# 1. The Two Cultures of Academia and Policymaking

> The policymaker, unlike an academic analyst, can rarely wait until all the facts are in. . . . He is very often under strong pressure to do something, to take some action. . . . The capacity of human beings to deal with situations of vast complexity is very limited. The human mind needs a highly simplified "map" of a situation if it is going to be capable of taking any action or making a decision.—Robert Bowie[1]

The development of theory about international relations by academic scholars and the use of this knowledge by practitioners in the conduct of foreign policy have been handicapped by the different cultures in which they have traditionally resided.[2] Members of these two communities have been socialized in quite different professional and intellectual worlds. They generally define their interest in the subject of international relations differently. The policymaker is typically preoccupied with how best to promote the national interest of the United States. However, many scholars believe this to be too narrow an approach to international relations and choose to work with a set of values broader than those encompassed by conventional notions of the national interest. An additional obstacle to bridging the two cultures is the

reluctance of some scholars, particularly when they disagree with the government's foreign policies, to serve as "technicians" for the state by providing specialized knowledge that may be "misused." Such scholars prefer the roles of critic and "unattached intellectual."[3]

With the passage of time, however, the gulf between the two communities has eroded substantially. As academic scholars and academically trained specialists in international affairs have moved in and out of government service, and as former foreign policy practitioners have found places in academia, a substantial intermingling of the two cultures has taken place. Many policy specialists and technical experts holding positions in the policymaking hierarchy, especially in middle levels, have had advanced training in international relations or in related fields. In addition to drawing on their own familiarity with scholarly knowledge, they are likely to maintain contact with academic scholars and their publications. These policy specialists can thereby serve as an informal bridge between the two worlds and increase the likelihood that relevant scholarly knowledge can be used in policymaking. Policy specialists in the government increasingly have tried in a variety of ways to tap and make use of the knowledge of scholars on specific policy problems. Frequently used for this purpose are conferences and meetings at which academic specialists meet with policy specialists to discuss a particular problem. Foundations have made important contributions in encouraging interaction between academics and policy specialists; for example, the Council on Foreign Affairs has for many years conducted a fellowship program that places carefully selected young international relations scholars in the government for a year and mid-career policy specialists in academic centers of foreign policy and security research. As a result, progress is being made in understanding how scholarly research on international relations can benefit from the perspective and experience of the policy world and how, in turn, policymaking can benefit from



scholarly research. The objective of the present study is to further this development.

This favorable trend, however, remains quite uneven. For example, the rapidity with which academic and policymaking perspectives converged after World War II in the field of strategic studies and arms control was quite striking. Because the field was relatively new and wide open it attracted the thoughtful interest of a number of academic scholars who had been exposed to problems of military strategy and operations during the war and who were galvanized by the new challenge of understanding the impact of nuclear weapons on strategy and foreign policy. In fact, much of the impetus and some of the most important early contributions to the new field of strategic studies and arms control came from civilians such as Bernard Brodie, William Kaufmann, and Herman Kahn and from members of the new postwar think tanks such as the RAND Corporation. International law appears to be another subfield of international relations in which there has been good two-way communication between government specialists and academic scholars. And the infusion of economists into government departments concerned with foreign policy may have brought the academic and policymaking perspectives closer together in related issue areas.

On the other hand, progress in bridging the worlds of policymaking and academia has been much slower and more difficult in regard to the role of force and threats of force in the conduct of diplomacy and in regard to the various dimensions of conflict management. And though there are striking exceptions, even less appears to have been accomplished in bringing about a more fruitful, sustained interplay between academic scholars and practitioners in the important issue areas of conflict avoidance and conflict resolution, and more generally in the study of international cooperation and long-term change in the international system.

The intermingling of scholars and practitioners in both worlds offers important opportunities for learning how to

make additional progress in bridging the gap between the two cultures and their traditional perspectives. It is just this opportunity and challenge that has motivated the present study. It is well to begin by clearing some of the underbrush that still stands in the way and formulating a common ground on which productive two-way interaction can take place between the theoretical approach to study of international relations pursued in academia and the practitioner's need for the kind of knowledge that can facilitate formulation of sounder, more effective policy. That common ground, it will be suggested here, is to be found in the relationship between knowledge and action.

In the following sections I shall consider some typical reservations, which may or may not be wholly justified, that many (though not all) practitioners of foreign policy and many (though not all) academic international relations scholars have about their respective approaches to the subject.[4] I hope the reader will keep in mind that this is a highly condensed characterization and that there is considerable variation in the views held by members of both groups. In part three, I offer a different set of observations regarding how the relationship between knowledge and action can be conceptualized so as to provide a bridge between scholars, who specialize in the production of better knowledge of international relations, and government policy specialists, whose responsibility includes using general knowledge to help top policymakers make their decisions.

