



Spring 2021

A Study of Groupthink and Multiple Advocacy in Presidential Foreign Policy Fiascos

Ethan S. Wilt
Gettysburg College

Follow this and additional works at: https://cupola.gettysburg.edu/student_scholarship



Part of the [American Politics Commons](#), [Industrial and Organizational Psychology Commons](#), and the [International Relations Commons](#)

Share feedback about the accessibility of this item.

Recommended Citation

Wilt, Ethan S., "A Study of Groupthink and Multiple Advocacy in Presidential Foreign Policy Fiascos" (2021). *Student Publications*. 923.

https://cupola.gettysburg.edu/student_scholarship/923

This open access student research paper is brought to you by The Cupola: Scholarship at Gettysburg College. It has been accepted for inclusion by an authorized administrator of The Cupola. For more information, please contact cupola@gettysburg.edu.

A Study of Groupthink and Multiple Advocacy in Presidential Foreign Policy Fiascos

Abstract

As “the sole organ of the federal government in the field of international relations,” Presidents have almost exclusively presided over foreign policy. Modern Presidents, spanning from Eisenhower, Kennedy, Ford, Carter, and Reagan, have readily encountered foreign policy crises, with varying degrees of success. Why do some President fail while others triumph? It comes down to an assortment of factors: organizational structure, multiple advocacy, and groupthink. Organizational structure affects how information is disseminated and decisions are made. Multiple advocacy brings out all important interests during deliberations. Groupthink paralyzes deliberations by causing conformity, cohesion, and replaces critical thinking with irrationality. These frameworks provide a reference for past and future cases of foreign policy crises. Therefore, drawing upon these frameworks, I will investigate the decision-making processes of the aforementioned five Presidents and the corresponding crises and conclude how decisions were made. Finally, I will consider contemporary Presidents–Trump and Biden–to install nuance into the discussion about their encounters with foreign policy crises.

Keywords

Foreign Policy, Presidential Decision-making, Groupthink, Multiple Advocacy

Disciplines

American Politics | Industrial and Organizational Psychology | International Relations

Comments

Written for POL 324: Executive Policy Making

Creative Commons License



This work is licensed under a [Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 License](https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/).

Ethan Wilt
POL 324: Executive Policy Making
Dr. Shirley Anne Warshaw
May 8, 2021

A Study of Groupthink and Multiple Advocacy in Presidential Foreign Policy Fiascos

As “the sole organ of the federal government in the field of international relations,” Presidents have almost exclusively presided over foreign policy. Modern Presidents, spanning from Eisenhower, Kennedy, Ford, Carter, and Reagan, have readily encountered foreign policy crises, with varying degrees of success. Why do some Presidents fail while others triumph? It comes down to an assortment of factors: organizational structure, multiple advocacy, and groupthink. Organizational structure affects how information is disseminated and decisions are made. Multiple advocacy brings out all important interests during deliberations. Groupthink paralyzes deliberations by causing conformity, cohesion, and replaces critical thinking with irrationality. These frameworks provide a reference for past and future cases of foreign policy crises. Therefore, drawing upon these frameworks, I will investigate the decision-making processes of the aforementioned five Presidents and the corresponding crises and conclude how decisions were made. Finally, I will consider contemporary Presidents—Trump and Biden—to install nuance into the discussion about their encounters with foreign policy crises.

Introduction:

The architects of the Constitution bestowed the President of the United States exclusive authority over the realm of foreign policy decision-making. Even before ratification, Alexander Hamilton, an adamant proponent of a robust singular executive, conferred, in *Federalist 70*, that “energy in the Executive is a leading character in the definition of good government” along with declaring that, under a sole individual, the executive branch could act decisively, quickly, and, when necessary, in secrecy (Hamilton 1788; Rudalevige 2006; 23). Ultimately, the U.S. Constitution vested the President with “executive power” as well as designating him or her as the “Commander-in-Chief” (Article II 1787; Section I-II). Additionally, the U.S. Supreme Court decision *U.S. v. Curtiss-Wright Export Corporation* codified “the very delicate, plenary and exclusive power of the President as the sole organ of the federal government in the field of international relations” and dictated as such that “the President alone has the power to speak or

listen as a representative of the nation” (U.S. v. Curtiss-Wright Export Corporation, 1936; Warshaw 2005; 186). Despite congressional ire against presidential prerogative throughout the twentieth century namely the War Powers Resolution of 1973, Congress has largely acquiesced in their role as the foreign policy check upon the executive. This acquiescence—to the fervor of some, most prominently former Co-President Dick Cheney—has galvanized modern Presidents to act decisively before eliciting congressional approval, notably when deliberating on national security and foreign policy issues (Warshaw 2009; 9).

Roger Porter, Special Assistant to President Ford and Director of the Domestic Policy Council under President H.W. Bush, accentuated the idea that “a ‘good’ decision-making process cannot guarantee ‘good’ or wise decisions. It can, however, provide the means for the President to make his decisions intelligently and not ignorantly. It can present the trade-offs, the costs, and the benefits between competing values and objectives, but it cannot weigh those trade-offs for him from his perspective” (Porter 1980; 1). Thus, the underpinnings of a calculated decision-making process are crucial when discerning reliable information during foreign policy crises. The President’s subordinates—consisting of cabinet officers, White House staff, and the Executive Office of the President (EOP)—are tasked with assisting the President in this process. All of which play an integral role in advising the President during foreign policy crises. However, the imperative question rests on how the President can effectively manage and oversee the various organizational appendages of the White House to formulate informed foreign policy decisions (Mitchell 2005; 2). Furthermore, to what degree does groupthink or multiple advocacy affect the President’s decision-making and subsequent outcomes?

President Roosevelt established the Brownlow Commission to study the President’s oversight over the Executive Branch and it, famously, recommended that “the President needed

help” (Warshaw 2005; 321). This, hereafter, led Congress to pass the *Reorganization Act of 1939*, which granted the President the power to reorganize the executive branch and resulted in the creation of the EOP along with the White House Office (WHO) (Warshaw 2005; 321; Dearborn 2019; 199). Roosevelt devised the spokes-of-the-wheel style—otherwise known as the competitive structure—in which the President is at the center and his advisors were assigned overlapping jurisdictions and given equal channels of communication with the President (Warshaw 2005; 323; Mitchell 2005; 14; Johnson 1974). In the competitive organizational structure, the President serves as the arbitrator between battling advisors—allowing the President to stay informed and manipulate the tension between advisors (Mitchell 2005; 11). Although FDR is seemingly the only President to exercise this type of structure, some of his predecessors have utilized variants of the competitive structure, such as the collegial structure.

In direct contrast to competitive is formalistic—or the hierarchal structure—in which policy-making is directed through the chain of command where the President sits at the top (Mitchell 2005; 11; Warshaw 2005; 326). This style of management was established by President Eisenhower, who was a career military officer prior to the presidency and relied on a Chief of Staff to act as the gatekeeper and control the flow of information to only the most pertinent policies (Warshaw 2005; 327; Warshaw 2013; 119). The hierarchal structure discourages bargaining and conflict within groups and the President rarely reaches down for information (Mitchell 2005; 14). The formalistic structure intends for the President to weigh the advantages and disadvantages to distinguish the best policy to address a foreign policy issue (Mitchell 2005; 12). Created and aptly employed by Eisenhower, Republican successors, like Richard Nixon and Ronald Reagan, adopted this style in organizing the White House.

A third organizational style, the collegial structure attempts to craft policy solutions by using different viewpoints in more informal settings and emphasizes building consensus among the group (Mitchell 2005; 14). Like the competitive structure, the President is at the center of decision-making and may assign overlapping jurisdictions to subordinates. Even though conflict is still a part of this structure, the President doesn't use it to facilitate proposals or policies and, instead, actively participates in the group to determine the most feasible course of action (Mitchell 2005; 14). The collegial model involves relying heavily on teamwork rather than competition while simultaneously discouraging parochialism in the group (Haney 1997; 8). Mostly Democratic Presidents—from Kennedy, Carter, and even Ford, a Republican—have favored this type of structure since it allows for more free-flowing deliberation. Although not all presidential management styles configure neatly into these organizational structures, Presidents depend on these structures to productively manage the vast network of White House staff.

In George Alexander's seminal article, "The Case for Multiple Advocacy in Making Foreign Policy," he postulated that multiple advocacy is a mixed system that requires centralized management and executive initiative of policymaking in the realm of national security crises (George 1972; 758). He also specified three distinct conditions—no maldistribution among actors, presidential participation in order to regulate policymaking, and adequate time for debate and give-and-take—that are imperative for multiple advocacy to work best (George 1972; 759; George and Stern 2002; 492-93). Multiple advocacy is designed to expose the President to competing arguments and perspectives from his or her advisors collectively to permit exchange, debate, and presentation (Porter 1980; 241). Effective management can be carried out by appointing different actors to roles in the advocacy group, such as the magistrate who presides at the apex and the custodian, who would manage the decision process by accumulating a spectrum of viewpoints,

bringing in advisors to argue for unpopular options, and setting up alternative channels for information flow (Hart 1990; 285; George 1972; 760). Multiple advocacy does not pursue to eliminate partisanship, parochial perspectives, and bargaining from the decision-making process. But, it does attempt to strengthen the analytical component of these facets of internal advisory structures (George and Stern 2002; 500). As illustrated by Roger Porter, the President “will want to have organizational arrangements that not only provide representation for all important interests, but that also do not significantly favor one perspective over another” when deliberating over foreign policy crises (Porter 1980; 22-23). Hence, multiple advocacy is crucial in the decision-making process to equip the President with viewpoints from all interests, which would, hypothetically, prevent irrational decisions emblematic of groupthink.

