19. NEW FOREIGN POLICY PROBLEMS AND OLD BUREAUCRATIC ORGANIZATIONS

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At the White House on January 17, 1987, the national security adviser, Vice Admiral John Poindexter, briefed President Reagan on a memorandum he had prepared concerning the continuing efforts to develop productive contacts with Iran. The memorandum accompanied a document that required the president's signature to authorize the Central Intelligence Agency to engage in covert activity. (Law requires that the CIA engage in covert activity only when the president formally substantiates that such an effort is important to U.S. national security.) The national security adviser's plan "proposed that the CIA purchase 4000 TOWs [portable antitank weapons] from DoD [the U.S. Department of Defense] and, after receiving payment transfer them directly to Iran. . . . That day President Reagan wrote in his diary: 'I agreed to sell TOWs to Iran.' " (Tower, Muskie, and Scowcroft, 1987:38).

Earlier efforts to promote renewed contacts with Iran by encouraging sales to Iran from Israel had failed to produce the desired results. Now, in one of the most controversial episodes of the Reagan administration, the U.S. government decided to become the direct supplier of weapons to Iran. That decision and the much larger sequence of events of which it was a part raise profound questions: Was the American objective to seek an improved relationship with Iran as part of an effort to gain influence in an area that could become pivotal in future Soviet-American rivalry? Was the real overriding concern the release of seven American citizens captured in Beirut, Lebanon, and held hostage by groups that Iran could pressure? Was the major objective actually to generate revenue that could be transferred by third parties to the *contras* fighting in Central America? Whatever the goal, what about the declared American policy of neutrality in the prolonged Iran-Iraq war and our insistence on an arms embargo by our allies as well as ourselves? What about the stern and often repeated policy that the United States would not negotiate with terrorists and would not pay ransoms for their release? Could we continue to pressure friendly countries to follow such a strategy if we violated it ourselves? How were the funds owed to the United States for the arms supplied to Iran to be used? Were they to be diverted, contrary to law, to provide assistance to the *contras* fighting the Nicaraguan government forces?

These questions touch on issues of considerable significance for American foreign and national security policy. Most revealing is the list of advisers present and absent when the presi
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present and absent when the president decided to engage in a major escalation of the potentially dangerous program. In their subsequent investigation the Tower Commission (1987:38) reports that in addition to the president the session was attended by Admiral Poindexter and one of his NSC staff members, Vice President Bush, and the chief of the White House staff, Donald Regan. Absent were Secretary of State Shultz, Secretary of Defense Weinberger, and Director of the CIA Casey. In earlier discussions, Secretaries Shultz and Weinberger and the departments they represented opposed any arms shipments to Iran. The CIA, whose agents might have been expected to direct the sale, was not represented, and in fact supervision of the operation was given to the NSC staff rather than the CIA.

In important respects, the decision was an anomaly in contemporary foreign policy, in part because of the configuration of presidential advisers participating and not participating. Most American foreign policy decisions involve extensive preparation by the relevant departments and agencies. When the decisions involve extensive action, as this one did, the complex government bureaucracies routinely assume responsibility for the implementation. That there appears to have been a serious attempt to skirt the major foreign policy organizations in this instance highlights some classic dilemmas concerning bureaucracy that confront every modern president of the United States. Consider these illustrations:

- Presidents need the professional expertise of career specialists in the major foreign and security agencies of government, *but* they want faithful execution of both the spirit and the letter of their decisions (and too frequently presidents feel bureaucracies fail to provide such implementation).
- Presidents need to conduct foreign and security policy in a manner that assures accountability to the Congress, the people, and the law of the land, *but* sensitive issues often require secrecy that easily becomes violated as the number of people involved increases and written records are kept.
- Presidents need to have sufficient knowledge about the international issues with which they must deal to ensure the best possible decisions, *but* the president is responsible for the complete spectrum of executive-branch operations, and knowledge about all potential key issues can overload any individual, particularly when the person's prior knowledge and interests in some areas inevitably must be less than in others.

It is against such a backdrop that this essay seeks to sketch a framework for the operation of bureaucratic organizations in the conduct of American foreign policy. Governments of complex contemporary societies, such as the United States, find it necessary to assemble many specialized organizations for the conduct of foreign and defense policy. Among the key executive-branch bureaucracies in the United States dealing with international affairs are the Department of State, the Department of Defense (including the individual military services), the Central Intelligence Agency, the National Security Agency, the Agency for International Development, the Treasury, the United States Information Agency, the Arms Control and Disarmament Agency, and many others.

Even though the Iran-*contra* episode in the Reagan administration may have been an anomaly because key organizations were frequently sidestepped, part of its root causes can be traced to the frustrations that all presidents have in dealing

with the very organizations upon which successful foreign policy depends. As President Reagan learned, attempting to conduct policy without them is filled with peril. But he and other presidents have seen their visions of effective policy dashed by systematically inadequate bureaucratic support. What is there about the large, complex bureaucratic organizations upon which all modern governments depend that often leads to ineffectiveness? Why do presidents and their White House advisers become so discouraged with the established organizations that they sometimes try risky alternatives? Often the heart of the difficulty lies with certain structural characteristics of organizations, not with willful bureaucrats who deliberately seek to frustrate presidents.

