1 Introduction

On March 19, 2011, President Barack Obama authorized US military action in Libya in support of United Nations Security Council Resolution 1973, which had been passed two days earlier. That resolution had called for an immediate cease-fire between the Libyan government and opposition parties, authorized the creation of a no-fly zone, and permitted UN member states to take military action to protect civilians. In the weeks that followed, American naval and air assets (operating both under the American flag and under the aegis of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization, NATO) carried out strikes against the forces of Muammar Gadhafi, while US special forces and intelligence operatives worked to strengthen the capacity of opposition groups to defend areas under their control and ultimately to depose and execute Gadhafi. Over the course of the campaign, the Obama Administration made other critical decisions, such as not endorsing an African Union peace plan that would have pursued a political settlement between Gadhafi and the opposition, and eschewing the dispatch of a large US-led ground force to provide security for a transitional government after Gadhafi's fall.

In the immediate period following Gadhafi's removal in October 2011, the US and NATO operations (Operations Odyssey Dawn and Unified Protector, respectively) were seen as great successes, hailed by the US ambassador to NATO, Ivo Daalder, and Supreme Allied Commander Europe, Admiral James Stavridis, as the model for how to conduct joint, limited military strikes to achieve positive political change.[1] In the months that followed, as post-Gadhafi Libya collapsed into chaos – providing safe refuge for terrorist groups and unleashing a migrant crisis across the Mediterranean Sea that threatened the political coherence of the European Union – that

[1] Ivo H. Daalder and James G. Staviridis, "NATO's Success in Libya," *New York Times*, October 31, 2011, at: www.nytimes.com/2011/10/31/opinion/31iht-eddaalder31.html.

assessment began to change. Almost a year after Daalder and Stavridis proclaimed the Libya intervention to be the successful template for how to conduct US foreign policy, an assault on the US consulate in Benghazi by anti-American militants, which killed Ambassador J. Christopher Stevens and several other US personnel, changed the narrative. No longer cited as a success story for the deft use of US power, Libya was now seen as an "abject failure" where the United States had not only been unable to help the country progress toward freedom and prosperity, but in fact had presided over its devolution into a failed state.[2] Ultimately, President Obama himself, in evaluating his overall foreign policy record during his eight years in office, admitted that he considered the operation ultimately to have been a failure; many observers believe the decision to intervene in Libya may well be cast as the president's "worst mistake" in his conduct of national security affairs.[3]

While any major national security decision is made up of hundreds of smaller choices and actions, there were three broad sets of questions the Obama Administration needed to answer when it came to responding to the deteriorating situation in Libya: (1) whether to intervene at all; (2) what the objective of intervention would be; and (3) what level of resources to dedicate to the intervention. These three core decisions – first to intervene, then to pursue regime change, and finally to use a light footprint approach rather than undertake a massive post-conflict reconstruction effort – were initially seen as successes. However, in hindsight this combination is now seen to have resulted in catastrophic failure.[4] So how were these decisions made? Why did the United States become involved in Libya in the way and fashion that it did? How did President Obama reach the conclusions that he did? What can we learn from the processes – both formal and informal – that guided his administration's national security decision-making process?

[2] Alan J. Kuperman, "Obama's Libya Debacle," *Foreign Affairs* 94(2) (March/April 2015), at: www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/libya/obamas-libya-debacle.

[3] Jeffrey Goldberg, "The Obama Doctrine," *The Atlantic*, April 2016, at: www.theatlantic.com/magazine/archive/2016/04/the-obama-doctrine/471525; Dominic Tierney, "The Legacy of Obama's 'Worst Mistake,'" *The Atlantic*, April 15, 2016, at: www.theatlantic.com/international/archive/2016/04/obamas-worst-mistake-libya/478461.