Irving Janis, who coined the term groupthink and was the first scholar to attribute it to presidential foreign policy decision making, posited that “the more amiability and esprit de corps among the members of a policy-making in-group, the greater is the danger that independent critical thinking will be replaced by groupthink, which is likely to result in irrational and dehumanizing actions directed against out-groups” (Janis, 1982; 13). Janis divided the symptoms of groupthink into three types. Type one—id est overestimations of power and morality within the group—discusses how the illusion of invulnerability and the unquestioned belief in the group’s inherent morality led to severe miscalculations and irrational decision-making (Janis 1982; 174). Type two—closed-mindedness—argues that collective efforts of the group to rationalize their assumptions and adamant stereotyping of enemy leaders as weak or too evil to warrant genuine considerations drove them to not acknowledge flaws or alternatives to their viewpoints (Janis 1982; 174). Last, type three—pressures of uniformity—contends that self-censorship of dissension from consensus, shared

illusion of unanimity, direct pressure against those who deviate from the group, and the emergence of self-appointed mind-guards all inevitably induce groupthink (Janis 1982; 175).

It is essential to note that groupthink should, reasonably, be treated as a contingent phenomenon, rather than a general property of foreign policy decisions making within group dynamics (Hart, Stern, and Sundelius 1997; 11). Only the utter breakdown of multiple advocacy can elicit the symptoms of groupthink, with the degree of irrationality depending on the severity of the symptoms. The advantage of groupthink analysis lies in its account of how the decision-making process by which groups solicit and decipher information as the basis for policy implementation is less than stellar (Hart, Stern, Sundelius 1997; 14). Subsequently, this results in important events going unnoticed, serious threats being played down, potential alternatives to the present policy going unprobed, and latent opportunities passed by unexploited (Hart, Stern, and Sundelius 1997; 14). Ultimately, groupthink complicates the decision-making process and precipitates deficient foreign policy decisions.

All of these decision-making structures and theories, undoubtedly, influence policy implementation. However, there is no one indomitable advisory structure that is consistently the most effective at countering foreign policy crises. At a forum for presidential decision-making, Ted Sorenson, Former White House Counsel to Kennedy, brought forth an exceptional insight into the decision-making process.

Questioner: Is there a larger lesson to be learned from the structure of the decision-making process during the crisis? Should American foreign policy be conducted in the informal manner of the ExComm, or should it be organized more formally?

Ted Sorenson: I don't think there is a single answer to that. I think that was the best organization and the best group for John F. Kennedy. That is the way he made decisions, that is the way he operated. President Eisenhower had a far more structured system. He was accustomed to that from the military and he was more comfortable with that. I don't second guess him, because I think every president

ought to be able to make those decisions in the way which he is most comfortable, which will be most effective for him (Mitchell 2005; 1)

Sorenson furthered the sentiment of Richard Pious who stated, “there is no single kind of presidential personality or leadership style that causes presidential failure: incumbents of different levels of intellect and energy, with different leadership styles and character, all make disastrous decisions, and all make decisions that turn out well” (Pious 2002; 726). Therefore, I will examine case studies of presidential decision-making during foreign policy crises to accurately conclude how Presidents—including Eisenhower, Kennedy, Ford, Carter, and Reagan—make decisions.

The Presidency of Dwight D. Eisenhower: Groupthink Epitomized

In the early morning hours on May 1st, 1960, the Soviets shot down an American U-2 reconnaissance spy plane over the Ural Region and, subsequently, captured the pilot, Francis Gary Power (Geelhoed 1987; 95; Beschloss 1986; 27). This event immediately triggered an international crisis, considering the two sides were expected to appear at a summit—merely fifteen days later—to negotiate an arms control agreement and détente (Pach Jr. and Richardson 1991; 211). The spy plane shoot-down threatened to derail any progress on rapprochement, which is why Eisenhower’s decision to certify the operation is so puzzling especially since it was Mayday—the Soviet equivalent of the Fourth of July (Beschloss 1986; 23). At the tail end of Eisenhower’s presidency, this choice doesn’t embody his philosophy on decision-making, quoted by Andrew Goodpaster, his staff secretary, “now boys, let’s not make our mistakes in a hurry” (Haney 1997; 132).

The U-2 spy program was initiated in 1954 by the CIA on behalf of President Eisenhower who requested more intelligence of the Soviet Union since relatively little was known of the Soviet landscape and accompanying arms build-up (Pedlow and Welzenbach 1992; 45). The project aimed to construct a plane that could fly at high altitudes—at least 70,000 feet—for long periods of time without refuel (Pedlow and Welzenbach 1992;46) Also, using high-altitude reconnaissance

lenses, the plane would photograph high-resolution imagery of the Soviet landscape and capture “every blade of grass” (Pedlow and Welzenbach 1992; Beschloss 1986; 135). These, ultimately, proved to be highly worthwhile since over ninety percent of the intelligence on the USSR would soon be gathered from these planes. Thus, the project was remarkably secretive, and only Cabinet Secretaries John Foster Dulles, Christian Herter, Thomas Gates; CIA Director Allen Dulles and his deputy Richard Bissell; Staff Secretary Goodpaster and his deputy John Eisenhower (Eisenhower’s son); National Security Advisor (NSA) Gordon Gray; and Vice President Nixon would be aware of the U-2 program (Beschloss 1986). However, due to Eisenhower’s hierarchal structure, subordinates asserted little to no dissent while Dulles and Bissell readily managed the operation without consulting other advisors, including the National Security Council who were never informed of the program until after the shutdown.

Wanting to gain intelligence prior to the Paris Summit, Eisenhower authorized a U-2 flight in late April and, with continued coercion from Dulles and Bissell, he hastily approved another flight but stipulated it had to occur before May 1st. Eisenhower would later come to regret his hurried and ignorant decision by saying “I would like to resign” (Beschloss 1986; 243). In the aftermath of the shutdown of Powers, the administration promulgated the phony story that a research weather service mission strayed into Soviet territory and went down, without completely understanding the extent of the U-2 crash and blindly assumed that Powers was dead (Beschloss 1986; 39). Khrushchev, on the other hand, knew of the U-2 spy planes—since previous flights were conducted and the Soviets were unable to shoot them down—and forgot to mention that the pilot was “quite alive and kicking” in his first speech after the shutdown (Beschloss 1986; 59). Khrushchev instinctively set up a trap for Eisenhower, who continued to voice the cover story until Khrushchev remarked the aforementioned quote to the Supreme Soviet, which left Eisenhower

and other officials in utter disbelief (Ambrose 1984; 574). Caught in a lie, Eisenhower was forced to convene the NSC and congressional leaders to explain the scope of the U-2 program and publicly take full responsibility for the program (Ambrose 1984; 575). Eisenhower continued to assert his commitment to the upcoming summit but Khrushchev was indignant over the transgressions and wasn't going to let Eisenhower off easy. The Paris Summit, however, began on May 16th and quickly spiraled into Khrushchev mounting an attack on Eisenhower and devolved into all sides arguing over the U-2 spy plane. Ultimately, the main objective of securing détente was lost in the conflict due to the souring relationship between Eisenhower and Khrushchev.

The illusion of invulnerability and unanimity perpetrated by the self-appointed mind-guards—who assumed that the U-2 spy plane would never be shot down and, if so, the pilot would automatically die—contributed to the poorly designed plan and subsequent blunders post-shutdown. Due to Eisenhower's hierarchic structure, discussion and dissension were virtually nonexistent and the limited interactions of the group substantially violated the three clauses of multiple advocacy. To put it bluntly, multiple advocacy was bucked in exchange for cohesion and unanimity between Eisenhower and his advisors. The failure of Goodpaster and other officials to speak up about the false assumptions made by Dulles and Bissell ultimately put Eisenhower in a position to make an uninformed decision. This made Eisenhower responsible for the erroneous decision to send another U-2 plane so close to the Paris Summit since traditional doctrine contends that the President is the one accountable for every decision originating within the executive branch (Janis 1982; 194). The secretive nature of the project—especially not informing the NSC—also contributed to the ossification of the deliberations over the program, which enhanced the miscalculations and assumptions. Ultimately, more people should have been informed of the program to limit the chances of groupthink and irrational decision-making. While Eisenhower's

legacy wasn't consumed by this failure, the brunt of the consequences fell on Vice President Nixon who subsequently lost his first chance to claim the keys to the Oval Office by losing the 1960 election to John F. Kennedy. Furthermore, the same officials—Dulles and Bissell—who caused the U-2 affair would later retain their groupthink tendencies and foster a hostile environment in the preparation of the Bay of Pigs.

