more detailed consideration of the military options developed by the JCS after that initial choice.

**Hypothesis 2b:** Resolution processes that are characterized by narrow selection among institutional preferences are more likely to result in demands determined by competition between advocates.

Hypothesis 2a (which concerned aggregation of institutional preferences) is not applicable in this case. An aggregation would have attempted to gain support for an option through satisfying some minimum level of requirement from individual advisors to arrive at a consensus position. In the context of the two independent variables, this hypothesis suggests that battlefield conditions did not support their current demands. See Siniver, *Nixon, Kissinger, and U.S. Foreign Policy Making*, 87–114.
a final decision will be based upon the outcome of the debate that takes place among the participants to influence the president.

The consensus that emerged on the Duck Hook decision appeared convincing to Nixon. Although he also cited three reasons for declining to escalate - new hope for renewed negotiations with the death of Ho Chi Minh, lower casualties for the US, and the risk of provoking other nations - Laird’s memo forcefully outlined the trade-off between the costs and benefits of escalation. The arguments of Laird and Rogers convinced the president that the escalation was not appropriate at that time. A position advocated by the majority of participants in the second and third decisions was not sufficient to convince the president on a recommended action. Instead Nixon risked the loss of the Moscow summit in the second decision and public condemnation in the third as he was urged to do nothing in each. Even in cases where there were less forceful options available (such as declining to mine Haiphong Harbor while bombing, or conducting only limited air strikes), the president accepted a greater level of risk when the debate over trade-offs was complete.

Given Nixon’s receptivity to recommendations provided by players in the system (although they were not always implemented), it is easy to imagine different outcomes had access to the president been more restricted and had more of a premium been placed on consensus prior to meetings. Although Kissinger did function as a gatekeeper, he did not blatantly suppress the perspectives of those that held differing views in these cases. In others, he was more active in controlling access and influence with the president, particularly after 1971. Yet in these cases, I argue that the process ultimately led to rational choices and bargaining positions.

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81 Glad and Link, “President Nixon’s Inner Circle of Advisers,” 24.
Alternate Explanation: The Predominant President

A predominant president model, as described in Chapter 3, holds the president as the primary initiator of action in times of decision. The empirical predications for this model hold that: the quality of a decision will be directly related to the president’s willingness to engage in an information search since information is scarce; changing course requires building a new supporting coalition; and decisions will reflect the desires of those in the supporting coalition. The executive is compelled to respect the wishes of bureaucratic advisors since they form an important base of power. Therefore, evidence should exist in the case for deliberate attempts to include bureaucratic preferences in key decisions. Further, a drastic change in policy will be accompanied by the emergence of a new supporting coalition, both in the advisor sphere and in public opinion.

The best evidence for this alternate explanation exists in Nixon’s initial decision to lower demands at the bargaining table. After raising the idea for dropping the requirement for the North to withdraw all of its troops in 1970 through a public speech (though only by omitting it as a condition), this was enacted at his direction in the negotiations in the spring of 1971. His speech can be viewed as a test for this new approach: there was no great public outcry against it. Though this may have been too subtle an adjustment to provoke a public response, it became an integral part of the settlement in later rounds of negotiation. It was, in fact, a significant departure from past policy but did not require establishing a new coalition; the test for public support appeared to be successful. From a bargaining standpoint, it was not within the power of the US to fully remove communist insurgents, so there was little use in insisting upon it. Nixon’s failure to identify and build a supporting coalition for his first critical decision on expansion of the war may provide further evidence for the predominant president model. In this
case, he was reluctant to act without the support of his key advisor on military affairs (Laird) while simultaneously realizing the general public would not support escalation in light of the previous four years. Though he was inclined to do so, Nixon’s failure to escalate the war was due to a failure in building a new supporting coalition. This also provides evidence that a more extreme version of this model, presidential dominance, is insufficient to account for this escalation decision as well as the president declining to use nuclear weapons.

The greatest problem for this explanation resides in Nixon’s initiation of the Easter offensive response and the Christmas Bombings. In both cases, his decisions were clearly at odds with the advice being given to him by several key advisors with powerful bureaucratic bases (Laird and Rogers in both, Abrams in the Easter offensive response). Kissinger was also highlighting significant problems that could emerge with talks that were taking place with the Soviets as well as the Chinese. Although the National Security Staff was generally supportive of the idea, the staff represented no significant base of power for the president since it was specifically designed to serve the needs of the executive and is tiny in comparison to the State and Defense Departments. Furthermore, Nixon risked (and received) a public backlash to the Christmas Bombings. This may lend some credence to a dominant presidential model (a more powerful version of theory explored here in which the executive is free to override his advisors when he is inclined to do so), but there were inconsistencies across the five decisions in terms of the president’s perception of his freedom to act.

The pattern of decision-making in the Nixon administration over the five key events discussed in this case study resists a simple apportionment of decision authority among the players and the president. In some cases, the president provided more weight to the opinions of his cabinet members while in others he relied on his staff to guide his decisions. Electoral
politics did play a role in some situations, though not in a consistent manner. When questioned about dissent among his staff in the decision to send ground forces into Cambodia, Nixon provided some insight on where he saw the responsibility for the controversial decision:

“Every one of my advisors, the Secretary of State, the Secretary of Defense, Dr. Kissinger, Director Helms, raised questions about the decision, and believe me, I raised the most questions, because I knew the stakes that were involved. I knew the division that would be caused in this country. I knew also the problems internationally. I knew the military risks. And after hearing all of their advice, I made the decision. Decisions, of course, are not made by vote in the National Security Council or in the Cabinet. They are made by the President with the advice of those, and I made this decision. I take responsibility for it. I believe it was the right decision. I believe it will work out. If it doesn’t, then I am to blame. They are not.”

On its surface, this quote provides some support to the presidential dominance model while suggesting that the predominance model suggested here is invalid; he did not seek to satisfy a coalition and realized it would undermine his electoral support. But this quote only acknowledges responsibility for the outcome and not option formulation or control over agenda. Nor does it suggest that advisors were carrying out orders to implement policies determined by the president. It points to a complicated relationship between the executive and his advisors that calls attention to the process by which costs and benefits are estimated for strategic options as the executive makes final decisions.

**Alternative Explanation: Psychological Limitations**

Chapter 3 points out that the primary explanation for poor decisions among executives and their advisors is psychological in the literature: fallible humans attempting to make decisions with more information than they can effectively process results in intellectual shortcuts that undermine the effectiveness of chosen policies. The most damaging of these shortcuts in situations as complicated as war is the tendency to engage in a selective information search.

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guided by the requirements of a preferred policy. Evidence of success will be relatively easy to find while evidence of a failing policy may not even be recognized, or is at least discounted. If this perspective is useful in accounting for failing to update effectively, this dissertation has argued several empirical predications should be evident: the quality of decisions will be directly related to the players’ familiarity with the issue in question, they will generally fail to recognize evidence of failure early enough, and the decisions will tend to reflect the bias of the executive since the president will provide more weight to the opinions of those with whom he agrees.

At the individual advisor level, there was evidence of psychological bias at work that damaged the war effort at times. For example, General Abrams discounted intelligence reports about a mounting attack that would become the Easter offensive while assuming that the ARVN that he had been responsible for training was up to the task of defending against the North in a conventional invasion.\textsuperscript{83} Both of these assessments turned out to be inaccurate and the early stages of the Easter offensive were disastrous. The failure of participating advisors to identify the potential costs associated with a ground invasion of Laos was due to the experience of Cambodia, and similarly misled the executive. The invasion of Laos actually provides the strongest evidence of psychological limitations in the process. A short period of consideration with little debate provided the opportunity for inaccurate framing to distort the net assessment. However, the invasion did not prove to be a key factor in terminating the war and there is more evidence that Nixon was fairly successful at avoiding detrimental psychological shortcuts in the national security decision-making process.

The general empirical predictions described above were not consistently observed in this case study across the five key events. Perhaps most importantly, the president did not necessarily provide more weight to the advisors with whom he agreed. His consideration of

\textsuperscript{83} Ibid., 534.
nuclear weapon use as well as the early options to escalate the war indicates he provided substantial weight to the opinions of dissenters. Laird’s memo that assessed the JCS options in early 1969 provides a good example, since Nixon was inclined to follow one of the five courses of action the military was recommending. When the consideration of Operation Linebacker II became necessary (also known as the Christmas Bombings), Nixon pointed out his reluctance to risk escalation with an agreement within reach. His final decision was made through being persuaded by Haig, who advocated a more massive campaign than Kissinger was recommending. This was not a compromise course of action, nor was it one in which the president confirmed a prior bias. Evidence of failing policy was also recognized fairly early in the Laos event. The failure of the ARVN to conduct an effective military campaign caused doubt within the president’s advisory circle on the viability of the Vietnamization policy. Although it was not abandoned, the downward revision of termination demands that followed indicates effective updating.

It is difficult to argue that psychological biases dominated decision-making in Vietnam during the Nixon Administration. Although it is easy to find evidence of biases among the advisors, this is consistent with both bureaucratic politics and the theory described in this dissertation. The central question is whether these biases caused poor decisions. In the most important decisions made between 1969 and 1973, this case study does not hold evidence of this.

**Conclusion**

The alternate explanations for decision-making explored above do not account for the shifting centers of influence across the decisions described in this case study. Although the president retained the ultimate decision authority, each decision reflected a changing mix of preferences in terms of origin. Similarly, a two-level-game bargaining approach is insufficient to
explain the decisions consistently. It is possible to argue that the US behavior by 1972 resembled what would be predicted by a bargaining model with domestic pressures in terms of the timing of decisions, but it would not adequately account for the decision to continue the war after Nixon’s first election. The pulling-and-hauling of bureaucratic politics was almost completely absent in the decisions examined here; not one was a compromise position. A pure bargaining model may hold the best explanatory power: the US made termination demands that were supported by battlefield conditions and both sides eventually reached a settlement. Certainly, the shifting of priorities anticipated in the future provided an advantage to the North under the settlement terms which the North was anticipating. The Administration intended to enforce the conditions of the settlement for a longer period of time than the War Powers Act permitted, but the North knew the US would not sustain as high a level of commitment. On the question of how the Paris agreement was reached, however, a pure bargaining model is the most powerful in terms of explanation. From the perspective of this paper, the most important question is what enabled the Nixon Administration to approximate a rational actor in its decisions?

The analysis provided in this chapter indicates that the decision making system itself provided this capability through establishing processes that encouraged both the introduction of new information and the revision of recommendations based on that new information. The system enabled the administration’s ability to question basic assumptions on Vietnam to a degree that the Johnson Administration could not. The president was therefore receiving multiple interpretations of battlefield and political conditions; each of them imperfect. There is no evidence of the president forging a unique path that was not generated by the assessments of his

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staff and cabinet. In the one case that he did consider a unique path (the use of nuclear weapons on two occasions) his staff provided information that deterred him from serious consideration.

The key outcome predicted in Chapter 3 based on the independent variables observed here is: “A narrow set of demands with the highest potential for effective updating; demands are closely related to battlefield conditions.” Information from the battlefield was effective at updating demands. There were two instances of demand revision that were connected to this information. The first was dropping the requirement for all communists to be withdrawn above the DMZ prior to settlement, which became highly improbable after the failed Laos invasion. The South’s army was not up to the task of the large-scale operation that would be required, and the commitments made by the Nixon Administration to draw down US presence made a massive ground operation infeasible as well as politically damaging. For the same reason, the US also offered a role for the communists in the South’s government with new elections, but refused to consider removal of the Thieu regime. The proposed council on reconciliation and the shorter timetable for withdrawal of US forces once an agreement was signed (60 days instead of 90 days) provide evidence of information originating at the bargaining table being integrated into the US’s termination position. Further, the administration retained an accurate perspective on what was achievable with the continued withdrawal of US ground forces and did not overestimate the benefits associated with any American actions. Nixon realized in his retaliation and Christmas Bombing decisions that gradual escalation and demonstrations of military power would not suffice and intense air attacks were required to achieve relatively minor benefits.

In general, there was more debate apparent on the first, third, and fifth events. The president had fewer debates over when and how to modify demands, though these instances were closely related to the assessments of the battlefield. These assessments were compiled in the
White House and the NSC in a break from past practice; a change that undermined bureaucracies that had greater input into decisions in the past. However, control in the White House did not mean dominance of the assessments, as this chapter has explored. Despite the caricature of the relationship between Nixon and Kissinger that indicated Kissinger was running foreign policy for the administration, there were key instances of the president dismissing his security advisor’s advice. For example, Kissinger recommended canceling the Moscow Summit in light of the planned retaliation for the North’s offensive, but Nixon proceeded with both the bombing and the summit.\footnote{Kimball, The Vietnam War Files, 218.}

The national security advisor was, however, enjoying a level of control in the process that was unprecedented. Kissinger had actually become more active by 1971 in suppressing some access to the president, particularly when it came to the State Department. This was in part due to Nixon’s desire to centralize control of foreign policy in the White House, but also due to Kissinger becoming more of a policy advocate.\footnote{Glad and Link, “President Nixon’s Inner Circle of Advisers,” 24.} During this time, the relationship between Nixon and Kissinger had begun to deteriorate for these reasons as Nixon wanted to keep the foreign policy decision-making for himself.\footnote{Ibid., 25.} Although he did not believe so at the time of his duties as national security advisor, Kissinger became convinced that the national security advisor should endeavor to ensure each significant point of view in the process is heard, while eschewing a policy making role.\footnote{Kissinger, White House Years, 30.}

Despite the advantages in this process in improving decisions, it comes at a price. It takes a high level of effort by the players to routinely revisit a topic before a final decision and update assessments with new information. The administration’s handling of Laos demonstrates
that even once these processes are implemented, conscious management of its application is still required. Further, it taxes the ability of the system’s managers to keep the process functioning effectively. Kissinger was confronted by senior staff on occasion on the backlog that tended to develop on other issues.\(^8^9\) Siniver points out many items of lesser importance than Vietnam, China, the Soviets, and Cambodia were often handled outside of the formal process which was consumed with these issues.\(^9^0\) Often, another problem was not addressed until a new crisis actually developed. In a statement to Congress, the Secretary of State asserted in 1971, “…preoccupation with Vietnam has pre-empted our attention from other areas of concern. By ending our involvement in the war we will restore perspective…”\(^9^1\) While not feasible to apply this level of attention to all issues, the process is well-suited for consideration of the most demanding of state decisions and improves rational behavior when utilized.

\(^9^0\) Siniver, Nixon, Kissinger, and U.S. Foreign Policy Making, 48.
\(^9^1\) Szulc, Illusion of Peace, 383.
Chapter 5: Truman in Korea

A Demonstration of Executive Accommodation

The Korean War was the first large military engagement of the Cold War for the US and the first for its new national security system. Truman and his advisors were forced to react to the North Korean communists’ invasion of June 1950 with only a minimal level of essential information. The advisors to the president were unable to provide him with details on the strength of the North’s forces, the extent to which the Chinese or the Soviets were involved, the likelihood of United Nations support, or to what extent US forces would be required to support the South Korean army.\(^1\) It was a poor start for the new system that was intended to provide the president with the best possible information. The new National Security Council and its supporting staff soon began generating the assessments and recommendations that would be used in the crisis, though its underdeveloped processes were easily influenced by players and were therefore likely to distort information.

There are three critical decisions that will be analyzed in this case study, each of which provided the opportunity to terminate the conflict. Each of these decisions is accompanied by a question of why the US did not recognize the conditions and information that should have led to more detailed examination of alternative courses of action. The interpretation of available information, which was a direct result of the system’s processes, led to ever-more expansive goals while under-estimating the associated costs of the chosen course. The first critical decision arrived once the landing at Inchon turned the tide of the war and resulted in a general retreat of

the North Korean army. At that point, a rational stopping point for the US should have been a reestablishment of the 38th Parallel as the boundary between the North and South Koreas. Why would this first success, after several months of losses, lead to the termination objective of reunification of the peninsula under the South’s government, rather than a *status quo ante bellum*? The second critical decision came after the US successfully captured Pyongyang. Capture of the enemy’s capital is an act that should result in the type of “political repercussions” advocated by Clausewitz that would seriously disrupt the organization of resistance.2 Why did the US choose to seize additional territory when the fall of Pyongyang put time on the side of the US and South Korea? Finally, the US decided to continue to push north, even as intelligence was indicating that the Chinese were likely to enter the war once their border area was threatened by US military action. Why did the US discount these warnings that indicated the costs associated with its current strategy were about to explode, while pursuing ever-shrinking benefits obtained by continuing to wage war against a defeated force?

Stanley argues that the Korean War should be considered a least-likely case for standard bargaining models in its latter stages because of the belligerent’s inability to locate a bargain between July 1951 and July 1953. Because of the role of information, entrapment, and preference obstacles that prevented regimes from acting rationally based on battlefield information, she asserts that a domestic coalition shift became necessary to overcome these obstacles.3 Here, I argue that the Korean War should be considered a most-likely case for standard bargaining models in its first four months because of the independent variable values, which favored a rapid convergence on settlement terms. First, there was power parity between

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the two sides, which should have indicated that there would be no rapid end to the war. Second, the reversals on the battlefield should have informed both sides the extent to which they may face rapidly accumulating costs. Third, in its initial stages, there were not mutually exclusive goals between China and the US. Although both North Korea and South Korea both sought unification, neither had the ability to accomplish that goal without outside assistance. China would eventually be demanding only a small buffer state, while the US began with the objective of reestablishing the status quo ante bellum. There is nothing to indicate that a mutually acceptable bargain could not be implemented in the war’s early stages. However, the standard bargaining model fails to account for the belligerent’s inability to locate settlement terms.

This case should also be considered a most-likely case for this dissertation’s theory, based upon the robust independent variable values that favored the expansion of war termination objectives.\(^4\) Truman received a high degree of plurality in the advice he was given, with representation from the State Department, the Joint Chiefs of Staff, the civilians in the Defense Department, the commanding general of the deployed forces, the CIA, and congressional leaders. However, the resolution process that emerged from the group strongly favored maximization of institutional goals; as battlefield opportunities arose, the hawkish advisors that dominated the process enabled expansion of wartime objectives which Truman did little to slow. According to this dissertation’s theory, a mutually acceptable bargain failed to materialize because termination demands became too extensive for the opposing belligerent to accept.

Studies of the decision-making in the Korean War often focus on the decision to cross the 38th Parallel and find that this action was responsible for the long war that followed. However, this focus conceals other opportunities to end the war that came after that boundary was crossed, and obscures other decisions that were equally important. I argue that the expansion of the war objectives and escalation of the war itself resulted not from a single fateful decision, but as a result of an institutionalized process that routinely found reason to up the ante in a high-stakes game that only a short time before was considered unimportant.

This chapter first explores the arc of the administration’s evolving demands and the key decisions that undermined convergence on a termination agreement. It then examines the bureaucratic rules of the game that were in force during this time period, and discusses how and why they changed over the course of the war, which ultimately undermined the US’s chances for an advantageous settlement. The structured analysis of the case follows. Finally, it offers a short discussion of potential alternate explanations for the observations.

**Context of the War, Key Assessments, and Decisions**

The division of the Korean Peninsula emerged from the need to send US forces in after the Soviets began occupying its northern area in 1945 as Japanese control disintegrated. The 38th parallel was used as a boundary only because it roughly divided the country in half; no significant geographical features coincide with it. Agreement on the division was reached within days with the Soviet Union, and both sides proceeded to set up military governments. The desire to contain Soviet expansion in the wake of World War II required a long-term

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commitment to this area of the world, which was managed from Tokyo by General Douglas MacArthur as the commander of the US Far Eastern Command. However, as made public by Acheson in a famous speech, Korea itself was not seen as a central security concern for the US. As a result of this, in addition to the post-World War II drawdown, the US Far Eastern Command was severely undermanned at the war’s outbreak.

Truman was in Missouri at the time North Korea invaded, and was notified over the phone by Dean Acheson, the Secretary of State. He requested that the relevant cabinet members develop some recommendations for him to review upon his return to Washington. The president held a meeting the night of June 25, 1950 with his advisors who consisted of five State Department members, the military secretaries, the Joint Chiefs of Staff, and the Secretary of Defense. The recommendations developed jointly between the State Department and the Defense Department were presented by Acheson. They included resupplying the South Korean army, evacuating non-essential personnel while protecting the airports, and moving the Seventh Fleet into the Formosa Strait. After asking other participants to provide their agreement or disagreement, Truman ordered the recommendations put into effect. At this meeting, the Secretary of Defense, Louis Johnson, argued emphatically that Formosa (Taiwan) was more important to the security of the US than Korea. Secretary of State Dean Acheson violently disagreed, and the debate over the relative importance of Korea was sidelined as attention turned to responding to the invasion.

Truman’s initial instructions envisioned a limited goal for the war: reestablishment of the border. He was further very concerned about the possibility of outside intervention from the

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7 Instructions for doing this included keeping air forces below the 38th Parallel while protecting the airports.
Soviet Union, and suppressed any indication in directives that would suggest the US was preparing for such a contingency.\textsuperscript{10} MacArthur was not authorized the use of ground forces, though it was expected naval and air forces would eventually be committed to direct combat.\textsuperscript{11} By June 26, it was clear to the Administration that if South Korea was going to survive, it would need direct assistance. It was unable to stand against the advancing tank columns of the North and Seoul fell quickly to the North.

Over the next several days, the US continued to solidify support from allies and the United Nations. Domestically, the Congress was supportive of reacting to the crisis with force, but Republicans placed the blame for the initial invasion on Truman for failing to implement a coherent and consistent foreign policy.\textsuperscript{12} The first several days of fighting were devastating for the South Koreans: by June 29, the command in Korea could locate only about 16,000 of the 100,000 men in the ROK army.\textsuperscript{13} More expansive commitments would be required from the US.

Instructions sent to MacArthur on June 29 authorized bombing north of the 38\textsuperscript{th} Parallel, but only against purely military targets. He was further authorized to send ground troops in to secure the port and airfield around Pusan. This was despite Truman’s concern over an expansion of the war that would unnecessarily draw in China or the Soviet Union to the conflict. MacArthur’s reply on June 30 was extremely (though accurately) gloomy on the state of affairs in Korea. He asserted that, “Unless provision is made for the full utilization of the Army-Navy-Air team in this shattered area, our mission will be needlessly costly in life, money and prestige.”\textsuperscript{14} Later that day, Truman authorized a small commitment of ground forces. Within the

\textsuperscript{11} Schnabel, The U.S. Army in the Korean War, 70.
\textsuperscript{13} Schnabel, The U.S. Army in the Korean War, 74.
\textsuperscript{14} Schnabel and Watson, History of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, Part I, III:113.
first two weeks of July, MacArthur’s earlier assessment of a two-division contingency force as sufficient to turn the tide was revised upward, and he soon requested an additional four.

The JCS realized it had to confront two major questions. First, how much military strength could be committed to Korea without endangering other critical areas such as Europe? Two, if commitments to Korea were limited based on what could be spared to meet requirements elsewhere, could the US still drive the North back behind the 38th Parallel? By mid-July, so much of US ground capabilities had become committed to Korea that the ability to respond to threats elsewhere was greatly reduced. The need to respond to evolving commitments reduced the Chiefs’ ability to answer these questions from a strategic standpoint, and many of their recommendations to the president were driven by the actions taken and recommendations made by MacArthur.15

In a first visit to Tokyo by the JCS in early July of 1950, MacArthur made two points plain that were guiding his thinking. First, he equated victory in Korea with a forceful global response to the communist challenge; losing in Korea was losing everywhere. Second, that he intended to push beyond the 38th Parallel and occupy all of North Korea if necessary to destroy its forces.16 MacArthur did not have the authority to do such a thing, and realized the issue was under intense debate in Washington.17 The JCS representatives did not challenge his interpretation of his operational limits.

After US forces were driven to the southern tip of the peninsula around Pusan, an amphibious landing to the west of Seoul at Inchon was executed to force the North’s army to retreat to avoid being enveloped. MacArthur had been planning for such an operation for quite a while. MacArthur developed his plan for Inchon based on his experience in island-hopping in

15 Schnabel, The U.S. Army in the Korean War, 104.
16 Ibid., 107.
World War II. Landing there had a variety of problems, and representatives of the JCS that were visiting him in August to learn of his plans expressed doubts while advocating for a landing further south at a more ideal location for amphibious operations. MacArthur made a strong case for landing at Inchon, since it would ensure a deeper envelopment and more thorough destruction of the North Korean army. Despite doubts being relayed to Johnson and Truman, Johnson firmly supported MacArthur’s plans and Truman relented. After overcoming initial resistance by Washington for such a risky operation, MacArthur successfully executed the landing on September 15 and was nearing Seoul within four days. With its rear area threatened and supplies cut off, the North began a general retreat from the Pusan perimeter and pursuit by US forces turned the withdrawal into a rout.

This reversal on the battlefield soon led to a drastic revision of the US’s war aims. After several months of losses for the South Koreans and US forces, Inchon allowed the US to narrowly escape a humiliating defeat. Subsequently, the United States pursued as its objective the unification of the peninsula, though not due to a Republic of Korea specific request for such an end. Both the North and the South wanted to unify the Peninsula, yet neither had the military capability to achieve this goal alone. Kim il-Sung actively petitioned the Soviet Union, and then China, for the permission, supplies, and support to make unification under the North a reality. Once the battle was joined, the US provided the means to make this goal a reality for the South. This provides the first critical decision point for the US to be analyzed in this case, which coincides with the US’s first opportunity to end the war. Why did the US so

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20 Stueck, *Rethinking the Korean War*, 5.
21 Ibid., 69.
drastically revise its termination demands upward after months of losses and experience with the costs that may be incurred?

Truman met with his advisors early in war to determine if the US was able to proceed beyond the 38th Parallel in the early phases of the war. The consensus was that since the UN resolution authorized the US to “restore peace and international security,” this could include going in to North Korea to ensure further attacks were not imminent. However, by September 1, advisors to the president were concerned over the reaction it would provoke from the Soviets, so wanted to make sure some flexibility was included in planning. The only reason to cross would be to take advantage of a tactical situation in which the North Korean army could be destroyed.\(^{22}\) They did not perceive crossing the boundary as a necessary condition for victory.

Similarly, the JCS believed they should not hold MacArthur back from crossing if he perceived a tactical advantage, and thought operations would be necessary to the north and south of the boundary as the fighting began to take on the character of a guerilla conflict.\(^{23}\) However, this line of reasoning did not justify conquering all of North Korea; authorization was based on a “hot pursuit” rationale where crossing was intended to deny a convenient sanctuary. Instructions for MacArthur in regards to proceeding beyond the boundary were delayed as Johnson resigned and George Marshall was installed as the new Secretary of Defense. Marshall was waiting for concurrence from the Secretary of State and then obtained permission from the president for new orders on September 27. He was directed to destroy the forces of North Korea as a military objective, but was given special instructions to rapidly scale back his plans and consult Washington if there was any evidence of Soviet or Chinese entry into the war.\(^{24}\) Though his instructions required him to submit to the JCS plans for any operations north of the 38\(^{\text{th}}\) Parallel,

\(^{23}\) Ibid., 180.
\(^{24}\) Ibid., 182.
MacArthur replied to a message from Marshall, asserting that he would consider all of North Korea open to operations until the enemy capitulates. This was clearly beyond his authorization and did not fit with the instructions he was given on Soviet and Chinese entry into the peninsula.

Politically, there was a growing movement to take advantage of the state of military operations to push for reunification. The General Assembly at the UN passed a formal resolution on September 19 authorizing the unification of the country, the text of which was mostly composed by Acheson. MacArthur had also met with President Rhee and obtained an agreement from him to grant amnesty to those that did not commit a war crime, and hold general elections for all of Korea once the fighting ended. The success at Inchon had tipped the scales toward MacArthur in the debates that followed, even if the Pentagon had reservations. At the time the Inchon landings were taking place, Truman sent additional orders to MacArthur, which still held the status quo ante bellum as the primary objective, but authorized further expansion and potential occupation if there were no indications of outside (Soviet or Chinese) intervention. In short, the decision had been given to MacArthur without much debate in Washington.

MacArthur quickly went on to planning for operations well north of the parallel after the South’s capital had been retaken. The new plan included another amphibious landing at Wonsan, which was on the east coast of North Korea and as far north as Pyongyang. Much of the criticism of MacArthur’s handling of the war militarily after Inchon centers on his decision to

25 Ibid., 183.
29 Ibid., 99.
split his force into two and advance upon Pyongyang with one half, while the other pulled back through Inchon, sailed around the peninsula, and landed at Wonsan to cut off retreating units of the North Korean army. Despite the assessment that approximately three-quarters of the army had already been destroyed, MacArthur wanted to prevent further escape. The amount of time it would take to move this force would likely allow US units traveling over land to Wonsan to arrive before the amphibious force. One protest was lodged by the operations officer in X Corps (the unit to go on to Pyongyang), which was noted by the commanding general but not forwarded to MacArthur; Walker had already made his objections known to no effect.30

The actual capture of Pyongyang was relatively easy, and did not change the course of the conflict, which was already heavily in favor of UN success. Kim il-Sung had issued an order to establish a “supervising army,” which was intended to shoot deserters as the UN forces closed in on the capital on October 14. It came too late as the last defensive line in front of Pyongyang fell that same day. By October 19, UN forces easily occupied the city as there were few forces available for further defense. The UN quickly set up a military government.31 This created the second critical decision of this time period as well as the second opportunity to end the war. After the capture of the capital, why did the US continue military operations?

Literature that deals with the Korean War pays scant attention to the fall of Pyongyang; it usually receives a page or less of discussion. This is partly due to the fact that the decision to advance beyond this point had already been made before it was captured; therefore these works usually look to the advance past the 38th Parallel as the fateful decision. From a bargaining perspective, however, occupation of the capital provided leverage that was greater than at any other point of the war. It signaled to the Soviet Union and China that the war was over and that

the North had overplayed its hand. It denied the North central control over its military and political capabilities. It also provided a logical stopping point for the Truman Administration to claim victory while using the capital either as a bargaining chip for concessions or as part of an expanded South Korea which would move the boundary up to the more defensible narrow neck of the peninsula. China would later indicate it could accept such conditions provided some narrow buffer state remained of North Korea.\textsuperscript{32} Even if the US and UN continued to insist upon eventual unification, the capture of Pyongyang could debilitate the North’s government over the long-term, and make later unification possible without military force extended up to the Yalu River. Loss of the capital would have created lasting political problems for Kim il-Sung. However, the decision-making processes that had taken hold at that time prevented consideration of these advantages and enabled the expansion of wartime demands.

In the days immediately before Pyongyang, Truman visited MacArthur at Wake Island to discuss the state of the war. During the conference, MacArthur told Truman he believed military operations would be complete by the end of November, and troops remaining would be destroyed by the approaching winter as they were separated from their logistics and their command was disorganized. He further advised the president that the capture of Pyongyang would effectively end the war.\textsuperscript{33} He envisioned operations after that as “mopping up” the battlefield by removing the last pockets of resistance. It is not clear why Truman did not put serious consideration into what the capture of the capital would mean. In a spectacular failure on the part of the president’s key advisors, both Marshall and Acheson declined to accompany Truman to the Wake Island conference. This may account for the president not adequately assessing the state of the war at that point.

\textsuperscript{33} Schnabel and Watson, \textit{History of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, Part I}, III:265.
An intelligence memo sent throughout the Far East Command after the fall of Pyongyang essentially assessed the war as over: there was no organized resistance and the remaining command structure had likely retreated into Manchuria across the Yalu. However, no official surrender had occurred, and sporadic fighting continued in small pockets. The force intended to land at Wonsan, the X Corps, was still attempting to load the boats that would transport them around the peninsula as Pyongyang fell. The boats were not unloaded until November 9.

