Introduction

> The statesman is therefore like one of the heroes in classical drama who has a vision of the future but who cannot transmit it directly to his fellow-men and who cannot validate its 'truth'... It is for this reason that statesmen often share the fate of prophets, that they are without honor in their own country, that they always have a difficult task in legitimizing their programmes domestically, and their greatness is usually apparent only in retrospect when their intuition has become experience.[1]
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> Henry Kissinger, 1964

Henry Kissinger made this observation five years before being appointed Assistant to the President for National Security Affairs to President Richard Nixon, and nine years before becoming U.S. Secretary of State and arguably one of the most powerful men in world politics. One cannot help but admire his prophetic vision, as these words would eventually come to symbolise the legacy of U.S. foreign policy under the partnership of Richard Nixon and Henry Kissinger.

This book explores the making of American foreign policy during the Nixon years. More specifically, it is concerned with the mechanism of crisis decision-making during four major foreign policy crises between 1969 and 1974. To date, questions about the organisation of the foreign policy machinery and its impact on the making of foreign

[1] H. Kissinger, *A World Restored* (New York: Grosset & Dunlap, 1964), 329.

policy have been overshadowed by more descriptive accounts of the main achievements of the Nixon administration in foreign affairs. This is regrettable since broad lessons about the linkage between structure and process in foreign policy on the one hand, and the importance of leadership and personality on the other, can be learnt from the experience of the Nixon and Kissinger years – lessons which are particularly pertinent to foreign policy making during international crises.

The book reflects some four years of work supported by various research grants and fellowships, which enabled me to be among the first to examine the newly released collections of the National Security Council Institutional Files series at the National Archives in College Park, Maryland. Hitherto, the range of original material concerning the making of foreign policy during the Nixon years has been limited. The picture has now changed. We are no longer dependent on journalists' and participants' accounts. The recently released National Security Council (NSC) series (along with other collections) offers original, high-quality material that has never been seen before. These new findings form the founding stones of this book, as they allow us, for the first time, to construct a more comprehensive narrative of the making of the Nixon administration's foreign policy during international crises. Furthermore, the declassification of a vast amount of governmental records from that period at the National Archives in London has enabled me to examine the making of U.S. foreign policy from a multi-archival perspective.

The objectives of this book are two-fold: first, to examine how President Nixon reshaped the machinery of U.S. foreign policy upon entering the White House, with particular emphasis given to the reorganisation of the NSC; and second, to analyse the impact this restructuring had on the process of decision-making during international crises, which was designed to 'routinize' procedures and create a more familiar environment for policy makers. Stated differently, this book seeks to explain how the introduction of hierarchical, formalistic structures to the machinery of U.S. foreign policy affected the process of decision-making during international crises.

Importantly, this analysis assigns a central role to the cognitive make-up of the president and his national security advisor (NSA), Henry Kissinger. In the making of U.S. foreign policy, personality is often indistinguishable from institutional structures and behaviours,

and therefore any analysis of the achievements and failures in Nixon's foreign policy must be examined on both levels.

At the heart of this book is a study of the Washington Special Actions Group (WSAG) and its performance in international crises during the Nixon presidency. The WSAG (pronounced Wa-Sag) was an interdepartmental group within the NSC, tasked with anticipating, monitoring, and managing international crises and providing the president with the relevant information and advice. By examining the workings of the WSAG, this book will attempt to offer fresh analysis about the linkage between structure and process in U.S. foreign policy crisis decision-making.

The performance of the WSAG is analysed during four international crises: the incursion into Cambodia in the spring of 1970, the Jordanian Crisis of September 1970, the India-Pakistan War in December 1971, and the Yom Kippur War in October 1973. These four cases were not selected randomly. Primarily, the selection was driven by the availability of archival records. The population of potential case studies for this book is not unlimited. The research objectives require sufficient material evidence on the process of crisis decision-making to generate tangible generalisations. Other potential case studies, such as the Chile coup in 1973 and the Cyprus crisis of 1974, were rejected because they were not supported at the time of research by the kind of fresh, high-quality archival sources that the crises selected here can offer. Furthermore, all four crises are traditionally ranked highest in terms of threat to U.S. national security during the Nixon administration, especially with reference to the potential threat of war with the Soviet Union.[2] Moreover, crisis decision-making during the Nixon administration is examined here because it provides a range of well-documented cases for comparison. By contrast, fresh primary evidence on crisis decision-making of subsequent U.S. administrations is relatively scant. At the same time, already a large number of studies look at crisis decision-making during previous administrations, such as the 1962 Cuban Missile Crisis, the Berlin crises of 1948 and 1961, Suez, and Dien Bien Phu. Lastly, the four crises also offer diversity. Although

[2] G. M. Herek, I. L. Janis, and P. Huth, 'Decision Making during International Crises: Is Quality of Process Related to Outcome?,' *Journal of Conflict Resolution*, 31:2 (June 1987), 203–226.

the period under investigation in this book is relatively short, the crises are discrete in their geographic locations, their trajectories as individual crises, and indeed their management. Each of the four crises provides a different perspective on how the structure of decision-making constrained, or conditioned, the process of decision-making.