## Practitioners' Reservations about Academic Theory

Academic specialists have often been struck by the fact that the eyes of policy specialists quickly glaze over at the first mention of the word "theory" or the phrase "scientific study of international relations." This reaction is unsettling to academic scholars, for they have been socialized in a world in



which the development of theory and scientific knowledge enjoys the greatest respect and highest priority.

What lies behind this glazing over of the practitioners' eyes? It is a certain image of academic efforts to theorize about international relations and policymaking. A familiar complaint is that academic scholars do not understand how policy is actually made, even when they undertake in case studies to follow the paper trail of a particular decision. Lacking an understanding of the process, academics tend to overintellectualize policymaking and exaggerate the importance of analytic rationality as the criterion on the basis of which policy is, or at least ought to be, chosen (see chapter 2).

Practitioners and policy specialists also question the high level of abstraction often employed in scholarly writings, and they are dubious about the relevance and utility of many of the theoretical generalizations and models put forward by academic researchers.

Even when the results of scholarly research are recognized as potentially relevant, they are often under-used for another reason: not a few policy specialists exposed to the scholarly literature have concluded that most university professors seem to write largely for one another and have little inclination or ability to communicate their knowledge in terms comprehensible to policymakers. Some practitioners are acutely uncomfortable with the unfamiliar and, to them, pretentious jargon with which their activities are described, and they are perplexed by the esoteric explanations that are given for their behavior. One may recall in this connection Secretary of State Dean Acheson's tongue-in-cheek response when he became aware of the way his role in the U.S. decision of June 1950 to come to the assistance of South Korea had been referred to in a scholarly study. Acheson took exception to being treated as a "dependent variable" in that study, observing dryly that he thought it obvious that he had played the role of an "independent variable" in that crisis.

Practitioners also object to what they consider a heroic but misguided effort by academicians to put foreign policy on a scientific basis. Insisting that statecraft is an art and not a science, practitioners emphasize the role of judgment in making policy decisions. (I return to what "judgment" encompasses in chapter 2.) Some years ago George Ball, then under secretary of state, emphasized this point in describing the complexity of the problem he and his colleagues had faced during the Cuban missile crisis: "We were presented . . . with an equation of compound variables and multiple unknowns. No one has yet devised a computer that will digest such raw data as was available to us and promptly print out a recommended course of action. . . ."[5] And other former policymakers have also emphasized that the president, unlike the academic scholar, has to make a decision in which *all* the variables are at play; the scholar deliberately limits the number of variables considered in order to develop a parsimonious theory.

How do policy specialists respond to quantitative studies that attempt to account for war and other foreign policy outcomes by means of statistical correlations? Quantitative studies may claim, for example, to "account for" (but not necessarily explain) 75 percent of the variance in the outcome of many instances of a particular phenomenon. Such studies may provide policymakers with a useful indication of the probability distribution, but of course this finding does not tell whether an actual case falls in that group or is among the 25 percent that are *not* accounted for. A more important dissatisfaction with this type of study among policymakers stems from the fact that it typically ignores domestic political and decision-making variables. The policy relevance of such studies is limited, therefore, because they do not include variables over which policymakers have some leverage that they can use to try to influence outcomes. Therefore, such studies give policymakers no help in deciding what they can do to avoid unwanted outcomes and to achieve desired ones.

More generally, the gap between academic scholars and



practitioners reflects the difference between their professional missions. Academics aim at increasing general knowledge and wisdom about international relations; practitioners are more interested in the type of knowledge that increases their ability to influence and control the course of events. In the role of policymaker, individuals often adapt by becoming action oriented: they need uncomplicated diagnoses and solutions in order to take action. It is not surprising that policy specialists should "want short, precise answers to problems rapidly. . . . But the academic cannot give a short answer to a policymaker's question—not because the academic is long-winded or pretentious, but because [it appears to him that] that the short answer is in fact not an answer. . . ."[6]

Similarly, practitioners find it difficult to make much use of academic approaches such as structural realist theory and game theory, which assume that all state actors are alike and can be expected to behave in the same way in given situations, and which rest on the simple, uncomplicated assumption that states can be regarded as rational unitary actors. On the contrary, practitioners believe they need to work with actor-specific models (see chapter 10) that grasp the different internal structures and behavioral patterns of each state and leader with which they must deal. Similarly, although practitioners can accept the academician's argument that the assumption of pure rationality is a powerful tool for the construction of theory, they are more impressed with the caveat that sophisticated academicians add, namely, that the validity of such theories of course must be established by empirical research that examines the "fit" between the theory and reality.