[4] See, for instance, Robert Gates' assessment, in Nancy A. Youssef, "Hillary's Libya Post-War Plan Was 'Play It by Ear,' Gates Says," *The Daily Beast*, October 20, 2015, at: www.thedailybeast.com/articles/2015/10/20/hillary-s-libya-post-war-plan-was-play-it-by-ear-gates-says.html.

UNDERSTANDING WHY NATIONAL SECURITY DECISIONS HAPPEN

One response is to reject the very premise of the questions posed – to argue that there is no value in engaging in any sort of autopsy of US foreign policy and national security decision-making. A related answer, famously posited by President John F. Kennedy, is to assert the fundamental unknowability of how and why decisions are made, because such matters are "impenetrable to the observer – often, indeed, to the decider himself."[5] Thus, some have argued that events in Libya occurred "seemingly by happenstance."[6] This, however, is neither a useful nor an accurate approach, and certainly not one of any value to current and future practitioners who will be charged in the course of their careers with analyzing and shaping American foreign and national security policy. American naval vessels did not simply appear in the Mediterranean, and cruise missiles and aircraft were not launched of their own accord at undefined locations. United Nations resolutions and allied coalitions did not materialize out of thin air. At some point, decisions were made that activated certain courses of action and closed off other alternatives – whether to eschew a diplomatic approach in favor of military action, to extend or deny recognition to governments, even to strike or not strike particular targets. At its core, foreign and national security policy involves a constant stream of deliberate decisions to take or refrain from taking actions (see Box 1.1 National Security versus Foreign Policy for a discussion of the overlap of these two terms).

BOX 1.1 National Security versus Foreign Policy

We often use the terms "national security" and "foreign policy" interchangeably. "National security" refers to the imperative of governments to protect the state from threats by utilizing the various tools of statecraft – military, economic, political, and so on. "Foreign policy" encompasses all aspects of a state's relationships with external actors. The overlap between the two terms comes from the reality that a country's national security often revolves around the forward projection of the instruments of power into the international arena and an effort to pursue a foreign policy that eliminates or mitigates threats to the country while maximizing opportunities. In practice, this means that a national security professional works and operates in the realm of foreign policy, just as a foreign policy professional contributes to national security. In other words, foreign and national security policy are in many ways two sides of the same coin.

[5] John F. Kennedy, "Foreword to Theodore C. Sorensen's 'Decision-Making in the White House,'" *The American Presidency Project* 370 (September 23, 1963), at: www.presidency.ucsb.edu/ws/?pid=9421.

[6] See Micah Zenko's discussion of this attitude and his criticisms of it in "The Big Lie about the Libyan War," *Foreign Policy*, March 22, 2016, at: http://foreignpolicy.com/2016/03/22/libya-and-the-myth-of-humanitarian-intervention.

Moreover, such a fatalistic attitude that foreign policy "just happens" fails to provide the student (and the future analyst or practitioner) with a way to understand how decisions were made and what factors influenced the process. This shrugging of the shoulders approach offers no opportunity to learn from past mistakes, suggest changes for the future, or validate existing procedures. Thus, there is a need to open the proverbial "black box" of decision-making (that is, the internal workings of a government or administration) and attempt to identify and understand the various factors and drivers that determine what particular policy options are placed on or taken off the table, why they are adopted or rejected, and how they are executed.[7]

Some analysts will immediately approach the question by focusing on *individual leaders*, arguing that the characters, background, worldviews, and management styles of the key decision-makers explain the sequence of events surrounding the Libya intervention (see Box 1.2 President Obama's Libya Intervention for photos of some participants).[8] Gadhafi's erratic leadership style and irresponsible and inflammatory rhetoric alienated potential defenders and alarmed both Arab and Western leaders. For Obama's part, the precepts outlined in his 2009 Cairo address and in his remarks accepting the Nobel Peace Prize made it clear that he would be looking for an opportunity to use American power judiciously to defend human rights and to support the emerging "Arab Spring." Different leaders in Washington and Tripoli might very well have meant that the Libya crisis would have evolved in a far different fashion – depending on how these individual leaders framed desired end-states, evaluated risks and rewards, and how they processed information and advice.[9]

Not so fast, others will interject. Leaders, they argue, are responding to trends in the *international environment* that provide incentives to act or to refrain from acting.[10] For all his stirring rhetoric, President Obama had

[7] Steve Smith, "Foreign Policy is What States Make of It: Social Construction and International Relations Theory," in *Foreign Policy in a Constructed World*, ed. Vendulka Kubálková (Armonk, NY: M. E. Sharpe, 2001), 27.