The invasion of Cambodia by U.S. ground forces in the spring of 1970, following an increase in Vietcong attacks from Cambodian sanctuaries, led to the expansion of the war in Vietnam into neutral territory. The domestic unrest in the United States which followed the invasion not only led to the withdrawal of the American troops within two months but also paved the way for the historic legislation of the War Powers Act, designed to restrict presidential power to deploy forces abroad without prior congressional approval. The management of the Jordanian Crisis in September 1970 was conducted under different circumstances altogether. This episode consisted of three distinct phases of crisis management as events in the Middle East unfolded. First, initial crisis assessments followed the hijacking of several western aircraft en route to Jordan by a Palestinian guerrilla group. Second, within a week, the process was complicated further as civil war ensued in Jordan between the moderate, pro-western regime of King Hussein and Palestinian guerrillas, backed by Syria and Iraq. The third phase of the crisis followed the invasion of Jordan by Syrian forces, an event which nearly triggered a direct confrontation between the two superpowers. The war between India and Pakistan at the end of 1971 provides perhaps the most telling account of the role of the Nixon-Kissinger partnership in setting the agenda and the process of foreign policy in the face of a dissenting bureaucracy. Known as 'The Tilt' because of Nixon and Kissinger's decision to support Pakistan despite the advice of the bureaucracy, this case also provides an interesting insight into the role of bureaucratic politics and cognition in the making of foreign policy decisions. The fourth Arab-Israeli war in October 1973 is unique because the process of decision-making was invariably constrained by the adverse domestic effects of the Watergate affair. Furthermore, it ultimately changed the balance of power between Nixon and Kissinger, thus cementing the emergence of Kissinger as the key actor in the U.S. foreign policy.

When examining these four crises as a continuous process of crisis decision-making, a rather telling pattern emerges. Notwithstanding the

obvious idiosyncrasies of each crisis, one would expect to see a common behaviour of decision-making, as the major variables – Nixon, Kissinger, the WSAG, and ultimately the NSC structure – remained constant. Furthermore, one would also expect to see an element of policy learning from previous crises – at least tentatively, the management of the India-Pakistan war, for example, ought to have been smoother and more efficient than that of the incursion into Cambodia.

However, this is not the case. Interestingly, the most consistent pattern of crisis decision-making during the Nixon administration is its inconsistency. Each crisis is characterised by a unique process of decision-making, almost regardless of the very clear, formalistic structure put in place by Nixon and Kissinger during the first year of the administration. While the president and his chief foreign policy advisor had a lucid concept of foreign policy and how to interpret its implementation into the organisational process, ironically, in some crises, it was exactly this rigid structure which frustrated the WSAG and prevented it from performing adequately.

Methodology: The Case-Study Approach

Case-study methods offer an invaluable contribution to the development of scientific knowledge. Their ability to cross-compare relatively detailed descriptions of events stands in contrast to some methodological shortcomings which can be associated with quantitative research.[3]

Any discussion regarding the research design of comparative methods must first answer the fundamental question, 'What makes these cases comparable?'[4] This question has bearing on the research design and, more specifically, the selection of cases. Despite the methodological and practical challenges that case-study research is often confronted with, it is by no means impossible to design, conduct, and analyse case

[3] H. Eckstein, 'Case Study and Theory in Political Science,' in F. I. Greenstein and N. W. Polsby (eds.), *Handbook of Political Science* (Reading, MA: Addison-Wesley, 1975), 79–138; A. L. George, 'Case Studies and Theory Development: The Method of Structured, Focused Comparison,' in P. Lauren (ed.), *Diplomacy: New Approaches in History, Theory, and Practice* (New York: Free Press, 1979) 43–68.