Practitioners have a similar reservation when encouraged to use new psychological theories, developed under carefully controlled laboratory conditions, that purport to—and indeed do—have relevance for some aspects of foreign policy. Perhaps drawing on their memories of undergraduate psychology courses, policy specialists recall that experimental

psychologists themselves emphasize that theories developed under laboratory conditions may or may not have external validity in real-world situations.

Policy specialists also believe that there are often good reasons to question the results of academic studies that explain and evaluate foreign policy decisions. Policymakers suspect that scholarly studies are not always as objective as they appear, and that they contain political or ideological biases. Given the proliferation of competitive "advocacy analysis" in the ever-expanding world of think tanks and academic centers, policymakers can find excuses and justification for rejecting those studies that do not fit their own policy orientations and rely instead on those that do.

Then, too, the data base used in scholarly studies, policy specialists argue, is often inadequate and can distort the scholar's interpretations. Not only is access to classified information for such studies limited, but available declassified information does not give the whole picture and may introduce flaws in the interpretations. Similarly, data obtained from current or former policymakers are subject to a variety of limitations that scholars are often unaware of or do not adequately take into account. In some cases scholars rely too uncritically on information about unsuccessful policies provided by lower level policy specialists who say in effect, "We had the correct analysis of the problem and the right answer, but the higher-ups didn't listen."

Finally, the practitioner is often wary of academic research theories and generalizations that purport to provide policy advice. A strong reservation of this kind was expressed by Richard Goodwin, a former policy adviser in the Kennedy and Johnson administrations, in a sharply critical review some years ago of the book *Arms and Influence,* written by Thomas Schelling, a leading strategic theorist.[7] For Goodwin, Schelling's book "raises troubling questions about the growing body of social-science literature devoted to military theory." Goodwin rejected the view that what Schelling called



"the diplomacy of violence" can be the subject of systematic theory, and he marshaled several familiar arguments to buttress his conclusion. For Goodwin, history is sui generis, and to generalize from one historical crisis to another is therefore dangerous and "almost guarantees error." In any case, the task of developing valid generalizations is, according to Goodwin, virtually insuperable. And even if some sort of generalization were somehow derived, its relevance to any immediate policy problem could not be determined, since in almost any situation policymakers must act without knowing all the facts, and the variables in the situation "are so numerous that they elude analysis." These concerns led Goodwin to put forward a sober warning: "The most profound objection to this kind of strategic theory is not its limited usefulness but its danger, for it can lead us to believe we have an understanding of events and a control over their flow which we do not have." I shall return to Goodwin's concern later in this chapter.

## Academic Scholars' Reservations about the Policy World

Although specialists in the study of international relations sharply disagree among themselves over questions of method and theory, many of them hold the belief that policymakers are too aconceptual and atheoretical, even anticonceptual and antitheoretical. At the same time, academic scholars note that policymakers and their advisers often do operate with a general view of international politics influenced by their acquaintance with realist theory and such related concepts as national interest and balance of power. Academic specialists express concern, however, that the realist theory that shapes the mind-set of these policymakers is a warmed-over and simplified version of Hans Morgenthau's influential post–World War II textbook *Politics Among Nations* and similar efforts by others in that era to steer American foreign policy away from what they considered to be a well-meaning but naively idealist

orientation. These academic scholars hope that policymakers do not take at face value Morgenthau's dubious contentions that power is and ought to be the dominant objective of foreign policy; that the national interest is an objective, scientific criterion that can provide policymakers with firm guidance in choosing policies; and that ideology is merely rhetorical justification for policy and does not (and should not) play any role in determining national policy. Elements of this earlier classical realist theory have been criticized and reformulated by a new generation of academic scholars.

The simplified and dated view of realist theory employed by many policymakers is seen by academics as part of a larger problem. Granted that policy specialists and top policymakers come into government with intellectual capital derived from earlier education and other relevant experience, their work in government provides most of them with little opportunity for replenishing and updating their knowledge. Full-time work in government offers inadequate opportunity and stimulates little inclination for keeping abreast of relevant scholarly knowledge. More than one policymaker has expressed concern that one eventually uses up and exhausts one's intellectual capital.[8] Academic scholars find that policy professionals tend to have a fixed body of knowledge that is relatively impervious to outside influence and challenge. Commenting on this state of affairs, some scholars who have had opportunities to participate in and observe policymaking speak of the policy professionals' resistance to knowing what they do not already know.