To begin with, governments—all governments—act only in response to recognized problems. Bureaucratic organizations are designed to be foreign policy problem-solving entities. Before examining certain critical organizational properties, we must examine what we mean by *problem* and by two important related concepts, *problem recognition* and *problem definition.*

BASIC DEFINITIONS

Problem

A problem exists when there is a discrepancy or imbalance between a preferred state of affairs and the present or possible future state of affairs. A number of corollaries follow from this definition. First, a problem requires that the actor be aware of one or more goals. If a government's foreign policy goals are poorly defined, then so are any problems that might arise from them. A critical problem arises when a government disagrees internally on its goals and the priorities among them.

Consider the Iran-*contra* case. Was the primary goal to get the release of the seven American hostages in the Middle East, and, if so, at what costs? Did the government also want to continue its policy of punishing governments that supported terrorists? In other words, would the United States be prepared to cancel delivery of its part of the bargain once the hostages were released? Such goals might be incompatible with another goal—improved relationships with some parts of the power structure in Teheran. Any kind of bargain would almost certainly be seen by some officials and American allies as incompatible with the stated policy of not negotiating with terrorists. Despite these seeming contradictions among preferred goals, almost all of them seem to have been held at some point by one or more high officials in the Reagan administration. Unless the goals are clearly defined and ordered—and this is often an extremely difficult task to achieve among government organizations—the problem cannot be fully recognized and the appropriate government response determined.

It should be noted that goals may be identified and refined in an interactive process. As an analogy, consider a small child who may not attach much value to a toy until another child shows interest in playing with it. Suddenly, maintaining possession of the toy becomes an important goal and the interest displayed in that object by the other child becomes the problem. After asserting ownership over the object, the first child may again lose interest in it and even forget its whereabouts. Applied to more complex matters, the analogy can reveal something about the behaviors of collective entities such as governments. Conditions

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or objects that are the subjects of goals need not be continuously valued at the same level of importance. The significance and the attainment of a foreign policy goal may emerge more or less suddenly in response to developing circumstances. The American commitment to the direct protection of South Korea in 1950 may be a case in point. Not until after the North Korean invasion did American policymakers fully articulate that goal; in fact, they had earlier implied that Korea's security was the United Nations' responsibility.

A second result of stipulating that the concept of problem depends on an entity's goals is that problems are relative. Whenever individuals or organizations have different goals or have assigned significantly different priorities to the same goal, then the possibility exists that what is seen as a problem for one will not necessarily be a problem for another. The same circumstances in different countries may create very different problems.

Somewhat less frequently acknowledged is the idea that different departments, agencies, or bureaus within a government may have different—even competing—goals and, hence, they may see different problems. For example, the U.S. Commerce and Defense Departments may have the goal of generating revenue and reducing unit costs of weapons by selling sophisticated arms to an ally, but the same arms sale may be viewed differently by the Arms Control and Disarmament Agency and the Department of State if each has a goal of restricting the distribution of certain armaments and maintaining an equilibrium in regional arms supplies. Thus, one of the first tasks of those who set agendas within a government may be to convince other government agencies of the importance of adopting a particular goal as having priority over others.

A third corollary of the proposed definition of a problem is that the government must have some knowledge of present conditions and possible trends. In other words, for a problem solver in government to identify a discrepancy, that person must be aware not only of the government's goals but also of the existing or emerging conditions that seem likely to affect those goals. Such intelligence about the environment, and the interpretation of what effect it may have on the government's goals, need not necessarily be accurate to generate action. The foreign policy literature as well as research on other kinds of problem solving contain numerous illustrations and evidence of misperception and erroneous estimates of cause and effect.[1] However, accuracy in the interpretation of the environment and of changes within it is essential for effective responses.

A fourth aspect of the term problem involves the concept of discrepancy. Often one thinks of discrepancies that result from negative circumstances such as punishment or threats of punishment. Potential opportunities, which are positive circumstances, can also produce a discrepancy and, hence, a problem. Suppose the presence of an American military base in a foreign country is obstructing the goal of increasing popular support for the United States within the country. If changing world conditions and improved military technology substantially reduce the importance of the base to the United States, the opportunity exists for moving toward the U.S. goal of improving its image with the foreign public. Unless a given development will transpire automatically without any government action, it remains only a potential opportunity. Recognizing a potential opportunity and the need for action to bring about its realization creates a discrepancy and a problem for a government in much the same way as a threat. Moreover, failure to realize the opportunity becomes a deprivation.

Problem Recognition

An individual with cancer may ultimately die from it if not successfully treated. Until the individual's condition is detected, however, the cancer is not a recognized problem; an undetected disease is not a matter for concern or action, and hence no discrepancy exists between the individual's preferred state of health and present health. An equivalent situation can occur for governments. The requirement that a policymaker be aware of a discrepancy between a preferred and an existing condition introduces another basic concept in need of specification—problem recognition. The human characteristic of selective attention and perception is well established (e.g., Tajfel, 1969; Tagiuri, 1969). Both individuals and organizations normally operate in environments so rich in stimuli that they cannot possibly attend to all of them, so they systematically screen out many signals—perhaps most—and select only a few to which they give conscious attention. Recognition of relevant stimuli is that first analytical step necessary for coping with a problem.