The Presidency of John F. Kennedy: Zenith and Nadir of Groupthink

President Kennedy remarked “how could I have been so stupid to let them go ahead?” to himself in the aftermath of the Bay of Pigs Invasion, proving to be a perfect failure (Pious 2002; 724; Janis 1982; 14). Kennedy is absolutely correct in his succinct assessment of the Bay of Pigs. This fiasco is a classic demonstration of Murphy's Law—if anything can go wrong, it will—in which it illustrated the shocking number of errors in the whole decision-making process (Neustadt 1990; 246; Janis 1982; 16). Kennedy was plagued by regret in the aftermath and was compelled to reconsider the decision-making processes that underpinned the covert operation.

With entering Kennedy the White House and pursuing a collegial organizational structure, this granted subordinates unrivaled access to the President. Growing up in a large household and previously being a U.S. Senator, Kennedy thrived in a communicative environment and bucked the hierarchal structure that suited his predecessor. Kennedy acted as the hub for activity and counsel, with his advisors collectively gathering around him and in one-on-one meetings. From Cabinet Secretaries Dean Rusk, Robert McNamara, and Bobby Kennedy, and to other close advisors CIA Director Allen Dulles, and his deputy Richard Bissel, NSA McGeorge Bundy and Arthur Schlesinger Jr., these core advisors constituted the intellectually rich group that would advise Kennedy and deliberate on the Bay of Pigs (Janis 1982; 18-19). This group represented the best and brightest of two generations, consisting of “elder statesmen, cunning bureaucrats, captains

of industry, and academic luminaries” (Hart, Stern, and Sundelius 1997; 153). Despite the extraordinary knowledge, expertise, and experience placed before Kennedy, they still went ahead with the inherently flawed course of plan based on an array of questionable assumptions (Hart, Stern, and Sundelius 1997; 153).

Quickly, Dulles and Bissell—carry-overs from the Eisenhower Administration—began to exert unilateral authority over advising and were the most active advocates for the CIA’s plan to overthrow the Castro government through amphibious invasion (Janis 1982; 16). Secretary Rusk had serious doubts about the plan but never voiced his opinion due to the constant internal questioning of his own jurisdiction (Neustadt 1990; 245). Kennedy, ever cautious, sought advice from the Joint Chiefs of Staff (JCS), who responded that it had a fair chance of success, and Dulles and Bissel who continually convinced those in the administration, including McGeorge Bundy, that the venture was feasible (Neustadt 1990; 245). Without vigorous dissent against the plan, key questions, assumptions, and issues were left by the wayside in pursuit of action. After making alterations to the plan, such as relocating the landing site seventy miles west leaving an immutable swamp between the reinforces in the mountains and the Bay of Pigs, Kennedy authorized the plan in the face of mounting internal deadlines and constant pressure to clamp down on the communist nation (Neustadt 1990; 246).

Early in the Morning, on April 15th, eight B-26B bombers commenced an aerial operation to attack three Cuban airfields near Havana, with the sole purpose of destroying armed aircrafts of the Cuban Air Force (FAR) in preparation for the planned invasion (Carradice 2018; 59). CIA reports overly exaggerated the damage—estimated at 80 percent of Castro’s air force—done by the bombing until U-2 reconnaissance flights indicated that the pilots had been over-optimistic in their previous claims (Carradice 2018; 62-62). Kennedy, frustrated, canceled all potential aerial attacks

and insisted that any further attacks would cast the U.S. undoubtedly as the aggressor. Two days later, 1400 Cuban-exiles—also known as Brigade 2506—crowded on U.S. transport ships and left the shores of Guatemala en route to Cuba, where they swiftly encountered a brush of coral reef that made disembarking nearly impossible. In the chaos, Cuban bombers, which were still operational, managed to destroy some of the ground forces, sink two escort ships, and destroy half of the U.S. air support.

Castro rapidly mobilizing his forces to the Bay of Pigs combined with the botched landing by the Cuban exiles led to a devastating loss. With nowhere to go—the troops not being trained to retreat to the mountains and the swampy terrain stopping everyone in their tracks—114 exiles died in the process while most invaders readily surrendered to Castro’s army (Neustadt 1990; 247; Hart, Stern, and Sundelius 1997; 170). To make matters worse, due to time-zone differences, B-26B bomber air-support arrived an hour late and were promptly shot down by the Cuban air force. Ultimately, the Kennedy Administration’s desires to topple the communist government laid bare in the swamp that encompassed the Bay of Pigs. Filled with miscalculations and assumptions, Brigade 2506 magnificently failed to realize the planned invasion, which branded President Kennedy as naïve by the international community. What seemed like a great idea during preparation turned into a failure of utter proportions—showcasing two striking features of the new administration, ignorance, and hopefulness (Neustadt 1990; 247).

In retrospect, the invasion plan was riddled with inconsistencies, misinformation, and assumptions that should have been contemplated if the decision-making process was regulated using multiple advocacy. Kennedy and his advisors made six crucial miscalculations that later turned out to be false or tremendously misleading: no one would suspect that the U.S. was responsible for the invasion, the Cuban air force was so ineffectual that it would be easily knocked

out by airstrikes, the Cuban exiles inspired high morale and would be able to carry the operation without U.S. troops, Cuba's army was weak and would be no match for the brigade, the invasion would invigorate a Cuban uprising leading to the overthrow of the Castro government, and if it were to fail, invaders could retreat to the mountains and reinforce their units (Janis 1982; 19-26). The decision-making process was marred by the influence of groupthink upon the members, with the sense of invulnerability, the illusion of unanimity, suppression of dissent, self-appointed mind-guards, the docility fostered by suave leadership, and taboo against antagonizing valuable new members all contributing to the fiasco that was the Bay of Pigs (Janis 1982; 35-46). The decision-making process also violated all three conditions for multiple advocacy due to Dulles and Bissell flexing their power over others of the group, the limited participation and say Kennedy had in the decisions and the haste at which they operationalized this invasion. The Bay of Pigs embodied the principal exemplar of what occurs when groupthink outweighs the processes of multiple advocacy in foreign policy crises. Ultimately, this lapse in judgment and critical thinking would prepare Kennedy for the larger and more potent crisis on the horizon: the Cuban missile crisis.

At 8:45 A.M., October 16th, 1962, NSA McGeorge Bundy briefed President Kennedy that a U-2 reconnaissance spy plane photographed Soviet surface-to-surface offensive missiles in Cuba, signifying the beginning of the crisis (Reeves 1993; 368; Gibson 2012; 4). The subsequent thirteen days marked the most perilous period for Kennedy; with the world watching the U.S. and Soviet Union walked a thin line between nuclear proliferation and diplomatic hostility. Navigating through the breaches of a crisis like no other, Kennedy, in stark contrast to the Bay of Pigs, showcased his sheer brilliance in a performance that vindicated him as the prophetic President who narrowly escaped oblivion (Schlesinger Jr. 1973; 176; Kennedy 1969; 15). Nonetheless, this

fruition unequivocally rested on the extensive labor Kennedy's advisors endured throughout the thirteen days and they were the sole reason the decision-making process was so effectual.

Immediately following the briefing of the impending crisis, Kennedy called together all of his closest advisors to form an ad hoc committee to evaluate the U-2 intelligence and identify and debate the alternative courses of action that could be taken. The morning of October 20th, Kennedy, formally, issued a national security action memorandum secretly establishing the Executive Committee of the National Security Council—prominently known as ExComm (Kennedy 1969; 24; Reeves 1993; 394; George 1972; 763). ExComm would consist of these advisors as follows:

Secretary of State Dean Rusk, Secretary of Defense Robert McNamara; Attorney General Bobby Kennedy; CIA Director John McCone; Secretary of the Treasury Douglas Dillon; NSA McGeorge Bundy; Presidential Counsel Ted Sorensen; Under Secretary of State George Ball; Deputy Under Secretary of State U. Alexis Johnson; General Maxwell Taylor of the JCS; Edward Martin, Assistant Secretary of State for Latin America; Llewellyn Thompson, Advisor on Russian Affairs; Roswell Gilpatric, Deputy Secretary of Defense; Paul Nitze, Assistant Secretary of Defense; and intermittently at various meetings, Vice President Johnson; Adlai Stevenson, Ambassador to the UN; Ken O'Donnell, Special Assistant to the President; and Don Wilson, Deputy Director of the U.S. Information Agency (Kennedy 1969; 25).

On the first day of the crisis, President Kennedy made it clear that acquiescence was impossible and that ExComm was expected to deliberate on a course of action that would remove the missiles from Cuba before they became operational (Janis 1982; 134). ExComm met continually over the thirteen days and profusely debated over what was the best option.

By the end of the first day, the group had actively considered at least ten alternatives: (1) do nothing; (2) exert diplomatic pressure on the Soviet Union through the United Nations or the Organization of American States; (3) arrange for direct communication between Kennedy and Khrushchev; (4) secretly approach Castro to warn him of U.S. intervention; (5) institute low-level military action by setting up a naval blockade; (6) launch an air assault that would target missile sites; (7) carry out a surgical air strike; (8) carry out a limited surgical airstrike with no advanced

warning; (9) carry out massive airstrike; and (10) launch all-out invasion to take Cuba—reminiscent of the Bay of Pigs invasion (Janis 1982; 143). Although, at first, members of the group gravitated towards different alternatives, what made ExComm so extraordinary was the ability of the advisors to never get married to their option and always question themselves and others in the group. Almost everyone in the room spoke as a generalist, instead of a specialist who had interests in achieving one end over another. In addition, Bobby Kennedy acted as the devil’s advocate, which entitled him to argue the unpopular position that should be considered without fear of isolation or rejection from the in-group (George and Stern 2002; 486). The group dynamics of ExComm act as a substantive case study of how to interact when facing a crisis.

