

THE UNIVERSITY OF CHICAGO

ORGANIZING MISTRUST: HOW LEADERS NAVIGATE BUREAUCRATIC RESISTANCE
ON FOREIGN POLICY

A DISSERTATION SUBMITTED TO
THE FACULTY OF THE DIVISION OF THE SOCIAL SCIENCES
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Abstract

This dissertation examines how political leaders confront an enduring dilemma: while foreign policy professionals offer critical expertise and continuity in managing inter-state relations, they can also undermine leaders' authority through resistance, obstruction, or disloyalty. How, then, do leaders shape foreign policymaking institutions, rules, and norms to secure their policy goals in the face of potential bureaucratic resistance? I argue that leaders deploy distinct organizational strategies—combinations of formal and informal institutional tools—to adjust the degree of bureaucratic inclusion and control in foreign policymaking. These strategies reflect a balance between two core objectives: retaining the technical competence and institutional memory of the bureaucracy and securing loyalty to the leader's agenda. Leaders who value control over competence tend to exclude or politicize the bureaucracy; those who prioritize competence promote its autonomy and neutrality.

The choice between control and competence hinges on a leader's trust in the bureaucracy, shaped by psychological processes of social identification. Leaders who see themselves as fundamentally distinct from the bureaucratic establishment experience higher levels of distrust, increasing the perceived cost of bureaucratic input. Distrustful leaders are thus more likely to adopt exclusionary or loyalty-driven strategies—purging, coopting, or restructuring bureaucracies—whereas trustful leaders are more likely to tolerate inclusion and neutrality, even amid disagreement. Significantly, these strategic choices are constrained by a leader's domestic political strength. Leaders with fewer political rivals can afford to expend more capital battling entrenched bureaucracies. Paradoxically, the most mistrustful leaders may refrain from politicizing bureaucracies if politically weak, while trustful leaders may sideline them when integration becomes too costly.

To test this theory, I employ comparative case studies across India, the United States, and Turkey. In India, Indira Gandhi moved from insulation to politicization as her political strength grew, while Manmohan Singh circumvented the bureaucracy in sensitive areas despite his inclusive style. In the U.S., Nixon insulated policymaking to avoid bureaucratic sabotage; Carter, amid conflict with the State Department, sometimes excluded it; and George H. W. Bush trusted and included bureaucratic actors. In Turkey, Recep Tayyip Erdoğan centralized and politicized foreign policy institutions as his political power solidified. Together, these cases reveal how trust, control, and political context shape the organization of foreign policymaking across regimes.

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Abbreviations

India

Prime Minister's Office (PMO)
Ministry of External Affairs (MEA)
Department of Atomic Energy (DAE)
Atomic Energy Commission (AEC)
Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP)
United Progressive Alliance (UPA)
Indian Foreign Service (IFS)
National Security Council Secretariat (NSCS)

United States

Department of Defense (DOD)
Central Intelligence Agency (CIA)
Foreign Service Officer (FSO)
Joint Chiefs of Staff (JCS)
National Security Adviser (NSA)
National Security Council (NSC)
National Security Decision Memoranda (NSDM)
Policy Review Committee (PRC)
Presidential Directive (PD)
Senior Interdepartmental Group (SIG)
Special Coordinating Committee (SCC)
Strategic Arms Limitation Treaty (SALT)
Vietnam Special Studies Group (VSSG)
Washington Special Actions Group (WSAG)

Turkey

European Union (EU)
Justice and Development Party (AKP)
Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK)
Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MFA)
National Intelligence Organization (MIT)
National Security Council (MGK)
Office of the General Staff (OGS)
Prime Minister's Office (PMO)
Republican People's Party (CHP)
Secretariat General for EU Affairs (EUSG)
Turkish Armed Forces (TAF)
Turkish Cooperation and Coordination Agency (TIKA)

Key Persons

Indira Gandhi's India

Indira Gandhi, Prime Minister of India (1966-1977, 1980-83)

Morarji Desai, Deputy Prime Minister (1967-69)

P.N. Haksar, Secretary (1967-71), Principal Secretary to the Prime Minister (1971-73), Deputy Chairman to the Planning Commission (1975-77)

T.N. Kaul, Foreign Secretary (1967-72) & Ambassador to the United States (1973-76)

D.P. Dhar, Ambassador to the Soviet Union (1969-71, 1975), Chairman of the Policy Planning Division, Ministry of External Affairs (1971-75)

P.N. Dhar, Adviser (1970-71) & Secretary to the Prime Minister (1971-77)

R.N. Kao, Secretary, Research & Analysis Wing (R&AW) (1969-77)

K.S. Shelvankar, Consul General to North Vietnam (1968-71) & Ambassador to the Soviet Union (1971-75)

L.K. Jha, Secretary to the Prime Minister (1964-67) & Ambassador to the United States (1970-73)

I.G. Patel, Economic Adviser to the Prime Minister

Swaran Singh, External Affairs Minister (1964-66, 1970-74), Defence Minister (1966-70, 1974-76)

Dinesh Singh, Foreign Minister (1969-1970)

Bangladesh

Sheikh Mujibur Rehman, Awami League President

Tajuddin Ahmad, Awami League General Secretary

Soviet Union

Leonid Brezhnev, General Secretary of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union (1964-1982)

Alexei Kosygin, Premier of the Soviet Union (1964-1980)

United States in the Late Cold War

Richard Nixon

Richard Nixon, President (1969–1974)

Henry Kissinger, National Security Adviser (1969–1975), Secretary of State (1973–1977)

H. R. Haldeman, Chief of Staff (1969–1973)

Melvin Laird, Secretary of Defense (1969–1973)

William Rogers, Secretary of State (1969–1973)

Richard Helms, Director of Central Intelligence (1966–1973)

Earle Wheeler, Chairman, Joint Chiefs of Staff (1964–1970)

Creighton Abrams, U.S. Commander in Vietnam (1968–1972)

Ellsworth Bunker, U.S. Ambassador to South Vietnam (1967–1973)

Joseph Farland, U.S. Ambassador to Pakistan (1969–1972)

Elliot Richardson, Under Secretary of State (1969), Secretary of Defense (1973)

Kenneth Rush, Deputy Secretary of State (1972–1974)

Laurence Lynn, Director of Program Analysis, National Security Council (1971–1973)

Adlai Stevenson, Democratic Presidential Nominee (1952, 1956)

Joe McCarthy, Senator (1947–1957)

Alger Hiss, State Department Official (1936–1947?)

Jimmy Carter

Jimmy Carter, President (1977–1981)

Walter Mondale, Vice President (1977–1981)

Zbigniew Brzezinski, National Security Adviser (1977–1981)

Cyrus Vance, Secretary of State (1977–1980)

Harold Brown, Secretary of Defense (1977–1981)

Leonard Woodcock, U.S. Envoy to China (1977–1979)

David Aaron, Deputy National Security Adviser (1977–1981)

Warren Christopher, Deputy Secretary of State (1977–1981)

Michel Oksenberg, China Specialist, NSC Staff (1977–1981)

Richard Holbrooke, Assistant Secretary of State for East Asian Affairs (1977–1981)

Harold Saunders, Assistant Secretary for Near East and South Asia (1978–1981)

Anthony Lake, Director of Policy Planning (1977–1981)

Stu Eizenstat, Domestic Policy Adviser (1977–1981)

Deng Xiaoping, Vice Premier of China (1978–1980)

Huang Zhen, Chinese Diplomat (1970s)

Chai Zemin, Head of Chinese Liaison Office in Washington (1973–1979)

George H.W. Bush

Brent Scowcroft, National Security Adviser (1989–1993)

James Baker, Secretary of State (1989–1992)

John Tower, Nominee for Secretary of Defense (rejected) (1989)

Dick Cheney, Secretary of Defense (1989–1993)

Erdogan's Turkey

Recep Tayyip Erdogan, Prime Minister (2003–2014) and later President of Turkey (2014–)

Abdullah Gul, Prime Minister (2002–2003), Foreign Minister (2003–2007), and President of Turkey (2007–2014)

Ahmet Davutoğlu, Foreign Policy Adviser (2003–2009), Foreign Minister (2009–2014), and Prime Minister (2014–2016)

Ali Babacan, Minister of Economy (2002–2007), Chief EU Negotiator (2005–2009), and Foreign Minister (2007–2009)

Egemen Bagış, Minister for EU Affairs and Chief Negotiator (2009–2013)

Necmettin Erbakan, former Prime Minister of Turkey (1996–1997)

Hakan Fidan, Head of MIT (2010–2023), Foreign Minister (2023–present)

Fethullah Gülen, Leader of the Hizmet Movement, exiled cleric and influential political actor

Manmohan Singh's India

Manmohan Singh, Prime Minister (2004-2014)
Atal Bihari Vajpayee, former Prime Minister
P.V. Narasimha Rao, former Prime Minister
Sonia Gandhi, Congress Party President
Rahul Gandhi, son of Sonia Gandhi and Congress Party politician
K. Natwar Singh, External Affairs Minister (2004-2005)
Pranab Mukherjee, (External Affairs, Finance, Defence)
J.N Dixit, National Security Adviser (2004-2005)
M.K. Narayanan, National Security Adviser (2005-2010)
Shyam Saran, Foreign Secretary (2004-2006)
Shivshankar Menon, Foreign Secretary (2006-2009), National Security Adviser (2010-2014)
Sanjay Baru, Media Adviser to the PM (2004-2008)
Satinder Kumar Lambah, Special Envoy for Afghanistan and Pakistan (2005-2014)
Anil Kakodkar, Chairman of the AEC (2000-2009), Secretary of the DAE
R. Chidambaram, Principal Scientific Adviser to the PM
Montek Singh Ahluwalia, Deputy Chairman of the Planning Commission (2004-2014)
Jaideep Sarkar, PMO official
Venkatesh Varma, PMO official

United States

George W. Bush, President (2000-2009)
Condoleezza Rice, National Security Adviser (2001-2005), Secretary of State (2005-2009)
Stephen Hadley, National Security Adviser (2005-2009)
Nicholas Burns, U.S. Under Secretary of State for Political Affairs

Pakistan

Pervez Musharraf, President of Pakistan (2001-2008)
Asif Ali Zardari, President of Pakistan (2008-2013)
Kurshid Mahmud Kasuri, Minister of Foreign Affairs (2002-2007)

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Chapter 1. Introduction

Foreign policy professionals can help leaders achieve their objectives: they provide information and guidance to ease decision-making, complete complex tasks requiring technical expertise and coordination, and facilitate communication with other nations. These functions are consequential for the success of foreign policy. Diplomatic, defense, and intelligence agencies assist leaders in achieving their foreign policy objectives by succeeding on the battlefield, providing reliable and objective intelligence estimates, or using their scientific and technical expertise to develop advanced military technologies.¹ They collect, organize, and filter the information that flows to leaders, upon which they base essential decisions of war and peace.² In foreign policy, diplomats posted abroad have specialized social networks and practical skills that help them succeed as negotiators and report valuable information back to headquarters.³ Diplomats have also been shown to help states credibly communicate, build trust, and formulate policies that favor cooperation with their host countries.⁴

¹ Samuel P. Huntington, *The Soldier and the State: The Theory and Politics of Civil–Military Relations* (Harvard University Press, 1957); Joshua Rovner, *Fixing the Facts : National Security and the Politics of Intelligence*, Cornell Studies in Security Affairs. (Cornell University Press, 2011); Jacques E. C. Hymans, *Achieving Nuclear Ambitions: Scientists, Politicians, and Proliferation* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012), <https://doi.org/10.1017/CBO9781139049429>.

² Keren Yarhi-Milo, “In the Eye of the Beholder: How Leaders and Intelligence Communities Assess the Intentions of Adversaries,” *International Security* 38, no. 1 (July 1, 2013): 7–51, https://doi.org/10.1162/ISEC_a_00128; Robert Schub, “Informing the Leader: Bureaucracies and International Crises,” *American Political Science Review* 116, no. 4 (November 2022): 1460–76, <https://doi.org/10.1017/S0003055422000168>; Tyler Jost, *Bureaucracies at War: The Institutional Origins of Miscalculation*, 1st ed. (Cambridge University Press, 2024), <https://doi.org/10.1017/9781009307253>.

³ Merje Kuus, “Symbolic Power in Diplomatic Practice: Matters of Style in Brussels,” *Cooperation and Conflict* 50, no. 3 (September 1, 2015): 368–84, <https://doi.org/10.1177/0010836715574914>; Jérémie Cornut, “To Be a Diplomat Abroad: Diplomatic Practice at Embassies,” *Cooperation and Conflict* 50, no. 3 (September 1, 2015): 385–401, <https://doi.org/10.1177/0010836715574912>.

⁴ Brian C. Rathbun, *Diplomacy’s Value: Creating Security in 1920s Europe and the Contemporary Middle East*, Cornell Studies in Security Affairs (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2014), <https://doi.org/10.7591/9780801455063>; Matt Malis, “Conflict, Cooperation, and Delegated Diplomacy,” *International Organization* 75, no. 4 (ed 2021): 1018–57, <https://doi.org/10.1017/S0020818321000102>; David Lindsey, *Delegating Diplomacy: How Ambassadors Establish Trust in International Relations* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2023), <https://catalog.lib.uchicago.edu/vufind/Record/13017640?sid=66494123>.

Yet bureaucrats can threaten leaders in several ways. They can weaponize the information they acquire through the foreign policymaking process by leaking it to the public or other elites. If information reaches the public's ears too early, policies may fail before leaders have time to deliberate on their value or justify their actions to the public and other elites.⁵ This weaponized information may also damage the leader's approval in the eyes of the public or other elites, thereby undermining their ability to withstand political challenges. Bureaucrats may also subvert the leader's foreign policy goals more directly by withholding or distorting information within the policymaking process or by failing to comply with orders. Finally, and most menacingly, in some regimes, bureaucrats – especially those in military and intelligence bureaucracies with access to the state's coercive capacity – can threaten leaders directly through coordinated coup d'états.

Leaders can reduce the intensity of bureaucratic threats through their organizational choices. They decide whether, and to what extent, to monitor or interfere in bureaucratic processes, and how much to delegate policy decision-making and implementation. In forming their decision-making circles, leaders are mindful of which elites might oppose their agenda. They must weigh whether including certain actors could result in leaks and damaging public criticism, which might be avoided only through costly trade-offs.⁶ Leaders may restructure advisory bodies—altering their composition, frequency of meetings, or access to resources—and can often do so without legislative approval.⁷ In military matters, leaders choose whether to delegate authority or engage in “coup-proofing” by controlling promotion patterns, training regimens, command arrangements, and

⁵ Elizabeth N. Saunders, *The Insiders' Game: How Elites Make War and Peace* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2024), 38–39.

⁶ Elizabeth N. Saunders, “War and the Inner Circle: Democratic Elites and the Politics of Using Force,” *Security Studies* 24, no. 3 (July 3, 2015): 466–501, <https://doi.org/10.1080/09636412.2015.1070618>; Sarah E. Kreps, Elizabeth N. Saunders, and Kenneth A. Schultz, “The Ratification Premium: Hawks, Doves, and Arms Control,” *World Politics* 70, no. 4 (October 2018): 479–514, <https://doi.org/10.1017/S0043887118000102>; Saunders, *The Insiders' Game*.

⁷ Jost, *Bureaucracies at War*, 52–57.

information management practices to avoid an ouster.⁸ Whether a leader trusts the military enough to delegate control over nuclear weapons, for example, has been shown to influence outcomes as consequential as a state's nuclear posture.⁹ When intelligence assessments contradict a leader's preferred policy agenda, they may pressure intelligence agencies to revise their conclusions to justify the desired course of action.¹⁰

With so many organizational tools available, how do leaders choose to reduce the influence of bureaucracy? Whether leaders include bureaucratic perspectives into policymaking and prioritize competence over loyalty has been characterized in the literature as the result of leaders' personalities, leadership styles, or operational codes. I, in contrast, argue that leaders strategically organize policymaking to obtain greater control over how their policies are translated into action. I develop a novel typology of organizational strategies leaders use to get their way on foreign policy despite anticipated bureaucratic resistance. In each strategy, leaders employ different changes to foreign policymaking institutions, rules, and norms to generate varying levels of bureaucratic inclusion and loyalty to their parochial interests. Some leaders may opt to *integrate* the bureaucracy into policymaking by including all bureaucratic elites in decision-making and preserving the permanent bureaucracy's expertise. Through *politicization*, leaders may overuse their appointment powers, fire bureaucrats en masse, and institutionalize new rules for recruitment and promotion to bring in trusted loyalists,

⁸ James T. Quinlivan, "Coup-Proofing: Its Practice and Consequences in the Middle East," *International Security* 24, no. 2 (1999): 131–65; Risa Brooks, "An Autocracy at War: Explaining Egypt's Military Effectiveness, 1967 and 1973," *Security Studies* 15, no. 3 (September 1, 2006): 396–430, <https://doi.org/10.1080/09636410601028321>; Caitlin Talmadge, "The Puzzle of Personalist Performance: Iraqi Battlefield Effectiveness in the Iran-Iraq War," *Security Studies* 22, no. 2 (April 1, 2013): 180–221, <https://doi.org/10.1080/09636412.2013.786911>; Caitlin Talmadge, *The Dictator's Army: Battlefield Effectiveness in Authoritarian Regimes* (Cornell University Press, 2015), <https://www.jstor.org/stable/10.7591/j.ctt20d89pv>.

⁹ Peter D. Feaver, "Command and Control in Emerging Nuclear Nations," *International Security* 17, no. 3 (1992): 160–87, <https://doi.org/10.2307/2539133>; Vipin Narang, *Nuclear Strategy in the Modern Era: Regional Powers and International Conflict* (Princeton University Press, 2014).

¹⁰ Robert Jervis, "Why Intelligence and Policymakers Clash," *Political Science Quarterly* 125, no. 2 (2010): 185–204; Rovner, *Fixing the Facts*.

encourage devotion among those serving, and root out those who are perceived as disloyal. In contrast, leaders may *insulate* themselves from the bureaucracy. They conduct decision-making in secret, tightly control the flow of information, and limit their accessibility to bureaucratic elites. Leaders may also use *circumvention* by selectively bypassing their bureaucracies only on politically explosive policy issues.

This brings us to the second question this dissertation answers: given a range of organizational choices and strategies, what motivates and constrains leaders in their selection? I argue that leaders choose strategies depending on how they balance the need for control over foreign policy with the importance of maintaining the competence of the foreign policy bureaucracy. Leaders who value control tend to adopt less inclusive strategies to ensure the bureaucracy aligns with their personal and political goals. In contrast, those who prioritize competence seek to involve the bureaucracy more by granting it greater autonomy and including a broader range of stakeholders. Whether leaders prioritize control or competence depends, in turn, on two factors: the *level of trust* leaders have in the bureaucracy and their *domestic political strength*.

Drawing on insights from social psychology, I argue that some leaders distrust their foreign policy bureaucracies because of partisan, ideological, and social conflicts preceding their tenure, regardless of the severity or reality of the threats they pose. Leaders who distrust the bureaucracy often rely on their personal experiences, social networks, and shared identity traits to see themselves as part of a political movement opposed to a bureaucratic “other.” Leaders’ distrust shapes both how useful they think the bureaucracy is and how costly they believe its involvement will be. When suspicion is high, leaders are unlikely to regard the bureaucracy’s expertise and institutional knowledge as worth the cost. For these leaders, excluding the bureaucracy from policymaking is no great sacrifice. They are thus more likely to pursue politicization or insulation. In contrast, leaders

who trust the bureaucracy are more inclined to preserve its competence and accept some loss of control in exchange for its professional contributions.

An important dimension of my theory centers on leaders' domestic political strength, defined by their level of public and party support. Leaders have to cope with a foreign policy bureaucracy to implement their foreign policy agenda, as well as party leaders, legislators, interest groups, and other centers of power across the political system. Many leaders simply lack the political capital and resources needed to transform foreign policymaking institutions. The fewer players they have to struggle against to implement their vision, the more resources the leader can afford to spend battling the bureaucracy. This has two counterintuitive implications: first, distrustful but politically weak leaders, unable to restructure institutions wholesale, may still maneuver around select bureaucratic agencies to neutralize internal opposition, thereby excluding their input from key decisions. Although such leaders may aspire to politicize the bureaucracy, they are constrained by time, capacity, and political risk. Second, leaders who trust the bureaucracy may prefer integration, but if their domestic support is limited, they may be compelled to circumvent the bureaucracy on politically sensitive or high-stakes issues.

The cases in this dissertation illustrate the range of organizational strategies leaders adopt to manage the foreign policy bureaucracy. Indira Gandhi, deeply mistrustful of the Ministry of External Affairs, bypassed career diplomats and concentrated foreign policymaking authority within her personal secretariat. Manmohan Singh, broadly trusting of the bureaucracy but politically weak, pursued an inclusive process on the U.S.-India nuclear deal while tightly controlling information and circumventing the bureaucracy on Pakistan negotiations. Nixon, mistrusting the State Department, centralized decision-making in the National Security Council and relied on a narrow inner circle, but could not politicize the bureaucracy to the extent he desired because of significant domestic

constraints. Carter, despite generally trusting the bureaucracy, presided over a fragmented advisory structure that left room for leaks and bureaucratic maneuvering. He was at times forced to circumvent the State Department bureaucracy to avoid challenges to his desired policies. Bush, with high trust and political strength, integrated the foreign policy bureaucracy into a cohesive, collegial process. Erdoğan, shaped by distrust of secular Kemalist elites, progressively sidelined traditional diplomatic institutions, empowered loyalists, and built parallel structures to consolidate control over foreign policymaking. Across these cases, leaders varied in how much they included, bypassed, or politicized the foreign policy bureaucracy to manage the tradeoff between control and competence.

Defining Concepts

Leaders and Foreign Policy

Foreign policy is “the means by which a sovereign nation interacts with other sovereign nations and non-state actors outside its borders.”¹¹ Political leaders – the heads of state who exercise power in a country – inherently care about the success and direction of their foreign policy for at least three reasons.¹² First, the structural realities of the international system drive leaders to pay close attention to foreign policy. States living in an anarchic international system must concern themselves with the actions of rival powers who threaten their survival.¹³ In an increasingly interdependent world, states have objectives they can often only pursue, or may pursue most effectively, with the help of other states.¹⁴ These realities are true for both the world’s most powerful

¹¹ Helen V. Milner and Dustin Tingley, *Sailing the Water’s Edge: The Domestic Politics of American Foreign Policy* (Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 2015), 7.

¹² In this context, “policy” refers to the government’s actions in practice, rather than its stated intentions. On the definition of political leader, see Henk E. Goemans, Kristian Skrede Gleditsch, and Giacomo Chiozza, “Introducing Archigos: A Dataset of Political Leaders,” *Journal of Peace Research* 46, no. 2 (2009): 271–72.

¹³ Kenneth N. Waltz, *Theory of International Politics* (McGraw-Hill, 1979).

¹⁴ Robert O. Keohane, *After Hegemony: Cooperation and Discord in the World Political Economy* (Princeton University Press, 1984), <https://www.jstor.org/stable/j.ctt7sq9s>.

states, who constantly guard themselves against rising powers, and its weakest, who perhaps stand to benefit from cooperation with other states the most.

Second, domestic political pressures motivate leaders to engage deeply with foreign policy. The common assumption in both international relations and comparative politics is that leaders choose policies to maximize their time in office. For this reason, leaders want to know about events abroad—such as wars, economic crises, or shifts in global power—that may affect their citizenry’s security or prosperity and how they might influence those events. They also care about managing their country’s relationships with others—through alliances, trade agreements, or diplomatic influence—in ways that protect their citizens from harm and, ideally, improve their well-being. While foreign policy is not as politically salient to the public as domestic politics, political constituencies—including the general public, political parties, and interest groups—often demand action on international issues. Voters may expect leaders to prevent or mitigate foreign threats, safeguard economic interests, or uphold national values abroad. Failure to do so can result in political punishment, whether through declining approval ratings, electoral losses, or internal party challenges.

Third, foreign policy offers opportunities to display effective leadership and engage in legacy-building. Constant media coverage personalizes foreign policy, positioning political leaders at the epicenter of international interactions.¹⁵ Diplomatic routine drives political leaders to spend considerable time on trips abroad to engage in face-to-face diplomacy with other political leaders.¹⁶

¹⁵ Meital Balmas and Tamir Sheaffer, “Leaders First, Countries After: Mediated Political Personalization in the International Arena,” *Journal of Communication* 63, no. 3 (June 1, 2013): 454–75, <https://doi.org/10.1111/jcom.12027>. In studies such as Talmadge (2015) and Jost (2024) in which the authors considered strategic cost-benefit calculations, the primary cost assessed has been to the leader’s political survival (e.g. through coups or political unpopularity) while threats to a leader’s foreign policy agenda itself are not captured.

¹⁶ Brendan J. Doherty, “POTUS on the Road: International and Domestic Presidential Travel, 1977-2005,” *Presidential Studies Quarterly* 39, no. 2 (2009): 322–46, <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1741-5705.2009.03677.x>; James H. Lebovic and

Leaders may also see foreign policy as the domain in which they can display leadership, raise their international profile, and leave an enduring legacy that will influence policy debates long after they leave office.¹⁷ Foreign policy matters to leaders therefore not solely because it may influence their political survival, but because it is integral to the exercise of effective leadership itself.¹⁸

We can classify foreign policy as effective if it is both *purposive* and *coherent*. That is, if it has a deliberate purpose and is pursued consistently across the different instruments of foreign policy, such as military spending, economic aid, and international trade.¹⁹ "Foreign policy encompasses dimensions traditionally associated with national security, such as intelligence and defense policy, as well as international economic policy, including aid, trade, monetary, and commercial matters."²⁰

Foreign Policy Bureaucracy

Assuming leaders value an effective foreign policy, the foreign policy bureaucracy is both a critical asset and a potential obstacle to achieving this goal.²¹ The foreign policy bureaucracy is the web of diplomatic, military, and intelligence bureaucracies that are responsible for crafting and executing foreign policy in these states.²² They provide a set of benefits that leaders may access to maneuver

Elizabeth N. Saunders, "The Diplomatic Core: The Determinants of High-Level US Diplomatic Visits, 1946–2010," *International Studies Quarterly* 60, no. 1 (March 1, 2016): 107–23, <https://doi.org/10.1093/isq/sqv008>.

¹⁷ Christian Fong, Neil Malhotra, and Yotam Margalit, "Political Legacies: Understanding Their Significance to Contemporary Political Debates," *PS: Political Science & Politics* 52, no. 3 (July 2019): 451–56, <https://doi.org/10.1017/S1049096519000209>.