For any problem-solving entity—whether an individual, a nation, or a civilization—the failure to recognize a major problem in time could mean severe deprivation and even destruction. In the early post–World War II years some in U.S. government believed that the Soviet Union posed a deadly military threat to our European and Asian allies and ultimately to America. They feared that the American democracy, lacking a strong tradition of a large and expensive peacetime military establishment, would fail to take adequate precautions and would neglect to respond to the problem in time. Debates within the government over the Marshall Plan, the Truman Doctrine, and NSC-68 (which, during the Truman administration, outlined a strategy for implementing the containment foreign policy) reflected the profound concern on the part of these individuals and their efforts to mobilize the government and society to respond to the alleged threat.[2]

More recently others have examined with alarm the vast U.S. military establishment and its theoretical justification (particularly the doctrine of strategic nuclear deterrence) and have argued that we have generated a problem of awesome proportions that could destroy civilization. For example, Jonathan Schell (1982:217) contends:

> Now deterrence, having rationalized the construction of the [nuclear military] machine, weds us to it, and, at best, offers us, if we are lucky, a slightly extended term of residence on earth before the inevitable human or mechanical mistake occurs and we are annihilated.

Both parties—those individuals and groups who either advocate or decry a certain course of action—fear that the government will fail to recognize the problems and take corrective measures in time.

For organizations, problem recognition demands more coordination than for individuals. The individual has the capacity for both problem recognition and problem coping, although the latter may be inadequate under some circumstances. By contrast, the specialization and division of labor in large organizations or in a set of organizations (such as those that normally deal with foreign affairs) separate the functions of problem recognition from those of decision and policy implementation. It is the political officer in an embassy, the military assistance officer in the field, the intelligence analyst, or the arms-control negotiator who is often the first memb
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tiator who is often the first member of the government to become aware of a problem. In most cases, however, such an official will not have the authority to resolve the problem and must report to superiors in the organization.

Studies of foreign policy are full of problems identified at the periphery of an organization only to be lost, discounted, or simply set aside until later.[3] From the perspective of problem solving, organizational problem recognition occurs only when awareness of the problem reaches those within the organization with sufficient authority to decide whether any action is appropriate and, if so, to implement the policy selected.

Problem Definition

Analytically it is useful to distinguish problem recognition from problem definition. Problem definition means the interpretation of a problem by policymakers. Snyder, Bruck, and Sapin (1962) have referred to this as the "definition of the situation." In the practical world, it seems clear that an interpretation must be at least tentatively made at the time a problem is recognized. Thus, the question might arise as to why definition should be analytically separated from recognition. At least two reasons can be offered. First, to interpret a problem usually requires attributing cause and effect. This becomes a precondition for prescribing a means of coping with the problem. What is interpreted as the source or cause of the problem? God? Nature? An enemy nation? What is the consequence or effect? Death? Flood? Aggression? At the core of many organizations is a capability designed to deal with problems presumed to have a certain cause-and-effect combination. Just as the Red Cross may be able to deal with problems that seem to be caused by the natural disasters that effect populations in a given area, so the Agency for International Development may be able to address problems associated with certain stages of economic development.

A second difference between problem recognition and problem definition is that the former tends to be constant whereas the latter—the meaning attached to a problem (e.g., the definition)—is dynamic. It can change dramatically across a period of months, weeks, days, or even hours. Such change in the definition of a problem can result either because the actual problem is evolving or because the policymakers' perceptions of the problem are changing.

We know that the same problem may be defined differently by different individuals, organizations, and nations. The matter of a shared definition of a problem is particularly acute in foreign affairs because of cross-cultural differences, governmental motivations for keeping signals ambiguous or deceptive, and conflicting messages sent from different parts of one government to another (e.g., Jervis, 1976). For example, what meaning should the United States attach to the discovery that the Soviet Union is enlarging certain intercontinental ballistic missile (ICBM) silos? Is the move simply the expression of a long-standing cultural need to build ever-larger weapons systems? Or is it a provocative attempt to create a first-strike capability by deploying larger missiles capable of destroying American land-based missiles?

Not only must one contend with multiple interpretations by different individuals, agencies, and governments, but the same group's definition of the problem may vary through time. Paige (1968) illustrates the rapidity with which the interpretation of a problem can undergo change, in his study of the Truman administration's decision to enter the Korean War. At first, the presi-

dent and his advisers believed the South Koreans could stop the invasion by themselves. Within less than a week, their interpretation of the Korean situation with regard to the expected effect had changed substantially, and American ground forces were committed. In contrast to the Korean example, however, problems are sometimes redefined out of existence. For example, the American concern in the 1970s over the need for alternative sources of energy virtually disappeared in the early 1980s after the Reagan administration concluded that the problem should be handled by the private sector. No element of the private sector found the development of new energy sources to be economically competitive with existing ones. Without government or private-sector research and development of alternative energy sources, the problem disappeared from the national agenda—at least for the time being.