After intense arguing, ExComm finally weighed two choices: a blockade—otherwise known as a quarantine—and a military strike (Kennedy 1969; 38). The blockade was much more flexible than a strike and was able to slowly escalate the situation without causing direct action from the Soviets, and was supported by Bobby Kennedy, Gilpatric, and McNamara. Conversely, the military strike was pushed by military leaders, such as Maxwell Taylor, who saw decisive action as the primary approach to enact. However, Kennedy was skeptical that the airstrikes would wipe out the missiles and the JCS were unable to unquestionably confirm that the surgical airstrikes would hit the target (Janis 1982; 144). Therefore, Kennedy chose to institute the naval quarantine and, on October 22nd, revealed to the public the Soviet missiles in Cuba and called for their removal while establishing the naval blockade until the Soviet Union agreed to dismantle the missile sites (Kennedy 1969; 43). With Kennedy making the decision, the world awaited at the nuclear abyss for the Soviet Union to decide their plan of action. From that point on, Kennedy and Khrushchev corresponded continually each day, which paralleled the stakes of the crisis increasing day-by-day. With Soviet ships inching closer to the Blockade line, Kennedy and ExComm considerably

deliberated on possible escalated military attacks that could be imminent. However, after many confrontational arguments between the two via letter, Kennedy and Khrushchev finally struck a deal on October 27th where Kennedy would remove missiles from Turkey and Italy in exchange for the removal of missiles from Cuba (Kennedy 1969;78).

After the exhaustive thirteen days that encapsulated the crisis, the decision-making of Kennedy and ExComm proved unprecedented in the endeavor to, most essentially, stifle nuclear disaster and prevent groupthink within the administration. After the Bay of Pigs fiasco, President Kennedy established a modus operandi that represented a drastic shift in the procedure, such as altering the participant's role in the group, modifying the group atmosphere, adding subgroup meetings, and instituting leaderless sessions (George 1972; 763; Janis 1982; 141-142). As a result, the symptoms of groupthink were effectively suppressed and the conditions that predicate multiple advocacy were exemplified by ExComm. ExComm members readily acknowledged the grave dangers of all options even after arriving at the blockade decision, explicitly discussed the moral issues at stake, reserved their judgment without fear or attachment to an option, and never stereotyped the enemy and their decision-making process (Janis 1982; 148-153). Allison and Zelikow theorized three models—rational actor, organizational behavior, and governmental politics—to articulate the foundational basis for the decision-making process during the crisis (Allison and Zelikow 1999). For example, governmental action would be a result of the rational choices of Kennedy and Khrushchev, the organizational structure of the U.S. Navy dictating how the blockade would be conducted, and the influence, whether misleading, persuasive or ignorant, from the officials that surrounded the key decision-makers in this crisis (Haney 1997; 11; Allison and Zelikow 1999; 391).

This decision-making process allowed for productive and confrontational deliberations without the group succumbing to groupthink tendencies and ultimately led to ExComm successfully navigating the harrowing days of the crisis (Janis 1982; 158). Even though ExComm was composed of almost all of the same members who made the disastrous decisions during the Bay of Pigs, the Cuban missile crisis offers an explicit counterpoint to groupthink (Janis 1982; 158). Thus, the determining factors of groupthink lie in the circumstances of the deliberations, not in the fixed attributes of the individuals who make up the group (Janis 1982; 158).

The Presidency of Gerald R. Ford: A Failed Success

On the heels of the fall—or liberation—of Saigon by the North Vietnamese Communists and the capture of Phnom Penh by the Khmer Rouge in late April 1975, President Ford proclaimed, “we are strong, and we will continue to be strong” (Lawrence 2008; 170). As U.S. foreign policy plateaued post-WWII, Ford had the balancing act of rejuvenating American morale while also exerting strength at home and abroad. Ironically, he was given an apt opportunity to do so less than a month later when the Khmer Rouge seized a U.S. cargo ship, *SS Mayaguez*, off the coast of Cambodia. The four days that occupied the time of Ford in dealing with *Mayaguez* resembled that of the thirteen days that underscored Kennedy and ExComm’s deliberations during the Cuban Missile crisis. Quickly called to action, Ford, on May 12th, assembled the National Security Council to contemplate the optimum course of action—whether militarily or diplomatically—to rescue the crew of the *Mayaguez* (Baral 1980; 16). Ford’s preeminent advisors consisted of NSA Brent Scowcroft, Cabinet Secretaries Henry Kissinger, and James Schlesinger, CIA Director William Colby, and Air Force Chief of Staff General Daniel C. Jones who was substituting for JCS General George S. Brown (Baral 1980; 16; Rowan 1975; 68). Additionally, in the face of Watergate, Ford moved away from Nixon’s hierarchal structure into a more relaxed collegial

structure, with the institution of counselors and the removal of the Chief of Staff (Warshaw 2013; 132) Although Ford initially, and somewhat casually, noted that “we’ve got a little crisis,” the Mayaguez incident tested Ford’s decision-making and crisis management skills (Rowan 1975; 66).

Nearing the end of the day on May 12th, rescue strategies were being developed, such as seizing the ship on the 14th and storming Koh Tang on the 15th along with other more expansive options like bombings Cambodian warships and additional military targets (Greene 1995; 145). By the next morning, Ford was briefed that the Mayaguez was anchored at Koh Tang and the Cambodians were supposedly taking the crew mainland (Baral 1980; 17). Ford also reminisced about the *USS Pueblo*, which was seized by the North Koreans and held for over a year and he indefinitely didn’t want a repeat of that incident (Baral 1980; 17; Greene 1995; 144). In the group’s meetings, Kissinger rapidly insisted the U.S. needed to use force while Schlesinger voiced his opposition—citing the inherent dangers of such action (Greene 1995; 147). This is where Ford and Kissinger disagreed with Schlesinger on the use of bombings, particularly Ford asserted that it would be a show strength and that “we meant business” (Ford 1979; 279).

Throughout the following day, May 14th, 175 Marines and armed forces moved closer to the position of the strike while Ford entertained any further debate over the plan (Greene 1995; 148). With rather little debate over the boarding of the Mayaguez, discussion, instead, turned to the aerial strikes of the mainland, which cultivated a divisive debate leading to Kissinger and Rockefeller being for it and Schlesinger and the JCS being against it (Greene 1995; 148). Again, unsurprisingly, Ford undertook the punitive action and approved the bombings (Greene 1995; 148). Afterward, as per the War Powers Resolution, Ford convened with congressional leaders to articulate the course of action and field questions from Senators and Representatives (Ford 1979; 280). Even though Ford argued that it was bad policy to force congressional members into the

decision-making process, he, however, respected the law and didn't want to pick a fight with Congress at that time (Friedman 2010; 25). At 7:29 A.M., May 15th, just as U.S. Marines were seizing the *Mayaguez*, Ford was informed by Kissinger of the Khmer Rouge's intent to release the crew and that they were currently setting out in a fishing boat from the shoreline— a fact that dumbfounded the President, Secretary of State, and the Marines fighting, and dying, on Koh Tang (Rowan 1975; 206). Therefore, Ford hastily ordered for the Marines to stop fighting but decided to go ahead with the airstrikes on the area, which caused confusion within the Defense Department and it is unknown why some bombs were and weren't dropped (Ford 1979; 282-284). As a result of his plan, forty-one Americans died in the process (Ford 1979; 284).

While Ford's decisive action against the Khmer Rouge to reclaim the *SS Mayaguez* was lauded by the general populace, some policy experts don't see it that way, especially pointing to the forty-one lives lost and fifty injured. Roger Morris, an NSC staffer under Kissinger, concluded that "running through the *Mayaguez* crisis was much of the muddled, impulsive policymaking that marked the worst and the most ineffectual of the U.S. intervention in Southeast Asia over the last decade" (Janis 1982; 178). In addition, a General Accounting Office—an ostensibly non-partisan vestige—report posited that the Ford Administration had made a serious error in that the attempted rescue mission was nothing more than lives wasted since the action took place after the Cambodian authorities released the crew (Janis 1982; 178; Sweeney et al 2019; 516). Furthermore, in retrospect, the group's deliberations readily violated the terms of multiple advocacy, especially the power dynamic that Kissinger had over the President and the NSC and the swiftness of their actions. The symptoms of groupthink, such as the appointment of the mind-guard, the direct pressure on members who expressed dissenting arguments against the plan, and the miscalculating of their adversary, all contributed to the decision-making processes that underpinned that of Ford

and the NSC. However, the group, despite deficient decision-making due to groupthink, succeeded in thwarting the crisis without fully succumbing to groupthink tendencies.