¹⁸ This logic is contrary to the logic of Saunders (2024), who attributes a domestic policy priority for doveish, liberal-leaning political parties and leaders, and Jost (2024), who argues that agenda priority determines the institutional changes leaders make. In contrast to these works, I focus on leader's general foreign policy and not on use of force decisions. As such, I argue that all leaders, with the potential exception of the weakest and most political troubled ones, care about the success and direction of their general foreign policy.

¹⁹ I. M. Destler, *Presidents, Bureaucrats, and Foreign Policy : The Politics of Organizational Reform /*, Princeton Paperbacks ; 320 (Princeton University Press, 1974), 4; On foreign policy instruments, Milner and Tingley, *Sailing the Water's Edge*, 7–9.

²⁰ Destler, *Presidents, Bureaucrats, and Foreign Policy*, 5.

²¹ By bureaucracy, I generally refer to a government agency as defined by Downs (1967): large size, full-time membership, and merit-based hiring and promotion. Anthony Downs, *Inside Bureaucracy* (Boston: Little, Brown and Company, 1967), 27–28.

²² In this study, I focus on the foreign policy bureaucracy rather than the national security bureaucracy. Although there is some overlap between the two, national security bureaucracy includes the internally oriented intelligence and even police bureaucracies which fall outside the scope of determining a country's external relations.

within the uncertain international system. They have at least three distinct roles. First, they *advise* leaders on important foreign policy decisions. By reconstructing the debates and perceptions of each “player” in deliberations during the Cuban Missile Crisis, Allison (1971) depicts individual elites as advocates for different courses of action (i.e., military strikes, diplomatic off-ramps, and so forth). Following Allison (1971), scholars have studied how advisers’ positions, dispositions, and experiences shape the policies they advocate, especially the desirability of the use of force during crises.²³ This may take the form of “diagnosing” the problem at hand as well as evaluating the multiple options under consideration.²⁴

Second, while bureaucracies provide information to leaders while advising them, bureaucracies in particular also supply leaders with a constant stream of *information* that leaders may use to identify *which* problems demand an immediate response and where leaders might need additional guidance. The most well-known of these streams is the daily intelligence briefing, though other types of briefings and reports often reach the leader’s eyes.²⁵ The most well-known of these is the President’s Daily Brief in the United States, a daily intelligence compilation that has been prepared for all U.S. presidents since the 1960s.²⁶

The third and most understudied role that bureaucratic elites play is in *implementing* the key tasks of foreign policy. These policy tasks can range from a high-level mission that a leader delegates

²³ Elizabeth N. Saunders, “No Substitute for Experience: Presidents, Advisers, and Information in Group Decision Making,” *International Organization* 71, no. S1 (April 2017): S219–47, <https://doi.org/10.1017/S002081831600045X>; Schub, “Informing the Leader”; Joshua D. Kertzer et al., “Hawkish Biases and Group Decision Making,” *International Organization*, March 11, 2022, 1–36, <https://doi.org/10.1017/S0020818322000017>; Tyler Jost et al., “Advisers and Aggregation in Foreign Policy Decision Making,” *International Organization*, February 8, 2024, 1–37, <https://doi.org/10.1017/S0020818323000280>.

²⁴ George (1980) calls these “diagnostic” and “options-assessment” functions. See George (1980), 240–244.

²⁵ One type of briefing institutionalized under Carter was the State Department Evening Report, which was prepared by the secretary of state and read and often commented on by the president. Jimmy Carter Presidential Library, Plains Files, Subject Files, Box 38-41.

²⁶ Austin Carson, Eric Min, and Maya Van Nuys, “Racial Tropes in the Foreign Policy Bureaucracy: A Computational Text Analysis,” *International Organization* 78, no. 2 (February 2024): 190, <https://doi.org/10.1017/S0020818324000146>.

to a particular bureaucratic player, like when a leader sends their foreign minister to negotiate with another country's foreign minister, to the routine conduct of a diplomat abroad or a general stationed abroad in war zone. Orders are not always clearly drafted and handed down from on high. Rather, they may be expressed in vague terms or without attention to the details of how an intended goal might be achieved, leaving the bureaucracy to execute the orders as they interpret them.²⁷ Indeed, many routine tasks of foreign policy need not be articulated because they have been “built in” to the mission of a bureaucratic agency: an ambassador is improving relations with her host country, a military intelligence officer is accumulating information about an adversary’s military capabilities, and scientist in an atomic energy bureaucracy is improving upon the country’s existing thermonuclear devices.

In addition to the benefits, bureaucracies have a distinct set of costs they can impose on leaders. First, bureaucracies can shirk by resisting, ignoring, or slow-rolling orders from the executive.²⁸ This includes the misrepresentation of information to “tie the principal’s hands” or “undermine the principal’s authority or long-term interest.”²⁹ Bureaucracies can also sabotage by intentionally subverting the directives of elected leaders.³⁰ This may include strategic leaks of information to the press, high-level resignations, or targeted publicity campaigns that are aimed at stopping an executive’s order in its tracks.³¹ Shirk or sabotage may deal damage to a leader’s political standing and policy

²⁷ Morton H. Halperin, Priscilla Clapp, and Arnold Kanter, *Bureaucratic Politics and Foreign Policy*, 2. ed (Washington, DC: Brookings Institution, 2006), 243–54.

²⁸ In the formal literature on delegation between principals and agents, bureaucrats can be seen as either “shirking” or “working.” Working is “the ideal conduct that the agent would perform if the principal had full knowledge of what the agent could do and was in fact doing” (Feaver 2005, 61).

²⁹ Saunders, “No Substitute for Experience,” 226.

³⁰ John Brehm and Scott Gates, *Working, Shirking, and Sabotage: Bureaucratic Response to a Democratic Public* (University of Michigan Press, 1997), 21, <https://doi.org/10.3998/mpub.15149>.

³¹ See Zegart 2000, 51; Saunders 2018, 2122–23.

agenda by raising the political capital, time, or material resources a leader must use to enact their preferred policy or cuing other elites by leaking information to other political parties or the media.³²

Foreign Policy Elites

Many of those working in the foreign policy bureaucracy can be considered “elites.” Their institutional memory, skill, and networks enable them to fully and skillfully carry out the government’s foreign policy objectives, at least more so than others without years of experience informing their actions. The term “foreign policy elite” has been used to refer to someone who has relevant foreign policy expertise or who “controls significant foreign policy resources,” such as money or power.³³ I refer to individuals who have relevant foreign policy expertise *and* occupy positions within the foreign policy bureaucracy as *bureaucratic elites*. In general, bureaucratic elites are mid-level officers and above. Low-level officials would not be considered bureaucratic elites as they may not yet have been sufficiently socialized into the elite club through years of experience on the job, connections to other elites, and other context-specific experiences that bind elites together and contribute to how they deploy heuristics and simplify complex tasks.³⁴ I distinguish bureaucratic elites from *executive elites*, who command influence over foreign policy by virtue of their high-level positions within the executive office.³⁵

³² Saunders (2024, 37-39) distinguishes between these two types of costs. She refers to them as resource costs and informational costs.

³³ Elizabeth N. Saunders, “Elites in the Making and Breaking of Foreign Policy,” *Annual Review of Political Science* 25, no. 1 (May 11, 2022): 222, <https://doi.org/10.1146/annurev-polisci-041719-103330>.

³⁴ Emilie M. Hafner-Burton, D. Alex Hughes, and David G. Victor, “The Cognitive Revolution and the Political Psychology of Elite Decision Making,” *Perspectives on Politics* 11, no. 2 (June 2013): 369, <https://doi.org/10.1017/S1537592713001084>.

³⁵ Even if a leader selects and appoints a non-careerist to lead a department or ministry (e.g. the Secretary of State in the United States), that person is considered a bureaucratic elite, not an executive elite. In contrast, if a leader names a career bureaucrat to serve as an adviser in the executive office, that individual is an executive elite. This is common practice especially in revolving door bureaucracies where it is common for some bureaucrats to exit and enter administrations over time. When he first was appointed to lead the National Security Council under the Nixon administration without any bureaucratic experience, Henry Kissinger, who studied nuclear weapons and international relations as a Harvard professor of government was an apex elite by virtue of his position being in the executive office. Later, when he was

I distinguish bureaucratic elites from executive elites based on their institutional role and location. Specifically, executive elites are those who occupy high-level positions within the executive office (such as the White House or the prime minister's office), while bureaucratic elites hold positions within the professional bureaucracy. For the purposes of this dissertation, I adopt this classification instead of the more common distinction between appointed and non-appointed elites, for both theoretical and practical reasons. The primary theoretical reason is that since where elites sit affects the threats leaders perceive from their direction. Existing literature overwhelmingly assumes that elites appointed to lead bureaucracies are selected by the leader and, therefore, are always trustworthy. While the department's heads are generally appointed, leaders do not necessarily trust them as much as they trust executive elites. Executive elites work *for* the executive, while bureaucratic elites, even department heads, have allegiance to their own departments. As Henry Kissinger writes in *White House Years*, “the opportunity to confer with the President several times a day is often of decisive importance” in gaining his confidence, adding there may be a “reassurance conferred by proximity just down the hall.”³⁶ Propinquity and consistent interactions between executive elites and leaders can facilitate trust; physical distance between bureaucratic elites and leaders can exacerbate feelings of distrust. Leaders may fear that information will inadvertently flow from the top of the bureaucratic ladder down to the lower levels, where it has a greater probability of leaking and harming the leader politically. Zbigniew Brzezinski, Carter’s national security adviser, once noted that while both he and the secretary of state had tried to keep their differences hidden,

concurrently Secretary of State and NSA, he can be characterized as a hybrid of both elite types (an “executive bureaucrat”).

³⁶ Henry Kissinger, *White House Years*, 1st ed (Boston: Little, Brown, 1979), 28, <https://catalog.lib.uchicago.edu/vufind/Record/312688>.

“the varying viewpoints filtered down to the bureaucracy, became increasingly the object of interagency conflicts and gossip, and then started to leak out.”³⁷

Practically speaking, the distinction between appointed and non-appointed officials becomes problematic in cross-regime comparisons because different political systems follow different norms regarding political appointments. In parliamentary democracies, for example, appointed ministers may be rival politicians within the ruling party or coalition, thus not personally loyal to the head of government. In many cases, coalition agreements even require that ministerial portfolios be allocated to leaders from other parties, further diluting the authority of the prime minister or president over these appointees. As a result, appointed officials cannot be assumed to be aligned with the executive’s preferences. If we rely solely on the appointee versus non-appointee distinction to classify elites as either executive or bureaucratic, this ambiguity undermines the analytic clarity of the categories. Therefore, a classification based on institutional role and location rather than appointment status offers a more consistent and meaningful basis for identifying elite types across regime types.

Existing Literature on Bureaucratic Influence

The study of bureaucratic influence in international relations (IR) has been relegated to an unresolved battle between Graham Allison’s bureaucratic politics model and its detractors.³⁸ The bureaucratic politics model assumes there are few ways for presidents and prime ministers to assert their will over the bureaucracy to ensure their orders are faithfully implemented and their informational needs are met. Executive power, as defined by Neustadt (1964), is the power to

³⁷ Zbigniew Brzezinski, *Power and Principle: Memoirs of the National Security Adviser, 1977-1981* (New York: Farrar Straus & Giroux, 1983), 38.

³⁸ Graham Allison and Morton H. Halperin, “Bureaucratic Politics: A Paradigm and Some Policy Implications,” *World Politics* 24 (1972): 57, <https://doi.org/10.2307/2010559>.

command “effective influence upon the other men involved in running the country.”³⁹ A president’s dilemma lies in their unique position in the policy system, since “no one sits where he sits or sees quite as he sees.”⁴⁰ In contrast, organizational biases and parochial interests often dominate the positions of bureaucrats. “Career officials...often develop their position largely by calculating the national interest in terms of organizational interests of the career service to which they belong,” Halperin et al. (2006) describe.⁴¹ Officials may believe the desire to maintain or expand the organization’s influence is in the national interest and, as a result, jockey for expanded budget allocations, missions, and roles vis-à-vis other agencies. In IR, this insight has been applied to the study of nuclear proliferation, military doctrine, and the causes of war.⁴²

Under the bureaucratic interest model, the chances of a leader dominating bureaucratic interests in deliberations are slim. Bargaining between senior players rarely results in the preferred path forward of any one actor, including the leader. Allison recognizes that an individual player’s “formal authority and responsibility” is one of the numerous “bargaining advantages” that can enhance their power to influence government decisions during bargaining. However, he is not optimistic about a leader’s ability to use that advantage effectively. Rather, state behavior is the likely result of “compromise, conflict, and confusion of officials with diverse interests and unequal influence.”⁴³ Organizational bias and interests may be difficult for leaders to discern. They may not

³⁹ Richard E. Neustadt, *Presidential Power: The Politics of Leadership*, A Mentor Book, MT708 (New York: New American Library, 1964), 4, <https://catalog.lib.uchicago.edu/vufind/Record/30059>.

⁴⁰ Neustadt, 8.

⁴¹ Halperin, Clapp, and Kanter, *Bureaucratic Politics and Foreign Policy*, 61.

⁴² Scott D. Sagan, “The Perils of Proliferation: Organization Theory, Deterrence Theory, and the Spread of Nuclear Weapons,” *International Security* 18, no. 4 (1994): 66–107; Barry Posen, *The Sources of Military Doctrine: France, Britain, and Germany between the World Wars* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1984); Jack Snyder, “Civil-Military Relations and the Cult of the Offensive, 1914 and 1984,” *International Security* 9, no. 1 (1984): 108–46, <https://doi.org/10.2307/2538637>.

⁴³ Graham Allison and Philip Zelikow, *Essence of Decision: Explaining the Cuban Missile Crisis*, Subsequent edition (New York, NY: Pearson P T R, 1999), 295.

even have the expertise required to monitor the quality of information they receive from the bureaucracy if they are inexperienced in national security affairs compared to their advisers.⁴⁴

When it comes to policy implementation, the prospects are even worse for leaders. “The most chilling passages in *Essence of Decision* are concerned not with the formulation of policy but with its implementation,” writes Krasner (1972) in a critique of Allison. “Despite concerted Presidential attention coupled with an awareness of the necessity of watching minute details which would normally be left to lower levels of bureaucracy, the President still had exceptional difficulty controlling events.”⁴⁵ Leaders can only be assured an order will be faithfully implemented when their words are “unambiguous”, the order “widely publicized”, and “the men who receive [the order] have control of everything needed to carry it out.”⁴⁶

In the opposing view, Allison’s critics are optimistic that bureaucratic parochialism will minimally impact foreign policy because of the hierarchy of executive policymaking.⁴⁷ While bureaucrats and other advisers may advise leaders, ultimately, leaders make all final decisions in international politics. Leaders may select advisers whose preferences align with their own or disregard the advice of those they disagree with. Advisers whose preferences resemble those of the leader are unlikely to put forward advice that diverges strongly from the leader’s preferences. Even if they might wish to, appointed officials are likely to have “some personal fealty to the President who has elevated them from positions of corporate or legal to ones of historic significance.”⁴⁸ On the whole, this makes appointed officials unlikely to challenge the leader’s values compared to

⁴⁴ Saunders, “No Substitute for Experience.”

⁴⁵ Stephen D. Krasner, “Are Bureaucracies Important? (Or Allison Wonderland),” *Foreign Policy*, no. 7 (1972): 177, <https://doi.org/10.2307/1147761>.

⁴⁶ Allison and Halperin, “Bureaucratic Politics,” 54.

⁴⁷ Jonathan Bendor and Thomas H. Hammond, “Rethinking Allison’s Models,” *The American Political Science Review* 86, no. 2 (1992): 301–22, <https://doi.org/10.2307/1964222>; Robert J. Art, “Bureaucratic Politics and American Foreign Policy: A Critique,” *Policy Sciences* 4, no. 4 (1973): 467–90.

⁴⁸ Krasner, “Are Bureaucracies Important?,” 166.

unappointed officials. Even then, while unappointed bureau heads may feel torn between “conflicting pressures arising either from their need to protect their own bureaucracies or from personal convictions, they must remain the President’s men” or face dismissal.⁴⁹ Finally, a leader’s position atop the policymaking hierarchy implies that leaders control both who participates in the process and how much influence a given participant can have. As the wide-ranging scholarship on leadership styles recognizes, leaders may have advising structures that encourage multiple advocacy or those which are much more hierarchical.⁵⁰ This model thus implies that the critical function of foreign policy bureaucracies lies in information provision rather than the dispensation of sage counsel.⁵¹

Another critique is that legislative bodies and the public defer to leaders regarding national security and foreign policy issues, thereby shaping the amount of discretion leaders have over bureaucratic interests. This criticism has its origins in the American politics literature on presidential power, particularly Wildavsky’s (1966) assessment that “in the realm of foreign policy, there has not been a single major issue on which presidents, when they were serious and determined, have failed.”⁵² Scholars have argued that Congress may recognize the benefits of allowing leaders to move swiftly and unilaterally in the national interest when needed.⁵³ Moreover, the influence of interest groups is weaker in foreign policy compared to domestic policy.⁵⁴ Policymaking entities are more

⁴⁹ Krasner, 166.

⁵⁰ Alexander L. George, “The Case for Multiple Advocacy in Making Foreign Policy,” *The American Political Science Review* 66, no. 3 (1972): 751–85, <https://doi.org/10.2307/1957476>; Thomas Preston, *The President and His Inner Circle: Leadership Style and the Advisory Process in Foreign Affairs*, Power, Conflict, and Democracy (New York: Columbia University Press, 2001), <https://catalog.lib.uchicago.edu/vufind/Record/11117515>.

⁵¹ Schub, “Informing the Leader”; Jost, *Bureaucracies at War*.

⁵² Aaron Wildavsky, “The Two Presidencies,” *Society* 35, no. 2 (February 1998): 7, <https://doi.org/10.1007/BF02838125>.

⁵³ Brandice Canes-Wrone, William G. Howell, and David E. Lewis, “Toward a Broader Understanding of Presidential Power: A Reevaluation of the Two Presidencies Thesis,” *The Journal of Politics* 70, no. 1 (January 2008): 4, <https://doi.org/10.1017/S0022381607080061>.

⁵⁴ Wildavsky, “The Two Presidencies,” 10.

diffuse, money is in shorter supply, and access to specific policy information is restricted due to national security concerns – all of which imply that interest groups are less likely to lobby the government over foreign policy outcomes.⁵⁵ In line with this logic, Canes-Wrone et al. (2008) find that there is greater room for presidential influence in the institutional design of U.S. foreign policy agencies than domestic agencies.⁵⁶ This may not be an accident; Goldgeier and Saunders (2018) argue that Congress has largely acquiesced to sidelining the foreign policy bureaucracy in favor of an empowered foreign policy staff based in the White House.⁵⁷

Contributions

This dissertation offers several theoretical contributions. First, the tools leaders use to manage bureaucratic influence are central to foreign policy outcomes, yet they remain conceptually and empirically underdeveloped. This dissertation brings them into focus. As Jimmy Carter's National Security Adviser Zbigniew Brzezinski observed:

Few people outside the upper levels of government realize the extent to which there is institutional flexibility and inherent ambiguity in the way foreign policy is made. The Cabinet as such is not designed to make it. The National Security Council in the statutory sense merely means a meeting...But who decides that it should be held? How is that meeting prepared? Who develops for the President the basic policy options? Who integrates the dozens of policy issues and the several agencies that have some responsibility for coping

⁵⁵ Amy Zegart, *Flawed by Design: The Evolution of the CIA, JCS, and NSC*, 1st edition (Stanford, Calif: Stanford University Press, 2000), 22–24.

⁵⁶ See also Milner and Tingley (2015)'s Chapter 5 on bureaucratic agencies, which extends the Canes-Wrone et al. (2008) study.

⁵⁷ James Goldgeier and Elizabeth N. Saunders, "The Unconstrained Presidency," *Foreign Affairs*, August 13, 2018.

with these issues? On all of these matters in recent years each President has developed his own style and his own procedures.⁵⁸

Despite this institutional flexibility, we lack a systematic understanding of how and why leaders choose among the many tools available to them. This is a significant omission from the active literature on leaders, political elites, and the latter's ability to constrain and shape executive decision-making, particularly given the malleability of foreign policymaking institutions, practices, and norms.⁵⁹ Neither the optimists nor the pessimists have it quite right: while leaders do have a wide array of organizational tools to curb bureaucratic influence, we still lack a framework for understanding the logic behind when and why they deploy certain tools over others. Moreover, existing research tends to focus on the American case or narrow bureaucratic domains, such as intelligence.⁶⁰ Without a systematic understanding of how leaders manage their bureaucracies across different political, institutional, and organizational settings, we cannot fully explain the range of tools available to them or the conditions under which specific combinations are chosen.

Leaders have a wide array of both formal and informal tools at their disposal to reshape how foreign policy is made, but the use and effectiveness of these tools vary across institutional structures, contexts of political competition, and historical legacies of bureaucratic power. Recent work by Jost (2024) suggests that leaders may restructure formal policymaking bodies, such as the National Security Council, to reduce bureaucratic influence.⁶¹ However, as Gerstle (2024) notes, the ease with which leaders can do so without legislative approval varies significantly across political systems. Beyond formal reorganization, leaders also deploy informal tools that preserve the outward

⁵⁸ Brzezinski, *Power and Principle*, 57–58.

⁵⁹ This literature is reviewed by Hyde and Saunders (2020) and Saunders (2022).

⁶⁰ In civil-military relations, see Feaver (2005) and Talmadge (2015). On intelligence, Rovner (2011). On advisers (including military advisers), see Saunders (2017, 2024). On American bureaucratic politics, see Moe (1985), Canes-Wrone et al. (2008), Gailmard and Patty (2012), Rudalevige (2021), and Gibson (2022).

⁶¹ Jost, *Bureaucracies at War*, 52–57.

structure of policymaking bodies while altering underlying norms and practices, such as by centralizing decision-making within the executive staff, redefining agency responsibilities through executive orders, or controlling access to the leader.⁶² Leaders may also seek to reshape the bureaucracy itself by altering recruitment and promotion criteria, expanding appointment powers, or facilitating mass resignations through morale deterioration.⁶³ The bureaucracy's composition and its corresponding preferences may change substantially over a leader's tenure through these mechanisms, enabling leaders to gradually secure greater responsiveness to their agenda.

A second area of theoretical development relates to the literature on leaders. To the best of this author's knowledge, there is no study systematically linking leaders, their attitudes towards the foreign policy bureaucracy, and how foreign policy gets made. Recent work on leaders in IR has illustrated how leader cognition, ascriptive traits like gender and age, and socializing experiences such as military experience impact foreign policy decisions.⁶⁴ Leaders' beliefs about aspects of the international system ranging from nuclear proliferation, international law legitimacy, and adversary threats have been shown to influence leader decision-making.⁶⁵ The dominant perspective in IR suggests that "leadership style" determines the extent to which leaders will integrate the national security bureaucracy into decision-making.⁶⁶ This leads to policymaking processes to take on "distinctive and idiosyncratic elements" based on traits like leader orientation towards interpersonal

⁶² Zegart, *Flawed by Design*, 49.

⁶³ A robust literature in American politics has explored how leaders have increasingly selected appointees on the basis of loyalty to obtain control of agency decisions and policy outputs. (Moe 1985; Rudalevige 2002; Lewis 2010).

⁶⁴ See literature reviews by Horowitz and Fuhrmann (2018), Krcmaric, Nelson and Roberts (2020), and Saunders (2022).

⁶⁵ Elizabeth N. Saunders, *Leaders at War: How Presidents Shape Military Interventions*, 1st ed. (Cornell University Press, 2011), <http://www.jstor.org/stable/10.7591/j.ctt7zgb7>; Rachel Elizabeth Whitlark, "Nuclear Beliefs: A Leader-Focused Theory of Counter-Proliferation," *Security Studies* 26, no. 4 (October 2, 2017): 545–74, <https://doi.org/10.1080/09636412.2017.1331628>; A. Burcu Bayram, "Due Deference: Cosmopolitan Social Identity and the Psychology of Legal Obligation in International Politics," *International Organization* 71, no. S1 (April 2017): S137–63, <https://doi.org/10.1017/S0020818316000485>.

⁶⁶ For a review of the literature on this topic, see Margaret G. Hermann and Thomas Preston, "Presidents, Advisers, and Foreign Policy: The Effect of Leadership Style on Executive Arrangements," *Political Psychology* 15, no. 1 (1994): 75–96, <https://doi.org/10.2307/3791440>.

conflict between their advisers, the strength of their preexisting beliefs about the world, and their desire to be personally involved in the policy process.⁶⁷ Other work has suggested that a narrow set of bureaucratic threats, like the threat of a military-led ouster or domestic political damage through leaks, may shape how leaders organize certain aspects of policymaking.⁶⁸

These characterizations discount the social, political, and ideological forces that often convince leaders that there may be a hidden, continuous political threat from the bureaucracy, even when one may not exist. Drawing on insights from social psychology, I argue that how leaders organize policymaking depends on whether they trust or distrust the foreign policy bureaucracy. There are numerous examples of leaders in power assailing their foreign policy establishments: perhaps most infamously, U.S. President Donald Trump promised to “drain the swamp” of the U.S. foreign policy establishment. India under Prime Minister Narendra Modi has quietly asserted a new set of Hindu nationalist diplomatic practices to the Oxbridge-educated, Anglophone elite that has traditionally filled the ranks of the country’s diplomatic cadre.⁶⁹ Brazil’s former President Jair Bolsonaro took aim at the country’s foreign policy establishment by conflating it with the socialist left-wing party elite.⁷⁰ I argue that trust between leaders and the bureaucracy emerges not merely from shared policy preferences, but from a leader’s perception that their worldviews are aligned because they are members of a shared social category. Conversely, when leaders perceive the bureaucracy to be part of a threatening outgroup, it will be difficult for trust to form. For instance,

⁶⁷ Alexander L. George, *Presidential Decisionmaking in Foreign Policy: The Effective Use of Information and Advice*, 1st edition (Boulder, Colo: Westview Press, 1980), 147; Preston, *The President and His Inner Circle*, 14–15.

⁶⁸ Talmadge, “The Puzzle of Personalist Performance”; Talmadge, *The Dictator’s Army*; Jost, *Bureaucracies at War*; Saunders, *The Insiders’ Game*.

⁶⁹ Kira Huju, “Saffronizing Diplomacy: The Indian Foreign Service under Hindu Nationalist Rule,” *International Affairs* 98, no. 2 (March 7, 2022): 423–41, <https://doi.org/10.1093/ia/iiab220>.

⁷⁰ Daniel F Wajner and Leslie Wehner, “Embracing or Rebuffing ‘the International’? Populist Foreign Policy and the Fourth Wave of Populism in Latin America,” *Global Studies Quarterly* 3, no. 2 (April 1, 2023): ksad026, <https://doi.org/10.1093/isagsq/ksad026>.

when nationalist leaders encounter internationalist bureaucracies, they are likely to perceive the costs and benefits of drawing upon the foreign policy bureaucracy differently than when internationalist leaders encounter internationalist bureaucracies. Distrust will emerge even if the two groups are largely in agreement on the specific policy matters of the day.

