Changing Course: When Governments Choose to Redirect Foreign Policy

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We are in a period of profound change in international relations and foreign policy. These developments call attention to the state of our knowledge about change processes in governmental decisionmaking. This essay reviews the contributions of several areas of conceptual literature and proposes a scheme for interpreting decisions in which a government decides to change policy direction. Foreign policy changes can be placed on a continuum indicating the magnitude of the shift from minor adjustment changes, through both program and goal changes, to fundamental changes in a country's international orientation. These degrees of change are examined with respect to four change agents: (1) leader driven; (2) bureaucratic advocacy; (3) domestic restructuring; and (4) external shock. The phases of decisionmaking mediate between sources of change and the magnitude of change in policy. The essay concludes with an examination of propositions that suggest conditions under which the phases of decisionmaking can increase the likelihood of major change.

Introduction

Change is a pervasive quality of governmental foreign policy. Although no era is immune to dramatic changes in world affairs, we are living in a period with numerous remarkable examples. The countries of the European community have committed themselves to an integrated, single market by 1992. Spain and several previously authoritarian governments in Latin America have begun new experiments with democracy. Regional conflicts in southern Africa, Afghanistan, and between Iran and Iraq have undergone promising shifts toward conflict reduction as a result of major changes in the foreign policies of the involved parties. Of course, to many concerned

with East-West relations, an air of excitement and anticipation has resulted from the prospect of profound changes in the relationship between the United States and the Soviet Union and in the domestic upheavals in Eastern Europe. As Hoffmann (1989:84) has observed: "There are periods of history when profound changes occur all of a sudden, and the acceleration of events is such that much of what experts write is obsolete before it gets into print. We are now in one of those periods."

The prospect of fundamental change in the relationship between the western allies and the communist nations illustrates the importance of making concerted efforts to understand profound social, economic, and political change and the conditions that foster them. The severe antagonism, threats, and confrontations of the Cold War have structured much of international relations for the last four decades. Foreign policy agendas not only between East and West but between countries in each alliance and between developed and developing nations have often been driven by Cold War concerns. At least for some governments, other problems have been indefinitely deferred or reinterpreted into East-West security issues.

For those of us concerned about Soviet-American relations, the recent changes raise basic questions: How profound are the changes underway? How will policymakers and others recognize that they are indeed fundamental and not mere window dressing? If the problem that has preoccupied security and foreign policy issues since World War II is being transformed, what is the nature of the new problem or problems? As Allison (1989) recently noted, if the Cold War ends, it poses a major challenge: "Perhaps most difficult of all, we will have to think again, to stretch our minds beyond the familiar concepts and policies of containment." The conceptual reorientation to which Allison refers is an integral part of any fundamental change of course in foreign policy.

Changes that mark a reversal or, at least, a profound redirection of a country's foreign policy are of special interest because of the demands their adoption poses on the initiating government and its domestic constituents and because of their potentially powerful consequences for other countries. Wars may begin or end. Economic well-being may significantly improve or decline. Alliances may be reconfigured. Sometimes the entire international system is affected, as when the Cold War began after 1945. Many of these dramatic changes in course occur when new governments with different perceptions of the environment and new agendas come to power. The current changes in the Soviet Union are an example. At least initially the changes have been associated with the emergence of Gorbachev and his associates. A basic question for the future is whether the changes would continue if Gorbachev no longer held power.

In fact, there may be a tendency to conclude that regime change is virtually the ony way to achieve profound shifts in a nation's foreign policy. Reflection, however, will reveal cases in which the same government that initiated a course in foreign policy recognizes that significant changes must be undertaken. After engaging in war with Israel, President Sadat of Egypt dramatically changed direction with his trip to Jerusalem. The administration of Lyndon Johnson, after having Americanized the Vietnam War, changed course and began to negotiate U.S. withdrawal.[1] Fidel Castro of Cuba, once an advocate of the export of revolution by military means, changed his mind. President Nixon, who for most of his career saw a monolithic aggressive

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[1] Some debate exists as to when, if ever, President Johnson changed course with regard to the Vietnam War. Karnow (1984:493–94, 565–66) notes that Johnson authorized negotiations with the North Vietnamese in 1967, although it is unlikely that he was prepared to reverse his administration's policy on the war at that time. It is more defensible to argue that Johnson had shifted his position by the end of March, 1968, when he announced he would not seek another term as president. Negotiations with the North Vietnamese did open in May 1968 in Paris, with the United States essentially calling for mutual withdrawal.

communist movement, initiated a dramatic change in United States policy toward China. Under what circumstances do these kinds of changes occur in which an existing government recognizes that its current course is seriously inadequate, mistaken, or no longer applicable? What are the conditions under which self-correcting change may arise? The answers to such questions have important practical and theoretical implications for the study of foreign policy. This is so not because major changes in foreign policy are always changes for the better—clearly they sometimes are for the worse. These issues are important because of the magnitude of practical consequences they generate for people and institutions and because understanding the conditions for change poses one of the most difficult theoretical problems for scholars and policymakers alike.

Defining Major Foreign Policy Change

Both the foreign policy and the international system perspectives have much to contribute to our understanding of change. This essay examines change from the perspective of the actor in the system; that is, it deals with foreign policy change. Let us be clear about other ways in which this essay is focused and bounded. Reference has already been made to the distinction between foreign policy redirection that results from regime change or state transformation, and change that occurs when the existing government elects to move in a different policy direction. We are concerned here with the latter—what might be characterized as self-correcting change—when the current actors change their course in foreign policy.

Just as Hereclitus observed that we cannot step in the same stream twice, so also is a government's foreign policy constantly changing—usually with minor adjustments or modifications in nuance. Our concern is not with such changes, but rather with fundamental redirections in a country's foreign policy. Establishing what constitutes fundamental foreign policy change poses many challenges.

Beginning with the concept of foreign policy, let us stipulate that it is a goal-oriented or problem-oriented program by authoritative policymakers (or their representatives) directed toward entities outside the policymakers' political jurisdiction. In other words, it is a program (plan) designed to address some problem or pursue some goal that entails action toward foreign entities. The program presumably specifies the conditions and instruments of statecraft.