The Presidency of Jimmy Carter: Indecision and Miscalculations

A man of deep faith, boundless optimism, and a political outsider with substantial plans, Jimmy Carter rode the wave of dissatisfaction towards his predecessor to claim the keys to the Oval Office in 1976. However, by 1980, Carter seemed to have been suffering the same fate as Ford with incessant aggravation over the Iran hostage crisis rapidly paralyzing his presidency. The first strike culminated in his problematic decision to admit the deposed Iranian Shah, in late October 1979, into the U.S. for treatment for his cancer in the face of widespread pressure from the likes of NSA Zbigniew Brzezinski, former Secretary of State Kissinger, and tycoon David Rockefeller (Hahn 2017). In reaction, an already volatile Iran effectively compounded the instability and saw massive demonstrations erupt in the streets across Tehran, especially near the U.S. Embassy (Hahn 2017). And then things got worse. On November 4th, 1979, around 300 young Islamist activists and college students gathered around the embassy and spearheaded a break-in into the compound where, at first, peaceful with students running rampant around the compound (Bowden 2006; 14). It quickly turned aggressive with Islamist activists seizing upon their opportunity and apprehending American embassy staff, taking them out of buildings in blindfolds with guns to their heads and holding them captive (Houghton 2001; 51). This would be the start of the dehumanizing captivity until being freed 444 days later, seconds after Reagan was inaugurated.

After being informed of the break-in and hostage crisis, Carter's constant concern would become the safety and well-being of the American hostages and he iterated that " I would walk in the White House gardens early in the morning and lie awake at night, trying to think of additional

steps I could take to gain their freedom without sacrificing the honor and security of our nation” (Carter 1982; 468). Carter launched the Special Coordinating Committee (SCC), solely to discuss the Iran hostage crisis and weigh the military and diplomatic alternatives (Houghton 2001; 75). This group consisted of Vice President Mondale; Cabinet Secretaries Cy Vance, Bill Miller, Harold Brown, and Benjamin Civiletti; members of the JCS; NSA Brzezinski; Press Secretary Jody Powell; CIA Director Stan Turner; White House Counsel Lloyd Cutler; and intermittently others including Assistant to the President Hamilton Jordan, Deputy Secretary of State Warren Christopher, and Deputy NSA David Aaron (Carter 1982; 471; Glad 2011; 9-10). It is also crucial to underscore that, at first, Carter established a collegial organizational structure for his staff (Warshaw 2013; 136). However, after issues arose throughout his tenure, he decided to switch to a more hierarchal system with Hamilton Jordan named as Chief of Staff. These advisors formed the crux of Carter’s “Rose Garden Strategy” and these decision-making processes during the multiple interventions punctuated the 444-day crisis.

With sixty hostages at the U.S. Embassy and three more—Bruce Laingen, Victor Tomseth, and Michael Howland—held captive in the foreign ministry, Carter and his advisors concluded that action, whether militarily or diplomatically, was required. As diplomatic negotiations gradually deteriorated, military action became the apparent option to rescue the hostages from the Iranian captors. In total, the decision-makers considered seven options: (1) encourage the Shah to leave the U.S.; (2) negotiate directly with Khomeini; (3) institute a naval blockade on Iran; (4) launch an airstrike on the oil refineries at Abadan; (5) mine the Iranian harbors; (6) seize the oil depots on Kharg Island; and (7) launch a rescue mission (Houghton 2001; 81). As diplomatic negotiations gradually deteriorated, military action became the apparent option to rescue the hostages from the Iranian captors. This caused a showdown of authority between Secretary of State Vance, who

avored a diplomatic settlement to resolve the crisis, and NSA Brzezinski, who argued for a more forceful and decisive stance for military intervention (Houghton 2001; 80). Coming into April 1980, the crisis continued to drag on and threatened to derail Carter's chances in the upcoming election.

After much internal deliberation, on the 11th, Brzezinski and Carter convened a meeting for the SCC and NSC to decide upon the rescue mission plan, which conveniently coordinated with Cy Vance leaving for Florida the day prior for vacation (Brinkley 2002; Houghton 2001; 125). Without the presence of Vance, Brzezinski easily controlled the debate and with the other members concurring, Carter, ultimately, authorized the covert operation—designated Operation Eagle Claw (Carter 1982; 517; Houghton 2001; 127). After returning, Vance vehemently objected to the mission, and without support from the President or other officials, he promptly resigned (Carter 1982; 523). Flashforward to April 24th, still adhering to the plan, Operation Eagle Claw commenced with C-130s carrying the rescue team to which resulted in several calamities, both irritant and catastrophic (Houghton 2001; 132). From entering Iran in the daytime instead of the night time to abandoning an undamaged RH-53 helicopter in the middle of the desert to entering a dust storm while trying to get to the target—Desert One—to creating a dust storm of their own at Desert One to ultimately one of the RH-53s colliding with one of the C-130s killing eight members of the rescue team, the rescue operation, from the outset, was plagued by deficiencies and miscalculations that hindered its mission and caused Carter to abort halfway through (Houghton 2001; 132). In reflection, President Carter credited it as one of the worst days of his life in which he then took full responsibility for the mission, paralleling that of President Kennedy's response to the Bay of Pigs fiasco (Carter 1982; 529).

In the aftermath, a Senate Armed Services Committee report, released in June 1980, explicated that major errors were incurred in the planning and execution of the covert operation (Janis 1982; 180). With poor contingency planning, inadequate intelligence, and imperfect information, President Carter bowed to pressure, internally and externally, and authorized the mission, even though inherent flaws and misjudgments were readily apparent to the decision-makers during the process (Janis 1982; 180). Even Carter remarked that “the cancellation of our mission was caused by a strange series of mishaps—almost completely unpredictable. The operation itself was well planned. The men were well trained. We had every possibility of success” (Carter 1982; 528). In retrospect, Carter couldn’t have been more wrong. Due to intensive group cohesiveness, rationalization of flawed thinking, censorship of deviants—id est Cy Vance—and the self-appointed mind-guard that was Brzezinski, Carter was led to believe that every other option was exhausted and that military force was the only possibility (Janis 1982; 182). The sheer degree of authority Brzezinski exerted throughout the SSC meetings indicates a strong maldistribution of power among the group, which threatened multiple advocacy. The most preeminent and striking symptom of groupthink has to be the exclusion of Cy Vance—the lone dissenter throughout the decision-making process—before deciding to sanction the mission. Ultimately, this fiasco rivals that of the Bay of Pigs and showcases how imperfect information with an indecisive President can cause drastic miscalculations and prolong or exacerbate the crisis.

The Presidency of Ronald Reagan: Groupthink Transcended

Established in 1961, the Sandinista National Liberation Front (NSLN), consisting of peasants, Marxists, and students, toppled the Somoza regime, in 1979, and began instituting centralization, land reform, and education reform, as well as allegedly perpetrating human rights abuses (Treharne 2015; 198). In resistance, various rebel groups all collectively fused together to

oppose the new government under the name the Contras. In 1981, President Reagan, a vehement anti-communist, publicly supported the Contras and authorized the CIA to disperse arms, funding, and training for the rebel group in hopes of overthrowing the government (Kornbluh and Byrne 1993; 1). In response, Congress passed what came to be known as the Boland Amendments, which prohibited the use of funds to support military operations in Nicaragua or to the Contras by the U.S. Government—id est the Reagan Administration (Walsh 1997; 18). On another foreign policy front, the U.S. began floating the idea of selling weapons to Iran—through Israel, acting as the intermediary—in exchange for Iranian intercession to secure the release of American hostages in Lebanon and the long term possibility of improving U.S.-Iran relations (Jenkins and Brink 1988; 30). Not only does that violate the cardinal rule of diplomacy in that you don't negotiate with terrorists but it also contravened the *Arms Export Control Act* (Jenkins and Brink 1988; 31).

It was already quite well known around Washington that President Reagan was an idealist and big picture chief executive rather than the detailed-oriented person that encompassed his predecessor. Similar to Eisenhower, Reagan cultivated a hierarchic organizational structure that was well-suited for his type of management style (Warshaw 2013; 140). Reagan's inner-circle of main advisors included Vice President Bush; Cabinet Secretaries George Shultz, Caspar Weinberger, Ed Meese; CIA Director William Casey; NSA Robert McFarlane and Deputy NSA John Poindexter; Chief of Staff Donald Regan and then Howard Baker; and Special Counselor David Abshire (Kornbluh and Byrne 1993). Although it was hardly President Reagan executing the Iran-Contra policy, Lt. Col Oliver North, Deputy Director of Political Affairs on the NSC, was at the forefront of decision-making with assistance from an assortment of key Reagan officials and private citizens. It was North who radicalized the program by devising the system at which the funds from the Iran Initiative would be diverted to the Contras (U.S. Congress 1987; 4). Thus,

once exposed, it was North who owned the blame and even admitted to being “willing to take the fall if somebody needed a political scapegoat” (North 1987).