Third, I contribute to the growing literature on populism and foreign policy. The recent global surge in populist politicians and parties has garnered attention in IR.⁷¹ But a decisive definition of populist ideology remains elusive, with some researchers referring to a “populist style” rather than ideology.⁷² Recent research has conceptualized populism as a “thin” ideology characterized by anti-elitist and anti-pluralist ideas, rather than specific orientations towards economics, politics, or international relations. That is, populist leaders generally criticize elites in deeply moralistic, Manichean terms and claim they alone represent the people.⁷³ The exact shape of

⁷¹ Bertjan Verbeek and Andrej Zaslove, “Populism and Foreign Policy,” in *The Oxford Handbook of Populism*, ed. Cristóbal Rovira Kaltwasser et al. (Oxford University Press, 2017), 0, <https://doi.org/10.1093/oxfordhb/9780198803560.013.15>; Angelos Chryssogelos, “Populism in Foreign Policy,” in *Oxford Research Encyclopedias: Politics*, ed. William R. Thompson (Oxford: Oxford UP, 2017), <https://oxfordre.com/politics/display/10.1093/acrefore/9780190228637.001.0001/acrefore-9780190228637-e-467>; Vedi R Hadiz and Angelos Chryssogelos, “Populism in World Politics: A Comparative Cross-Regional Perspective,” *International Political Science Review* 38, no. 4 (September 2017): 399–411, <https://doi.org/10.1177/0192512117693908>; Iñaki Sagarzazu and Cameron G. Thies, “The Foreign Policy Rhetoric of Populism: Chávez, Oil, and Anti-Imperialism,” *Political Research Quarterly* 72, no. 1 (March 1, 2019): 205–14, <https://doi.org/10.1177/1065912918784212>; Johannes Plagemann and Sandra Destradi, “Populism and Foreign Policy: The Case of India,” *Foreign Policy Analysis* 15, no. 2 (April 1, 2019): 283–301, <https://doi.org/10.1093/fpa/ory010>; Erik Voeten, “Populism and Backlashes against International Courts,” *Perspectives on Politics* 18, no. 2 (June 2020): 407–22, <https://doi.org/10.1017/S1537592719000975>; Thorsten Wojczewski, “Populism, Hindu Nationalism, and Foreign Policy in India: The Politics of Representing ‘the People,’” *International Studies Review* 22, no. 3 (September 1, 2020): 396–422, <https://doi.org/10.1093/isr/viz007>; Angelos Chryssogelos, “Is There a Populist Foreign Policy,” *Chatham House* 3 (2021), https://www.chathamhouse.org/sites/default/files/2021-03/2021-03-26-populist-foreign-policy-chryssogelos_0.pdf; Erin K Jenne, “Populism, Nationalism and Revisionist Foreign Policy,” *International Affairs* 97, no. 2 (March 1, 2021): 323–43, <https://doi.org/10.1093/ia/iiaa230>; Wajner and Wehner, “Embracing or Rebuffing ‘the International?’”; Daniel F Wajner, Sandra Destradi, and Michael Zürn, “The Effects of Global Populism: Assessing the Populist Impact on International Affairs,” *International Affairs* 100, no. 5 (September 9, 2024): 1819–33, <https://doi.org/10.1093/ia/iiae217>; Sandra Destradi and Johannes Plagemann, “Do Populists Escalate International Disputes?,” *International Affairs* 100, no. 5 (September 9, 2024): 1919–40, <https://doi.org/10.1093/ia/iiae172>.

⁷² Benjamin Moffitt and Simon Tormey, “Rethinking Populism: Politics, Mediatisation and Political Style,” *Political Studies* 62, no. 2 (June 1, 2014): 381–97, <https://doi.org/10.1111/1467-9248.12032>.

⁷³ Cas Mudde, *Populist Radical Right Parties in Europe* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), <https://doi.org/10.1017/CBO9780511492037>; Jan-Werner Muller, *What Is Populism?* (University of Pennsylvania Press,

these criticisms and how they are enacted into policy (e.g. whether leaders engage in ethnonationalist rhetoric or oppose international trade, or support socialist economic policies) is determined by an underlying “thick” ideology. But if a leader’s rhetoric diverges from their ideology or displays some features of populism more strongly than others, deciding whether a leader’s populism is sincere or strategic may present difficulties for researchers.⁷⁴ This dissertation examines a specific dimension of populism with significant implications for foreign policymaking: the anti-elitist orientation of populist leaders. As Plagemann and Destradi (2018) contend, such beliefs can foster skepticism toward diplomats and motivate populist leaders to centralize and personalize foreign policy decision-making, thereby sidelining alternative perspectives.⁷⁵ I extend this argument by positing that populists’ anti-elitism frequently evolves into a broader anti-establishment or anti-system worldview, characterized by a deep-seated suspicion of the entire system of government. Furthermore, I differentiate between populist leaders who espouse a “thick” ideology that fundamentally diverges from the values and priorities of the bureaucratic establishment and those who do not. I find that the former are particularly inclined to curtail the influence of bureaucratic institutions in shaping foreign policy.

Fourth, the dissertation improves our understanding of how leaders’ organizational choices impact on the effectiveness and shape of foreign policy. It is possible that leaders might pursue politicizing or insulating strategies to obtain greater control, but conclude with an ineffective or intransigent policymaking apparatus that undermines their foreign policy objectives. When a leader employs a strategy towards the foreign policy bureaucracy prioritizing the control of the direction of

2016); Cas Mudde and Cristóbal Rovira Kaltwasser, *Populism: A Very Short Introduction* (Oxford University Press, 2017), <https://doi.org/10.1093/actrade/9780190234874.001.0001>.

⁷⁴ Maurits J. Meijers and Andrej Zaslove, “Measuring Populism in Political Parties: Appraisal of a New Approach,” *Comparative Political Studies* 54, no. 2 (February 1, 2021): 378–80, <https://doi.org/10.1177/0010414020938081>.

⁷⁵ Plagemann and Destradi, “Populism and Foreign Policy,” 288.

foreign policy over the preservation of bureaucratic expertise, the quality of foreign policymaking may decrease. While this could occur in the form of degraded information quality from the bureaucracy, as per Jost (2024), it might also negatively affect how well policy is implemented by bureaucrats on the ground. Organizational strategies that prioritize control of foreign policy may affect how competent the bureaucracy is in the long run. A robust literature in American politics suggests that when leaders expand the number of appointed positions or shatter norms to protect meritocracy in the bureaucracy, bureaucratic expertise may decrease, impacting performance.⁷⁶ Low morale caused by reduced autonomy may affect how motivated bureaucrats are to gather expertise and other costly information.⁷⁷

This research will also shed light on whether bureaucracies actually become more obedient as leaders select more controlling strategies. Leaders risk wasting scarce time and resources by monitoring their bureaucracies for disobedience through regularized “police patrol” monitoring.⁷⁸ Feaver (2005) argues that the secretariat of the Office of the Secretary of Defense, as an extension of the executive branch, regularly monitors the military in the United States.⁷⁹ If leaders want to monitor bureaucracies without “police patrol” monitoring, they may attempt to directly monitor bureaucratic elites, though this can be difficult to do given the non-transferability of foreign policy expertise.⁸⁰ They may also use punishment to bring elites in line, disciplining bureaucrats that are

⁷⁶ David E. Lewis, *The Politics of Presidential Appointments: Political Control and Bureaucratic Performance, The Politics of Presidential Appointments* (Princeton University Press, 2010), <https://doi.org/10.1515/9781400837687>.

⁷⁷ Sean Gailmard and John W. Patty, *Learning While Governing: Expertise and Accountability in the Executive Branch*, Chicago Studies in American Politics (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 2012), <https://press.uchicago.edu/ucp/books/book/chicago/L/bo14365173.html>.

⁷⁸ Mathew D. McCubbins and Thomas Schwartz, “Congressional Oversight Overlooked: Police Patrols versus Fire Alarms,” *American Journal of Political Science* 28, no. 1 (1984): 165–79, <https://doi.org/10.2307/2110792>; Alex Acs, “Policing the Administrative State,” *The Journal of Politics* 80, no. 4 (October 2018): 1225–38, <https://doi.org/10.1086/698846>.

⁷⁹ Peter D. Feaver, *Armed Servants: Agency, Oversight, and Civil-Military Relations*, Revised edition (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2005), 84.

⁸⁰ Saunders, “No Substitute for Experience.”

disobedient by publicly firing them or moving them to a less-desirable role. However, scholars have questioned whether this is an effective means of gaining compliance.⁸¹

Finally, the dissertation will lay the groundwork for future research on leaders and the orientation of countries' foreign policies. IR scholars since Putnam (1988) have recognized that the structure of political institutions, the shape of domestic political coalitions and public opinion, and the interest group landscape each influence foreign policy. Recent work has elevated the role of political elites in these dynamics. Given that most of the public pays little attention to international politics, elites play an important role in prompting the public to pay attention to foreign policy. Yet as leaders concentrate more power in their own hands, partisan polarization surges around the world, and foreign policy expertise in legislatures is absent or on the decline (as in the U.S. Congress), bureaucratic elites may be transforming into a uniquely important source of constraint on executive authority across political regime types.⁸² When distrustful leaders politicize or insulate foreign policymaking to limit the influence of bureaucratic elites, they further erode elite constraints on executive authority. Unconstrained leaders even in democracies may behave abroad similarly to personalist autocratic leaders, e.g. by initiating more conflicts than democracies and even dictatorships constrained by military juntas and civilian regime insiders.⁸³ At the same time, academics and politicians alike often see bureaucratic elites as an unaccountable source of policy "drift" that should be brought to heel by democratically elected leaders.⁸⁴ It is possible that leaders

⁸¹ Brehm and Gates, *Working, Shirking, and Sabotage*.

⁸² Goldgeier and Saunders, "The Unconstrained Presidency."

⁸³ Jessica L. P. Weeks, *Dictators at War and Peace*, 1st ed. (Cornell University Press, 2014), <http://www.jstor.org/stable/10.7591/j.ctt1287f18>.

⁸⁴ Patrick Porter, "Why America's Grand Strategy Has Not Changed: Power, Habit, and the U.S. Foreign Policy Establishment," *International Security* 42, no. 4 (May 1, 2018): 9–46, https://doi.org/10.1162/isec_a_00311; Stephen M. Walt, *The Hell of Good Intentions: America's Foreign Policy Elite and the Decline of U.S. Primacy*, Kindle (Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2018).

who prioritize control over bureaucratic competence may be better able to dexterously navigate external challenges and overcome the status quo preferences of the bureaucracy.

Plan of the Dissertation

Chapter Two develops a theory of how and why political leaders adopt different organizational strategies to manage the influence of the foreign policy bureaucracy. It argues that leaders face a core tradeoff between maintaining control over foreign policy and preserving the competence of bureaucratic elites, whose expertise and networks are critical to effective policy. Leaders resolve this tradeoff by selecting among four ideal-type organizational strategies—integration, circumvention, insulation, and politicization—each defined by the degree of bureaucratic inclusion and neutrality they foster. Two factors drive these choices: leaders’ trust or distrust of bureaucratic elites, shaped by social identity dynamics, and their domestic political strength, which conditions their ability to implement organizational reforms. Distrust heightens leaders’ perceptions of bureaucratic threat and reduces the perceived value of bureaucratic inputs, inclining them toward exclusionary strategies. Political weakness constrains leaders’ capacity to reshape institutions or staff them with loyalists, limiting their options. The chapter also considers and distinguishes its argument from competing explanations rooted in institutional design, leader personality, and prior experience. In sum, it proposes a novel framework for understanding variation in how leaders structure foreign policymaking.

Chapter Three examines how Indian Prime Minister Indira Gandhi’s deep distrust of the Indian foreign policy bureaucracy—rooted in political and social cleavages—shaped her organizational strategy. Seeing the Ministry of External Affairs as dominated by conservative, pro-Western elites opposed to her left-leaning and more non-aligned vision, Gandhi pursued a two-phase strategy: first insulating her office by expanding the Prime Minister’s Secretariat (1966–69),

then politicizing the bureaucracy itself after consolidating power (1970–75). She prioritized personal loyalty over merit in appointments, systematically bypassed career diplomats, and centralized foreign policymaking authority within a small circle of trusted advisers. The chapter draws on archival material and elite memoirs to trace how Gandhi's mistrust drove exclusionary institutional reforms.

Chapter Four explores how Indian Prime Minister Manmohan Singh, a technocratic leader with high trust in the foreign policy bureaucracy but limited political strength, adopted a circumvention strategy to manage bureaucratic resistance. Singh's inclusive and competence-oriented approach relied heavily on trusted bureaucrats in the Ministry of External Affairs and his personal networks, but he selectively bypassed the bureaucracy on politically sensitive issues. On the U.S.-India nuclear deal, Singh led an open, consensus-driven process involving key bureaucratic actors; on secret backchannel negotiations with Pakistan, he excluded much of the bureaucracy to minimize leaks and opposition. Singh's strategy reflected both his relational trust in bureaucratic elites and his constrained ability to impose broader organizational reforms given his dependence on Congress Party leadership.

Chapter Five analyzes how Nixon, Carter, and George H. W. Bush each structured U.S. foreign policymaking based on their trust in the bureaucracy and political strength. Nixon, deeply distrustful of the State Department and CIA, centralized decision-making in the White House and sidelined traditional agencies through a strategy of insulation and secret backchannels. Carter, though more trusting of career professionals, failed to manage a divided leadership team and engaged in selective circumvention, resulting in bureaucratic conflict and disarray. In contrast, Bush's deep trust in the foreign policy bureaucracy and strong political position enabled him to integrate career professionals into a cohesive and collegial decision-making process, fostering effective bureaucratic engagement.

Chapter Six analyzes how Recep Tayyip Erdoğan reshaped Turkish foreign policymaking through a sequence of strategic adaptations rooted in his deep distrust of the secular foreign policy bureaucracy and shifting political strength. From 2002 to 2007, despite high electoral support, Erdoğan was politically weak due to the military's entrenched role in Turkish politics. He pursued a hybrid strategy that tactically empowered career diplomats to pursue EU accession while centralizing decision-making in the Prime Minister's Office to insulate against military influence. After confronting the military in 2007 and growing politically stronger, Erdoğan transitioned to full politicization: sidelining the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, empowering loyalists, and creating parallel institutions like TİKA and the Ministry of EU Affairs to bypass bureaucratic resistance. Initially allying with the Gülen movement to weaken the secular military and judiciary, Erdoğan later turned on the Gülenists as their influence grew threatening, launching mass purges after the 2016 coup attempt. Ultimately, Erdoğan's evolving organizational strategy—shaped by shifting sources of threat—transformed foreign policymaking into a personalized, de-institutionalized process under an executive-centered regime.

Chapter 7 explores the broader implications of leaders' organizational strategies for foreign policy effectiveness, institutional design, and international alignments. It argues that while strategies like politicization, insulation, and circumvention may enhance leaders' short-term control, they often degrade bureaucratic performance, disrupt information flows, and lead to inconsistency, infighting, and even strategic incoherence—especially when personalized decision-making overrides institutional norms. At the same time, inclusive strategies, though more legitimate, can slow decision-making and stall urgent initiatives. The chapter further reveals that these choices leave behind lasting institutional legacies that constrain successors, particularly when politicization reshapes recruitment and redistributes power within the bureaucracy. Finally, the chapter shows how

leaders' mistrust toward entrenched foreign policy elites often drives them to reorient their countries' alignments, suggesting that bureaucratic distrust is both a driver and consequence of foreign policy transformation. Together, these insights offer a compelling foundation for future research on how organizational strategies may shape global order.

Chapter 2. When Bureaucracy Meets Power: The Politics of Trust, Exclusion, and Control in Foreign Policymaking

This chapter will proceed as follows. First, I make the case in favor of studying leader organizational strategies in IR. Second, I describe the various organizational strategies leaders may use to reshape the influence of the foreign policy bureaucracy on policymaking. I then present a theory of leader strategy selection that explains why leaders select certain organizational strategies over others. The theory argues that leaders' distrust of bureaucratic elites affects how leaders calculate the costs and benefits of drawing on bureaucratic inputs in foreign policymaking. It suggests that this distrust, combined with their political support at home (or lack thereof), influences the selection of organizational strategies. I conclude by assessing a set of alternative explanations from existing literature.

What Leaders Can Do: Four Organizational Strategies

In this dissertation, I argue that leaders use organizational strategies to widen or reduce the influence of the foreign policy bureaucracy relative to the status quo. An organizational strategy is the set of changes a leader makes to foreign policy institutions, rules, and norms that affect the bureaucracy's influence over policy decisions and outcomes. Many of these choices occur at the start of a leader's time in office, though adjustments and redirections may occur at any time throughout her tenure. They combine into four ideal-type strategies: integration, politicization, circumvention, and insulation.

Integration is broadly committed to transparent, decision-making that includes all bureaucratic elites regardless of their policy preferences or personal loyalty to the leader. Leaders may appoint individuals at their discretion but stop short of pushing the boundaries by naming controversial

appointees, expanding the use of appointment powers, or altering the rules surrounding career progression for bureaucrats. Leaders enacting an integration strategy may delegate high priority objectives to bureaucracies and bureaucratic elites, though this is done intentionally and not due to leader ignorance. Even if such leaders have a small circle of advisers, most of whom are staffed in the executive office, they refrain from making crucial decisions until all elites across the relevant bureaucratic agencies have had their voices heard. Anyone who opposes a plan of action can forcefully make their case for an alternative. The elder Bush's inner circle during the 1991 invasion of Kuwait was both collegial and cohesive, yet dissenting voices were neither disregarded nor marginalized. Saunders (2017) describes Colin Powell, the chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, as the "brakeman" of the operation and credits his voice with keeping the political goals of the invasion limited.⁸⁵

Leaders may also *insulate* themselves from or *circumvent* the bureaucracy. Both strategies involve restricting the bureaucracy's access to information by reconstituting the responsibilities of agencies or individual roles, outsourcing important tasks to one or a handful of trusted individuals outside of the bureaucracy, or failing to convene the institutionally required meetings with bureaucratic elites. Tools that promote secrecy of the policymaking process are primarily informal, since a formal decree to cut out the bureaucracy procedurally would likely prompt immediate bureaucratic backlash and could make headlines if leaked. Not only will deliberations among members of the leader's inner circle secretly exclude bureaucratic elites, but important policy tasks may be delegated to executive elites or outsiders whom leaders trust more than bureaucratic elites. Both varieties of exclusionary behavior occurred frequently under President Richard Nixon, who employed an insulation strategy. Nixon and Kissinger also excluded all State Department officials

⁸⁵ Saunders, "No Substitute for Experience," 240–41.

from Nixon's first meeting with the Soviet ambassador and arranged a confidential channel with the ambassador via Kissinger that Secretary of State William Rogers was not privy to or aware of.⁸⁶ In a well-known instance of secretive delegation, Richard Nixon sent his National Security Adviser, Henry Kissinger, to meet Chinese Premier Zhou En-lai and led the rest of the government to believe he was on an “information trip” to Asia.⁸⁷

Insulation is a form of centralized evasion in which leaders insulate bureaucratic elites from the policy process in a sustained and consistent manner across many issue areas. It is different from circumvention in that the latter is ad hoc and selective, while insulation is a sustained effort to exclude bureaucratic elites from policymaking. Under circumvention, leaders will centrally manage an inclusive and transparent foreign policy process but quietly sideline the bureaucracy when they fear shirking or sabotage on a particular issue of contention. In Chapter 4, I show that from 2005 to 2008, Indian Prime Minister Manmohan Singh included the atomic energy bureaucracy in all matters related to Indo-U.S. civil nuclear cooperation despite their vocal opposition to many of the deal's mechanisms. Yet under the more politically sensitive issue of rapprochement between India and Pakistan, the prime minister appointed a retired foreign service officer whom he trusted to run direct backchannel negotiations and kept those aware of ongoing discussions limited.

Finally, leaders can *politicize*, which coopts the bureaucracy into responding to the leader's personal and political interests. Politicizers may alter the composition of the bureaucracy by selecting appointees on the basis of loyalty rather than competence, manipulate the meritocratic recruitment and promotion processes of the bureaucracy, or even dismiss large numbers of bureaucrats en masse. In India, Indira Gandhi and her close adviser P.N. Haksar worked to promote the concept of

⁸⁶ Ivo H. Daalder and I. M. Destler, *In the Shadow of the Oval Office: Profiles of the National Security Advisers and the Presidents They Served-From JFK to George W. Bush* (Simon & Schuster, 2011), 64.

⁸⁷ Daalder and Destler, 80.

a “committed bureaucracy” that was ideologically aligned with their shared vision of India’s future. They even altered the criteria for merit-based promotion in the Indian Foreign Service (IFS) to prioritize civil servants who demonstrated “a clear commitment to the Government’s policies.”⁸⁸ In Turkey, Recep Tayyip Erdogan, while slowly amassing political power, began to politicize the Turkish bureaucracy in the late 2000s and early 2010. At this time, Erdogan’s government became highly focused on damaging the authority of the Turkish military, which was a powerful guardian of the secularist political establishment in Turkey, and other aligned bureaucratic agencies. The politicization strategy was both obvious (e.g., purging military officials in sham trials) and clandestine (e.g., increasing the number of appointed non-career diplomats, creating new revisionist foreign policy agencies, and centralizing decision-making to exclude and systematically degrade the influence of the agencies they did not trust). This case is covered in Chapter 6 of this dissertation.

Table 1 disaggregates the features of four organizational strategies—politicization, insulation, circumvention, and integration—by comparing how each approach structures decision-making, delegation, personnel changes, and other institutional tools. In decision-making, politicization is marked by loyalty-driven inclusion, informal processes, and the exclusion of alternative viewpoints. Insulation presents a superficial appearance of inclusion, but in practice, relies on secretive and exclusive decision-making housed within the executive. Circumvention adopts a more collegial tone but remains exclusive on politically salient issues, often relying on informal coordination among trusted insiders. Integration encourages genuinely inclusive and consensus-based decision-making, with space for divergent views. Delegation practices also vary. Both politicization and insulation concentrate implementation of top priorities within the executive or among loyalists, though under insulation, this is largely secretive. Circumvention allows for

⁸⁸ J.N. Dixit, *Indian Foreign Service: History and Challenge* (Konark Publishers, 2005), 147–48.

Table 1. Characteristics of Organizational Strategies

Characteristics	Organizational strategies				
	Strategy	Politicization	Insulation	Circumvention	Integration
	Decision-making	Loyalty dictates decision-making inclusion Alternative viewpoints not encouraged Ad-hoc, informal decision-making common	Inclusive decision-making infrequent, may be largely for show Exclusive, secretive decision-making common	Collegial, consensus-based, inclusive decision-making common Exclusive, secretive decision-making on politically salient issues only	Collegial, consensus-based, inclusive decision-making Alternative viewpoints encouraged
	Delegation	Top priorities may be delegated to executive office or to loyalists in politicized bureaucracy	Top priorities delegated to executive office for implementation, kept secret	On politically salient issues <u>only</u> , Secretive delegation to trusted insiders, outsiders possible	Clear division of labor between executive & bureaucratic elites
	Personnel changes	Widespread loyalist appointments; competence not prioritized Expansion of appointment powers Large-scale dismissals or resignations	Limited loyalist appointments	Few loyalist appointments; generally values competence in appointees	Standard use of appointment powers Prioritizes competence over loyalty in appointments
	Other tools	Legal changes to recruitment & promotion incentives Creation of parallel, redundant institutions Increases in executive office responsibilities, size, & resources common Uneven leader access across elites	Increases in executive office responsibilities, size, & resources Restricted information flows Extensive bureaucratic monitoring Uneven leader access across elites	Relatively even leader access across elites Some reliance on outside expertise for advice	Preserves existing institutional norms Regular, informal coordination common Even leader access across elites

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selective delegation to outsiders on sensitive policy issues, while integration upholds a clear and formal division of labor between executive and bureaucratic actors. On personnel changes, politicization involves widespread loyalist appointments, often at the expense of competence, and frequently entails dismissals or expansion of appointment powers. Insulation and circumvention involve more limited personnel changes, with circumvention generally preserving some meritocratic considerations. Integration relies on routine appointment procedures and prioritizes professional competence over loyalty. Finally, in terms of other institutional tools, politicization is the most disruptive, involving legal changes to incentive structures, the creation of redundant institutions, and uneven access to the executive. Insulation and circumvention both expand executive office capacity and restrict information flows, though circumvention allows more access to outside expertise. Integration, by contrast, preserves existing institutional norms and facilitates informal, regular coordination among actors with balanced access. Taken together, this table shows the range of organizational choices leaders may use the structure of foreign policymaking to balance bureaucratic competence and control according to their priorities.

Formal tools refer to tangible, institutionalized changes to foreign policy bureaucracies and their place within the policymaking process. These changes are usually enacted through executive decree or similar legally recognized levers of direct executive action. They may entail reorganizing

the structure of advisory bodies, enacting changes to how bureaucrats are promoted, or expanding the number of appointed positions within a given bureaucracy. In contrast, informal tools are those that take place without a decree from the leader, or at least one that is not written down. This distinction helps make sense of the often-present gap between how procedures and rules are supposed to work in theory versus practice. Some strategies rely more heavily on informal rather than formal tools because the changes that leaders make using informal tools are not institutionalized to the same extent that changes made formally are.

We might expect leaders to more nimbly deploy informal tools than formal tools, as the former are more easily reversed and less likely to receive backlash than the latter. In general, circumvention and insulation rely more heavily on informal tools than politicization and integration. Under insulation, in 1972, Richard Nixon “convened a grand total of three meetings of the [National Security] Council he had pledged four years earlier to ‘restore.’”⁸⁹ However, politicization’s focus on undermining bureaucratic norms of neutrality and nonpartisanship often requires the use of informal tools. For example, the position of foreign secretary in India is customarily granted to the seniormost bureaucrat in the IFS. That secretary nearly always serves a full term before retirement, regardless of leadership turnover. Yet after Prime Minister Narendra Modi was elected in 2014, he abruptly held ad-hoc meetings where decisions are often made informally, and the accessibility of the leader to bureaucratic elites.

Table 2 summarizes the four organizational strategies by highlighting their core distinctions across three dimensions: inclusivity, bureaucratic neutrality, and the leader’s principal priority.

