

Are bureaucracies
involved in foreign
policy making?



**ASSIGN
BUSTER**

In western democracies, especially UK and US, the role of bureaucracy in making policy is analyzed to understand its effective power in the decision making process: is bureaucracy a simple “armed arm” of the politics or it is completely involved in making policy? The foreign policy is not exempt from this debate and various authors spend their academic career trying to answer to this question.

The aim of this essay is to investigate under what circumstances, bureaucrats are passively involved in foreign policy or when they are actively part of the process of decision making. For these reasons the essay will be divided into three parts. The first part is entitled to analyze and explain the Allison’s model III (Bureaucratic Politics Model) based on the idea that the decision to follow a certain line in foreign policy is basically the result of bargaining between offices and bureaucrats in different positions of command. This theory is a masterpiece in the analysis of the impact of bureaucracy in foreign policy, consequently it is necessary to mention it. In the second part all the theoretical restrictions of the Allison’s model III will be shown and as result an alternative model will be provided. In the last part, all the theoretical assumptions emerged during the analysis will be tested according to two cases study: in one hand the relationship between US bureaucracy and Kissinger, former National Security Advisor (NSA) and head of the Department of State in the US administration; in the other hand the US Navy and the study of its internal bureaucracy.

By definition, bureaus are ‘non-profit organizations that are financed, at least in part, from a periodic appropriation or grant... bureaus specialise in providing goods and services that some people prefer in larger amounts than

<https://assignbuster.com/are-bureaucracies-involved-in-foreign-policy-making/>

would be supplied by their sale at a per-unit rate' (Niskanen 1973: 8). They are usually financed by a government department which is financed by tax revenues.

The term bureaucrat will be used to describe ' any full-time employee of a bureau... nearly synonymous with civil servant... [it] will be used to define the senior official of any bureau with a separate identifiable budget...these bureaucrats may be either career officials or directly appointed by the elected executive' (Niskanen 1973: 11).

* * *

The Allison's model called Bureaucratic Politics analyses the foreign policy decision making process. The core of the Allison's model III is easily summarized in his words: ' bargaining along regularized channels among players positioned hierarchically within the government' (Allison 1969: 707).

The scheme predicts no unitary actor but rather many players focused on different problems. The governmental apparatus is led by political leaders who need to decentralize some of their functions. This process guarantees discretion on the hands of the subject in charge of that function. In foreign policy, different players opt for different solutions because of their perceptions and priorities. In doing so, decisions are the result of the triumph of one group over others. The axioms produced by the Allison's model III are many: governmental actions are the result of compromise and competition among public officials; ' players are men in jobs' (Allison 1969: 709) that means their tasks and obligations are related to the position they hold at that moment; within bureaucratic organization usually the bargaining is

driven by parochialism, that influences internal priorities, perceptions and <https://assignbuster.com/are-bureaucracies-involved-in-foreign-policy-making/>

issues; each player has a reasonable probability of success according to the effective power in his/her hands; ' each decision has critical consequences not only for the strategic problem but for each player's organizational, reputational, and personal stakes' (Allison 1969: 710). Moreover, bargaining is possible only in certain channels and its results are not the consequence of individual rationality but rather the sum of different intentions (Allison 1969).

Through the study of the UK and US foreign policy decision making process, it is possible to identify those elements present in Allison's model III in order to understand how they are implemented in practice.

' Formal responsibility for the conduct of British foreign policy rests with the Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs and under him the FCO' (Wallace 1975: 21). This vision would be limited until we do not recognise also the importance of overseas missions home departments, the Prime Minister, the Cabinet, others ministries and officials. In fact, in UK foreign affairs if the policy-making process in lower levels is in the hands of the Foreign Office, for what we consider high policy we need to add the interference of other member of government (with their personal relationships and prejudices) and small group of interests. With the exception of situations of emergency, the decisions are taken into formal channels (e. g. intergovernmental relations, negotiation of treaties and representation abroad) (Wallace 1975).