In the summer of 1985, President Reagan approved the sale of arms through Israel to Iran, even after knowing the illegality of such action (U.S. Congress 1987; 6). This process was facilitated by the Enterprise. Founded as the Stanford Technology Trading Group International by Richard Secord, a retired Major General, and Albert Hakim, an arms dealer, the Enterprise was described as an “off-the-shelf, self-sustaining entity, outside the bounds of congressional oversight, which could be called upon on short notice to conduct covert actions around the world (Kornbluh and Byrne 1993; xxxi; Shenon 1987). In essence, the Enterprise would sell arms to Israel who would then mark up the price and sell them to Iran and the Enterprise would retain the residual profits from those sales. At the direction of Oliver North and the NSC, the Enterprise would continue with this endeavor even when it was apparent that the hostages weren’t being freed (Jenkin and Brink 1988; 31). In reaction to this failure, in the latter stages of 1985, Secretaries Shultz and Weinberger along with NSA McFarlane recommended that the operation be halted (Jenkins and Brink 1988; 31). But President Reagan sided with Deputy NSA Poindexter who favored the continuation of arms sales (Jenkins and Brink 1988; 31). These actions ultimately constituted as arms-for-hostages. By early 1986, North realized that he could capitalize on these profits and thought of a plan: divert future arms sales to Nicaragua to fund and support the Contras (U.S. Congress 1987). Thus, this began the second phase of the operation with North having authorization from Poindexter, he started ratcheting up the diversion in cahoots with the Enterprise. The two ventures intertwined at the nexus of the Iran-Contra affair, which it was effectively covert until October 5th, 1986 when the Nicaraguan government shot down an American cargo plane carrying arms for the Contras, and the secret operation was exposed to the world (Walsh 1993).

After the disclosure of the Iran arms sales, President Reagan, on November 6th, stated that there was no foundation to the reports of arms sales but, a week later, he admitted that the U.S. did, indeed, sell Iran arms but the arms-for-hostages allegations were utterly false (U.S. Congress 1987; 10). Both of these statements would prove to be false along with Meese's conclusion that the President did not know of the Israeli shipments until after they occurred; in reality, the President approved the shipments (U.S. Congress 1987; 10). Meese, however, attempted to place the blame on subordinates, not the President (Warshaw 1997; 140). While this was all occurring, McFarlane, Poindexter, and North committed to covering up the covert missions by shredding and altering documents (U.S. Congress 1987; 10). On the 22nd, the diversion, nonetheless, was discovered, which put more pressure on Reagan and the Administration to answer for their indiscretions.

Three separate investigations were launched to investigate the inner-workings of the covert operations and decipher who knew what and when. First, on November 25th, President Reagan announced the establishment of the Special Review Board—consisting of former Senator John Tower, Former Secretary of State Edmund Muskie, and Former NSA Brent Scowcroft. What came to be known as the Tower Commission determined that Reagan wasn't fully aware of the extent of the program and criticized the actions of Reagan officials, like North, Poindexter, and Weinberger, and the lack of oversight by Reagan over his subordinates, particularly the NSC (Tower, Muskie, and Scowcroft 1987; 80). Second, Meese requested that an Independent Counsel be appointed to investigate the Iran-Contra affair, and, subsequently, on December 19th, Lawrence Walsh was appointed to lead the investigation. Walsh concluded that “the off-the-books nature of the Iran and contra operations gave line-level personnel the opportunity to commit money crimes”

and that Reagan officials deliberately deceived Congress and the public about the extent of their knowledge of the operations (Walsh 1993).

Third, a joint congressional investigation ensued in January 1987, it subsequently iterated that “the common ingredients of the Iran and Contra policies were secrecy, deception, and disdain for the law. A small group of senior officials believed that they alone knew what was right” and that “the confusion, deception, and privatization which marked the Iran-Contra Affair were the inevitable products of an attempt to avoid accountability” (U.S. Congress 1987; 11). A minority report—co-authored by a younger Dick Cheney—asserted that “there was no constitutional crisis, no systematic disrespect for ‘the rule of law,’ no grand conspiracy, and no Administration-wide dishonesty or coverup” (U.S. Congress 1987; 437). Even though North, Poindexter, McFarlane, Weinberger, and others were indicted on a multitude of charges, they either escaped consequences through immunity or pardon by former VP and then President H.W. Bush. An inconsequential end to the Iran-Contra affair with Reagan escaping impeachment by virtue of deteriorating age and stamina and his subordinates as well escaping punishment for their illegal actions (Hersh 1990).

The NSC’s transformation from an advisory committee to an operational off-the-shelf branch of the executive branch, coordinating with the Enterprise, constituted a severe breach of the rule of law and the decision-making process. An exceptional level of group cohesion inhabited the members, in the administration, to seek privatized methods for covert operations. In this realm, there is zero accountability or checks on their actions, especially considering the President was unaware of the full extent. North, unelected and unaccounted for, held significant delineated power over decision-making and caused a skewed level of maldistribution within the group. The official’s overestimation of power in the form of their illusion of invulnerability encouraged extremely risky behaviors and decisions (Janis 1982; 174). Even members who thought the actions were illegal,

such as Shultz and McFarlane, were either susceptible to self-censorship of dissent and failed to speak up or even worse aided in the operation. Oliver North's bold actions are inherently caused by his assumption of unanimity that his supervisors, including the President, consented to what he was engaging in. What makes this case study extraordinary is the intentionality behind misinforming the President and, subsequently, the President's lack of oversight over his subordinates generating a breeding ground for the suppression of multiple advocacy and advancement of groupthink. Oliver North legitimately gave Allen Dulles and Richard Bissell a run for their money in his attempt to supersede the imperative of the President in the foreign policy decision-making process. Therefore, the Iran-Contra affair represents a transcendence of groupthink, something not seen in any of the previous cases and any since.

Present Considerations: The Trump and Biden Presidencies

In conclusion, modern Presidents, within an ever-increasingly complex world, have more or less made great and disastrous decisions during the paramount of foreign policy crises. The U-2 affair depreciated Eisenhower's agenda for détente between the U.S. and the USSR, leaving a sour end to his presidency. The Bay of Pigs humbled a naïve Kennedy while the Cuban Missile crisis rejuvenated his optimism and confidence. The American people lauded Ford's decision-making during the Mayaguez incident but, behind the scenes, his deceptive and misinformed actions showcased an amateur President. The Iran Hostage crisis rapidly paralyzed the last year of Carter's presidency and led to a demoralizing loss in the 1980 election. The Iran-Contra affair evinced a deteriorating Reagan and his lack of oversight of his subordinates. While groupthink is supposed to be understood as a contingent, not a rule, it is difficult to deny the influence it has on each of these foreign policy crises for better and, mostly, for worse. Multiple advocacy stands on the other side of the spectrum and, in Roger Porter's mind, aims to assist the President "in

balancing the competing forces and interests in major areas of public policy” that provides representation for all indispensable interests (Porter 1980; 22). Therefore, these presidential case studies energetically articulated the ebb and flow of groupthink and multiple advocacy within the contexts of foreign policy decision-making during twentieth-century crises.

However, these influences haven’t disappeared from decision-making and have only become more readily demonstrated and recognized. From H.W. Bush’s decisions during the Persian Gulf War to W. Bush’s decision to invade Iraq during the War on Terror—chronicled by Bob Woodward’s tetralogy—to Obama’s persistence in Afghanistan, a varying level of groupthink is still alive and well within the situation room where the President and advisors make decisions. Then came Donald Trump, a true political outsider and provocative figurehead for the Republican party, who claimed the keys to the Oval Office by charging that he, alone, would “Make America Great Again” and place “America First” in his foreign policy agenda (Paterson 2019). At first, Trump selected Reince Priebus as Chief of Staff to act as the gatekeeper; but quickly, other aides, such as Steve Bannon, came flooding into the Oval Office, at Trump’s request (Warshaw 2017; 569). Trump, resistant to being tied down, informally established the spokes-of-the-wheel organizational style but that coupled with a constant influx of staff caused havoc early on in the White House (Warshaw 2017; 569; Tenpas 2021). During this time, the White House sprang persistent leaks to the public, which undercut their agenda and decision-making severely. It wasn’t until July 31st, 2017 when former DHS Secretary John Kelly became Chief of Staff and instituted a hierarchal structure that the White House relatively stabilized. Once Kelly resigned, Acting Chief of Staff Mick Mulvaney tried a competitive style again and, ultimately, failed (Cook and Zanon, 2020). Mark Meadows concluded the array of Chief of Staffs’ under Trump’s disposal and came

into the role at the outset of the pandemic and guided the White House rather ineffectively through the final stages of the Trump presidency (Cooke and Zanona, 2020).

As the organizational structure of the White House suffered tremendously during the Trump presidency, so did the retention of subordinates. It is truly challenging to underscore Trump's key advisors because of the rate at which subordinates came and went. But, Trump's inner circle consisted of a smattering of advisors including Cabinet Secretaries Rex Tillerson, who was quickly replaced by Mike Pompeo, Steven Mnuchin, Jim Mattis, who was replaced by Mark Esper; NSA Michael Flynn, who was caught lying to Vice President Pence and promptly replaced by H.R. McMaster to John Bolton to finally Robert O'Brien; Senior Advisors Jared and Ivanka Kushner; and Stephen Miller (Nelson 2019; 116; Warshaw 2017; 570). Although done before by previous Presidents Eisenhower and Kennedy, Trump's choice to make his daughter and son-in-law imperative voices in his decision-making process pushed the boundaries of nepotism and generated widespread condemnation. For example, Jared Kushner is a valuable example of a subordinate asserting authority on policy, with Kushner taking the reins on national security relating to peace in the Middle East. All of the advisors represent a jumble of competing agendas, interests, and intentions in which they all vied for President Trump's attention (Warshaw 2017; 571).