With this definition, foreign policy can be viewed as subject to at least four graduated levels of change:

(1) *Adjustment Changes.* Changes occur in the level of effort (greater or lesser) and/or in the scope of recipients (such as refinement in the class of targets). What is done, how it is done, and the purposes for which it is done remain unchanged.

(2) *Program Changes.* Changes are made in the methods or means by which the goal or problem is addressed. In contrast to adjustment changes, which tend to be quantitative, program changes are qualitative and involve new instruments of statecraft (such as the pursuit of a goal through diplomatic negotiation rather than military force). What is done and how it is done changes, but the purposes for which it is done remain unchanged.

(3) *Problem/Goal Changes.* The initial problem or goal that the policy addresses is replaced or simply forfeited. In this foreign policy change, the purposes themselves are replaced.

(4) *International Orientation Changes.* The most extreme form of foreign policy change involves the redirection of the actor's entire orientation toward world affairs. In contrast to lesser forms of change that concern the actor's approach to a single issue or specific set of other actors, orientation change involves a basic shift in the

actor's international role and activities. Not one policy but many are more or less simultaneously changed.

At different times, U.S. policy toward Vietnam illustrated all four levels of change. Following the defeat of the French in Indochina and the separation of North and South Vietnam, the United States Government pursued a goal of keeping South Vietnam independent of North Vietnam and aligned with the United States. In the late 1950s and early 1960s the American policy to pursue that goal involved military and economic assistance to South Vietnam, including American military advisers. The increase in military assistance during this period would be defined as adjustment changes. With the introduction of American combat forces in 1965, a program change occurred, followed by further adjustment changes as the level of American military effort increased. The determination to return the fighting gradually to Vietnamese troops and withdraw American forces marked a second program change. A goal change occurred when American policymakers concluded that the continued ability of the South Vietnamese to resist the North Vietnamese forces was questionable, and when the U.S. elected to accept that outcome rather than reintroduce American combat forces.

Whether the highest form of foreign policy change—international orientation change—occurred is more debatable. It can be argued, however, that after the collapse of Vietnam, the United States experienced at least a decided shift in its willingness to use large-scale force in its conduct of foreign policy. Together with its changing relative economic status, this produced a decline in its hegomonic leadership role. Certainly increased caution with respect to the use of force altered American policies toward Angola, Central America, and the Middle East. It is unclear whether the invasion of tiny Granada represents the end of this American reluctance to use force or simply further evidence of the lopsided military advantage that the United States must have before it will introduce force.

In this essay major foreign policy redirection will be defined as the last three forms of change—that is, change in means (program), ends (goal/problem), or overall orientation. Reliable empirical differentiation is not always easy. In program change, however, one would expect to find changes in the configuration of instruments, in the level of commitment, and probably in the degree of expressed affect. All these developments, plus policy statements and policy actions incompatible with prior goal or problem stipulations—if not open rejection of prior goals—accompany goal/problem changes. International reorientation involves dramatic changes in both words and deeds in multiple issue areas with respect to the actor's relationship with external entities. Typically, reorientation involves shifts in alignment with other nations or major changes of role within an alignment.

We can now inquire about the conditions that promote major redirection in foreign policy; that is, changes in program, changes in goal/problem, or—even more drastically—changes in international orientation. At least four areas of scholarship, to some degree located in different academic fields of inquiry or disciplines, can potentially contribute to this exploration. They are (1) domestic political systems, (2) bureaucratic decisionmaking, (3) cybernetics, and (4) learning.

Some Applicable Areas of Scholarship

Domestic Political Systems

At the core of this perspective on foreign policy change is the assumption that the rulers and their regime, that is, those who create governmental foreign policy, depend for their continuance on the support of certain constituencies. Constituencies, as defined here, are those entities whose endoresement and compliance are neces-

sary to legitimate and sustain the regime. They may be members of a ruling political party (or a faction within it), the political clients in a client-patron system, a dominant religious or ethnic group, military officers, major land owners, interest groups and associations, or the leaders of key sectors of society.

Changes in the policy preferences or in the dominant alignment of these constituencies, or—more drastically—changes in the nature of the political system itself (such as in who constitutes constituencies or in the relationship between them and a regime), presumably trigger changes in foreign policy. Certainly the nature of the political system and its relationship to constituencies strongly influence the way in which changes in that system affect foreign policy. Boyd (1987) differentiates the way political change must operate in Third World states, in large communist systems, and in industrialized democracies (separating the last category into post-industrial societies, pluralistic political economies, and neocorporatist political economies). In most studies of political change, however, the focus has been on a single country, most often on the United States. In the American case the emphasis has been on such topics as public opinion, interest groups, political parties and opposition, elites or, at a slightly different level, on coalitions and social/economic cleavages (see Almond, 1950; Cohen, 1973; Hughes, 1978; Holsti and Rosenau, 1984). After reviewing the political change literature pertaining to three countries (United States, West Germany, Soviet Union), Goldmann (1988:44) concludes that three dimensions influence the extent to which foreign policy is likely to change:

1. The degree of institutionalization, or roughly the extent to which the government has become committed to the policy.
2. The degree of support, or roughly the extent to which the various actors in domestic politics support, are indifferent to, or oppose the policy.
3. The degree of salience, or roughly the significance of the issue in the domestic power struggle.

Domestic politics may affect foreign policy through several different dynamics:

1. Issues become a centerpiece in the struggle for political power. Competing political leaders and their supporters use a foreign policy position to differentiate themselves from opponents. If those out of power succeed, then the foreign policy changes. Alternatively, an existing regime may change its foreign policy to distinguish itself from opponents or to prevent defeat.
2. The attitudes or beliefs of the dominant domestic constituents undergo a profound change. Attitude change becomes the underlying source of explanation and some profound stimulus presumably creates a realignment in the views of many.
3. A realignment occurs of the essential constituents of a regime, or a revolution or other transformation of the political system takes place. Thus, for example, when a military junta seizes power from civilian political parties, the relevant constituencies change. After the fall of the Shah, the entire political system changed in Iran. The results are similar to those described in item one, except that foreign policy is a consequence of political realignment rather than the centerpiece. Also, a change in the system is always necessary in this case, whereas in item one the threat to a regime's continuance may be enough to cause it to change policy. It is important to recognize that restructuring or transforming the economic system also can be a source of foreign policy change.