Inclusivity refers to whether and to what extent bureaucratic elites are included in decision-making, delegated implementation of priority policies, and informed of executive actions and priorities. An

⁸⁹ Daalder and Destler, *In the Shadow of the Oval Office*, 71.

inclusive strategy does not just superficially include the topmost bureaucrats within the ministry, but also sees the leader weigh their inputs seriously and even encourages a competitive dialogue between bureaucratic and executive elites to play out on difficult decisions. In a less inclusive strategy, bureaucratic elites may merely be informed of a leader's decision in their domain just before the decision takes place or even after the fact. Indira Gandhi's nuclear policymaking prior to the 1974 nuclear test featured low inclusivity. According to Sagan (1996), "the military services were not asked how nuclear weapons would affect their war plans and military doctrines; the Defense Minister was reportedly informed of, but not consulted about, the final test decision only 10 days before the May 18 explosion; the Foreign Minister was merely given a 48-hour notice of the detonation."⁹⁰ Broadly speaking, integration features the most inclusivity, followed by circumvention and then insulation. However, politicization may be more inclusive than insulation when leaders have identified *which* loyalists within the bureaucracy they can include in deliberations and implementation.

Table 2. Summary of Organizational Strategies

	Politicization	Insulation	Circumvention	Integration
Inclusivity	Selectively inclusive	Broadly exclusive	Selectively exclusive	Broadly inclusive
Bureaucratic Neutrality	Most loyal	Somewhat loyal	Somewhat neutral	Most neutral
Leader Priority	Control	Control	Competence	Competence

Bureaucratic neutrality refers to the extent to which the bureaucracy remains unresponsive to the personal or political interests of the leader.⁹¹ In the ideal, nonpartisan careerists have access to

⁹⁰ Scott D. Sagan, "Why Do States Build Nuclear Weapons?: Three Models in Search of a Bomb," *International Security* 21, no. 3 (1996): 67, <https://doi.org/10.2307/2539273>.

⁹¹ This definition comes from the American politics and public administration literature. Kaufman (1956) developed the classical theory of neutral competence, defined as a quality bureaucrats can have "to do the work of government

objective guidance and expert knowledge of institutional pathways for a leader's intended policy goals. While complete neutrality is unlikely, leaders can erode norms of bureaucratic nonpartisanship and independence by interfering in the rules and practices governing merit-based recruitment, training, and promotion, such as by weakening tenure protections and expanding the number of appointed positions within a bureaucratic agency.⁹² In 2020, less than a month before the U.S. presidential election, Donald Trump moved to convert existing career officials into a new "Schedule F" classification, which would have degraded job protections for bureaucrats in policy-relevant roles.⁹³ If Schedule F had endured, it would have rendered bureaucrats beholden to the leader's evaluation of their performance and made it difficult for them to ignore career incentives to follow the leader's personal and political prerogatives. Bureaucracies become less neutral when leaders engage in politicization, though insulating leaders will also use similar tools. Politicization, if successful, renders the bureaucracy more loyal and therefore responsive to leaders' parochial interests. Integration, in contrast, preserves the competence and autonomy of the bureaucracy. Leaders who are insulating or circumventing may use trusted insiders situationally but largely leave bureaucratic neutrality intact as well.

expertly, and to do it according to explicit, objective standards rather than to personal or party or other obligations and loyalties" (1060). This formulation of neutral competence takes bureaucratic expertise as exogenous and observable in select expert bureaucrats. In contrast, Gailmard and Patty (2007) have developed a model of bureaucratic expertise is endogenous to "the political environment of bureaucracies and on the personnel management practices and institutions in government" (866). Sean Gailmard and John W. Patty, "Slackers and Zealots: Civil Service, Policy Discretion, and Bureaucratic Expertise," *American Journal of Political Science* 51, no. 4 (2007): 873–89, <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1540-5907.2007.00286.x>.

⁹² While it appears true that career bureaucrats are, on average, less likely to remain neutral regardless of a leader's interests, I do not assume that all career bureaucrats are neutral while all political appointees are loyalists. I do assume, however, that loyalty on average decreases the competency of an individual bureaucrat. The latter assumption follows the literature, notably Lewis (2010). See also Kim (2024) on bureaucratic neutrality as conditional on tenure protections. Minju KIM, "How Bureaucrats Represent Economic Interests: Partisan Control over Trade Adjustment Assistance," *International Studies Quarterly* 68, no. 3 (September 1, 2024): sqae089, <https://doi.org/10.1093/isq/sqae089>.

⁹³ Donald P. Moynihan, "Public Management for Populists: Trump's Schedule F Executive Order and the Future of the Civil Service," *Public Administration Review* 82, no. 1 (2022): 174–78, <https://doi.org/10.1111/puar.13433>.

Both politicization and insulation are fundamentally control-oriented strategies, but they achieve control through different mechanisms. Politicization enforces compliance by reshaping the bureaucracy itself—leaders appoint loyalists to key positions, alter incentive structures to reward political loyalty over professional competence, and often create redundant or parallel institutions that bypass traditional channels. Over time, this results in a bureaucracy that is highly responsive to the leader’s personal or political interests, but often at the expense of institutional capacity and policy coherence. Insulation, by contrast, achieves control not by transforming the bureaucracy, but by sidelining it. Leaders who insulate rely on secrecy, tight executive control, and restricted information flows to ensure that bureaucrats lack the knowledge or access necessary to resist, leak, or obstruct policy initiatives. In both strategies, the common thread is the leader’s desire to minimize bureaucratic interference.

Circumvention departs from this pattern: while it does entail control over particularly sensitive policy areas, its broader goal is to work around bureaucratic resistance rather than overhaul or suppress it. Leaders who circumvent often seek specialized expertise or create alternative structures to supplement, rather than dominate, the formal bureaucracy. Finally, integration is the only strategy centered on competence. Leaders who adopt this approach trust the bureaucracy’s inputs and aim to harness its institutional knowledge and capacity to achieve their policy goals. Rather than dominating or avoiding the bureaucracy, they work through it, valuing neutrality, coordination, and professional expertise.

Shaping Foreign Policymaking: Leader Strategy Selection

If these four strategies represent the organizational options available to leaders, what explains how leaders select among them? No two leaders will enact the same strategy in precisely the same way. The formal and informal tools a leader selects to enact their strategy will depend in part

on existing institutions, rules, and norms as well as the leader's personality. I argue that leaders have both ideological and political reasons for selecting the strategies they do. This section posits that leaders opt for organizational strategies according to two motivating factors: their distrust of bureaucratic elites and the political strength they command in the eyes of the public and the party. How much leaders distrust bureaucratic elites drives their perceptions about the severity of the threat the foreign policy bureaucracy poses and the value of the bureaucracy to their foreign policy agenda. This has follow-on effects for a leader's cost-benefit calculations, which determine whether and how they reshape foreign policymaking. A leader's finite access to political and material resources to enact her policy agenda may pose constraints for the type of organizational strategy she selects (see **Table 3**).

Table 3. Typology of Leader Organizational Strategies with Empirical Codings

	<i>Distrust</i>	<i>Trust</i>
Strong Leader	Politicization India: Indira Gandhi (1970-1977), Rajiv Gandhi Turkey: Recep Tayyip Erdogan	Integration United States: Dwight Eisenhower, George H.W. Bush, Bill Clinton
Weak Leader	Insulation United States: Richard Nixon, Lyndon Johnson India: Indira Gandhi (1966-1969)	Circumvention India: Manmohan Singh United States: Jimmy Carter

The differentiation between strategies hinges on how leaders resolve the tradeoff they face between two incentives: the desire to control the direction of foreign policy and the desire to preserve the autonomy and competence of the foreign policy bureaucracy. Leaders who prioritize control will select less inclusive strategies and render the bureaucracy more responsive to the leader's personal and political whims, while leaders prioritizing competence will broadly aim to embrace the bureaucracy's role in policymaking by delegating greater autonomy and incorporating a wider range of bureaucratic stakeholders into foreign policymaking. Whether leaders prioritize retaining full control or maintaining bureaucratic expertise depends on whether they trust or distrust the bureaucracy.

Bureaucratic Trust and Distrust

Trust is central to the functioning of any organization. In social psychology, trust across social systems has been defined as “the expectations, assumptions, or beliefs about the likelihood that another's future actions will be beneficial, favorable, or at least not detrimental to one's interests.”⁹⁴ Operating under this definition, trust requires the probability of a positive outcome to offset the risk of adverse consequences.⁹⁵ A number of scholars have conceptualized trust as dispositional, encompassing an individual's propensity toward risk and social orientation towards society broadly, or history-based, rooted in patterns of trustworthiness in others' past behavior.⁹⁶ The brand of trust with which I am concerned contains a set of “diffuse expectations and

⁹⁴ Sandra L. Robinson, “Trust and Breach of the Psychological Contract,” *Administrative Science Quarterly* 41, no. 4 (1996): 576, <https://doi.org/10.2307/2393868>.

⁹⁵ Deborah Welch Larson, “Trust and Missed Opportunities in International Relations,” *Political Psychology* 18, no. 3 (1997): 714–15.

⁹⁶ See distinction in Kramer (1999), 575. An example of a dispositional view of trust and distrust can be found in Foster and Keller (2014), who argue that “distrust implies a Hobbesian view of the political universe” (209).

depersonalized beliefs” about a distinct category of others.⁹⁷ Compared to the rational choice view of trust as the result of iterated interactions and the development of reputations for trustworthiness, this version of relational trust is a complex psychological state that contains emotional and cognitive dimensions.⁹⁸

In contrast, distrust is characterized by the absence of “confidence in the other, a concern that the other may act as to harm one, that he does not care about one’s welfare or intends to act harmfully, or is hostile.”⁹⁹ Like trust, distrust can be a rational response to other’s behavior and the extent to which it affirms or discredits the *a priori* expectations of the perceiver. Yet it can also encompass paranoid cognition, in which the perceiver is both hypervigilant of others’ behavior and prone to ruminating on conspiracy-like hypotheses of that behavior.¹⁰⁰ In the most extreme cases, such cognitive tendencies may appear irrational. In a competitive political system in which the costs of misplaced trust are steep, paranoid cognition may be an adaptive response on the part of leaders. Nevertheless, these cognitive tendencies lead perceivers to “fail to discern how their own behavior ends up eliciting behavior that sustains the view that the world around them is populated by hostile and untrustworthy others”— an important theme that will recur in this dissertation.¹⁰¹

What causes leaders to trust or distrust their foreign policy bureaucracies? One answer lies in the social categories to which both leaders and bureaucrats belong. The core insight of the social identity approach in social psychology is that self-categorization “creates and defines an individual’s

⁹⁷ Roderick M. Kramer, “Trust and Distrust in Organizations: Emerging Perspectives, Enduring Questions,” *Annual Review of Psychology* 50 (1999): 579, <https://doi.org/10.1146/annurev.psych.50.1.569>.

⁹⁸ J. David Lewis and Andrew Weigert, “Trust as a Social Reality,” *Social Forces* 63, no. 4 (1985): 967–85, <https://doi.org/10.2307/2578601>.

⁹⁹ Trudy Govier, “Self-Trust, Autonomy, and Self-Esteem,” *Hypatia* 8, no. 1 (1993): 160, <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1527-2001.1993.tb00630.x>.

¹⁰⁰ Roderick M. Kramer, “Paranoid Cognition in Social Systems: Thinking and Acting in the Shadow of Doubt,” *Personality and Social Psychology Review* 2, no. 4 (November 1, 1998): 251–75, https://doi.org/10.1207/s15327957pspr0204_3.

¹⁰¹ Kramer, 269.

own place in society" within an ingroup and in contrast to an outgroup.¹⁰² As a result, it produces a variety of intergroup and intragroup behaviors. A vast literature on social identity suggests that shared identification with a symbolic group or social category causes individuals to perceive ingroup members as especially trustworthy and honest and outgroup members with suspicion and hostility.¹⁰³ They glean information about the norms of the social groups to which they belong and the "fuzzy sets" of attitudes and behaviors that "define one group and distinguish it from other groups" through direct communication and indirect cues.¹⁰⁴

Applying this social identity approach to my research questions, we can view leaders and bureaucrats as members of often overlapping but sometimes opposing social categories. Per organizational theorists like Wilson (1991), the distinct organizational culture of a bureaucratic agency shapes its members' broader sense of mission.¹⁰⁵ Organizational culture thus defines the attitudes and behaviors of group members who identify with the organization as a social group and draw meaning from membership in this group. As Drezner (2000) writes, "the ability of bureaucracies to use organizational culture as a means of propagating ideas is crucial to determining outcomes."¹⁰⁶ The development of organizational culture is supported by the dual processes of network-based selection and socialization. The former occurs when senior bureaucrats will encourage the entry and selection of individuals into an applicant pool that they think will fit with the agency culture; the latter is whenever status within the agency is rewarded to those who identify

¹⁰² Henri Tajfel et al., "Social Categorization and Intergroup Behaviour," *European Journal of Social Psychology* 1, no. 2 (1971): 293, <https://doi.org/10.1002/ejsp.2420010202>.

¹⁰³ Marilynn B. Brewer and Wendi Gardner, "Who Is This 'We'? Levels of Collective Identity and Self Representations," *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology* 71, no. 1 (1996): 83–93, <https://doi.org/10.1037/0022-3514.71.1.83>.

¹⁰⁴ Michael A. Hogg and Scott A. Reid, "Social Identity, Self-Categorization, and the Communication of Group Norms," *Communication Theory* 16, no. 1 (February 2006): 10, <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1468-2885.2006.00003.x>.

¹⁰⁵ James Q. Wilson, *Bureaucracy: What Government Agencies Do And Why They Do It*, 1st edition (New York, NY: Basic Books, 1991).

¹⁰⁶ Daniel W. Drezner, "Ideas, Bureaucratic Politics, and the Crafting of Foreign Policy," *American Journal of Political Science* 44, no. 4 (October 2000): 734, <https://doi.org/10.2307/2669278>.

with the organization's culture.¹⁰⁷ Agencies that feature a powerful organizational culture will foster "cohesion, coordination, and commitment" among agency personnel.¹⁰⁸ Even if organizational culture in an agency is weak, the mere act of an individual being part of a group has meaningful ramifications for how that individual will think about herself and her self-concept.¹⁰⁹ As insights from social psychology tell us, this may lead members to categorize themselves into "us" versus "them" categories, enabling ingroup favoritism and intensifying outgroup antagonism.¹¹⁰ Kaarbo (1998) and Kaarbo and Gruenfeld (1998) have applied these insights directly to bureaucratic conflict.¹¹¹

Leaders identify themselves with their own social categories. Social psychological research indicates that leaders who are prototypical members of the organization they are leading (i.e. representative of what members believe to be the normative properties of the group) are more supported and trusted by group members.¹¹² Leaders who are not prototypical members of a group are likely to face greater leadership challenges. In the case of leaders and their foreign policy bureaucracies, it is conceivable that leaders may identify themselves strongly with a group that identifies members of the bureaucracy as part of an outgroup. There are at least three ways in which this may occur, although this list is not exhaustive.

¹⁰⁷ Daniel P. Carpenter, *The Forging of Bureaucratic Autonomy: Reputations, Networks, and Policy Innovation in Executive Agencies, 1862-1928* /, Princeton Studies in American Politics (Princeton University Press, 2001), 27.

¹⁰⁸ Carpenter, 24.

¹⁰⁹ It is not often the case that the organizational culture of a major foreign policy bureaucratic agency is weak. Destler (1972) identifies a strong organizational culture in the U.S. diplomat corps while Wilson (1991) notes the same in the U.S. military. Destler, *Presidents, Bureaucrats, and Foreign Policy*; Wilson, *Bureaucracy*.

¹¹⁰ For foundational work on this topic, see Tajfel et al. (1971). For a historical review of the topic, see Hornsey (2008). On its application to organizational psychology, see Hogg and Terry (2000).

¹¹¹ Juliet Kaarbo, "Power Politics in Foreign Policy: The Influence of Bureaucratic Minorities," *European Journal of International Relations* 4, no. 1 (March 1, 1998): 67–97, <https://doi.org/10.1177/1354066198004001003>; Juliet Kaarbo and Deborah Gruenfeld, "The Social Psychology of Inter- and Intragroup Conflict in Governmental Politics," *Mershon International Studies Review* 42, no. 2 (1998): 226–33, <https://doi.org/10.2307/254414>.

¹¹² Michael A. Hogg, Daan Van Knippenberg, and David E. Rast, "The Social Identity Theory of Leadership: Theoretical Origins, Research Findings, and Conceptual Developments," *European Review of Social Psychology* 23, no. 1 (March 2012): 258–304, <https://doi.org/10.1080/10463283.2012.741134>.

(a) *Internationalists versus nationalists*: The secular, cosmopolitan identity that dominates many diplomatic bureaucracies is associated with commitments to the political beliefs shared by the international community, such as deference to international law.¹¹³ Recent nationalist backlash to the foreign policy establishment within the United States is arguably reaction to failings of the doctrine of U.S. primacy that emerged after the end of the Cold War.¹¹⁴ The doctrine of American primacy upheld by the U.S. foreign policy establishment has real historical roots in the strategic rationale from the early Cold War era. However, it has evolved to be synonymous with the persistence of the U.S.-led liberal international order and its associated rules and norms, which oftentimes “privilege international institutions over domestic considerations” and “clash with nationalism over key issues of sovereignty and national identity.”¹¹⁵ The presidential victory of Donald Trump even caused card-carrying members of the U.S. foreign policy establishment to reevaluate their foreign policy commitments, or at least to reconsider how they articulate them to the public.¹¹⁶

(b) *Liberal versus conservative*: Differences over partisanship and ideological cleavages are also likely to play a role in determining how much leaders mistrust bureaucratic elites. Several works in American politics suggest that leaders widely perceive the civil service to be filled with liberal-leaning careerists and select conservative appointees to counteract the effects of

¹¹³ Bayram, “Due Deference,” 143.

¹¹⁴ Benjamin H Friedman and Justin Logan, “Why Washington Doesn’t Debate Grand Strategy,” 2016, 32; Porter, “Why America’s Grand Strategy Has Not Changed.”

¹¹⁵ John J. Mearsheimer, “Bound to Fail: The Rise and Fall of the Liberal International Order,” *International Security* 43, no. 4 (April 1, 2019): 8, https://doi.org/10.1162/isec_a_00342. Since organizational culture varies agency by agency, it follows that while leaders may regard some bureaucratic elites with suspicion, they may still trust bureaucrats in other agencies.

¹¹⁶ See Alexander Ward, *The Internationalists: The Fight to Restore American Foreign Policy After Trump* (New York: Portfolio, 2024), chap. 1.

careerist ideology.¹¹⁷ Other scholarship suggests leaders distinguish between liberal and conservative-leaning agencies. For example, they might modify their patronage-based appointments to fit the ideology of the appointees. Using survey data of federal bureaucrats, Clinton et al. (2012) find that more liberal appointees are selected for agencies where the average careerist has more liberal preferences, and more conservative appointees are selected for agencies containing more conservative careerists.¹¹⁸ This reaffirms Lewis's (2010) claim that patronage concerns also drive presidential appointments (i.e. liberal appointees would rather be appointed to liberal agencies while conservative appointees would rather be appointed to conservative agencies). In the foreign policy domain, left-right ideological cleavages and related partisan incentives do not become irrelevant. Leaders may rightly fear that partisan bureaucrats who are opposed to their political survival will undermine them at every turn, as Nixon did when he told Kissinger before entering office that the CIA was filled with “Ivy League liberals who behind the façade of analytical objectivity were usually pushing their own preferences.”¹¹⁹ (Kissinger 1979, 40). Leaders may make little distinction between the opposition to their agenda fueled by ideological differences and that which is driven by partisan gamesmanship. Particularly when polarization is high, or when leaders are ideologically extreme, we would expect partisanship to shape how much leaders mistrust bureaucratic agencies and elites.

¹¹⁷ Joel D. Aberbach and Bert A. Rockman, “Clashing Beliefs Within the Executive Branch: The Nixon Administration Bureaucracy,” *The American Political Science Review* 70, no. 2 (1976): 456–68, <https://doi.org/10.2307/1959650>; Terry M. Moe, “The Politicized Presidency,” *The New Direction in American Politics* 235, no. 238 (1985): 244–63; Thomas Weko, *The Politicizing Presidency: The White House Personnel Office, 1948-1994*, Studies in Government and Public Policy (Lawrence, Kan: University Press of Kansas, 1995), <https://catalog.lib.uchicago.edu/vufind/Record/1721001?sid=62481044>.

¹¹⁸ Joshua D. Clinton et al., “Separated Powers in the United States: The Ideology of Agencies, Presidents, and Congress,” *American Journal of Political Science* 56, no. 2 (2012): 341–54, <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1540-5907.2011.00559.x>.

¹¹⁹ Kissinger, *White House Years*, 40.

(c) *Hawks versus doves*: Distrust can also emerge from the hawk-dove divide. While this can arise in leaders alongside mistrust over ideology and partisanship, the mistrust that a hawkish leader develops for dovish elites and vice versa emerges along a distinct pathway. Narrowly defined, hawkishness captures an individual's disposition towards using force to resolve international disputes. A more expansive view of hawkishness considers how individuals calculate the relative benefits of an international good (e.g., arms control) versus the costs to domestic consumption – the more doveish the leader, the more likely they are to prioritize domestic commitments over international ones.¹²⁰ As such, they may be more willing to make concessions to adversaries abroad if the costs internationally do not outweigh the costs to the domestic political agenda. Leaders thus mistrust agencies and elites within the foreign policy bureaucracy who disagree with their beliefs about the severity of international threats and how they resolve the “guns or butter” trade-off. Lebovic (2013) illustrates how Cold War U.S. presidents battled over technical treaty details with hawkish arms control skeptics whose ideals were informed by deeply held beliefs about the true intentions behind the Soviet Union’s nuclear strategy.¹²¹

Much of the time, the shared self-perceptions of bureaucratic elites do not invite mistrust from leaders. Leaders are not often predisposed against the dominant organizational cultures of foreign policy bureaucracies. But when leaders and bureaucratic elites have conflicting self-categorizations based on who they each label as “us” or “them,” distrust is present.¹²² A leader who

¹²⁰ Kreps, Saunders, and Schultz, “The Ratification Premium,” 484.

¹²¹ James H. H. Lebovic, *Flawed Logics: Strategic Nuclear Arms Control from Truman to Obama* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2013).

¹²² This is most important at the start of a leader’s tenure. As leaders get further into their tenure, the degree of mistrust they hold for the bureaucracy may be updated to account for their recent experiences with the bureaucracy. However, leaders who initially mistrust the bureaucracy are unlikely grant the bureaucracy opportunities to prove trustworthy, therefore making it improbable that relations will see much improvement.

rejects the ideas widely held throughout the foreign policy bureaucracy will likely regard bureaucratic elites with deep suspicion. These leaders stand out against those who criticize past governments' policies or see bureaucracies as inefficient, wasteful, or needing reform. Instead, they locate the problem with the foreign policy at the level of *people*: those career foreign policy professionals who make up the establishment. This mistrust's interpersonal and intergroup dimensions aggravate what might otherwise be seen as differences in policy preferences.

Recall that leader strategy selection centers on the cost-benefit calculus of drawing upon the bureaucracy in foreign policymaking. Extreme distrust heightens threat perceptions. Kucinskas and Zylan (2023) report that when leaders distrust the bureaucracy, they overestimate the amount of subversion from below. As one interviewee who served under the Trump administration noted, “I think whenever you raised a question in this environment you were thought to be leaking as well. It just didn’t make any sense. If I wanted to get people in trouble, I’d just leak it. I wouldn’t tell them that I have a concern and give them advice and then leak it. But I think if you were raising concerns, it was seen as leaking.”¹²³ The expectation of costs imposed by bureaucrats is coupled with a decrease in their perceived value. Bureaucrats serving under Trump also confirmed that appointees would appear uninterested in receiving briefings or meeting with careerists.¹²⁴ Other appointees in the Department of State would utter “bald lies that we knew not to be true.”¹²⁵ Such mistrust ultimately shapes organizational strategy selection by diminishing the perceived value and intensifying the anticipated costs of bureaucratic input in foreign policymaking.

¹²³ Jaime Kucinskas and Yvonne Zylan, “Walking the Moral Tightrope: Federal Civil Servants’ Loyalties, Caution, and Resistance under the Trump Administration,” *American Journal of Sociology* 128, no. 6 (May 1, 2023): 1792, <https://doi.org/10.1086/725313>.

¹²⁴ Kucinskas and Zylan, 1780.

¹²⁵ Kucinskas and Zylan, 1781.

It is important to note that a leader's trust in the elites of the foreign policy bureaucracy is not reducible to their prior experience working with these elites. U.S. President Richard Nixon, for example, had substantial foreign policy experience when he came to office, having served as vice president during the Eisenhower administration. But this experience had tainted his views on the civil servants in the State Department and other foreign policy agencies, which he purportedly saw as "relics from the Roosevelt-Truman era [who] could not be trusted to support the new initiatives or assist in the implementation of policy." This example illustrates that past proximity to elites is insufficient to generate the shared beliefs that facilitate trust. Instead, trust may be achieved if a leader's beliefs are similar to those of bureaucratic elites, which vary by agency. This can occur if a leader has previous experience within the bureaucracy itself or if they have experience in other groups that share similar ideas, interests, and norms. In India, former Prime Minister Manmohan Singh is an example of a leader whose experience as an economist and senior bureaucrat generated a self-concept that aligned with the cosmopolitan worldview of the diplomatic bureaucracy.¹²⁶

Whether leaders trust or distrust bureaucratic elites is one component of how they organize the foreign policymaking process. In the next section, I will expand on a second component: domestic political strength. I argue that leaders do not have limitless political capital to expend on reorganizing the foreign policymaking process. The amount of support she has from the public and her party determines how many resources she can use to change the rules of foreign policymaking, which limits her choice of strategies.

¹²⁶ See chapters 3-4.

Domestic Political Strength

Even if leaders are equally motivated to rewrite the rules of the foreign policymaking process to sideline those bureaucratic elites they do not trust, they may not be equally capable of doing so. Leaders face severe time and institutional constraints that limit how they can reshape foreign policymaking. A leader's ability to enact certain strategies – especially those that require substantial investments in time, political capital, and legislation – hinges on their domestic political strength, defined in terms of public and party-level domestic political support. Clary (2022) has argued that leaders who are secure in office (whether through domestic political support or dictatorial control, as the case may be in authoritarian regimes) and have allies across the government typically have "concentrated executive authority," or the ability to make foreign policy decisions without fear that others in the government may reverse them.¹²⁷ Beyond the leaders having to cope with a foreign policy bureaucracy, leaders must also confront party leaders, legislators, interest groups, and other centers of power across the democratic political system to implement their foreign policy vision. The fewer players they must struggle against to execute their vision, the more capital the leader can expend battling the bureaucracy. Without other powerful political entities to ally themselves with, bureaucratic elites will be less likely to slow-roll or otherwise place obstacles before a leader's desired policy outcome. Even in weakly institutionalized democracies, democracies display some characteristics of autocratic regimes, militaries, and intelligence agencies will be less likely to threaten the leader's primacy if they fear a domestic political backlash against an ouster.