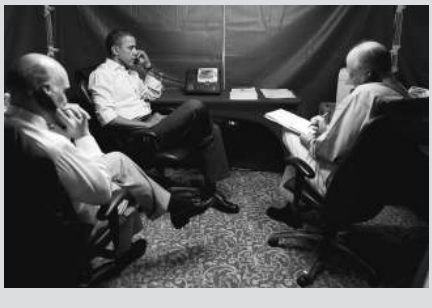
[8] For instance, in his analysis of decision-making, Arnold Wolfers stressed the importance of individual agency and choice in the selection of policies. See his *Discord and Collaboration: Essays on International Politics* (Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1962), 41.

[9] A number of key economic theories about how individuals make choices have been applied to national security decision-making, among them "rational choice" theory and "prospect" theory. For an analysis of how these theories can apply to foreign policy analysis, see Steven B. Redd and Alex Mintz, "Policy Perspectives on National Security and Foreign Policy Decision-Making," *Policy Studies Journal* 41(S1) (2013): S11–S37.

[10] For a discussion of the context of systemic incentives as they relate to US policy in the Middle East, see Fareed Zakaria, *From Wealth to Power: The Unusual Origins of America's World Role* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1998), 18–20.

BOX 1.2 President Obama's Libya Intervention

Photographs: (clockwise from top left) (1) President Obama receives an update on the situation in Libya with National Security Advisor Tom Donilon and Chief of Staff Bill Daley (White House Handout, Getty Images); (2) President Obama delivers statement on Libya, with Secretary of State Hillary Clinton (Alex Wong/Staff, Getty Images); (3) A Libyan rebel watches President Obama speaking on television (Saeed Khan/Staff/AFP, Getty Images); (4) Libyans celebrating the capture of Tripoli (Benjamin Lowy, Getty Images)



shown himself, over the preceding two years, to be very cautious in considering when and where to intervene. These observers would point to how developments in the international environment pushed the White House to get involved: a request from the Arab League, the first in its history, asking for American military involvement to avert a humanitarian tragedy; pressure from America's European allies in NATO, who, having supported the president's military surge in Afghanistan, were looking for a reciprocal American commitment to assisting in a security mission on Europe's vulnerable southern periphery; and a rare alignment of the diplomatic stars at the United Nations clearing the way for a UN Security Council resolution to authorize action without the prospect of a Russian or Chinese veto.

Still others will focus attention on how the *internal governmental processes* within the national security system of the US Executive Branch,

or the broader dynamics of American *domestic politics*, might have affected and shaped decisions. Did the president have a process in place that allowed for careful consideration of all options in the search for the optimal choice in pursuit of US interests? To what extent did personalities and factions swirling around Obama control how different policy choices were formulated and presented for his consideration? Were the options under consideration based on pure strategic assessments of the situation or on preferences and views of different national security organizations? These questions focus on how the balance of influence and information can shape the decision environment – a leader may not impose a decision as much as he or she accepts compromise choices that result from bargaining among different parts of the Executive Branch, between the president and Congress, and between the United States and other countries. In such cases, a decision may be less about what a president or other leaders want, and more about what options are possible given political and systemic constraints.[11]