Attention has been devoted to definitions and their implications. The major task of foreign policy organizations is to deal with problems—that is, discrepancies between preferred and actual, or expected, conditions. Monitoring the external environment for potential foreign policy problems also requires consideration of the many tasks associated with the concepts of problem recognition (perception by those capable of action that a discrepancy exists) and definition (assigning meaning with respect to cause and expected effect). Further insights about organizations intended to operate as problem solvers can be gained by examining some of their basic characteristics or qualities and combining them with the ideas associated with the problem concept.

ORGANIZATIONAL QUALITIES

If most foreign policy officials spend much of their careers working in governmental organizations, it is not surprising that the qualities of those organizations can influence what problems are recognized and how they are defined. That is both good news and bad. When compared to individuals working alone or in small groups, those in large organizations are potentially better able to *recognize* a problem, even though more coordination is required. Because of hierarchical structure and competing interests in an organization, however, bureaucracies may have greater difficulties than isolated individuals in *defining* a foreign policy problem. Furthermore, even though an organization should have the necessary human skills and technology for problem recognition, it can fail to do so if the problem is extremely unusual or if its effective treatment requires a radically different approach from those used previously. These strengths and weaknesses become more evident when one examines some particular qualities of governmental organizations.

Organizational Restructuring and Personnel Changes

Problems can emerge from perceived changes in the foreign environment or from internal restructuring within the foreign policy machinery of the government. Restructuring means the new interpretation of existing information through reassessments, often caused by the shift of organizational personnel or changes in organizational mission and operation. As a result of new assignments, people who hold different interpretations of the same available information may suddenly have new power to enable them to shape government ac-

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In the early years after the National Security Council was established in 1947, the assistant to the president for national security and his staff remained limited to basic functions of coordination and record keeping. Over time, the responsibilities of that presidential adviser and his staff grew, so that when Henry Kissinger held the position, it was he, not the secretary of state, who conducted secret negotiations with China to explore reestablishing relations with that country. As was noted at the outset of this essay, in the Reagan administration the NSC staff conducted critical overseas operations in Iran and elsewhere. For better or worse, such changes in the structure of organizations are inevitable. When the United States assigned the Navy responsibility for operating submarines armed with nuclear ballistic missiles capable of traveling many thousands of miles, the mission of that armed service expanded. Not only did the new mission change the Navy's view of world problems, but it led inevitably to strains between the Navy and the Air Force, and between those in the Navy committed to its traditional missions and those charged with its new responsibilities.

Of course, American foreign policy personnel changes can be most dramatic following the election of a new president who makes hundreds of new appointments. The shift can be quite significant when the movement is between administrations with substantially different political outlooks. It could be argued that the actual foreign policy environment of the United States changed only slightly between the last months of the Carter administration and the first months of the Reagan administration, but the perception of problems and the perceived best means of treating them changed substantially. Everything from human rights to the basing of the MX missile was reinterpreted by the incoming Reagan appointees.

The general conclusion is that the more a foreign policy organization reassigns personnel—particularly across hierarchical levels of authority or through the recruitment of new personnel into the organization—the more likely are new problems to be recognized or old ones to be redefined. There is, however, an important exception. While the new personnel are learning the office routines and the information retrieval system as well as the substance of an unfamiliar foreign policy area, they may miss information or be less able to piece it together than would an "old hand." The subtle shift in a trend or a small change in a foreign position might be more likely to alert the more experienced person that a problem is developing. Thus, organizational restructuring can have short-run liabilities arising from a loss of problem recognition. A president who must depend on organizations undergoing major personnel changes may suffer the consequences. Many observers have noted that the attempted invasion of Cuba at the Bay of Pigs in 1961 was approved and implemented by foreign policy advisers who all had just begun learning their new jobs when the Kennedy administration took office that year.

Selective and Differential Search

The other way policy problems emerge is through changes in the organization's external environment. Foreign policy organizations must establish search rou-

tines to discover any such possible changes. Organizations by their nature must develop specialization and role differentiation. Specialists establish routines or standard operating procedures by which they search or monitor their assigned domains. For example, in the Department of State, as in most other foreign policy agencies, specialization involves grouping personnel into a mix of geographical and functional categories for defining search capabilities. Special facilities can be developed for monitoring particular types of situations (e.g., the Crisis Communication Center, the Berlin Task Force) and procedures for transmitting information can be made systematic (e.g., under specified conditions cables of only a certain priority are to be transmitted; or instructions are given the watch officer to awaken key individuals during the night if certain occurrences transpire).