Second, politically strong leaders can appoint whomever they desire to positions of importance within the foreign policy bureaucracy without facing challenges from other political

¹²⁷ Christopher Clary, *The Difficult Politics of Peace: Rivalry in Modern South Asia* (Oxford University Press, 2022), 36.

leaders, such as the political heads of the diplomatic or defense ministries or political party leaders. This control over a significant lever of career progress – appointments – may produce a bureaucracy eager to pander to a massively popular executive. In post-independence India, Prime Minister Jawaharlal Nehru's cabinet ministers and bureaucrats were deferential to him because he was “the chief vote-catcher and therefore dispenser of favours for people with political ambition.”¹²⁸ One retired Indian diplomat explained that while bureaucratic appointments in the Ministry of External Affairs (MEA) are customarily allocated based on seniority, the prime minister has discretion to break tradition: “Sometimes he respects seniority. At another time, he exercises his personal prerogative and appoints a certain person, superseding other people...this can create a rumble within the [bureaucratic] set-up.”¹²⁹ Electorally strong leaders will be able to make decisions that disrupt the status quo in the bureaucracy with greater ease than those who are weaker.

Finally, politically powerful leaders are more likely to get reelected and remain in power in subsequent elections. As such, foreign policy bureaucrats have long-run incentives to cater to the views and needs of popular leaders (and the members of their trusted inner circle): if they are successful, they might be able to secure a positive career trajectory for at least as long as the leader is in office. If they are unsuccessful or otherwise fall out of the executive's good graces, their career prospects could stagnate or falter. The more electoral support a leader commands today, the more likely they will command unconstrained foreign policymaking authority tomorrow. In sum, foreign policy bureaucrats have potent incentives to respond to changes of the political winds.

A leader's lack of popularity with the public and support from the party limits the strategies that leaders may select. Integration represents the preferred strategy for trustful leaders, but political

¹²⁸ P. N. Dhar, *Indira Gandhi, the ‘Emergency’, and Indian Democracy* (Oxford University Press, 2000), 133.

¹²⁹ Interview with retired Indian diplomat, New Delhi, August 2022.

weakness renders it out of reach for many. A trusting leader who otherwise runs an inclusive and neutral policy process may keep bureaucratic elites in the dark or minimize the number of elites involved in the policymaking process on select issues when their grasp on the public and the party is low. *Circumvention* is thus ad-hoc and contingent on the leader's perceptions of the level of threat from bureaucratic elites and the potential consequences of sabotage. Suppose a policy choice is unpopular with bureaucratic elites and politically salient. In that case, leaders will be vulnerable to information about the policy leaking to the public before the leader has shaped the public narrative of the policy.

In contrast to this ad-hoc circumvention, a suspicious and distrustful leader who lacks sufficient political resources at home will make sustained efforts to sideline bureaucratic elites through insulation but do so in a manner unlikely to endure beyond the leader's tenure. Leaders will institutionalize processes within the executive branch that concentrate authority in the hands of trusted executive elites while sidelining bureaucratic elites. Yet this strategy's centralized and secretive nature highlights its main pitfall from the perspective of a distrustful leader: its limited reach into the bureaucracy. Without faithful agents they can rely on to control the bureaucracy from within, they are still forced to confront the bureaucratic elites they believe are out to thwart their policy agendas. They would rather politicize but lack the required political capital and associated resources to enable this strategy.

Scope Conditions

This theory applies mainly to political systems where leaders have significant control over bureaucratic structure, appointments, and policymaking processes. Therefore, all political regimes with reasonably established bureaucracies fall within its scope. It is most relevant during changes in leadership or early in a leader's term, when they can modify the foreign policy framework. It also

assumes that bureaucratic elites are embedded within institutions enough to be distrusted, a less accurate notion in countries with weak institutions. Ultimately, the theory aims to explain specific instances of leader-driven, strategic efforts to change the bureaucracy's role in foreign policy outcomes, rather than all forms of bureaucratic politics.

While this framework includes both democratic and authoritarian regimes, its usefulness diminishes in highly fragmented coalition governments or collective executive setups where no single leader can implement a strategy alone. Research on authoritarian regimes has shown that leaders often have more freedom to change the foreign policy framework, including significant power to appoint loyalists, create or eliminate institutions, and protect decision-making from outside checks. Although some of these actions might align with my theory, authoritarian bureaucracies may be less independent and more politically connected from the start, which reduces the risk that bureaucrats pose to the leader. In personalized regimes, where bureaucracies are weakened or controlled, opportunities for variation in leader strategy may be limited. For this reason, my case selection strategy focuses on democratic and hybrid regimes. To explore the boundaries of this condition, I included a case of a leader in Turkey, a country with a history of military oversight and disputed civilian control.

One criticism could be that the theory only applies in situations where leaders expect or encounter significant resistance from the foreign policy bureaucracy. It is true that leaders who deeply mistrust bureaucrats are the ones most likely to see bureaucratic obstruction—whether real or assumed—as a major threat. However, I argue that almost all leaders expect some level of bureaucratic resistance concerning their foreign policy goals. This expectation can vary depending on how much the leader's agenda diverges from the existing bureaucratic views or norms. For instance, leaders proposing radical or revisionist foreign policies are more likely to foresee

bureaucratic opposition than those pursuing policies that align more closely with the status quo of bureaucratic preferences. Nonetheless, how observable the organizational strategies are likely depends on the intensity and severity of the resistance. When bureaucratic pushback is strong, it becomes easier to spot tactics linked to exclusionary strategies, such as secret delegation, informal coordination, or withholding information, especially under circumvention or insulation. Conversely, when bureaucratic resistance is weak or subtle, a leader may implement a strategy, but the evidence—like appointment patterns or informal meetings—may be less noticeable or impactful. Thus, while the theory assumes that the anticipation of bureaucratic resistance is common, it also suggests that the most observable signs of organizational strategy will emerge when leaders view resistance as a real and urgent challenge to their policy goals.

Alternative Explanations

In this chapter, I make two theoretical moves. First, I suggest that leaders select organizational strategies to moderate or expand the influence of the foreign policy bureaucracy. Second, I state that a leader's distrust of bureaucratic elites and domestic political strength derived from public and party-level support shapes how leaders organize foreign policymaking. Existing scholarship highlights a few alternative explanations to both theoretical developments that merit attention.

Alternatives to Organizational Strategies

Do leaders really use organizational strategies to calibrate the influence of the foreign policy bureaucracy? The existing literature offers a few alternative determinants of foreign policymaking institutions, rules, and norms, with an overwhelming focus on institutional design. The first is that institutional design choices must reflect the inputs of other actors like the judiciary, the legislature,

and interest groups. In the study of American politics, control over the institutional design of bureaucratic agencies is seen as the subject of a tug-of-war between the president and Congress.¹³⁰ Scholars of American foreign policy suggest that because Congress tends to delegate foreign policymaking to the president and there are fewer interest groups in the foreign policy arena, presidents have more control over foreign policy agencies compared to domestic agencies.¹³¹ Others have challenged this view, suggesting that the president's influence over bureaucratic agencies will be strong over national security-oriented agencies but weaker over those dealing with trade and economic aid.¹³² Broadly speaking, this view suggests that the executive's main opponent when organizing foreign policymaking will be those in legislatures who have a vested interest in controlling bureaucracies. If this view is correct, we would expect to see battles over foreign policy organizing play out between leaders and other politicians, not between leaders and bureaucrats. Organizational choices will target congressional oversight of policymaking rather than bureaucratic influence.

A second perspective is that organizational choices are constrained by the basic features of agency design. Since most agencies are created via legislation and legislation is difficult to amend or rescind, “agency mandates, procedures, and structures that manage to get written into law tend to endure.”¹³³ Zegart (2000) argues that the interests of relevant players – especially leaders and bureaucrats – as well as external events can impact how the agency evolves, enduring institutional reform should be rare and difficult to achieve. If this is correct, we would expect to see leaders rely predominantly on informal rather than formal tools across all strategies. We would also expect to see major changes in institutional design be preceded by external developments that “move the focus of

¹³⁰ Joel D. Aberbach, *In the Web of Politics : Three Decades of the U.S. Federal Executive /* (Brookings Institution Press, 2000).

¹³¹ Zegart, *Flawed by Design*, 26; Canes-Wrone, Howell, and Lewis, “Toward a Broader Understanding of Presidential Power.”

¹³² Milner and Tingley, *Sailing the Water's Edge*.

¹³³ Zegart, *Flawed by Design*, 42.

public debate, change the political context in which these agencies operate, and alter the interests and capabilities of major players.”¹³⁴

A third explanation is that leaders constantly search for greater control of the bureaucracy and thus will likely always tend towards certain strategies over others. Terry Moe (1985) argues that a U.S. president’s “pursuit of responsive competence” from the bureaucracy will encourage centralization and politicization.¹³⁵ Through centralizing strategies, leaders can “use structure to shift the locus of effective decisionmaking authority to the center,” write Moe and Scott Wilson.¹³⁶ Politicization is a “strategy of imperialism, extending the reach of the presidential team, by infiltrating alien territory [within bureaucratic agencies]. The idea is to ensure that important bureaucratic decisions are made, or at least overseen and monitored, by presidential agents.”¹³⁷ One complication arising from this perspective is that scholars do not agree on whether centralizing and politicizing tools are best considered complements or substitutes.¹³⁸ Moreover, the nature of foreign policy and national security *expects* that leaders centrally manage the policymaking process to some extent.¹³⁹ Especially in matters of war and peace, centralized authority is the status quo. In general, I view politicizing and centralizing tools to be a component of the various organizational strategies rather than a strategy in itself. Nevertheless, we can assume that if this explanation were correct, integration should be rare if not nonexistent.

¹³⁴ Zegart, 43.

¹³⁵ Moe, “The Politicized Presidency,” 244.

¹³⁶ Terry M. Moe and Scott A. Wilson, “Presidents and the Politics of Structure,” *Law and Contemporary Problems* 57, no. 2 (1994): 18, <https://doi.org/10.2307/1192044>.

¹³⁷ Moe and Wilson, 18.

¹³⁸ On this discussion, see Gibson (2022).

¹³⁹ Another drawback of using “centralization” and “politicization” as defined by Moe and Wilson (1994) is that they are difficult to apply cross-nationally. Many parliamentary democracies have fewer appointed foreign policy positions compared to presidential democracies. Moreover, coalition partners often have influence in who is appointed to senior bureaucratic roles like the foreign affairs minister. This limits the cross-national study of the interaction of leaders and bureaucracies.

A final alternative explanation is that leaders (or their advisers) alter institutions in ways that are idiosyncratic and therefore unpredictable. If true, it would be difficult to detect changes to the foreign policymaking status quo that follow a consistent logic and can thus be characterized as a strategy.

Alternatives to Leader Strategy Selection

If we accept that leaders use organizational strategies as described, what determines which strategy they select? The extant literature provides a set of alternative explanations, most of which are focused on the leader-level variables.

The first is that leaders' personalities, leadership styles, or operational codes influence how they organize foreign policymaking.¹⁴⁰ Among those traits which have received ample attention in the literature are the desire for power, overconfidence, and reluctance to tolerate conflict among advisers.¹⁴¹ These characteristics may influence leaders' preferences for centralized, exclusionary decision-making.¹⁴² Leaders also have distinct cognitive styles, or ways of gathering, processing, and

¹⁴⁰ Alexander L. George, "The 'Operational Code': A Neglected Approach to the Study of Political Leaders and Decision-Making," *International Studies Quarterly* 13, no. 2 (1969): 190–222, <https://doi.org/10.2307/3013944>; James M. Goldgeier, *Leadership Style and Soviet Foreign Policy: Stalin, Khrushchev, Brezhnev, Gorbachev*, Edition Unstated (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1994); Margaret G. Hermann, "Explaining Foreign Policy Behavior Using the Personal Characteristics of Political Leaders," *International Studies Quarterly* 24, no. 1 (March 1980): 7, <https://doi.org/10.2307/2600126>; Margaret G. Hermann and Charles F. Hermann, "Who Makes Foreign Policy Decisions and How: An Empirical Inquiry," *International Studies Quarterly* 33, no. 4 (1989): 361–87, <https://doi.org/10.2307/2600518>; Margaret G. Hermann, "Presidential Leadership Style, Advisory Systems, and Policy Making: Bill Clinton's Administration after Seven Months," *Political Psychology* 15, no. 2 (June 1994): 363, <https://doi.org/10.2307/3791745>; Hermann and Preston, "Presidents, Advisers, and Foreign Policy"; Juliet Kaarbo and Margaret G. Hermann, "Leadership Styles of Prime Ministers: How Individual Differences Affect the Foreign Policymaking Process," *The Leadership Quarterly* 9, no. 3 (September 1998): 243–63, [https://doi.org/10.1016/S1048-9843\(98\)90029-7](https://doi.org/10.1016/S1048-9843(98)90029-7); Preston, *The President and His Inner Circle*.

¹⁴¹ Thomas Preston, *The President and His Inner Circle: Leadership Style and the Advisory Process in Foreign Affairs, Power, Conflict, and Democracy* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2001), 8, <https://catalog.lib.uchicago.edu/vufind/Record/11117515>; Emilie M. Hafner-Burton, D. Alex Hughes, and David G. Victor, "The Cognitive Revolution and the Political Psychology of Elite Decision Making," *Perspectives on Politics* 11, no. 2 (June 2013): 372, <https://doi.org/10.1017/S1537592713001084>; Margaret G. Hermann and Thomas Preston, "Presidents, Advisers, and Foreign Policy: The Effect of Leadership Style on Executive Arrangements," *Political Psychology* 15, no. 1 (1994): 82, <https://doi.org/10.2307/3791440>.

¹⁴² Preston, *The President and His Inner Circle*, 8.

using information in decision-making.¹⁴³ Some leaders may be more receptive to making decisions based on new information provided via advisory inputs while others may adhere strictly to a predetermined set of beliefs about or vision for the world.¹⁴⁴ A leader's cognitive complexity has therefore been linked to a preference for open and deliberative advisory and information processing systems. In contrast, leaders with low complexity prefer comparatively exclusionary deliberation and fast-paced policymaking with "limited emphasis upon the presentation by advisers of alternative viewpoints, discrepant information, and multiple policy options."¹⁴⁵

Three empirical predictions follow from this perspective. First, leaders may pursue politicization or integration strategies without adequate political support, while others with ample support may opt for circumvention or insulation. By comparison, my theory's empirical predictions follow from the interaction of two variables – distrust *and* the domestic political environment. Second, leaders should behave consistently towards all bureaucratic agencies. In contrast, my theory asserts that we may see leaders behave differently towards different agencies based on how much they distrust a given agency. It is important to emphasize that distrust of bureaucracy may be associated with specific personality traits. However, the form of distrust under consideration here is relational, rather than dispositional. Finally, a change in a leader's personality or leadership style could lead to a subsequent shift in her chosen organizational strategy. For instance, leaders who remain in office for extended periods may become less cognitively complex, potentially limiting policy debate.¹⁴⁶ On the contrary, my theory predicts that change should not occur in the absence of changes to the political context or distrust.

¹⁴³ George, *Presidential Decisionmaking in Foreign Policy*, 147.

¹⁴⁴ Hermann and Hermann, "Who Makes Foreign Policy Decisions and How."

¹⁴⁵ Preston, *The President and His Inner Circle*, 146.

¹⁴⁶ Juliet Kaarbo, "New Directions for Leader Personality Research: Breaking Bad in Foreign Policy," *International Affairs* 97, no. 2 (March 1, 2021): 431, <https://doi.org/10.1093/ia/iaaa221>.

A related explanation is focused on leaders' prior foreign policy experience. Leaders who are highly experienced are more likely to become deeply involved in foreign policymaking, while those with less experience are more likely to delegate the management of foreign policymaking to others.¹⁴⁷ Leader experience may also influence how much leaders focus on foreign policy issues compared to domestic policy issues.¹⁴⁸ It can also shape how credibly leaders are able to monitor advisory inputs and effectively delegate to bureaucratic elites.¹⁴⁹ Finally, experience can help leaders withstand public criticism of their foreign policy decisions from experienced bureaucrats.¹⁵⁰

If it is clear that more experienced leaders organize policymaking differently, the expected outcomes are much less certain. A focus on and desire to be involved in foreign policy might motivate experienced leaders to use centralizing tools. However, experienced leaders might feel less threatened by bureaucratic inputs and therefore more willing to integrate, as Jost (2024) argues. Conversely, inexperienced leaders might strategically organize their policymaking to compensate for their shortfalls in foreign policy expertise through greater inclusion of and delegation to the bureaucracy. They may also restrict advisory inputs that they cannot effectively monitor by centralizing or politicizing. In any case, we would expect to see experience systematically determine organizational strategy selection rather than distrust or political strength.

Empirical Strategy

This dissertation uses qualitative process-tracing methods in a comparative case design to explore the often-hidden dynamics of leader-bureaucracy relations in three countries and six leaders,

¹⁴⁷ Preston, *The President and His Inner Circle*, 11.

¹⁴⁸ Hermann and Preston, "Presidents, Advisers, and Foreign Policy," 83. Agenda focus is a mechanism in both Jost (2024) and Saunders (2024). The former argues that an agenda that focuses on domestic issues will impact whether they prioritize bureaucratic inputs. The latter argues that agenda focus is determined by political party, with doveish parties tending to have a greater domestic policy focus.

¹⁴⁹ Saunders, "No Substitute for Experience."

¹⁵⁰ Jost, *Bureaucracies at War*, 46.

including two cases of variation within leaders. The case selection includes parliamentary (India) and presidential (United States) democracies, along with a hybrid regime (Turkey). This approach tests the theory's scope across different institutional settings. By comparing countries over time, particularly in India and Turkey, I can hold many details of the domestic institutional context, such as bureaucratic structures, civil service norms, and democratic procedures, constant. This allows me to examine how differences in leader trust and political strength influence strategic choices. Moreover, by studying two leaders, Indira Gandhi and Recep Tayyip Erdoğan, during different periods of their time in office, I show how changes in their key variables relate to shifts in organizational strategy. This design improves the internal validity of the theory by isolating causal mechanisms within cases while also increasing external validity through cross-national comparison.

Process tracing involves analyzing how events unfold over time and taking “good snapshots at a series of specific moments.”¹⁵¹ To map each leader's organizational strategy, I first identify the main foreign policy priorities of each administration and track how the leader approached those priorities. I then look at the leader's use of organizational tools throughout their time in office. I note changes in tool usage and provide a series of snapshots that show how specific tools were used to achieve major foreign policy goals. My coding of each strategy is based on evidence from the four dimensions outlined in Table 1: decision-making, delegation, personnel changes, and other tools. If I find that a leader regularly uses most of the tools linked to a particular strategy, I categorize that leader as having used that strategy. For politically weak leaders, I also investigate times when leaders showed intent or made initial moves to use certain tools but ultimately refrained due to limitations from their domestic political situation. This method allows me to evaluate not only what leaders do

¹⁵¹ David Collier, “Understanding Process Tracing,” *PS: Political Science & Politics* 44, no. 4 (October 2011): 824, <https://doi.org/10.1017/S1049096511001429>.

but also what they cannot do, capturing both their actual behavior and the potential actions limited by institutional and political factors.

To code a leader's level of trust in the bureaucracy, I look for evidence of distrust expressed prior to or near the beginning of their time in office, particularly during the transition between governments. The most compelling indicators include public statements, private remarks, or memoir accounts that reveal explicit skepticism toward bureaucratic elites. When such evidence is unavailable or limited, I supplement it with analysis of the leader's formative political experiences, peer networks, and the extent to which their social identity diverges from that of the bureaucratic establishment. I consider evidence of distrust to be strong when leaders explicitly position themselves in opposition to the bureaucracy as part of broader partisan, ideological, or social conflicts, framing bureaucrats as members of a hostile or alien "other."

To assess a leader's political strength at home, I look at indicators of both public support and party support, though these indicators differ by regime type. In parliamentary democracies like India, I evaluate strength based on whether the leader's party has a majority in parliament and how much control the leader has over their party. Coalition governments often dilute a leader's authority by requiring power-sharing and limiting unilateral decisions. On the other hand, in presidential democracies, control of the legislature by the party is less important for determining strength. Instead, I focus on electoral vote share and stable public approval ratings as key indicators. High vote margins and consistently positive public opinion show that a leader has political capital to use, even when there are institutional veto points. While a divided government can create challenges for implementing policy, it doesn't automatically make a leader weak. Presidents can still act decisively in foreign policy if they have strong public support or a direct electoral mandate. This support enables

them to overcome legislative resistance using executive powers, public appeals, or control over the bureaucracy.

“Bureaucracies are designed to guard information, and foreign policy institutions do so explicitly, with little allowance made to transparency or public engagement.”¹⁵² This lack of clarity creates a major hurdle for studying leader-bureaucracy relations. To tackle this issue, this dissertation relies on two main sources of new primary data: elite interviews in Chapter 4 and archival evidence in Chapters 3 and 5. It also includes memoirs, oral histories, and interviews that provide firsthand accounts from leaders and policymakers, along with news reports and secondary sources. Since there is not much public documentation available, elite interviews, though not perfect, are often crucial for understanding the internal workings of policymaking. As Lilleker (2003) highlights, these interviews “provide insights into events about which we know little: the activities that take place out of the public or media gaze, behind closed doors. We can learn more about the inner workings of the political process, the machinations between influential actors and how a sequence of events was viewed and responded to within the political machine.”¹⁵³ To reduce the risks associated with elite interviews, such as retrospective distortion or self-aggrandizement, I triangulated interview testimony with contemporaneous news accounts, secondary analyses, and, where possible, additional interviews.

¹⁵² Merje Kuus, “Foreign Policy and Ethnography: A Sceptical Intervention,” *Geopolitics* 18, no. 1 (January 1, 2013): 118, <https://doi.org/10.1080/14650045.2012.706759>.

¹⁵³ Darren G. Lilleker, “Interviewing the Political Elite: Navigating a Potential Minefield,” *Politics* 23, no. 3 (September 1, 2003): 208, <https://doi.org/10.1111/1467-9256.00198>.

Chapter 3. Distrust in India: Insulation and Politicization under Indira Gandhi

Indira Gandhi's father, India's founding prime minister Jawaharlal Nehru, envisioned India's future as a prominent and independent force in global affairs. In a 1946 *New York Times* op-ed outlining how newly decolonized states might contribute to a more peaceful world, he wrote, "India in particular is wedded to peace and her powerful influence will make a difference."¹⁵⁴ In keeping with this vision, Nehru committed India to a policy of nonalignment by refusing to join either the Eastern or Western blocs during the Cold War. This approach not only underscored India's strategic autonomy but also positioned it as a leading voice in the emerging Non-Aligned Movement (NAM) and a neutral mediator in international disputes like the Korean War.¹⁵⁵ While most scholarship emphasizes Nehru's deep commitment to anti-colonial solidarity, moral leadership, and a belief that newly independent nations could forge an alternative to the zero-sum logic of the Cold War as the basis for non-alignment, there was also a security rationale behind it.¹⁵⁶ By remaining detached from great power competition and therefore friendly to all nations, Nehru felt that India would be protected from external threats. "The normal idea is that security is protected by armies," he said.

¹⁵⁴ Jawaharlal Nehru, "'Colonialism Must Go,' Says Nehru; The Indian Leader Holds It Does Not Fit in with the Political Structure Now Evolving," *The New York Times*, March 3, 1946, sec. Archives, <https://www.nytimes.com/1946/03/03/archives/colonialism-must-go-says-nehru-the-indian-leader-holds-it-does-not.html>.

¹⁵⁵ On Indian role in NAM, see A. Appadorai, "The Bandung Conference," *India Quarterly* 11, no. 3 (July 1, 1955): 207–35, <https://doi.org/10.1177/097492845501100301>. On Indian mediation in the Korean War, see Srinath Raghavan, *War and Peace in Modern India* (Palgrave Macmillan, 2010), chap. 5.

¹⁵⁶ On non-alignment broadly, see A. P. Rana, "The Intellectual Dimensions of India's Nonalignment," *The Journal of Asian Studies* 28, no. 2 (1969): 299–312, <https://doi.org/10.2307/2943004>; Harsh V. Pant and Julie M. Super, "India's 'non-Alignment' Conundrum: A Twentieth-Century Policy in a Changing World," *International Affairs (Royal Institute of International Affairs 1944-)* 91, no. 4 (2015): 747–64.

“That is only partly true; it is equally true that security is protected by policies. A deliberate policy of friendship with other countries goes further in gaining security than almost anything else.”¹⁵⁷

Indira Gandhi shaped Indian foreign policy from 1966 to 1977 and again from 1980 until her assassination in 1984. When Gandhi first became prime minister, Nehru’s optimistic assessment of India’s strategic circumstances had proved incorrect. War with China in 1962 dealt India’s friendship policy a blow and exposed weaknesses in its foreign and defense policies.¹⁵⁸ The United States had begun arming Pakistan in the 1950s, emboldening Rawalpindi enough to attack Kashmir in 1965.¹⁵⁹ Nehru had passed away in 1964, and his successor, Lal Bahadur Shastri, died suddenly in January 1966. Meanwhile, relations with the United States were strained; U.S. arms and ammunition had been used against India during the war with Pakistan, although American officials had assured India that they would not be.¹⁶⁰ Conditionality on food aid and U.S. reticence to sell arms to India also created resentment in New Delhi and a growing perception that Washington was an unreliable partner.¹⁶¹ In this climate of uncertainty and strategic reorientation, Gandhi inherited a foreign policy apparatus in flux, caught between the fading ideals of non-alignment and the hard realities of regional insecurity and global Cold War pressures.

Her sudden ascendance as prime minister arose from internal factionalism within the ruling Congress Party. After Shastri’s death, Gandhi was chosen to be the party elders, a faction known as

¹⁵⁷ Jawaharlal Nehru, *India’s Foreign Policy, Selected Speeches, September 1946–April 1961* (New Delhi: Ministry of Information and Broadcasting, Government of India, 1961), 79.

¹⁵⁸ Raju G. C. Thomas, “Nonalignment and Indian Security: Nehru’s Rationale and Legacy,” *Journal of Strategic Studies* 2, no. 2 (September 1, 1979): 159–60, <https://doi.org/10.1080/01402397908437019>.

¹⁵⁹ Rudra Chaudhuri, *Forged In Crisis: India And The United States Since 1947* (Harper Collins, 2014), 120–22. Dennis Kux, *The United States and Pakistan, 1947–2000: Disenchanted Allies* (Washington, D.C.: Woodrow Wilson Center Press ; Johns Hopkins University Press, 2001), 159.

¹⁶⁰ Dennis Kux, *India and the United States: Estranged Democracies, 1941–1991* (Washington, D.C.: National Defense University Press, 1992), 239.