In understanding the choices a country makes in terms of its national security options, therefore, the analyst must consider a wide range of factors and influences: the position and freedom of maneuver the state enjoys in the international system and the tools of statecraft it has at its disposal; how its government and bureaucracy are set up; if and how the government represents the broader society and how this society envisions its collective interests; and the personalities and worldviews of national leaders and those they select as advisors and department heads.[12]

The risk here, of course, is of falling into the trap that everything explains everything. Some factors – whether personal, political, organizational, or systemic – will have had more influence than others in any specific instance. But determining which analytic paradigm should take precedence or has more explanatory accuracy can be difficult. Did the United States, for instance, eschew the deployment of ground forces to Libya because President Obama, having cast himself as "not George W. Bush" in the 2008 election campaign, was reluctant to emulate his predecessor by getting involved in a complicated land operation in yet another Middle Eastern country? Did the decision reflect a series of legal and political compromises that allowed for US participation in the Libya operation without triggering

[11] For a narrative that helps to summarize the different influences, see, for instance, Ryan Lizza, "The Consequentialist," *New Yorker*, May 2, 2011, at: www.newyorker.com/magazine/2011/05/02/the-consequentialist. For a more academic assessment, see Mikael Blomdahl, "Bureaucratic Roles and Positions: Explaining the United States' Libya Decision," *Diplomacy and Statecraft* 27(1) (2016): 142–161.

[12] Juliet Kaarbo, Jeffrey S. Lantis, and Ryan K. Beasley, "The Analysis of Foreign Policy in Comparative Perspective," in *Foreign Policy in Comparative Perspective*, eds. Ryan K. Beasley, Juliet Kaarbo, Jeffrey S. Lantis, and Michael T. Snarr, 2nd edn (Los Angeles, CA: Sage, 2013), 7–19.

the War Powers Act 1973 – requiring a declaration of war or some other form of congressional authorization – or significant institutional and public resistance?[13] Sometimes, different influences can align to move policy choices in the same direction; in other cases, policy may emerge from the struggle between competing and contradictory factors.

Consider the analogy of national security policy as a train on a specific policy railroad track: if there are no interruptions or changes, policy will move in a particular direction toward a particular end, unless, by deliberate choice or the impact of circumstance, something causes the policy train to switch tracks, jump tracks, or reverse. The academic study of **foreign policy analysis** (**FPA**) gives us the conceptual tools to focus our analytical attention to ascertain which factors, variables, or circumstances keep policy on track or cause it to reverse or change tracks (or even to derail).[14]

WHY STUDY FOREIGN POLICY ANALYSIS?

In understanding past decisions, or in assessing the unfolding environment as decisions are being made, it becomes necessary to identify the balance of factors – the personalities of the leaders, the makeup of the international environment, the demands of domestic politics, the structural and institutional framework in which national security decisions are taken – that will determine the shape and scope of the options that are placed on the table for consideration. In any foreign or national security policy situation, there will be a wide variety of institutional, domestic, and global factors at play (see Box 1.3 Models of Foreign and National Security Policymaking). These *determinants of action* are various "unrelated internal and external factors [that] become related in the actions of the decision-makers."[15] This is the realm of the academic field of FPA, which provides the theoretical underpinnings for this textbook.

But not all factors will matter equally at any given time. Part of the process of analysis, therefore, is to be able to determine which are the "influentials," that is, those that are most in play and/or that will have the most impact on a given decision or set of related decisions.[16] Has Congress

[13] See, for instance, Nikolas K. Gvosdev and Ray Takeyh, "The Decline of Western Realism," *National Interest* 117 (Jan./Feb. 2012), 8–20, for a discussion of some of these issues.