Bureaucratic Decision Making

The premise of the bureaucratic source of foreign policy change is that contemporary foreign policy—even in small, weak, or authoritarian governments—tends to be conducted by individuals in organizations. Information and intelligence is collected

and analyzed by individuals, usually professionals, working in governmental organizations. Options and choices are made by ministers, agency heads, cabinet members, or their representatives, and policies are implemented by one or more government departments. Thus, to understand foreign policy change, it can be argued, one must examine the bureaucratic conditions governing the policy process.

Intriguing evidence for the importance of this source of foreign policy change comes from eight case studies assembled by Holsti (1982a). Holsti and his associates examined nations that changed their foregin policy alignment (through shifts in isolation, self-reliance, dependence, or diversification). These regimes engaged in the most far-reaching type of change as categorized in this essay. Among the various external and domestic sources of explanation the authors considered, only one factor was regarded as a powerful explanation of change in seven out of the eight cases: the decisionmaking variables of personality and perception (Holsti, 1982b:211). In the eighth case this factor was judged to have been somewhat less powerful, but was still rated a "moderately significant explanation." (The next most frequently cited source—non-military threats—was noted as a powerful explanation in only four of the eight cases.).

Juxtaposed to the Holsti studies that found decisionmaking variables to be a major source of foreign policy change are other works which suggest that the structure of governmental organizations and the nature of political leadership normally act to resist change. Etheredge (1985) reviewed a series of American foreign policies toward Central America. From his analysis of American political processes and institutions as well as political leadership, Etheridge responds negatively to the question posed by the title of his book: *Can Governments Learn?* Goldmann (1988) develops a broader framework using "stabilizers" that operate to maintain the direction of a government's policy once established. Goldmann (1988:54–62) accounts for the continuation of policy by positing "administrative stabilizers."

The theoretical insight of these studies is that any foreign policy change must overcome normal resistance in political, administrative, and personality structures and processes. Among these resisters to change, bureaucratic inertia and standard operating procedures were frequently cited. Of course, the studies of foreign policy change and those concerned with resistance to change are not necessarily contradictory—we simply have not yet postulated with specificity those conditions under which the resisters are overcome and the foreign policy redirected.

To extrapolate further from the bureaucratic decisionmaking literature may be risky. I am struck, however, that Holsti (1982b) found in cases of successful foreign policy realignment that personal qualities and shifts in perception were powerful explanations. Furthermore, the only factors he cited as resistant to policy changes were bureaucratic initiatives that operated in two of the eight cases. The importance of decisionmaking structures and processes seems confirmed by Holsti's work as well as by the resistance studies of Etheredge (1985) and Goldmann (1988). We might infer that change in established foreign policy will normally be resisted by various structural elements of government, and the greater the shift the stronger the resistance. Thus, program changes will be easier to adopt than goal/problem changes, which in turn will be easier to achieve than reorientation changes in policy—where resistance will be greatest. To overcome organizational resistance requires the presence of key individuals with the knowledge and the ability to circumvent normal organizational constraints.

Cybernetics

Cybernetics and control theory approaches to dealing with change, of course, have developed elsewhere (see Wiener, 1948; Ashby, 1954; Ashby, 1956), but they have attracted periodic interest from those concerned with foreign policy (see Deutsch,

1966; Steinbruner, 1974; Miller and Thorson, 1977; Marra, 1985). An essential feature of these approaches is that an agent, attempting to pursue some standard or goal, continuously monitors a select stream of information from the environment that indicates where he is in relation to that goal and how the relation has altered across intervals of time. The agent engages in incremental self-corrective action in an effort to close on the goal or remain in close proximity to the standard. This process accounts for the association of cybernetics with the concepts of information (feed-back) and control (steering).

The elaboration of such a process would appear to be attractive for interpreting adjustment changes in policy. The system of control might also be extended to cover program changes as well. It is precisely to pursue a goal or to keep performance within acceptable boundaries with respect to that goal that basic cybernetics seems most applicable. The specification of appropriate indicators for monitoring feedback and then initiating new actions parallels what has been characterized as maintaining a foreign policy plan or program. Of course, this is not the kind of major change we seek to understand.

A key problem in the cybernetics of complex systems is the means of dealing with discontinuous changes in the environment. What happens when the conditions that have prevailed up to a given point suddenly change so that the previous indicators become inadequate or no longer apply? Imagine Europeanists who in the early 1950s thought the way to achieve greater integration that included West Germany in an acceptable fashion was through the creation of a European Defense Community. They monitored activities that would be important for achieving that goal and took corrective steps to ensure that the process remained on track. Then the French National Assembly rejected the idea. The environment had changed. Other correc-tive steps to establish and maintain support for a European Defense Community in other countries were no longer applicable. Can cybernetics handle such major envi-ronmental changes?

The international environment in which most foreign policies operate is a very large system with enormous uncertainty. Ashby (1956:244) has suggested that the challenge for cybernetics is not normally size itself but "the variety in disturbances that must be regulated against." Simon (1968) and others have suggested that an approach to the problem is to decompose the environment into various subsystems that are hierarchically arrayed—presumably according to the priority of one's goals. Marra (1985:361) constructs a cybernetic model for U.S. defense expenditures using the umbrella goal of survival, which he divides into a hierarchial set of subgoals:

> In the context of the US defense expenditure policymaking process the concept of "survival" is neither limited to nor primarily concerned with the physical continuation of various decisionmaking groups. Survival can and does encom-pass many different dimensions: e.g., national survival, political survival, fiscal survival, survival in a bureaucratic sense, etc.