However, the real authority rested in only one person's hands: President Trump. His penchant for loyalty dominated his leadership style and determined who helped make the decisions (Warshaw 2017; 573). Those that aligned closely with Trump and ingratiated themselves with him were rewarded and those who didn't meet these aspirations were gaslighted and, most likely, fired. This disposition, alone, constitutes an inherent symptom of groupthink, with President Trump controlling the decision-making among his advisors and cultivating cohesiveness and self-

ensorships of dissent. The decision-making process devolved into in-fighting between subordinates to see who could gain traction with Trump. Furthermore, the maldistribution of power was austere and skewed towards the President, which hindered fruitful deliberation and subsequent decisions. Therefore, multiple advocacy was curtailed, and that caused immensely ignorant decision-making, especially during the pandemic when decisive action was necessary but didn't occur. Irving Janis and Roger Porter—whose son, ironically, was in the Trump Administration—would be astonished at the ineffective governing strategy, the sheer degree of groupthink originating precisely from Trump, and the total breakdown of intelligible counsel from advisors. No matter how deliberative the process was, Trump had the tendency to blow it up with impulsive decisions, which fractured the decision-making process during crises (Warshaw 2017; 576).

In direct contrast to his predecessor's sporadic, sometimes unhinged, and ignorant persona, newly elected President Biden is level-headed, experienced, and brings a sense of stability to the White House in desperate need. Compared to "the former guy," President Biden has filled his administration with qualified and experienced advisors to turn the tide from the lethargy of the pandemic to progress and prosperity. First, Biden appointed longtime aide Ron Klain as his Chief of Staff and he will act as a resolute gatekeeper while allowing for critical deliberations in a collegial organization style. President Biden's inner circle of advisors includes Cabinet Secretaries Antony Blinken, Lloyd Austin, Janet Yellen, Merrick Garland, Pete Buttigieg; NSA Jake Sullivan; Special Envoy for Climate John Kerry; VP Kamala Harris; and, in the short term, Dr. Fauci (Moore, Carlsen, and Swasey). In the meantime, Biden is consumed by domestic affairs, such as passing the *American Rescue Plan Act of 2021* to address the pandemic and advocating for his American Jobs Plan to restore infrastructure around the nation.

Soon though, Biden will inevitably turn to foreign policy, his expertise, to flex his muscles on the world stage. Currently, the type of White House structure and atmosphere Biden is cultivating could lead to successful multiple advocacy and deterrence from groupthink. What Biden has on his predecessor is his detailed knowledge of the mechanisms of the presidency, something Trump utterly lacked coming into the Oval Office. This also lends itself to productive deliberations during foreign policy crises, which has already been exhibited throughout his time leading the pandemic response. In a similar vein to Ford after Watergate, Biden is presently seeking to heal the nation from the damaging implications of the pandemic, the Trump presidency, and the litany of social issues that spawned in the last year. In doing so, it is paramount for Biden to draw upon his predecessors' actions, whether great or calamitous, to execute informed and intelligible decisions during his presidency, which will ultimately determine his legacy.

Out of the surveyed foreign policy crises a few commonalities arise. First, ignorant decisions are made when Presidents either hastily draw out and execute courses of action, limit deliberations and neglect to contemplate the detail-oriented ramifications, or are coerced by internal or external advisors into taking action. Second, when irrationality and cohesion replace critical thinking among group members, it inevitably leads to a breakdown of multiple advocacy and foreign policy fiascos. Third, well-informed decisions consist of extensive time for vehement deliberations, rational thinking of the crisis and the adversary, and the inclusion of as many policy advisors as possible deliberating over the crisis. Fourth, groupthink isn't determined by the fixed attributes of the group members, but, rather, the circumstances of the deliberations during the crisis. Fifth, White House organizational structure unequivocally influences decision-making; however, there is no one structure that unanimously supplants all others. Presidents have triumphed and failed utilizing each one of the structures and, in the words of Ted Sorensen, "every president

ought to be able to make those decisions in the way which he is most comfortable, which will be most effective for him” (Mitchell 2005; 1). Therefore, this analysis stands to provide hindsight for the case studies and advice for future Presidents on how to conduct the decision-making process and make effective decisions during foreign policy crises.

Bibliography:

- Abshire, David M. 2005. *Saving the Reagan Presidency*. 1st ed. College Station. Texas A&M University Press. (Accessed April 22, 2021)
- Allison, Graham, and Philip Zelikow. 1999. *Essence of Decision: Explaining the Cuban Missile Crisis*. 2nd ed. New York. Longman. (Accessed April 15, 2021)
- Ambrose, Stephen E. 1984. *Eisenhower: The President*. 2nd ed. New York. Simon and Schuster. (Accessed April 15, 2021)
- Article II of the United States Constitution. 1787. (Accessed April 30, 2021)
- Atkinson, Rick. 1993. *Crusade: The Untold Story of the Persian Gulf War*. Boston. Houghton Mifflin Company. (Accessed April 27, 2021)
- Bauer, Bob, and Jack Goldsmith. 2020. *After Trump: Reconstructing the Presidency*. Washington D.C. Lawfare Press. (Accessed April 27, 2021)
- Baral, Jaya Krishna. 1980. "The Mayaguez Incident: A Study of Crisis Management." *International Studies*. 19(1): 15-41. January 1. (Accessed May 4, 2021)
- Beschloss, Michael R. 1986. *Mayday: The U-2 Affair*. New York. Harper & Row Publishers. (Accessed April 15, 2021)
- Bowden, Mark. 2006. *Guests of the Ayatollah*. New York. Grove Press. (Accessed April 15, 2021)
- Brinkley, Douglas. 2002. "THE LIVES THEY LIVED; Out of the Loop." *The New York Times Magazine*. December 29. (Accessed May 5, 2021)
- Burke, John P. 2009. *Honest Broker?: The National Security Advisor and Presidential Decision Making*. College Station. Texas A&M University Press. (Accessed April 27, 2021)
- Carradice, Phil. 2018. *Bay of Pigs: CIA's Cuban Disaster, April 1961*. South Yorkshire, Great Britain. Pen and Sword Military. (Accessed April 15, 2021)
- Carter, Jimmy. 1982. *Keeping Faith: Memoirs of a President*. Fayetteville. The University of Arkansas Press. (Accessed April 15, 2021)
- Cook, Nancy, and Melanie Zanona. 2020. "Trump tries on a fourth chief of staff in the middle of a devastating crisis." *Politico*. April 6. (Accessed May 6, 2021)
- Cooper, Philip J. 2014. *By Order of the President: The Use and Abuse of Executive Direct Action*. 2nd ed. Lawrence, Kansas. University Press of Kansas. (Accessed April 15, 2021)
- Dearborn, John A. 2019. "The Foundations of the Modern Presidency: Presidential Representation the Unitary Executive Theory, and the Reorganization Act of 1939." *Presidential Studies Quarterly*. 49(1): 185-203. (Accessed May 1, 2021)
- Ford, Gerald R. 1979. *A Time to Heal*. 1st ed. New York. Harper & Row Publishers. (Accessed April 15, 2021)
- Friedman, Jason. 2010. "Gerald Ford, the Mayaguez Incident, and the Post-Imperial Presidency." *Congress & the Presidency*. 37(1): 22-44. (Accessed May 4, 2021)
- Geelhoed, E. Bruce. 1987. "Dwight D. Eisenhower, the Spy Plane, and the Summit: A Quarter-Century Retrospective." *Presidential Studies Quarterly*. 17(1): 95-106. (Accessed April 23, 2021)

- George, Alexander. 1972. "A Case for Multiple Advocacy in Making Foreign Policy." *The American Political Science Review*. 66(3): 751-785. (Accessed April 30, 2021)
- George, Alexander L., and Eric K. Stern. 2002. "Harnessing Conflict in Foreign Policy Making: From Devil's to Multiple Advocacy." *Presidential Studies Quarterly*. 32(3): 484-508. (Accessed April 17, 2021)
- Gibson, David R. 2012. *Talk at the Brink: Deliberation and Decision During the Cuban Missile Crisis*. Princeton and Oxford. Princeton University Press. (Accessed April 24, 2021)
- Glad, Betty. 2011. *An Outsider in the White House: Jimmy Carter, His Advisors, and the Making of American Foreign Policy*. Ithaca and London. Cornell University Press. (Accessed May 4, 2021)
- Greene, John R. 1995. *The Presidency of Gerald R. Ford*. Lawrence, Kansas. University Press of Kansas. (Accessed April 15, 2021)
- Hahn, Peter L. 2017. "How Jimmy Carter lost Iran." *The Washington Post*. October 22. (Accessed May 4, 2021)
- Haney, Patrick Jude. 1997. *Organizing for Foreign Policy Crises Presidents, Advisors, and the Management of Decision-making*. Ann Arbor. University of Michigan Press. (Accessed April 30, 2021)
- Hamilton, Alexander. 1788. "Federalist No. 70." *The New York Packet*. March 18. (Accessed April 30, 2021)
- Hart, Paul 't. 1990. *Groupthink in Government: A Study of Small Groups and Policy Failures*. Baltimore. The Johns Hopkins University Press. (Accessed April 15, 2021)
- Hart, Paul 't, Eric Stern, and Bengt Sundelius. 1997. *Beyond Groupthink: Political Group Dynamics and Foreign Policy-Making*. Ann Arbor. The University of Michigan Press. (Accessed April 17, 2021)
- Hersh, Seymour M. 1990. "The Iran-Contra Committees: Did They Protect Reagan?" *The New York Times Magazine*. April 29. (Accessed April 27, 2021)
- Houghton, David Patrick. 2001. *US Foreign Policy and the Iran Hostage Crisis*. Cambridge. Cambridge University Press. (Accessed April 28, 2021)
- 2015. "Understanding Groupthink: The Case of Operation Market Garden." *The US Army War College Quarterly*. 45(3): 75-85. September 1. (Accessed April 15, 2021)
- Janis, Irving L. 1982. *Groupthink: Psychological Studies of Policy Decisions and Fiascoes*. 2nd ed. Boston. Houghton Mifflin Company. (Accessed April 15, 2021)
- Jenkins, Ed, and Robert H. Brink. 1988. "The National Security Council and the Iran-Contra Affair." *Georgia Journal of International and Comparative Law*. 18(1): 19-46. (Accessed April 24, 2021)
- Johnson, Richard T. 1974. *Managing the White House: An Intimate Study of the Presidency*. New York. Harper & Row. (Accessed May 1, 2021)
- Jordan, Hamilton. 1982. *Crisis: The Last Year of the Carter Presidency*. New York. G.P. Putnam's Sons. (Accessed April 15, 2021)