Academics are skeptical of claims that the intuitive judgment and experience of policy specialists suffice to ensure sound foreign policy decisions, that they need not make use of what academics refer to as theory and systematic empirical knowledge regarding the uses and limitations of the various instruments of statecraft. Academics also point out that in fact, whether policymakers realize it or not, they do use theory, though usually in the form of a variety of implicit as-



sumptions, beliefs, and maxims that are seldom raised to full consciousness and examined critically.[9] Policy beliefs and maxims of this kind emerge from an individual's personal or vicarious experience of past historical events, and from lessons passed on from earlier generations of policymakers. Such policy beliefs and historical analogies are usually rather simple, uncomplicated formulations of causal relationships. An example is the familiar proposition derived from the experience of the 1930s that was and remains influential in shaping American policy, namely, "If appeasement, then World War III," or, as it is often worded, "If we appease the opponent now we shall have to fight a much larger war against him later."

To the academician, simple generalizations of this kind seriously oversimplify the complexity of foreign policy strategies and outcomes. They should be replaced by *conditional generalizations;* thus, one needs to ask "*Under what conditions* is appeasement counterproductive and serves to increase the likelihood of war?" But the question should also be asked, "*Under what different conditions* is appeasement a useful, viable strategy for conflict resolution?" (The strategy of appeasement is discussed in chapter 5.) Systematic study of a variety of historical cases and more thoughtful reflection, the academician argues, are needed to provide discriminating conditional generalizations of this kind.[10] (At the same time, however, it must be said, academic scholars have yet to produce a systematic, empirically grounded, and differentiated theory of appeasement.)

A related criticism singles out the policymaker's habit of relying on and often misusing a single historical precedent or analogy.[11] Policymakers and scholars who agree with Richard Goodwin maintain that history is sui generis and that each case is unique; nonetheless, in practice they often search for and use historical analogies to help them deal with their "unique" cases. Academicians see policy specialists as uninterested in cumulating lessons from a number of different

historical cases and having no effective method for doing so. As a result, or so academicians believe, policymakers often do not take into account and digest a broad variety of relevant historical experience, and therefore what they do learn from history is of dubious validity.

For these and other reasons, academic scholars believe policymakers need to develop a better understanding of how their own beliefs and tacit assumptions about the international system, international politics, and other actors in the state system influence their perception of developments, their diagnoses of situations, and their judgments. Academics are therefore very much in agreement with the observation made many years ago by a former State Department planner, Louis Halle, that the foreign policy of a nation addresses itself not to the external world per se but rather to "the *image* of the external world" that is in the minds of those who make foreign policy. Halle concluded his book on American foreign policy with a sober warning: "In the degree that the image is false, actually and philosophically false, no technicians, however proficient, can make the policy that is based on it sound."[12] Accordingly, academic specialists suggest, practitioners should recognize the importance of subjecting the operative beliefs and policy maxims they rely upon to scrutiny via scholarly studies of a broader range of historical experience.

Finally, academic specialists believe that in choosing a policy, policymakers are too often swayed by political considerations rather than by the results of objective analysis. According to this view, policymakers are less inclined to choose the best policy than to choose one that commands greater political support and avoids too much controversy. Another criticism is that even when good policies are announced, the reason is largely so that the administration can say it has a policy, but low priority is assigned to it and little is done to implement it. At the same time, it must be said that many academic scholars do not understand or sympathize with the fact that



policymakers must deal with difficult trade-off dilemmas between the quality of a policy and other desiderata. (On the latter point, see chapter 2.)

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I have called attention to the somewhat different conceptions of knowledge about international affairs that are valued most in academia and in the world of policymaking. Also contributing to the gulf between these two cultures are the rather different socialization experiences that shape an individual's career orientation and professional style in the worlds of academia and policymaking. Those who participate in policymaking learn that little can usually be accomplished by individuals without a great deal of coordination, cooperation, and compromise with others. And one gets ahead in government by being able to adapt to the norms and procedures of various kinds of group work. The policymaking process blends the search for a high-quality policy decision with the need to develop a degree of consensus and support. Interpersonal and negotiating skills as well as analytic competence are at a premium. At the extreme, an individual occasionally finds it preferable not to claim credit for a good idea but instead to plant it inconspicuously in the process of interacting with others.

On the other hand, as is well known, efforts to cooperate and coordinate often break down, and the policy process is then driven by the dynamics of bureaucratic politics. When the game of bureaucratic politics cannot be tamed by strong leadership at higher levels, information and knowledge become instruments of the struggle between competing policy advocates.