Policymakers attend to the highest priorities first: if everything is currently satis-factory with the highest ordered goal (national survival, for example), then they can move to the next level (political survival, for example). If feedback indicates trouble with performance in that area, then policymakers scan key subareas within the do-main of political survival (such as satisfaction of support groups or strength of opposition) until the area of the problem is identified. Then corrective measures are attempted.

This would appear to be the area of cybernetics with the greatest promise for exploring the kind of major changes that are of current concern. It would seem to postulate a decision system that can order goal preferences, recognize challenges to each, and shift effort accordingly. That may impose a very demanding set of require-ments on most foreign policy systems.

Learning Approaches

Currently, considerable activity is underway in psychology and cognitive science in an effort to understand learning processes. The general approaches of a generation or so ago—associated with names like Hull-Spence, Skinner, and Mowrer—in many respects have been replaced by a variety of more specific learning problems and alternative explanations. Instead of general principles about reinforcement of responses through reward or punishment, researchers now have advanced alternative conceptualizations addressed to different kinds and methods of learning. A common point of reference among these varying approaches is the idea that learning involves the acquisition of some new skill, ability, or knowledge that can be recalled and used on some future occasion. Thus, change does not always imply learning. This assumption of acquisition can be contrasted with cybernetic approaches where corrections are performed according to previously established rules or operations.

Humans are expected to learn how to do a great many different kinds of things, from riding a bicycle to solving algebra problems, from forming ways to get along with family members to negotiating successfully with representatives of different cultures over vital issues in dispute. At the present stage of scholarship different models of the learning process have been advanced for understanding different types of activities (see Glaser and Bassok, 1989). Perhaps most relevant to foreign policy change are models for solving complex, ill-defined problems lacking any correct answer. Problem-solving in this context is presumed to involve the organization and management of structures of knowledge about different domains, which a person assembles as a sort of road map or schemata. It also involves the ability to make inferences from that knowledge. Learning entails not only the acquisition of knowledge, but also the restructuring and modification of existing schemata. Schemata can be envisioned as a series of mental models that a person uses to interpret experiences and that enables the individual to cope with them. Learning can involve various operations on these mental models, such as adding, deleting, and merging—that is, processes that restructure them (see Stevens and Collins, 1980).

What triggers new learning? Again, different theories exist. Perhaps one of the most basic explanations is failure. One's mental model does not adequately explain experiences; coping is impaired. But beyond the recognition of failure is the need to account for how new knowledge is acquired to revise or replace existing schemata. Are repeated trials or exposures necessary? Must there be some kind of pattern-recognition? Or can the observation of a single case provide the basis for what is called explanation-based learning (DeJong, 1988)?

Learning in the form of problem solving may be quite instructive in considering major foreign policy change. Leaders may replace goals in foreign policy or the means for achieving them as a result of a basic restructuring of their own schemata about the problem or the policy designed to address it. Thus, better understanding of the conditions under which such reformulations occur could have significant payoffs. Furthermore, as will be suggested below, the research on problem solving may be instructive in considering the stages of decisionmaking that foster significant foreign policy change.

Insights From Literature Review

Abstracting broad conclusions from such diverse literature risks serious misrepresentation. Nevertheless, it may be instructive to offer a personal perspective suggested by these areas of research.

In the domestic political system, two things are necessary to effect change in foreign policy. First, there must be a change in that system and, second, that systemic

change must trigger a change in the government's foreign policy. One of the changes that would fulfill these requirements is a fundamental alteration in the attitudes of most members of the politically relevant segments of society. In the United States, such changes have included shifts in beliefs as to what countries posed the greatest threat to American security in the mid to late 1940s, and in evaluations of the merits and costs of the Vietnam War effort. Attitudes may now be changing with regard to whether there is likely to be a continuing Cold War with the Soviet Union. There are other ways by which political system changes affect foreign policy. Among them is the transformation of the entire political system, including the political-economic system, as when a society moves from an agricultural-based economic system to an industrial one.

In what have been characterized as studies of bureaucratic decisionmaking, major foreign policy change appears to depend on mobilizing sufficient specialized human talents to overcome or circumvent the organizational structures and processes committed to the maintenance of existing policy. It is little wonder, therefore, that political scientists and others adopting this framework tend to conclude that major foreign policy change most often occurs with a change in government accompanied by the appearance of new leaders. New leaders are sometimes best able to create organizational changes and make key new appointments.

Cybernetics, which can readily capture adjustment changes, can also interpret more profound reconfigurations. What must occur for major change, however, is the activation of some kind of "meta regulators" that move policymakers from one problem to another or to higher goals necessary to maintain the system. In non-mechanistic terms, it is not obvious what these regulators are. Perhaps they entail powerful political and social forces capable of setting and resetting agendas and of redistributing the government's effort and priorities.

Finally, learning approaches suggest that major foreign policy change can occur when key policymakers who are confronting a problem restructure their mental models or schemata of the problem. This can lead to a redefinition of the problem or to a new understanding of the relationship between it and their policies.

These different areas of inquiry can be seen as suggesting different sources of major foreign policy change. I have labeled these sources of change leader driven, bureaucratic advocacy, domestic restructuring, and external shock.

Leader driven change results from the determined efforts of an authoritative policymaker, frequently the head of government, who imposes his own vision of the basic redirection necessary in foreign policy. The leader must have the conviction, power, and energy to compel his government to change course. Anwar Sadat's decision to pursue a peace settlement with Israel following the 1973 war illustrates this source of change. It would be instructive to explore whether Sadat underwent some significant reconceptualization of his problem with Israel that contributed to this dramatic shift. Certainly learning approaches might well provide insight into changes triggered in this manner.[2]

Bureaucratic advocacy as an agent of change may seem a contradiction in view of what has been described as the resistance of bureaucratic organizations to major redirection of policy. The suggestion is not that an entire government becomes seized with the need for change, but rather that a group within the government becomes an advocate of redirection. This group may be located in one agency or scattered among different organizations but with some means for regular interac-

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[2] Auerbach (1986) proposes a cognitive framework to account for turning-point decisions that entails first a perception of failure that generates dissonance, which then can result in attitude change and a decision to change policy. It is possible, but not certain, that Sadat viewed the 1973 war as a failure.

tion. To be effective, the advocates have to be sufficiently well placed to have some access to top officials.