A difficulty arises because search routines, decision rules, and standard operating procedures by definition focus the search for potential foreign policy problems on some cues or particular kinds of signals, but not on others. The unavoidable question thus becomes: What about critical problems that do not have the characteristics established by the specialized search routines? Searching for the unexpected will always pose major challenges to foreign policy organizations, but they can at least avoid certain kinds of common biases. Pool and Kessler (1969:669–670) provide a convenient list of selective attention patterns applicable to bureaucratic specialists as well as isolated individuals:

1. People pay more attention to information that deals with them.
2. People pay less attention to facts that contradict their views.
3. People pay more attention to information from trusted, liked sources.
4. People pay more attention to information that they will have to act on or discuss, because of the attention by others.
5. People pay more attention to information bearing on actions they have already taken—i.e., action creates commitment.[4]

Consider the implications of item 3. Political officers in an American embassy may find it much easier to maintain contact with leaders in that country who are friendly to the United States (and perhaps even speak English). But relying primarily on such sources can seriously bias their understanding of what is taking place. Knowledge of this natural tendency that most of us have can be used to limit the effects of selective attention, but organizational officials must appreciate the possibility and be vigilant against its effects. This does not always happen.

Internal Communication

Another consequence of organizational role specialization and task differentiation is the separation of the individuals and units engaged in search and intelligence activities from those who ultimately make a decision as to whether action should be taken on a particular problem. If the internal communication system between the initial perceiver of a problem and the individual with authority fails for any reason, then the organization's behavior will not reflect the discovery. In a meaningful sense the organization can be said not to have recognized the problem at all. Therefore, a critical feature of any organization is the speed and accuracy of its internal communication system. But communication among

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parts of an organization can be inadequate for numerous reasons. The need for security and protection of sensitive information can obstruct the flow of information, as can struggles for bureaucratic power—in which the old adage that "knowledge is power" applies. If the foreign policy problem does not fit squarely within the domain of a single organizational unit, but instead cuts across multiple units, then communication can be slowed (particularly if the concerned units are unaccustomed to dealing with one another). Although modern communications technology can sometimes be used to ease the problem, it can occasionally give the illusion of information exchange when in fact little is occurring. These issues concern the failure to provide information when and where it is needed, but there is also the problem of too much information on too many problems, resulting in overload.

Problem Load

The failure of problem recognition can result not only from weaknesses in the internal communication system of foreign policy organizations, but also because of the heavy decision load on the middle and higher political levels of the organization. Study after study (e.g., Kissinger, 1966; Hoffmann, 1968) has noted the decision overload on foreign policy makers at this level of government. It is reasonable to speculate that the broader the base of an organization's authority structure, and the greater the delegation of authority, the more likely are external problems to be recognized, provided internal communication is well maintained. The difficulty in such a configuration arises when the collected information and analysis must be passed up through the organization, and becomes part of the load on a small number of top-level officials.

A word of caution is required about one of the consequences of overloading the problem-management process. In order to capture a position on the overcrowded agenda of senior policymakers, earnest subordinates may attempt to mobilize support from other parts of the government, the media, the public, and even from foreign nations. In the process of creating such support, the characterization of the problem may become distorted; frequently, the future consequences of failing to deal with the issue are exaggerated to promote attention. This problem deserves separate consideration, not as a matter of inadequate information or communication overload, but instead as illustrative of information distortion.

Responsiveness to Public Pressure

Why do public campaigns to mobilize support to deal with a problem lead to distortion in the perception of the problem? Two major reasons can be advanced. First, in order to motivate people to act it is necessary to persuade them that their vital interests are affected. To shape a foreign policy issue into an effective appeal for public support may require associating the immediate issue with a greater substantial danger—for example, the threat of war, severe economic loss, militant Communism, increased taxes, or the possibility of a military draft. In the process of linking the issue to a widely perceived concern, the definition of the problem may become distorted. Second, to reach millions of people requires the use of the media—especially radio and televi-

sion. Because new stories in the media must be short and easily grasped, mass media can serve as another force acting to simplify and exaggerate aspects of an issue. The result is another constraint on the ability of the government to define the problem accurately. And public involvement may actually decrease the likelihood that quick agreement can be reached on any definition of a problem.

Foreign policy bureaucracies, or groups within them, search for and sustain public constituencies that support their general worldview and specific interpretation of policy problems. These supporters can include friendly media representatives, lobby and interest groups, and even foreign governments. When the Congress of the United States restricted military assistance to the *contras* fighting the government forces of Nicaragua, members of the NSC staff sought financial support from private groups and friendly foreign governments. One danger of such practices is the possibility of commitments and future obligations incurred in exchange for such support, as well as the tendency to shape the problem in a way most congenial to those from whom support is sought.

Organizational Goals

At the beginning of this essay, a problem was described as involving goals or preferred conditions. Goals are both formal and informal, and this brings us to a final organizational characteristic. The literature on bureaucratic organizations has made the point repeatedly that organizations and bureaus within organizations often have different missions and goals. If individuals see their promotions and careers as dependent on how well they succeed in their particular bureau or organization, then it will be natural for them to promote the goals of their bureaucratic units. The result is that individuals in different bureaucracies will have a built-in disposition to interpret problems in terms of their organization's goals and mission.

This process is at the heart of bureaucratic politics. It also makes the task of reaching consensus within the government on goals and on their relative priorities difficult unless other factors intervene (e.g., a strongly expressed presidential preference). To facilitate agreement, goals and objectives may be poorly specified and actual contradictions among them may be ignored. Furthermore, once consensus on goals and the related definition of a problem has been reached within an organization, inertia sets in and works against any revision of definition that may become necessary. The evolution of a problem's definition thus tends to be more gradual for bureaucratic organizations than for individuals; exceptions might arise, however, when the top of an organization changes suddenly, when a new administration comes to power, or when a coalition whose interpretation of a problem had prevailed collapses.