- Kennedy, Robert F. 1969. *Thirteen Days: A Memoir of the Cuban Missile Crisis*. New York. W.W. Norton & Company. (Accessed April 15, 2021)
- Kornbluh, Peter, and Malcolm Byrne. 1993. *The Iran-Contra Scandal: The Declassified History*. New York. The New Press. (Accessed April 22, 2021)
- Laingen, Bruce. 1992. *Yellow Ribbon: The Secret Journal of Bruce Laingen*. New York. Brassey's Inc. (Accessed April 15, 2021)
- Lawrence, Mark A. 2008. *The Vietnam War: A Concise International History*. New York. Oxford University Press. (Accessed April 15, 2021)
- Lindsay, James M., Lois W. Sayrs, and Wayne P. Steger. 1992. "The Determinants of Presidential Foreign Policy Choice." *American Politics Quarterly*. 20(1): 3-25. (Accessed April 30, 2021)
- Mitchell, David. 2005. *Making Foreign Policy: Presidential Management of the Decision-Making Process*. Burlington, Vermont. Ashgate. (Accessed April 28, 2021)
- Moore, Elena, Audrey Carlsen, and Benjamin Swasey. 2021. "Biden Administration: Here Are His Cabinet Members and His Advisors." *NPR*. April 28. (Accessed May 6, 2021)
- Neustadt, Richard E. 1990. *Presidential Power and the Modern Presidents: The Politics of Leadership from Roosevelt to Reagan*. New York. Free Press. (Accessed April 15, 2021)
- Nelson, Michael. 2019. *Trump: The First Two Years*. 2nd ed. Charlottesville. University of Virginia Press. (Accessed May 6, 2021)
- North, Oliver. 1987. "North on Who in the Cabinet Knew What." (Video) *Understanding the Iran-Contra Affair Project*. Brown University. July 8. (Accessed May 5, 2021)
- 1991. *Under Fire: An American Story*. New York. Post Hill Press. (Accessed April 22, 2021)
- Obama, Barack. 2020. *A Promised Land*. New York. Crown. (Accessed April 27, 2021)
- Pach Jr., Chester J., and Elmo Richardson. *The Presidency of Dwight D. Eisenhower*. Revised Ed. Lawrence, Kansas. University Press of Kansas. (Accessed April 15, 2021)
- Pedlow, G.W. and Welzenbach, D.E. 1992. "The Central Intelligence Agency and Overhead Reconnaissance: The U-2 and OXCART Programs, 1954-1974." *The Central Intelligence Agency*. (Accessed May 4, 2021)
- Peterson, Erin. 2019. "Presidential Power Surges." *Harvard Law Bulletin*. July 18. (Accessed May 6, 2021)
- Pious, Richard M. 2002. "Why Do Presidents Fail?" *Presidential Studies Quarterly*. 32(4): 724-742. (Accessed April 17, 2021)
- Porter, Roger. 1980. *Presidential Decision Making: The Economic Policy Board*. Cambridge. Cambridge University Press. (Accessed April 27, 2021)
- Reeves, Richard. 1993. *President Kennedy: Profiles of Power*. New York. Simon and Schuster. (Accessed April 15, 2021)
- Rowan, Roy. 1975. *The Four Days of Mayaguez*. 1st ed. New York. W.W. Norton & Company. (Accessed April 15, 2021)
- Rudalevige, Andrew. 2006. *The New Imperial Presidency: Renewing Presidential Power After Watergate*. Ann Arbor. University of Michigan Press. (Accessed April 15, 2021)

- Rucker, Philip, and Carol Leonnig. 2020. *A Very Stable Genius*. New York. Penguin Press. (Accessed May 6, 2021)
- Sanchez, Boris. 2021. "60 years After the Bay of Pigs invasion, many Cuban Americans' distrust of the Democratic Party still affects national politics." *CNN*. April 17. (Accessed April 17, 2021)
- Schlesinger Jr., Arthur M. 1973. *The Imperial Presidency*. New York. Houghton Mifflin Company. (Accessed April 24, 2021)
- Shenon, Philip. 1987. "The Iran-Contra Report; What 'the Enterprise' was." *The New York Times Magazine*. November 19. (Accessed May 5, 2021)
- Strong, Robert A. 2005. *Decisions and Dilemmas: Case Studies in Presidential Foreign Policy Making Since 1945*. 2nd ed. Armonk, New York and London, England. M.E. Sharpe. (Accessed April 28, 2021)
- Sweeney, Michael, Michael DiBari Jr., Edgar Simpson, and William Schulte. 2019. "President Ford's Personal Watergate: The Undermining of the Public Sphere during the Mayaguez Incident." *American Journalism*. 36(4): 497-518. (Accessed May 4, 2021)
- Tenpas, Kathryn D. 2021. "Tracking Turnover in the Trump Administration." *The Brookings Institute*. January. (Accessed May 6, 2021)
- Treharne, Sally-Ann. 2015. "Nicaragua: The Allies Stand Together." *Reagan and Thatcher's Special Relationship: Latin America and Anglo-American Relations*. Edinburgh University Press. (Accessed May 5, 2021)
- Tower, John, Edmund Muskie, and Brent Scowcroft. 1987. *The Tower Commission Report: A Full Text of the President's Special Review Board*. New York. Bantam Books and Times Books. (Accessed April 22, 2021)
- United States Congress. Joint House and Senate. 1987. U.S. Senate Select Committee On Secret Military Assistance to Iran And the Nicaraguan Opposition and U.S. House of Representatives Select Committee to Investigate Covert Arms Transactions with Iran. *Report of the Congressional Committees Investigating the Iran-Contra Affair With Supplemental, Minority, and Additional Views*. 1987-1988 sess. November 17. (Accessed April 27, 2021)
- United States v. Curtiss-Wright Export Corporation. 1936. 299 U.S. 304. (Accessed April 17, 2021)
- Walsh, Lawrence E. 1993. *Final Report of the Independent Counsel for Iran/Contra Matters*. Volume I. United States Court of Appeals for the District of Columbia Circuit. August 4. (April 27, 2021)
- 1997. *Firewall: The Iran-Contra Conspiracy and Cover-Up*. New York. W.W. Norton & Company. (Accessed April 22, 2021)
- Warshaw, Shirley Anne. 1997. *The Domestic Presidency: Policy Making in the White House*. Boston. Allyn and Bacon. (Accessed April 28, 2021)
- 2005. *Keys to Power: Managing the Presidency*. 2nd ed. New York. Routledge. (Accessed April 15, 2021)

- 2009. *The Co-Presidency of Bush and Cheney*. Stanford. Stanford University Press. (Accessed April 15, 2021)
- 2013. *Guide to the White House Staff*. Los Angeles. CQ Press. (Accessed April 28, 2021)
- 2017. “The Struggle to Govern in the Trump White House: Competing Power Centers, Personalities, and World Visions.” *The Forum*. 15(3); 567-581. (Accessed May 5, 2021)
- Woodward, Bob. 1991. *The Commanders*. New York. Simon & Schuster. (Accessed April 27, 2021)
- 2002. *Bush At War*. New York. Simon & Schuster. (Accessed April 27, 2021)
- 2004. *Plan of Attack*. New York. Simon & Schuster Paperbacks. (Accessed April 27, 2021)
- 2006. *State of Denial*. New York. Simon & Schuster. (Accessed April 27, 2021)
- 2008. *The War Within*. New York. Simon & Schuster. (Accessed April 27, 2021)
- 2010. *Obama’s Wars*. New York. Simon & Schuster. (Accessed April 27, 2021)
- 2018. *Fear: Trump in the White House*. New York. Simon & Schuster. (Accessed April 28, 2021)
- 2020. *Rage*. New York. Simon & Schuster. (April 28, 2021)

I affirm that I have upheld the highest principles of honesty and integrity in my academic work and have not witnessed a violation in the Honor Code. **ESWilt**