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The importance of American foreign policy has increased exponentially over the past 200 years. From humble beginnings, the United States has unquestionably become the strongest and most powerful force on the global stage. While the actual policy used by leaders has shifted over time, a general trend can be seen that helps explain the atmosphere we see today. I believe that the policy and actions taken by the U.S. government can generally be explained through the theory of *realism* in international relations, in addition to the ideology of *American exceptionalism* that exists within the United States public and is touted by American leaders. Though the United States as a whole acts as a realist state, I believe that *bureaucratic politics* within America's government further explains the practices of foreign policy embraced by the United States.

First, for review, the theory of realism in foreign policy suggests that *states* are self-interested powers that constantly compete for power and/or security. Through the use of both economic and military power, states make decisions based almost entirely off the idea of growing their individual wealth or power, not based off what is best for their people or the global community (Walt, *International Relations: One World, Many Theories*, 38). Often times the self-interested decisions made by states can match or be crafted to match the public opinion of a state, either through the use of propaganda or exploitation of nationalism. The realist theory also suggests that humans are egocentric, which contributes to states acting as rational actors. Since the end of the Cold War, the world has gone from a bi-polar world with two superpowers (USSR

and US) to a uni-polar world with only one superpower. This is important to consider when examining the United States' actions assuming the realist theory to be correct.

Graham Allison discusses three types of decision making models that could be used to explain the Cuban Missile Crisis, and could very well be used to more broadly explain most decisions concerning American foreign policy. I believe the bureaucratic politics model best explains the foreign policy decisions made by the United States. The bureaucratic politics theory suggests that the decisions of a state are less centralized and focuses more on the individual players. It suggests that each decision is a weighted choice by players of a game, bargaining for power and influence (Allison, *Conceptual Models and the Cuban Missile Crisis*, 707). While this model seems to directly compete with the theory of realism, I believe it can work hand-in-hand with realism. Every individual player is a rational actor that wishes to advance the state, they just have different ideas on how to do it. Ultimately, every decision considered by individual actors advances the state's interests in one way or another (while possibly advancing their own political stock), but the bureaucratic politics theory explains the road to the seemingly expected conclusion.

The U.S. government has a strong executive branch that makes decisions regarding foreign policy, but has many bodies within the government that may influence these decisions (e.g. the CIA, the State Department, the President and advisors, and the Joint Chiefs). We must consider these individual bodies, their influence, as well as their particular interests when examining foreign policy decisions. Each one of these individual departments has different solutions to problems, and each department is vying for power over the decision making process.

How did we get here? How has America's foreign policy evolved to the point where

these important decisions were being made by such a select group of people? And why, for the most part, are the decisions being made almost exclusively made with U.S. self-interests in mind? To examine that, we must consider the history of the Constitution by examining the Federalist Papers. John Jay in *Federalist #4* clearly states, “It is too true, however disgraceful it may be to human nature, that nations in general will make war whenever they have a prospect of getting anything by it.” This is both an acceptance and an embracement of the realist perspective of foreign policy. In soliciting these thoughts, Jay hopes to show the people of New York that other nation-states (e.g. France, Spain, England) will be acting in self-interest, and it is in the self-interest of America to combine the States and act together as a Union to both defend itself, as well as to advance its own self-interest.

In *Federalist #11* Alexander Hamilton more clearly discusses the need for American power to influence the world. Here he argues for the need to create a federal navy, and the importance of a Navy in respect to America’s expanding commerce. He states, “A further resource for influencing the conduct of European nations toward us, in this respect, would arise from the establishment of a federal navy.” He’s arguing that having a navy would allow the United States a better hand in negotiating what would be in its best interest to negotiate, and that it would improve our image on the global stage. He goes further to state that the creation of a navy would allow the United States, “to incline the balance of European competitions in this part of the world as our interest may dictate.” Basically, Hamilton’s saying that the creation of a strong navy would allow the U.S. to dictate which European powers are allowed to trade, or will be successful in trading, in the Western hemisphere. Hamilton continues, “Under a vigorous national government, the natural strength and resources of the country, directed to a common

interest, would baffle all the combinations of European jealousy to restrain our growth.”

Hamilton is saying throughout *Federalist #11* that a showing of power would put Europe in its place, and allow the U.S. to act in its own interest.

Throughout history, and especially following WWI, the United States seems to fit the realist theory best when considering foreign policy decisions. While the state certainly has tendencies and clear goals and interests, I ultimately believe who the President is has the greatest effect on what foreign policy decisions will look like. For example, I believe President Jimmy Carter is much less likely to use military force than his successor, Ronald Reagan, in any given scenario. Outside of the unsuccessful operation to save the Iranian hostages, President Carter rarely used the military as a means for influence over foreign policy. The question is, while the final decision may *look* different, in the scope of the history of American foreign policy, how much influence do individual players actually have on America's foreign policy?