IMPLICATIONS OF A SHIFT IN THE ARRAY OF PROBLEMS

In this final section we will examine how the characteristics of American bureaucratic organizations could prove to be constraints in recognizing and defining the foreign policy problems of the 1990s. Basic to the discussion is the contention that the types of major foreign affairs problems in need of attention are undergoing a profound change.

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Post–Cold War Problems

For much of the period since the end of World War II, most American organizations concerned with monitoring foreign affairs problems were influenced greatly by the Cold War. The protracted and intense antagonism between the United States and the Soviet Union shaped the problems that were recognized and the ways in which they were defined. Even issues that in other periods might have been interpreted very differently were defined as Cold War problems—such as the end of colonialism, the emergence of nationalistic forces and the efforts at economic development in the Third World, and national innovations in science and technology.

Of course not every problem became an adjunct of the Cold War, but the budgets of major agencies, the time allocations of presidents and other officials, and the foreign policy debates in Congress and the media point to the prominence of the Cold War framework in American foreign policy problem recognition and definition.

The political and military problems stemming from the conflict between the Communist and Western powers certainly have not disappeared. In fact some of these problems may even become more acute in the future. There could be an accelerated tendency on the part of the USSR to engage in conflicts that are far removed from its borders. The Soviets may be less prepared than in the Cuban missile crisis of 1962 to make concessions to avert a nuclear confrontation. Perhaps the most troubling aspect for the United States is its loss of clear superiority, relative to the Soviet Union, in many areas of military technology and nuclear forces. For most of the Cold War period, America enjoyed unquestioned predominance, at least with respect to nuclear weapons and military technology. However, with Soviet military advances and with changes in destructive capabilities that have robbed the concept of nuclear superiority of useful meaning, a fundamental transformation has occurred. Even if this loss of clear Western military superiority in certain areas were not to create problems, and even if the Soviets were to exercise restraint, the American coalitions that developed as a result of the Cold War might continue to interpret problems in the framework of the Cold War. Such problem definitions would conform to needs and experiences of many individuals and groups. Unfortunately the developments in much of the 1980s suggest a far more ambiguous record of Soviet behavior; the inclination to continue interpreting many problems in the Cold War framework therefore remains strong.

Having noted this continuing Cold War legacy, we must nevertheless recognize that many individuals inside and outside the American foreign policy community are identifying and debating problems that cannot be understood by reference to Cold War antagonisms. Even if problems with the Soviet Union continue to be of major importance to the United States, they may exclusively dominate our foreign policy agenda only if we ignore other pressing and urgent challenges. Consider again the problem with which this essay began. The Reagan administration's struggle to determine the future of U.S. relations with Iran and to shape a strategy for gaining the release of American hostages does not fit easily into a Cold War perspective. The government of Iran, rooted in fundamental concepts of Islam, holds both the United States and the Soviet Union in contempt. And the captors of American hostages in Lebanon are nonstate actors whose motivations arise from issues in the Middle East, not Communism.

Some observers warn of emerging problems that seem even more remote from the traditional political-military issues of the Cold War. A study done for the Commission on the Organization of the Government for the Conduct of Foreign Policy (known for short as the Murphy Commission) identified eight global problem areas that could have major adverse effects on the United States and the rest of the world after the year 2000 if not effectively handled before then. These problems, which were drawn exclusively from the area of global environmental and resource interdependence, were ocean pollution, atmospheric pollution, weather modification, resource monitoring satellites, communications-satellite jurisdiction, nuclear reactors, food, and population (Keohane and Nye, 1975). Given the environmental orientation of this list, it is perhaps understandable that the entire range of economic problems was excluded. However, economic problems—ranging from trade deficits and widespread inflation to the calls for a new international economic order—illustrate the emergence of acute foreign policy problems that seem to have little or no direct relationship to the Cold War.

From a somewhat different perspective, Mesarovic and Pestel (1974) have noted a set of unprecedented crises emerging in population, energy, raw materials, and pollution that are a result of undifferentiated growth and of rapidly increasing interdependence. From yet another perspective, the shaping of the world economy in the next quarter of a century constitutes "the greatest challenge to industrial civilization since it began to take shape two centuries ago" (Rostow, 1978).

Only time will tell whether Keohane and Nye (1975), Mesarovic and Pestel (1974), Rostow (1978), or other forecasters (e.g., Platt, 1969; Schell, 1982) have enumerated accurately the most demanding set of foreign policy problems of the future. Because we are interested in the recognition and definition of new international challenges, the particular problems identified by various individuals are less important to us than the apparent shift away from what appear to be Cold War–type problems. If there are likely to be significantly different types of problems threatening the well-being of the United States in the 1990s, how will situational characteristics and organizational properties influence their successful recognition and definition?