¹⁶¹ Kux, 229–31, 240–44.

the Syndicate, simply because they believed she was the “most malleable of the major candidates.”¹⁶² This proved to be a miscalculation. Gandhi quickly outmaneuvered her political patrons, consolidating power and ultimately splitting the Congress Party in 1969 after a dramatic confrontation over the presidential election. Gandhi firmly seized control of the party apparatus and the government, soundly overcoming the breakaway faction of the party.¹⁶³ This transformation marked the beginning of her dominance over Indian politics and the emergence of a more centralized and personalized style of leadership that would come to define her tenure.

Indira Gandhi is often accused of having no foreign policy ideology. Her former information adviser stated she had “no program, no worldview, no grand design.”¹⁶⁴ As one of her closest advisers, P.N. Haksar, would later bemoan, her perception of Indian interests was often calculated in the short-term; she did not know how to provide “long-term strategies or sustain momentum in either foreign or economic policy.”¹⁶⁵ Compared to her father, she may not have been a grand strategic thinker. Yet the long years she spent accompanying her father on official visits and hosting foreign dignitaries at home had given her a unique exposure to Indian diplomacy from an early age.¹⁶⁶ The conflicts with China and Pakistan had convinced her that reason and idealism had to be tempered by practicality and political realism in the conduct of India’s foreign policy.¹⁶⁷ Emerging

¹⁶² J. ANTHONY LUKAS, “She Stands Remarkably Alone: She Stands Remarkably Alone Already Her Opponents Have Indicated She Can Expect No Quarter as a Woman,” *New York Times*, March 27, 1966, sec. The New York Times Magazine.

¹⁶³ Sagarika Ghose, *Indira: India’s Most Powerful Prime Minister* (Juggernaut Books, 2020), 110–12.

¹⁶⁴ Interview with George Verghese quoted in Shashi Tharoor, *Reasons of State: Political Development and India’s Foreign Policy Under Indira Gandhi, 1966-1977* (Vikas Publishing House, 1982), 74.

¹⁶⁵ Surjit Mansingh, *India’s Search for Power* (New Delhi: SAGE Publications, 1984), 43.

¹⁶⁶ Tharoor, *Reasons of State*, 50–51.

¹⁶⁷ J. N. Dixit, *Makers of India’s Foreign Policy: Raja Ram Mohun Roy to Yashwant Sinha* (New Delhi: Harper Collins, 2004), 122.

geopolitical realities, combined with Gandhi's "instinctive dislike for the West", compelled her to orient India's foreign policy toward the Soviet Union and frame the shift in ideological terms.¹⁶⁸

At the heart of this chapter is a test of my leader strategy selection theory: that leaders choose organizational strategies based on the degree of trust they place in the bureaucratic elite. Distrust, I argue, emerges from deep political, ideological, or social cleavages between leaders and the foreign policy bureaucracy. Despite being the daughter of Jawaharlal Nehru—India's first prime minister and the principal architect of its foreign policy—Gandhi was fundamentally skeptical of the diplomatic establishment. Her early comments and private letters reveal not only a deep suspicion of bureaucratic inertia but a conviction that conservative, pro-Western forces within the IFS had grown disproportionately powerful after Nehru's death. This skepticism was not merely ideological but also rooted in political and social conflict, particularly between an "old guard" of diplomats and leftist younger cadres who favored socialism. Gandhi's alliance with P.N. Haksar, an IFS officer aligned with these ideals, and her growing mistrust of perceived American influence in Indian politics, further shaped her confrontational stance toward the foreign policy establishment.

What emerges is a clear pattern: Gandhi's mistrust of bureaucratic elites—particularly those aligned with Western interests—led her to prioritize control over the foreign policy apparatus by eroding the principles of bureaucratic neutrality. She pursued this in two phases. First, between 1966 and 1969, she insulated her office from the formal bureaucracy by expanding the size, scope, and authority of the Prime Minister's Secretariat (PMS). Then, following her dramatic consolidation of power in late 1969, she moved to politicize the bureaucracy itself. Meritocratic norms were

¹⁶⁸ Tharoor, *Reasons of State*, 78. The Indo-Soviet Treaty of Peace, Friendship, and Cooperation alludes to the "just aspirations of the peoples in their struggle against colonialism and racial domination." Indian Embassy of Moscow, "The Indo-Soviet Treaty of 1971: 50th Anniversary Commemoration" (Moscow, August 9, 2021), https://indianembassy-moscow.gov.in/pdf/Indo%20Soviet%20Treaty_2021.pdf. See also Indian Ministry of Information and Broadcasting, *The Years of Endeavour: Selected Speeches of Indira Gandhi August 1969-August 1972* (New Delhi: Government of India, 1975), 720–29, <https://indianculture.gov.in/flipbook/32943>.

increasingly sidelined, as personal loyalty became a key criterion for access to decision-making and, in some cases, even to critical information flows.

Studying Indira Gandhi poses significant challenges. Her private papers and those of several close advisers remain inaccessible to researchers. She did not share her inner thoughts freely with colleagues or even trusted friends, nor did she write a memoir or keep a diary. To gauge her distrust of the bureaucracy and trace her organizational strategies, I draw on the private papers of key advisers such as P.N. Haksar and T.N. Kaul, housed at the Prime Ministers Museum and Library in New Delhi. I also rely on memoirs of those who worked closely with her¹⁶⁹, contemporary analyses of her foreign policy that include firsthand accounts of her speech and behavior¹⁷⁰, newspaper reporting, and a range of secondary sources. In some instances, I cite archival material that I could not access directly—for example, diplomat and historian Chandrashekhar Dasgupta’s (2021) references to documents from the Ministry of External Affairs archives.¹⁷¹ Access to these materials remains limited. The fragmented nature of the archival record complicates efforts to process-trace key decisions and policymaking dynamics during Gandhi’s tenure, but it does not make them impossible.

The centrality of her advisers in the archival record and in Gandhi’s decision-making has implications for how we discern her preferences and ideas. Her distinctive decision-making style

¹⁶⁹ For example, the memoirs of P.N. Dhar, I.G. Patel, J.N. Dixit, T.N. Kaul, Sharada Prasad, P.C. Alexander, and B.N. Tandon were enormously helpful sources. Dhar, *Indira Gandhi, the “Emergency”, and Indian Democracy*; I. G. Patel, *Glimpses of Indian Economic Policy: An Insider’s View* (New Delhi : New York: Oxford University Press, 2002); J. N. Dixit, *My South Block Years: Memoirs of a Foreign Secretary* (New Delhi: UBS Publishers’ Distributors, 1996); J. N. Dixit, *Liberation and beyond: Indo-Bangladesh Relations* (Delhi, India: Konark Publishers, 1999); Triloki Nath Kaul, *Diplomacy in Peace and War: Recollections and Reflections* (Vikas, 1979); H. Y. Sharada Prasad, *The Book I Won’t Be Writing and Other Essays* (Orient Blackswan, 2003); B.N. Tandon, *PMO Diary-I: Prelude to the Emergency* (Delhi, India: Konark Publishers, 2003); P. C. Alexander, *My Years with Indira Gandhi* (New Delhi: Vision Books, 1991); P. C. Alexander, *Through the Corridors of Power: An Insider’s Story* (New Delhi: HarperCollins Publishers, 2004).

¹⁷⁰ Indian parliamentarian Shashi Tharoor’s doctoral dissertation draws on interviews he conducted with Indira Gandhi. Tharoor, *Reasons of State*.

¹⁷¹ Chandrashekhar Dasgupta, *India and the Bangladesh Liberation War* (New Delhi, India: Juggernaut, 2021).

relied on written communications from advisers, especially for complex decisions, which were submitted for her consideration before she sanctioned a path forward. While it is difficult to determine whether these written recommendations reflected her initial preferences, we can identify the choices she ultimately endorsed. Moreover, the ideological homogeneity among her core advisers—Parmeshwar Narayan (P.N.) Haksar, Triloki Nath (T.N.) Kaul, Rameshwarnath (R.N.) Kao, and Durga Prasad (D.P.) Dhar—makes it reasonable to assume their preferences often aligned with her own. As one scholar has observed, “despite her seeming absence from the big ideas behind Indian statecraft, [Gandhi] was still a crucial arbiter in the policy choices even if some ideas got initiated by one or more members of her core group.”¹⁷² This underscores her decisive role in shaping outcomes even when the ideational impetus came from trusted advisers.

The chapter will proceed as follows. The first section traces the historical and structural roots of Gandhi’s distrust in the foreign policy bureaucracy. The second section explains her rise from a politically weak leader to the dominant figure in Indian politics post-1969. The empirical analysis is divided into two time periods: first, it examines the 1966–1969 period of insulation, when Gandhi was politically weak and began strengthening the Prime Minister’s Secretariat (PMS) and installing trusted advisers; second, it analyzes the 1970–1975 period of politicization, when she centralized power and systematically rewarded loyalty over merit.¹⁷³ Finally, the chapter evaluates my theory’s explanatory power and discusses alternative explanations.

¹⁷² Zorawar Daulet Singh, *Power and Diplomacy: India’s Foreign Policies During the Cold War* (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2019), 196, <https://doi.org/10.1093/oso/9780199489640.001.0001>.

¹⁷³ This chapter does not delve into the period of the Emergency (1975–1977) or Mrs. Gandhi’s return to power from 1980 to 1983. The Emergency refers to a 21-month period in India from June 25, 1975, to March 21, 1977, when Prime Minister Indira Gandhi unilaterally declared a state of emergency under Article 352 of the Indian Constitution, citing internal disturbances. This period marked a dramatic departure from democratic norms and is widely regarded as the most authoritarian chapter in independent India’s political history.

The Origins of Indira Gandhi's Bureaucratic Distrust

My theory of leader strategy selection suggests that leaders select organizational strategies based on whether they trust bureaucratic elites in the foreign policy bureaucracy. Distrust, I argue, arises from significant political, ideological, or social conflict between a leader and their bureaucracy. Though she was the daughter of the former prime minister who led the foreign policy establishment of India for nearly two decades, Indira Gandhi was fundamentally skeptical of the foreign policy bureaucracy and broadly critical of the administrative state in India. In her first speech as prime minister in 1966, she mentioned “the disconcerting gap between intention and action. To bridge this gap we should boldly adopt whatever far-reaching changes in administration may be found necessary.”¹⁷⁴ According to P.N. Dhar, who would later become one of her closest advisers, she gave him a warning on his first day as an adviser in the Prime Minister’s Secretariat (PMS), telling him “I hope you will not be a bureaucrat.”¹⁷⁵ She also privately expressed her frustrations about the defense and diplomatic bureaucracies during the 1965 war with Pakistan, writing that “we have failed so miserably on the diplomatic and publicity fronts....Diplomatically, we must move terribly fast if we are we are to regain even part of the ground lost.”¹⁷⁶ These comments display her general skepticism towards bureaucrats and bureaucracy in India, though the reasons underlying her distrust were deeper, the basis of a struggle between advocates of socialism and conservatism in Indian politics with roots in British colonial rule and the formation of the Indian administrative state post-independence.

The IFS was formally established in 1946 as an apolitical institution to advise the government on and implement foreign policy options.¹⁷⁷ The Indian Civil Service (ICS) under the British Raj

¹⁷⁴ Nayantara Sahgal, *Indira Gandhi, Her Road to Power*, 1st edition (New York: Ungar Pub. Co., 1982), 36.

¹⁷⁵ Dhar, *Indira Gandhi, the “Emergency”, and Indian Democracy*, 116.

¹⁷⁶ Indira Gandhi to T.N. Kaul, September 21, 1965, T.N. Kaul Papers, Installments I, II, & III, Correspondence with Indira Gandhi, Prime Ministers Museum and Library, New Delhi, India.

¹⁷⁷ Dixit, *Indian Foreign Service*, 23.

contained Indian officers who functioned as administrators of the British colonial rule across India, some of whom even had experience serving in sensitive diplomatic posts during World War II.¹⁷⁸ When India became independent, Nehru was skeptical that these ICS officers, whom he viewed as having forsaken the independence movement he led, would be fit to constitute the new diplomatic service representing the interests of a sovereign and independent India abroad.¹⁷⁹ Ultimately, these senior ICS officers were included and served as the backbone of Indian diplomacy in its first decades; these officers formed their own club apart from those politicians, intellectuals, and family members who Nehru handpicked to recruit into the IFS and those who passed a competitive examination to join the service.¹⁸⁰ The former was generally regarded as conservative and pro-West, while the latter was relatively more liberal and in favor of Indian non-alignment as articulated by Nehru. As Dixit explains,

Members of the newly formed post-independence Indian Foreign Service, who belonged to the former [Indian Civil Service] or the former Political Service or British Indian Armed Forces, had an essentially pro-Western tilt and did not identify with factors such as socialist ideals, solidarity with the newly independent developing countries, and non-alignment. The other groups of early recruits brought into the service by Nehru himself, along with the majority of officers recruited directly to the Foreign Service, were more in tune with the ideological and political orientations of Nehru. The ideological divide was reflected in the professional advice and inner workings of the Foreign Office till 1968-69.¹⁸¹

¹⁷⁸ Dixit, 9.

¹⁷⁹ Dixit, 19–20.

¹⁸⁰ Kallol Bhattacherjee, *Nehru's First Recruits: The Diplomats Who Built Independent India's Foreign Policy* (HarperCollins India, 2024), 66–69.

¹⁸¹ Dixit, *My South Block Years*, 37.

Amid the divide between the socialism-oriented “new guard” and the conservative “old guard” within the foreign policy establishment, Indira Gandhi believed that the latter had gained disproportionate influence after her father’s death in 1964. In a later interview, she remarked, “The bureaucracy has never been much in favor of non-alignment. They were, and many of them still are, biased in favor of the Western bloc.” She felt that Prime Minister Shastri was “surrounded by such people,” which, in her view, skewed the direction of his foreign policy. Gandhi added, “I remember I was distressed by this attitude for I felt we should not encourage any country to interfere in our affairs...I remember warning against the Congress sliding away from the socialist path.”¹⁸² For Gandhi, socialism was not only a domestic orientation but also a vision for foreign policy rooted in her father’s legacy: independent and non-aligned. In contrast, she saw Shastri’s conservatism as signaling a broader tilt toward the West, particularly the United States. It is true that during Shastri’s tenure, Indian economic and foreign policy took a more conservative turn, shaped in large part by influential ICS bureaucrats such as L.K. Jha.¹⁸³ Those bureaucrats involved in Shastri’s policymaking came to represent, in Gandhi’s eyes, an entrenched establishment resistant to her father’s legacy and her own political vision. As one biographer observed, “Socialists and conservatives would be euphemisms for pro-Indira and anti-Indira forces respectively in her dictionary. Those who were on her side were progressive and socialist; those against her were pro-American, right-wing stooges.”¹⁸⁴

Although it is clear that Gandhi never trusted the conservative, pro-West forces within the foreign policy bureaucracy, her distrust was reinforced after she rose to power. Her closest adviser was P.N. Haksar, who was a member of the IFS by way of Nehru’s hand-selection.¹⁸⁵ Haksar was

¹⁸² Indira Gandhi, *My Truth*, ed. Emmanuel Pouchpadass (New York: Grove Press, 1982), 103.

¹⁸³ Michael Brecher, *Succession in India: A Study in Decision-Making* (Oxford University Press, 1966), 118–20.

¹⁸⁴ Ghose, *Indira*, 90.

¹⁸⁵ Sharada Prasad, Indira Gandhi’s longtime speech writer and a colleague of Haksar, wrote that many of Haksar’s colleagues viewed him as a “mere political appointee” and “not an authentic civil servant” because he had been selected

vocal in his dislike of the pro-Western bias in Indian foreign policy and cited bureaucracy as its root cause. “He thought poorly of most of [the ICS],” one of his colleagues in the IFS, Natwar Singh, later wrote.¹⁸⁶ Writing in a letter to Gandhi while serving at the British High Commission in London in February 1966, he criticized the “Civil servants retired or otherwise” and “peripatetic diplomats” who would “give firm assurances of our undying faith in Britain and our gratitude to her,” giving a “fresh lease of life” to the British idea that “India could be managed and handled through a variety of British connections in India.”¹⁸⁷ In another letter of the same year, he complained about the difficulty of changing Indo-British relations “largely because our administrative machinery as well as those who man it are committed to ensuring continuity.” He continued, “One can, of course, bring about change. And, indeed, one must. Lord Curzon once said that, ‘epochs arise in the history of every country when the administrative machinery requires to be taken to pieces and overhauled and readjusted to the altered necessities or the growing demands of the hour.’”¹⁸⁸ One historian and contemporary of Haksar interprets his vision of a committed bureaucracy as a call for “commitment to the social revolutionary ideals of the Constitution, especially by his civil servants, who should act with integrity and honesty, giving advice, not taking personal advantage and not caving into politicians.”¹⁸⁹

While Gandhi had only just become prime minister when these letters between her and Haksar were exchanged, the ideas appealed to her, and she later selected Haksar to become her right-hand and head of the Prime Minister’s Secretariat (PMS). She would continue to find these ideas resonant

by Nehru and not “come in through the hollowed examination gate.” Prasad, *The Book I Won’t Be Writing and Other Essays*, 85.

¹⁸⁶ Bidyut Sarkar, ed., *P.N. Haksar, Our Times and The Man: Writings on the Occasion of His 75th Birthday* (Ahmedabad: Allied Publishers, 1989), 18, <http://archive.org/details/pnhaksarourtimes00bidy>.

¹⁸⁷ P.N. Haksar to Indira Gandhi, February 13, 1966, P.N. Haksar Papers, Installments I & II, Correspondence with Indira Gandhi, Prime Ministers Museum and Library, New Delhi.

¹⁸⁸ P.N. Haksar to Indira Gandhi, May 4, 1966, P.N. Haksar Papers, Installments I & II, Correspondence with Indira Gandhi, Prime Ministers Museum and Library, New Delhi.

¹⁸⁹ Granville Austin quoted in Jairam Ramesh, *Intertwined Lives: P.N. Haksar and Indira Gandhi*, Kindle (New Delhi: Simon & Schuster India, 2018), 325.

throughout her tenure and, as this chapter will show, act accordingly. In a November 1969 note to INC party members, she criticized the civil service as a “stumbling block” in the way of the country’s social and economic progress. The note complained, “The present bureaucracy under the orthodox and conservative leadership of the Indian Civil Service with its upper-class prejudices can hardly be expected to meet the requirements of social and economic change along socialist lines.”¹⁹⁰

It is crucial to note that Indira Gandhi’s distrust of conservative elements of the foreign policy bureaucracy was not ideological as much as it was political and social. “There was nothing basically ideological about Mrs Gandhi,” economic adviser I.G. Patel wrote.¹⁹¹ Although she used anti-establishment rhetoric characteristic of left-wing populism to attack the bureaucracy and win votes, her commitment to a thoroughly socialist ideology was less clear. “I don’t really have a political philosophy, I can’t say I believe in any ‘ism’,”¹⁹² she told one interviewer before her prime ministership. “I wouldn’t say I’m interested in socialism as socialism. For me it’s just a tool. If I found a tool that was more efficient, I’d use it.”¹⁹³

If not ideology, what can be the source of Gandhi’s preference for socialism over conservatism, the Soviet bloc over the Western bloc? Tharoor posits that she found socialism to be a useful *political* tool with which to secure votes and attack her domestic political opponents. The situation she inherited upon entering office – a food shortage crisis caused in part by the suspension of U.S. economic aid after the India-Pakistan war in 1965 – certainly did not induce in her sympathy towards the Western bloc.¹⁹⁴ She found it politically convenient to attack the faction of the Congress

¹⁹⁰ S. R. Maheshwari, “The Indian Bureaucracy: Its Profile, Malady and Cure,” *The Indian Journal of Political Science* 31, no. 3 (1970): 222–37.

¹⁹¹ Patel, *Glimpses of Indian Economic Policy*, 110.

¹⁹² Welles Hangen, *After Nebru, Who?* (New York: Harcourt, Brace, & World, 1963), 161.

¹⁹³ Hangen, 181.

¹⁹⁴ “Indian Prime Minister Indira Gandhi: Performance and Prospects,” Special Report (Central Intelligence Agency, August 26, 1966), <https://www.cia.gov/readingroom/docs/CIA-RDP79-00927A005400050002-8.pdf>.

party that had tried to control her as a “political and economic elite” and her battle against them as an “uphill battle against entrenched privilege.”¹⁹⁵ Throughout her tenure, she was suspicious of conservative, pro-American forces within the political and bureaucratic establishments supporting U.S. covert action against her leadership. She made no secret of her fears that the U.S. Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) may be building up her political rival, the decidedly pro-West Morarji Desai, to unseat her, just as it had other socialist and non-aligned governments. Gandhi leveraged the bogey of external influence to justify instituting the Emergency in 1975.¹⁹⁶

Since Gandhi’s distrust was not ideological but rather social and political, she tended to trust only those whom she trusted on the basis of interpersonal familiarity and social affinity. As we will see in the remainder of the chapter, she tended to rely on people of her own Kashmiri Brahmin community and those whom she saw as personally loyal to her or her family.¹⁹⁷ The so-called “Kashmiri Mafia” of civil servants Gandhi relied on closely included P.N. Haksar, R.N. Kao, T.N. Kaul, and D.P. Dhar.¹⁹⁸

Indira Gandhi’s Ascendancy and the Transformation of Political Authority

Although Indira Gandhi had lived much of her life embroiled in Congress Party politics and was heavily involved in the day-to-day of her father’s life as prime minister, Indira Gandhi was not a political force when Shastri passed away suddenly in 1966. Indeed, she had long claimed to be “wholly without political ambition.”¹⁹⁹ Even then, the elders of the Congress Party, a group of powerful men known as the Syndicate, had decided to elevate her to the prime ministership. Compared to

¹⁹⁵ “Indira Gandhi: Power, Strategy, Plans,” Intelligence Memorandum (Central Intelligence Agency, June 29, 1972), <https://www.cia.gov/readingroom/docs/CIA-RDP85T00875R001100130089-5.pdf>.

¹⁹⁶ Tharoor, *Reasons of State*, 62–64.

¹⁹⁷ Jayantanuja Bandyopadhyaya, *The Making of India’s Foreign Policy: Determinants, Institutions, Processes, and Personalities* (New Delhi: Allied, 1980), 340, <http://books.google.com/books?id=rea1AAAAIAAJ>.

¹⁹⁸ Dhar, *Indira Gandhi, the “Emergency”, and Indian Democracy*, 160.

¹⁹⁹ Sahgal, *Indira Gandhi, Her Road to Power*, 7.

Congressman Morarji Desai, her primary opponent, Gandhi was perceived to be a “manageable” candidate who would not swerve from the guidance of the influential party leadership.²⁰⁰ On January 19, 1966, the party overwhelmingly voted Gandhi in as prime minister. Yet she was not *in power*. As diplomat Natwar Singh later reflected, “From 1966 to 1969, Indira Gandhi was in office but not in power.”²⁰¹

Although the Congress Party performed poorly, losing 81 seats and falling to a narrow majority of 283 in the Lok Sabha, Gandhi’s personal position strengthened.²⁰² She won her seat by a large margin, while many of her rivals in the Syndicate were defeated. Nonetheless, Morarji Desai, backed by Congress Party President K. Kamaraj, was appointed deputy prime minister. His presence in the Cabinet kept Gandhi politically constrained and focused on survival. Desai, who had led “a sort of Congress dissident faction” prior to the elections, had now “emerged with enhanced prestige and is now one of the strongest contenders in the sharing of power after the election.”²⁰³

Her political authority would not remain constrained for long. In 1969, a crisis over the sudden death of President Zakir Husain brought Gandhi’s clash with the party’s old guard to a head. As the dispute over his successor unfolded, Gandhi burnished her populist credentials by nationalizing the banks. Her candidate’s victory in the presidential election reinforced her image as the champion of “the people” against “vested interests.”²⁰⁴ The confrontation culminated when the Congress Working Committee expelled her for breaching party discipline. Gandhi responded by forming her own faction, the Congress (R) (Requisitionist), while the old guard became Congress (O) (Organisation). Though not eliminated, the old guard was severely weakened. Of the 429 Congress members of parliament,

²⁰⁰ Sahgal, 8.

²⁰¹ Natwar Singh quoted in Clary, *The Difficult Politics of Peace*, 132.

²⁰² Samuel J. Eldersveld, “The 1967 Indian Election: Patterns of Party Regularity and Defection,” *Asian Survey* 10, no. 11 (1970): 1015–30, <https://doi.org/10.2307/2642821>.

²⁰³ “The Two-Tier Battle of 1967,” *Economic and Political Weekly* 2, no. 1 (1967): 9–10.

²⁰⁴ Sahgal, *Indira Gandhi, Her Road to Power*, 44–46.

310 sided with Gandhi. In splitting the party, she became its supreme leader, suspending elections for the rest of her tenure.²⁰⁵

In 1971, Gandhi called elections nearly a year early and overwhelmed her political adversaries – a coalition of the Congress (O) and a swath of right-wing, socialist, and regional parties. Her foes had campaigned against her with the slogan “*Indira Hatao*” (remove Indira), to which Indira replied “*Garibi Hatao*” (remove poverty). She secured her party 352 out of 518 seats in parliament.²⁰⁶ In the words of her close adviser, P.N. Dhar, after her victory at the polls in March 1971, she was “not only prime minister in her own right but also the most dominant political leader and vote gatherer.”²⁰⁷ Writing in 1973, former minister M.C. Chagla said of Indira,

Today she is undoubtedly one of the most powerful rulers in the world, perhaps the most powerful. There is probably no ruler whose authority within his country is so unquestioned as hers is in India. All power is concentrated in her hands. What she says is law. There may be formal consultations with her colleagues, but she realises, and they realise, that ultimately it is her writ that runs throughout the land.²⁰⁸

Table 4. Empirical Coding of Independent Variables

IV	1966-1969	1970-1975
Political Strength	Low	High
Distrust	High	High

²⁰⁵ Ghose, *Indira*, 110–12.

²⁰⁶ Katherine Frank, *Indira: The Life of Indira Nebru Gandhi* (Houghton Mifflin, 2002), 327. Srinath Raghavan, *1971: A Global History of the Creation of Bangladesh* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2013), 55.

²⁰⁷ Dhar, *Indira Gandhi, the “Emergency”, and Indian Democracy*, 135.

²⁰⁸ M.C. Chagla, *Roses In December: An Autobiography*, 12th edition (Mumbai: Bhartiya Vidya Bhavan, 2014), 449.

Indira Gandhi's shift from a weak leader with circumscribed political authority to the undisputed leader of a revitalized Congress Party is striking. For the purposes of my theory, I code Gandhi as politically strong during the period from 1970 to 1975, when she held both the office of prime minister and total control over the Congress Party. In contrast, from 1966 to 1969, when she was prime minister but not yet the dominant party leader, I code her as politically weak (see **Table 4**). This represents an instance of within-case, over-time variation, enabling me to examine how Gandhi's organizational strategies evolved across the two periods of her tenure.