MacArthur had been denied a second Inchon by his own plan, which had its flaws repeatedly raised by subordinate commanders and staff officers. None of these staff officers were willing to push too hard to raise these issues; MacArthur had already been punishing those officers who were against his Inchon plan by reducing their roles and responsibilities.

MacArthur next pressed on for an end to the war, which apparently had not yet been achieved to his satisfaction. To do this, he assumed wide latitude in his orders from the end of September that remained in effect, and identified military objectives between 50 and 100 miles beyond his limit of advance, which brought non-South Korean forces close enough to the northern borders to make Washington nervous. By October 23, the Eighth Army and ROK forces had reached the Chongchon River, which parallels the Yalu about sixty miles to its south. MacArthur had discounted his earlier instructions, asserting the old limits were based on the assumption that the enemy would capitulate; he did not yet have this. The JCS sent a message to remind him of his limits of advance, which he dismissed since these new objectives were necessary militarily, and assured them he was “cognizant of the basic purpose and intent of

34 Goulden, Korea: The Untold Story of the War, 252.
37 Goulden, Korea: The Untold Story of the War, 256.
his earlier orders.” He further claimed that this situation was covered with the president at the Wake Island Conference.\footnote{Schnabel and Watson, \textit{History of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, Part I}, III:274–275.}

This led to the third and final critical decision in the early stages of the war that would lead to the eventual stalemate. Once the landing at Wonsan was complete, MacArthur had another opportunity to extend the border of South Korea further up the narrow neck of the peninsula, but this option was not considered. Immediately after the fall of Pyongyang, forces were advancing further north. China had been vocal about intervening if the 38th Parallel was violated; in reality, China would have tolerated an expansion of South Korea’s territory provided it retained a buffer state. As MacArthur moved further north, evidence of China’s involvement grew but was routinely dismissed. Given the advantages the US enjoyed on the battlefield at this point, why would it pursue a defeated, disorganized force which provided few benefits when doing so increased the risk of drastically growing costs?

Planning for operations in the northern areas was completed even before Pyongyang fell; the new objective line approached the northern boundary as close as 45 miles in some places and MacArthur’s most recent instructions removed restrictions on the use of non-Korean forces.\footnote{Ibid., III:273.} After Inchon, the Chinese Foreign Minister declared they would not tolerate international aggression against its neighbor, and transmitted through their Indian Ambassador that they would not interfere, provided it was only the South Koreans that crossed into North Korea.\footnote{Schnabel, \textit{The U.S. Army in the Korean War}, 197.} Reports by early October of Chinese troops massing in North Korea were discounted by the Far East Command, which asserted there was no evidence for such actions. Subsequent instructions to the command by the JCS advised MacArthur to continue his operations even if Chinese forces
did begin to join the battle, provided he still stood a reasonable chance of succeeding in his operations.  

Concern in Washington remained over Chinese intervention, despite MacArthur’s optimistic assessments. A reconnaissance mission in mid-October identified approximately 100 fighters near the Yalu River in Manchuria. At the same time, the State Department was suggesting that MacArthur announce hydroelectric plants near the Yalu River in North Korea would be spared to avoid protest by the Chinese and signal the limits to which the US forces would advance. The JCS dissented, but were directed by Truman to forward the warning; they suggested to MacArthur he could issue the warning “if he wished.”  

He did not.

The first engagements with Chinese troops occurred 15 miles northwest of the Chongchon River, and the ROK division that encountered it was destroyed between 25 and 26 October. The upper echelons of command (Corps and Division) were reluctant to acknowledge units the US forces had encountered were Chinese. Worse, this willful ignorance resulted in poor intelligence assessments which did not provide even the most basic of requirements to mount an effective counter-attack (location, strength, lines of communication, and anticipated direction of attack).  

Initial military assessments late in October assumed engagements with the Chinese were due to China’s concern with “saving face” with an enemy at its borders and was not due to a full scale counterattack.  

By the time the Chinese began to enter into the war in direct engagements, MacArthur was planning to conduct operations in the approximately 20% of the peninsula that remained out of US control for the disorganized 25% of the North Korean Army that survived and was

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41 Ibid., 200.
42 Ibid., 231.
43 Schnabel and Watson, History of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, Part I, III:278.
45 Sandler, The Korean War, 118.
believed to already have crossed into Manchuria, according to intelligence that circulated immediately after the fall of Pyongyang. Once the Chinese intervened in force, MacArthur had split his forces on their march northward and the difficulty in establishing communication lines between them seriously damaged their ability to repel Chinese attacks.46 The UN force was ill-prepared for the offensive that followed and the momentum shifted quickly. On November 28, MacArthur sent a communiqué to Washington, noting they were in “a new kind of war.”47

**Bureaucratic Conditions and Rules of the Game**

The failure of the US to recognize and seize opportunities to end the war in its early stages creates a puzzle from the perspective of bargaining models of war. As discussed earlier, the conditions favored locating a mutually acceptable bargain. From BMW approaches that incorporate domestic influences, there were incentives for the president to accommodate the wishes of the hawkish Republican members of Congress in terms of the initial response. However, these influences did not mandate the use of military force to unify the entire country even if that possibility was a stated goal. There was ample evidence that China would eventually intervene which was discounted even as their forces began to engage the UN units. I have argued the greatest opportunity to terminate the war was after Pyongyang fell, which was also the most advantageous from a rational actor perspective. It maximized the benefits from waging the war while limiting the potential costs. If the US believed China’s threats to intervene were genuine, stopping at the narrow neck of the peninsula north of Pyongyang would have provided months of preparation to defend against a Chinese invasion while forcing those units to operate over a longer distance. A traditional bureaucratic politics approach could have accounted for a

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46 Ibid., 112.
47 Rees, Korea: The Limited War, 157.
failure to act in Washington if the debate led to regular deadlock among presidential advisors which provided MacArthur wider latitude to act in the absence of guidance. However, there was active support for his ever-more-expansive goals, rather than disagreement and deadlock. This section reviews the evidence in light of the relevant information posited in Chapter 3. That chapter identifies two independent variables: the degree to which the president received a plurality of perspectives and the rules used to resolve competing interpretations of information.

Truman had not been involved in high-level decisions at the White House as Vice President; he had been there only a short time before Roosevelt’s death and was not integrated into the system as contemporary Vice Presidents are. Although he had served in World War I and studied history, he lacked formal foreign policy experience, had no specialists in that area in his personal staff, and generally relied upon the recommendations of the formal governmental organizations.48 This in and of itself does not result in poor decisions; these recommendations can provide the raw material of a rational decision provided the system is managed correctly. It did put Truman in a poor position to push back against other perspectives when he felt it necessary in terms of his knowledge level in foreign affairs. Truman sometimes looked to the opinion pages of the time to reinforce his own interpretation of events.49 However, the initial decision-making did not reflect this as he effectively managed the recommendations being generated during the Blair House meeting.

The effectiveness of one of his advisors, however, was immediately called into question. Secretary of Defense Johnson deliberately came to the meeting without a set of recommendations to avoid predisposing the president to a particular course of action.50

48 Elizabeth Stanley, Paths to Peace: Domestic Coalition Shifts, War Termination and the Korean War (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2009), 122.
49 Paige, The Korean Decision, 146.
50 Ibid., 128.
Coordination at lower levels provided some military information to Acheson, who provided the set of compiled assessments of the Defense and State Departments. Acheson had gone through a great effort to assemble a supporting team in the State Department that reflected his own view of the world; this meant the necessity of launching a strong challenge to the spread of communism.\textsuperscript{51} In 1948, the JCS asserted that no military guarantee should extend to Korea because it would risk a war with the Soviets in an area where they had all of the natural advantages.\textsuperscript{52} This changed with the crisis and the publishing of NSC-68, which predisposed the national security professionals to see all communist actions as being controlled by the Soviet Union and as a challenge to the US. Consequently, participants at the Blair House meeting saw the attack as primarily a test of the resolve of the United States, rather than a nationalist issue.\textsuperscript{53}

The initial decisions effectively provided a short-term response to the crisis and read the international conditions \textit{accurately enough} to take action. MacArthur was immediately placed in operational charge of the response to the invasion and alerted him to be prepared to commit ground forces to \textit{restore the 38th Parallel as a boundary} should it be necessary, although the president had not yet made that strategic decision yet.\textsuperscript{54} The great failure in the initial recommendations to the president was that they dealt only with the immediate crisis, and did not address more long-term issues as the policy began to take shape.\textsuperscript{55} Specifically, wartime termination demands were not considered in depth. Consequently, the administration failed to recognize opportunities as they arose. The failure on the military side was in an accurate

\textsuperscript{51} Stanley, \textit{Paths to Peace}, 124.
\textsuperscript{52} Schnabel, \textit{The U.S. Army in the Korean War}, 50.
\textsuperscript{53} Paige, \textit{The Korean Decision}, 132; Dean Acheson, \textit{The Korean War} (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 1971), 20; Truman, \textit{Years of Trial and Hope}, II:335.
\textsuperscript{54} Schnabel, \textit{The U.S. Army in the Korean War}, 67.
\textsuperscript{55} Acheson, \textit{The Korean War}, 19.
assessment of the state of readiness of the Far East Command to respond effectively. The command was actually at about half its authorized strength at the time war started.\textsuperscript{56}

Once Johnson was replaced, the preferences of Marshall and Acheson tended to dominate national security decision-making in Washington; their perspectives favored those of MacArthur and helped provide him with a great deal of freedom.\textsuperscript{57} The critical event that tipped the scales in favor of MacArthur was the successful landing at Inchon. It was not clear before it was executed that it would achieve the type of success that it actually did. Questioning by the JCS in the days leading up to Inchon indicated to MacArthur that they had little faith in the plan, and were pushing for alternatives because they anticipated canceling the landing once another alternative was available.\textsuperscript{58} After the landing, the JCS was generally unwilling to check the influence of MacArthur in decision-making. It would take a clear case of insubordination for the president to later put an end to the general’s apparent feeling of freedom to decide national policy.

From a domestic standpoint, the president, the NSC, and the JCS were concerned that countermanding MacArthur’s instructions might feed domestic opposition in the upcoming elections; they were reluctant to be seen as soft on communism in Asia.\textsuperscript{59} Across the bureaucracies, people advising crossing of the 38\textsuperscript{th} Parallel were more numerous than those that advocated a halt. This was not reflective of their bureaucratic position as much as it was indicative of their personal beliefs, which were heavily influenced by MacArthur’s confidence and demonstrated success.\textsuperscript{60} He began to make decisions on his own by late September; his

\textsuperscript{56} Schnabel, \textit{The U.S. Army in the Korean War}, 53.
\textsuperscript{59} Caridi, \textit{Korean War and American Politics}, 90.
plans to reestablish the Rhee government raised concerns in the State Department since they saw this as their responsibility. To clarify, the JCS sent specific instructions on September 27 to reiterate that his goal was the destruction of the North Korean Armed Forces, to ensure he avoided use of non-Korean troops in the northern border areas, and restrict his air and naval activities to Korea while avoiding targets north of the Yalu.\textsuperscript{61} Crossing the parallel was a means to the end, which was the destruction of the North’s army. The same day, Marshall sent a telegram to MacArthur directing him to feel “unencumbered” when it came to operations north of the parallel. This was not reviewed by Acheson, who was surprised to learn of its existence afterward.\textsuperscript{62} These instructions were not necessarily a change in policy at that point, but set the stage for an expansion of wartime objectives.

To accomplish this end, MacArthur presented his plans for the landing at Wonsan and the attack by the Eighth Army on the west.\textsuperscript{63} General Omar Bradley later claimed that if an army major had developed the plan for the landing at Wonsan and the capture of Pyongyang at the Army’s Command and General Staff College, he would have been laughed out of the classroom.\textsuperscript{64} MacArthur continued to enjoy wide latitude in terms of military operations. Yet as discussed in Chapter 2, military operations must be closely integrated with political objectives. By this time, Washington had forfeited much of its control over these objectives. The length of time required to land at Wonsan meant that Pyongyang fell before MacArthur’s second dramatic amphibious assault. Washington’s failure to exert its control at this point led to the reversal that followed.

\textsuperscript{61} Schnabel and Watson, \textit{History of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, Part I}, III:230.
\textsuperscript{62} Acheson, \textit{The Korean War}, 57.
\textsuperscript{63} Truman, \textit{Years of Trial and Hope}, II:360.
\textsuperscript{64} Alexander, \textit{Korea: The First War We Lost}, 241.
Before Inchon, the Truman Administration had not considered what would occur if the momentum of the war shifted and it was in a position to demand an end to the hostilities. The sunk costs in the war loomed large, and any indications of victory were likely to draw the US further into conflict and raising war aims. Truman was not prepared to identify a bargaining position by the time he needed to do so. Therefore, he was ill-informed on how to limit or direct MacArthur’s operations. The JCS was aware that MacArthur was violating the intent of his orders by the time he was advancing toward the northern border areas shortly after Pyongyang fell. The violation of his advance limits as well as his declining to ensure the safety of power plants in the border areas indicated a break with official Washington policy. The JCS again failed to exert control over events on the battlefield to ensure they matched national policy; the potential for a significant victory was too tempting.

Likewise, Truman failed to exert control over his immediate advisors, who in turn would control MacArthur. Despite both Marshall and Acheson supporting and enabling the commanding general’s actions, they declined to accompany Truman to the Wake Island conference, which perhaps provided the best opportunity to recognize the possibility to demand settlement terms as Pyongyang fell just days later. Neglecting to include his trusted advisors on these military matters likely hampered Truman’s decisions and allowed MacArthur to reinterpret his instructions later by claiming the president provided consent at this conference. Including them would likely have led to a more detailed discussion of MacArthur’s plans. Truman did not even call for a thorough reassessment of US objectives in Korea until November, and did not attend the meeting on November 9 of the NSC that focused on that topic. Even at that late

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65 Halberstam, The Coldest Winter, 323.
66 Schnabel and Watson, History of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, Part I, III:276.
67 Hess, Presidential Decisions for War, 53.
68 Ibid., 57.
date, the advisors did not seriously question the actions being taken in battle. For example, Marshall asked about the dispersion of UN forces that were advancing north which created logistical and communication challenges. The Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff noted MacArthur had directed this formation to better enable occupation of the entire country.\(^{69}\) The following day, Marshall advocated permitting MacArthur to continue his operations until the anticipated end date (November 24) and address political questions (the establishment of a demilitarized zone) only after that was complete.\(^{70}\) It is interesting that he did not see the two as more intimately linked, given his military and diplomatic experience. As they struggled to keep up with MacArthur’s stretching of his authorized actions, the president’s advisors continued to accept the advantages gained, while ignoring the mounting evidence of coming costs.

**Structured Assessment**

The previous section established that the president was receiving a plurality of perspectives from his advisors, but the rules of the game enabled his advisors to maximize termination objectives, which he either accepted or actively supported. This section returns to the structured assessment questions identified in Chapter 1 and examines how the degree of plurality and the resolution approach established in the rules of the game led to the US’s over-reach in Korea while missing opportunities to end the war much earlier. George identified four purposes of advisors that support presidential decision-making: information and advice; emotional support during stressful decisions; support for decisions that are to be implemented; and generation of political legitimacy for those decisions.\(^{71}\) Truman, like all of the presidents examined here, made use of all four of these purposes. As will be discussed later, the extent to

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\(^{69}\) Schnabel and Watson, *History of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, Part I*, III:305.

\(^{70}\) Foot, *A Substitute for Victory*, 27.

which the president desires to make use of the last three purposes will affect the ability of the 
president to make use of the first. For example, an executive who is cautious to ensure his 
advisors will provide political cover for a decision will be less likely to reject the advice of one 
or more of those advisors in favor of another’s interpretation. This section will restrict itself to 
consideration of how the accepted process affected the integration of relevant information into 
the decisions intended to terminate the war while leaving aside for now the question of why, 
specifically, those decision rules emerged.

As suggested in Chapters 2 and 3, all advisors have personal biases that should be 
anticipated; each will tend to over-estimate the benefits associated with their preferred course of 
action while under-estimating its costs. When the bureaucratic rules of the game allow the 
desires of each participant to be included in the bargaining offer at the negotiation table, 
demands will tend to be excessive. The conditions on the battlefield are unlikely to support these 
demands and an overlapping bargaining space will fail to develop. The system that Truman 
implemented allowed this type of logrolling, particularly due to the widespread support of 
MacArthur’s interpretation of national interests. Truman effectively lost control of the system 
and failed to apply the brakes on the runaway train.

The interpretation of battlefield information was clearly biased in multiple instances 
throughout the case. In the early stages, the extent of the bias was not as great, though the 
dynamics of interaction among the advisors gave indication that earnest debate among the 
advisors would be scarce. Johnson’s early objections, which were based on the relative 
importance of Korea in comparison to Formosa, were aggressively contained by Acheson, who 
was determined to take action. Johnson’s failure to develop a set of recommendations also ceded 
the initiative to Acheson, whose aggressive anti-communist stance was well-known and further
bolstered by his supporting staff. Though it is impossible to gauge how this affected later debate, it is interesting to note that the initial decision group failed to consider the limits to which the US would become committed to the war and did not place the national interest at stake in context with other areas of the world. From Acheson’s interpretation, the costs of inaction were too great to consider.

From an intelligence standpoint, the US in general was biased in its understanding of the role of Moscow in this type of regional conflict. The concern with the global spread of communism and the publishing of NSC-68 led to most government agencies over-estimating the level of control the Soviets exerted. In this case, the US incorrectly assessed the relationship between China and North Korea as significantly less important than that between Pyongyang and Moscow. Though it later became more aware of the threat from China as MacArthur approached the northern border area, its failure to focus on this earlier likely led it to miss important signals from the Chinese leadership.

MacArthur’s forceful advocacy for the landing at Inchon over the objections of other military advisors and subsequent vindication played an important role in spreading the bias toward more expansive demands. Truman was initially aiming to restore the border along the 38th Parallel. Operations above this line were only to be conducted based on military necessity. While the JCS envisioned limited operations that were approved by the president, Marshall soon allowed MacArthur to feel “unencumbered” when it came to such actions. Only four days after the landing, Acheson secured General Assembly approval for his reunification resolution at the UN when he sensed an opportunity for rollback of communism in Korea.

Once Truman ceded decision authority to MacArthur when it came to balancing risk and reward north of the parallel, the commanding general’s bias became the most important among

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Foot, The Wrong War, 55.
the advisors. Immediately after the landing, Truman gave instructions to MacArthur to drastically reduce his operations upon any indication of Chinese or Soviet intervention. Several weeks later, revised instructions directed reduction in operations only if MacArthur was not able to handle the Chinese forces he encountered. Steadfast belief that the Chinese could not intervene effectively in large numbers led to routine ignoring of growing evidence that China would commit itself to saving North Korea.

The newly created national security system did ensure multiple bureaucracies were providing input to the decision-making process. However, the beliefs of the top advisors played a role in suppressing important information that should have been factored in. For example, the State Department was biased toward aggressive action, and gave a privileged place to the advice of hawkish Dean Rusk, while sidelining the more cautious George Kennan. Kennan eventually left in late August due to his inability to voice his differing perspectives with decision-makers.\textsuperscript{73} Similarly, supporting staff and commanders under MacArthur suppressed information about the difficulty that would be associated with executing the landing at Wonsan.

In what may have been the most important piece of suppressed information, a regional expert could have provided recommendations that would have avoided a large-scale Chinese intervention. In early November, a Chinese specialist in the State Department was advocating establishing a small North Korean rump state with a demilitarized zone south of the Yalu that would provide the Chinese their desired buffer. It was later learned that retaining the buffer state was more central to Chinese aims than restoring the border at the 38\textsuperscript{th} Parallel. However, the top advisors to the president insisted upon MacArthur retaining operational control of where troops moved.\textsuperscript{74} The movement close to the Yalu triggered the larger engagements that occurred later

\textsuperscript{73} Janis, \textit{Groupthink}, 60.
\textsuperscript{74} Stueck, \textit{Rethinking the Korean War}, 115.
that month. The Chinese had decided to intervene before Pyongyang fell, but only because they feared American units on their border. Additionally, those troops would not have been encountered as early as they were had the movement north to pursue a defeated force been halted.

Although Truman had the benefit of multiple interpretations of battlefield information available, all of those interpretations were influenced by MacArthur and all of the top participants sensed opportunities to demand more in the termination bargain. These interpretations were clearly biased in the manner discussed in Chapters 2 and 3; they overestimated the benefits of further military actions while discounting the costs. But these biases were not a result of bureaucratic capture of top officials. The perspective of the State Department was influenced before the crisis by Acheson himself by how he chose his own top advisors and officials which sidelined some important voices. A serious diplomatic effort in the region to contain the crisis would certainly detect the signals emanating from China on their interests. Acheson’s efforts were more often directed at legitimizing further military action, particularly at the UN.

Biases at the Defense Department were also inconsistent. Early plans developed by the Pentagon advocated extensive use of military force, though this was not necessarily the position of Johnson, who would be replaced shortly. Johnson was clearly biased against a massive military commitment in the war’s early stages. The JCS had also expressed reservations on the Inchon plan. But by the end of July, the Pentagon was recommending that MacArthur be allowed to cross the parallel, destroy the North Korean army, and occupy the country. These

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recommendations were enabled by Marshall, whose correspondence with MacArthur was sufficient to embolden the commanding general and exceed the limits of his authority.

The Far Eastern Command was biased toward discounting evidence of Chinese intervention which carried down to the Eighth Army. Despite the destruction of the ROK division by October 26, it was still reluctant to believe it was facing organized Chinese resistance, even after Chinese prisoners divulged their units and points of origin.\textsuperscript{77} This bias is more consistent with bureaucratic interests, since recognizing massive Chinese resistance meant MacArthur’s plans would have to be scrapped. By minimizing the problem, Far Eastern Command retained control over key decisions rather than surrendering them to Washington (where they rightly belonged).

Reconsideration of recommendations and assessments after Inchon generally occurred in one direction only: upward revision of termination demands. Opportunities to seize additional benefits were plentiful from the perspective of the participants, while the potential costs were few. Even Truman’s early caution about outside intervention succumbed to MacArthur’s forceful advocacy of aggressive action. The president’s goal of restoring the \textit{status quo ante} soon gave way to defeat of the North Korean forces, followed by reunification under the South’s government. Restrictions on operations above the parallel were established, then scaled back, then set aside. Concerns over military maneuvers in the border area were similarly scaled back and ultimately ignored by MacArthur. All of this upward revision took place concurrently with MacArthur’s battlefield successes. Halting the movement north was also seen as indicative of timidity with the communist threat from the Soviet Union; failing to act was seen as a greater danger.\textsuperscript{78}

\textsuperscript{77} Schnabel and Watson, \textit{History of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, Part I}, III:280. 
\textsuperscript{78} Foot, \textit{A Substitute for Victory}, 26.
In contrast, downward revision of termination demands occurred only with overwhelming evidence of growing costs: the Chinese intervention in-force. Battlefield evidence that had accumulated by November included Chinese propaganda that asserted they were preparing for war with the imperialistic US, multiple instances of Chinese troops being discovered in North Korea, and a military build-up north of the Yalu that included Soviet planes and Chinese troops. Even at this point, the upper echelons of government were unwilling to risk a public dispute with MacArthur if his orders were changed. But they were also eager to exploit the success on the battlefield with expanding demands from mid-September through November. As evidence of Chinese intentions to intervene mounted (such as a diplomatic message sent through an Indian ambassador), Truman’s instructions to MacArthur were basically to continue until evidence accumulated in the battlefield that he would not be successful. It is interesting to wonder what Truman thought constituted such evidence; the point at which the army would recognize failure is the point at which the US’s ability to terminate the war favorably would deteriorate.

The theory described in this dissertation suggests that even optimistic assessments by individual departments and agencies are not sufficient to induce expanding war demands; they must be facilitated by the bureaucratic rules of the game that control how new information is brought into the process. Janis’s writing on groupthink utilizes this time frame as an example of how intelligent policymakers may badly misinterpret situations. Chief among the problems he identifies is solidarity among the decision-making group that interfered with questioning of basic assumptions. The individual backgrounds of the participants likely led to a great deal of

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80 Truman, *Years of Trial and Hope*, II:362.
accommodation to the opinions of the military.\textsuperscript{81} Truman himself held military men in high regard, such as MacArthur and Eisenhower. Acheson’s advocacy of aggressive containment (and rollback, when possible) of communism required him to rely on the military. Marshall’s background further solidified the backing of military assessments in this situation.

Decisions in the Truman Administration during the war were generally made at the highest level of government with minimal conflict. Meetings were very cordial, with each participant willing to reinforce the perspectives of others.\textsuperscript{82} This tendency was not as extensive in the war’s early stages, with participants such as Johnson and Kennan. By mid-September, Truman relied on the advice of only a few key officials, specifically Marshall and Acheson, who were both willing to accommodate the wishes of military planners and advisors.\textsuperscript{83} The military success of MacArthur in mid-September exacerbated this solidarity since he had multiple supporters across the administration. Even as his actions began to generate additional risks in the operation, decision-makers were reluctant to reign him back in.

There was little reconciliation of battlefield information that was required in Washington after Inchon. There was generally a single opinion that mattered at that point: that of MacArthur’s. While the president and his cabinet had the responsibility to manage the political aspects of the war, they would not begin to assume that role again until the tide of the conflict had turned once again. The meeting of the National Security Council on November 9, 1950 provided the last clear chance to reassert control over the war, which the NSC declined to take. This did not imply, however, that information was not available that should have corrected misperceptions and biased interpretations. The problem was an “unwillingness to draw

\textsuperscript{81} Janis, \textit{Groupthink}, 51.
\textsuperscript{82} Ibid., 49.
\textsuperscript{83} Hess, \textit{Presidential Decisions for War}, 41.
unpleasant conclusions” from information that was available. For example, George Kennan argued vehemently for restraint before the publishing of NSC 81/1, which provided a great deal of flexibility to MacArthur when it came to operations near the Yalu and warned of Chinese or Soviet intervention should the US venture too close to the northern border. He would eventually be proven correct, but only after the US lost its military advantages in the theater of war.

Consistent with the theory described in Chapter 3, battlefield information was related to belief revision only in terms of expanding war termination demands. This chapter has already discussed how success led to more demands while information about accumulating risks was dismissed. This exacerbated the biases in the assessment process. This tendency also prevented the US from recognizing favorable battlefield conditions to successfully bargain an ending. Had MacArthur proceeded with his plans to land at Wonsan and stopped northward movement after the fall of Pyongyang, he would have effectively bisected the peninsula at its narrowest point, ensured logistical support from both ports (Inchon and Wonsan), controlled the overland logistic routes to the south, and would have been well-positioned for establishing a new defensive line that would force the Chinese to operate over longer distances in their offensive. There was later evidence that the Chinese planned on a spring invasion in 1951, but by that time would have faced formidable defenses. These were conditions that the Secretary of Defense, in conjunction with the JCS, should have recognized.

Battlefield information on the state of the North Korean army also failed to have the type of influence it should have in deliberations about continuing the war. At the time the US reached the 38th Parallel, the North’s army was a defeated force that was retreating in a poor state of

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84 Janis, *Groupthink*, 57.
86 Stueck, *Rethinking the Korean War*, 111.
organization. The extent of the reversal was not even known to Kim, who had to be informed by the Soviets that Seoul had fallen back into UN hands three days after it occurred.\textsuperscript{87} In fact, the US had difficulty in locating the North Korean army on the battlefield, as it had disintegrated quickly.\textsuperscript{88} Along with the fall of the capital, this should have indicated that a dramatic end to the war through a decisive battlefield defeat of the enemy and the signing of a formal treaty was unlikely. However, MacArthur continued to push further north in search of a force that was too disorganized to inform its leadership on the extent of its losses.

The origin and evolution of the US’s settlement terms for the war best demonstrates the problems associated with Truman’s advisory system. The initial response of the president’s advisors after learning of North Korea’s attack was to allow the South Koreans to handle the invasion to the greatest extent possible.\textsuperscript{89} Doing so indicated the US had little interest at the time of using military force to unify the country since they were aware that the South did not have the military capabilities to do so. They quickly realized from an assessment conducted by MacArthur that this would not be a feasible course of action, and that a greater involvement from the US would be required.\textsuperscript{90}

On June 29, 1950, Truman addressed the NSC and made it clear that operations were intended to restore the border. By August, lower-level staff memos in the Department of Defense were beginning to advocate reunification under the South’s government. A split emerged between the more hawkish Far East Division of the State Department (led by Dean Rusk) and its Policy Planning Staff (PPS, led by George Kennan) on this issue.\textsuperscript{91} The PPS was noting that the Soviets were unlikely to accept an unfriendly regime in the northern peninsula.

\textsuperscript{87} Sandler, \textit{The Korean War}, 102.
\textsuperscript{88} Schnabel, \textit{The U.S. Army in the Korean War}, 195.
\textsuperscript{89} Truman, \textit{Years of Trial and Hope}, II:336.
\textsuperscript{90} Acheson, \textit{The Korean War}, 29.
\textsuperscript{91} Goulden, \textit{Korea: The Untold Story of the War}, 234.
The first debate that emerged about expanding operations after Inchon was on the physical act of crossing the border, without addressing in concrete terms why that would occur. NSC 81 allowed crossing of the border for only local, tactical reasons. The JCS objected, since the parallel did not provide a logical front from which to enforce the border. A revision of the paper, NSC 81/1, gave more flexibility in northern areas, but asserted that it “should” be the policy of the US not to employ forces close to the northern borders of North Korea to avoid antagonizing China and the Soviet Union. As discussed earlier, the advisory and decision process allowed final objectives to grow unchecked from this point as MacArthur continued to claim military necessity for continued advance toward the Yalu.

In fact, there was no military necessity to continue toward the northern border, though the crossing of the parallel was advantageous and provided an opportunity to bargain with greater leverage and likely would have avoided bringing China into the war. The JCS and Washington in general simply did not formulate a plan on how to exploit the success achieved at Inchon. The discussion on military strategy in Chapter 2 indicated that military objectives should be determined based on political goals articulated by civilian leadership. In this case, the opposite occurred.

From the Chinese side, there is evidence to suggest that even the capture of Pyongyang would not necessarily lead to large-scale intervention. Mao had made a request to Stalin for military aid to assist in repelling the US, but Stalin declined to provide air support and provided only equipment; he did not want to get into direct conflict at that time. Given this information, Mao initially delayed orders to intervene, but reissued them in mid-October as the US moved

92 Under this numbering system, the NSC papers were identified as revisions to an original. For example, NSC 81/1 was the first revision to NSC 81.
93 Goulden, Korea: The Untold Story of the War, 234.
94 Halberstam, The Coldest Winter, 12.
95 Alexander, Korea: The First War We Lost, 229.
further north. He established defensive lines in the northern area of the peninsula, and waited for UN forces to encounter their defense. His actions indicate more concern with securing his border area than the fall of the North Korean capital. The Chinese had actually offered accepting a much smaller buffer zone in November than the 38th Parallel (only insisting upon “south of the Yalu”), provided the US withdraw its recognition of Chiang’s Chinese government and that the Seventh Fleet be removed from the Formosa Strait. Although the US would not have withdrawn recognition of Chiang’s government, Mao was at least signaling a willingness to search for an acceptable bargain through side-payments. Analysis of the Chinese decision to enter into the war later indicated that it acted not at the direction of the Soviets as was assumed at the time, but to preserve at least a remnant of the North Korean state as a buffer; restoration of the previous border was not necessarily a non-negotiable condition.