Unless the evidence from the external environment is very dramatic, officials in the middle levels of government may be in a better position than their superiors to receive signals that current policy is not working. They also may have the advantage of a keen understanding of how the government works and what, therefore, must be done to overcome resistance. For these reasons, the decisionmaking approach can be an important means of interpreting the necessary conditions for bureaucratically induced change. The Canadian government's move for greater independence from the United States in the early 1970s appears to be an example of change generated at least partially in this fashion. In his case study, Holsti (1982c) attributes major importance to groups within the Canadian government. At one point he notes that "it is clear that initiative lay with two subdivisions of the Department of External Affairs and that the Cabinet basically *responded*" (Holsti, 1982c:97, emphasis in original).

Domestic restructuring refers to the politically relevant segment of society whose support a regime needs to govern and the possibility that this segment of society can become an agent of change. In writings on American foreign policy and domestic politics much has been made of the breakdown of the Cold War consensus on the basic goals of policy following the Vietnam War, Watergate, and the political activism of the sixties and early seventies. More narrowly, one might link sharp reductions in the American foreign agricultural aid program—with its supports for American farmers—to the change in rural and urban demographics and to Supreme Court rulings insisting that all Congressional districts represent roughly equal numbers of people. These trends eliminated the powerful Congressmen with high seniority from rural districts who engineered such aid programs. In different political systems the dynamics of domestic restructuring will vary, but at their core is a common theme: Foreign policy redirection occurs when elites with power to legitimate the government either change their views or themselves alter in composition—perhaps with the regime itself.

External shocks are sources of foreign policy change that result from dramatic international events. Presumably most foreign policy change results from a perception by government leaders of some change or initiative (or lack of it) in the external environment. Normally these events are hardly traumatic. Typically, their scope is modest; they may be ambiguous; their immediate impact is limited. In short, unless they are repeatedly reinforced by other events, most foreign stimuli are easy to miss, misinterpret, ignore, or treat routinely. By contrast, external shocks are large events in terms of visibility and immediate impact on the recipient. They cannot be ignored, and they can trigger major foreign policy change. The Vietnam Tet Offensive, Sadat's visit to Jerusalem, the 1971 action of the Nixon Administration to terminate the convertibility of dollars for gold and devalue the dollar are all examples of external shocks. In each case major events contributed to significant foreign policy change in one or more governments. With a cybernetic approach such cases represent the kind of feedback that would trigger foreign policy system regulators for monitoring and coping with discontinuous change. Accordingly, they would appear to be candidates for explanation from this conceptual approach.

Obviously, there is likely to be interplay between these sources of foreign policy change. They may work in tandem, or one (such as an external shock) may activate another (a leader driven initiative) which in turn creates the redirection of foreign policy. Just as the actual agents of change may interact with one another, so also may it be possible to integrate some of the theoretical explanations that provide the underpinning for various interpretations of change.

Consider a final observation from the review of various approaches to the explanation of change. All the material examined seems explicitly or implicitly to assume

that change is driven by failure. The inadequacy of an existing schemata to account for some critical experience forces the individual into a learning mode that may lead to a restructuring of his or her mental model. Information that existing policy is not performing properly motivates advocates of change in a government and serves as ammunition in their struggle with the bureaucracy. Realignment of the domestic system often results from large-scale discontent with the existing government or the failure of the system to meet the demands of present or newly powerful constituents. Particular types of negative feedback or discrepant information must trigger the overarching cybernetic control system.

If one assumes that the redirection of foreign policy must result from explicit decisions to change course, then a shared task for each theoretical perspective is to determine how information about failure or potential failure enters the decision system and under what conditions it actually triggers major change.

An assumption of this essay is that governments change their foreign policy through a decision process. Up to this point we have considered various degrees of change in policy that need to be explained and we have proposed various agents of change. But intervening between agents and change is decisonmaking. At the risk of implying a more linear relationship than is likely to exist, the linkage can be diagrammed as follows:

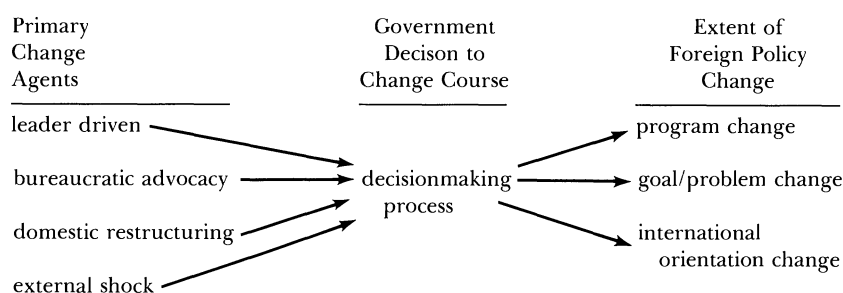| Primary Change Agents	Government Decison to Change Course	Extent of Foreign Policy Change
leader driven		program change
bureaucratic advocacy	decisionmaking process	goal/problem change
domestic restructuring		international orientation change
external shock		

FIG. 1. The mediating role of decision processes between change agents and degree of policy change.

In other words, to effect a change in governmental foreign policy, agents must act on the governmental decision process. The decision process itself can obstruct or facilitate change. To pursue the possible theoretical underpinning of foreign policy change one step further, let us consider stages of the decision process and the conditions under which discrepant information (information about possible failure) can produce decisions to alter the course of foreign policy.