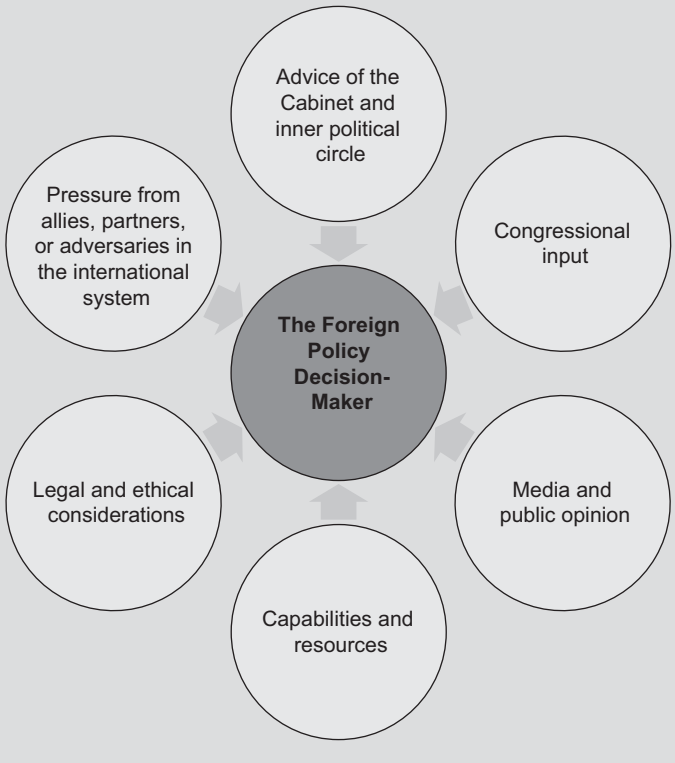
[14] On the role of the theoretical tools in understanding decisions, see Derek Beach, *Analyzing Foreign Policy* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012), esp. 7–8.

[15] R. C. Snyder, H. W. Bruck, and B. Sapin, eds., *Foreign Policy Decision-Making: An Approach to the Study of International Politics* (Glencoe, IL: Free Press, 1962), 53, 85.

[16] The notion of "influentials" first referred to key persons in the decision process (see, for instance, Mark Lagon, "Are 'Influentials' Less Influential?" *World Affairs* 158 (1996): 122–135), but can be expanded to consider various other factors such as organizations and institutions. See, for example, Richard J. Fisher, *Interactive Conflict Resolution* (Syracuse, NY: Syracuse University Press, 1997), 200.

BOX 1.3 Models of Foreign and National Security Policymaking

There are many different ways to depict influences on a foreign policy decision-maker. This is one generic example. The challenge, of course, is altering this model to fit the circumstances and facts of each individual case. The depiction of the size of each major influence will increase or contract based on the situation at hand, and influences that were critical in one case may not even be a factor in another. Models, paradigms, diagrams, and frameworks can all provide a useful snapshot or set of analytic guidelines, but the analyst must always be aware of not attempting to shoehorn any specific decision-making case into their pre-existing parameters or to ignore influences and factors which may not be depicted in the model that is being used.



staked out a position, for instance? Are they likely to get involved, or will they hand a blank check to the Executive Branch? Are there interest groups with a position and preferred policy outcome? Media influence? Is the president personally invested in a particular outcome and seeking to shape the situation, or is he responding to a situation where others are the driving force? Are there significant divisions among his team? Do his advisors and personal staff have differences of opinion with the heads of the key bureaucratic agencies? Do different parts of government have stakes in particular outcomes? How about the international environment? Are allies offering help, or are adversaries in a position to raise costs for US action

to an unacceptable level? Every case is different in terms of what appears to move policy. As a result, any number of "variables might be added (or subtracted)" when considering different situations.[17]

The purpose of this book is to equip you with the intellectual tools and frameworks to probe national security decision-making and to be able to assess the interplay of different (and sometimes competing) factors and influences. Many good and useful volumes have already been written to guide the future academic who is planning to study these matters and pursue an advanced research agenda related to US foreign policy. However, we have a different purpose in mind. We want to make these tools accessible to the aspiring analyst or practitioner – a student who intends to pursue a career related to some aspect of conceptualizing, assessing, or implementing US foreign and national security policy. We aim to provide theoretical constructs that can help to make sense of the complex environment in which policy is decided and to offer conceptual landmarks that can assist in the successful navigation of that environment.[18]