In contrast, the US provided no indications of a willingness to locate a bargain through the use of side-payments. Expanding demands also prevented recognition of conditions that provided political advantages even beyond the original purpose for waging the war (restoration of the *status quo ante*). Overly-optimistic assessments of the probable outcome, even after the Chinese intervened, continued to characterize NSC deliberations where participants believed that MacArthur would eventually stabilize the situation near the Yalu.

_Hypothesis Assessment_

This section returns to the hypotheses identified in Chapter 3 and assesses their viability in light of the information examined in this case study.

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96 Stueck, *Rethinking the Korean War*, 107.
**Hypothesis 1:** As the number of alternative interpretations of endogenous wartime information provided to the foreign policy executive increases, the likelihood that the rational bargaining position is encapsulated across those interpretations also increases.

In a high-performing decision group, there are several characteristics of the process that can be expected, which include conducting a wide search for relevant information which must continue to be integrated into the decision process.¹⁰⁰ This hypothesis holds that as a greater variety of perspectives are included in high-level deliberations, it is more likely that the president can establish a rational bargaining offer through the advice being provided. This variety of perspectives provides the president with information on potential costs from areas that would not otherwise be considered, as well as alternative methods of securing those interests under threat in the war.

This case provides evidence that a variety of perspectives is not sufficient to ensure consideration of those inputs. The decision-making process must be structured so that dissenting opinions are provided sufficient time and opportunity to inform the group of advisors on emerging information. The Korean War is a situation characterized by missed opportunities to improve the collective understanding of the battlefield information. There were two notable instances of alternative interpretations that were silenced by the process. First, Johnson’s attempt to contextualize the Korean conflict within the wider regional situation may have led to a discussion on how extensive the US’s commitment to Korea should become before it threatened other interests. Acheson’s forceful advocacy for the use of force and the reasons he gave for it overwhelmed Johnson’s ability to provide a counterargument in this first meeting at the Blair House. Johnson may not have been the ideal pick to lead the Pentagon in a war, but Marshall’s

¹⁰⁰ George, *Presidential Decisionmaking in Foreign Policy*, 10.
management there during this time also fell short. Second, George Kennan’s important insight that the Chinese were likely to intervene would have improved decisions had Acheson’s hand-picked team not taken center stage at the State Department and subsequent decisions.

It is clear from this case that the Truman Administration did not suffer from a lack of information that would have improved rational bargaining to terminate the war. Instead, an unwillingness to recognize the implications of that information prevented effective construction of a bargaining offer. Intelligence on the Chinese interests at stake, what the fall of Pyongyang meant for the war, where the leadership of the North’s army was (north of the Yalu) as well as the poor state of the army itself after the Pusan breakout, what the Chinese were doing to prepare for intervention, and how poorly situated the US forces were in November, was easily available for the administration.

**Hypothesis 2:** The processes that are used to resolve these alternative interpretations of endogenous wartime information will determine if the executive is able to discern the rational bargaining position or arrives at a decision based on bureaucratic biases. This will impact both the extent of the state’s demands and the state’s ability to update appropriately.

This hypothesis suggests that as the bureaucratic rules of the game limit the number of alternative interpretations of battlefield information, the more dominant the remaining bias becomes in the process. There were two clear biases that were common across the key participants in final decisions (though not necessarily common with those dissenting opinions that were sidelined). First, participants thought that a strong stand in Korea was necessary to

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101 Particularly in his failure to accompany Truman to his meeting with MacArthur as well as providing the opportunity for MacArthur to exceed his authority in a poorly-conceived message to feel “unencumbered” when it came to operations north of the parallel.

102 Janis, *Groupthink*, 55.
stand up to the global spread of communism, which was being directed by the Soviets. In fact, Korea was a more localized affair with greater Chinese interests at stake than Soviet; there was ample evidence of this by the time MacArthur sent forces toward the Yalu. Second, participants’ accommodation of MacArthur’s demands was the result of bias on the heels of his success at Inchon. All assumed he could unify the peninsula, even as evidence of Chinese intentions to intervene mounted. This was unwarranted confidence that was not informed by any understanding of battlefield conditions. These biases prevented a genuine consideration of the rational limits that should be imposed on military operations. The more robust debate that accompanied the initial decisions on the response to the invasion, the small ground units deployed at the start, and the limits of the war aims indicate a more cautious approach that soon gave way to over-reaching created by these two biases.

**Hypothesis 2a:** Resolution processes that are characterized by aggregation of institutional preferences are more likely to result in overly-optimistic demands that are unacceptably high for an opponent, preventing earnest bargaining.

Hypothesis 2b is not applicable here, since the process tended to expand wartime demands. The evidence in this case is not as strong for the mechanism posited in Chapter 3 that results in expansive wartime demands. The theory of this dissertation posited that this institutional aggregation would be based more on accommodation across agencies to ensure particular bureaucratic interests remained a part of settlement terms. Several cases in this dissertation have indicated that bureaucratic interests were not as important at decision points as personal biases were. This will be discussed in greater detail in the conclusion. There was a greater degree of unanimity in this case than traditional bureaucratic politics would suggest. As discussed in the previous hypothesis, the two most important biases that influenced decisions

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103 Ibid., 56.
were commonly held across the key participants while the system restricted access to the president when it came to dissenting voices. This created the predicted outcome, though through a mechanism different than what was anticipated.

**Alternative Explanation: The Predominant President**

The predominant president model suggests that as opposed to the theory of this dissertation, a well-informed president determines the policies to be implemented while accommodating the interests of key parts of a supporting coalition. If this alternative explanation is applicable, there should be evidence of the president canvassing members of a coalition while directing his staff to conduct an information search for the optimal policy as determined by both domestic and battlefield cost/benefit analyses.

There is some evidence to suggest that Truman was concerned about domestic opposition to his policies. Republican opposition placed a great deal more faith in MacArthur than Truman, Acheson, or even Marshall.\(^{104}\) This may explain to a certain extent why Truman allowed such a great degree of latitude to MacArthur, though it was not necessarily all due to a deliberate decision on his part. The fear of global communism was high, and Truman could not be seen as weak when it came to Soviet expansionism. Truman and Democrats in general had a strong incentive to exploit the success of Inchon for an election victory in the off-year of 1950.\(^{105}\) In order to balance the imperatives of the battlefield while protecting himself from political criticism, it would be reasonable to pursue aggressive military action on the peninsula. Yet this perspective falls short on two key points.

\(^{104}\) Caridi, *Korean War and American Politics*, 64.
\(^{105}\) Ibid., 84.
First, it cannot explain the decision to push military forces closer to the Chinese border in late November, after the elections were already over. As already pointed out, it is likely that large-scale engagements with Chinese troops could have been avoided as late as the early days of November, which coincided with the election. Once those advantages were secured, why would Truman allow risky operations to continue so far north when there was little left to be gained? Had the timing of the crisis required a final decision on military operations to unify the country well before the elections, this alternative explanation might be more powerful. Such a decision was not necessary.

Second, it cannot account for the poor battlefield assessments that were taking place in Washington. The predominant president would be concerned with both domestic and battlefield assessments. While MacArthur’s leadership would be advantageous from a domestic political standpoint, it is more difficult to explain Truman’s willingness to allow the military to accumulate such risks during its operations. Truman was well-versed in the role of civilian leadership of the military, yet his understanding of the war was poor. Why did the administration not recognize the great possibilities of stopping the war after Pyongyang fell? This would have provided domestic political advantages immediately prior to the election while maximizing bargaining leverage. It is difficult to imagine an effective Republican criticism in the final weeks of the election that acknowledged the military feat of capturing the capital while faulting the administration for not conducting military operations in the northern mountainous areas which therefore indicated weakness in the face of communism.

Rather than a predominant president, the evidence of this case finds a predominant military commander who was not concerned with the domestic or international ramifications of his actions. After making the initial decision to intervene, Truman’s subsequent decisions can
best be characterized by acquiescence to the biases that had come to dominate the recommendations of key advisors. At critical times, these advisors abandoned their responsibilities to conduct due diligence on the choices the president was required to make. By the time the precarious position US forces were in was recognized, it was too late to rescue the benefits that had been secured by waging the earlier stages of the war.

**Alternative Explanation: Psychological Limitations**

The predominant president model provides an explanation of why decisions may not be rational from a bargaining model perspective as the president attempts to balance domestic requirements in his decisions. The alternative psychological limitation model suggests that rational decisions may not be made because the president and advisors are simply not able to perceive the rational bargaining position because of personal biases and heuristic shortcuts. This perspective would expect to find evidence of discounted information that did not fit with previously held beliefs.

The evidence of this case is much stronger for psychological biases in the process than a predominant president. Perhaps most importantly is the role of NSC-68 in biasing all of the key players at the time of the conflict.\(^\text{106}\) This misled the participants into believing that Soviet expansion was a global threat that was manifesting in Korea; only Moscow could have directed the invasion that began the conflict. The focus on the Soviets likely blinded key participants to the probability of Chinese intervention, including the CIA, the Defense Department, State Department, and even the Far East Command.\(^\text{107}\) Even MacArthur’s staff was discounting intelligence indicating that the Chinese had moved into Korea by November.\(^\text{108}\)

antagonizing the Soviet Union was a key operating assumption developed in the Blair House meetings Truman held in the early days of the conflict.\textsuperscript{109} Ironically, it was Kennan who suggested in the aftermath of this meeting that the Korean invasion was a local affair after reviewing the available evidence and not indicative of a Soviet attempt to start a world war.\textsuperscript{110}

The bias that existed in the system due to the confidence in MacArthur and his forceful advocacy for preferred military actions has already been discussed. It is likely this bias also led to a heuristic shortcut of “military necessity” on the part of some participants. For example, Marshall’s previous experience in World War II informed him on the necessity of providing commanding generals in the field what they require; they would be in the best position to make that type of determination. When MacArthur’s plans for operations north of the parallel arrived on Marshall’s desk once he assumed the position of Defense Secretary, he secured quick approval from the president without much debate, while later giving MacArthur the latitude to determine the extent of military necessity. Similarly, the JCS advocated for MacArthur’s plans at key times for this same reason. Unfortunately, no one had sufficiently established the political objectives that should be guiding the determination of military necessity. Instead, it became a shortcut that could also be described as “whatever MacArthur wanted.”

Despite the plentiful evidence of both psychological bias and heuristic shortcuts, a key question is whether this is sufficient to cause the observed outcome. While the biases are necessary, I argue they are not sufficient. The first case study showed that despite the presence of bias in the system, it is possible to control its effects with a properly managed option system. This becomes more difficult when the bias is commonly held, but not impossible. A sub-optimal alternative to multiple advocacy is including a devil’s advocate. Although decision-making

\textsuperscript{109} Hess, \textit{Presidential Decisions for War}, 23.

\textsuperscript{110} Paige, \textit{The Korean Decision}, 147.
theory was not as developed then as when these ideas were developed, it was not uncommon for the “downside” of an alternative to be explored in 1950.

Furthermore, the role of “previously held beliefs,” central to psychological explanations when confronted with new evidence, cannot explain the expansion of war aims. A purely psychological explanation would be powerful in accounting for a state failing to seize on an opportunity to improve its benefits from war due to political goals that were set lower than those benefits. It would not be able to recognize what the changing conditions of the battlefield represented. In this case, the state did recognize the opportunity to expand war objectives, but failed to recognize when it should scale its demands back.

Conclusion

“The first, the supreme, the most far-reaching act of judgment that the statesman and the commander have to make is to establish by that test the kind of war on which they are embarking.”

-Clausewitz

The above quote provides a military/strategic explanation for the failures of the Truman Administration. By failing to adequately describe the type of war that they were pursuing (i.e. the political goals) it allowed objectives to outgrow its ability to secure them. It started by pursuing a limited war for limited objectives, but within months waged a limited war for unlimited objectives (the eradication of the North Korean state). In the midst of the post-World War II drawdown, the US was not prepared to provide military means commensurate with its most demanding of war objectives.

A pure bargaining model of war cannot provide an adequate explanation for the large amounts of information that was ignored in the Korean War by the Truman Administration.

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111 Clausewitz, On War, 88.
Simple delays in Bayesian updating are insufficient to explain why the US missed indications of Chinese intervention despite its early concern over the possibility of outside interference. Furthermore, some evidence was quickly recognized when it provided the opportunity to move beyond the original limitations placed on military operations. The unwarranted optimism as the US Army moved north originated in Tokyo at the Far East Command with MacArthur, and infected the upper ranks of the command on the ground, as well as those in Washington.\textsuperscript{112} The president had at least a month to countermand or clarify the orders given to MacArthur’s, which the commanding general incorrectly (and deliberately) interpreted as calling for the unification of Korea; no such orders had actually been given.

As this chapter has pointed out, some alternative approaches to this case can account for some of its characteristics, though none can fully explain the three critical decisions described here. A bargaining model that incorporates domestic pressures, as well as the predominant president approach, can both explain why Truman would continue to pursue aggressive action in the weeks leading up to the election. However, they cannot account for the decision to continue the push north after the election was over. A predominant president model also has difficulty in accounting for the poor assessments made by the president and his advisors as the risk associated with the movement north continued to accumulate. A president should have strong incentives to retain close control over battlefield events, yet the administration failed to recognize the opportunity that the capture of Pyongyang provided to deal a significant political blow to North Korea as well as improve bargaining leverage while limiting the risks associated with operations in the northern border area. Finally, a psychological approach can account for the decision group’s incorrect assessment of where the impetus for the invasion originated as well as the related problem of discounting the risk of Chinese intervention. This approach cannot explain

\footnotesize{\textsuperscript{112} Halberstam, \textit{The Coldest Winter}, 13.}
the decision to expand war demands as easily since previously held beliefs would speed
recognition of conditions that supported the original goal of restoring the 38th Parallel as a border
yet impede recognition of opportunities to seize additional territory. It is also unable to explain
the decreasing concern with communism in other areas of the world as the US invested growing
effort into Korea.

Stanley focuses on the later stages of the war, and addresses why the belligerents became
entrenched in their demands and could not locate an appropriate settlement. She suggests that
the United States faced an information obstacle in that it did not realize it should end the war.
This can occur due to poor quality information, differing information or indicators being utilized
between the two belligerents, or biases that interfere with effective use of information. She
suggests an entrapment obstacle also existed that prevented recognition of information that
suggested the US should have negotiated for the war’s end. It may lead to information
processing in a manner that justifies current policies.\textsuperscript{113} In order to overcome these issues, she
suggests a change in political leadership is necessary to overcome the problems associated with
sunk costs for the current leadership.

This case clearly has aspects of Janis’ groupthink, Stanley’s information and entrapment
obstacles, selective Bayesian delays, as well as psychological bias. This dissertation seeks to
explain why these problems can develop in one administration but not another; why did the new
national security system which was designed to provide the president with more options and
greater insight on this type of crisis, fail to deliver on its promises? It is because the rules of the
game followed within the president’s advisory circle are as important as the formal rules
established in the National Security Act.

\textsuperscript{113} Stanley, \textit{Paths to Peace}, 120.
A key failure of the advisory process was in not generating sufficient options for the president to consider.\textsuperscript{114} Despite having a plurality of perspectives available within close proximity to the decision group, its tendency to accept the most optimistic assessment and recommendation maximized termination demands. Chapters 2 and 3 argued that optimism is synonymous with bias. Therefore, accepting recommendations that are the most optimistic is the same as accepting those with the greatest bias (i.e. assuming the greatest benefits with the least cost). This dissertation’s theory holds that these conditions will lead to termination demands that are close to an ideal point with little updating and will enjoy broad bureaucratic support. The US’s ideal point was unification under the South’s government and virtually all advisors enthusiastically supported this goal. Rather than providing several options, this process generated only one, which was to place a great deal of trust into MacArthur while neglecting the political responsibilities that should have rested with the administration for management of the war.

There was less evidence in this case to support the hypothesized mechanism for aggregation of preferences. Rather than Snyder’s logrolling, there were more indications of Janis’s groupthink where participants were highly cohesive and shared similar biases. Chapter 2 emphasized that in order to control the effects of bias within a decision group members should have unlike biases, which was not the case here. This dissertation posited that the aggregation of institutional demands would occur through mutual accommodation between institutions with diverse demands which would eventually lead to a termination position that reflected this. Instead, the bureaucratic representatives coalesced on one ideal demand. Logrolling and groupthink theoretically both provide a mechanism to arrive at a bargaining position that is

ultimately unattainable. Both will tend to inflate estimates of benefits while ignoring evidence of potential costs.
By all accounts, Vietnam was a tragic experience for the United States. Fought in the shadow of the Cold War and on the heels of Korea and the Cuban Missile Crisis, advisors to the President during the conflict struggled to decide on the proper context of the war.\textsuperscript{1} All failed to grasp the fundamentals that should have led to other choices. The trail of decisions began for the US in 1950 by supporting French attempts to retain colonial territory and ended with the evacuation of the US Embassy in Saigon in 1975 as North Vietnam seized its southern adversary’s territory. At the end, some 58,000 Americans had died in the conflict which was never a declared war. It led to the end of Johnson’s presidency, but not before it decimated his closest advisors as they became disillusioned with the course of the war and policy decisions. The influence of those years on contemporary decisions on the use of force is difficult to overstate. Armed conflicts that the US became involved in since have all had the specter of Vietnam invoked as a cautionary tale. The word “quagmire” has become synonymous with an unpopular war from which the government is unable to extricate itself since David Halberstam’s 1965 accounting of Kennedy’s growing commitments to Vietnam.\textsuperscript{2}

The critical time period to be analyzed in this chapter is late 1964 to mid-1965. Immediately following the decisions made during that period, the ground troop commitments were massively expanded, as were the bombing missions intended to convince the communist


forces to come to the bargaining table. Most importantly, the US mission shifted from a Vietnamese war (a position held by the two previous presidents) to an American war (despite Johnson’s assertion that an expanding troop commitment did not imply a change in policy “whatsoever”\(^3\)). Perhaps an indication of the strong influence the lessons of the Cuban Missile Crisis had on administration advisors, goals for the conflict were described in communicative terms in conjunction with the escalation. Johnson asserted that the goals were one, to convince the communists that the US could not be defeated by force of arms (a remarkably apt assertion), and two, to convince the communists that they should come to the bargaining table to settle.\(^4\)

This time period was a deliberate attempt to end the conflict and secure appropriate termination objectives.

This case study should be considered a “most-likely case” for bargaining models of war that analyze outcomes from a unitary, rational actor framework for several reasons. First, the president was at the pinnacle of his power at the time these decisions were made, having just won a landslide election. His next electoral battle was as far in the future as possible for US presidents, which should have freed him to focus on the war in isolation from domestic pressures. Despite his domestic program goals, he should have been able to approximate a unitary actor and mitigate poor outcomes before election pressures mounted again. Second, the US possessed the preponderance of power and had a superior capability to control the escalation of violence to create conditions conducive to settlement. Deliberations among the players demonstrate that they conceptualized the war in bargaining terms with an expectation that the North would see the situation similarly. Finally, with better intelligence capabilities, the


\(^4\) Ibid.
administration should have been better able to assess the conditions on the battlefield and appropriately modify termination demands.

In contrast, this is a crucial case for the theory posited here for the reasons described above with one addition: Johnson himself harbored doubts about the likelihood of eventual success in Vietnam. This dissertation holds the rules of the game that aggregate preferences and control the presentation of assessments and options determine the state’s ability, or inability, to action rationally in arriving at a termination bargain. Given that there were advisors who had deep reservations on the course decided upon in this time period, Johnson should have had his personal biases reinforced and eventually chosen a different path. Since he did not, the methods employed in the advisory system require exploration for an accounting of its failures.

This chapter first provides a narrative of the escalation of the war from the US’s perspective. This narrative differs from the other case studies in that it focuses on a single problem for the administration: finding the level of force that would convince the North to concede. It then discusses the salient points of the bureaucratic rules of the game under which the administration attempted to locate the answer to its problem. After a structured analysis of the case and assessment of the hypotheses, it briefly explores alternate explanations for the president’s decisions.

**Context of the War, Key Assessments, and Decisions**

The US’s early involvement in Vietnam began shortly after the French defeat at Dien Bien Phu, where an attempt to lure communist insurgents into a conventional fight ended in disaster and withdrawal for France. The subsequent peace conference in Geneva split the nation into two states; a relatively strong communist north led by Ho Chi Minh, and a weak pro-western south led by Ngo Dinh Diem. Ho’s support for pro-communist insurgents in South Vietnam
(Viet Cong) induced the US to lend support to Diem. The fear that other nations in Asia would fall to the communists (erroneously assumed to be a monolithic entity) created the incentive for more expansive aid when required. By the time Lyndon Johnson assumed the presidency after Kennedy’s assassination, there were approximately 16,000 advisors in South Vietnam. The advisors were primarily providing military training to the South Vietnamese Army (Army of the Republic of Vietnam, or ARVN) to conduct search-and-destroy missions against the Viet Cong, and were not intended to engage in direct combat themselves.

The Viet Cong’s primary method of expanding their influence in the south was through controlling rural villages. Using a mixture of brutality and assistance, they convinced villages that Diem’s government was illegal and foreign. In fact, if Diem had abided by the Geneva agreement to hold national elections in 1956, it is likely that the popular Ho Chi Minh would have become the leader of a united Vietnam. Realizing this, Diem ignored the requirement and proceeded to solidify his power by installing loyal followers into key positions, further undermining his claim to any legitimate power.\(^5\) Diem’s priorities in Saigon (instead of in the rural villages) undermined the creation of an effective army and the ARVN was poorly led and poorly disciplined, unable to effectively counter the communist village strategy. Diem’s early successes in organizing a government were overshadowed by his later crack-down on traitors (led by his brother, Ngo Dinh Nhu), who were generally defined as anyone in opposition to Diem. The coup that removed Diem from power after support from the Kennedy Administration waned created a lasting problem for the US throughout the remainder of the conflict. No capable leader rose to the occasion to fill the void. In the absence of a strong government capable of directing political and military activities, the responsibility for managing those functions fell

increasingly to the US, complicating a political settlement to the conflict. The right set of conditions would fully Americanize the war; those conditions began to crystallize in 1964.

In August of that year, an attack on the Maddox, a US destroyer operating in the Gulf of Tonkin, provided justification to Johnson for retaliatory strikes. The Tonkin Gulf Resolution, passed by Congress, authorized the president to “take all necessary measures to repel any armed attack against the forces of the United States and to prevent further aggression [emphasis added].” Johnson retaliated with what was generally perceived as a measured response, appropriately focused on the ports that supported the boats that carried out the attacks.\(^6\) With an election to follow shortly, he was reluctant to pursue wider involvement in Vietnam.\(^7\) In addition, he was reluctant to acknowledge that the original attack on the Maddox may have been in retaliation for covert operations conducted against the North; a fact the Secretary of Defense, Robert McNamara, worked successfully to obscure in the hearings prior to the passing of the resolution.\(^8\) With an illusion of control over events in Vietnam, Johnson’s popularity surged in the 1964 campaign season and culminated in a landslide victory.

Debate over further actions after the reprisal attacks for the Maddox took place throughout the campaign season and into early 1965. The decisions made in those months set the sequence of events into motion that would commit the US to direct combat. Among the top level advisors and cabinet members, there were four major assessments that entered into the decision-making process. Three of these assessments pointed to significant problems with taking direct military action. However, two advisors had formed a different perspective. Their assessment eventually carried the decision and was a direct result of the decision-making process

that Johnson had enabled. The competing assessments originated from the Joint Chiefs of Staff, a key member of the State Department, a working group commissioned by the president, and the Saigon Embassy.

All of the key decisions and analyses of the war were made in the shadow of National Security Action Memorandum (NSAM) 288. Written only four months after Johnson had taken office, the memo was informed by McNamara’s and Taylor’s latest trip to Vietnam. Their assessment of the situation there was gloomy on both the political and military capabilities of the South. NSAM 288 reaffirmed the US’s commitment to Vietnam, but made explicit grand aims to establish an “independent, non-communist South Vietnam” which had not been the official policy to that point.9 It also made explicit use of the domino theory, stating: “Unless we can achieve this objective in South Vietnam, almost all of Southeast Asia will probably fall under Communist dominance.” Up to this point, official policy had been stated in NSAM 273, Johnson’s first NSAM, which reaffirmed Kennedy’s approach, placing the responsibility for the war on the South with the US providing only advisory capabilities.10 The new memo also authorized studies to be undertaken for direct strikes against the North.11

The first key assessment was that of the Joint Chiefs of Staff (JCS). Divisions among the Chiefs eventually resulted in a “lowest common denominator” approach – a course which was not objectionable to anyone, though no one had an expectation of success (the definition of

9 Leslie H. Gelb, United States-Vietnam Relations 1945-1967 (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1971), Part IV.C.1, iii. This document is informally known as The Pentagon Papers, sections of which became available in 1971 following a leak to the New York Times by one of the members of the project. This became known as the Gravel Edition, after the Senator that entered them into the Congressional Record. The citation here refers to the original version under its official title, a project managed by Leslie Gelb, which was released in 2011 by the National Archives and made available the remaining 34% unreleased portion.

10 McNamara denies that this was a change in US policy and cites one line from the memo (“The South Vietnamese must win their own fight...”), while ignoring the statement above. See Robert S. McNamara and Brian VanDeMark, In Retrospect: The Tragedy and Lessons of Vietnam (New York, NY: Vintage Books, 1996), 274.

which became increasingly muddied). After the Tonkin Gulf incident, the JCS perceived the US as “deeply involved” in Vietnam and did not address the possibility of negotiations. Instead, they advocated for proceeding with a plan to introduce the forces required to conduct airstrikes when needed.\(^\text{12}\) However, there were divisions between the Army Chief of Staff (Harold Johnson) and the Air Force Chief of Staff (Curtis LeMay). While the Army advocated a more extensive pacification campaign through ground forces, the Air Force (supported by the Marines following a direct appeal from LeMay) continued to forcefully advocate for airstrikes against the North, which it argued was the source of the problem.\(^\text{13}\) All members of the JCS had different approaches they favored for addressing the problems in Vietnam; yet each also differed on the actual problems. Though they all advocated the use of military force to affect Hanoi’s capabilities, they produced no alternative to the emerging consensus on strikes; they only disagreed in terms of intensity and the instruments of force.\(^\text{14}\)

An important event during this period was a war game conducted by the Joint Chiefs of Staff in mid-September 1964; this was an event that should have gone far in informing the players on the potential costs associated with the war. The game was a second attempt to evaluate the utility of air strikes in achieving objectives against the North. An earlier version found that air strikes would be ineffective at preventing the North from resupplying insurgents operating in the South.\(^\text{15}\) The Ho Chi Minh Trail was simply not susceptible to destruction since it could easily be diverted. This new war game was intended to assess the potential to cause the North to “recalculate its interests,” rather than affect its actual capabilities, through graduated

pressure created by bombing. The war game indicated not only that bombing would not have the intended effect, but that a massive introduction of ground forces would be required to achieve the stated US objectives.\textsuperscript{16} The idea that the North could be convinced that continuing their policies of supporting the insurgents was not in their interests became known as the “Rostow thesis” after Walt Rostow, who was the State Department’s policy planning director. Despite not finding support in either of the war games intended to validate a military solution, the Rostow thesis became an integral part of the consensus that had developed in the Administration by mid-October.\textsuperscript{17}

The second key assessment emerged in a series of memos that were circulated among key advisors, culminating in a memo to the President in January of 1965 which summarized the positions the advisors were taking. The most important of these was launched in early October. On October 5, 1964, George Ball, an Under Secretary of State, provided a memorandum to McNamara, Dean Rusk (Secretary of State), and McGeorge Bundy (National Security Advisor) that questioned the basic assumptions of the Vietnam policy and analyzed options.\textsuperscript{18} Ball was a well-known critic of Vietnam policy, and would continue to play that role throughout his tenure. Out of the four potential courses of action he perceived, he recommended pressing for a political settlement to the conflict while rejecting the options of maintaining the present course, expanded ground troop involvement, and air strikes against the North. At the time he wrote this, momentum was building behind the air strike option, and he wrote that “the burden of proof [for following a different course of action] is upon those who advocate the third option [air

\textsuperscript{16} Ibid., 155–157.
\textsuperscript{17} Gelb, \textit{United States-Vietnam Relations 1945-1967}, Part IV.C.2b, 37.
strikes].” 19 The weakness in his analysis was that he provided no meaningful way to achieve his four objectives, 20 though he was prescient in his analysis of the potential costs associated with escalation. In a similar line of reasoning, a memo from Bill Bundy (Assistant Secretary of State for the Far East) followed that advocated a short, intense bombing followed by negotiations which he expected to follow shortly. Though he expected the South to fall to the communists, it would allow the US to save face in the Cold War while preparing the next line of defense against the march of communism. 21 In effect, he rejected the domino theory which guided much of the thinking on Vietnam and instead advocated the creation of a new firewall to halt the spread of communism in Asia.

The third key assessment was a formal working group study initiated by presidential order immediately after the 1964 elections. The working group was to evaluate the US’s position in Vietnam, and provide Johnson with alternatives to secure US objectives there. This assessment is notable for its integration of several intelligence agencies’ analysis of military and political conditions. The most damaging piece of analysis to the administration’s position was the finding that the source of strength for communists in the South was the indigenous population; strikes in the North would do little to affect the communist guerillas’ ability to operate in the South. 22 This was a natural result of the village strategy described earlier in this chapter and the strong nationalist reputation of Ho Chi Minh. The JCS member of the working group disagreed with this analysis vigorously. In deference, the working group devoted space to assessing the potential effectiveness of military strikes (emphasizing benefits), though it assumed

19 Ibid., 36.
20 Which were: getting the North to stop supporting the insurgents, establishment of an independent government in Saigon able to call on the US for additional support, and guarantees for the continued independence of the South.
22 Gelb, United States-Vietnam Relations 1945-1967, Part IV C.2c, iv.
the North would be able to sustain substantial damage without being compelled to change course.\textsuperscript{23}

The working group generated three options. Option A was a continuation of the current policies, with the addition of advocating reprisal attacks and refusing negotiations until the North accepted US pre-conditions (including a communist-free South). Option B was a sustained campaign of significant military actions against the North and continuation of bombing during any negotiations to press the advantage. Option C was a more modest campaign of strikes intended to bring the North to the negotiation table. By the end of November when these options were to be presented to the principals, the distinctions between them were blurred. All three advocated military strikes, refused negotiation in the short-run, and insisted on pre-conditions for bargaining. The working group also suggested that the domino theory was “overly simplified,” a point that the JCS disagreed with and insisted a recording of dissent be included in the final report.\textsuperscript{24} The greatest failure of the working group in its stated objective of providing the president options was in not being able to identify potential points to negotiate over with the North.\textsuperscript{25} The final recommendation of the principals to the president was to implement Option A (phase I) while preparing for execution of Option C (phase II). The fact that any of the options could be substituted in this manner as phases of the same plan is an indication of the limited success the group achieved.

The fourth key perspective to enter into deliberations was that of the Saigon Embassy, headed by Maxwell Taylor. Taylor led off the discussions on the working group assessment on November 27, 1964 with a brief on the situation in South Vietnam. He confirmed the assessments in intelligence estimates which indicated deteriorating political conditions and

\textsuperscript{23} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{24} Ibid., 17.
\textsuperscript{25} Ibid., 24.
growing strength of the Viet Cong, despite successes achieved by the ARVN. According to Taylor, success for the US required an adequate GVN, a more extensive counter-insurgency campaign, and cutting off insurgent support from the North. Improvement of the central government was a lynchpin; he saw little prospect for success without it.