Decision Making Stages in Changing Policy

Foreign policy begins with a problem—a threat or opportunity—that motivates concern. Typically, foreign policy problems can be characterized as what Simon (1968) and others (such as Reitman, 1965, and Voss and Post, 1988) have called "ill-structured" problems. Ill-structured problems, as contrasted with those that are well structured, are not clearly defined at the beginning of the decision process. The boundaries or dimensions of the problem are ambiguous and the preferred goal or outcome may be vague. Much of the effort of policymakers must be devoted to defining the nature and implications of the problem. For example, it will be necessary to determine from a great deal of potentially relevant information, what will actually be required to define the problem. In the process of structuring the prob-

lem, the basic nature of a possible solution will be increasingly constrained. Problem solving of this sort—and of course we are speaking of a continuum—has substantially different properties from that associated with well structured problems. Research on the distinctions between such problems continues, and could be important for our understanding of the conditions for fundamental foreign policy change. For significant change in policy to occur, the decision process must operate to promote actively a reformulation and to overcome the usual resistance. We must conceptualize the decision process for the management of foreign policy problems so as to gain insight into how changes in course occur.

The stages of decisionmaking have been variously conceptualized (see Mintzberg, Raisinghani, and Theoret, 1976), but perhaps more important than any particular configuration of the sequence is the recognition that the process is not linear. For major problems, decisionmaking frequently involves cycles and pauses rather than an orderly process in which each stage occurs only once and always leads directly into one subsequent step until an outcome is reached. With that caveat in mind, let us consider a possible configuration of the phases of the decision process and suggest what developments at each stage are necessary for major change to occur. The seven proposed stages are:

1. Initial policy expectations
2. External actor/environmental stimuli
3. Recognition of discrepant information
4. Postulation of a connection between problem and policy
5. Development of alternatives
6. Building authoritative consensus for choice
7. Implementation of new policy

Phase 1: Initial Policy Expectations

Changing course in foreign policy assumes an a priori foreign policy. Any enumeration of the decision stages in foreign policy change must include the policymakers' existing expectations concerning the effects to be produced by the existing policy. These expectations form standards against which the policy's performance can be evaluated. What had the policymakers anticipated their existing policy would achieve with respect to the problem confronting them? When a major power provides economic assistance to a developing country, what results do the donor country's leaders expect? Will it reduce the immediate suffering of the recipient's population? Will it provide necessary infrastructure to improve the economic growth of the recipient? Will it induce the recipient government's loyalty to the donor or the greater loyalty of the recipient population to its government? Will it be widely recognized at home and abroad as a generous humanitarian act? Obviously, how the policymakers characterized the original problem when the policy was adopted shapes their expectations for the policy's performance—the policy should solve the problem or reduce its effects. Alternatively, it should realize an opportunity.

If the original problem is poorly specified, then it is unlikely that the expectations for policy can be very clear. If disagreements continue to exist among policymakers over the course they should be following, even after the policy is initiated, then various policymakers may hold different expectations. Furthermore, if subsequent events negate certain expectations, policymakers may then consciously or unconsciously shift their expectations to emphasize other outcomes that cannot be characterized as failures. However characterized, policy expectations, generated either by the policymakers themselves or imposed upon them by others, create standards for subsequent judgments of success or failure.

Several propositions about the effect of expectations on the conditions that can lead to change suggest directions for possible inquiry.

(a) The more clearly specified and articulated the problem, the more likely are the expectations for policy performance to be specific and clear.

(b) The more clearly specified the policy expectations, the less ambiguity arises in judging whether the policy fulfills or fails to fulfill the expectations.

(c) When policy expectations are not fulfilled, policymakers tend to change expectations for the policy or to attribute its lack of success to external events.

(d) The more numerous the agencies of government who must agree upon a policy for its adoption and implementation, the more policy performance expectations will be general and nonspecific and the more likely are the expectations to be multiple and not necessarily consistent. Also, the more numerous the agencies, the greater the resistance to acknowledging policy failure.

(e) If policy expectations are specific and the effects of policy publicly visible, then it is more difficult for policymakers to avoid the evaluation of the policy against those expectations.

(f) The shorter the time between the implementation of policy and observable actions by the objects of the policy, the more likely are the policymakers to attribute the actions to their policy—to see a causal linkage: conversely, the greater the time between implementation and the object's action, the less likely is the behavior to be attributed to policy.

Policy can be changed for various reasons (for instance, its success may eliminate any further need for it), but if one invokes cybernetics or a form of failure-induced learning to account for change, then the policymakers must accept some kind of causal connection between what their policy will do and the state of the problem of concern to them.

Phase 2: External Actor Responses and Other Environmental Stimuli

In any information-based interpretation of foreign policy change, developments arise in the environment—most likely they are unexpected—that produce a stimulus for examining an existing policy. The international occurrence may be a direct response to the original policy or a completely independent event that can be understood to have implications for that policy. In addition to activities by the intended objects of an actor's policy, there may be actions by third parties or natural events that transform the problem. The effectiveness of the United States grain embargo against the Soviet Union following its invasion of Afghanistan in late 1979 was influenced not only by dissent on the part of some of America's allies, but also by previous good weather in several parts of the world that resulted in bumper grain crops. Some foreign policy changes require joint action, and therefore cannot occur without the appropriate external response. For example, Sadat's trip to Jerusalem required the consent of the Israeli government.

Most important is the characterization of the external stimulus as it affects the actor's policy and its purposes. Is it consistent or inconsistent with the actor's policy expectations? Does it pose a threat or an opportunity? Is it time-urgent or open-ended?

To explain a decision to change policy, the characteristics of the environmental stimuli must be understood in terms of how they are perceived by policymakers. The following propositions are offered to that end:

(a) Stimuli from the environment that are discrepant with the actor's policy are more likely to occur when that policy threatens the interests of other actors.

(b) Stimuli from the environment that are discrepant with the actor's policy are more likely to occur when that policy expects major commitments from other actors.

(c) Stimuli from the environment that are discrepant with the actor's policy are more likely to occur when that policy is perceived by others to be ambiguous in its expectations or require resources that others do not believe they can allocate.

(d) Stimuli from the environment that are discrepant with the actor's policy are more likely to occur when that policy requires action in concert by several other actors.

(e) Stimuli from the environment that are discrepant with the actor's policy are more likely to occur when that policy creates demands that are inconsistent with existing norms, principles, and structural arrangements governing those to whom the policy is addressed.