[4] Eckstein, 'Case Study and Theory in Political Science'; A. Lijphart, 'The Comparable Cases Strategy in Comparative Research,' *Comparative Political Studies*, 8 (July 1975), 158–177; G. Peters, *Comparative Politics, Theory, and Method* (New York: New York University Press, 1998).

studies effectively. As with other fields of social inquiry, the researcher should capitalise on the benefits of the approach but at the same time be aware of its limitations – most notably the fact that it is often unfeasible to apply quantitative, large-*N* methods to the study of foreign policy. Thus, the nature of the field and the relatively limited number of events and processes make the application of small-*N* comparative studies highly desirable. This book largely builds on Alexander George's method of 'structured, focused comparison.'[5] This approach views the treatment of a case as a process; the approach is 'focused' because it selectively examines the information relevant to the study according to the researcher's purpose; it is 'structured' because the comparison is controlled, and the same set of questions is asked of each case. The first phase in the process is designing the research (identifying the problem; specifying the requirements for case selection); the researcher then moves to examining the case studies according to the research design; and then develops the theoretical implications of the comparisons of the case studies.[6] While this method has been criticised for its lack of scientific rigour,[7] its advantages lie in its particular applicability to studies of politics and foreign policy in which processes and problems are limited in number, which render statistical, large-*N* research designs inappropriate.[8] George's method also offers the historical depth and patterns of generalisation which are often not accounted for by quantitative and deductive approaches.[9]

This book employs the case-study method to explain the impact of structural settings on the process of decision-making during international crises in the Nixon administration by examining six components of crisis decision-making. Despite the apparent uniqueness of each crisis and the variations in contexts of time, geography, and content, by raising similar questions about each of these cases within the context of the WSAG apparatus, some valuable causal inferences on the linkage

[5] George, 'Case Studies and Theory Development.'
[6] Ibid., 54–59.
[7] C. Achen and D. Snidal, 'Rational Deterrence Theory and Comparative Case Studies,' *World Politics*, 41:2 (January 1989), 143–169.
[8] P. J. Haney, *Organizing for Foreign Policy Crises: Presidents, Advisers, and the Management of Decision Making* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2002), 28.
[9] T. V. Paul, *Asymmetric Conflicts: War Initiation by Weaker Powers* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994), 35–36.

between structure and process can be drawn. To determine the nature of the relationship between structural settings and the decision-making process, the following six areas are examined in each of the cases with reference to the performance of the WSAG:

1. How were objectives surveyed?
2. How were alternative courses of action evaluated?
3. How was information searched for?
4. How was new/contradictory information integrated into the process?
5. How were potential benefits/costs evaluated?
6. How were implementation and monitoring mechanisms developed?

These questions pertain to distinct phases of a 'rational' decision-making process.[10] Over the years, several studies have suggested that the ideal decision-making process must include certain components; some have attempted to establish a causal inference between 'high-quality' process, or good performance of these tasks, and positive outcome of the crisis.[11] However, while these studies raise important questions about the linkage between process and outcome, often methodological problems of case selection and limited sources outdo whatever positive contributions these studies have to offer. To illustrate, in their examination of crisis decision-making during the India-Pakistan War, Herek et al. rely on a single source to codify the performance of the Nixon administration, compared with seven sources used to examine the performance of the Truman administration during the

[10] See G. Allison's Model I, in *Essence of Decision: Explaining the Cuban Missile Crisis* (Boston: Little, Brown, 1971).

[11] Herek, Janis, and Huth, 'Decision Making During International Crises'; M. Shafer and S. Crichlow, 'The Process-Outcome Connection in Foreign Policy Decision-Making: A Quantitative Study Building on Groupthink,' *International Studies Quarterly*, 46:1 (March 2002), 45–68. See also I. L. Janis, *Groupthink: Psychological Studies of Policy Decisions and Fiascoes* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1982, 2nd ed.); A. L. George, *Presidential Decisionmaking in Foreign Policy: The Effective Use of Information and Advice* (Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 1980); J. G. Stein and R. Tanter, *Rational Decision Making: Israels Security Choices, 1967* (Columbus: Ohio State University Press, 1980); P. J. Haney, 'Decision-Making during International Crises: A Reexamination,' *International Interactions*, 19:3 (1994), 177–191; Haney, *Organizing for Foreign Policy Crises*.

initial stages of the Korean War.[12] Moreover, the assignment of 'positive,' 'negative,' and 'neutral' marks to crisis management performance does little to further our understanding of the *making* of foreign policy. The reader is then left with more questions than answers about why and how decisions were made. A case in point is Haney's analysis of the Nixon administration's crisis management of the Jordanian Crisis and the Yom Kippur War. The following excerpt from Haney's study exemplifies the flaws in this approach: 'I have given "neutral" codings to the group's performance of Task 3 (information search) and Task 4 (information assimilation). Quandt and Dowty agree that the search for information (Task 3) in the crisis was adequate but not exhaustive (i.e., "neutral").'[13]