In January 1965, Taylor advocated more extensive airstrikes against the North, asserting that the proper ratio of ground troops required to the guerillas to achieve success (10 to 1) were unattainable. Bombing was the only alternative. At the same time, Johnson was dissatisfied with receiving only recommendations for an air campaign, which he felt stood little chance of assuring a satisfactory outcome. Yet by then the decision had been made; the consensus forged after the working group findings committed the US to a particular course. Bombing would proceed, but Taylor had to keep the government together long enough for the strikes to have its intended effects. One of these effects was to improve the morale of the government in the South which would, they believed, lead to better performance. Naturally, the GVN leadership dissolved their civilian advisory body and made extensive political arrests in the dead of night two weeks later. This led to an infamous rebuke of the political leadership by the ambassador that destroyed any veneer that remained of an independent GVN. The lynchpin was gone soon after the US had decided upon its course.

In response to the memos, other assessments by the CIA and Taylor, the war games, and the working group analysis discussed below, McNamara and McGeorge Bundy provided a memo and briefing to Rusk and Johnson on January 27, 1965. It is notable for undermining the arguments of dissenters as well as forcing a choice on the president; it became known as the

“fork in the road” memo. It outlined the deteriorating conditions in the South Vietnamese Government, which were not being corrected by the current policies. In light of those conditions, they described two options, which were presented as the only alternatives. The first was to use military options to “force a change in communist policy.” The second was to seek negotiations under the current policy. While pointing out that Rusk did not favor either option, the memo cast his recommendation under a “current policy” category.29

The memo did not explore analyses discussed above that may have provided additional options. Specifically, it did not question the extent to which US interests were at stake in Vietnam in light of the questioning of the validity of the domino theory by the working group, Ball, and Bundy in the recent months. In other words, the president received neither analysis on the extent to which the US would incur costs with expanded commitments, nor whether or not those costs were commensurate with the benefits the US would receive. By neglecting other options, the alterative course of action (do nothing more while seeking negotiations) was clearly a non-choice. The deterioration of the GVN was apparent to all, the ARVN was losing in its efforts to slow the spread of Viet Cong, and the Viet Cong’s village strategy resulted in extensive local support. This left only their first course of action to follow. Also neglected in the memo was a consideration of the prospects for success under the “only option.” Given the conditions above, it was not clear that cutting off support from the North would sufficiently hamper the insurgents and allow time for the GVN to get itself organized.

In response to the memo, the president sent his national security advisor to Vietnam to assess the prospects for stable government in the South. His assessment echoed that of Taylor’s, which was bleak. While Bundy was there, the Viet Cong bombed a US airbase near Pleiku, about 240 miles north of Saigon on February 7, 1965. Despite his assessment of the poor state of

29 McNamara and VanDeMark, In Retrospect, 167–168.
affairs in the government, Bundy advocated graduated and sustained bombing of the North, given that “the prestige of the United States, and a substantial part of our influence, are directly at risk in Vietnam.”\(^{30}\) The bombing of Pleiku galvanized the opinions of others in the advisory circle that all arrived at the same conclusion as Bundy. The system designed to provide the president with a variety of options to achieve objectives and assess costs and benefits associated with each, provided only one. Additionally, their analysis emphasized only the costs associated with an unacceptable course of action (the existing policy), further ensuring that the president would go forward with bombing to achieve graduated pressure.

**Bureaucratic Conditions and Rules of the Game**

The failure of the US to take a different course with the problems in Vietnam is difficult to account for under the dominant approaches in international relations. From a bargaining model of war (BMW) perspective, there should have been a wide array of options for the US to pursue, since it assumes substitutable objectives enabled through side-payments. However, both sides had mutually exclusive goals (a free and independent South Vietnam and a communist one) and the US had no options at the bargaining table it could perceive; no advisor earnestly recommended proceeding with formal negotiations given the conditions existing at the time. A rational actor should have perceived flaws in the domino theory, particularly when advisors to the president were calling it into question. Even under a BMW perspective that allows for an office-retention problem for the president, Johnson was at the apex of his power at the time he made these decisions. An election was as far in the future as possible since he made the critical one immediately after his inauguration so there is little to suggest domestic audiences compelled the decision. A pure bureaucratic politics approach also fails to account for how the variety of

pessimistic assessments of the graduated pressure option led to this exact outcome; bargaining among the players should have resulted in something less. This chapter will later analyze the psychological perspective as well as the presidential predominance approach, which I will show to be also inadequate. Only the conditions in the advisory system itself can explain this outcome.

The theory described in Chapter 3 utilized two independent variables. The first concerned the degree to which a plurality of perspectives was presented to the chief executive at the time of decision. In this case, the critical decisions by the president came during the last week of January and the first week of February 1965. The system had initially generated competing perspectives, particularly on the utility of bombing in bringing the North to the bargaining table through the graduated pressure approach. Most assessments were pessimistic on this point. The JCS’s final perspective differed from the other players’ in that they advocated a more extensive bombing campaign to bring more immediate results. However, the plurality of perspectives did little to lead to a plurality of options. As this chapter has pointed out, the working group generated options that all consisted of bombing followed by negotiations. Critical questioning of fundamental objectives demanded by national interests was not included in the deliberations, as all participants relied on the guidance from NSAM 288 as well as the faulty domino theory.

At the time these critical decisions were being made, the Joint Chiefs of Staff were unable to recommend a coherent military solution to the challenging objectives sought in NSAM 288. On September 9th, 1964, the Joint Chiefs of Staff and the Secretary of Defense met with President Johnson to discuss the deteriorating situation in the South Vietnamese government and options to counter the North’s influence. In this meeting, the Air Force Chief of Staff and the Marine Corps Commandant advocated air strikes against the North, while the remainder of the

military advisors were concerned that would place too much pressure on the Southern government. When Johnson worried that the weak government might actually nullify the US’s ability to succeed, his military advisors, as well as his Ambassador to South Vietnam, argued that allowing it to fall would initiate the domino chain. When the JCS became skeptical of the utility of a limited bombing campaign, they sent a memorandum that called into question the prospects for success in Vietnam to the Secretary of Defense. Although it was received by McNamara two days before the critical meeting with the President on September 9, it was not given consideration.

At the time the working group began, there was little debate over the importance of Vietnam to the US. Objectives had become less flexible due to the presence of high-level members that already had an interest in current policies. The JCS representative on the working group (Admiral Lloyd Mustin) also refused to accept any re-interpretations of interests and goals in Vietnam, instead preferring to rely on the domino theory. His influence in the working group was extensive, indicating that costs would accumulate faster from inaction, rather than assessing the costs associated with his recommendations. The Pentagon Papers note: “Missing [in the final draft, due to the JCS member’s influence] was the earlier draft’s reference to potential costs and risks involved in pursuing current objectives. Missing also was any suggestion that the Administration might find some advantage in seeking an alternative to these objectives.” Ultimately, the Chiefs inability to formulate fully-developed military options provided civilian leadership the latitude to substitute their own judgments on military matters.

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32 Maxwell Taylor, who assumed the ambassador position after serving as Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff.
33 McNamara and VanDeMark, *In Retrospect*, 155.
36 McMaster, *Dereliction of Duty*, 151.
The lessons learned from the Cuban Missile Crisis for the civilian leadership proved a poor precedent.

A major factor in the decision making was the banishment of expertise as decisions become more important. Much of the talent in the East Asian Bureau of the State Department had been eliminated by the early 1960s. The desk officers that dealt with Vietnam were generally French specialists in a holdover from a previous policy of supporting French claims to colonial territories. Although the Department endeavored to replace that talent, it was generally excluded in crucial decision-making forums. Instead, sensitive issues were considered by generalists (secretaries and high-level deputies) rather than the area specialists and lacked analysis that was based on region-specific expertise. The emphasis placed on communicating with the adversary by the generalists through military posturing, which played a central role in the Cuban Missile Crisis, proved insufficient to cause the North to “recalculate its interests.”

These conditions also indicate that this dissertation’s second independent variable, the resolution rules in the system, should be characterized as a narrow selection approach. The system that Johnson had established provided significant weight to civilian advisors while limiting the professional military advice he should have received from the Joint Chiefs. In effect, he utilized both McNamara and Taylor as filters between himself and the military, which provided them with the opportunity to frame critiques and counter-arguments. In the months before escalation of the Vietnam conflict, the president met with the Chiefs only twice.

The most egregious example of the system narrowly selecting a favored approach for presentation came in November of 1964. At the time the working group was carrying out its mandate to generate a range of options for the President’s consideration, an intervention changed

the field of possibilities. Rusk and McNamara interfered in the working group’s option development, effectively narrowing their alternatives to one. Early drafts considered more limited objectives in Vietnam, proposed expanded counter-insurgency measures in the South, and pointed out the possibility of up to 65,000 North Vietnamese troops intervening in the South. At its end, the project was redrafted by the State Department using wording that strongly favored Option C – the course of action favored by Rusk and McNamara. Option C became the second phase of the graduated pressure policy as the only option to increase pressure after Phase I (Option A) was implemented.

**Structured Assessment**

This section considers the case study in terms of the structured questions listed in the introduction. Critical to this analysis is examining how new information is integrated into the comprehensive understanding the state develops of the battlefield situation and political conditions that it uses to terminate the war. This section will assess the extent to which the process itself affected the decision through either suppressing or highlighting important information that should inform the executive in the final decision-making. The previous sections identified a total of five assessments of the military and political situation in South Vietnam at the advisor level. The president was not anxious to proceed with a course of action that would commit the US to war; his doubt about the viability of the GVN indicated he may have been convinced another alternative was feasible. The initial states of these assessments do not display extensive bias since there were multiple indications of potential problems that would arise. The

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40 Ibid., 358–363.
bias in the assessments began to emerge once the multiple assessments were being integrated by the bureaucratic rules of the game.

The assessment of the JCS did not follow the same pattern of resolution at the top advisor level in this case. The JCS’s inability to generate a coherent option for the president resulted in a lowest-common-denominator outcome, in which the internal bargaining created a minimally acceptable solution. This was a classic case of pulling-and-hauling among the players, but carried out in a smaller circle. As a result, neither of the two opposing sides in the debate (the Army in favor of an extensive counter-insurgency and the Air Force and Marines favoring an intense bombing campaign) received all of what it wanted. Furthermore, their inability to agree upon the linkage between the instruments of force and the political objective they were trying to achieve was a result of disagreement on the fundamental problems in the South (support from the North vs. indigenous insurgency). A limited bombing campaign option resulted, though they later became skeptical of its utility. That opinion was suppressed in the September 9 meeting with the president.

A separate military opinion came from Westmoreland. As the head of the Military Assistance Command, Vietnam (MACV), he was responsible for training the Army of the Republic of Vietnam (ARVN). Westmoreland saw more promise in a counter-insurgency effort than in bombing the North. His assessment of the ARVN was suspect, however; he saw defections in the ARVN as a positive sign since the better soldiers would stay behind.\(^\text{41}\) His interpretation was likely biased, given that he was assessing the progress of his own mission in South Vietnam. Even if his assessment was biased, however, rejecting it does not directly lead to the conclusion that graduated pressure was the only alternative. McNamara discounted the

assessment of progress provided by Westmoreland on the ARVN while advocating for the graduated pressure option.

The weight given to Westmoreland’s assessment should have been bolstered by the one generated by Taylor. Although his option included cutting off support from the North, an effective counter-insurgency campaign coupled with a strong central government lay at the heart of his recommendations. Both of these interpretations originated from players in Vietnam rather than Washington. Yet even in Washington, intelligence estimates on the South’s government by October gave little solace to those that hoped for a strong central government to hand responsibilities over to for the management of the conflict. Furthermore, there was growing evidence of extensive infiltration of the South by the Viet Cong.42 The assessments from the Department of State below the secretary level (Ball and Bundy) were consistent with this intelligence; they both believed it was infeasible to expect a bombing campaign would result in an improvement of the South’s government and a less-capable insurgency.

The system did generate multiple interpretations of battlefield and political information that was available. There was also evidence of bias on the part of some players based on their organizational interests. For example, the Army was advocating a counter-insurgency campaign, the Air Force was advocating bombing, Ball and Bundy were recommending negotiations, and Westmoreland was advocating further enhancements of the ARVN. Except for Ball and Bundy, these advocates did little to assess the extent of the potential costs associated with their preferred actions. However, the bias of McNamara does not fit as neatly into organizational imperatives. McNamara’s focus was on reaching negotiations while assuming a limited bombing campaign would communicate to the adversary that bargaining was in his best interest.43 This perspective

42 Ibid., 1.
43 McNamara and VanDeMark, In Retrospect, 159.
was not resident in any of the recommendations he received from the Joint Chiefs. McNamara’s bias originated from his prior experience in the Kennedy Administration.

Despite having multiple opportunities to do so, the players did little reassessment of their recommendations. The failure to revise beliefs as information became available on critical parts of their plans is surprising from a BMW perspective. There are at least three points at which fundamental beliefs should have been called into question. The first point was the time at which information from the SIGMA wargames became available. They indicated that not only was the insurgency not dependent upon supplies from the North, but also that bombing would do little incentivize negotiations for the North – the “Rostow Thesis” was defunct. The second point was when the domino theory was criticized by both Bundy and the working group. Though it was upheld as unassailable, Bundy’s perspective actually provided a logical way to avoid the downside of losing Vietnam to the communists while placing the blame on the South’s government. Not only would this avoid excessive military commitments to Vietnam, it would also incentivize other governments to more quickly organize to defeat communist insurgencies behind the new firewall. This was a task at which South Vietnam failed miserably. Allowing the first domino to fall while stopping the second was feasible.

The final point at which a revision of beliefs should have taken place was when evidence accumulated that the GVN would be unable to sufficiently stabilize in order to mount a challenge to the growing presence of the communists in the South. The consistent deterioration of this one foundation that plans rested upon seemed only to stiffen the resolve of the players behind the only option on the table. Johnson himself was doubtful that bombing would logically lead to their objectives and lamented his lack of alternatives.44 However, since all players shared an assumption that a strong central government was a lynchpin in their plans, this deterioration

should have prompted a re-assessment of the likelihood for success. Since the domino theory remained influential in the process even though it was called into question by the working group, costs associated with failure became more important than the costs associated with the chosen course of action. From a BMW perspective, the government failed to act rationally by ignoring costs even though this information was available.

Initial assessments of the players did not seem to be unduly influenced by the bureaucratic rules of the game as the classic bureaucratic politics model would suggest. Despite NSAM 288 and 273, there was a great deal of questioning of the extent to which national interests were at stake in Vietnam. These memorandums represented settled policy for the administration. Calling this policy into question should have been fairly risky for players desiring to maintain their access and influence. Once interactions began to take place among the various perspectives, and recommendations were aggregated through the rules of the game, this questioning was suppressed as momentum built behind graduated pressure.

The system that Johnson implemented to support his decision-making was designed to resolve competing interpretations of battlefield and political information before he received recommendations. Despite his concern that he received multiple recommendations for bombing with few other alternatives, his decision-making system operated as he had intended and limited his exposure to competing perspectives. McNamara had been given a great deal of latitude to “keep Vietnam quiet” in the months leading up to the election in the interest of avoiding potential problems. This proved to be pivotal in establishing the course that was followed in November through January. McNamara remained the central figure in bringing options to the president; he failed to give up the reins post-election. At the time critical decisions were made, the perspectives of key players such as the JCS failed to take center stage. He actively

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discouraged dissenting chiefs from going directly to the president. Johnson’s emphasis on consensus would continue to characterize his later decisions, including with his infamous “Tuesday lunches” that only included players with opinions he wanted to hear as decisions on Vietnam were being made. At the time ground combat troop deployment decisions were considered, McNamara’s carefully framed alternatives were the only ones presented to the president and drove the outcome toward the secretary’s preferences. The resulting system suppressed a great deal of information that should have been considered, such as expanded ground troop requirements needed to guard expanded air bases needed for graduated bombing. Critical questions such as what course of action should be taken if bombing did not have the intended effects were not part of the deliberations.

Reconciliation of competing perspectives was primarily accomplished through suppression of dissenting opinions. The working group, for example, was developing two “fall-back” options if the more extreme program of an extensive military commitment was not followed. While both would be in conflict with NSAM 288, they could be justified by the assertion that the war in Vietnam was the responsibility of the GVN, which had been long-standing policy. These options would have made it clear that the US would continue to resist communist expansion while communicating to other states behind a new firewall that the situation in Vietnam was unique and did not set a precedent for others. The first option would place a ceiling on the number of troops in the South while building up a base elsewhere that could respond to a growing crisis. The second would to execute a short, intense military

\[\text{Ibid., 488.}\]
\[\text{At this time, the graduated pressure option was not central to the group’s analysis. For the purpose of option building, the two discussed above fell between a withdrawal option and massive military involvement. Later revisions, guided by McNamara, introduced the escalatory bombing program.}\]
\[\text{Gelb, } \textit{United States-Vietnam Relations 1945-1967}, \text{ Part IV.C.2a, i.}\]
campaign while placing the blame for the anticipated fall of the GVN on incompetence of that
government.\textsuperscript{50} McNamara’s interference in the working group prevented this large range of
alternatives from being developed. This created a situation in which decisions would be
determined by such bureaucratic maneuvering.

Conditions on the battlefield played an ever-smaller role in guiding the decisions of the
administration, beginning in September of 1964. At the time the US government would be
spending more effort on the problems of Vietnam as the election came to a close, reports from
the MACV failed to show any indications of progress in pacification of the South. The ARVN
was conducting larger scale “search and clear” missions – a conventional operation against an
increasingly unconventional adversary.\textsuperscript{51} As the ARVN deteriorated due to desertion and
incompetence, it became clear that the American strategy was failing to prevent the penetration
of the South by communists. General Westmoreland advocated striking the North by late
November, failing to provide other options, and without a clear understanding of how such
strikes would improve the strategic position of the US in Vietnam.\textsuperscript{52}

As the working group became more focused on developing a graduated pressure option,
William Bundy provided his memo to McNamara and Rusk that advocated withdrawing, but
only after retaliation for an inevitable strike by the North. His plan was similar to the unexplored
options by the working group. Again, McNamara shut down the line of inquiry, asserting that it
“wouldn’t wash.”\textsuperscript{53} Critically, this dissent was kept private and Bundy’s questioning of the logic
of the domino theory and his advocacy of reducing support to the failing GVN was not heard
beyond Rusk and McNamara. The secretaries did little to raise these types of objections to the

\textsuperscript{50} Ibid., ii.
\textsuperscript{51} Kaiser, \textit{American Tragedy}, 346–348.
\textsuperscript{52} Ibid., 348.
\textsuperscript{53} Bird, \textit{The Color of Truth}, 295.
president’s level. Ball’s objections were heard more directly, but the administration expected him to take this “devil’s advocate role” and did not update beliefs on Vietnam based on his analysis.\textsuperscript{54} At critical times, no other advisors backed up Ball’s position when it came in front of the president, even when they might have agreed.\textsuperscript{55}

The administration was committed to a course of action and eventually reached the point where costs were completely discounted as decisions were made to further the chances of success. The bombing began as a limited program, but was quickly expanded to keep constant pressure on the North to meet the US’s termination demands. As troop deployments eventually expanded to stabilize South Vietnam and its government, the Army Chief of Staff asked the Secretary of Defense how much more they could expect to contribute to ensure its security. McNamara replied that anything required to “strengthen the position of the GVN will be sent.”\textsuperscript{56} On another occasion, he sent an internal memorandum to the department staff stating that there was “an unlimited appropriation available for the financing of aid to Vietnam.”\textsuperscript{57} Cost was no longer an object. Furthermore, this course of action was followed despite not having military objectives that were linked to the desired political outcomes.\textsuperscript{58} A lack of military objectives provided a great deal of flexibility to the interpreters of battlefield information and made it difficult to identify the slide toward failure. Later, the infamous body-count statistic would be used to highlight progress. As it lacked context, any number could indicate progress without addressing the likelihood of eventual victory.

At the time reprisals for the Pleiku bombing were being considered, McGeoge Bundy was advocating a policy of “sustained reprisals” that were not necessarily linked to actions by the

\textsuperscript{54} Halberstam, \textit{The Best and the Brightest}, 491.
\textsuperscript{55} Bird, \textit{The Color of Truth}, 339.
\textsuperscript{57} Ibid., 106.
\textsuperscript{58} Goldstein, \textit{Lessons in Disaster}, 160.
North. He was also advocating lowering expectations for a capable government in Saigon, saying that it was only necessary that it be able to make military decisions and provide political support to US actions.\textsuperscript{59} After a series of delays due to weather and political instability in the South, Rolling Thunder began in early March 1965 and became a sustained program. As this program was being implemented, troops were deployed to improve security at the air bases used to support the program. The Pentagon Papers observed: “The strategy of security [for the ground troops] expired along with the early hopes that Rolling Thunder could succeed by itself.”\textsuperscript{60}

After a month of the Rolling Thunder campaign, hopes that it could succeed in isolation began to fade. Further leverage would be required to convince the North to bargain. A poorly devised “enclave strategy” proposed that US troops could secure coastal villages that would allow them to quickly withdraw from the country if needed, while freeing up ARVN forces to mass in areas that were falling to the communists. US forces would also come to the ARVN’s aid should it be necessary.\textsuperscript{61} There were many issues. First, it implied a higher level of commitment to the war than what policy had been to that point without openly acknowledging it. Second, it was basically a passive strategy that did little to restrict the movement of the Viet Cong while relying on the ARVN to do operations it had shown little capacity for. Third, there was no limiting US ground commitments to battles once they were called upon to relieve the ARVN; commanders would deploy the necessary force to ensure successful outcomes. This quickly gave way to a search-and-destroy mission set for US troops to deny the enemy the initiative. ARVN forces had been badly mauled in engagements in the spring and summer; they were being destroyed faster than they could be replaced. Still attempting to support the policy of the US, Westmoreland requested additional ground forces to halt the losses, failing to see another

\textsuperscript{60} Ibid., Part IV.C.5, 5.
\textsuperscript{61} Ibid., Part IV.C.5, 6.
This new mission quickly became the focus for operations in Vietnam and opened the door to further ground commitments. Additionally, it changed the strategy from one of convincing the North and the Viet Cong that they would be defeated, to one of actually attempting to defeat those forces in South Vietnam.

The explanation of how ground forces became involved is essential in understanding how the rules of the game led to this outcome. The only belief revision that was taking place within the highest circles of government concerned what additional force could be deployed to ensure success through the current policy. The belief that pressure could be ratcheted up to eventually convince the North to bargain did not place an upper limit on the force that should be applied. As already discussed, the costs associated with allowing the South to fall occupied a privileged place in the net assessments of the top advisors, while the costs associated with the chosen policy were never fully considered. Under this biased interpretation of the political and military conditions, further commitment of ground forces became the only option. Further, the president remained isolated from any real debate about appropriate war aims. By the early summer of 1965, both Rolling Thunder and the enclave strategy were faltering. McGeorge Bundy was advocating that the president hear directly from dissenting advisors on the costs and benefits associated with several options in Vietnam. At the time, there were three alternatives: McNamara’s suggestion for a massive military build-up, Ball’s suggestion for a withdrawal, and Bill Bundy’s suggestion for continuing the present policy with current force levels. This debate never occurred, and Johnson eventually received guidance from a group of “wise men” who ultimately reinforced the president’s inclination toward McNamara’s proposal.⁶³

The details behind the origins of the settlement terms also indicate a strong connection to the preferences of controlling advisors in the process; there was little or no bargaining among the players to arrive at final terms. The demand for an independent government friendly to the west remained central since NSAM 288. By April, with indications of poor results from bombing, momentum was developing behind massive troop deployments with an expanded mission profile. Ball objected at a meeting with the president and pointed to the potential costs in lives the US may be accepting with McNamara’s plans. Ball was advocating that the US explore a negotiated settlement, which would aim to secure something less than the goals outlined in NSAM 288. The president gave him only one day to develop an alternative, which was promptly discounted upon presentation. According to McNamara, it did not provide a way to achieve the “objectives we all sought.” The central purpose of a settlement is to agree upon something less than those objectives – McNamara dismissed it for that very reason. In short, a settlement would not be acceptable.

The North was proposing a “four points” formula for peace, which included recognition of Vietnam’s basic national rights, that both the North and South abstain from military alliances, that reunification be settled by the Vietnamese, and that the internal affairs of South Vietnam be settled in accordance with the program of the South Vietnam National Front for Liberation. These conditions added up to accepting eventual communist control of the South, particularly because of the Vietcong’s village strategy. The ARVN and ground troops from the US were unable to halt their spreading control of rural areas. Reduction in US operations would mean expansion of the Vietcong’s operations and the eventual fall of the GVN.

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64 Goldstein, Lessons in Disaster, 172.  
65 McNamara and VanDeMark, In Retrospect, 184.  
66 Ibid., 182–183.
There were no side-payment attempts to locate an over-lapping bargaining space for the belligerents; the demands by the US were incompatible with the demands of the communist North. McNamara’s shutdown on Ball’s negotiation proposal in a critical time of decision leading to a massive troop buildup prevented side-payment possibilities and a bargaining space. A memorandum from the Gravel edition of the Pentagon Papers attracted a great deal of attention when it was published. John McNaughton, the Assistant Secretary of Defense for International Security Affairs had drafted a memo that called the escalation into question, while identifying the priorities the US had in Vietnam. He suggested it was 70% in avoiding a humiliating defeat and protecting the US’s reputation as a security guarantor, 20% in keeping South Vietnam and other states from Chinese hands, and 10% in securing the South’s freedom and new way of life.\(^67\) If this was even remotely the case, a range of side-payments should have been available to provide the US with its top priority; it was not incompatible with the North’s four point plan.

Despite the output that the rules of the game generated, there were options available to the US. The best option may have been disentanglement from the dysfunctional GVN and December 1964 provided the best opportunity with the rise of the sixth government in Saigon since Diem’s fall.\(^68\) At that point, many advisors were recognizing that political stability in the south would not be achievable to the degree the policy required. This recognition only spread in the spring of 1965. At the very least, such stabilization could not be achieved through the bombing program intended to improve the government’s morale. As discussed, abandoning the intent of NSAM 288 was not seriously considered, so neither was this viable course of action.

For those who still wanted to save the South, there was only one other option. The US could invest more heavily in building up the GVN while more closely working with the ARVN militarily to counter the Viet Cong strategy. This ran the risk of making it appear that the US was controlling the government in Saigon as well as assuming responsibility for the war. Although this responsibility shifted nonetheless, it did so gradually with incremental attempts to further raise the pressure on the North.

The skeptics in Washington were eventually swamped by the process. The bombing of Pleiku assisted in the final moments of the decision, but the system had already effectively generated only a single option by the time this occurred. McNamara’s influence over the working group’s alternatives as well as the later opportunities to change course suppressed potential costs associated with a bombing campaign. It was never clear that bombing would improve GVN performance, or that the loss of the South would be as serious as some believed. The chosen course did nothing to assist the US in recognizing appropriate conditions for the termination demands. Nor did it allow the US to realize that the termination demands would never be supported by the political and military situation in Vietnam. The decision-making system had generated a policy that assumed the US could achieve almost limitless aims (defeat of the insurgents and stabilization of the GVN) with very limited measures (initially a bombing campaign intended to communicate to the North that they should negotiate). Evidence of mounting costs was discounted as new ways to achieve these aims were attempted and eventually led to massive military involvement.

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69 Gelb and Betts, *The Irony of Vietnam*, 112–114. Although the authors discuss a second option of diplomacy, the North’s four point plan effectively precluded earnest negotiation, since saving the South’s government was a priority for the US.


71 Ibid., Part IV.C.1, iii.
**Hypothesis Assessment**

This section considers the above information in light of the hypotheses made in Chapter 3. These hypotheses focus on the process put into place by administration and asks if it is sufficient to explain the outcome.

**Hypothesis 1: As the number of alternative interpretations of endogenous wartime information provided to the foreign policy executive increases, the likelihood that the rational bargaining position is encapsulated across those interpretations also increases.**

This hypothesis suggests that across multiple organizations that view the battlefield and political conditions with diverse lenses, it is likely the rational position for war termination can be built with the raw materials provided by these organizations. The analysis in this chapter has already pointed to multiple instances of critical information being possessed by key players that should have informed the policy, such as analysis conducted by the intelligence services, the JCS, the State Department, the Saigon Embassy and the MACV. All had quality information on the limitations and costs of the consensus course of action. There were also several players that had viable alternative options to a gradual commitment of ever-larger military means. For example, Bundy suggested in his October memorandum that a new firewall could be created to limit the downside of allowing Saigon to fall. Further analysis by the working group lent support to this argument in its early drafts. It pointed out that the domino theory was overly simplified and it would be possible to shift blame for the loss of the South onto its government while incentivizing other states to more quickly organize to counter communist infiltration.

**Hypothesis 2: The processes that are used to resolve these alternative interpretations of endogenous wartime information will determine if the executive**
is able to discern the rational bargaining position or arrives at a decision based on bureaucratic biases. This will impact both the extent of the state’s demands and the state’s ability to update appropriately.

The problem throughout this period was providing alternative perspectives to the executive in a manner that gave them equal footing with the graduated pressure option. Each time an opportunity came up to present them to the president, they were hampered in some way. If a dissent does not reach the president through an open debate in the inner circle of advisors, the first case study in this dissertation suggests that it must be effectively integrated prior to presentation. Despite Johnson’s stated desire to receive recommendations for a course of action other than bombing, the problem was with his strong preference for a consensus position. This consensus was created by the rules of the game he fostered. It either weeded out or undermined evidence that should have been more carefully weighed. As decisions were being made that committed the US to war, the president received only biased interpretations of critical information. Chapter Three pointed out that the most effective way of overcoming the impact of an advisor’s bias in the process is to include other advisors that have unlike-biases. With a system that restricted or undermined dissenting opinions, the Johnson Administration was unable to control the effects of the dominant biases.

This suppression of competing bias also represents suppression of information relevant to the executive’s decisions. With critical information being left out of key assessments, the US did not update its beliefs appropriately despite its availability in the system. There are several instances where information should have informed the players that their understanding of the political and military conditions was inaccurate. From the military side, an enduring “puzzle” for the advisors was the continued strength of the insurgents in the South, despite the operations
that should have cut off support from the North. The extent to which the insurgency became indigenous eluded the US, as it continued to focus on cutting the Ho Chi Minh Trail. That the trail was not essential for the day to day operations of the insurgency should have called graduated bombing option into question. From the political side, the failure of the South’s government to stabilize never seriously altered the option under consideration, despite its stability being recognized as central to US plans. If it was truly central, the US should have reconsidered its options after seven different regimes rose and fell. Instead, expectations for performance of the GVN were revised downward, though a minimally acceptable level of capability was never really established.

**Hypothesis 2b:** Resolution processes that are characterized by narrow selection among institutional preferences are more likely to result in demands determined by competition between advocates.

This hypothesis holds that the state’s bargaining position will be primarily based upon the assessment of the dominant player under these conditions; situations in which decision-making occurs under intense bureaucratic competition. There are multiple instances of bureaucratic maneuvering during this time, which only intensified over the next several years. The most serious example of this was likely McNamara’s exploiting the JCS’s inability to formulate clear military alternatives in early September. After reaching a consensus in a meeting with Rusk, the Bundys, and Taylor, McNamara misrepresented the Chiefs’ perspective on “limited pressures” in a meeting with the president. Instead of providing their objections, he instead suggested they would support the option with only minor modifications.\(^7\) Although this was not a final decision meeting, the limited pressures option survived early rounds of consideration because of

\(^7\) McMaster, *Dereliction of Duty*, 150–151.
the privileged treatment it received by the advisors controlling the process and was eventually implemented as “graduated bombing.”