Phase 3: Recognition of Discrepant Information

External stimuli serve as cues or signals that potentially form feedback to the policy-makers. Presumably when an external development generates information that is inconsistent with policy expectations, or offers new evidence about the nature of the problem, it becomes a signal rather than background noise for the policymakers. The classic difficulty is whether the cue will be recognized and how it will be inter-preted.

Given that individuals and organizations must deal with potentially discrepant information all the time, the issue is when it becomes impossible to ignore it or accommodate it within an existing schemata. Of course, it may be possible to recog-nize that some difficulty has arisen that requires only some adjustment of the policy, but no major redirection. For major foreign policy change to occur, it is necessary for authoritative policymakers to conclude that their prior formulation of the problem, their mode of dealing with it, or both, no longer accomodate information received from the environment.

Some of the conditions affecting detection of environmental signals are suggested by the following propositions:

(a) Policymakers are more likely to recognize discrepant information concerning a policy if they anticipate that there is an available practical solution or if they are generally confident of their success in managing similar problems in the past.

(b) Recognition of a policy discrepancy is more likely if those in a position to monitor the environment do not have a personal or professional investment in the contin-uation of the present policy or if they have continuing reservations about its merits.

(c) Recognition of a policy discrepancy is more likely when the polity has multiple entities with differing missions that monitor the environment.

(d) Recognition of a policy discrepancy is more likely when the policymakers' sche-mata is not strongly connected to other major policies or to an ideological belief system.

(e) Environmental stimuli are more likely to be recognized if they involve extensive use of resources, persist over a period of time, are reinforced promptly by similar or parallel events, or come from a friendly or trusted source.

(f) Crisis stimuli (involving high threat, time pressure, and surprise) are more likely to be recognized than noncrisis stimuli.

(g) A government engaged in a crisis or coping with several major problems is less likely to recognize a stimulus offering an opportunity.

Phase 4: Postulation of a Connection Between Problem and Policy

If policy is to change, a critical step is the identification of a causal connection between the deepening problem and existing policy. The policymakers must conclude that their government's policy is either ineffective in dealing with the problem, making the problem worse, generating new problems of substantial concern, or costing much more than anticipated. Having committed themselves to the existing policy, government leaders may find it extremely difficult to perceive its flaws or failure. This widely acknowledged attribution bias suggests that policymakers will attribute success in foreign affairs to their policy, but will attribute failure to external factors (Tetlock and Levi, 1982). In cases of either failure or success, the connection between current policy and a foreign policy problem may be incorrectly drawn. Many developments in the international environment that occur after a policy is implemented are totally independent events, but they may be perceived as associated with the policy. Nevertheless, it is forging the connection—regardless of whether it is actually correct—that becomes essential if reevaluation of policy is to occur.

If a link between a problem and current policy has been drawn by policymakers, they may be inclined to look for explanations that are least disruptive to their existing schemata of the problem and their understanding of how their policy should affect it. Thus, they may attribute difficulties to the policy's implementation while preserving the policy goals and the problem schemata.

With these considerations in mind, we offer the following propositions:

(a) The shorter the time between the implementation of a policy and the recognition of subsequent difficulties with the foreign policy problem it was designed to address, the more likely are policymakers to perceive a causal association between them.

(b) Policymakers will more readily recognize a basic flaw in policy if they have made repeated unsuccessful efforts to improve the implementation of that policy.

(c) Policymakers are more likely to recognize a causal connection between existing policy and a foreign policy problem if that connection is advanced by a trusted and respected source or was forcefully disputed when the policy was originally being considered.

(d) Policymakers are more likely to recognize a causal connection between existing policy and a foreign policy problem if the goals of that policy are lower in a hierarchy of policy goals and if higher priority goals are being threatened by the problem—that is, if the problem threatens to disrupt more important goals.

(e) Policymakers are more likely to recognize a causal connection between existing policy and a foreign policy problem if discrepant information about the problem fits within the categories of some other problem schemata known to the policymakers.

Phase 5: Development of Alternatives

No matter what difficulties they may recognize with existing policy, if policymakers cannot find a means to reduce the problem then change is unlikely. For coping with a problem two broad approaches exist. First, there can be changes in policy intended to address the problem. Second, there can be changes in the definition of the problem.

The more frequently considered course is changing policy. To minimize the restructuring that people and governments must undergo, policymakers can be expected initially to explore ways of changing the conduct of the policy while retaining the original goals. More drastic change occurs when the goals of the policy themselves are rejected. In Vietnam, the United States changed its goal from retaining an

independent South Vietnam allied with the U.S. to withdrawal of American combat personnel under circumstances that would enable the South Vietnamese to continue waging the war. In such cases, a new set of goals will replace prior ones. In other difficult cases, the existing set of goals will be replaced by only vague ideas about the preferred new direction. A period of incrementalism follows.

If major reconceptualization of the policy occurs, then the representation of the foreign policy problem itself may come under examination. A problem may be redefined, or simply declared no longer to be a problem. Thus, the basic postwar security problem for the United States was at some point transformed from containing the Soviet Union to promoting peaceful coexistence.

One of two means to generate alternatives is search. Mintzberg and associates (1976) suggest that alternative solutions can also be developed by designing new options. Essentially, processes are undertaken to seek out already existing options that can be borrowed and applied directly, or in a readily modified way, to the present problem. The more laborious task—in most cases—of designing or inventing a completely new option is more likely when search routines fail to generate plausible options.

Illustrative propositions concerning change in this stage of the decision process include the following:

(a) Reexamination of the goals of a foreign policy and the definition of the problem they are intended to address occurs only when compelling evidence suggests that modifications of the policy itself will not change the situation.
(b) Internal actors without vested interests in the current policy and with knowledge of policy instruments other than those presently involved will more likely generate new policy alternatives that they can implement.
(c) More policy options are likely to be considered if they can be discovered through search routines than if they are designed especially for the present problem.
(d) The more sensitive to contextual information and the more conceptually complex are the policymakers who perceive a need for a change, the more likely are multiple options to be perceived.