Daily foreign policy making process is, not only an activity related to the Secretary of State, but also to senior officials in important delegations, such as UN, NATO and UE, who ' effectively become part of the process of policy-making in their areas' (Wallace 1975: 36). Each home department has the

right to have one or more civilian attaché(s) in overseas missions because of their significant international interests. Traditionally, the most important ones are from the Treasury and the Ministry of Defence (MoD). FCO, Treasury and MoD ' had responsibilities overlapped with significant areas of high policy as well as low-level external relations' (Wallace 1975: 40). Therefore, one of the roles of the Prime Minister and the Cabinet is to pull together different instances and to coordinate the governmental action through the Home Civil Service, a permanent bureaucracy of Crown employees that support the national interest with the instances from private industries and public departments. ' Officials do their best to ensure that they " know their minister's mind" and to take his assumed preferences into account in formulating and implementing policy' (Wallace 1975: 51). They are considered the protectors of the public interest and they have a particular relationship with the politicians:

[i]It is very difficult to assess the relative impact of official advice and political direction on external policy...of course there is a difference in outlook between the official, whose professional career is foreign policy, and the minister, who must be more concerned with domestic politics, his constituency, his standing in the party, and the next election (Wallace 1975: 52).

However, the relationship between the politicians and their officials in some cases are affected by personal factors more than formal structures.

Consequently, foreign policy seems to be driven not only by the national interest but also by personal interest, energy, experience, expertise,

friendships, personality and preferences. Different opinions and different attitudes are reflected into different views within the government.

The making of US foreign policy is delegated to different actors. The President, the NSA with the National Security Council (NSC), the State Department, the Department of Defence (DoD) and the Intelligence Community (IC) are all of them directly or in part involved in the process of foreign policy decision making. ‘ The NSA’s organizational origins derive from the NSC system set up in 1947, and from the putative need for Presidents to have on their staff a manager and coordinator for foreign policy’ (Dumbrell 1997: 89). In fact, ‘[t]he NSA and NSC staff tend to be seen as flexible, responsive, relatively free of bureaucratic baggage, and sensitive to the President’s political and electoral interest’ (Dumbrell 1997: 92). The Secretary of State is the official governmental responsible for the making of foreign policy. Although its mandate is clear, it is progressively increasing the tendency for inter-departmental networks of influence to cut traditional institutional linkages. As pointed out by Dumbrell (1997: 97), for example, during the Cold war ‘ a militarization of diplomacy and a consequent endemic tension between the Pentagon and the State Department’ monopolized the policy-making process. ‘[T]he CIA was an institutional embodiment of the “ trend towards non-accountable, subterranean policy-making and security operation”’ (Dumbrell 1997: 102). Therefore, the CIA has to be considered a powerful instrument of foreign policy in the hands of the White House.

* * *

The Bureaucratic Politics Model is not exempt by critics.

<https://assignbuster.com/are-bureaucracies-involved-in-foreign-policy-making/>

Krasner (1972) claims that the Allison's model III is ambiguous and dangerous because in western democracies elected officials are responsible for the acts of government, not public ones. Merits and demerits of the governmental structure because of the implementation of weak policies or wrong ones is direct responsibility of the elected leader, and not of bureaucrats. Moreover, the model lacks in describing how policy is made because it does not consider adequately the figure of the President especially in the US system. Only the President has the power of the ultimate decisions, to choose most of the important players, to set the rules. That explains why even if his/her attention is absent, bureaus are sensitive to his/her values.

Neither organizational necessity nor bureaucratic interests are the fundamental determinants of policy. The limits imposed by standard operating procedures as well as the direction of policy are a function of the values of decision-makers. The President creates much of the bureaucratic environment which surrounds him through his selection of bureau chiefs, determination of "action-channels," and statutory powers (Krasner 1972: 169).

Another controversial point in the Allison's model is that it does not consider the possibility of failure, that is at the end of the process of bargaining the players could not take any decision. According to Krasner (1972) this outcome not only is common but also it reflects confusion over values which afflicts the society and the political elite. In the Bureaucratic Politics Model, this sort of confusion is not allowed because each player is certain about its priorities and parochial interests.

<https://assignbuster.com/are-bureaucracies-involved-in-foreign-policy-making/>

Bendor and Hammond (1992) indicate at least four weaknesses in the Allison's model III: the bargaining, the hierarchy, the ambiguity of the assumptions and the extreme complexity. The model suffers when it assumes that the bureaucratic actors have conflicting goals; often what is conflicting within a governmental organization is the beliefs about how to achieve those goals. Furthermore, it is not understandable why the President with all his/her powers has to bargaining with other officials and in doing so the model suffers in understanding the sense of hierarchy within the Executive Branch. The prepositions in the model often are claimed without scientific values, without data support and they seem to be generalizations without proof. After all, the complexity of the model is given by the amount of information necessary to verify it and the number of variables to consider.