In later rounds of consideration of alternatives, the preferences of the dominant players in the process continued to have the greatest influence on strategy. As evidence of inadequate measures was sporadically recognized, the dominant players led the US into war through an incremental approach, hoping that the next allocation of force would be sufficient to drive the North to the bargaining table.73 This approach preserved the preferences of the key players but assumed more risk and costs in order to achieve them. Given the conditions under which the decision support system operated, it is difficult to conclude that the president would have made the same choices had the controlling players not intervened in the manner they did. If dissenting perspectives were presented as equally viable, a more accurate understanding of the potential costs and limited benefits associated with graduated bombing would have developed.

**Alternative Explanation: The Predominant President**

From a predominant president perspective, the executive holds the ultimate decision authority. If this perspective holds, there should be evidence of the president influencing the manner in which the advisory process supports those decisions. Johnson would have committed the US to Vietnam based on his own cost/benefit analysis, which would be informed by his advisors. Instead, there is ample evidence that advisors in the system constrained the president’s options and the decision to expand the war was the result of their assessments and influence.

As Chapter Three discussed, this model asserts that the quality of a given decision will be directly related to the president’s willingness to conduct an information search prior to his

decision. As more information is generated by this search, it informs the subsequent decisions. The most comprehensive information search began with a presidential order to commission the working group that evaluated the US’s interests and options in Vietnam. The predominant president would have conferred on this group a mandate to provide their unvarnished assessment since the executive was the only player that really mattered in the system. The interference in this process by McNamara undermines this explanation for decision-making here.

Some treatments that use the predominant president approach allow for electoral considerations to enter into the executive’s assessment process. Opinion of the selectorate may not require that the president choose to expand the war in Vietnam, but this approach would not expect to see the executive perceiving mounting costs in his choice. Yet Johnson was warned public support for both the bombing and the later troop deployments was not robust; it would deteriorate as costs began to mount.74

The president’s initial reluctance to commit to the use of force in Vietnam was eventually overcome by his advisors’ recommendations. Despite conducting an extensive information search prior to graduated bombing, and being aware of the eventual costs he would pay electorally if success did not come soon, Johnson proceeded to commit ever-increasing levels of force to achieving objectives recommended to him by his advisors. The president only became more forceful in his decisions as other alternatives were cut off; when he wanted other options aside from bombing, the proposal for more ground troops to “kill more VC” was accepted more readily.75 The evidence of the case points to a president that was being constrained, rather than a president that was driving the decision-making process.

74 Hunt, Lyndon Johnson’s War, 101.
75 Gelb and Betts, The Irony of Vietnam, 121.
One area in which the predominant president approach does appear to hold is in explaining Johnson’s reluctance to change course once an initial round of ground troops were committed. The executive’s ability to change course is dependent upon his ability to perceive a significant coalition that will support his new decision. Since there was general support for the initial expansion, Johnson would not have seen advantages in altering the strategy. However, even this falls apart when we recognize that he realized support for the war would be transient. Mounting costs that accumulated with further commitments undermined support from the public and he was aware that there were dissenters in the supporting bureaucracies such as Ball.

If the interaction between the president and his supporting staff is conceived as a two-way street on which influence flows both ways, the predominant president approach expects to see the majority of the influence flowing from the president to his staff. The executive drives the actions of the advisors and bureaucracies in searching for the best alternative that fits the president’s needs, both in the war and in his office-retention efforts. Instead, this case indicates that the majority of the influence flowed from key staff members to the president, where alternatives were suppressed and Johnson made decisions that he sensed were not optimal. The fact that the president made the final decision is not adequate to support this model.

**Alternative Explanation: Psychological Limitations**

A second alternative explanation to this case study is that the decisions were made by cognitively-limited participants that were unable to perceive the important information from the “background noise” of the conflict that generates a great deal of information. Attempts to economize thought processes hamper both the president and the advisory group in their efforts to decide upon the optimal strategy. If this perspective is accurate, this case study would show evidence of discounted information due to the previous mind-sets of the participants and the time
constraints of the situation. Although there appears to be a psychological element to Johnson’s decision-making, it was in his desire to generate a consensus alternative rather than his personal bias on questions relating to Vietnam.

A psychological explanation for Johnson’s decisions during this period would show a strategy that primarily reflected his personal bias. He would tend to give more weight to the opinions of advisors with whom he agreed since there was a diversity of opinion available to him. Instead, Johnson was initially reluctant to commit force, questioned the viability of the GVN, and was anxious to receive recommendations outside of bombing plans. Yet there was an element of psychology at work in how he structured his advisory system which reflected his preference for a consensus position. At the time critical decisions were made, Johnson’s style had sidelined potential dissenters while providing advocates of the use of force a privileged place in the system. The doubters were “lesser men” that had not achieved much in their lifetimes. 76

His emphasis on consensus and the role of the advisors that were “men of accomplishment” in the system ultimately created the conditions discussed in this case analysis and in the predictions of Outcome 3 in Chapter Three.

There were two items that did have a lasting impression upon both the advisory group and Johnson during this period. First was NSAM 288, which limited options available to the group if it were treated as unchangeable policy. However, there was sufficient questioning of the domino theory and the viability of any government in the South to suggest that it did not have symmetric influence on both the upper and lower levels of the administration. The top advisors were less willing to question NSAM 288 due to their personal involvement in its creation. Lower-level advisors and the members of the working group were more willing to look outside the constraints of the policy, save for the JCS. The second item was the potential fallout of

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“losing” Vietnam to the communists in a manner similar to the “loss” of China in 1949]. From a psychological perspective, this could account for the Administration being so concerned with the potential downside of allowing communism to spread in Vietnam. Both of these items did introduce an element of psychological bias into the process.

A psychological approach may be more powerful in explaining McNamara’s preferences and decisions than Johnson’s within this particular case. McNamara’s certainty that force as a means of communication between adversaries would be effective reflected his experience in the Cuban Missile Crisis. Graduated bombing was exclusively focused on changing the behavior of the North and bringing about a conclusion to the conflict; it was even implemented in the absence of a clear sense of how military targets translated into political objectives. This bias could explain his decision to interfere with the functioning of the advisory system at key times to ensure the “right” recommendation was generated.

The preponderance of evidence from this case does not, however, indicate that the cognitive limitations of the participants have an advantage in explaining this outcome over the theory posited in this dissertation. Many of the military actions were planned and prepared well ahead of triggering events that led to specific decisions. Time constraints were not a factor in escalation to the extent that deliberate preparation was. Further, information was not discounted due to non-conformity with previously held beliefs; it was suppressed. It appears the president’s bias did not play a key role in the decisions on Vietnam specifically; it influenced the decisions more generally through the way in which he structured his advisory system to arrive at a consensus option which was the proximate cause of the outcome.

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Conclusion

The literature on the decisions leading to Vietnam falls into two general categories: those that emphasize the non-rational aspects of decision making, and those that emphasize the structural pressures of the international system and the domestic pressures of Cold War anti-communism that led the US to make rational decisions in attempts to secure political objectives. This dissertation argues that the bureaucratic rules of the game offer a third option that allows the integration of important insights from both. The advisory system was structured in such a way that it prevented the integration of readily available information that could have led to a different strategy; it skewed the net assessment of the systemic pressures and suppressed competing biases in the advisory group that should have corrected the biases of the dominant players in the process. This is a direct challenge to assumptions resident in the bargaining model of war. Information is not necessarily integrated as it becomes available. Electoral pressures are not the only source of irrational behavior.

The hypotheses made in Chapter Three were supported by the evidence of this case study. The plurality of perspectives at decision meetings was non-existent; the process generated a unanimous position that reflected the preferences of a narrow group who advanced their agenda through bureaucratic maneuvering. The utilization of position to suppress information damaging to a key individual’s standing occurred in several instances. Although this can happen in any organization, it could not have occurred to the extent that it did at the highest levels of government without a process that enabled it.

This case also displayed the anticipated reaction to disconfirming evidence that emerged from the battlefield and changing political conditions. Bureaucratic struggles determined

whether or not such information was integrated into future decisions. Revisions of beliefs only occurred in the sense that additional costs were acceptable to implement the preferred policy when necessary. Problematic information that called the course of action itself into question was discounted. For example, the information that suggested the GVN was unlikely to succeed, had little capacity for self-government and the South’s nationalist movement had been hijacked by communist infiltrators.79

The final recommendations to the president by the principals were characterized by a wide gap between the extensive objectives described in NSAM 288 and the relatively light pressures initially being used against the North.80 Consistent with the organizational tendencies discussed earlier, the Offices of the Secretary of Defense and the Secretary of State underestimated the potential costs associated with their preferred option while overestimating their ability to secure their preferred objectives. Consequently, the attempt to terminate the conflict in Vietnam in early 1965 led instead to its escalation.

80 Ibid., ii.
Chapter 7: Clinton in Somalia

A Demonstration of Organizational Logrolling

The end of the Cold War presented the U.S. with a host of issues, not least of which concerned determining how military force would be used in a world without bipolar organization, which had provided the foundation of national security thinking for the previous forty-five years. The primary debate in the 1990s after Desert Storm was over intervention, particularly for humanitarian reasons. Reagan’s Secretary of Defense, Caspar Weinberger, articulated what he thought should be the approach to the use of military force in a speech at the National Press Club in the early 1980s, so was therefore still guided by bipolar concerns. He asserted that force should only be used for vital national interests, executed with a clear intent of winning, undertaken only with the support of Congress and the population, and guided by clear political objectives.¹ In 1992, after the fall of the Soviet Union, the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, Colin Powell, echoed these sentiments in a Foreign Affairs article, though he acknowledged humanitarian and peacekeeping missions would now be “a given.”² Powell’s cautions on using force for missions other than war were not as great as Weinberger’s, but both were informed by the experiences of Vietnam. Weinberger’s perspective was perhaps more reflective of a cautious policymaker’s position: we can deploy our forces, but must avoid placing them in situations for which they are ill-suited. Powell’s perspective was more reflective of a soldier’s with an optimistic assessment of his capabilities: we can do more than just war, but

need clear objectives suited to the purpose. Both agreed on this latter point, yet differed in their acceptance of the range of missions appropriate for the military.

Both Powell and Weinberger were educated by Vietnam, where the changing nature of the military’s mission was identified as a primary cause of U.S. failures. This experience drove them to their shared concern with objectives suitable for the military and connected to political goals. The changing nature of the U.S.’s involvement in Somalia between August of 1992 and October 2, 1993 again illustrated the difficulty in remaining committed to a stable set of objectives. Clinton justifiably referred to Somalia as his version of the Bay of Pigs. In both cases, the incoming president inherited plans for a military operation from the previous administration, no serious review took place with the new administration, and the management of the details fell to lower-level officials. At the time he assumed office, the U.S. involvement in Somalia had already expanded somewhat from a strict humanitarian mission to providing some stabilizing influence in the country with military force. Simultaneously, the size of the U.N. force deployed in Somalia shrunk, creating a gap between the ends and means of U.S. policy. After the Clinton Administration assumed responsibility, the nature of the mission changed quickly to the point where it launched the infamous raid to capture two of the warlord Mohamed Farrah Aidid’s lieutenants. Clinton asserts that although he approved the use of force for such purposes in general, he never approved the specific mission to capture Aidid or his lieutenants “in its particulars.”

The focus of this case study is exploring how the U.S. became so extensively committed to a risky course of action in Somalia with such a minimal level of involvement from the Oval Office. As indicated in the introduction, this case does not fit this dissertation’s focus on attempting to reach a war termination bargain. In this case, there was not widespread recognition

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that the U.S. was in an open conflict with Aidid. However, this example was selected to examine the effects of the independent variables on the dependent variable and assess the validity of the hypotheses identified in Chapter 3. The dependent variable requires a minor restatement, since it was earlier examined in terms of bargaining position and how well that position was supported by battlefield information. In this case, it is equally valid to ask how the independent variables affected the U.S.’s ability to maintain consistency and proportionality between the ends and means of U.S. policy in Somalia, and to employ military tactics and strategies suited to U.S. political goals.

The case of Somalia is almost entirely unexplored in the bargaining literature; the time during which the U.S. was conducting offensive military operations was simply too short to explore any development in common bargaining space. It is, however, possible to examine the event from the U.S.’s side and its assessments of costs and benefits associated with the intervention. The case is well-suited to examine how the decision-making processes affected this net assessment. For example, the type of equipment to be deployed, the size of the force, the types of missions forces would participate in, whether or not Special Forces would be used, and how best to support the U.N. were all under consideration in the Clinton Administration. These decisions were never considered holistically at the highest levels of government. The central question for this case study is: what were the aggregate effects of these decisions, which were made in isolation, on the U.S.’s strategy in Somalia?

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4 Consistent with filling in the spaces of a typological theory. See Alexander L. George and Andrew Bennett, Case Studies and Theory Development in the Social Sciences (Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press, 2005), 23.

5 See, for example: Patricia L. Sullivan, “War Aims and War Outcomes: Why Powerful States Lose Limited Wars,” The Journal of Conflict Resolution 51, no. 3 (June 1, 2007): 519. The author only mentions Somalia in the conclusion in an article exploring why powerful nations refuse to commit sufficient forces in lower-intensity military operations. She uses some basic bargaining model insights in explaining the calculations of costs and benefits.
There were three phases of U.S. involvement in the Horn of Africa. First, Operation Provide Relief was implemented in support of U.N. Security Council Resolution (UNSCR) 751, which established UNOSOM I (U.N. Operations in Somalia). During this phase, which took place between April and December of 1992, the U.S. was providing military and humanitarian support to Kenya and Somalia to help in the distribution of aid, but without combat troops. Second, Operation Restore Hope was established in support of UNITAF (United Task Force) created by UNSCR 794, and took place between December of 1992 and May of 1993. With President Bush’s backing, this involved the deployment of U.S. combat troops to Somalia, reaching a peak of 26,000 U.S. troops in early 1993. The goals of UNITAF were more expansive in this phase, providing not only aid, but also stabilizing parts of southern Somalia. This phase was intended to bridge the time period between the provision of humanitarian aid to transferring authority to the U.N. for peacekeeping in the country. Finally, USFORSOM (U.S. Forces in Somalia) was established under President Clinton to support UNOSOM II, which was created by UNSCR 814. It took place between May of 1993 and March of 1994. The goals called for under this UNSCR were highly ambitious: disarm the Somali clans, rehabilitate political institutions, and build a secure environment throughout the country. The U.N. led during this phase, with the U.S. providing critical military capabilities in support of the U.N. The command structure during this phase would come under heavy criticism for leading to the events on October 3-4, 1993.

This chapter first provides a historical narrative of the administration’s involvement in Somalia and identifies the key decisions. Next, the chapter examines the dominant “rules of the game” that provided the bureaucratic context for the decisions. This is followed by a structured

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assessment of the case through the questions identified in the introductory chapter and the hypotheses developed in Chapter 3. Finally, I assess the explanatory power of the alternate explanations identified in Chapter 1 in accounting for the observed outcomes.

Context of the Intervention, Key Assessments, and Decisions

In the aftermath of a civil war which removed a dictator who had remained in power since 1969, Somalia degenerated into chaos. The civil war resulted in the deaths of some 300,000 Somalis before the U.N. intervened. The famine that followed the war was caused by a combination of a drought and the military occupation by the ousted dictator, Siad Barre, in his final months of power. Chaos reigned for four months until the warring factions signed a tentative cease-fire agreement. After its signing, the U.N. Security Council agreed to send a small unarmed force of fifty personnel to monitor the cease-fire agreement on April 24, 1992. Simultaneously, humanitarian aid was to be sent into Somalia to relieve the suffering of its people. This became known as UNOSOM I, which was ineffective; only 19,000 out of a planned 68,000 tons of food aid were delivered due to poor security conditions.

Aidid had played a key role in deposing Barre. He therefore saw assuming leadership of the country as his right. The deployment of security forces to protect the weaker cleans through monitoring of the agreement was a challenge to Aidid’s leadership and prevented him from consolidating his power. From Aidid’s perspective, the intervention authorized by UNSCR 751

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enhanced the prestige of his chief rival, while placing restrictions on him. However, the negotiation skills of the U.N. Secretary General’s Special Representative in Somalia, Ambassador Mohamed Sahnoun, enabled early implementation of monitoring without overt resistance by Aidid. Sahnoun had spent a great deal of time reaching out to all of the clans in gaining acceptance of any intervention by the U.N. and was able to quell any serious resistance. Aidid remained suspicious of the U.N.’s plan, which included establishing headquarters in areas of the country that had not experienced humanitarian emergencies. This reinforced Aidid’s perception that the intervention would ultimately infringe upon Somalia’s sovereignty. Lower-scale harassment of humanitarian relief efforts continued and created the poor security conditions mentioned above.

The U.N. decided to address this problem in August of 1992 and approved an additional 3,000 personnel for UNOSOM I that would monitor the cease-fire agreement as well as provide security for relief efforts. This decision was made and announced without Sahnoun’s input or knowledge, likely due to his constant criticism of the U.N.’s bureaucracy. The troop announcement strained his relationship with the U.N. bureaucracy and eventually led to his resignation in November. He had worked hard to pave the way for earlier deployments and was unable to do the same for this latest round. His replacement displayed none of the ambassador’s work ethic or understanding of the Somali power structures.

The U.S. agreed to support this mission and established Operation Provide Relief to provide transportation capabilities to the Pakistani contingent, some relief workers, and additional supplies. In September of that year, President George H. W. Bush addressed the U.N.

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10 Ibid., 125.
General Assembly and outlined ways in which it might support the Secretary-General’s recent call for enhanced assistance in peacekeeping missions, which were becoming more common.

Over the next several months, the U.S. national security bureaucracies became much more active in addressing this growing need. In early November of 1992, options on intervening in Somalia were developed in a specialized staff in the Department of Defense that focused on low-intensity conflict over four formal meetings and repeated interactions with NSC staff. They ultimately recommended that it be handled by the U.N. with expanded U.S. support, since there were no vital U.S. interests at stake. But in the wake of the election, the Bush Administration found that it was behind other NATO members in terms of the commitments to U.N. peacekeeping efforts. Prior to the election, Bush put off making a risky decision on military deployments to Somalia or Bosnia. Now, the administration felt the momentum for some action was growing; coverage in the media of both crises was expanding. In two Deputies Committee meetings of the National Security Council on November 20 and 21, 1992, the Administration decided to support U.N. activity in Somalia but with the caveat that responsibility would be handed over to the U.N. at the earliest possible time. The Bush Administration lobbied heads of state at the U.N. and the Security Council passed UNSCR 794 on December 3.

When Bush made it clear to the American people that the intervention would be limited in terms of both time and scope (but without clearly stating what the limitations would be) in an address to the nation, the Secretary-General protested these limitations. Feeling that the U.N. would lack the capabilities necessary to run large-scale operations in such a dangerous place, he urged disarmament as a central function of UNITAF. The scale of the U.S. commitment to

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UNITAF was fairly large; over 25,000 U.S. troops would deploy while a total of approximately 13,000 additional troops would come from twenty other countries. Despite the Secretary-General’s requests, the U.S.’s mission did not extend to disarmament of the various clans. The Central Command (CENTCOM) Commander, General Hoar, did not consider it possible or even necessary to disarm the factions in Somalia. The mission CENTCOM was given was to ensure U.N.-provided relief supplies arrived at their intended destinations; disarmament would only be required to the extent necessary to achieve this goal.\footnote{Daniel P. Bolger, \textit{Savage Peace: Americans at War in the 1990s} (Novato, CA: Presidio Press, 1995), 285.} At times, this did include some limited weapons seizures, but only following a confrontation. It did not extend to preemptive weapon seizures or general disarmament efforts. In a state that was flooded with small arms and had a significant number of heavier weapons such as artillery, it was simply not possible for UNITAF to force disarmament on an unwilling population.

The U.N. lacked the ability to provide effective security for itself and the people they were there to protect; handoff from the U.S. would be problematic no matter when it occurred. From the U.S.’s side, the Bush Administration was attempting to stay within the parameters of Powell’s reinterpretation of the Weinberger Doctrine. This kept the execution of a humanitarian mission separate from a strategic intervention intended to alter the balance of power within a failing state.\footnote{Robert G. Patman, \textit{Strategic Shortfall: The Somalia Syndrome and the March to 9/11}, 1st ed. (Santa Barbara, CA: Praeger, 2010), 43.} Consistent with this intent, the administration implemented an approach that augmented the work being done by Sahnoun.

President Bush appointed the former ambassador to Somalia, Robert Oakley, as his special representative and head of civilian operations. Oakley felt he had received a great deal of support, direction, and assistance in assuming his role in Somalia. The experience level of the staff on the NSC and the attention it was providing to the Somali mission enhanced his optimism.
that Somalia would not become another quagmire where the U.S. was unable to disengage. The NSC members had sufficient experience with Vietnam and Lebanon to avoid those mistakes again. During the initial deployments of troops to Somalia he spent a great deal of time informing clan leadership on upcoming events. His warnings to keep armed gangs away from the ports helped ensure an unopposed arrival. These did not make it to the press, leading to the somewhat embarrassing spectacle of cameras filming the stealthy arrival of reconnaissance units on the beach near Mogadishu. Oakley was able to secure commitments from both Mahdi and Aidid to refrain from interfering with the delivery of humanitarian aid, honor a cease-fire, and remove roadblocks. Oakley’s continued work with the two warlords did begin to draw UNITAF into the internal politics of Somalia, despite the U.S.’s intent. This created a perception problem with the population: rather than arresting the antagonists in the civil war, the U.N. mission was working with them.

In the closing month of the administration, the Bush team had to hand over responsibility for the management of Somalia. During the transition, several Bush Administration officials told the incoming administration that Somalia would be over by January 20. This was not to be the case, and it appears the Bush Administration was aware of this at the time they undertook Operation Restore Hope. Clinton inherited the largest humanitarian operation in history with U.S. soldiers providing security at many key facilities. A rapid withdrawal would surely lead to a deterioration of security in Somalia with the U.N. left “holding the bag.” Plans were already in place to begin a general withdrawal early that spring. The new ambassador to the U.N.,

17 Rutherford, Humanitarianism Under Fire, 82.
20 Patman, Strategic Shortfall, 46.
Madeleine Albright, unsuccessfully attempted to pressure the Secretary-General into accepting responsibility for Somalia at that time. Instead, he pushed for retaining a heavy U.S. presence even after the responsibility shifted to the U.N..

The Clinton Administration accepted a more extensive presence of U.S. troops than they would prefer in exchange for the U.N. accepting eventual responsibility. This would at least continue the withdrawal of U.S. troops, though at a slower rate. The goals outlined by the Bush Administration had been accomplished and handover was the only remaining U.S. interest. The Clinton Administration was supportive of a multilateral foreign policy and wanted the U.N. efforts to succeed in the wake of its drawdown. The management of Somalia was not a top priority and there was little indication among Clinton’s top advisors that there was much reason to be concerned with it. While top administration officials focused on the events in Russia and new domestic initiatives, management of Somalia fell to lower-level officials. There had been some American casualties in Somalia; eight had died early in the intervention, though only two to direct firefights. Others occurred to landmines, traffic accidents, a drowning, as well as non-fatal injuries caused by random gunfire incidents. However, there was nothing that indicated a deteriorating security situation since these causalities could be considered “light” in such an operation and the broad policy goals had been achieved. There was simply no reason for regular NSC meetings at this point (early spring) to routinely revisit U.S. policy in the Horn of Africa.

This brought the Clinton Administration to its first decision point regarding Somalia. It concerned to what extent the conventional military capabilities in-country would be reduced. In the final month of the Bush Administration, the number of U.S. soldiers reached a high of just under 26,000 with plans in place to begin a fairly quick draw-down with a hand-off to the United Nations. Albright’s meetings with Boutros-Ghali changed the nature of the hand-off. What had

23 Bolger, *Savage Peace*, 293.
not changed was that the withdrawal of conventional force capabilities that were providing security would continue. By the beginning of February, the total U.N. forces in Somalia dropped from 38,000 to 24,000, with the vast majority of the drop coming from U.S. force reductions.²⁴ By the time transition occurred on May 4, 1993, U.S. troop presence was down to 4,000 with approximately 1,300 of them combat troops which comprised the QRF promised to the U.N.²⁵

This decision to proceed with the reduction in force levels contributed to the degradation of security conditions as the U.N. prepared to take responsibility. At the time the Clinton Administration assumed office, there were numerous reports provided by the CIA that the situation in Somalia was destabilizing rapidly. However, the appearance of an orderly withdrawal that began before they assumed responsibility, the low levels of casualties, and other priorities that occupied the top level bureaucrats combined to keep attention on Somalia at only the lowest levels.²⁶ The policy was not thought through or discussed at the advisor level. On occasions, Secretary of Defense Les Aspin would be preparing for interviews on Sunday morning talk shows, and be making phone calls on Saturday in an attempt to figure out what the policy was in Somalia.²⁷

Although the U.S. was proceeding with its reduction, the U.N. had done little to back up its intention to become a credible peacekeeping force. At the time of the transition at the beginning of May, only 30% of the U.N.’s staff was in place.²⁸ The Secretary-General’s insistence on a broad mission set for UNOSOM II coincided with a surge in interest in both political parties in the U.S. in having the U.N. assume more of the burden for providing a

²⁴ Stevenson, Losing Mogadishu, 57.
²⁷ Ibid., 256–257.
²⁸ Bolger, Savage Peace, 296.
stabilizing presence abroad. Unfortunately, serious consideration of the implications of the withdrawal for UNOSOM II’s success never took place. Therefore, there was also no consideration given to potential responses to setbacks, escalating violence, or U.N. failure. As a result, decisions would begin to be made at lower levels to fill the policy void over a series of crises. As specific issues did rise to the level where cabinet members and advisors became involved, those decisions would be made without the context of an overall guiding policy; they were made in isolation. These decisions did not, however, have isolated consequences on the ground in Somalia; they combined to expand U.S. commitments while reducing capabilities.

A bargaining approach to interventions such as Somalia suggests that the Clinton Administration should have considered its goals in Somalia and the proper extent of its involvement. A guiding concern appears to have been ensuring U.N. success and troop level decisions should have been based on that end. In a sense, UNITAF experienced pre-mature success. A shaky peace framework in conjunction with a large number of capable U.S. forces and experienced U.S. political leadership in the country was able to quell the violence enough to ensure supply delivery. This masked the deep problems in Somalia and prevented an accurate assessment of the likelihood of a breakdown.29 By the time UNOSOM II began, the elements that ensured UNITAF’s success were missing in the new equation. At the presidential level, this first critical decision on matching troop levels to political goals became a non-event as plans proceeded according to the goals of the previous administration even as conditions in Somalia were changing.

During UNOSOM II, the U.S. was not in charge of operations but was, on paper, primarily providing logistical support in addition to the QRF. The commander of the U.N. forces was Turkish General Cevik Bir, who was directed by UNSCR 814 to begin rehabilitating the

political institutions and economy, while promoting political settlement and national reconciliation.\textsuperscript{30} The transfer of responsibility to UNOSOM coincided with a transfer of responsibility in the U.S. envoy’s position as well as the U.N.’s ambassador’s position. Robert Oakley was replaced by Ambassador Robert Gosende while the U.N. ambassadorship passed from Ismat Kittani to U.S. Admiral Jonathan Howe. The newly-established command structure had some oddities that complicated command and control in Somalia. While Bir was in charge, the U.S.-provided QRF did not report to him. Instead, it reported to U.S. Major General Thomas Montgomery, who was both Bir’s second in command as well as the commander of U.S. forces in Somalia. Despite having control over combat forces in Somalia, Montgomery did not have the air or maritime capabilities that would normally be associated with such a position; those were to be provided only “as needed.”\textsuperscript{31}

Aidid’s gangs had provided the American troops under UNITAF a decent level of respect due to their military capabilities. They did not provide this same level of respect for the U.N. forces as they were rushed in to take the place of the U.S. troops.\textsuperscript{32} Aidid had waited until the majority of U.S. forces had departed Somalia before attempting to consolidate his power. He first attempted to secure the blessing of the U.N. in asserting his leadership over the other clans, which was rebuffed by Howe. Two peace conferences that Aidid participated in collapsed with no progress. Interpreting Howe’s unwillingness to confront his gangs overtly as weakness, Aidid began to increase the pressure on U.N. forces. Rock-throwing, shootings, and demonstrations became more common. When Pakistani forces attempted to shut down Aidid’s pirated radio station that was broadcasting anti-U.N. propaganda in early June, they were ambushed. The

\textsuperscript{30} Bolger, \textit{Savage Peace}, 296.
\textsuperscript{31} Ibid., 297–298.
\textsuperscript{32} Halberstam, \textit{War in a Time of Peace}, 255.
U.S.’s QRF reacted, but not before twenty-four Pakistanis were killed and an additional fifty wounded.\textsuperscript{33}

This led to the second critical decision for the U.S.: to what extent would the U.S. back the expanding demands of the U.N. in Somalia? The problem of transitioning to U.N. control in the final phase of the operation hinged on the capabilities of the warlords in power. The U.N. Secretary-General did not want to assume responsibility for Somalia until the U.S. disarmed the warring clans.\textsuperscript{34} As discussed, this was impossible to accomplish even with the relatively robust capabilities of UNITAF. Boutros-Ghali did not give up this goal, however, once UNOSOM II began. Although disarmament was not a specific goal of the new mission, establishing a secure environment was. This vague statement allowed a broad interpretation of political goals in Somalia while leaving it to the personnel implementing the policy to determine the specifics. UNOSOM II was intended to be a force of approximately 20,000 troops and 8,000 logistical personnel from 33 separate countries and was now supposed to accomplish goals that the better-equipped and better-organized UNITAF could not do: establish a secure environment throughout Somalia.\textsuperscript{35}

Pressure on the U.S. to expand its limited reach in Somalia was not limited to the U.N. Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs) that were providing aid outside of Mogadishu were also pressuring the U.S. to expand its presence outside of the capital during Operation Restore Hope. Some of this was accommodated, though always with Oakley first engaging local leaders and informing them of coming troops and explaining their purpose. The U.S. tried to hold fast to a narrow interpretation of a “secure environment,” disarming only those Somalis that appeared to

\textsuperscript{33} Bolger, \textit{Savage Peace}, 299–300.
\textsuperscript{34} Allard, \textit{Somalia Operations}, 18.
\textsuperscript{35} Patman, \textit{Strategic Shortfall}, 49.
be a threat to arriving aid and troops.\textsuperscript{36} But pressure from the U.N. and NGOs was beginning to expand the U.S.’s role even before the attack on the Pakistanis.

After the attack, UNSCR 837 authorized the Secretary-General to take “all necessary precautions” against those responsible for the attacks.\textsuperscript{37} This meant that the U.N., with the U.S.’s backing, would be targeting Aidid. President Clinton announced that “a warrant had been issued” for Aidid’s arrest. No consideration had yet been given to the implications of failure in attempting to capture him.\textsuperscript{38} Howe made a public spectacle of branding Aidid a criminal, which forced him to go into hiding. The U.N. would have to focus its efforts on targeting Aidid’s organization, the Somali National Alliance (SNA).