1966-1969: In Office but Not in Power

From January 1966 to December 1969, Indira Gandhi's limited political authority hindered her ability to act strongly on her distrust of the bureaucracy. Still, she was able to begin the process of centralizing power away towards the executive office and away from the bureaucracy while also protecting herself from her political foes. From her selection as prime minister in January 1966 until the new elections in February 1967, her most urgent priorities were to stave off famine caused by food shortages in India and succeed in the February 1967 general elections.

Gandhi's challenges left little time to consolidate control within the PMS across the bureaucracy. Similar to the Executive Office of the President of the United States, the PMS was established under Shastri in July 1964 as the executive office of the prime minister.²⁰⁹ "I am aware of the prejudice in the Government and the Secretariat about any new approach or attitude to various problems," T.N. Kaul, Gandhi's personal acquaintance serving as ambassador to the Soviet Union, wrote to her towards the start of her government in April 1966. Alluding to the gap between Gandhi's own left-leaning views and those of her Cabinet colleagues and the staff of the PMS, he

²⁰⁹ Brecher, *Succession in India*, 115–18.

continued, “It is difficult to suddenly reverse a trend which is of several years’ standing, especially when the whole governmental machinery was inclined strongly on the other side.”²¹⁰ While cryptic in his tone, Kaul, whose pro-Soviet leanings were no secret to Gandhi or to the diplomatic circles in Delhi, was writing to her in kinship against the right-leaning bureaucrats and politicians in Shastri’s government who had favored the Western bloc.²¹¹ The letter goes on to discuss Gandhi’s own difficulties in managing domestic pressures to lead Indian foreign policy down the “right path.” Kaul explained, “The Parliament will soon be adjourned and I hope you will be able to unite the true socialist elements in the Party for a realistic approach to the urgent problems...I can assure you that those who matter in the Soviet Union know that with you as Prime Minister, India has a much better chance of going on the right course than it would otherwise have.” Gandhi, who was preoccupied with her domestic challenges at home, wrote back, “I am a solitary tree in the midst of a dust storm. The ‘right’ and ‘left’ are moving heaven and earth to mar my image in the Indian public...I need time to consolidate my position, before making any worthwhile changes.”²¹²

Facing food shortages caused by a drought, little foreign exchange available to import food, and the U.S. suspension of food aid in response to the 1965 war with Pakistan, Gandhi went to Washington to meet President Lyndon Johnson in March 1966, her first foreign trip.²¹³ Her delegation was rather small. According to economic adviser I.G. Patel, it contained only himself, L.K. Jha, the powerful principal secretary and former ICS officer she had inherited from Prime Minister Shastri, Planning Commission staffer Pitambar Pant, her personal staff, and P.N. Haksar,

²¹⁰ T.N. Kaul to Indira Gandhi, April 30, 1966, T.N. Kaul Papers, Installments I, II, & III, Correspondence with Indira Gandhi, Prime Minister’s Museum and Library, New Delhi, India.

²¹¹ L.K. Jha as ambassador to the U.S. later told Henry Kissinger that both Kaul and Haksar were “very much under Soviet influence.” Document 134. Louis J. Smith and Edward C. Keefer, eds., *Foreign Relations of the United States, 1969–1976*, vol. XI. South Asia Crisis, 1971 (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office), accessed April 10, 2025.

²¹² Indira Gandhi to T.N. Kaul, May 2, 1966, T.N. Kaul Papers, Installments I, II, & III, Correspondence with Indira Gandhi, Prime Ministers Museum and Library, New Delhi, India.

²¹³ Ghose, *Indira*, 94–95.

who held no formal position in Gandhi's office at the time. Indeed, Gandhi had asked Haksar to join her on the trip to the United States in a March 1966 letter. She wrote, "I am anxious that you should accompany me to America not only because you will be such a help on various issues of foreign policy, but also because this may give us some opportunity to talk about various matters."²¹⁴ Haksar's presence was initially mysterious to the rest of the delegation. Patel writes of Haksar, "Most of us did not know him and had no idea why he was there. It soon was clear that he was to succeed LK, whom Mrs Gandhi did not trust."²¹⁵

The visit to the United States was a rousing, though temporary, success for Gandhi. Johnson agreed to provide \$9 million in aid and three million tons of food supplies.²¹⁶ In exchange, Washington expected India to pursue economically liberal reforms such as the devaluation of the Indian rupee—a policy decision that had been almost imminent when Shastri had suddenly passed away. During talks between Gandhi and Johnson, aid was never explicitly linked to the devaluation of the Indian rupee. However, when Johnson made his announcement, those in Washington felt it was "an open secret in Washington that Mrs Gandhi had agreed to devaluation."²¹⁷ Upon returning to Delhi, Gandhi consulted widely on whether or not to devalue the rupee, calling on those within and outside of government who could speak on the economic consequences of the move, including intellectuals, ministers, and civil servants.²¹⁸ However, decision-making was secretive until she

²¹⁴ P.N. Haksar to Indira Gandhi, March 10, 1966, P.N. Haksar Papers, Installments I & II, Correspondence with Indira Gandhi, Prime Ministers Museum and Library, New Delhi.

²¹⁵ Patel, *Glimpses of Indian Economic Policy*, 109.

²¹⁶ Ghose, *Indira*, 95.

²¹⁷ Michael Brecher, "India's Devaluation of 1966: Linkage Politics and Crisis Decision-Making," *British Journal of International Studies* 3, no. 1 (1977): 14.

²¹⁸ Patel and Brecher note that Gandhi consulted economist-intellectuals Jagdish Bhagwati and K.N. Raj, Planning Commission Chairman Ashok Mehta, Agriculture Minister C. Subramanian, Finance Minister Sachindra Chaudhuri and civil servants in these ministries. Representatives of the foreign ministry were notably absent from all discussions. Patel, *Glimpses of Indian Economic Policy*, 112-114. Brecher, "India's Devaluation of 1966," 18.

reached the decision to devalue. Gandhi then had to convince the Cabinet to authorize the move.²¹⁹

In the contentious Cabinet meeting, Gandhi gained their approval by reiterating that “aid would not be available without devaluation.”²²⁰ But not only did the assured aid fail to come, but the harsh public reaction to devaluation led to a surge in attacks against her from the communist parties, and the country’s economic situation did not improve as promised.²²¹ In a bid to stave off criticism that she bowed to U.S. pressure on devaluation just ahead of the February 1967 elections, Gandhi attacked U.S. bombing of Vietnam and halted all economic reforms while other foreign policy decisions stalled.²²² This marked the end of Gandhi’s tentative period of reliance on civil servants she had not handpicked. According to Natwar Singh, she felt she had made a “big mistake” by going through with devaluation sold to her by “rightists” like Jha.²²³

After the 1967 came and went, Gandhi replaced Principal Secretary L.K. Jha with P.N. Haksar in May 1967.²²⁴ Whether this was because she had distrusted and intended to replace Jha all along or that she only began to distrust him after devaluation is unclear. What is clear is that Haksar’s entry into the PMS was a step towards strengthening the office by promoting ideological uniformity and personal loyalty amongst its staff. Haksar, in contrast to Jha, had been a longtime friend of Indira and her late husband since the 1930s. Ideologically, he was a socialist who was skeptical of the West, “handsome, witty, erudite, and cosmopolitan,” and a protégé of Nehru’s trusted Defense Minister Krishna Menon while serving as second-in-command at the High Commission of India in London.²²⁵ According to a biographer, “Indira trusted Haksar’s intelligence

²¹⁹ Brecher, “India’s Devaluation of 1966,” 18–19.

²²⁰ Brecher, 16.

²²¹ Ghose, *Indira*, 95–96.

²²² “DEVALUATION DECISION TAKEN AFTER CAREFUL STUDY: ‘No Danger To Honour Of Our Country,’” *The Times of India* (1861-), June 7, 1966.

²²³ Ghose, *Indira*, 98.

²²⁴ Frank, *Indira*, 313.

²²⁵ Frank, 313.

and judgment implicitly and completely,” which allowed him to become the “alter ego” of the PM until he left the PMS in 1973.²²⁶ Once Haksar was in place to lead her office, she began to centralize decision-making to the PMS. Haksar recruited trusted bureaucrats into positions of authority within the PMS and expanded the number of positions available for them to fill. “Before a person was appointed in the Prime Minister’s secretariat, [Haksar] would make sure he or she was ‘loyal’ to Indira Gandhi,” P.N. Dhar later observed.²²⁷ This had the effect of rendering the secretariat insulated from the rest of the bureaucracy and government. Natwar Singh would later remark, “In those days the secretariat didn’t leak!”²²⁸

Gandhi also centralized control over policymaking away from the bureaucracy through the creation of the Research & Analysis Wing (R&AW) in September 1968. The impetus for a new agency—distinct from the Intelligence Bureau (IB)—to gather foreign and military intelligence predated Gandhi. However, she was uniquely responsible for positioning it under the supervision of the Cabinet Secretariat, which organizationally was under the supervision of the PM.²²⁹ R&AW, therefore, was designed to function “for all practical purposes, under the direct control of the Prime Minister.”²³⁰ This was at least in part intended to insulate it from intra-bureaucratic rivalry with the IB that could interfere with its operational function. Writing on the new organization in February 1969, Haksar stressed the need for an insulated agency: “I am convinced that unless the Head of the

²²⁶ Frank, 314.

²²⁷ Dhar, *Indira Gandhi, the “Emergency”, and Indian Democracy*, 143.

²²⁸ Ghose, *Indira*, 109.

²²⁹ Ryan Shaffer, “Unraveling India’s Foreign Intelligence: The Origins and Evolution of the Research and Analysis Wing,” *International Journal of Intelligence and CounterIntelligence* 28, no. 2 (April 3, 2015): 259–60, <https://doi.org/10.1080/08850607.2015.992754>.

²³⁰ Bandyopadhyaya, *The Making of India’s Foreign Policy*, 244. This was in part a response to a bureaucratic battle already playing out over the creation of the agency’s bifurcation from the country’s other existing intelligence agency, the Intelligence Bureau (IB). The crucial difference between IB and RAW that remains today is that while the IB is directly under to the Home Ministry, RAW operates without any parliamentary oversight. Shaffer, “Unraveling India’s Foreign Intelligence,” 245.

organization is allowed the necessary power and autonomy to function as an Additional Secretary under the overall supervision of the Cabinet Secretary himself, the Organisation will run into a great many difficulties.”²³¹ In practice, however, the formation of R&AW was another lever of power for Gandhi that worked in close proximity to the PMS. Its new office was located first in Rashtrapati Bhavan (President’s House) but later occupied “the most prestigious position among the Army and Navy Chiefs of Staff on the second floor of South Block”—where the PMS was also located.²³² Gandhi named R.N. Kao the first chief of a new intelligence agency. A Kashmiri Brahmin like Gandhi, Kao had worked at a prominent level in the IB and served as the Personal Security Officer of Nehru.²³³ Gandhi trusted Kao to staff and organize the new agency, requiring him only to ask for her approval for the two top positions.²³⁴

Gandhi also sporadically began to recruit trusted loyalists into the bureaucracy. She appointed the left-leaning senior journalist K.S. Shelvankar to become the Consul General in North Vietnam in 1968, a critical time of Indo-U.S. tensions over the Vietnam conflict. Haksar wrote to Dwarka Chatterjee, a trusted diplomat, to convince Shelvankar’s wife to allow him to accept the assignment. He describes Gandhi’s thinking on the subject:

For reasons which I need not spell out but which I am sure you will understand, Prime Minister has had in mind the need for sending to Hanoi a person endowed with special political sensitivity. She thinks that Shelvankar answers the description. Having regard to the developments now taking place, the importance and urgency of the assignment has, if anything, increased.²³⁵

²³¹ Ramesh, *Intertwined Lives: P.N. Haksar and Indira Gandhi*, 121.

²³² Bandyopadhyaya, *The Making of India’s Foreign Policy*, 244.

²³³ R. K. Yadav, *Mission R&AW* (Manas Publications, 2014), 18–19; Bandyopadhyaya, *The Making of India’s Foreign Policy*, 245.

²³⁴ Shaffer, 259.

²³⁵ P.N. Haksar Papers, Installments I & II, Subject File No. 35, Prime Ministers Museum and Library, New Delhi.

Even under trying international conditions, Gandhi's right-hand man was urging a non-bureaucrat outsider to go diplomatically toe to toe with the United States in Vietnam. Similarly, in 1969, Gandhi handpicked D.P. Dhar to serve as Ambassador of India to the Soviet Union. Known to be soft on the Soviet Union, he was a Kashmiri Pandit and a longtime associate of the Nehru family, so much so that during Nehru's time, he was perceived as "the eyes and ears of New Delhi in Kashmir."²³⁶ Appointments of political allies into ambassadorships were not a widespread practice in India at the time, and Dhar's appointment irked senior officials in the MEA.²³⁷ A handwritten note from Dhar to Kaul contains Dhar's complaints about the "cold, withdrawn attitude" he faced from Foreign Minister Dinesh Singh and senior diplomat Kewal Singh when the two visited Moscow.

As far as I am concerned, I gave all the respect [to him] both as the FM of the Republic of India and as the FM of the PM. You will, however, concede that I cannot be a darbari [servant]...FM was cold and his whole warmth was absent. I have a feeling that he has gone to the extent of telling some people here that I am not so confident that I have been made out to be. This makes me sad. As soon as the shimmer of criticism gathers against me, and they seek to embarrass the PM please let me know. I shall know how quietly I should try to withdraw from here.²³⁸

The senior hands of the MEA were disgruntled with Dhar's ambassadorship in one of their most coveted and senior posts.

²³⁶ Quotation from "Durga Prasad Dhar, 57 Dead; Cemented Indian Ties to Soviet." On Dhar's appointment, see Raghavan, 1971: *A Global History of the Creation of Bangladesh*, 68–69; NAYAK, "Planning and Social Transformation," 320.

²³⁷ NAYAK, "Planning and Social Transformation."

²³⁸ D.P. Dhar to T.N. Kaul, September 17, 1969, P.N. Haksar Papers, Installment III, Correspondence with D.P. Dhar, Prime Ministers Museum and Library, New Delhi. Kaul likely sent the copy of this note to P.N. Haksar.

1970-1975: From the Bangladesh Crisis to the Emergency

Gandhi's rise as the new leader of the Congress Party in 1969 marked a turning point in both her governance and her relationship with the foreign policy bureaucracy. Strengthened by her domestic political dominance and encouraged by Haksar's vocal advocacy for a "committed" bureaucracy, she pursued an organizational strategy aimed at consolidating control over foreign policy by aligning the bureaucracy with her personal and political ambitions—a strategy of *politicization*. This strategy ultimately rendered the bureaucracy more loyal in three ways. First, it eroded norms for meritocratic professional advancement for appointments and promotions. Second, it allowed loyalty to dictate who has access to policymaking (i.e. including bureaucrats who were ideologically aligned and/or personally loyal to her and marginalizing those who were not). Finally, it used loyalty to determine who would have access to important information relevant to policymaking.

Eroding Meritocratic Norms

Gandhi used the appointment powers of the prime minister to appoint loyalists to fill key positions within the bureaucracy in the pre-1970 period. After she consolidated her domestic political backing and became the undisputed leader of the Congress, she began to use this practice much more regularly as a form of ideological patronage, institutionalized new appointed positions to infiltrate the bureaucracy, and linked commitment to the government's ideology to promotion within the IFS. The result was the erosion of meritocratic norms for professional advancement within the foreign policy bureaucracy.

Just as she did in her first years in office, Gandhi continued to appoint trusted advisers to positions within the bureaucracy. At least until 1975, when she instituted the Emergency, she continued to rely on the same circle of foreign policy advisers throughout this period, even against their wishes to end their government service. Haksar had formally put in his retirement notice in late

January 1971.²³⁹ Writing to D.P. Dhar in May 1971, he would bemoan his exhaustion after four years of working as Gandhi's right-hand man:

As far as I am capable of knowing about myself, all that I can say at this stage is that I feel, physically and mentally, stretched beyond the breaking point. I feel that I just cannot carry on. Maybe my outlook and the way I look at things now will radically change after I have had a little rest and time to think. My present assessment is that for the new phase that has begun I am not the man.²⁴⁰

In September 1971, Haksar reached the official retirement age and took leave from his duties, with P.N. Dhar taking over. In that brief respite from the PMS, the official story was that Haksar was on holiday with his wife in Geneva, Paris, London, Moscow, and Warsaw from September to October 1971.²⁴¹ Still, he joined Gandhi in Vienna and Washington for official visits in late 1971. Ramesh suggests that Haksar may have even been engaging in "super secret diplomacy" on the Bangladesh crisis while visiting these European capitals in late 1971.²⁴² His official return to the PMS in the new role of principal secretary came in December 1971, when India was at war with Pakistan.

Even after his official retirement from government service in December 1972, Gandhi could not seemingly find a replacement for Haksar within her secretariat or the bureaucracy.²⁴³ She continued to rely on him extensively for guidance and otherwise. She asked him to serve as special envoy of the prime minister to Iran in 1973 and 1975, Bangladesh in April 1973, and the 4th Non-

²³⁹ Haksar Papers quoted in Ramesh, *Intertwined Lives: P.N. Haksar and Indira Gandhi*, 346.

²⁴⁰ P.N. Haksar to D.P. Dhar, May 22, 1971. P.N. Haksar Papers, Installments III, Subject File No. 166, Prime Ministers Museum and Library, New Delhi.

²⁴¹ Ramesh, *Intertwined Lives: P.N. Haksar and Indira Gandhi*, 438.

²⁴² Ramesh, 439.

²⁴³ Ramesh, 552.

Aligned Summit in Algiers in September 1973.²⁴⁴ It is also clear that Haksar continued to be involved in the planning of the India's peaceful nuclear explosion in May 1974. Per Ramesh:

It is obvious that a decision to go ahead with such a test had been taken at least 18 months earlier, in the final weeks of Haksar's tenure in the prime minister's Secretariat....Even after his retirement Haksar was amongst the five or six people involved in discussing the test and its operational details, and its implications for economic and foreign policy.²⁴⁵

He also appeared highly influential in guiding the prime minister on appointments. After Kaul's tenure as foreign secretary ended in November 1972, Indira Gandhi asked Haksar to convince Kaul to serve as ambassador to the United States "stand up to the U.S. administration."²⁴⁶ Similarly, it was on Haksar's advice that Gandhi appointed D.P. Dhar to return to Moscow as ambassador—a request that required the persuasion of both Kaul and Haksar to convince Dhar to accept.²⁴⁷

Another change that took place post-1970 was Gandhi's first experience of becoming involved in appointments within the armed forces. In early 1973, Indira Gandhi appointed O.P. Mehra as the chief of air staff over two more senior officers. One of the more senior officers had the support of Defense Minister Jagjivan Ram, but Haksar overruled him.²⁴⁸ While this was a minor controversy that quietly faded, one of her more controversial decisions was to deny the position of chief of army staff (COAS) to P.S. Baghat in 1974. Baghat was one of the authors of the 1963 Henderson Brooks report on defense preparedness in the 1962 India-China war.²⁴⁹ The reasons for both appointment decisions are ambiguous. It appears that Gandhi denied Baghat a post that was customarily his by seniority

²⁴⁴ Ramesh, 579–89.

²⁴⁵ Ramesh, 602.

²⁴⁶ Bidyut Sarkar, *P.N. Haksar*, 175.

²⁴⁷ Bidyut Sarkar, 175; Ramesh, *Intertwined Lives: P.N. Haksar and Indira Gandhi*, 610–12.

²⁴⁸ Anit Mukherjee, *The Absent Dialogue: Politicians, Bureaucrats, and the Military in India* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2020), 199.

²⁴⁹ Neville Maxwell, "Henderson Brooks Report: An Introduction," *Economic and Political Weekly* 36, no. 14/15 (2001): 1189–93.

because she assumed he would challenge her supremacy. According to one individual within the defense ministry at the time, “his strong views on civil–military relations and the ‘proper role’ between civilian bureaucrats and the military was common knowledge and was held against him.”²⁵⁰

Gandhi oversaw the creation of a new appointed position within the MEA in 1971. The Policy Planning Division of the MEA was created in May 1966 in an effort to bring long-term strategic planning to Indian foreign policy and originally functioned with the foreign secretary as the ex officio chairman.²⁵¹ Gandhi appointed D.P. Dhar as the chairman of the Policy Planning Division of the MEA in fall 1971; she later would appoint her adviser and family friend G. Parthasarathi to the same position in early 1975.²⁵² The proposal to appoint Dhar, as conceived of by Haksar, was controversial within the foreign ministry for two reasons.²⁵³ First, placing a political appointee as chairman was seen within the MEA as eroding the independent authority of the foreign secretary. Besides the foreign minister and his staff, as well as certain ambassadorships, the MEA was not accustomed to the presence of political appointees in South Block. Second, the ministerial rank of the Dhar was to receive was controversial because it meant that the chairman technically outranked the foreign secretary in the bureaucratic hierarchy. This confused the bureaucratic set-up and “created problems of procedural and administrative equations” for the service and required “a difficult exercise in tight-rope walking” for the foreign secretary, per diplomat J.N. Dixit.²⁵⁴ Haksar’s proposal to appoint Dhar received

²⁵⁰ P.R. Chari interview quoted in Mukherjee, *The Absent Dialogue*, 200.

²⁵¹ Bandyopadhyaya, 255-258.

²⁵² The man she would choose to replace him as the ambassador to India’s closest strategic partner of the time was Shelvankar, who served in the Moscow post from 1971 to 1975. “Obituary: Krishnarao Shelvankar,” The Independent, January 3, 1997, <https://www.independent.co.uk/news/people/obituary-krishnarao-shelvankar-1281410.html>.

²⁵³ In a letter to Dhar, Haksar mentions the policy planning chairman role, adding “All this is my brainchild, but I have vaguely mentioned it to P.M. and Tikki [T.N. Kaul].” P.N. Haksar to D.P. Dhar, May 22, 1971. P.N. Haksar Papers, Installments III, Subject File No. 166, Prime Ministers Museum and Library, New Delhi.

²⁵⁴ Dixit, *My South Block Years*, 36.

pushback from Foreign Minister Dinesh Singh, but Gandhi overruled him.²⁵⁵ That this organizational change was a means of placing trusted loyalists in positions of influence—and not instead to improve the policy planning efforts of the MEA—is evident in that the position lay vacant between 1972 and 1975 when Dhar moved into Gandhi’s cabinet.²⁵⁶ Both Dhar and Parthasarathi worked closely with the prime minister, ignoring the foreign minister in the chain of command. According to a former diplomat, Foreign Minister Swaran Singh, who replaced Dinesh Singh mid-1971, was “generally ignorant of the actual functions of Dhar.”²⁵⁷ Parthasarathi also “ignored” Foreign Minister Y.B. Chavan.²⁵⁸

Finally, in a notable departure from the previous period, Gandhi institutionalized ideological alignment as a prerequisite for professional advancement within India’s most influential foreign policy bureaucracy. Dixit describes a “major institutional debate” between 1969 and 1971 concerning the IFS’s commitment to the government’s ideology and policies.²⁵⁹ At a meeting of the Indian Foreign Service Association chaired by T.N. Kaul in late 1969 or early 1970, Haksar “tried to convince members of the Association of the rationale of the need to have political commitment.”²⁶⁰ Senior IFS officers attempted to push back during the meeting but were ultimately unsuccessful.²⁶¹ The episode foreshadowed an order issued by Foreign Secretary T.N. Kaul on May 17, 1971, which

²⁵⁵ P.N. Haksar Papers, Installments III, Subject File No. 169, Prime Ministers Museum and Library, New Delhi. Also quoted in Dasgupta 75.

²⁵⁶ Dasgupta, *India and the Bangladesh Liberation War*, 258.

²⁵⁷ Bandyopadhyaya, *The Making of India’s Foreign Policy*, 257.

²⁵⁸ Bandyopadhyaya, 258.

²⁵⁹ Dixit, *Indian Foreign Service*, 147.

²⁶⁰ Dixit, 147. While there is little information available about the Foreign Service Association, it seems to have been a group that advocated for the interests of IFS personnel. Bandyopadhyaya, *The Making of India’s Foreign Policy*, 151.

²⁶¹ Dixit’s phrasing leaves ambiguity as to whether Haksar or Kaul were speaking at the meeting. It seems likely that Haksar spoke while Kaul was chairing the meeting. “A majority of members of the Foreign Service, particularly the middle and younger levels of the Service, were opposed to Mr. Haksar’s point of view. At a meeting of the Indian Foreign Service Association late in 1969 or early in 1970 chaired by Foreign Secretary T.N. Kaul, he tried to convince members of the Association of the rationale of the need to have a political commitment.” Dixit, *Indian Foreign Service*, 147.

outlined the criteria for merit-based promotion to senior grades (pay levels) within the Foreign Service.²⁶² “Topping the list was “Integrity, devotion to duty and a clear commitment to the Government’s policies”—a criterion placed above qualities such as “Intelligence, ability, application and industry,” “Capacity to analyse political events in depth and quality of despatches,” and “Performance in improving India’s image and in furthering India’s political, economic and cultural interests.” The order specifies that the criteria were approved by the prime minister.²⁶³ Linking commitment to the government’s ideology to pay marked a significant moment in the politicization of the IFS.

Loyalty Dictates Policymaking Inclusion

In marginalizing those officials lacking in ideological or personal devotion to her, Gandhi tended to rely on a trusted circle of bureaucrats over her cabinet ministers. A Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) memorandum in June 1972 analyzes that Gandhi “distrusts people with independent political bases, and this means her political alliances with [Finance Minister Y.B.] Chavan, [Defense Minister Jagjivan] Ram, and other politicians are probably temporary.”²⁶⁴ In 1970, she consequently consolidated the Cabinet Committees on Foreign Affairs, Defense, and Internal Affairs, replacing them with one catch-all Political Affairs Committee and further blunting the power of the Cabinet as a deliberative body.²⁶⁵ However, the PAC was largely sidelined during this period. As her close advisers were weighing and eventually finalizing the Treaty of Peace and Friendship with the Soviet Union, the PAC was marginalized. She informed her most senior Cabinet Ministers, Chavan and Ram, of the

²⁶² Within the Indian bureaucracy, the term “grade” refers to the rank or pay level of an officer, while the post refers to the position an officer occupies. While posts are typically linked to certain grades, they are not always identical, especially in diplomacy where postings can carry more or less weight depending on the country, mission size, or political priority.

²⁶³ Dixit, *Indian Foreign Service*, 148.

²⁶⁴ “Indira Gandhi: Power, Strategy, Plans.”