Phase 6: Building an Authoritative Consensus for New Options

Philippine President Ferdinand Marcos enjoyed strong support from the United States Government until August 21, 1983, when Benigno Aquino was assassinated at the Manila airport as he returned from exile in America. As evidence mounted not only of the involvement of Marcos's government in the murder but also of widescale corruption, an increasing number of American policymakers turned against him. Evidence of the need to change American policy with regard to Marcos accumulated over the ensuing months. But President Reagan was personally close to Marcos and his wife, and no authoritative action could be taken to change U.S. policy until it had the support of the American president. Not until February 23, 1986, when President Reagan met in the Situation Room of the White House with his senior advisors— most of whom had been persuaded for some time of the need to withdraw support from Marcos—was the President finally convinced (see Karnow, 1989). A year and a half had been devoted to building the necessary consensus for a policy change.

In many cases in foreign policy, an authoritative consensus involves more than one policymaker but, regardless of the number, policy change cannot proceed until it has been established. The choice stage of the decision process has been one of the most thoroughly studied. Certainly this phase frequently triggers recycling back to early stages in an attempt to resolve differences. It is well understood that some of the means used to resolve differences in the choice stage can lead to bargaining and logrolling strategies that alter the direction, if not the very feasibility, of policy change.

Again, a few propositions illustrate the range of considerations that affect the likelihood of policy change at this stage:

(a) The more cognitively complex are authoritative decisionmakers, the more likely are they to be willing to consider alternative policies.
(b) When power is shared among multiple actors, consensus is more likely when all actors accept a common set of norms governing the political process and the political legitimacy of the other participants.
(c) The more ideologically similar are the policymakers who must approve a change in policy, the more likely will a consensus be reached on a change in policy.

Phase 7: Implementation of New Measures

The study of organizational behavior and bureaucratic politics emphasizes that the decisionmaking process does not end with an authoritative selection of some new policy. Unless the entire plan can be realized in a relatively simple act, such as a speech by the head of government, the process of implementation can alter the nature of the intended policy dramatically. If the previous policy had strong advocates even after a change in course has been ordered, or if there are powerful proponents of another option not adopted, then resistance to the new policy may manifest itself during implementation. Thus it becomes important to establish whether those individuals and agencies charged with carrying out a policy are fully committed to it.

Lack of strong commitment to new policy may not be the only difficulty in implementation. Equally important is whether the objectives and procedures required for implementation are clear and whether those charged with policy execution have resources sufficient to the task.

We return to where we began. What are the policymakers' expectations for the new policy? Are they clear as to how they expect the policy to alter the problem and have they communicated those expectations unambiguously to those who must implement the policy? Even more basic, has the problem that the policy is designed to address been well defined in the course of the policy process? Sometimes the old problem definition is rejected without adequate specification (particularly to others) of how it has been revised.

These observations invite a final round of propositions:

(a) The greater the participation in all stages of the decision process by those charged with policy implementation, the more likely are they to activate the policy in a manner consistent with the policymakers' intentions.
(b) The more specific and explicit are the policymakers' expectations for the policy, the more likely it is to be implemented in a manner consistent with those expectations.
(c) The more those charged with policy implementation are committed to the new policy direction and prefer it over previous policy (or other policy options of which they are aware), the more likely is the policy to be implemented fully in a manner consistent with the policymakers' preferences.
(d) The more consistent the new policy is with the a priori mission and with available resources of the implementing people and agencies, the more committed they will be to the execution of the policy.
(e) The more attention the top leadership gives to follow-up and review of new policy in the post-choice stages of the process, the more likely it is to be implemented fully.

Of course, a characterization of the analytical stages of the decision process that may be necessary for the emergence of a new direction in foreign policy does not

provide a theory explaining such changes. Nor do isolated propositions about the conditions in those stages that may foster major change offer such a theory.

What we hope to have provided here is a platform or orientation that may promote theoretical inquiry. For example, do various sources of change (and potentially associated theoretical approaches) primarily concern different stages of the decision process? Theories of leader driven change may address initial expectations and how the recognition of discrepant information results in a reformulation of the causal linkage between policy and problem. The concept of bureaucratic advocacy may focus attention—and suggest explanations for—the development of alternatives, the construction of an authoritative consensus, and the implementation of new policy. Theory focusing on external shocks invites further examination of external stimuli as well as of the policymakers' expectations that proceed them and the recognition that follows. In other words, various ways of conceptualizing the sources of change address various analytical points in the process of policy redirection.

Conclusions

My intent in this essay is to join the ranks of those urging attention to the conditions giving rise to major changes in foreign policy. We need a perspective that views major change not as a deterministic response to large forces operative in the international system, but rather as a decision process. Of course, major shifts in international political and economic systems can pose significant requirements for the modification of foreign policy. But policymakers can either anticipate these international changes, respond just in time, or only after suffering dramatic consequences. Furthermore, policymakers can act as agents of change in the absence of any overwhelming systematic force. "We would rather be poor and our own masters than slaves to a foreign power. We have sipped that bitter tea before" (quoted in Holsti, 1982d:105). Guided by these words, General Ne Win and his associates on the governing Revolutionary Council redirected Burmese foreign policy and plunged the country into deep international isolation. Their action was taken without any new international force compelling such change, but rather as the leadership's policy preference.

We may have entered a period of human history where not only is the rate of change accelerating in political, social, and economic arenas of domestic and international life, but where we are on the dividing line between epochs. The performance of existing policies to meet present and emerging needs must be carefully and creatively examined. Both the opportunities and the dangers that can result from failing to deal with the changes that beset us are too great to be ignored.

Under these circumstances it is not enough for those engaged in international studies and foreign policy studies to examine regularities and patterns of association under assumed conditions of ceteris paribus. We need a much more vigorous effort to characterize the conditions that can produce decisions for dramatic redirection in foreign policy. If there is a very real possibility that major dimensions of foreign policy may need to undergo significant change, then we scholars urgently need to improve our understanding of the conditions that can enable such changes as well as to promote the exercise of wisdom in the redirection of policy that may result.

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