The objective of this book is not, therefore, to assign normative values to these tasks but rather to establish how they were followed and executed in the formalistic, hierarchical framework instituted by Nixon and Kissinger. What can we then learn about the impact of structures on the decision-making process? Can we formulate some broader lessons about the linkage between structure and process in U.S. foreign policy making? How do the cognitive schemes of policy makers alter the causal relationship between structures and processes of policy making? The evidence presented in this book suggests that structures and processes of foreign policy making are important regardless of whether the president heeds the advice of the bureaucracy or operates against it. It is often argued that the NSC system during the Nixon years 'did not matter' because, ultimately, Nixon and Kissinger made decisions regardless of the institutional input. This book challenges this common misperception on three accounts. First, the NSC system *did* matter because it ultimately provided the president with the required information and advice. That Nixon then decided to act against the advice did not make it wrong or unimportant, as the purpose of institutional (the foreign policy bureaucracy) or group (the WSAG forum) advice is exactly that – to recommend a particular course of action – not to force it upon the president. In other words, decisions were made by

[12] Herek, Janis, and Huth, 'Decision Making During International Crises,' 209–210.
[13] P. Haney, 'The Nixon Administration and Middle East Crises: Theory and Evidence of Presidential Management of Foreign Policy Decision Making,' *Political Research Quarterly*, 47:4 (December 1994), 950.

Nixon (and Kissinger) not in an institutional vacuity but based on the input of the bureaucracy and, more specifically, the WSAG. Second, not only did the NSC system fulfil its general operational function, but its unique structures and procedures mattered as well, because they matched (and, indeed, were the product of) the individual policy-making style of the president and his chief foreign policy advisor. It would be erroneous to assume that had Nixon and Kissinger operated with Lyndon Johnson's lax and confused NSC system, the processes of decision-making would have still been the same because Nixon and Kissinger ultimately determined the outcome. However, this counter-factual reasoning fails to acknowledge that institutional structures and processes are not designed to determine outcomes, only to *help* the president to make an informed decision. Had Nixon and Kissinger relied on President Johnson's flimsy NSC apparatus, they would have certainly not received the same high-quality input which the more hierarchical and organised system provided them later on, thus leading to a skewed process of decision-making from the beginning.

Finally, and building on the first two points, institutional structures and procedures matter because when the president follows the theoretical design of the system and uses it to its full potential, the outcome is evidently more favorable in terms of national interests. That the United States found itself in a thorny position (domestically and internationally) during and following the Cambodian and Indo-Pakistani episodes cannot be separated from the poor attention Nixon and Kissinger had given to the institutional input during the management of the two crises. Conversely, America's position and leverage in the Middle East improved significantly in the aftermath of the Jordanian Crisis and the Yom Kippur War – to a large degree due to the smooth and effective process of decision-making during the two crises (the Jordanian Crisis in particular). In both cases, the president (and more so Kissinger during the Yom Kippur War, following Nixon's preoccupation with the Watergate affair) paid close attention to institutional contributions. The NSC system is important because when used properly by the president, it has the potential to deliver outcomes of higher quality than if otherwise ignored or bypassed. In this analysis, the all-important factor which links the system (its structures and processes of decision-making), on the one hand, and the outcome, on the other hand, is the president. More specifically, we are interested in the psychological

make-up and cognitive schemes of the leader and his most influential advisor, as they ultimately conditioned the institutional characteristics of the decision-making process. As will be discussed later, the unique cognitive structures of Nixon and Kissinger can explain not only the theoretical design of the NSC system but also very often the difference between success and failure in managing foreign policy crises.

Chapter Outline

Chapter 1 presents a theoretical framework for the study of U.S. presidents and their foreign policy systems beyond the immediate experience of the Nixon administration. It is grounded in the literature of foreign policy analysis (FPA) which will explore the main themes of U.S. foreign policy making that will be discussed in succeeding chapters. The second chapter examines the radical restructuring of the NSC system during the Nixon-Kissinger years, including the shift from a cabinet-oriented system to a staff system. There is also here a well-informed account of the role of the national security advisor and of the Nixon-Kissinger relationship. The chapter also explains the emergence of the WSAG as the key body in charge of anticipating, monitoring, and managing international crises and providing the president with the relevant information and advice. Chapter 3 through 6 evaluate the performance of the WSAG according to the six categories set out earlier, by examining four cases of international crisis decision-making during the Nixon administration. The book concludes with an overview of Nixon and Kissinger's failure to produce an effective system of crisis management, explicable due to the inevitable gap between their abstract paradigm of foreign policy systems and the realities of policy making. The conclusion also provides pertinent and well-drawn observations about the functioning of the NSC system and ends with a discussion of the idiosyncrasies of the foreign policy system under Nixon, with a forward-projection to the experiences of succeeding administrations.

A Note on Sources

A significant amount of data was collected from the recently declassified series of the National Security Council Institutional Files at the