Academia is less conducive to participation in group work. To get ahead one tries to differentiate one's ideas and scholarly products to give them a distinctive stamp. Importance is attached to establishing an individual reputation rather than

a reputation for effective participation in group work. It is not surprising that academics who enter government often find that with the individualistic professional style into which they have been socialized they encounter difficulties in the world of policymaking. However, it must also be said that other academics entering the policy world adapt all too readily to tempting opportunities to participate in influencing policy. They become absorbed in the internal politics of policymaking and lose interest in strengthening the role of scholarly knowledge in policymaking. In my interviews I have found that such former academics are often more useful as informants on the process and politics of policymaking than on ways of strengthening and using substantive knowledge of policy problems.

## A Common Ground: Knowledge and Action

The most promising way to bridge the gap between the academician and the policymaker, I believe, is to focus on the relationship between knowledge and action in the conduct of foreign policy. That relationship, of course, must be conceptualized in a way that will speak to both academic scholars and policy specialists. What this means, more concretely, is that scholars should acquire a clear and detailed understanding of the types of knowledge policymakers need as they attempt to understand and to deal with different types of foreign policy problems. Scholars can be assisted to some extent in refining their understanding of the knowledge requirements of practitioners by what policy specialists themselves say they need. But since practitioners and their staff specialists may not be able to articulate knowledge requirements well enough, scholars will need to study actual policymaking closely to identify the types of theory and knowledge that are likely to be relevant.

Since so many individuals who serve as policy specialists



and in staff roles in the government have previously studied international relations in academic centers, they can and do serve as informal intellectual brokers between the two cultures. To the extent that they accept this role they are in a position to draw on and adapt the results of academic research for use in policymaking and, also, to familiarize academic specialists with the kinds of information and knowledge required by policymakers. How much interest they have in doing so and how well they perform this role, however, is another question. Nonetheless, it has been useful to interview a number of present and former policy specialists and intelligence officers with academic backgrounds in order to draw on their experience and to obtain their suggestions for better appreciating the relationship between knowledge and action.

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In concluding this chapter I return to one of Richard Goodwin's criticisms of Thomas Schelling's *Arms and Influence*. Goodwin argued that a "systematic theory" of the kind he (incorrectly) attributed to Schelling was impossible as well as dangerous. The criticism rests on a misunderstanding of systematic theory as something that seeks or seems to provide policymakers with detailed, high-confidence prescriptions for action in each contingency that may arise. I will argue that such a theory does not exist and is not feasible. The choice, however, is not between detailed, high-confidence prescriptions for action and nothing at all. I suggest that theory and generic knowledge may most feasibly and usefully contribute to the *diagnosis* of the specific situations with which policymakers must deal, rather than to *prescriptions* for action. My assumption is that correct diagnosis of a policy problem should precede and—as in much of medical practice—is usually a prerequisite for making the best choice from among policy options. The analogy with the medical profession is an

apt one, since the policymaker, too, acts as a clinician in striving to make a correct diagnosis of a problem before determining how best to prescribe for it.

The reader will note that for Goodwin's rhetorical question whether a systematic theory is possible I have substituted three different questions: (1) What is the relationship between knowledge and action? (2) What kind of knowledge is most relevant for assisting policymaking? (3) How can *this* type of knowledge be developed by scholars and research specialists and how can it be employed effectively by policymakers?

# 2. The Role of Knowledge in Policymaking

Some persons interviewed for this study expressed a sober view of the prospects for improving foreign policy by developing and making available better knowledge of the various strategies and activities that enter into the conduct of foreign policy. Some who read an earlier draft of parts of this study thought I had underestimated the extent to which policy is determined by factors other than scholarly knowledge and competent policy analysis. A realistic view of how policy is actually made, they cautioned, would emphasize that political considerations in the shaping of policy often constrain the impact that objective analysis can have on the decisions taken. Others emphasized that top policymakers and policy professionals at lower levels are heavily influenced by their existing mind-sets in terms of how they view and deal with policy problems and in their receptivity to new ideas and analysis.

In fact, scholars who have studied policymaking are well aware of these characteristics of the policy process and the constraints they impose. However, many of them reject, as I do, the implication that even an improved body of policy-relevant knowledge would make little difference in improving the quality of many policy decisions and that, therefore,

there is little point in urging the development of better scholarly knowledge of foreign policy problems and of better ways of using such knowledge in policymaking.

Of course, the policymaking system must be structured and managed to make it possible for policymakers to obtain relevant knowledge, when it exists, on a timely basis, and to encourage and facilitate use of it. I have found it useful in developing policy-relevant theory to distinguish between *substantive theory* and *process theory*. Substantive theory provides knowledge of standard foreign policy undertakings, instruments of policy, and strategies. Process theory focuses on how to structure and manage the policymaking process to increase the likelihood of producing more effective policies. Of course, substantive knowledge and process intersect as policy specialists analyze a problem and consider alternative options for dealing with it.[1] And of course various political and organizational factors and situational constraints come into play that may limit the impact of substantive knowledge.