While the U.S. was attempting to support the U.N. in its new role, practical concerns on the ground in Somalia forced greater participation by U.S. troops that were supposed to be available only in emergencies such as the attack on the Pakistanis. Each of these decisions was made in Africa, with only cursory review by Washington. First, the U.N. troops that were intended to provide security in and around Mogadishu refused to leave their compounds without U.S. participation in patrols and missions.\textsuperscript{39} As a result, the U.S. was forced to play a larger role in day-to-day operations. Second, once the targeting of Aidid and the SNA began, other countries began to reduce their involvement in U.N. actions. The French withdrew from Mogadishu as tensions rose; they placed little faith in the command structure or planning capabilities of the U.N. mission.\textsuperscript{40} Likewise, the Italians reduced their participation in military operations within the capital. Third, the U.N.’s decision to target the SNA in what amounted to

\begin{footnotesize}
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\item \textsuperscript{36} Rutherford, \textit{Humanitarianism Under Fire}, 101–102.
\item \textsuperscript{37} Patman, \textit{Strategic Shortfall}, 50.
\item \textsuperscript{38} Bolger, \textit{Savage Peace}, 300–301.
\item \textsuperscript{39} Levin and Warner, “Review of the Circumstances Surrounding the Ranger Raid on October 3–4, 1993 in Mogadishu, Somalia,” 17.
\end{itemize}
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military raids required the capabilities that resided only with the U.S. Since the U.S.’s success was tied to the U.N. accepting responsibility for Somalia, U.S. forces began to support these raids.

In the wake of the June 5th attack, General Montgomery advised Howe to request additional forces for employment in the fight against Aidid, which included four AC-130 gunships and the elite counterterrorist unit Delta Force, which would assist in capturing Aidid. The AC-130s were approved, while Delta Force was not.41 The gunships are heavily armored planes which can provide support to ground missions through precision 105mm, 40mm, and 20mm fires. These were quickly put to use in raids against SNA targets in mid-June and caused significant damage.

A raid that took place on June 17 provided critical battlefield information that should have informed later military operations. In order to keep the pressure on the SNA, General Bir planned a strike against the home of Aidid and one of his top lieutenants. General Montgomery provided assistance in planning and preparing for the mission. The raid began with employing the AC-130s against surrounding targets and was followed by a ground operation executed by the Italians, Moroccans, and Pakistanis. The American QRF commander, Colonel James Campbell, observed the engagement from the air in a helicopter. Several hours after the raid began, the military perimeter began to take large-caliber fire in the midst of demonstrations that included women and children attempting to shield the military targets from the raid. The pressure on the U.N. force did not let up until reinforcements, which included tanks, arrived on the scene.42 Tensions continued to escalate and Aidid attacked an Italian checkpoint in what was

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41 Bolger, *Savage Peace*, 300–301.
42 Ibid., 302.
generally considered a safe area of the country, killing three and wounding twenty-four. The
U.N. retaliated with U.S. attack helicopters and the gunships.43

At this point, the U.S. was locked into an escalating cycle of violence that experienced
only brief pauses. While the U.N. failed to provide adequate capabilities to accomplish its
extensive goals, American officials in Somalia continued to attempt to enhance the U.N.’s
probability of success. The U.S. was providing military planning assistance for raids to the U.N.,
despite its intention to primarily provide logistical support. The QRF, which was supposed to be
available only for such situations as the one in which the Pakistanis were killed, was soon being
used to escort daily patrols of U.N. forces that would not otherwise leave their compounds. The
air support that was intended to augment the QRF was being employed in retaliatory strikes.
Finally, the U.N.’s broad peace enforcement operation was increasingly becoming an open
conflict against one man while only the U.S. could provide the necessary military capabilities in
that conflict.

By the end of June, it was necessary for the U.S. to more directly confront a choice it had
been avoiding: whether or not to take the lead in dismantling Aidid’s SNA and taking him into
custody. Up to this point, the U.N. had this responsibility. This was the administration’s third
and final critical decision to be examined here. The three key people in Somalia were all
advocating direct action against Aidid: General Bir, General Montgomery, and Admiral Howe.
Pressure from this group, the U.N. Headquarters, as well as some within the Clinton
Administration44 combined to convince the Department of Defense to provide military

43 Ibid., 303.
44 The Levin and Warner Report does not specifically identify who within the administration at this point was
pressuring the Department of Defense to provide additional capabilities. It does go into more specificity on policy
decisions later.
capabilities to the command in Somalia it had so far resisted. A key component of this request was Special Forces.\textsuperscript{45}

The inclusion of Special Forces in this package of additional capabilities provided a clear signal to policymakers of how far the U.N. mission had deviated from its original purpose. These units have a smaller military “footprint” than conventional forces and are ill-suited to provide broad security capabilities except when being used to train local forces over a longer time horizon. The deployment of the elite Delta Force, the Army’s counterterrorist unit, could only be for the purpose of direct action against individuals. Therefore, this decision indicated awareness that the U.S. was taking responsibility and leadership in the fight against Aidid.

Powell initially resisted dispatching Delta to capture Aidid, fearing the risks involved with attempting to capture him in a city such as Mogadishu. But by mid-August, the CIA had gathered sufficient intelligence to enable a raid to capture the warlord while repeated attacks by the SNA on U.S. bases continued to erode the combat capabilities of the relatively small force. Lake, Aspin, and Under Secretary of Defense for Policy Frank Wisner met and decided that mission should be executed to take advantage of the current intelligence and prevent further degradation of U.S. forces.\textsuperscript{46} Powell eventually concurred because of the repeated requests from the command in Somalia and his desire to support the commander in the field.\textsuperscript{47}

There were three options for “force packages” that were considered for approval in light of the new operational focus.\textsuperscript{48} All three options included additional AC-130s, which would replace the ones that were available in June but had since redeployed. In addition to the

\textsuperscript{46} Ibid., 25.
\textsuperscript{47} Powell and Persico, My American Journey, 584.
\textsuperscript{48} A force package is a combination of military capabilities deployed to a military theater simultaneously to support a given mission.
collateral damage concern associated with the weapons, policymakers were also concerned about the additional 250-300 people that would be required to support AC-130 operations. They were interested in keeping additional U.S. force commitments to only what was necessary for the mission and avoid deploying anything above that. The AC-130s were eventually disapproved. Instead, additional Cobra helicopter gunships were sent even though the policy group raised further objections on the increased force commitments.49

In a related matter, General Montgomery was also requesting that the force package include tanks since he was growing increasingly concerned with the lower levels of commitment to military operations he was witnessing on the part of the other nations participating in UNOSOM II. Although this was not necessary for the group that would be targeting Aidid (termed Task Force Ranger, which included a company of the 3d Battalion, 75th Ranger Regiment and a unit of approximately 130 men from Delta Force), they would be used to enhance the QRF and would provide the ability to clear obstacles in the roads rapidly. Obstacles were becoming more common as Somalis attempted to interfere with U.N. operations. Powell was recommending to Aspin that the request be approved based on the same rationale he used for Delta: he must support the requests of the command on the ground. Aspin declined to make an immediate decision, and delayed it for several days, eventually handing it off to the Under Secretary of Defense for Policy for a recommendation.50 The Secretary of Defense ultimately disapproved the request because of the desire to limit the expansion of U.S. presence.51

Task Force (TF) Ranger arrived in late August. In order to maintain its secrecy, it answered through U.S. Central Command to the Chairman, JCS, and the president. Therefore, it

50 Powell and Persico, My American Journey, 586.
operated outside of both the U.N.’s command structure as well as the command sub-structure
established for control of the QRF. Command relationships and responsibilities of each began to
get confused.\textsuperscript{52} TF Ranger conducted six nearly identical raids by the end of September with
little operational success and one spectacular failure.\textsuperscript{53} At the same time, confrontations between
the SNA and all U.S. forces began to further escalate, to include a helicopter being shot down by
a rocket propelled grenade (RPG) in mid-September.\textsuperscript{54} The opposition to Aidid actually
enhanced his standing among various factions within Somalia, and better enabled him to call on
support when needed.\textsuperscript{55} As a result, he became stronger as the conflict wore on longer.

In Washington, the president and his advisors were getting concerned with the situation.
Clinton, Aspin, and Christopher decided to proceed with a two-track policy by the end of
September, which would place a greater emphasis on a political settlement with Aidid. As a
result, another request by Howe for armored forces to enhance the struggling QRF was ignored.
At the same time, diplomats at several levels of the State Department began to advocate for
complete disengagement.\textsuperscript{56} Despite the reluctance of the top policymakers in Washington to
proceed with the status quo, no revised guidance was ever provided to the U.S. forces operating
in Somalia. While the QRF continued to conduct patrols and engage in firefights, TF Ranger
continued to gather intelligence and make attempts at apprehending Aidid and top officers of the
SNA.

Ultimately, Howe and Montgomery gave the orders for the raid on October 3 to the
Rangers and Delta Force, who proceeded without the armor in the QRF or the AC-130 air

\textsuperscript{52} Bolger, \textit{Savage Peace}, 308.
\textsuperscript{53} In its first raid, TF Ranger took several UN workers into custody at a dwelling believed to belong to an SNA
member. This incident became public knowledge through the press, and alerted all who were paying attention to the
presence of the Special Forces.
\textsuperscript{54} This was a separate incident from the helicopters shot down during the raid of October 3, 1993.
\textsuperscript{55} Patman, \textit{Strategic Shortfall}, 52.
\textsuperscript{56} Bolger, \textit{Savage Peace}, 313.
support that the military commanders believed they required. After its initial success in capturing 24 enemy prisoners, the SNA reacted quickly with small arms fire and RPGs that ultimately downed two aircraft and damaged four others. The firefight that ensued while the U.S. and the U.N. attempted to rescue the crews of the downed aircraft resulted in the deaths of eighteen Americans and one Malaysian, the wounding of ninety-one U.S. and U.N. soldiers, and the capture of one American. Most shocking to the American public was the footage of a dead American soldier being dragged through the streets by the crowds. Clinton announced a plan for withdrawal by March of the following year on October 7 while armor, jets, ships, soldiers, and helicopters were rapidly moved into Somalia to provide force protection until the withdrawal.

**Bureaucratic Conditions and Rules of the Game**

A bargaining model of war approach to the situation in Somalia would suggest, based on the relatively modest commitments made to the theater, that the Clinton Administration placed a low value on the associated political objectives. Yet this is at variance with the emphasis that the U.S.’s ambassador to the U.N. and the administration in general placed on ensuring that the U.N. succeeded at its new mission. UNSCR 814 was the first-ever resolution issued under Chapter 7 of the U.N. Charter, which concerns peace enforcement, rather than peacekeeping. If the U.N. became a capable force in peace enforcement, it would greatly reduce the responsibilities of the U.S. in future crises. There was a great deal of uncertainty in both the U.N. and remaining U.S. commands on how to carry out this mandate. Information from the battlefield throughout the summer of 1993 made clear two facts about the mission. First, it indicated that U.N. success was dependent upon the U.S.; the Secretary-General recognized this even before UNOSOM II began.

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It became more obvious as other nations scaled back their commitments as engagements with the SNA escalated. Second, it was also clear that achieving the U.N.’s expansive goals would be more costly and require a more extensive commitment than initially believed. These facts did not prompt a reassessment of U.S. policy until disaster struck.

The theory described in Chapter 3 holds that two factors created the policy disconnect before the Battle of Mogadishu. First, preferences were aggregated across the participating organizations. Second, the president was provided with the aggregated preferences as the recommended policy, which prevented consideration of alternatives. The previous section looked at three critical decisions the administration faced in 1993: continuing with the planned reduction of U.S. forces in Somalia, supporting the expanding goals of the U.N., and assuming the lead role in apprehending Aidid. Each of these decision points provided an opportunity to align U.S. strategy with the political goals in Somalia. Strategy enables accomplishment of political objectives through the appropriate application of requisite capabilities. In this case, capabilities were reduced while objectives were expanded. This occurred even as there was general recognition that even the larger force available during UNITAF was insufficient for the U.N.’s stated goals.

The Clinton Administration’s early establishment of decision “rules of the game” hampered a focused assessment of policy in a general sense. The new NSC system under Clinton expanded its subcommittees but failed to add people. As a result, workload sometimes overwhelmed the group. Despite the intention to have high-level officers chair the interagency working group (IWG) meetings, that responsibility routinely fell to lower-level staff.60 NSC meetings tended to be long, unfocused, and without a clear manager of the process. These long

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debates tended to convince participants they had a viable option for a policy, though it was insufficiently thought-through.\textsuperscript{61} Somalia, however, never rose to the level of debate in that forum which was more focused on Russia and Bosnia.

In the wake of the Battle of Mogadishu, the national security advisor, Tony Lake, directed a review of how the policy on Somalia was handled; the review found it was basically left in the hands of mid-level officials, without guidance from the higher levels of government.\textsuperscript{62} Out of the thirty-eight principle meetings held by the National Security Council in the president’s term up to that time, none considered U.S. policy in Somalia.\textsuperscript{63} The only time in which it was mentioned in that forum was when Powell brought it up without clearing his remarks through the Secretary of Defense; Somalia was not on the agenda. He stated that the commander in Somalia was requesting tanks and personnel carriers because of degrading security conditions, and a decision would have to be made on his request soon; no debate occurred.\textsuperscript{64}

While the U.S. failed to make an assessment of the direction of its policy, the U.N. leadership was aggressively pursuing its set of objectives. Disarmament remained a central goal for the Secretary-General. Originally, he insisted upon this condition to better enable the U.N.-run organization, UNOSOM II, to assume responsibility from UNITAF, which was primarily a U.S.-run organization. After securing a commitment from the U.S. to continue to provide a QRF after the U.N. took over, this condition should not have been a primary concern. In fact, it should have been easily apparent that attempting to disarm the factions would lead to more intense conflict. Yet Boutros-Ghali insisted it remained a requirement for rehabilitation of the country as UNOSOM II began. Eventually, the U.S. intended to complete the transfer of

\textsuperscript{61} Powell and Persico, \textit{My American Journey}, 575–577.
\textsuperscript{63} Ibid., 44.
\textsuperscript{64} Halberstam, \textit{War in a Time of Peace}, 261.
responsibility to the U.N. and withdraw the remaining forces once the U.N. was prepared. But with only 30% of its staff and only 21,000 out of the authorized 28,000 troops on-hand at the time of the initial transfer in May, such a level of preparation would prove to be elusive.

For the American command in Somalia, these conditions created multiple problems. The Deputy Commanding General at CENTCOM stated they had two inconsistent policy goals: complete the hand-over of responsibility for Somalia to the U.N. while not allowing it to fail, while in addition, reducing U.S. forces in Somalia. With active U.N. participation in directing the mission and passivity on the part of the U.S. government, General Montgomery proceeded to employ U.S. forces in missions beyond their original purpose. Since he was both commander of U.S. forces as well as the deputy commander in the U.N.’s command structure, he was left to determine what missions were suitable for the QRF. Faced with the need to ensure the U.N. succeeded at the same time its goals were expanding, the QRF conducted routine patrols and raids. With a relatively small force to execute a demanding policy, requests for additional forces to be deployed to Somalia became the norm.

Once the U.N. became focused on Aidid, Washington had to decide whether additional troops were called for to capture him. The Secretary of Defense was reluctant to deploy the capabilities to capture Aidid for two reasons: he was afraid it would raise Aidid’s profile, and he thought it would be difficult to get actionable intelligence. He did not consider the inherent expansion of objectives. Decisions continued without the benefit of a guiding policy. When considering the first request for special capabilities to apprehend Aidid, the issue never went

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above the national security advisor; Lake informed the president of the decision to decline the request through a memo.\textsuperscript{68}

The fact that these decisions were routinely being made below the president’s level does not imply they were coordinated. In one instance, the Secretary of State publicly criticized the work of the Deputies Committee in developing policy in the wake of several American deaths in Somalia in June. Lake responded by arguing that the NSC was overworked, and that the State Department was under-prepared with its recommendations.\textsuperscript{69} The rationale used in isolated decisions to deploy some capabilities and not others was inconsistent. While declining to deploy some capabilities to avoid having the U.N. become too dependent upon the U.S., Washington agreed to take the lead in the U.N.’s goal of apprehending Aidid and eventually approved the deployment of Special Forces. Shortly after that, it again declined to deploy tanks and armored personnel carriers to fill the gap being created by declining levels of participation by other U.N. members.

This final request for armor was brought to Aspin by Powell, who recommended that the Secretary of Defense consider it for a couple of days. When he returned to ask about it (after bringing it up in the NSC meeting mentioned above), Aspin informed Powell he had passed the issue to the policy group, who recommended it be declined. Powell was upset, believing that the issue should rest with Aspin, and not at the policy group that already had too many overlapping players.\textsuperscript{70}

A line in the Warner-Levin Report, which examined the circumstances leading to the Battle of Mogadishu, perfectly encapsulates the confused position of the U.S. in Somalia by the

\textsuperscript{68} Soderberg, \textit{The Superpower Myth}, 47.
\textsuperscript{69} Auger, “The National Security Council After the Cold War,” 60.
time UNOSOM II was put into operation. It states, “The Security Council also requested the U.N. Secretary General, through his Special Representative, retired United States Admiral Jonathan Howe, to provide assistance to the Somali people in rehabilitating their political institutions and promoting national reconciliation.”\textsuperscript{71} Therefore, the U.S., acting as part of a group (the UNSC), requested that the Secretary-General direct his representative, a former U.S. military officer, to execute missions that the U.S. had specifically rejected in earlier consideration of the scope of its involvement. As the isolated decisions aggregated into an incoherent policy and the ill-fated raid on October 3, Clinton’s attention was primarily focused on the struggle between Boris Yeltsin and reactionary communists attempting to halt Russia’s reform.\textsuperscript{72}

\textit{Structured Assessment}

This section returns to the structured questions identified in Chapter One. According to Chapter Three, the conditions described above should have led to a particular outcome. With preferences that were aggregated below the level of the president and unanimity in the few recommendations that were brought to him for review, the theory described in this dissertation expects to see excessive demands unrelated to battlefield that amount to an ideal point in bargaining parlance, with a minimal role for presidential decision-making. From a bargaining model of war’s perspective, the critical issue between belligerents is gaining access to “true” information, which may be misrepresented. From this dissertation’s perspective, the critical issue is whether or not the decision process can overcome unavoidable biases in an information-rich environment.

\textsuperscript{71} Ibid., 14.
\textsuperscript{72} Clinton and Knopf, \textit{My Life}, 549.
In each of the major decisions described earlier, it is apparent that the process was not at all structured to control the detrimental effects of bias, primarily because of neglect. A lack of focus by the top decision-makers failed to generate a guiding policy or strategy that would connect U.S. goals in Somalia to military and diplomatic actions. This provided substantial leeway to lower-level officials in the interpretation of their responsibilities. Bureaucratic politics suggests that these interpretations would likely be guided by self-interest, and reflect significant bias; this proved to be the case in several instances. This section therefore examines the handling of battlefield information to determine if it was possible for the U.S. to construct a rational policy with commitments commensurate with the expected benefits and an awareness of associated costs. If the information was available but not used, it provides further evidence that the bargaining model’s treatment of information is incomplete.

There were multiple instances of biased interpretation of battlefield information that reflected bureaucratic interests. Perhaps the most significant is the case of General Montgomery, and his handling of the U.S.’s QRF. Although his was a temporary organization, the military frequently establishes this type of command and can rapidly staff it and create standard operating procedures to manage operations. His organization was in the unique position of needing to please two superior organizations in the execution of his duties. In order to satisfy the Pentagon and civilian guidance, Montgomery was required to ensure the U.N.’s success in a first-of-its-kind mission while setting the conditions for the withdrawal of U.S. troops. To satisfy the U.N., he was required to supply combat power that enabled routine patrols, weapons seizures, as well as the specified mission of providing a quick reaction force.

Although the emphasis on military operations from the U.N.’s side rather than diplomatic efforts appears to contradict bureaucratic politics, the Secretary-General’s primary interest was in
demonstrating that the U.N. was a capable force in peace enforcement. To do this, he felt he needed to reduce the military capabilities of the gangs to the point where he could sustain commitments from member states to contribute to Chapter 7 efforts. The U.S. was the only nation that was able to provide that type of capability. His pressure on this front yielded the bulk of what he wanted to proceed. Yet the U.N.’s understanding of that type of operation was limited due to a lack of military planning capabilities other than what was provided by contributing states and he vastly underestimated the scale of the effort required. Once the U.N. focused its operations on Aidid, the U.S. seemed unable to change the U.N.’s course. While even the president’s Secretary of State was pressing for moderation in dealing with the warlord, the Secretary-General insisted that Aidid had to be removed before other political leaders would begin to emerge.\footnote{Stevenson, \textit{Losing Mogadishu}, 105.}

For military leaders, the U.S.’s acquiescence to U.N. goals signaled that policymakers supported the U.N. operations that were requested. This was not entirely true. Aspin grew concerned U.S. troops were too deeply committed to offensive military operations by August. Despite his concern, the only restriction he placed on them was through denying additional military capabilities to avoid further commitments.\footnote{Hirsch and Oakley, \textit{Somalia and Operation Restore Hope}, 125.} He did not establish limits on how available forces should be used. Consistent with its interests in achieving success, U.S. forces in Somalia continued to conduct offensive operations with the limited capabilities they had available.

TF Ranger also displayed a biased approach to its role. Special Operations Command was strongly advocating for executing a raid to capture Aidid, despite Powell’s reluctance to
proceed with that option.\textsuperscript{75} TF Ranger had a narrow set of capabilities that it brought to Somalia, and it employed them too often. The repeated use of TF Ranger on raids of questionable strategic value alerted Aidid to the threat against him and allowed the SNA to study U.S. tactics which they took advantage of on October 3.\textsuperscript{76} While U.S. forces continued to focus on their roles within the narrow set of capabilities they possessed, insufficient attention was paid to the mounting risks. The shooting down of a helicopter in September and the large crowds that became involved in confrontations were indications of increasing difficulties that did not inform decisions in Washington.

The U.N., TF Ranger, and General Montgomery’s QRF all underestimated the costs of the course of action they were following while inflating their benefits. Although Aidid was the primary problem for the U.N. by mid-1993, the Secretary-General had no reason to believe that his capture would substantially improve security conditions. As discussed earlier, Aidid’s ability to exert influence grew with the U.N.’s continued efforts to capture him. By publicly declaring a reward for his capture, the U.N. both alerted the warlord to the danger and cast him as the defender of Somalia against the unpopular U.N.. The use of the AC-130s caused significant damage in several operations, and undermined any remaining popular support for the U.S.. It is very likely a successful capture of Aidid would have led to an escalation of violence due to retaliation. As further evidence of it underestimating the costs associated with its actions, the U.N. proceeded with these offensive operations while missing approximately 7,000 personnel from its authorized strength as late as August. UNITAF, which considered the mission the U.N.

\textsuperscript{76} Ibid., 50.
was pursuing to be outside of its capabilities, outnumbered UNOSOM II by approximately 15,000.\textsuperscript{77}

TF Ranger’s conduct indicated it gave little consideration to the growing risks associated with each raid it executed. It failed to vary its pattern in each of the raids, prematurely revealed its presence in Mogadishu, and neglected to study the more forceful responses from the SNA and general population in each operation. Likewise, Montgomery did not articulate the limits of the QRF’s capabilities and over-committed to daily operations. Although he was requesting additional armor and air capabilities, his failure to receive them did not result in any scaling back of the QRF’s missions. U.S. commanders also failed to consider the potential for failure along the lines of the actual outcome. They were primarily concerned with the possibility of killing Aidid, which would further elevate his national status.\textsuperscript{78}

This case provides fairly strong evidence that participating organizations interpreted information from the battlefield and made recommendations according to their bureaucratic bias, with a minor caveat. Rather than concern over long-term issues such as budgeting and autonomy, the organizations were more concerned about short-term success in their assigned mission. The U.N. had a more long-term goal in terms of establishing a record of success at peace enforcement operations, but placed an outsized emphasis on immediate military actions while neglecting the diplomatic side. Oakley had already demonstrated the importance of establishing good diplomatic ties with important players in Somalia to facilitate the military operations. Not only did the U.N. neglect this, they revised downward their personnel requirements for conducting political rehabilitation from their initial estimates. The demands on the civilian/political side of the U.N.’s efforts were estimated to require approximately 2,800

\textsuperscript{77} Beech, “Mission Creep,” 27.
personnel by a study conducted by the Secretary-General’s office; this was drastically scaled back by the time the U.N. assumed responsibility.\textsuperscript{79} While under-estimating the potential for failure and the associated costs, the organizations also inflated the benefits that would result from its narrowly focused mission. Capturing Aidid would do little to remove weapons, further national reconciliation, and, based on his surging popularity, would be ineffective in quelling outbreaks of violence against the U.N. and U.S.

Because of the isolated nature of decision-making under these conditions, there were no comprehensive recommendations being raised to the president or other high-level decision-maker for consideration. Therefore, organizations were making recommendations that benefitted their part of the mission. For example, the QRF was requesting additional armor and air capabilities to better enable it to conduct offensive operations rather than pressing the U.S. and the U.N. to get other nations to provide patrolling and site security personnel. The U.N. bureaucracy, led by the Secretary-General, was pressing the U.S. to conduct more offensive operations and disarm the clans rather than fully staffing its diplomatic requirements and working toward reconciliation. The U.N. command in Somalia was recommending that Special Forces be used to capture Aidid rather than recommending participating nations pursue a more comprehensive solution to the violence in the Horn of Africa. Guided by their narrow immediate interests, organizations interpreted battlefield information as reason to sustain their efforts and requests instead of being forced to take a holistic look at the policy.

There is little to no evidence of these organizations revising their assessments as new information became available through events in Somalia. There were several points at which these events should have prompted a reassessment of policy preferences. First, the June 17 raid showed that the general population would become involved in skirmishes with U.N. and U.S.

\textsuperscript{79} Hirsch and Oakley,\textit{ Somalia and Operation Restore Hope}, 113.
personnel. It required the presence of tanks to compel the crowds to disperse. Second, although Montgomery was to receive some air and armor capabilities only “as needed,” these requests started to come up short when they were made. This should have prompted him to assess the extent of his daily commitments. Had he done so, the U.N. might have been more aggressive in pursuing other reconciliation options rather than focusing on Aidid and offensive operations as their ability to do so was reduced. Third, the downing of a helicopter in September as well as the increasingly hostile reactions to TF Ranger raids should have alerted both the U.S. and the U.N. to the likelihood of high casualties and a failed mission. Since the decision processes were not established to challenge the wisdom of policies, these organizations did not update their understanding of the situation when it was called for.

The above assessment included analysis of the U.N. bureaucracy to explore how organizations did or did not update properly since its interests were tied to U.S. actions. To explore questions at the state level, this assessment will focus on the U.S. and leave the U.N. bureaucracy aside. Since the U.S. had representation at the U.N. command in Somalia, information received from this organization should have also been shared with U.S. decision-makers.

The general lack of awareness at the White House of the manner in which U.S. policy was developing in Somalia has already been discussed. Since there was not a policy discussion in a formal NSC meeting or even in a more informal setting, the various interpretations of battlefield information was never reconciled. From Washington’s perspective, the policy of disarmament (which would lead to reconciliation) was proceeding. Although there were points at which some suspected that goal would be too difficult to achieve, no one examined the potential costs associated with failure. Therefore, the U.S.’s aggregate position was clearly
biased in terms of overestimating benefits while underestimating costs with the disarmament policy.

The critical question for this dissertation as an alternative to the bargaining model that assumes frictionless integration of information is how closely related battlefield outcomes are to belief revision. In this case, battlefield costs had to become excessive and surprising before a comprehensive consideration of U.S. policy in Somalia took place. The three examples cited above of events that should have prompted a revision of beliefs did not reach the White House. Additionally, Clinton was never briefed on how the specific mission to capture Aidid would be executed. While he assumed it would take place in an isolated area where the risks of casualties on both sides would be controlled, it actually took place in a crowded market in the middle of the day, which sacrificed the element of surprise for the U.S.. 80 Similarly, Powell was caught off guard, saying, “I was not aware of what was going on on October 3rd. It was bad luck. The overall policy for Somalia should have been long reviewed before October 3rd.” 81

There was yet another costly event that should have led to better informed policy. Aidid’s attack on the Pakistanis led to more aggressive policies on the part of the U.S. forces in Somalia and the U.N. The U.S., however, did not make any adjustments to overall policy, and allowed other organizations to determine the way ahead. It is clear that there was no appreciation in the U.S. of the significance of the change in the U.N. mission in the wake of UNSCR 837, which was passed after the attack. Furthermore, there was no understanding of the associated difficulties with operations to capture Aidid and reduce his capabilities in an area such as Mogadishu. 82 The attack on the Pakistanis created a general desire on the part of the U.S. to

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80 Clinton and Knopf, My Life, 552–553.
82 Hirsch and Oakley, Somalia and Operation Restore Hope, 118.
respond strongly; if it did not, other nations might begin to withdraw from UNOSOM II and weaken the U.N.’s ability to accomplish its goals.\textsuperscript{83} Yet as this strong response was implemented, decisions made at the U.N. command and the U.S. command began to change the policy without the White House’s oversight.

The president never really considered the implications of moving from a humanitarian mission to a more aggressive military mission within the setting of an NSC or advisory meeting, nor was it debated among the principal cabinet members.\textsuperscript{84} Although most of the changes in policy were driven from the bottom up, higher-level officials were not completely innocent of expansive goal-setting. The U.S.’s U.N. ambassador while addressing the Security Council, asserted UNSCR 814 created “an unprecedented enterprise aimed at nothing less than the restoration of an entire country.”\textsuperscript{85} This was clearly not what the goals of the Bush Administration were, nor had the Clinton Administration explicitly aimed for such ends outside of their support of the U.N.’s efforts. Given its dependence on the U.S. for the capabilities to attempt such goals, the U.N. would likely have modified its position if pressured by the administration.

The U.S. cemented its confused position on September 22, 1993 when it acted as part of the U.N. Security Council and approved a resolution that reaffirmed nation-building as the U.N.’s policy in Somalia. At the same time, Clinton and his advisors were beginning to state a preference for a diplomatic settlement to reduce the U.S.’s commitment to the mission.\textsuperscript{86} This was driven more by expedience rather than a reassessment of the information available in the battlefield. There was no regular two-way communication with Somalia to drive such a

\textsuperscript{83} Patman, \textit{Strategic Shortfall}, 50.
\textsuperscript{85} Hirsch and Oakley, \textit{Somalia and Operation Restore Hope}, 111.
\textsuperscript{86} Halberstam, \textit{War in a Time of Peace}, 260.
reassessment; even after the White House decided upon this new policy, U.S. forces in Somalia remained unaware of the modification.\(^87\) It became clear by mid-September that the political goals of the U.S. and the U.N. continued to diverge yet no new guidance was issued and the search for Aidid continued.

In the wake of the October 3 raid, Clinton expressed anger with what he perceived to be a shift in policy without his knowledge or input. The White House personnel had difficulty in discerning why the raid had taken place at all, since they had determined a new emphasis would be placed on a political settlement, even though this was not adequately conveyed to the military.\(^88\) Somewhat contradictorily, Clinton also asked why no one had told him about the “downside” of the Somalia policy. If he believed the raid was actually a violation of established policy, this question would not make sense. In fact, this determination to emphasize political settlement did not change the actions of U.S. forces in Somalia even if it was intended to. The majority of decisions were being made at their level. Clinton laid a great deal of the blame for his ignorance on the direction of U.S. policy in Somalia on his advisors, telling them afterward that he expected them to keep him better apprised of foreign policy developments.\(^90\) He did have some reason for this. When the decision to send TF Ranger to Somalia was made, it was again held at the national security advisor’s level like the original declination was; the president did not weigh in on the decision.\(^90\) Like other developments in Somalia, the president was informed of the developments afterward, rather than becoming involved in the decision itself. Clinton

\(^{87}\) Patman, *Strategic Shortfall*, 53.
\(^{89}\) Ibid., 326.
\(^{90}\) Ibid., 322.
decided to become more familiar with battlefield risks and make clear what type of operation required approval in Washington before execution.\textsuperscript{91}

There was no effort to identify a set of demands that would enable a settlement through bargaining and modification of positions. The U.N.’s demands, which became the U.S.’s, were total in nature vis-à-vis the SNA: it had to be disarmed and Aidid had to be taken into custody. Furthermore, the country itself would have to be rehabilitated. With a new emphasis on political settlement in the aftermath of the Battle of Mogadishu, side-payments and termination demands became better articulated as the U.S. closed the gap between its policy and its capabilities. To the dismay of some Americans, the U.S. provided military transportation and security to Aidid, the man responsible for the deaths and defilement of U.S. soldiers, to get him to a peace conference that would pave the way for the U.S.’s exit. Additionally, Robert Oakley was sent back to Somalia to leverage his experience with negotiations with the belligerents.\textsuperscript{92}

\textit{Hypothesis Assessment}

Chapter Three made four hypotheses about the effects of information handling in bargaining, three of which are applicable here. As a reminder, a minor modification is made to express the dependent variable in terms of a “policy position” rather than a “bargaining position.” Since the U.S. was not treating its involvement in Somalia as an open confrontation with the SNA as the U.N. was, it was not attempting to reach a termination agreement with another belligerent. Instead, it was attempting to create conditions conducive to handing off responsibility for the mission to the U.N.