General Colin Powell, at the time serving as chairman of the joint chiefs of staff (CJCS), advised mid-career military officers of the importance of understanding the "broader context in which you are serving," and that an inability to chart the various influences and pressures that shape national security decisions would lead to failure.[19] You may not ever be directly involved yourself in making high-level national security decisions, but it is essential for any national security analyst or practitioner to understand this broader context. Scholars often examine foreign policy decisions in order to assess the utility of various theories, whereas political pundits seek to render judgments about their wisdom or folly. In contrast, the objective policy analyst seeks to obtain useful roadmaps of the broader decision environment. This is especially important for the current or prospective practitioner, since this is the very environment in which she or he will be functioning. Thus, the emphasis in this book is on taking various theories and rendering them in a fashion that is useful for someone who will be assessing and/or working within the foreign and national security policy decision-making environment.

[17] Stephen J. Andriole, Jonathan Wilkenfield, and Gerald W. Hopple, "A Framework for the Comparative Analysis of Foreign Policy Behavior," *International Studies Quarterly* 19(2) (June 1975): 194.

[18] That policymakers and their staff need such resources was a point raised by Lisa S. Disbrow of the Joint Staff in a 2002 paper at the National War College, "Decision Superiority: Transforming National Security Decision-Making." This was also discussed in Nikolas K. Gvosdev, "Should Military Officers Study Policy Analysis?" *Joint Forces Quarterly* 76(1) (2015): 30–34.

[19] Colin S. Powell, "The Triangle Analogy," excerpt of an address given at the Naval War College, Newport, RI, June 6, 1990.

TEXTBOOK ORGANIZATION

Chapter 2 introduces the academic field of foreign policy analysis (FPA). This scene-setting chapter explains this book's conceptual fusion of three foundational approaches – the *levels of analysis* posited by scholar Kenneth Waltz and then refined by David Singer (the individual, the nation-state, and the international system); the various *paradigms (or models) of decision-making* first developed by scholar Graham Allison and then refined and expanded by others to explain the workings of the US national security apparatus; and, the concept of the *two-level game* as explicated by scholar Robert Putnam, where decisions emerge from concurrent negotiations between countries and within each of their own domestic political systems. From these foundations, *six analytic perspectives* are developed. Each of these distinctive perspectives is then examined in separate chapters as integral lenses that, when used together, offer a complete conceptual toolkit for the analysis of American foreign and national security decisions.

Chapter 3 introduces what we term the **unitary state perspective**. Known to generations of scholars under the formal academic rubric, *rational actor model*, the unitary state perspective starts from the premise that states function as unitary actors and are able to articulate and act upon a clear definition of "the national interest." It posits that states are responding primarily to developments at the international level, and have a coherent and consistent process for assigning priorities. At its core this lens sees the conglomerated state acting for itself within the systemic international environment.

Chapter 4 offers the contrasting paradigm of what we term the **cognitive perspective**. This perspective shifts the analytic focus to the impact of beliefs, worldviews, and experiences of individuals in leadership positions, especially the American president. At its core this lens focuses on how human factors can shape an individual president's perceptions and assessments in ways that may influence foreign policy outcomes.

Chapter 5 explores the **organizational process perspective**. This perspective reconceives the concept of policy goals through the lens of the procedures, missions, and cultures of specific organizations. It therefore shifts the center of gravity for policymaking away from the unitary state to the myriad of departments and agencies within that state. This shift is particularly pertinent in the American context given the size and dispersion of the national security apparatus throughout the Executive Branch. At its core this lens focuses attention on the middle level of analysis – the domestic/organizational – as the dominant factor, as opposed to the systemic/international level in which the unitary state perspective is situated, and the individual level of the cognitive perspective.