Welch (1992) identifies the impossibility to test the Allison's model III as one of the main problem of the model itself. What is more, he is aware of two contradictions. The first one is related to the importance of the positions held by the players. According to Allison the position determines the preferences but at the same time the priorities in the mind of the actors are also dictated by their experiences and perceptions. The second one is related to how bureaucratic positions can influence the decision making process. According to Allison the position determines the power of the player but at the same time one fundamental aspect in the bargaining process is the personality.

Brady and Kegley (1977) criticize the literature about bureaucratic politics considered by Allison in his assumptions. Generalizations and lack of evidence seem to overemphasize the role of bureaucratic influences. In fact, bureaucratic influences should be explained as a component of the foreign <https://assignbuster.com/are-bureaucracies-involved-in-foreign-policy-making/>

policy decision making process and not the most important one. The way in which bureaucracy influence decisions is only in part related to parochial interests, as shown in situations of crisis, when each organizational position and the consequent process of bargaining is led by the common interest of combating or avoiding a threat for all the players.

Not only critics to Allison are necessary, but also the examination of an alternative model can help us in understanding strengths and weaknesses of that model.

Aberbach, Putnam and Rockman (1981) created a new model to explain the relationship between politicians and bureaucrats. In this case, the sophisticated model is not simply bureaucratic centric like the Allison one, but it is focused on four different outcomes called "images".

The first one is 'the simplest: politicians make policy; civil servants administer. Politicians make decisions; bureaucrats merely implement them' (Aberbach, Putnam and Rockman 1981: 4). Public officials are indispensable servants because of their competences and expertise. For Weber, this is the ideal relationship because the institutional functions of politics and administration are separated, but at the same time it is highly improbable because every governmental decision has political considerations and consequences. Authority, simplicity of decision and political supremacy are the potentiality of this image.

The second outcome 'assumes that both politicians and civil servants participate in making policy, but that make distinctive contributions. Civil servants bring facts and knowledge; politicians, interests and values'

<https://assignbuster.com/are-bureaucracies-involved-in-foreign-policy-making/>

(Aberbach, Putnam and Rockman 1981: 6). Division of labour and rationality are the main characteristics of this model.

According to the third image ‘ both bureaucrats and politicians engage in policymaking, and both are concerned with politics... whereas politicians articulate broad, diffuse interests of unorganized individuals, bureaucrats mediate narrow, focused interests of organized clienteles’ (Aberbach, Putnam and Rockman 1981: 9). In this case, it is unclear if the initiative comes from the bureaucrats or the interest groups. In any case, the more problematic issues cannot be addresses only by one part, however, during emergencies, the policymaking role of the civil service is irrelevant.

In the last outcome, ‘ the two roles have been converging – perhaps reflecting, as some have argued, a “ politicization” of the bureaucracy and a “ bureaucratization” of politics’ (Aberbach, Putnam and Rockman 1981: 16). This image has been associated with the expansion of executive agencies like the Cabinet in UK, the Chancellery in Germany or the White House in US, which have absorbed several political administrators. Bureaucrats and politicians are policymakers: the bureaucrats because indirectly manage the governmental apparatus by the implementation of decisions; the politicians are involved directly in policymaking activities.

* * *

The first case study demonstrates the failure of the Allison’s model in terms of bargaining and it confirm some critics present in Bendor, Hammon, Aberbach, Putnam and Rockman. ‘ The century’s most thoughtful and

practically effective critic of bureaucracy in foreign affairs, Kissinger had no taste or skill to do more than suppress it' (Strong 1987: 75).

Kissinger developed critics to the bureaucratic system because he was convinced that the only way to solve US bureaucratic problems was in decisions and actions exercised by politicians. When he was appointed NSA during the Nixon administration, ' they both preferred a system of foreign policymaking that would be centralized in the White House and dominated by the president and his personal advisers' (Strong 1987: 57). He modelled a new foreign policy organization, where a series of interdepartmental committees report to the Review Group (RG), chaired by the NSA who will present the topics to the President and the NSC. In such a system, the NSA was in the position to exercise all its influence over information and options and to manipulate the decision making process. He intended the bureaucracy as a source of information about important international issues. ' He wanted the maximum realm for personal choice in a policymaking environment where circumstance and bureaucratic practice almost always tended to reduce the opportunities for leaders to act' (Strong 1987: 61). The objective was to establish White House control over the making of foreign policy.

This model of foreign policy making process presents some problems: abuse of power by the NSA, no transparency, it is decision centric, it is run by small stuff which means limited capacity and probable superficiality in dealing with international issues. Scarce expertise, information manipulated, jealousies and ambitions can also affect the political considerations.