\textsuperscript{91} Clinton and Knopf, \textit{My Life}, 554.
\textsuperscript{92} Patman, \textit{Strategic Shortfall}, 57.
Hypothesis 1: As the number of alternative interpretations of endogenous wartime information provided to the foreign policy executive increases, the likelihood that the rational policy position is encapsulated across those interpretations also increases.

There was very little information reaching the president on the evolving conditions in Somalia. For example, the military’s plan to respond to the attack on the Pakistanis was never reviewed by Clinton. Lake kept the president informed of such developments through memos and verbal updates, but the president was not brought in to the actual policy debate. These decisions were arrived at in isolation and could not be considered informed by alternative interpretations. Organizational preferences dominated their actions and requests while the approval process was conducted by advisors who were primarily interested in reducing U.S. commitments to the mission. TF Ranger was approved on the assumption that it could capture Aidid and speed the U.N.’s acceptance of responsibility while the QRF requests were more likely to be declined to avoid growing commitments.

Personnel decisions that were made at the beginning of UNOSOM II also served to limit the alternative interpretations of events in Somalia. Robert Oakley, whose work through engagement with the factions in and around Mogadishu led to so much success, was replaced and emphasis on that type of work evaporated. Although easily accessible to the presidential advisors in the spring and summer of 1993, he was not consulted until October 5, 1993. The full contingent of diplomatic personnel initially assessed as essential by the U.N. never arrived and the U.N. command relied heavily on the U.S.’s planning and assessment capabilities. At the same time, the U.S. command’s standing orders led them to give great deference to the U.N.’s

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93 Soderberg, The Superpower Myth, 41.
94 Halberstam, War in a Time of Peace, 264.
wishes. The scarcity of alternative analysis in this situation lowered the likelihood that a rational policy could be provided to the president or a designated representative for Somalia (which did not exist).

**Hypothesis 2:** *The processes that are used to resolve these alternative interpretations of endogenous information will determine if the executive is able to discern the rational policy position or arrives at a decision based on bureaucratic biases. This will affect both the extent of the state’s goals and the state’s ability to update appropriately.*

The manner in which the decisions were made in the absence of a guiding policy served to prevent the executive from exploring actual options in Somalia. There were at least two other options available that were never provided actual consideration in any formal setting, since none occurred at the key advisor level until after October 3. First, the U.S. could have expanded its commitment to speed the capture of Aidid through providing additional Special Forces, armor, and air support. Simultaneously, had there been a recognition of how extensively committed the QRF was to daily operations, additional forces could have been sent to better enable those efforts. Since no one above the commanders in Somalia considered the implications of the escalating confrontations during weapons seizures and raids, there was no recognition of the potential costs associated with the status quo. Secondly, the U.S. could have pressured the U.N. to pursue more diplomatic options to establish security, since such an approach had already proven successful. Had the U.S. declined to continue supporting daily operations with the QRF, it could have brought more pressure on the U.N. to agree to this.

The only modifications the Clinton Administration was making to its policy were based on its exogenous goal of handing over responsibility to the U.N. As endogenous information
developed, it failed to update the beliefs of the president on the likelihood of achieving his exogenous goal. There was ample evidence that the security situation was deteriorating despite the offensive operations the U.S. was conducting on a regular basis. Neither the U.N. nor the U.S. used this information to revise their expectations. Therefore, the evidence does indicate that bureaucratic bias was heavily embedded in policies due primarily to the system’s inability to reconcile its extensive goals with the minimal level of commitment the U.S. was willing to make to Somalia.

**Hypothesis 2a:** Resolution processes that are characterized by aggregation of institutional preferences are more likely to result in overly-optimistic demands that are unacceptably high for an opponent, preventing earnest bargaining.

There are two ways in which aggregation of policy preferences can occur. First, it can be deliberate design and intended to secure a minimal level of support across organizations for a policy choice though offering “consolation prizes” to any and all of those that did not secure their ideal preference. A second alternative is that aggregation occurs due to neglect and all players attempt to secure their ideal preference while no one attempts to check these rising demands; this is the case here. Although the military would have preferred additional forces to execute their missions, failure to receive them did not deter commanders from proceeding with their preferred course. While TF Ranger did this out of preference for the type of mission they were conducting (Halperin’s organizational essence\(^\text{95}\)), the QRF did this out of their desire to convince the U.N. to assume complete responsibility which was the U.S.’s only articulated goal.

TF Ranger, the QRF, the U.N. command, the U.N. bureaucracy, and the Clinton Administration were all operating with biased understandings of the situation. None fully

appreciated the potential costs. The U.N. was severely over-estimating the benefits that would accrue from removing Aidid; the violence would certainly continue and weapons would still be plentiful. The Clinton Administration also over-estimated the likelihood the U.N. would agree to assume complete responsibility in Somalia after Aidid’s capture. Its allocation of forces between the QRF and TF Ranger was short-sighted since it was operating with this flawed assumption. There is ample evidence here to support the assertion that the aggregation of institutional preferences led to an overly-optimistic policy that was devoid of relevant battlefield information.

Alternate Explanation: The Predominant President

If a predominant president model held any relevance to the situation in Somalia, the evidence would support several associated empirical predictions. First, the quality of the policy would be directly related to the president’s willingness to conduct an information search. On its face, this prediction does hold true in the sense that the president’s weak information search resulted in a poor policy. However, the search is needed under this model because of the scarcity of information available initially. The previous administration’s experiences, battlefield evidence of mounting costs, pessimistic CIA assessments, and commanders’ recommendations (as well as the CJCS’s) all provided sufficient evidence negate the need for a high-effort information search. It is also difficult to argue that the mission itself was such a low priority that it did not warrant consideration at the highest levels of the White House. If this was the case, the U.S.’s Ambassador to the U.N. should not have been making grandiose statements about the rehabilitation of Somalia. Other key advisors such as the CJCS, the Defense Secretary, and the national security advisor were all involved in decisions on Somalia at times, providing evidence that the Administration in general did not relegate it to the backwaters; presidential consideration was warranted but not provided.
A predominant president model would also suggest that the current policy is the result of a coalition of supporting interests. From a certain perspective, this was the case here. However, this coalition was created through ignorance of actual costs and benefits while each organization was pursuing its own agenda through its preferred means. It was not the result of a deliberate choice. Congress is an important consideration in this model, particularly since the president relies (to an extent) on it to authorize the use of force.\textsuperscript{96} Yet Congress was generally unaware of the extent of UNOSOM II’s mission or of the difference between the policies of the U.S. and the U.N. until Aspin made a speech at the Center for Strategic and International Studies in late August, after policies were proceeding on their own momentum.\textsuperscript{97} There was also evidence that the public did not support U.S. actions. An opinion poll conducted in December 1992 indicated strong support for the narrowly-defined goals in Somalia in the U.S.. After the raid, almost 70% favored immediate or gradual withdrawal. To an extent this is understandable, but it is notable that the attack on U.S. forces did not lead to any rallying effect.\textsuperscript{98} Since Congress and the public would be important elements of the predominant president’s policy decisions, their lack of awareness of current policy indicates this model is not applicable.

\textbf{Alternate Explanation: Psychological Limitations}

According to the psychological model, poor decisions are generally the result of the imperfect understandings of the situation that reside within the president’s advisory circle, to include the president himself. Bountiful information requires heuristics to categorize important

\textsuperscript{96} The War Powers Act provides latitude to the president, which both Bush and Clinton used here. However, had there been a general awareness of the type of mission the QRF was conducting it is unlikely Clinton would have been able to sustain that latitude.


information and economize thought on a complicated foreign policy problem. A selective information search heuristic is highly problematic, since its employment is likely to result in a confirmation bias and support the preferred policy. The most damaging piece of evidence to this perspective is the lack of a preferred policy. Even if the U.S.’s only stated goal, handover to the U.N., is considered a guiding policy, there was no information search based on that preference. If there was, the administration would be expected to routinely list the quantity of weapons seized, the number of SNA prisoners taken, and the capabilities of the U.N. forces as evidence of progress. Progress in general was simply never assessed. If it was, the widely-recognized shrinking capabilities of the U.N. (which should have been the most important indicator as indicated above) should have prompted a reassessment of current policy.

The personal biases of the participants are also expected to factor heavily into final decisions on policy under this model. The biases of the president did not influence the earlier decisions, other than the higher priority he placed on events in Russia and Bosnia when discussing foreign policy with his staff. But by mid-September, the bias of both Clinton and Christopher supported a political settlement with Aidid rather than continuing searches and raids. This never influenced the actions of the commands on the ground in Somalia since no deliberate process was in place to link decisions and preferences to the course of policy.

There is stronger evidence to suggest that psychological limitations factored heavily into the U.N.’s mismanagement of its available assets in Somalia. Once it had decided that its sole problem was in removing Aidid, it failed to recognize evidence of a deteriorating security situation. The U.N. focused on capturing weapons (through the actions of the U.S.’s QRF) in and around Mogadishu, mistakenly believing it would improve security. Yet even after Aidid
had pledged to disarm, he was actually moving weapons into Mogadishu throughout the spring. The U.N. never assessed the state of its progress, and instead clung to its preferred indicators of success which were the removal of weapons and Aidid himself.

On the part of the U.S., neglect is a more compelling explanation of poor policy in this case than misunderstanding. Had psychological limitations affected the course of decision-making in Somalia, there would be more evidence of confirmatory bias in information search and a greater personal bias role in decisions. However, the structure was so loose that it did not allocate a place for such bias to even enter into the system. The president’s failure to influence the situation after his preferences changed is indicative of this. There was plenty of time for changing course between mid-September and the raid on October 3. The decision-making system on Somali was simply not sufficient to influence the diverse preferences of the concerned organizations.

Conclusion

Detractors of Clinton’s handling of Somalia tend to focus on the limited nature of Bush’s goals and the more expansive aims of the Clinton Administration. This is not completely accurate. First, “mission creep” had already begun by the time the new administration came in through operations such as weapons seizures. Although they were limited and focused, they did stretch the intended role of U.S. forces. Second, both Bush and Clinton had a similar approach to the post-Cold War world; they wanted to use the U.N. in certain missions to maintain a peaceful international system which would somewhat reduce America’s burden in

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100 Dumbrell, Clinton’s Foreign Policy, 68.
police actions.\textsuperscript{101} For example, Bush had already used the military in two other humanitarian missions before Somalia. Finally, as this case study shows, the expansion of aims in Somalia was not as much due to deliberate decision as they were acquiescence to the logic of key players through neglect.

Although there was strong evidence of organizational bias in the actions taken in Somalia, a bureaucratic politics approach is unable to account for the ultimate outcome. Rather than bargaining among the players, each pursued their own preferences in the general absence of the need to satisfy another’s preference. The situation gave a great deal of latitude to the Pentagon and players there took actions based on the tools they had available. The Under Secretary of Defense for Policy noted, “The most serious flaw in our policy was that we tried to accomplish political objectives solely by military means.”\textsuperscript{102} As discussed in Chapter 2, Clausewitz asserted both the political aims and military means must be closely integrated. No forum existed to accomplish this integration. There was also too little skepticism on the part of the players individually, particularly for the Defense Department and in its internal assessment of what it could realistically accomplish in the post-Cold War era.\textsuperscript{103}

Each of the hypotheses made in Chapter 3 were supported by the case study. Aggregation of preferences in isolation from a guiding policy and the need to justify actions led to the predicted outcome: “Excessive demands unrelated to battlefield information.” All players over-estimated their probability of success while under-estimating the potential costs. The confluence of interests in this situation, particularly the U.S.’s desire to see the U.N. successful in its new role of peace enforcer, led to the U.S. surrendering sufficient control of its policy.

\textsuperscript{101} Patman, \textit{Strategic Shortfall}, 8.
\textsuperscript{103} Ibid., 19.
disparity between the U.N.’s grandiose schemes and the U.S.’s acquiescence to them was not rectified until after the disastrous raid. In mid-October, the U.S. gave word to Aidid that they considered him a viable political figure in Somalia and was no longer a wanted fugitive. At that point, U.S. policy goals once again matched the commitments it was making to the intervention.

There are two final policy notes worth making in light of the information examined here. First, troop levels are not costs – they are capabilities to achieve political ends. Given the U.S.’s interest in completing its handover to the U.N., it began to treat troop commitments as costs in isolation from what they could achieve. As a result, expectations for what the troops in Somalia could accomplish were unrealistically high. The true costs were more directly related to the U.N.’s inability to influence the security situation than the simple number of troops in Somalia. Second, the issue with “creating conditions” as an objective from a bargaining perspective is that there is no single party with which to bargain. Decisions were made by the U.S. to speed handover, which would be ultimately be determined by the U.N.’s assessment of security conditions. While the U.N. pursued a flawed policy, the U.S. failed to focus its efforts on more effective alternatives to improve security such as the multi-party engagement strategy that Robert Oakley had followed. An adversarial process that did more to challenge the flawed assumptions built into the policy at all levels would have corrected the wide chasm between the U.S.’s preferred outcome and its policy.

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104 Stevenson, Losing Mogadishu, 106.
Chapter 8: Conclusion

The bargaining model of war holds fighting as the means by which states resolve disagreements over relative capabilities which should determine the distribution of available benefits. This approach has generated important insights into how states end wars with the use of endogenous information. Fearon’s articulation of an exogenous information war puzzle (the distribution of capabilities prior to war and benefits to be distributed) pointed to the necessity of examining failures in handling and interpreting information to explain why war ever occurs at all. Private information and incentives to misrepresent should be easier to overcome as the Rubicon of initiating a war approaches. Modern intelligence and surveillance capabilities should lessen the likelihood of successful misrepresentation of critical information. The exogenous bargaining literature logically led to a more recent emphasis on endogenous wartime information, since private information should become public quickly as the battle is joined by both sides.

The endogenous bargaining literature has emphasized that information obtained through the means of fighting is more valuable in decision-making than what was available before the war began. Two belligerents that are engaged in conflict should revise their termination demands as this information is generated and converge upon an agreement to divide the goods under dispute in a manner that reflects the revealed relative power. This costly-process approach suggests that the faster information is revealed, the faster the war should be terminated. It also assumes that all states’ ability to learn and update appropriately are equal; two belligerents observing the same event should draw identical conclusions. This leads to this dissertation’s puzzle, which was identified in the introductory chapter: Why has the expansion of information available to policymakers through modern intelligence capabilities not led to a corresponding
drop in the time and costs associated with war? The United States’ experience with modern, limited war is particularly illuminating since it has enjoyed an informational and military advantage in all of its wars since 1945. Although there were precedent-setting concerns in the context of the Cold War, the stakes in these wars cannot be considered to be unlimited in nature and should therefore be easier to terminate.

Endogenous bargaining literature that has incorporated domestic influences on war termination has generally focused on the second of a two-step process in explaining failures: assessing the state of the war and subsequently revising demands. Although a state may realize it should change its approach to a war, these works suggest a state may not be able to because of domestic pressures. Yet this approach makes the sweeping assumption that belligerents are equal in their ability to correctly interpret information in the first step. Psychological literature suggests otherwise: in an information glut, a biased filtering of information (preference-directed search) will lead to a biased understanding of the situation. Works that examine decision-making in groups take this a step further and find that participants can exacerbate biases under certain conditions which lead to poor policy. Bargaining literature has done little to integrate these findings, which is surprising because of the central role of information that must be interpreted in high-pressure conditions by biased individuals working in a group. Several gaps in the endogenous bargaining model indicate closer attention to information processing itself is warranted.

First, the bargaining approach is more powerful in explaining a poor decision in isolation by viewing it as a deviation from an optimal course of action; it does not provide a convincing mechanism for a flawed system that is more likely to make errors than other systems.¹ This is

unsatisfying because of its implications for the value of intelligence and analysis capabilities. Improving them clearly should provide advantages to a belligerent within the bargaining framework because of the value it places on such information. If this is true, then its converse, the idea that deteriorating analysis capabilities should lead to poorer performance, must also be true. But it has not examined in any systemic manner what characteristics prevent a state from utilizing this information effectively.

In a related issue, the bargaining model has not provided a convincing mechanism that explains why some states can update their beliefs effectively while others struggle, without relying on the circumstances of the moment. Leveraging the current domestic conditions in examining a bargaining situation, or including leader attributes will improve explanatory power. Fearon’s “ability to cope” with complexity is central in improving predictive power here, but clearly a more fully specified concept is needed. Fearon points out that this is a bounded rationality explanation, rather than a fully rationalist one. In real-world applications, the main problem for a belligerent is in how it improves its bounded rationality to the point where it can approximate a rational actor. The more severely bounded its perspective is, the poorer it can expect to perform. If the conceptual boundaries of the belligerent are more determined by pre-war expectations than the conditions of the battlefield, then that belligerent’s behavior is more likely to be irrational.

Third, the bargaining model has left aside the question of preference origins for war termination. I have argued this is due to the approach’s treatment of demands as perfectly substitutable. Side-payments may enable a mutually-acceptable bargaining space to develop in some cases, but not others. Why are some items of value relevant to settlement, while others are not? For example, grain has a measurable value. Theoretically, it is possible to provide a

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sufficient quantity of grain to a belligerent to compensate for a loss of territory. Practically, this would not occur (in almost all cases – provision of aid to North Korea has assisted in calming saber-rattling over the past few decades, but this would have done nothing to deter conflict in 1950). The problem returns to explaining why settlement terms vary in acceptability. If they are not perfectly substitutable, the process by which a state determines which terms are acceptable is more central to endogenous bargaining than what the literature has generally recognized.

Fourth, the bargaining literature has generated contradictory assertions on war duration. If sheer information quantity is the central problem that belligerents must overcome in reaching settlement terms, the probability a war will end at any given point should increase as war duration increases. Yet there is also the possibility that wars can become entrenched, with neither side willing to make concessions to reach an overlapping bargaining space. Surprising outcomes may overcome this entrenchment, or even lead to an early settlement if they occur at the beginning of the war. Left aside is the question of why one side continued in the war based on the belief that it could deliver a surprising victory at some point in the future. Further, why had the opposing belligerent not recognized the possibility of a surprising victory and hedged its wartime bets?

In order to address these gaps, work on the bargaining model has begun to look inside the black box of the state though it has underemphasized the role of information processing prior to updating demands. In a modern state, most of this information is generated by specialized organizations. Bureaucratic politics is the traditional answer to accounting for the effects of massive, powerful organizations competing to advance their interests. But the way in which the research program was structured treated bureaucratic politics as a constant independent variable
while attempting to account for varying outcomes.\(^3\) Subsequently, it articulated conditions under which bureaucratic bias would more likely be reflected in a decision and assumed that in some situations of national security, such politics would be set aside (such as when the president decided to become more involved and set an agenda). On other issues, bias was expected to be more prevalent and those situations were treated as more appropriate for bureaucratic politics. Therefore, the research program created an error-bias in its formulation; it was better at explaining mistakes than successes. I have argued that the program’s preoccupation with explaining stands through seats is partially responsible for this.

Halperin’s and Allison’s early works placed a heavier emphasis on “rules of the game” then those that are more recent. Chapter 3 made the argument that by focusing on characteristics of those rules and treating them as independent variables we can improve our ability to predict varying outcomes (a decision based on biased bureaucratic interests vs. one that is considered more rational). The advantage of this approach is that it does not require defining conditions under which the research program is applicable and those under which it is not; it is always applicable but the extent of its influence varies. Certain situations may not only incentivize greater participation from the president which eclipses bureaucratic bias (such as agenda-setting) but also better enable control of that ever-present bias. Most works have assumed that the key question in the bureaucratic politics paradigm concerns the relationship between an organization’s interests and its agent’s recommendation based on the logic that if those interests are not reflected in the recommendation, they are therefore not powerful in explaining outcomes.

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A better approach would ask if the paradigm can explain state actions through the interaction of government officials and their organizations.\textsuperscript{4}

This dissertation has proposed a typological theory that describes how the characteristics of a state’s information processing system (embedded in the rules of the game) either reveal or distort information essential for successful war termination. The two independent variables which make up this typology are the degree of plurality of perspectives provided to the president and the approach utilized to resolve differing interpretations and recommendations, generating the following:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Degree of Plurality</th>
<th>Resolution Rules</th>
<th>Outcome</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Pluralist</td>
<td>Narrow Selection</td>
<td>A narrow set of demands with the highest potential for effective updating. Demands consistent with battlefield information.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pluralist</td>
<td>Aggregation</td>
<td>Acceptable demands close to aggregate ideal point with little updating and broad bureaucratic support. Excessive demands selectively supported by battlefield information.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unanimity</td>
<td>Narrow Selection</td>
<td>Acceptable demands and assessment of battlefield conditions are determined by bureaucratic battles. Inflexible demands unrelated to battlefield information.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unanimity</td>
<td>Aggregation</td>
<td>Unmovable acceptable outcome close to ideal point for participating members and little role for Presidential decision-making. Excessive demands unrelated to battlefield information.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

From a policy standpoint, the key question is: What decision conditions best enable a state to integrate battlefield and diplomatic information when determining its termination demands based on endogenous information, while allowing for an appropriate deviation from exogenous preferences in an information-rich environment? Chapter 3 argued that the first situation, with a high degree of plurality and a narrow selection among options, creates the greatest chance of proper updating in attempting to reach a settlement. This is due to the conditions and incentives created in the advisory setting.

A high degree of plurality ensures that all participating members are privy to new information brought forth by any one of its members. The diverse interests and specialties represented by each organization’s agent(s) ensure that the greatest possible amount of relevant information is presented. Organizations will tend to provide and emphasize information that supports their preferred course of action. If the executive chooses only a narrow slice of recommendations to implement, some of the participating organizations’ interests will be excluded. This will incentivize members to gather information aggressively and prepare their arguments carefully in the first place, and to challenge the biased interpretation of information that other organizations will be relying upon to advance their preferred course of action. These public challenges will further incentivize more moderate recommendations with a better accounting of associated costs and benefits. Repeated interactions of this sort also improve decisions as new battlefield information is revealed that has relevance to the decision. Ultimately, these adversarial proceedings improve understanding of the wartime conditions and lead to a more rational bargaining position. In contrast, lower plurality and a more aggregative resolution approach degrades a state’s ability to approximate a rational actor in predictable manners. These assertions were explored in four case studies, each one representing a different space of the typology.

**Review of Findings**

*The Roles of Plurality and Resolution Strategy.* As discussed above, plurality was expected to facilitate the introduction of new information into advisory meetings. In effect, it provides the raw material of the rational bargaining position as the diverse advocates present their preferences for action as well as their interpretation of endogenous information. The interaction of this independent variable with the resolution rules determines if the rules of the
game are effective in enabling the executive to appropriately adjust the state’s bargaining position. The executive faces a challenge in deciding upon resolution rules when presented with dissenting opinions. Due to coalitional concerns, the president has a strong incentive to ensure the widest support possible, which may lead to aggregating preferences. This may improve the executive’s ability to assemble a supporting coalition domestically, but will lead to a poorer bargaining position with demands the opponent is unlikely to accommodate. On the opposite end of the spectrum, a president can elect to choose only a narrow set of recommendations which improves the bargaining position in the war (provided they are appropriately matched to the battlefield) and drastically changes the set of incentives provided to advisors and reduces the probability of garnering wide support.

Points at which the executive received a variety of interpretations of battlefield conditions did improve the introduction of new information based on the case analysis. Nixon’s decision-making in Vietnam as well as that of Truman’s early decisions in Korea provided ample information for rational bargaining and “good” decisions. There was a lower degree of plurality in Nixon’s case when he was revising offers at the bargaining table. In these situations, the circle of advisors was smaller. The case indicates that in unstructured situations, such as how and when military means should be applied to generate desired conditions, the high degree of plurality is beneficial. Appropriate assessment of the battlefield conditions through this pluralistic approach may lessen the need to hold debate on bargaining offers since costs and benefits are better understood. In addition, the number of advisors that are attuned to settlement terms through diplomatic channels is simply smaller.

Nixon’s case also demonstrates that although the rules of the game improved decision-making, they were difficult to apply in all situations. For example, the debate on the invasion of
Laos was light because the administration was using Cambodia as a precedent. It turned out to be a poor one since it relied extensively on the military prowess of the South’s army. The failure to question assumptions indicates that even in a system that establishes better decision analysis processes it can be difficult to follow in all executive decisions. The decision-making improved after the surprising outcome of Laos, and Kissinger recognized the origins of the problems.

A process that led to a narrow selection of recommendations for implementation by the executive resulted in the predicted outcome. In Nixon’s case, the very wide variety of options he was presented necessitated a clear choice. In some cases, he exceeded the recommendations of his advisors since the process clarified the costs and benefits of each possibility. Truman’s case, however, showed that availability of information did not lead to better decisions in isolation. When presented with a variety of sources of information, the unique role of MacArthur led the president to overreach as he embraced the most optimistic alternative (biased in the sense of over-estimating benefits while under-estimating costs). These conditions led to the classic “logrolling” in which the state demanded more than it ever intended. The war aimed at restoring the status quo ante became an effort to establish a unified, democratic Korea. The president chose a course that would encompass all of the desires of the advisors when they were biased in similar manners. Advisors that had unlike biases were sidelined and MacArthur’s demanding settlement terms became accepted and supported even though participants later claimed to harbor doubts on the strategy being followed.

The tendency to narrow alternative interpretations of battlefield information demonstrated more drastic failures in the other two cases. Both Clinton and Johnson established processes that narrowed interpretations by the time they reviewed recommendations, which

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5 See Vijay Krishna and John Morgan, “A Model of Expertise,” *The Quarterly Journal of Economics* 116, no. 2 (May 2001): 747–775. The authors show that decision-makers consulting only similarly-biased advisors are more likely to succumb to that bias in final decisions.
suppressed information and created delays in effective updating. In Somalia, the president completely surrendered control to advisors and officials and was merely informed of decisions being made. Johnson was more informed (clearly larger stakes were involved), but empowered McNamara and Rusk to narrow options and net assessments before making a choice. As a result, bureaucratic political struggles became more pronounced, and the classic “middle-road” alternative between two extreme positions became the president’s only choice. As the middle-road failed to deliver the results, US commitments grew. Bureaucratic struggles determined the course of action chosen, rather than battlefield information. Information that was damaging to the dominant bureaucratic preference (that of McNamara’s and Rusk’s) was suppressed.

In Clinton’s case, this bureaucratic struggle was basically absent in decision implementation. The desires of each participant were aggregated into a policy arrived at through acquiescence rather than deliberate choice. Each organization pursued its ideal preference and battlefield information became almost irrelevant in policy decisions which were driven by low level officials. Unanimity was achieved through mutual agreement and acquiescence and the executive received only the very narrowest of choices: only that which was already agreed upon and, in most cases, the one that was already being implemented.

**Structured Question Assessment.** The structured questions identified in the introduction and applied in the case studies were divided into two broad categories. First, they examined the handling of information at the bureaucratic/organizational level. Second, they examined how the alternative interpretations of that information was handled at the state level and used to make policy decisions. The major theme of all questions was the origin and control, or lack of control, of biased assessments.
At the bureaucratic level, there was strong evidence of bias, even in the Nixon Administration. Players tended to interpret information through their organizational lenses, particularly in early assessments. For example, in the Johnson Administration, the military continued to advocate ever-increasing military pressure even though they all had doubts about the extent to which it could deliver the results politicians were seeking. One of the more interesting aspects of the cases was the prevalence of cost-inflation for alternatives that biased advisors did not prefer. The theory described in Chapter 3 primarily discussed bias in terms of over-estimating benefits while under-estimating costs for a preferred course of action. From a decision standpoint, the net advantage should be sufficient to secure that preference. However, to further stack the deck, or perhaps as a way to avoid advancing unreasonable estimates of their own preferences, players highlighted the detrimental effects of the “bad” options. This was most noticeable in the decision to intervene in Korea and in Johnson’s decision to escalate in Vietnam.

The typological spaces that were expected to show exacerbated bureaucratic influences on outcome demonstrated the slowest reevaluation of battlefield assessments, though for different reasons. In Truman’s case, players with similar biases saw their preferences included in the policy so serious questioning did not take place. MacArthur’s stature after the success of Inchon discouraged this and not even the Joint Chiefs of Staff were willing to challenge him. The theory chapter posited this would be due to a reluctance to jeopardize players’ preferences from being excluded in the final decision. Along these lines, there was one instance of a player resigning due to becoming excluded in deliberations as he questioned accepted wisdom (George Kennan). In the Johnson Administration, bureaucratic infighting was common, though often in vain as McNamara routinely advanced his own preferences while outside organizations struggled to advance their interpretations. In Clinton’s case, organizations were simply not forced to
reevaluate their biased assessments as they were free to pursue their preferred policies in isolation from a guiding policy that would otherwise restrict their actions.

The “surprising outcome” phenomenon was sufficient to induce a reassessment in both Clinton’s Administration and the Truman Administration. However, the outcome was so surprising that both had lost any temporary advantage they might have had to secure an ideal outcome. In the Johnson Administration’s case, surprise was not sufficient to induce a serious reassessment. The bureaucratic battles and biased assessments led to ever-increasing military commitments in failed attempts to terminate the conflict even though those assessments were routinely proven incorrect.

Initial bureaucratic assessments were not affected as thoroughly as expected by the rules of the game. This dissertation made the case that the possibility of being exposed to competing arguments and critiques in decision meetings would likely lead to a moderation of initial recommendations. In situations where such critique would not be expected, demands for bargaining terms would be more extreme. In fact, the Truman and Johnson Administrations’ cases both indicated that policy demands were slightly moderated during the process in the hopes of securing a higher probability those interests would be represented in the final decisions. This is consistent with a “go-along-to-get-along” philosophy. Nixon’s case showed that those organizations felt freer to bring in more extreme recommendations initially, since the rules of the game provided more equality to diverse advocates. However, the debate process quickly revised those initial estimates and costs and benefits were clarified more often in the debate process than beforehand.

Once the rules of the game began to resolve any competing interpretations of battlefield information, the state’s aggregate policy took shape. This process generated the unitary actor;
whether or not it was a rational actor would be determined by the quality of the process. A higher quality process was expected to be more effective in controlling bias from a variety of sources and clarify costs and benefits with any possible policy choice.