When relevant general knowledge that bears on a particular type of policy problem is weak or nonexistent, these other factors are likely to have a stronger impact on policymaking. However, when policy-relevant knowledge is available, it can discipline and constrain the unfettered play of political factors in policymaking. This is not to say, however, that even robust policy-relevant knowledge can eliminate consideration of political factors by policymakers; rather, it provides the possibility of better disciplining and constraining such factors. The position I take here differs from that held by some students of policymaking who argue that the sole or dominant criterion of good policy should be its objective *analytical rationality*. Such a point of view reflects an overintellectualized view of foreign policy. In choosing from alternative options, policymakers typically must be concerned not merely with meeting the ideal of analytical rationality, but also with several other policy desiderata. To highlight the necessarily broader political concerns and interests that



policymakers must take into account, I have coined the term *political rationality*.

It is admittedly difficult, then, to ensure that relevant substantive knowledge will have an optimal impact on policymaking. Assuming that it does enter the policymaking process, what kind of impact can it be expected to have? The position taken in this study is that policy-relevant knowledge can be expected to make a limited and indirect, but still quite useful, contribution. *General knowledge of international relations produced by scholars can be only an input to, not a substitute for, the policy analysis of a specific problem conducted within the government.* Policy analysts, not academic scholars, have the difficult task of adapting the available general knowledge of a given strategy or foreign policy undertaking to the particular case at hand. General knowledge can help with making the diagnosis of the situation that policymakers need, but the diagnosing also requires access to specific intelligence and information about the situation. Government policy analysts and policymakers have access to more of that information than scholars outside the government have.

Similarly, it should be emphasized, *general knowledge of a strategy or standard foreign policy undertaking is not a substitute for, but only an aid to, the final judgment of high-level policymakers.* (Incidentally, the same can be said regarding the results of intragovernmental policy analysis; it, too, is an aid to, not a substitute for, the judgment of policymakers.) This is so because these policymakers take into account various factors, such as domestic political considerations, international opinion, and value priorities, that cannot be anticipated by scholars who produce generalizations about foreign policy and cannot be taken into account or adequately weighed even by policy analysts. Thus, whereas scholars and policy analysts can and should preoccupy themselves with the task of identifying high-quality policy options (i.e., meeting the special criterion of analytical rationality) high-level policymakers must exercise broader judgments that take into account a variety

of additional considerations. What these additional considerations are will become clearer as we turn now to a discussion of what is meant by the "judgment" of policymakers to which policy-relevant knowledge attempts to contribute.

## Judgment in Policymaking

The importance of judgment is often emphasized in discussions of policymaking. Individuals who have had experience in policymaking regard judgment as a critical and indeed necessary ingredient of policymaking, and for this reason, they maintain, policymaking must be regarded as an art and not a science. Yet the concept of judgment is seldom explicated or studied and, therefore, despite its centrality in policymaking it remains ambiguous. Since judgment plays so important a role in bringing knowledge to bear on action, it is necessary to try to identify more clearly what judgment consists of.

One way to proceed with this task is to replace the global notion of judgment with an identification of those aspects of decisional problems about which policymakers exercise judgment. At least seven different types of judgment need to be distinguished from one another. A policymaker may feel obligated to make more than one type of judgment in arriving at a particular decision, but it is unlikely that all or most of the following types of judgment would enter into a particular decision.

1. *Trade-off judgments.* One of the most important decisions high-level policymakers are often obliged to make concerns the trade-off between seeking to maximize the analytical quality of the policy to be chosen and the need to obtain sufficient support for the policy option that is finally chosen. Another familiar, often difficult trade-off problem arises from having to decide how much time and policymaking resources to allocate to the effort to identify the best possible policy option. A third trade-off problem arises from having to decide how much political capital, influence resources, and time to expend in an effort to increase the level of support for the option to be chosen.