Interaction of Situational and Organizational Properties

How well foreign policy organizations meet future challenges depends not only on the organizational qualities discussed above but also on the nature of the situations they encounter. Do they differ in any important respects from the situations foreign policy organizations have been addressing for more than four decades? In considering such characteristics of situations as threats, opportunities, complexity, awareness, and decision time, the impression emerges that many future situations could be of a different nature from those of the past.

With respect to future threats, they may be directed not only (through war) at physical survival, but at a variety of social, political, and economic institutions, and even at ecological systems as well. Both threats and opportunities may well emerge from sources other than those with which we have grown accustomed to dealing. They may involve not only familiar antagonists, but also nonstate actors—such as terrorists, multinational corporations, nonterritorial nations—and, in general, arise from human interaction with nature.

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Complexity can be interpreted as an interaction betwen the multiplicity of interacting demands created by a problem and the capabilities of the problem solvers. The problem side of this equation might be expected to become more complex in several respects. First, the growth in interdependence between international social and economic systems may complicate attempts at resolution by requiring coordination of a number of politically separate units inside and outside the United States. Those units outside the United States may not be particularly susceptible to American governmental influences. Interdependence may increase the likelihood that "solutions" to problems have more unanticipated secondary and tertiary effects that trigger new problems or confound the treatment of the original one. What may confuse detection of such problems is a breakdown of any clear idea about cause and effect. A second source of complexity may result from an increased tendency for many large, demanding problems to arise simultaneously. Platt (1969:1116) refers to this difficulty when he notes: "What finally makes all of our crises more dangerous is that they are now coming on top of each other." Our concentration on one may deflect attention from the presence of others.

Awareness of problems also affects the other side of the complexity equation—the ability of foreign policy agencies to cope with these problems. For example, as dangerous as the repeated crises over West Berlin were, the United States in time gained familiarity with some recurrent features of the problem and characteristics of the adversary. This general awareness might not have prevented a tactical surprise in any particular crisis, but it made it easier for American policymakers to recognize the problem and define it within the context of the Cold War whenever a crisis suddenly arose. One of the difficulties facing policymakers in an era of emerging new foreign policy problems could be the absence of familiarity with these problems and with their associated indicators and danger signs.

Many of the problems of the Cold War—such as in the Cuban missile crisis or the invasion of South Korea—emerged as crises in which decision time was extremely short. Although one can envision some future nuclear confrontation in which decision time is reduced to something less than the thirty minutes required for ICBMs to reach their targets, the Cold War problems of the past may have established benchmarks for acutely short decision times that are unlikely to be surpassed in the vast majority of new challenges. In fact, some of the emerging problems could be just the reverse, in that they may have long lead times before they become a major danger (an example would be the problem of ocean pollution). However, the time during which action must be initiated to avert or correct a dangerous problem may far precede the time when the full danger is actually experienced.[5]

The previous paragraphs have tried to illustrate the possible nature of situational characteristics of problems different from those that have dominated American attention during the Cold War. Assuming that such different types of problems become more important for American foreign policy, how would the organizational characteristics identified previously affect recognition and identification of these new problems?

Perhaps the most critical organizational feature concerns the selective search processes of organizations. We have suggested that governmental organizations, just as individuals, must be selective in the domains they search. The Cold War provided a framework that for more than forty years served as a

structure indicating to the U.S. government's foreign policy organizations what situations to monitor and what meaning to attach to problems that arose. These highly established search routines and interpretative processes may now become increasingly dysfunctional, not directing monitoring activities to situations that could pose new kinds of dangers or opportunities, or imposing a inappropriate Cold War definition on a detected problem.

The organizational restructuring that regularly marks foreign policy agencies as new people assume key positions could aid in more rapidly eroding the Cold War framework. A darker side, however, also must be considered. If more of the foreign policy problems of the future demand attention far ahead of a crisis to avoid severe adverse effects, no leadership that expects to remain in power only a few years may find it desirable or politically feasible to attend to them. The frequent turnover of political leadership also may make it more difficult to construct coalitions with a shared definition of the problem.

Many agencies of the U.S. government participate in foreign policy decisions, but the Cold War gave certain agencies dominance—including the State and Defense Departments, the Joint Chiefs of Staff, the CIA, the Agency for International Development and its precursors, and, increasingly, the National Security Council staff. Established channels of communication, clearance processes, and interagency working groups have gradually evolved. Faced with different types of problems the internal channels of communication among these agencies may not be the most appropriate ones, nor may the agencies themselves. Indeed, there may be no present agency charged with monitoring for a given set of future problems. Even if an agency does engage in such monitoring, it may be unclear who has responsibility for assessing and communicating whether or not a problem merits further attention on any agency's agenda. Internal communications may need major revision.

What about problem overload? Any available organizational slack could be more than consumed in one of several ways. If problems are unfamiliar or seemingly more complex, it may take longer to agree on their definition and to devise an acceptable response; other problems would have to be placed "on hold." Furthermore, if Platt (1969) is correct, the emerging challenge is not simply one of different kinds of problems but of more problems occurring concurrently.