The combination of independent variables had the expected effect on belief revision and its relationship to battlefield events. Truman’s process aggregated or maximized demands of the similarly biased advocates that were all able to influence the president. The direction of this bias was almost exclusively toward supporting MacArthur’s wishes. As a result, any success on the battlefield justified further expansion of demands until the US was seeking a unified peninsula. Evidence that Chinese intervention was likely, or that the fall of Pyongyang had effectively ended the war and provided the US the best chance for unification of most of the peninsula over a longer time period was lost on the key decision-makers. Johnson’s process did not tend to inflate demands through aggregation, since the interests of only one or two advisors dominated decisions and the decision process. In that case, evidence of success was highlighted as justification for continuing a given policy, while evidence of failure was occasionally used to justify further military commitments to achieve unchanging ends.

The process used in the Clinton Administration did little to link any decisions to events on the battlefield. As organizations operated in isolation, the president’s advisors occasionally intervened to limit expansion of commitment, though at the same time, it was trumpeting the ability of the UN to accomplish unrealistic outcomes in places such as Somalia. There was never a comprehensive assessment of the Horn of Africa conducted at any time prior to the Battle of Mogadishu in Clinton’s White House. The Nixon/Kissinger system was the most effective at linking battlefield events to termination demands, and the case study outlined several incidents of downward revision of objectives as it recognized that conditions did not support initial demands.
Multiple interpretations of the course of the war were advantageous here since new information did not always originate in the same channel (i.e., different advisors carried the decision in each case).

The multiple interpretations of the battlefield were most damaging in Truman’s case, since MacArthur’s success at securing support for his actions led directly to the log-rolling of preferences. This is a classic example of Janis’s groupthink, with the expected isolation of disagreeable participants. In contrast, Johnson’s system displayed none of this type of convergence among like-minded players, except among the very small number of dominant advisors. Even Johnson was dissatisfied with the limited number of recommendations he was provided. Disagreement was common among the bureaucratic agents in the process, but the rules of the game allowed McNamara to suppress those opinions before they reached the president. In Clinton’s case, the multiple interpretations of battlefield information simply survived and were an indication of a lack of a mechanism to reconcile or aggregate these perspectives.

The Nixon Administration was effective at both reconciling divergent assessments and preserving several options for the president to choose from. This reconciliation generally centered on clarification of costs and benefits of a particular action. For example, when formulating the Easter Offensive response, Nixon had a better understanding of the likely Soviet response to bombing and mining the harbor when choosing that option. Kissinger would have preferred a different course of action to avoid jeopardizing the upcoming summit, but the advice the president received allowed him to perceive that a strong response was called for, and the course of the war was more important than a summit that could be rescheduled. At the same time the administration had updated its beliefs on costs and benefits, it also retained several
alternatives for the president (bomb only, mine only, status quo military actions) while
dissuading him from consideration of nuclear retaliation.

Reevaluations were common in Nixon’s Administration. They were less common in the
other cases, but had different effects when they did occur. Reevaluations in the Johnson
Administration led the participants to conclude that additional pressure was needed to bring the
conflict to an end, which reinforced previously held biases rather than correcting them.
Implementation of the initial decisions was never questioned, only what additional means were
needed to achieve the stated goals. Similarly, biases were reinforced by the reassessments
conducted by the Truman Administration in Korea, with no information that was damaging to
the direction of the policy ever seriously considered.

The lack of reassessments in the Somalia case study did nothing to change actions on the
ground. Even as military leaders learned their mission was expanding while assets available
were severely limited by the administration, they continued supporting the decisions of the
United Nations. In Washington, players such as Aspin, Powell, and Christopher had lost faith in
the direction of US actions by August, but no real course correction was ever debated or made.
Problems encountered during raids such as the downing of a helicopter, growing hostility of
civilian crowds, and the necessity of tanks to reestablish order in mobs did not change planning
or actions.

The origins of preferences were fairly well predicted by this dissertation’s theory, with
some exception in Nixon’s case. I expected to see a single bureaucracy’s preference more
strongly represented in any given decision. Instead, he made several choices through combining
the alternatives that were available. In one, Nixon exceeded the recommendations of all his
advisors. There are several possibilities to explain this deviation. First, the world-views of the
participants may prevent them from completely eliminating their biases even after deliberations, leaving it to the administrator of the process to complete the “rational” position. Second, the president’s own bias may predispose him to certain aspects of several available options. Third, the president may make some decisions by utilizing information not available to other participants, or information they simply do not use. For example, the president retained greater control over offers made at the bargaining table while using a more expansive circle of advisors when considering military and diplomatic actions intended to support those offers. This also provided the president the ability to determine which demands were negotiable.

Settlement terms in the other cases were more easily predicted. In Johnson’s instance, the preferred ends of forcing the enemy to the negotiating table were primarily residing in the Defense Secretary’s office. The advantages he retained in information analysis and presentation in meetings provided him with the opportunity to advocate more forcefully than other participants. This prevented consideration of policy goals that were negotiable, since the Secretary had little incentive to change his recommendation. Truman ceded control of settlement terms to those advisors who were most optimistic (i.e., biased) at each decision point, consistent with the expected effects of the independent variables observed in that situation. The privileged place given to the optimists in the advisory process did not provide the US the ability to revise demands downward when appropriate, until the surprising outcome forced a reassessment.

Finally, through neglect, the US allowed the UN to determine terms in Somalia while allowing military commanders and diplomatic officials to determine the optimal use of their assets, with no check to ensure the use of those assets was appropriate or sufficient for the desired goals. Skepticism in the president’s cabinet by August of 1993 should have given the US the ability to
reevaluate demands for settlement, but the lack of a controlling process failed to force the Administration to face difficult questions.

Side-payments are integral to the formulation of Fearon’s original exogenous war puzzle, and theoretically should facilitate a wide variety of settlement possibilities as endogenous information accumulates. In reality, the use of side-payments was only leveraged in Nixon’s administration, and enabled only a narrow set of terms. In the other cases, there were few incentives for the US to reassess its termination conditions which were generally inflexible. The quality of information search in these examples was poor and players did not recognize that battlefield conditions did not support the stated objectives. Therefore, the US would not engage in a search for acceptable side-payments when it did not have cause to do so.

The bargaining that took place in Nixon’s Administration in the closing months of the Vietnam War touched upon a range of issues that had not been identified as central to war aims only a year before. Economic aid, the disposition of prisoners and infiltrators, replenishment of military supplies, and a reconciliation council all assisted the sides in locating a mutually-acceptable bargain. In contrast, the Johnson Administration insisted upon increasing military pressure until the North capitulated. Ball’s proposals for negotiation late in the process were given little time for development for consideration (only 24 hours) and were promptly dismissed. The recognition of poor political stability in the South should have provided the US with ample incentive to search for a set of side-payments that would allow it to achieve a minimally acceptable outcome. The bureaucratic rules of the game prevented such consideration. As a result, Johnson was unable to recognize what offers were supportable.

Side-payments were also absent from Truman’s attempts to end the Korean War quickly. This is especially challenging for bargaining models to account for since the US reached several
advantageous points in the course of the war from which to bargain. The initial reestablishment of the *status quo ante* at the 38th Parallel, the capture of Pyongyang, and the total defeat of the North’s army on the battlefield occurred over time that should have allowed the US to recognize the opportunities to seek advantageous terms. The range of side-payments available to the US to offer should have been wide and could have been used to put the North in a politically disadvantageous position over the long-term to advance unification more slowly. Instead, settlement conditions became more stringent and the North was never given an opportunity to consider any combination of terms. Despite having advantages in successfully terminating the war several times, the Truman Administration never recognized the favorable conditions.

Side-payments did not enter into the Clinton Administration’s handling of Somalia, since there was not wide recognition that the US should initiate a settlement term search. Negotiations were crucial in the US’s early success, but were under-resourced by both the US and the UN by the spring of 1993. After the Battle of Mogadishu, the US was deliberate in seeking negotiation possibilities though disentanglement was its primary concern. Before then, the lack of a unifying system precluded development of a rational position.

*Hypotheses Assessment.* I found strong evidence to support the hypotheses made in Chapter 3 in the case studies. The deviations in the structured questions examined above from what was expected did not substantially alter the predicted outcomes. The first hypothesis held that increasing alternative interpretations of battlefield information also increased the likelihood that the foreign policy executive would receive the “rational” policy recommendation. In Nixon’s case, there was never a single clear best alternative, but the debate did generate improved understanding of costs and benefits and the president was able to arrive at a rational choice through the material provided in an advisory setting.
The evidence in Truman’s case suggests that a modification to the hypothesis is called for by adding at its end: “provided the alternative interpretations are not similarly biased.” Simply having different perspectives is insufficient to recover the maximal level of information available to the executive in the bureaucracies. This addition is only a small clarification, since the term “alternative” should indicate unlike biases. However, the fall of Pyongyang generated alternative interpretations of its meaning. Intelligence services assessed that the war was basically over and that the North could no longer provide organized resistance. MacArthur barely considered its meaning at all, focusing instead on his inability to decisively engage the North’s army while assuming that was necessary for the war to end. The fall of the capital simply indicated a dramatic victory was close and he should therefore pursue the defeated force north. The Truman Administration’s problem was not the availability of information, but its unwillingness to consider its true implications.\textsuperscript{6} This would have been accomplished more thoroughly had advisors with different biases (such as George Kennan) remained part of the advisory circle. The deliberate suppression of information and options in Johnson’s case drastically demonstrated the effects of a more limited range of perspectives.

The second hypothesis indicates that the resolution rules will either assist or prevent the president from arriving at a rational policy position. Effective rules will enable proper Bayesian updating while ineffective rules will lead to decisions based on biased interpretations. Kissinger’s role in the Nixon system was unique in comparison to the other cases in that he was the most powerful of the security advisors. Lake enjoyed a great deal of freedom in Somalia decisions, but the US’s commitment was much lower than that of Vietnam. Although the narrowing of alternatives sometimes took place before the president officially considered them,

Kissinger was faithful in forwarding most of the dissenting opinions for inclusion. He clearly attempted to tip the scales in the direction of his favored policy, but not through the type of intervention witnessed in McNamara’s actions.

Hypothesis 2a was applicable in Truman’s and Clinton’s cases, and indicated that aggregation of institutional preferences would lead to unrealistic demands. In Truman’s case, aggregation of similarly-biased advocates led to the evolution of war demands to the drastic unification objective. There was none of the deliberate accommodation across agencies, however, that was originally posited. Instead, aggregation took place through widespread optimism among the advisors with access to the president. Skepticism on the conduct of the war, primarily in the JCS, was not voiced due to the practical worship of MacArthur in both government circles and the general public.

In Clinton’s case, aggregation occurred due to neglect by the highest levels of government which enabled concerned organizations to pursue their preferred policies. Little attention was given by any organization to the potential costs associated with their actions. The UN’s insistence upon executing peace-enforcement operation ensured that the US would have to sustain a level of commitment that it was uncomfortable with. Washington assumed it would be able to withdraw from military operations relatively soon, but did not assess whether or not the actions being taken were sufficient to create the conditions the UN desired. Similarly, the UN did not seriously consider whether or not the assets it had were capable of achieving its expansive vision. Military commanders proceeded with what they understood to be the best chance of bolstering the UN’s position, while never assessing how far they would allow “mission creep” to take them. The perverse incentives in the situation allowed a disorganized aggregation
of preferences to develop into a highly irrational policy. Clinton’s claim that Somalia was his “Bay of Pigs” was accurate.

Hypothesis 2b was applicable in Nixon’s and Johnson’s cases, and indicated that narrow selection among available alternatives would result in policy determined by competition among the relevant advisors. In Johnson’s case, that competition took place below the level of the president. Bureaucratic battles during his administration were legendary; poor civil-military relations and the unique personality of Johnson created competition that was detrimental to good policy. Rather than competitive analysis, the administration had competitions to exclude analysis. The heavy-handed editing of the Vietnam Working Group’s report is the clearest example of this and it was directly responsible for denying the president crucial information early in the process. In a more systematic example, players were unable to discern the source of the insurgent’s strength in the South because they failed to recognize that the insurgency was becoming more indigenous as they restricted their options and information search around graduated bombing.

In Nixon’s case, the selection of alternatives took place much closer to the president; either in direct discussions or through Kissinger’s NSC staffing. Bureaucratic infighting was not completely eliminated, as there were complaints about the backlog of decisions that tended to build up. The centralization of so many decisions took a toll on the efficiency of the system for many of the more routine decisions that did not require the extensive consideration that the war did. Concerns about Kissinger’s manipulation of information were warranted a few years into the Nixon Administration, but Nixon demonstrated on several occasions that Kissinger’s recommendation was not the automatically accepted option. The debates that took place in such close proximity to the president were beneficial in airing information on multiple sides of an
argument. The final decision did reflect the preferences of the relevant players in the latter stages of debate, whether the president took the consensus option (as in Duck Hook), selected a single option among several (as in the Christmas Bombings), or integrated several options into one course (Linebacker I, where the debate was particularly heated).

There was no strong evidence that contradicted these hypotheses. In some instances, the bureaucratic politics was not as central as originally thought, but was predictably exacerbated under some circumstances. Additionally, organizational preferences were not as strongly represented in specific settlement terms as they were in the type of actions taken. For example, Nixon provided access to a wide variety of participants when making decisions that would drive military actions, but consulted few people on negotiation terms.

**Alternative Explanation Assessment.** There were two alternative explanations explored to provide accounts of a state’s ability, or inability, to update appropriately. Evidence in favor of rejecting these accounts was stronger than the evidence for accepting their predictions for any particular case. These explanations were powerful only within confined circumstances and in no situation did they provide a compelling explanation for multiple decisions in an administration. The predominant president model would indicate that information search and policy selection would primarily be driven by the executive’s preferences, with strong indications of accommodating the wishes of a supporting coalition. A psychological explanation of a state’s inability to update appropriately would find the primary cause of errors in faulty heuristics utilized in information search and the role of personal bias in predisposing decision-makers to particular decisions.

The predominant president model was strongest in accounting for Nixon’s declining to escalate the war under Duck Hook and Truman’s continued support of MacArthur even as
Truman lost control over US policy. In both cases, the president was unable to locate an alternate supporting coalition to change policy. Advisors were unanimous in recommending against Duck Hook and in their continued support of MacArthur. Likewise, the public had no appetite for increased commitments in Vietnam and held MacArthur in high regard. Making decisions that jeopardized their supporting coalitions would have been very risky for both presidents.

At the same time, this model was unsuccessful in accounting for Nixon’s decisions to proceed with Linebacker I and Linebacker II and in accounting for Truman’s willingness to allow the military to accumulate such extensive battlefield risks. Public opposition to escalation of the Vietnam War remained a constant during the Nixon Administration and there was public backlash when it occurred. Presidential advisors were also against some of the specifics of the Christmas Bombings and Easter Invasion retaliation, particularly when it risked the US’s progress in talks with the Soviet Union. There was no clear supporting coalition the president was attempting to accommodate. Further, Nixon proceeded with these options even though he initially was not inclined to take them. The executive’s preferences did not drive option development. Similarly, Truman’s support of MacArthur to satisfy his supporting base did not need to extend to risking the military progress made by the early fall of 1950. After being advised by MacArthur that the fall of Pyongyang would end the war at Wake Island, Truman could have intervened, trumpeted MacArthur’s success for the sake of preserving his coalition, and halted military operations before venturing too close to the Chinese border. Truman was simply not “predominant” in the decisions after the initial commitments to South Korea’s defense were made.
The evidence in Johnson’s case is also weak for the predominant president and completely absent in the Somalia situation. Johnson was very reluctant to commit to the use of force in Vietnam but allowed the recommendations of his advisors to carry the day. Further, his frustration with the limited options he was receiving (increased bombing) should have led to a more extensive information search. According to this model, decision-making should improve as the president’s willingness to engage in such a search increases. Despite his interest in this, it never actually occurred. The president was forced to choose among the poorly developed and assessed options provided by his advisors. Once he recognized the policy was not improving the situation, a predominant president would be able to change course while building a base of support. In Clinton’s case, presidential neglect and the absence of any coalitional interests that would explain decisions fail to provide any support for this approach.

There was a great deal of evidence supporting the psychological model in individuals acting as advisors to the president. This is consistent with the expectation of this dissertation that bias in the system is rampant. There was little evidence that these psychological biases were causative in a consistent manner. For example, Nixon’s decision on Laos can easily be attributed to a psychological bias that was created by the precedent of Cambodia’s invasion that affected all advisors. However, Nixon’s biases as the primary decision-maker did not influence policy in other instances. He did not routinely rely upon the assessments of advisors with whom he agreed and he set aside his own reservations on some decisions based on the arguments of his staff. Importantly (and thankfully) his inclination to use nuclear weapons at points in the war was overcome by other recommendations.

There were more extensive psychological elements at work in the Johnson Administration, though they cannot account for specific choices. NSAM 288 biased the policy
search in Vietnam by identifying a democratic Vietnam as the US’s ultimate goal. Additionally, lost opportunities in Korea predisposed the group toward deliberate action as they wanted to avoid weak responses to communist aggression. Reinforcing these elements was the faulty domino theory. But these cannot explain how the administration converged on a single option of increased bombing when it was not the president’s preference, when the JCS held little hope of achieving desired results, when Westmoreland’s recommendations were discounted while he was claiming increasing levels of success, or when two detailed war games conducted by the Pentagon undermined the “Rostow Thesis.” There were a wider variety of options available to the group in terms of courses of action, even if psychological bias can account for the group’s unwillingness to reconsider its termination demands. NSC-68 had a similar effect on the Truman Administration in its initial decisions. Later, the heuristic shortcut of military necessity would predispose support of MacArthur’s forceful advocacy of any demand.

Ultimately, the psychological explanation fails to provide convincing accounts of the varying outcomes. Why did biases that were present in both the Nixon and Truman Administrations prove to be so devastating in one case and controllable in another? While being predisposed to a certain understanding of the war’s context can account for initial decisions made in that war, it is less useful in explaining modification of demands or policies in a comprehensive manner once the war has begun.

**Other Case Study Observations**

This section discusses some of the additional observations made about the role of the advisory process and a state’s ability to recognize and integrate relevant information. The discussion on the role of psychological bias above and the varying effects of bureaucratic bias in

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7 The idea that graduated bombing would eventually compel the North to settle at the bargaining table.
the cases indicate that the origin of the bias is not as important in accounting for specific decisions as the manner in which those biases are either reinforced or controlled by the process. The literature has traditionally treated psychological explanations as a way to explain errors when other accounts are insufficient. The false dichotomy between a rational choice and a mistake due to psychological limitations is created when works treat the state as a unitary actor. By focusing on the process that leads to a state’s unitary policy choice we can better understand what conditions exacerbate psychological bias, intensify bureaucratic infighting, or enable more rational choices. By recognizing that psychological bias and bureaucratic struggles over policy are ever-present, it is more useful to examine when they dominate the process.

Second, endogenous bargaining was more successful when the state’s leaders treated the bargaining and battlefield actions as a tightly linked process. In Nixon’s handling of the Vietnam War, battlefield information was used to revise demands that were offered at the table while fighting continued which led to further revisions. In Johnson’s handling of the same war, the administration was viewing this as a two-step process. From their perspective, they would first create the correct conditions in the war, and then fighting would end once the other side agreed to come to the bargaining table. This proved to be an ineffective approach as the battlefield never supported the desired settlement terms and never led to a negotiation. Furthermore, there was no discussion of what options they had if the North refused to accept settlement terms even if they did come to the table. If information from both the battlefield and negotiation table is important in converging upon a bargain as discussed in Chapter 2, then the state is at a disadvantage when it never begins these talks. Bayesian updating will be more effective when the state has access to both sources of information.

Third, there was some evidence that domestic politics was influential in some of the timing of decisions on the wars, but less evidence that it necessarily changed the substance of decisions. For example, Truman was interested in demonstrating success before the mid-term elections and this may have pre-disposed him to accept the risky Inchon plan. After the elections, it is difficult to explain why the war continued so far north since the benefits of success were already secured. Nixon was also concerned about forcing the North back to the bargaining table when he launched the Christmas Bombings before Congress came back into session. Fearing they would curtail funding for the war, he pushed for an aggressive campaign. However, most advisors were recommending some form of bombing (with the exception of Laird), so it is likely that this would have been the course of action regardless. It was simply more advantageous to conclude negotiations quickly.

**Policy Implications and Advice to the President**

This dissertation has made some initial claims about the role of perspective plurality and selection strategies in facilitating proper belief updating in decisions aimed at war termination. This section will explore implementation of these findings. Clausewitz’s warning to consider the type of war being embarked upon at its beginning applies equally to the need to consider the evolving possibilities for terms and conditions while fighting continues. The exogenous purpose for which the war was waged will remain, but will be changed by the endogenous events that create opportunities as well as prohibit them. The failure to understand the nature of the war being fought has led to some of the most spectacular failures in military history.\(^9\)

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George suggests that presidents require advisors to satisfy cognitive needs, as well as provide support in making and implementing difficult decisions.\textsuperscript{10} This paper has focused on the first, but has also noted ample evidence that the reasons for seeking support among advisors can dramatically affect the quality of information processing. For example, a president who seeks reassurance in these situations because of emotional requirements may rely upon a small number of advisors with whom he is comfortable. The number of advisors consulted may be further curtailed in extremely stressful and momentous decisions.\textsuperscript{11} Since these are the very decisions that require the highest quality information, this tendency will put the president at a disadvantage.

Wars provide the most interesting context to assess presidential decision-making not only because of the stakes involved internationally, but also because of the unique combination of advice required to wage war effectively. The challenge with war termination is that it requires a close integration of both political and military expertise; these are areas in which practitioners are likely to hold very different world-views. In administrations with poor civil-military relations, it is unlikely this integration can be done effectively if the opinions of the leaders of the military branches are not heard. The very act of conducting the difficult process of mutual questioning of assumptions can lead to hostility between civilian and military leaders. Since all participants are expected to have a bias regardless of its origin, open debate is the only method to force reevaluations and ensure all participants receive the benefit of new information introduced. As discussed in Chapter 3, an individual can overcome the bias of another individual only through becoming an expert in the subject matter at hand so that flaws in reasoning can be

\textsuperscript{11} Ibid., 83.
pointed out. This problem is lessened when a leader can rely upon the wisdom of the relatively small crowd to better control unwarranted optimism.

The balance of the civilian and military advisors in the decision meeting is also worth consideration. The best decisions examined in this dissertation occurred when several military leaders are involved in debating options. This is because those leaders are not similarly-biased. For example, the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs will have different interests and perspectives than the commander in the theater of war while the Army’s Chief of Staff will have different recommendations than the Chief of Naval Operations. In cases where only one military leader was involved (such as the case of Somalia) decisions were made with much poorer information. Relying upon the “military solution” is a misnomer; there are many dimensions of any military action that require a variety of expertise. When political decisions are made on war and its termination, this expertise is required to find the best possible combination of military methods to generate the conditions sought for political bargaining.

The advantages gained through such a process come at a cost of efficiency. The administrator of the system (e.g., the national security advisor) should determine early the rules that control what type of decision will require the open debate and routine reassessment before the pressures of the situation encourage a narrow selection of advisors. Although some of this is established in the early national security memorandums, the practice of decision-making rarely conforms to the ideal type described in these aspirational documents. The process is also challenged to establish an upper limit of advisors before it becomes too unwieldy. The numbers observed in more effective decisions suggests that between five and ten are manageable. It is not necessary for all to have equal time in presenting their cases, only that all have equal opportunity
and freedom to question opinions they disagree with and can present facts that support their own position.

Presidents and advisors must also carefully consider at what point endogenous information becomes more important than exogenous beliefs. Reluctance at the strategic level to acknowledge that sunk costs may have been unnecessary or even futile can be a powerful incentive to avoid reexamining the political incentive behind the war at its outset.\textsuperscript{12} An ideal rational actor may be able to ignore sunk costs theoretically, but politicians faced with domestic opposition and precarious supporting coalitions will lend them a great deal of weight. Downward revision of demands is difficult, but possible when alternatives are considered that open side-payment possibilities. Likewise, the president must be cautious when allowing endogenous information to lead to expansion of termination demands.

Two of the cases provide strong evidence that citing the costs of inaction as a justification of any policy is likely to skew a rational net assessment, unless there is an advocate for the status quo that points out its benefits. Johnson’s Administration made poorer decisions when they believed they had to act simply because failing to do so was too costly. The rational response to the assertion that “something has to be done” is “why?” Even if action is called for when the alternatives are clarified, this crucial first question can call some faulty assumptions into question. In single-stage decisions, the effects of framing are more dominant, particularly when information is new and has not been subjected to sufficient competitive analysis. Once these decisions are made based on this incorrect frame, participants will be less likely to return and question those assumptions because they are personally invested. The inclination to quickly “do something” prevents adequate alternative development and slows effective updating.

\textsuperscript{12} Murray, \textit{Military Adaptation in War}, 320.
The cases also show that presidents should avoid intentional accommodation of preferences among his advisors. The tendency to aggregate is understandable since it ensures the executive secures broader support for any given choice, which is preferable from the president’s perspective. However, Truman’s case showed that this can both provide more power to similarly-biased advisors in the process and lead to excessive settlement terms an opposing belligerent is unwilling to accommodate. Reciprocal retaliation among advisors through public exposure of faulty assumptions is preferable to reciprocal agreement among those advisors for the president. This second situation can lead to a classic groupthink scenario. Janis described nine prescriptions to control a dominant bias in a group decision situation, and all rely to some extent on competitive analysis and mutual questioning.\textsuperscript{13} He closes this section with the observation that widespread agreement on a course of action is an indicator of a lack of understanding. Decisions intended to generate widespread agreement among advisors is a faulty approach.

Strategy is an implicitly rational endeavor: it assumes that desired ends are achievable through the correct application of military force, diplomatic engagement, and political assessments. It is clearly hampered in practice by irrational dismissal of crucial evidence, inadequate examination of options and assumptions, and poor political guidance. All of these were observed in the case studies and were created by the decision process. Strategy also requires assumptions based on performance: it is only possible to realize what is achievable \textit{ex post facto}.\textsuperscript{14} If the decision-making processes do not return to assess information generated by the war, a state’s rationality in the conflict will deteriorate quickly as decisions are driven by considerations other than the state of the battlefield.

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Further Research

This section briefly returns to some of the gaps in knowledge identified in Chapter 2 and suggests opportunities for further research that may assist in filling these gaps. The endogenous bargaining model of war was the primary source of this dissertation’s puzzle. With greatly expanded abilities to collect and analyze information in this modern age, how can war continue to occur? Mutual optimism is one possibility, but the bargaining literature that relies so heavily on rational choice is generally unable to account for the source of this mutual optimism. The mechanisms described here examine one side of the bargaining process in war and suggests that the advisory process itself can account for unwarranted optimism. Analyzing war from both belligerents’ perspectives with special attention to these advisory functions may generate insight on the sources of mutual optimism.

Secondly, the bargaining model is also challenged to account for war duration. This dissertation suggests the rate at which information is revealed from a neutral standpoint may not be as important as how effective both sides are at recognizing and making effective use of that information. A study of two belligerents’ advisory systems and the rate at which they are able to recognize the value of important information in modifying their beliefs would lend support to this. Situations in which advisors continue to emphasize exogenous goals on both sides would be more likely to prolong war. Of special interest would be the case of one effective updater facing an ineffective updater. How does a state that recognizes a war should end conduct itself when facing an opponent that does not recognize this?

Third, this dissertation’s theory indicates that there may be more convincing mechanisms to account for variation within like-regimes in terms of their ability to conduct war effectively and change policies appropriately. To date, several works have indicated the degree of
repression in a state is responsible for this while leaving aside variation in similarly-structured political systems. Even within a repressive state where a leader can face stiff penalties for failure, the quality of the information he receives should affect performance predictably. This places a greater burden on research to distinguish between information that was recognized but not used because of domestic political constraints and information that was never recognized in the first place due to poor information systems.

Fourth, the bargaining model of war should handle more explicitly the origins of specific termination conditions. Assuming a common unit of value to enable trade-offs is insufficient to account for actual terms. If war is politics “all the way down,” then the internal bargaining on acceptable conditions should be of special interest. According to the theory described here, if an influential bureaucracy is unable to secure its preferences in a settlement, a war will likely continue. Winning a prolonged war in this situation may depend upon delivering a surprising outcome sufficient to expose biased assessments that are dominating the opponent’s advisory system. In a dyadic relationship, this would also indicate that advisory systems will affect how rapidly two sides are able to converge upon an acceptable bargaining space with appropriate offers. In some cases, these systems will lead to a state clinging to their unattainable exogenous goals.

The weakness of the bureaucratic politics approach has been in providing a convincing account of when it “matters.” The inflated importance it has attached to agents’ preferences has obscured that internal competition is a constant, but that it comes to dominate deliberations over war only under specific conditions. Providing access in advisory settings lessens bureaucratic behind-the-scenes maneuvering, but narrow option selection by the president intensifies overt competition which ultimately better informs the executive. This approach can strengthen its
predictive power by revisiting contingent explanations beyond distinguishing between “really important” situations where bureaucratic competition is less pronounced because the president is involved and “less important” situations where bureaucracies might have a freer hand.

This approach to examining the advisory process can also be applied in decisions other than war termination. That subject was chosen because of the large stakes involved, the two major sets of biases that were expected to be involved in deliberations (military and civilian/political), and the need to closely link the military and political elements to successfully terminate the war from a Clausewitzian perspective. This is a tall order that makes it a valuable area for research. However, there are a range of other presidential decisions that can be examined using the same approach and provide answers to other, more general, research questions. For example, how does decision-making process affect a president’s propensity to accept risk? Or, how do risk management and information flows affect the likelihood of failure?

*The Road Not Taken…*

The vast amount of information available to policymakers during war itself creates a puzzle in explaining why it is effectively utilized in some cases but not others. Information quantity also creates a challenge for researchers. Specifically, there is a great deal of it that is eliminated from the decision-making process prior to presidential consideration. Some of this is out of necessity, while two cases here indicate that it can also be out of deliberate choice by dominant players attempting to manipulate the system. How can a study identify when an executive is receiving sufficient information to enable rational choices? Were the options that

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15 George, *Presidential Decisionmaking in Foreign Policy*, 97.
were considered and discarded at low levels of various bureaucracies relevant in assessing the range of perspectives the president receives, or not? To an extent, where these options and assessments are narrowed matters in assessing the quality of the advisory process.

The best indicator of higher-quality processes should be a well-developed alternative that was never implemented but was considered by the president. This likely indicates that an earnest attempt was made to control bias in the system. In contrast, the bureaucratic trick of providing a “Goldilocks option” between one too big and one too small is clearly indicative of bias remaining in the system. In all likelihood, this middle road will be sufficient to secure the preferences of similarly-biased advisors while failing to meet the needs of the president. Open arguments that lead to clear losers in the policy advocacy game should indicate a high-quality process since they had strong incentives to present their best information that was supportive of their own preference and critical of the winner’s.

A second indicator that is necessary, but not sufficient, to control bias is a revisiting of battlefield assessments at the high levels of government. Multi-stage decision making has been shown to be superior to single-stage processes in controlling the effects of framing and bias. Assertions made by any member of the group may require some research by others to provide disconfirming evidence. McNamara dominated many decision meetings by providing an array of facts while advocating for a quick decision and then moving on to other topics in subsequent meetings. This prevented reconsideration of associated assumptions and resulted in poor decisions. Even if the substance of the policy is not changed by this revisiting, it will assist the president in understanding the true costs and benefits of any actions which were likely wrong in early assessments.
If war is politics “all the way down,” then intra-governmental competition must be recognized as an important component of that process. This study has shown that increased attention to this competition will enhance the bargaining approach and improve our understanding of the state’s varying ability to handle information effectively.


Lobell, Steven E., Norrin M. Ripsman, and Jeffrey W. Taliiaferro, eds. Neoclassical Realism, the State, and Foreign Policy. 1st ed. Cambridge, MA: Cambridge University Press, 2009.