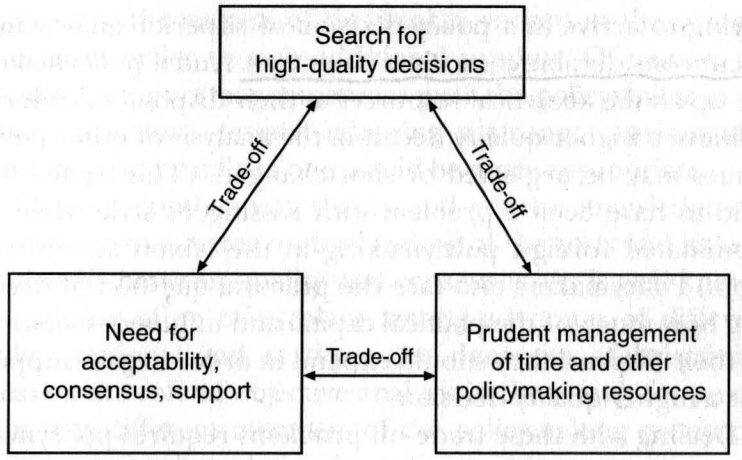


**Figure 2.1.** Trade-off dilemmas in policymaking. (Adapted from A. L. George, *Presidential Decisionmaking in Foreign Policy: The Effective Use of Information and Advice* [Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 1980], p. 2.)

The three trade-off problems are depicted in figure 2.1.

Academic specialists can easily fall into the error of thinking about high-quality policy decisions in too narrow a framework. Policymakers have to deal with the tension that often exists between policy quality and the need to choose a policy that commands enough support. Very often a measure of quality has to be sacrificed in favor of a decision that will get the kind of political support within and outside the administration that is necessary if the policy is to have a chance of being sustained.

Another trade-off in political policymaking is the one between the quality of the decision and the policymaker's sensible use of time and of analytical and political resources. A policymaker who spends a tremendous amount of time

trying to arrive at a policy decision of superior quality may incur considerable costs; time is not free. And if policymakers tie up all the analytical resources at their disposal in order to achieve a higher quality decision, the analysis of other policy issues may be neglected or shortchanged. (This trade-off is said to have been a problem with Kissinger's style when he dominated foreign policymaking in the Nixon administration.) Policymakers also face the practical question of deciding how much of the political capital and influence resources at their disposal they should expend in order to gain support for a higher quality decision.

Dealing with these trade-off problems requires policymakers to exercise ad hoc judgment, since well-defined rules are lacking. When such dilemmas arise, how, if at all, can policy-relevant theories and generic knowledge of international relations assist in exercising judgment? This question is all the more difficult to answer because theory and generic knowledge are most directly relevant in the search for policy options of high analytical quality. This is also the focus and objective of prescriptive models of "rational" policymaking, which pay little, if any, attention to the trade-off dilemmas identified here. In fact, I know of no theory or model of decision making that tells policymakers how best to manage trade-offs among quality, consensus, and management of time and policymaking resources.

Nonetheless, several ideas can be put forward regarding the relevance of theory and generic knowledge for dealing with some trade-off problems. Knowledge can be developed about strategies such as deterrence, coercive diplomacy, and crisis management, for example; distinctions can be made between strong and weak variants of these strategies and between conditions that favor success and conditions that are likely to hamper success. Knowledge of this kind should be helpful in deciding whether the trade-off of policy quality for enhanced support would be acceptable or whether it would



jeopardize the success of the weaker variant of the strategy chosen in order to gain additional support. Of course, the need for support may sometimes push the policymaker in the other direction—toward adopting a stronger variant of a strategy when a milder one would be more appropriate.

There is another way theory and generic knowledge can contribute to a better understanding of the costs and risks of trade-offs between quality and consensus. As is well known, bargaining often takes place among advocates of different policy options, and at times the dynamics of bargaining weaken the role of objective analysis in the search for an option that different members of the policymaking group can agree on. Good analysis of a policy problem can equip policymakers to anticipate what kinds and degrees of effectiveness a high-quality option is likely to lose if trade-offs are made during the bargaining in order to gain broader support. In this view, *analysis is not a substitute for bargaining but serves to inform and discipline the bargaining process in a way that helps prevent ending up with a compromised policy that is likely to prove ineffectual.*

2. *Judgments of political side-effects and opportunity costs.* Still another type of trade-off dilemma must be recognized. The criterion of analytical rationality is applied most comfortably by the policymaker when the problem in question is "bounded"—that is, when it is insulated from other policy issues that are already on the agenda or may soon emerge. But many policy issues are imbedded in broader political and policy contexts. When this is so, the policymaker finds it necessary to consider what effect his choice on a particular policy issue will have on his overall political standing and on other parts of his overall policy program. In choosing what to do in situations of this kind the policymaker is guided not exclusively or even primarily by the dictates of analytical rationality but may be heavily influenced by his judgment of the political side-effects and opportunity costs of his choices. Of course,

this is not to say that a policy choice that is "best" when judged by the criterion of analytical rationality always conflicts with the decisionmaker's political interests—indeed it may enhance them—or that the analytically best policy choice on a particular issue will necessarily entail significant opportunity costs, but simply to recognize that such trade-off dilemmas often do arise.