Coping with a certain type of problem in foreign affairs has become part of the mission or goals of particular foreign policy organizations. The difficulty arises when no agency regards a certain problem as falling within the definition of its primary mission or goals. The real possibility exists that the present array of organizational goals of the various American foreign policy bureaucracies are such that any meaningful attention to some potential problems of the future is, in effect, unlikely.

CONCLUSIONS

The Iran-*contra* affair discussed at the opening of this essay provides the basis for several concluding observations. First, the problem may represent a kind of transition case from the classical political-military confrontations of the Cold War to those of a different nature which the United States may face increasingly in the future. In certain respects some of the old, familiar features were

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present, particularly with respect to the Central American dimension of the issue, in which opposing military forces received backing from their respective superpower. In other ways, as has been noted, the problem appears different. Some actors were not national governments (e.g., the groups in Lebanon holding American hostages); some actors are not allied with either side in the Cold War (e.g., Iran); and repeatedly the outcomes were dependent on third parties with whom the United States has complex, interdependent relationships (e.g., Israel, Costa Rica, Honduras). Moreover, the dynamics of the case involve some issues that have little to do directly with Soviet-American rivalry (e.g., the Iran-Iraq War, the Palestinian desire for a homeland).

Second, the episode dramatically illustrates what can happen to problem definition when the government cannot agree on goals and objectives. Releasing the hostages, aiding the *contras,* and improving relations with Iran became competing objectives. The difficulty was complicated by disagreement on cause and effect. (For example, could Iran cause the hostages to be released?)

Third, the case highlights the dependent relationship between the president and the bureaucracies. The Tower Commission (Tower, Muskie, and Scowcroft, 1987:89) begins its recommendations by noting the source of foreign policy innovation and the source of resistance to change:

> The policy innovation and creativity of the President encounters a natural resistance from the executing departments. . . . Circumventing the departments, perhaps by using the National Security Advisor or the NSC Staff to execute policy, robs the President of the experience and capacity resident in the departments. The President must act largely through them, but the agency heads must ensure that they execute the President's policies in an expeditious and effective manner.

Here we see in stark terms the dilemma this essay explores. Bureaucracies can resist change, and can fail to see new problems, and can fail to implement policy effectively for the reasons that have been reviewed. But if in frustration a president tends to ignore them and conduct policy without their assistance, he can make serious errors.

It can be argued that the picture sketched in this essay exaggerates the constraints and difficulties in problem management and response in foreign policymaking. The author hopes so, but perhaps more than hope is needed to make certain that the interaction of new situations and old organizational routines does not obstruct the recognition and definition of problems that need to get on the American national agenda as well as on the agenda of other governments and world actors. The avoidance of these pitfalls in part entails modifying organizational capabilities to meet the requirements of foreign policy in the 1990s and beyond.

Some might be tempted initially to regard substitution or replacement as the approach. The government, it could be argued, should shift from an East-West framework to one focused on North-South conflicts; from agencies concerned with military capability to those working on economic capability; from crisis management to long-range planning. All indications are that such attempts to "redistribute" responses would be most inadequate and inappropriate. Few careful observers would claim that many of the older type of problems have been resolved or have faded away. The U.S. government must still attend to such problems. Even though various sources seek to dramatize presently emerging issues, relatively few responsible individuals or groups claim to have a clear

and certain vision of what the total array of future foreign policy problems will be. Thus, a greater sensitivity to the unusual in international affairs and in the international environment appears to be a watchword for monitoring, rather than locking on a given alternative domain of new problems.

Going beyond the heightened attention to various forms of activity, those responsible for foreign policy—and the conduct of government generally—may need to invest more in the exploration of new forms of social organization for collective problem recognition and management. McNeill (1963) argues that civilizations began to emerge when people developed primitive administrative and bureaucratic skills. If we are to avert an unpleasant future, we should devote significantly more resources to the design of new forms of collective problem recognition and management.

NOTES

1. For a social psychological study of the mistaken belief in events and their anticipated effect, see Festinger, Riecken, and Schachter (1956). In organizational theory, Thompson (1967) has defined activities done on the basis of collective beliefs about cause and effect relationships as an organization's core technology—regardless of whether the organization's collective beliefs are correct or not. Misperception in international politics has been a major concern of Jervis (1976).

2. The task of mobilizing support is well documented in the case of the Marshall Plan by Jones (1955), for the Truman Doctrine by Gaddis (1972), and for NSC-68 by Hammond (1962).

3. This difficulty in problem recognition is illustrated by the "loss" in the system of cues that might have alerted U.S. policymakers to the Pearl Harbor attack (see Wohlstetter, 1962) and by the failure to consider intelligence about the location of German *Panzer* divisions prior to the beginning of Operation Market-Garden in 1944 (see Ryan, 1974).

4. It is possible to construct some plausible organizational parallels to the Pool and Kessler (1969) statements about selective perception of individuals. Consider these examples: (a) an organization pays more attention to information pertaining to itself or its mission; (b) an organization pays less attention to—or seeks to deny or to alter—information that contradicts its objectives or that challenges its prior behavior.

5. See Keohane and Nye (1975) for a discussion of problems they believe need prompt attention if adverse effects are to be avoided sometime between 2001 and 2020.

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