Also the second case study recommends the failure of the Allison's model in terms of bargaining and it confirms some critics present in Welch, Brady and Kagley. In this case the 'outcomes cannot be predicted on the basis of parochial interests and the distribution of bureaucratic power' (Rhodes 1994: 3).

The US Navy is considered one of the most traditionalist military corps of the US. For this reason, internal and 'external observers have long argued that bureaucratic parochialism within the navy has strongly influenced national decisions over national force posture – that is, decisions regarding kinds and levels of naval forces' (Rhodes 1994: 3). The main Chief of Naval Operations (CNO) is the highest uniformed officer and he is responsible for ruling inter-departmental competition for funds. In fact, all the three components, that is aviators, submariners and surface ship members try to drive the navy's force posture. The CNO with his personal experience and bureaucratic baggage is supposed to reflect his membership to one of the components, while he is ruling. According to Allison, in fact, he has a substantial interest in force the posture of Navy in favour of his unit.

Analyzing the data available in the forty years between 1950 and 1990 when the Navy had 12 CNOs is possible to deduce that 'the identity and objectives of the principal bureaucratic interest groups, inside and outside the navy, have remain constant' (Rhodes 1994: 21).

This bureaucratic model suggest that state behaviour is far from being based on competing interests. The assumption "where you stand depends on where you sit" failed in front of the evidence that what they think is

independent of where they sit. The outcome suggest that instead of parochial interests we should talk about parochial sets of ideas. Except for moment of crisis, the internal trends of a bureaucratic organization tend to remain unaltered across time despite changes in the decision makers' environment. ' Given the weight of evidence that parochial loyalties... has been dominant in determining naval force posture, the findings from this case give us considerable reason for scepticism about any generalized claims that bureaucratic politics are critical in shaping state behaviour' (Rhodes 2004: 40).

According to the cases study presented, the Allison's model III and its attempt to explain state behaviour is suitable for routine and standard decisions. It lacks in predicting outcomes because its strength is describing the intra organizational bargaining. As mentioned by Rourke (1972), the influence of bureaucracy on the foreign policy decision making is not so relevant as Allison tries to demonstrate. Bureaucracy can adopt policies in its interest but when it is in charge to translate political decisions into actions, it is merely following the intentions of the decision-maker. However, it has limited possibilities to influence presidential decisions because political players can easily reduce its power to a subordinate status. Smith and Clarke (1985), focus on the aspect of policy implementation: they affirm that in the process of foreign policy decision making it is important how a certain decision has been implemented, not only how it was taken. The Bureaucratic Politics model tends to have an implicit notion of implementation because it takes it for granted, and this is an unforgivable mistake because usually decisions are ambiguous, therefore all the power is in the hands of those

subjects involved in the execution. Only the bureaucracy has the power to control and monitor the outcomes. For all these reasons, in analyzing bureaucracy behaviour, academics should focus on the implementation because it explains the relationships between the decision making process and the results. The Allison's model III (Allison and Halperin 1972) argue that, through the bargaining, bureaucrats are protagonists of the decision making process in foreign policy. Looking at the model in depth, it has been demonstrated how the model can basically give us a dimension of the governmental interactions between hierarchies but it cannot anticipate the outcome. Certainly, it describes the rationality in achieving parochial interests but the results cannot be predetermined a priori.

* * *

Bureaucrats are servants and masters in the foreign policy making process and during the phase of implementation because even if they know intentions, structures and process of bargaining, it is impossible to foresee the final outcome. Definitively, their behaviour is goal oriented but it is impossible to calculate all the information and variables necessary to achieve that goal. For these reasons, the Bureaucratic Politics model cannot assure definite results. With no doubt, the Aberbach, Putnam and Rockman's model is more appropriate in describing the decision making process, but it is not specific for foreign policy outcomes.

The power of bureaucratic organizations over foreign affairs has been exaggerated even if they have the power to channel decisions into practical policies and they are increasingly involved in the administration of the foreign affairs. There is no doubt about the pulling and hauling in <https://assignbuster.com/are-bureaucracies-involved-in-foreign-policy-making/>

governmental debates but it does not affect the presidential choice. If there is no direction or control from the top, then obviously a bureaucratic paradigm is essential for analyzing the foreign policy process; then, decisions are truly the resultants of governmental mechanics. But if there is central control from the top, then the mechanics make no difference.