3. *Judgments of utility and acceptable risk.* Policy analysts provide policymakers with relevant information for attempting to calculate the utility of different options. This task is often severely complicated by the inherent uncertainties regarding so many of the factors on which decisions and choices must be based. Although policy analysts attempt to identify relevant uncertainties and possible costs and risks, policymakers often perceive other possible costs and risks and other benefits that analysts have not considered. In the final analysis, it is the policymakers who must judge what costs and risks they are willing to accept in return for payoffs to which they attach particular value. Similarly, it is the policymakers who have to decide whether to choose an option that offers the possibility of a bigger payoff but is more risky or an option that offers less of a payoff but is less risky.

4. *Judgment about short-term and long-term payoffs.* Many policy problems pose a possible trade-off between short-term and long-term payoffs. The conventional wisdom of students of policymaking is that policymakers generally act to avoid short-term losses or to make short-term gains in preference to pursuing strategies for avoiding long-term setbacks or for long-range gains. Judgments of this kind are easier to make when policymakers are more certain of obtaining the short-term payoff than the long-term one. After all, the more distant future is laden with greater uncertainties than the near term. Moreover, short-term payoffs—either gains or avoided losses—tend to be more highly valued by most political leaders. However, not all trade-offs between short-term and long-term payoffs are so easily resolved, and these offer a greater



challenge for exercising judgment influenced by relevant knowledge and analysis of the problem.

5. *Satisfice or optimize?* Policymakers are often faced with the need to decide whether to settle for a limited payoff in a particular situation (i.e., to "satisfice") or to strive for a substantially greater one (i.e., to optimize). The literature on complex organizations emphasizes that they are generally programmed for satisficing. Political leaders, however, are able to display more variation in making such choices, and this is another type of judgment they are sometimes called on to make.

It would be interesting to study what role general knowledge and policy analysis play, or could play, in policymakers' judgment whether to satisfice or to optimize.

6. *Dealing with value complexity.* Many of the policy problems policymakers have to deal with are laden with competing values and interests. (These include, of course, not only the national interest of the country, insofar as it can be assessed, but also the personal and political stakes of the leader.) The standard textbook model of rational policymaking cannot be employed in such instances, because the multiple values embedded in the policy problem cannot be reduced to a single utility function that can then be used as a criterion for choosing among options.

In such cases, policymakers must exercise several kinds of judgment to deal with value complexity. Can a policy option be invented that may at least partially satisfy each of the competing values and interests? When such political creativity is not possible or is not forthcoming, policymakers have to judge value priorities. Which values and interests engaged by the policy problem are more important? What criterion of importance should be employed? If not all the values and interests embedded in the problem can be satisfied by the policy option that is selected, can additional policy measures be identified and put into effect later to offer some degree of satisfaction for the other values and interests? Once again,

one can ask how general knowledge of international affairs and policy analysis can help policymakers deal with difficult issues raised by value complexity.

7. *When to decide?* Finally, policymakers are often called on to decide *when* a decision should be made. Policymakers may or may not delay making decisions to give analysts more time to come up with a better policy or to muster more support for their policy choice. But here we want to call attention to the fact that other considerations may influence policymakers' sense of the timing of a decision. The urgency of the policy problem itself, or domestic or international constraints or both, may influence the policymakers' judgment about when to decide on a policy, quite independently of the quality of analysis available.

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Perhaps this brief discussion of the various types of judgments policymakers must make from time to time suffices to provide a richer framework, albeit a more complicated one, for considering the extent to which general knowledge of international relations problems and policy analysis within the government can contribute to the decisions of policymakers. Quite obviously, scholarly knowledge and policy analysis can contribute more to some of the judgments policymakers make than to others. And, certainly, some types of judgments take precedence over—or are relatively insensitive to—the professional knowledge base that is analytically relevant for policymaking. In other words, there can be no assurance that even a well-developed knowledge base and competent policy analysis will have impact when policymakers are impelled to make judgments in reaction to other considerations.

The foregoing picture of how the policymaking process complicates and limits the likely impact of general knowledge of foreign policy activities and policy analysis on policy is indeed sobering. I will attempt to demonstrate that even



"weak" theories and general knowledge of foreign policy problems *are* relevant nonetheless, and that their absence or the failure to make use of them in policymaking can mean the success or failure of policy. Part two highlights this point by showing that lack of adequate conceptualization and general knowledge of several of the strategies employed by the United States toward Iraq in 1988–91 had something to do with the failure or mixed results of these policies.

Explain ?
Understand ?

6. Adds to the problem of decision-making