The fact that Jimmy Carter is less likely than Ronald Reagan to use force seems to suggest that it *does* matter who's President during the decision making process. Further than the Presidency, there are other individual players to consider as well, however to a lesser extent. Recently, President Barack Obama drew a “red line” on Syria, and the United States came extremely close to overtly intervening in Syrian affairs. The President ultimately decided to ask Congress for approval to use force. It is important to note that this decision occurred shortly after the “hawks” of the Obama administration (Sec. of State Hillary Clinton, Sec. of Defense Robert Gates, and CIA Director Leon Panetta) had departed and were replaced by “doves” (Sec. of State John Kerry, Sec. of Defense Chuck Hagel, and CIA Director John Brennan). It was reported that the decision to ask for Congressional approval was considered off the table by all of his advisors,

with the exception of his Chief of Staff, Denis McDonough.¹ While we may have to wait until his Presidency is over, it is extremely possible the President was influenced to “punt the ball” to Congress by the “doves” of his administration. You have to wonder, would the same decision have been made if Hillary Clinton and Robert Gates were in the room?

Another example is President John F. Kennedy’s leadership throughout the Cuban Missile Crisis. As Allison discusses, the President had a keen awareness of the bureaucratic politics at play during the Cuban Missile Crisis, and was aware of attempts by the CIA to both invade Cuba and to assassinate Castro. This made him hesitant to CIA suggestions during the 13 days of the crisis. However, this also blinded him in the lead up to the crisis—on August 22nd, almost 2 months before the crisis began, CIA Director John McCone warned President Kennedy the Soviets may put offensive missiles into Cuba, but the President ignored McCone and wrote him off as a hawk (Allison, *Conceptual Models and the Cuban Missile Crisis*, 712). This specific examples shows both the benefits and risks of bureaucratic politics-style governing.

As shown by these two examples, the decision making process has not significantly changed since the September 11th attacks. But beyond the question of *how* the decision is made or *what* the decision looks like, which bureaucratic politics explains, the larger question to consider is in the scope of American history, has the actions of the United States *really* changed from one administration to the next. Ultimately, I believe that the actions taken by the United States are extremely similar from one administration to the next. For further consideration, and to compare a Democratic president to a Republican president (which we’re told inherently changes the policy implemented by each administrations because of their different political parties), let us

¹ <http://www.politico.com/story/2013/08/behind-the-scenes-obama-syria-decision-96126.html>

examine both the policies and practices for a ground war and the use of drones under George W. Bush and Barack Obama.

President Bush authorized ground invasions of Afghanistan in 2001 following the September 11th attacks and a ground invasion of Iraq in 2003 following purported evidence that Saddam Hussein possessed weapons of mass destruction. In Pakistan alone, the Bush administration authorized 52 drone strikes. While President Obama ended ground operations in Iraq, he authorized a surge in Afghanistan in 2010 similar to the surge President Bush authorized in the Iraq War in 2007. President Obama also overtly intervened in Libya in 2011 but did so without putting American troops on the ground, and as discussed early, requested Congressional authorization to launch military strikes into Syria before ultimately solving the problem diplomatically. Most notably, President Obama has considerably accelerated the use of drones against enemy combatants since taking office in 2008, launching over 300 drone strikes in Pakistan since 2009 compared to the 52 strikes during the Bush administration.²

These comparisons seem to draw the conclusion that the nature of America's foreign policy, regardless of who is president, changes very little. While President Obama seems to be less likely to engage in a ground conflict than President Bush, he has exponentially increased the use of drones. The use of force in American foreign policy has been continuous since the end of World War II and was accelerated by the Cold War and further by the September 11th attacks.

Toward the end of *Federalist #11*, Hamilton begins displaying some of the American exceptionalism that certainly adds to the rhetoric and decision making we see today. He states, "It belongs to us to vindicate the honor of the human race, and to teach that assuming brother,

² <http://natsec.newamerica.net/drones/pakistan/analysis>

moderation.” This sentiment almost perfectly fits the justification of American foreign policy, specifically the use of force, for the past two centuries. It places the United States above others in the world, and places us on a moral high ground. It is *our* job, Hamilton argues, to teach other nations “moderation” and to vindicate “the honor of the human race” that have been wronged by others. We see this argument used in almost *every* instance that America uses military force in another part of the world. Most recently, we saw it used to justify intervention in Syria that never actually took place. We saw it used to justify military force in Libya, to invade Iraq, to invade Vietnam, as well as throughout the Cold War and during the Cuban Missile Crisis.

This argument, that we must teach “moderation” to the world, seems to be the foundation of the decisions made for over 200 years. That, coupled with the realist nature of the United States, as well as the bureaucratic politics within American government, has resulted in the American foreign policy we see today. It is my belief that we will continue to see decisions within this line of thinking for the foreseeable future, regardless of who is president.