

Policy Perspectives on National Security and Foreign Policy Decision Making

Steven B. Redd and Alex Mintz

This article reviews major decision-making models with an emphasis on basic theoretical perspectives as well as on how these models explain foreign policy decision making and national and international security decisions. Furthermore, we examine how these models have been utilized in explanations of various international crises. Specifically, for each model, we present examples drawn from the literature on applications of the respective model to foreign policy and national security decisions. The theories we have reviewed are as follows: rational choice, cybernetic model, prospect theory, poliheuristic theory, organizational and bureaucratic politics, groupthink and polythink, and analogical reasoning. We also review the Applied Decision Analysis method, and the concept of biases in decision making.

Introduction

How do leaders actually make foreign policy and national security decisions? How do they process information? Which decision rules do they utilize in making decisions? How do the rules and strategies adopted by decision makers affect the policies they enact? More important, how do scholars of foreign policy and national security decision making utilize decision models in explaining real-world decisions? In this article, we attempt to answer these questions by reviewing various decision-making models and what they tell us about how national security level policymakers process information en route to choice and how this information processing affects the policies they choose. We begin with rational choice theory and then proceed to review the contributions of cybernetic theory, prospect theory, poliheuristic theory,