²⁶⁵ Tharoor, 115.

treaty's existence only after it had been finalized and the rest of the Cabinet half an hour before it was formally signed.²⁶⁶ The marginalization of the Cabinet Ministers under Gandhi led to a scenario in which the Cabinet became even more supplicant. When Gandhi would request the formal approval of the PAC for a decision, it was "automatic and usually given without serious discussion."²⁶⁷

Gandhi's loyalists were concentrated within the PMS, which had grown into a powerful policymaking epicenter in the first three years of her leadership. With Haksar in charge of the PMS, its size grew from 198 in 1966 to over 229 in 1977.²⁶⁸ According to P.N. Dhar, who joined the secretariat as an economic adviser in November 1970, "its prestige stood very high" when he joined.²⁶⁹ Having ousted her rival Morarji Desai in dramatic fashion, Indira Gandhi's political power, and that of her office, was elevated. "The successful management of crisis situations had brought Haksar into the limelight and dramatized the role of the prime minister as the ultimate custodian of power and bearer of responsibility," wrote Dhar.²⁷⁰

The secretariat harmonized with other trusted bureaucrats in other parts of the government. T.N. Kaul, D.P. Dhar, and P.N. Haksar—all leftist Kashmiri Brahmins who enjoyed the confidence of the prime minister—were in constant communication. Dhar wrote using his "reputation of being in the P.M.'s confidence" in Moscow to negotiate with elites within the Soviet Union.²⁷¹ Confiding in Haksar, he wrote, "I am mentioning this to you in strict confidence, because, human nature being what it is, our small successes in Moscow have caused jealousies in various quarters of Delhi."²⁷² Kaul would later reflect on his experiences working closely with Haksar in this time period, "I do

²⁶⁶ Tharoor, 125.

²⁶⁷ Sisson and Rose, 140.

²⁶⁸ Alexander, *Through the Corridors of Power*, 146.

²⁶⁹ Dhar, *Indira Gandhi, the "Emergency", and Indian Democracy*, 145.

²⁷⁰ Dhar, 124.

²⁷¹ D.P. Dhar to P.N. Haksar, September 16, 1969, T.N. Kaul Papers, Installments I, II, & III, Correspondence with Indira Gandhi, Prime Ministers Museum and Library, New Delhi, India.

²⁷² Ibid.

not remember a single occasion on which we had any serious differences.”²⁷³ As India sought to secure endorsement of its policy towards the crisis from the international community as well as and military assistance from the Soviet Union, Dhar wrote lengthy updates from Moscow directly to Kaul and Haksar. These letters, labeled “top secret” and/or “personal” would not be distributed widely to others within the bureaucracy (see **Appendix A**).

During the 1971 crisis in East Pakistan and the ensuing war with Pakistan, Gandhi continued to rely primarily on her trusted hands, assembling “a quite small and homogenous coterie around Mrs. Gandhi that consulted together and reached decisions rather informally.”²⁷⁴ This coterie included not only Haksar, Kaul, D.P. Dhar, and Kao, but also Defence Secretary K.B. Lall and Cabinet Secretary T. Swaminathan.²⁷⁵ P.N. Dhar recounts, “The physical proximity of their establishments made it easy for members of this group to meet informally and on short notice.”²⁷⁶ Gandhi’s policymaking processes were ad-hoc, informal, and heavily personalized, having the effect of generating policymaking processes that could be easily modified to exclude or include those within policymaking. The prime minister’s team would also call on others outside of the core circle who they felt could be useful on a particular point of concern. This decision-making structure, therefore, allowed Gandhi to consult on an ad-hoc basis, based on her core team’s personal relationship with that individual, regardless of the non-insider’s placement in the bureaucratic hierarchy. Dhar writes that the core group of insiders was also in touch with the home secretary, secretary for economic affairs, and General S.H.F.J. Manekshaw, chief of the army staff, while still others “were called in by the core group when their expertise was required.”²⁷⁷ Still, Dhar suggests

²⁷³ Bidyut Sarkar, *P.N. Haksar*, 174.

²⁷⁴ Sisson and Rose, 138.

²⁷⁵ Dhar, 160.

²⁷⁶ Dhar, 160.

²⁷⁷ Ibid.

that the urgency of the crisis situation masked differences within this group. “The immensity of the crisis and awareness that any miscalculation could be disastrous helped each mind to focus on the same points. Nonetheless, it would be an exaggeration to say that the group functioned without friction, for there were differences of approach and assessment.”²⁷⁸

Gandhi’s informal inner circle was by far the most important decision-making entity within the government during the Bangladesh crisis, despite the existence of other relevant formal bureaucratic entities. The earliest and most significant body created to examine the crisis was an inter-ministerial Committee of Secretaries that Gandhi put together in March after R&AW received the first request for aid from the leaders of the Awami League in March 1971. Headed by the cabinet secretary, the committee contained the defense, foreign, and home secretaries, as well as Kao and Haksar.²⁷⁹ Sisson and Rose (1990) describe the committee as “very important in decision-making on East Pakistan, both as a channel of communication to the prime minister and in its policy recommendations.”²⁸⁰ The committee’s influence is best attributed to the overlap it had with Gandhi’s sanctum sanctorum. Nearly every member has been cited by at least one or more firsthand observers as a member of Gandhi’s inner circle, with the sole exception of the home secretary.

As the newly appointed as chairman of the MEA’s Policy Planning Division, D.P. Dhar played an outsized role as the prime minister’s go-to man for all matters relating to Soviet assistance for the Bangladesh crisis. Haksar had convinced Gandhi to appoint Dhar so that he could simultaneously serve as the “Principal Political Liaison” to the new Bangladesh government in exile.²⁸¹ With the Indo-Soviet Peace and Friendship Treaty signed in August 1971, Gandhi was readying the country for a

²⁷⁸ Dhar, 161.

²⁷⁹ Dasgupta, 40.

²⁸⁰ Sisson and Rose, 139.

²⁸¹ In a letter to Dhar in May 1971 labeled “personal and confidential”, Haksar admitted “All this is my brain child, but I have vaguely mentioned it to P.M. and Tikki [T.N. Kaul].” P.N. Haksar to D.P. Dhar, May 22, 1971, P.N. Haksar Papers, Installment III, Subject File No. 166, Prime Ministers Museum and Library, New Delhi.

potential war with Pakistan. She was intent on securing Soviet support for this war, which many in India expected might involve China.²⁸² Necessary to achieve this was convincing the Soviets that India was assisting the Mujibnagar government in a “national liberation war.”²⁸³ Shortly after assuming the chairmanship in August 1971, Dhar visited Calcutta to talk to the Mujibnagar government about the importance of involving the left parties that had been active in East Pakistan in the government to mobilize Soviet support for the cause.²⁸⁴ When Gandhi was to travel to Moscow in September to obtain Soviet buy-in, Dhar went ahead to “secure ground” for the visit.²⁸⁵ He also oversaw, jointly with Kaul, the special unit of MEA formed to cope with the crisis. J.N. Dixit, then a midranking official the unit, received “guidance and instructions by T.N. Kaul and D.P. Dhar, on the basis of the discussions in which they were participating.”²⁸⁶ After the war, Dhar was sent to lead India’s negotiating team in the peace talks with Pakistan in Shimla in July 1972.²⁸⁷

The relevance of advisers within the bureaucracy fluctuated over time as individuals fell in and out of favor with Gandhi. In the early 1970s, an MEA-PMS split played out over a political crisis in the Indian protectorate of Sikkim. Sikkim was a princely state under the British Raj and in 1950 a treaty between India and the Maharaja in Gangtok granted Sikkim status as an Indian protectorate. At the time, Nehru had no interest in granting Sikkim statehood, assuring the Sikkim State Congress in New Delhi in 1948 that the will of the people “would be regarded as the supreme authority in shaping the destiny of Sikkim.”²⁸⁸ By the late 1960s, however, an emboldened Chogyal²⁸⁹ had signaled that he

²⁸² Dasgupta, *India and the Bangladesh Liberation War*, 144–45.

²⁸³ Dasgupta, 164.

²⁸⁴ Dasgupta 76.

²⁸⁵ Dasgupta, *India and the Bangladesh Liberation War*, 164.

²⁸⁶ Dixit, *Liberation and Beyond*, 50.

²⁸⁷ Band. 257.

²⁸⁸ Dhar, *Indira Gandhi, the “Emergency”, and Indian Democracy*, 282.

²⁸⁹ Chogyal is the title of the leader of Sikkim, formerly referred to as the Maharaja.

wanted Sikkim to become an independent nation.²⁹⁰ According to B.S. Das, an Indian diplomat who served as the Chief Administrative Officer in Sikkim during the crisis, New Delhi had “lost its leverage to check the growing independence of the Chogyal.”²⁹¹ In the debate over what to do about the Chogyal’s growing assertiveness, there was once again a divide between Indira Gandhi’s inner circle and the foreign policy bureaucracy. On one side of the debate were officials within the MEA, who advocated for a non-interventionist posture. On the other side, Kao favored an activist approach, “project[ing] the crisis in ominous terms and largely through a prism of a sensitive and vigilant outlook to India’s security interests and relative position in the subcontinent.”²⁹² Only one individual crossed factional lines: the Indian Political Officer to Sikkim, K. Shankar Bajpai, a high-level career diplomat who had joined the IFS in 1952. However, Bajpai’s family ties had made him personally close to both Kao and Gandhi, which may explain why he favored an activist approach to the Sikkim issue.²⁹³ Bajpai’s agreement with Kao and his consistent advocacy for a more coercive approach to the Chogyal seemed to fall on deaf ears in Kaul, who later admitted to wanting to preserve Sikkim’s autonomous status.²⁹⁴ In 1971, Bajpai wrote that he feared that his repeated entreaties “will succeed only in making the Ministry [MEA] fed up with me.”²⁹⁵

The group of those who fell out of favor with Gandhi eventually came to include some of her most trusted advisers. Although Gandhi continued to rely on Haksar for advice and high-level policy tasks even after retirement, “his influence began to wane since the middle of 1972,” wrote B.N. Tandon, who worked in the secretariat alongside Haksar from 1969 to 1973.²⁹⁶ Still, he was

²⁹⁰ Singh, *Power and Diplomacy*, 317–18.

²⁹¹ Brajbir Saran Das, *The Sikkim Saga* (Vikas, 1983), 11.

²⁹² Singh, *Power and Diplomacy*, 319.

²⁹³ Singh, 321–22.

²⁹⁴ Kaul, *Diplomacy in Peace and War*, 89.

²⁹⁵ 'Bajpai to Secretary West', 8 November 1971, K.S. Bajpai Papers, as cited in Singh, 323.

²⁹⁶ Tandon, *PMO Diary-I: Prelude to the Emergency*, 134.

asked to join the Planning Commission as the deputy chairman in 1974. Tandon, who had been in close touch with Haksar, speculated in his diary that the reason for this was pragmatic on the part of Gandhi: “the truth is that Haksar was turning into a silent critic of the government...The PM hates criticism and if a person like Haksar turned into a critic, it would have done her great damage.”²⁹⁷ Tandon also notes that Haksar’s exit from government service was because he did not want to “witness the decline and eclipse of the institution he had built. He did not approve of the sort of people who had begun to acquire a hold over the PM” (Ramesh 621, Tandon #). This was an allusion to Sanjay Gandhi, Indira Gandhi’s ambitious and politically ascendant son, whose business ventures and ideology Haksar had long opposed (Ramesh 681). Towards the mid-1970s, Sanjay and his associates operated from the prime minister’s house (PMH), where a “rival mini-secretariat” had begun emerging, according to P.N. Dhar. “This could not have happened without Mrs Gandhi’s explicit instructions.”²⁹⁸ Once a well-oiled “transmission belt” of ideas staffed with her closest and most loyal aides, Gandhi’s PMS was becoming an increasingly irrelevant stakeholder in policymaking as she prepared to launch the Emergency in 1975, India’s first and only tryst with authoritarian rule.²⁹⁹ Even Haksar, in his role as the deputy in the Planning Commission, no longer weighed in extensively on foreign policy matters.

Loyalty Dictates Information Access

For much of the 1970 to 1975 period of Gandhi’s leadership, there was not much need to be particularly guarded with information about foreign affairs. Having placed loyalists in key positions within the bureaucracy and reshaping the organization of decision-making to allow for flexibility, she

²⁹⁷ Tandon, 136.

²⁹⁸ Dhar, *Indira Gandhi, the “Emergency”, and Indian Democracy*, 304–5.

²⁹⁹ Dhar, 144.

consolidated control over the bureaucracy. Still, leaks were infrequent but “not unknown.”³⁰⁰ Thus, in Gandhi’s handling of the Bangladesh crisis, access to information flows was dictated by one’s loyalty. On March 2nd, 1971, R&AW chief R.N. Kao informed Gandhi that they had received an appeal for assistance from the Awami League. They were asking for supplies, arms, and equipment that the Awami League would need to wage a resistance against Pakistan, which was engaging in a military crackdown on the East Pakistan population. Immediately, Gandhi ordered the formation of a committee consisting of Haksar, Kaul, Kao, and Home Ministry Secretary Govind Narain, another trusted hand, to discuss the political, economic, and military implications of recognizing the new Bangladesh government in exile and supplying them with the requested aid.³⁰¹ Repeated unanswered entreaties from Awami League leaders to the High Commission in Dhaka in March led to a secret meeting between Indira Gandhi and Awami League General Secretary Tajuddin Ahmad in April after Ahmad had managed to cross the border into India and persuade Indian officials to fly him to New Delhi.³⁰² This meeting proved decisive for Gandhi’s decision-making. The government shortly thereafter adopted a plan named “Operation Jackpot” to “build up the strength of Bangla Desh Forces to keep West Pakistani forces tied down in a running struggle” and “consolidate their hold on peripheral territories.”³⁰³

Once Gandhi made the decision to arm the rebels, the challenge was how to coordinate between decision-makers in Delhi and the Bangladesh government-in-exile without risking leaks. As Haksar himself had stressed to the prime minister, at that early stage, most countries were likely to

³⁰⁰ Document 180. Paul Hibbeln and Peter Kraemer, eds., *Foreign Relations of the United States, 1969–1976*, vol. Volume E–8, Documents on South Asia, 1973–1976 (Washington, D.C: United States Government Printing Office, 2007), <https://history.state.gov/historicaldocuments/frus1969-76ve08>.

³⁰¹ P.N. Haksar Papers, Installment III, Subject File No. 220, Prime Ministers Museum and Library, New Delhi.

³⁰² Dasgupta, *India and the Bangladesh Liberation War*, 57.

³⁰³ D.P. Dhar’s note to prime minister dated November 13, 1971, MEA archives, as cited in Dasgupta, 58.

regard Indian intervention as unjustified interference in Pakistan's internal affairs.³⁰⁴ (Dasgupta 60) On May 6, 1971, Gandhi met Tajuddin Ahmad again in New Delhi. They met at 10 o'clock in the evening to preserve the meeting's secrecy. Prior to the meeting, Kao sent Gandhi some guidance for the meeting, including some suggestions for decision-making and coordination. Significantly, he argued that liaising with the government in exile "should be maintained only through the agency of the R&AW" with leadership from the secretaries committee as well as coordination from the Border Security Force (BSF) and, as needed, the army. Kao's comfort with the BSF in a coordinating role was likely because they had been "operating as a front for R&AW" for some time.³⁰⁵ "It is recommended that we start with this nucleus of an organization, and then see what demands develop and what extra organizational support would be necessary," wrote Kao, noting with dismay "it appears some unfortunate publicity has already been given in Calcutta to the presence of a few of the freedom fighters who have crossed into India."³⁰⁶

Gandhi decided to adopt Kao's guidance. Tightly controlled decision-making and restricted information flows ensured a high level of secrecy. R&AW was put in charge of managing relations with the Awami League's leadership as they set up a new government in exile for an independent Bangladesh on Indian soil. They began to recruit, train, and arm thousands of freedom fighters known as the Mukti Bahini. They also set up the Mujib Bahini, a "special squad" of the Mukti Bahini reporting directly to R&AW, keeping the army out of matters as much as possible. The members of the Mujib Bahini were politically and personally close to Mujibur Rahman and received better arms and training from R&AW.³⁰⁷ As operations progressed, Kao began briefing Gandhi directly, with only Haksar

³⁰⁴ Dasgupta, 60.

³⁰⁵ Anusha Nandakumar and Sandeep Saket, *The War That Made R&AW* (Chennai: Westland, 2021), 100.

³⁰⁶ P.N. Haksar Papers, Installment III, Subject File No. 227, Prime Ministers Museum and Library, New Delhi.

³⁰⁷ Nandakumar and Saket, *The War That Made R&AW*, 120–21.

copied on communications.³⁰⁸ He oftentimes typed status reports from memory and then hand-delivered documents to Gandhi himself.³⁰⁹ R&AW's special channel was used to transmit important messages from Kolkata or Dhaka to New Delhi.³¹⁰

Beyond the committee of secretaries, a select few of Gandhi's trusted hands within the bureaucracy were in the know. D.P. Dhar wrote to Haksar in early April, implying that he had briefed the Soviet leaders on Operation Jackpot and received their approval:

I would repeat that our main and only aim should be to ensure that the marshes and quagmires of East Bengal swallow up the military potential which West Pakistan can muster. This may even open up perspectives of a long drawn struggle. I have no doubt that in the end and that too in the not very distant future the West Pakistan elements will find their Dien Bien Pho in East Bengal...I would like to inform you that the Soviets have taken a plunge in the belief that the resistance in East Bengal will not collapse. This resistance must not be allowed to collapse.³¹¹

In another "personal" and "top secret" letter later the same month, Dhar insinuates that the Soviet Union was poised to make some contribution to the covert liberation efforts:

The Soviet Union will in my opinion shortly announce its decision to make substantial contributions to the relief operations for the large number of refugees which have crossed into

³⁰⁸ Kao sent Gandhi an "East Bengal Situation Report" on April 13, 1971 assessing the Pakistan army's control over East Pakistan. The only other recipient was P.N. Haksar. Haksar also received from Kao a report from a R&AW joint director in Calcutta labeled "top secret" and "personal" dated July 3, 1971. Other similar unsigned, undated reports in the archives are likely from R&AW to Haksar and/or Gandhi. P.N. Haksar Papers, Installment III, Subject File No. 227, Prime Ministers Museum and Library, New Delhi.

³⁰⁹ Nandakumar and Saket, *The War That Made R&AW*, 33.

³¹⁰ Examples include a telegram from the High Commission in Dhaka to New Delhi regarding Mujib's request for assistance from India, March 14, 1971. P.N. Haksar Papers, Installment III, Subject File No. 90(a), Prime Ministers Museum and Library, New Delhi.

³¹¹ D.P. Dhar to P.N. Haksar, April 4, 1971, P.N. Haksar Papers, Installment III, Subject File No. 227, Prime Ministers Museum and Library, New Delhi.

our territory. More significant is the decision of the Soviet authorities to meet the 'special' requirements of Ramji'.³¹²

The second line is likely a coded allusion to Soviet assistance to R&AW's efforts in East Pakistan and even potentially directly to the Mukti Bahini, since R.N. Kao's close friends called him "Ramji".³¹³ Dhar was likely overstating the extent or probability of Soviet commitment, as his predictions did not come to pass and the Soviet Union remained intent on deterring war from breaking out on the subcontinent.³¹⁴ Still, even from Moscow, he was aware of the developments in New Delhi and remained actively engaged in talks with Soviet officials about their views on the crisis. Dhar began to lay the groundwork for revisiting the proposal for a treaty of friendship and cooperation that Moscow had put forward in March 1969.³¹⁵ Haksar, Kaul, and Dhar had urged Gandhi to proceed with the treaty then, but she was hesitant to accept the domestic political blowback that would inevitably emerge.³¹⁶ According to Dhar, the treaty would not only deliver India "a counter blow to the Pakistani morale" but also allow for increased material assistance from Moscow to boost its defense preparedness.³¹⁷ When Gandhi held talks with the Soviets in August 1971 to sign the treaty, the Soviets authorized the delivery of military equipment India had requested."³¹⁸

³¹² D.P. Dhar to T.N. Kaul, April 29, 1971, P.N. Haksar Papers, Installment III, Subject File No. 227, Prime Ministers Museum and Library, New Delhi. Haksar was copied.

³¹³ Chandrashekhar Bhattacharyya, "Ramji Kao: Seven Things You Must Know About The Legendary Spymaster," Delhi Defence Review, May 11, 2018, <https://delhidefencereview.com/2018/05/11/ramji-kao-seven-things-you-must-know-about-the-legendary-spymaster/>.

³¹⁴ "The Indian ambassador [Dhar] overestimated both the extent to which the Soviet Union would turn the screws on Pakistan and the willingness of the Soviet leadership to support a secessionist movement." Raghavan, *1971: A Global History of the Creation of Bangladesh*, 117.

³¹⁵ Dasgupta, 143.

³¹⁶ Amb. Dhar told Soviet interlocutors that domestic politics would not allow her to conclude the treaty, blamed "rightist reactionary elements." MEA archives quoted in Dasgupta, 152.

³¹⁷ D.P. Dhar to P.N. Haksar, April 29, 1971, P.N. Haksar Papers, Installment III, Subject File No. 227, Prime Ministers Museum and Library, New Delhi.

³¹⁸ Record of P.M.'s Conversation with Mr. Gromkyo, Soviet Foreign Minister. Prime Minister's Secretariat. P.N. Haksar Papers, Installment III, Subject File No. 227, Prime Ministers Museum and Library, New Delhi.

As the efforts behind the Mukti Bahini expanded and war appeared increasingly likely, more of the government would inevitably be informed. General Manekshaw briefed the prime minister on the success of the Mukti Bahini in October.³¹⁹ By November, 100,000 forces would be trained and infiltrated back into Bangladesh.³²⁰ Yet there is suggestive evidence that Gandhi was hesitant to include those connected to the bureaucracy, especially those who had been skeptical of India's early involvement in the crisis. Prior to the May 6 meeting with Tajuddin, she sent Haksar a note suggesting that Foreign Minister Swaran Singh be excluded from the meeting on the basis of his skepticism of the Bangladesh policy:

Re this evening's meeting. If you think Sardar [Swaran Singh] etc should be called, by all means do so. You should anyhow be there. However, Sardar is a little doubtful about our policy re. B. Desh. This should be kept in mind.³²¹

Swaran Singh had long been a trusted and dependable figure in Indira Gandhi's cabinet and would later play a key role in negotiating the Indo-Soviet Peace and Friendship Treaty signed in August 1971. Yet, it is possible that he had internalized the Ministry of External Affairs' more cautious stance on the Bangladesh crisis—a position that diverged sharply from the views of R&AW and much of Gandhi's inner circle. The divide was already evident as early as 1969: while the MEA generally favored a restrained, non-interventionist approach to the escalating situation in East Pakistan, R&AW regarded the rise of Bangladeshi national aspirations as both inevitable and a strategic opportunity for India to support them. Per Singh (2019), "It appears that Nehru's core images regarding conflict avoidance and a reluctance to disturb the geopolitical status quo in the subcontinent were still strong in sections

³¹⁹ MEA archives quoted in Dasgupta, *India and the Bangladesh Liberation War*, 92–93.

³²⁰ Dasgupta, 84–85.

³²¹ Gandhi to Haksar, n.d., P.N. Haksar Papers, Installment III, Subject File No. 227, Prime Ministers Museum and Library, New Delhi.

of the MEA.” Kao’s belief system, which “included the impulse to reshape the subcontinent’s order, coercively if necessary” was more consistent with Gandhi’s own views.³²²

A similar decision to use R&AW to intervene covertly against the Chogyal in 1973 was heavily shrouded in secrecy, known only to Kao, Haksar, and a select few other R&AW officials. Even though Kaul was a trusted adviser of Gandhi and Bajpai actually agreed with Gandhi and Kao about taking a coercive approach against the Chogyal, evidently Mrs. Gandhi did not trust these men to not hinder the policy implementation in Sikkim. They were only brought into the loop as needed after Gandhi made the initial decision that Sikkim should officially merge with India.³²³

Discussion

Leaders and bureaucrats rarely operate in harmony; friction is the norm. Existing theories of bureaucratic politics in IR suggest national security bureaucracies constrain leaders from making foreign policy decisions that may otherwise be in the best interest of the country. But these theories rarely take seriously the hierarchical structure of intra-elite interactions that determine who “wins” a struggle between a leader and the foreign policy bureaucracy and the role that leaders have in reshaping existing institutional arrangements. I argue that leaders have a set of strategies available to them for coping with a resistant bureaucracy. The strategies they select are dependent on the leader’s beliefs about trustworthiness of the bureaucracy and their domestic political standing.

According to my theory of leader strategy selection, I would expect Gandhi to adopt insulation as her organizational strategy from 1966 to 1969 and politicization from 1970 to 1975. **Table 5** depicts the list of tools usually employed in the insulation and politicization organizational strategies. Although the availability of primary source evidence in the 1966 to 1969 is thin, my theory works reasonably

³²² Singh, *Power and Diplomacy*, 273.

³²³ Singh, *Power and Diplomacy*, 326.

well. Gandhi used several of the formal tools of insulation by expanding the role, size, and resources allocated to the PMS, filling it with advisers whom she knew personally and trusted to be loyal, and

Table 5. Indira Gandhi's Organizational Tools, 1966-1975

	1966-1969	1970-1975
Strategy	Insulation	Politicization
Decision-making	Inclusive decision-making infrequent, may be largely for show ✓ Exclusive, secretive decision-making common	Loyalty dictates decision-making inclusion ✓ Alternative viewpoints not encouraged ✓ Ad-hoc, informal decision-making common ✓
Delegation	Top priorities delegated to executive office for implementation, often kept secret ✓	Top priorities may be delegated to executive office or to loyalists in politicized bureaucracy ✓
Personnel changes	Limited loyalist appointments ✓	Widespread loyalist appointments; competence not prioritized ✓ Expansion of appointment powers ✓ Large-scale dismissals or resignations
Other tools	Increases in executive office responsibilities, size, & resources ✓ Restricted information flows Extensive bureaucratic monitoring Uneven leader access across elites ✓	Legal changes to recruitment & promotion incentives ✓ Creation of parallel, redundant institutions Increases in executive office responsibilities, size, & resources are common ✓ Uneven leader access across elites ✓

using appointment powers to begin installing loyalists across the bureaucracy. However, her foreign policy decision-making did not appear to be overly secretive, one of the trademark informal tools of the insulation strategy. In her first year in office, it appears she relied heavily on both ministers and civil servants she had not handpicked to advise her on devaluing the rupee. Yet there is little evidence

to suggest that foreign policy decision-making was frequently inclusive or deliberately exclusive in the post-1967 period. In fact, from 1967 to 1969, Gandhi appears to have been preoccupied with battling her domestic political rivals and consolidating power rather than advancing any foreign policy objectives.

The evidence is clearer in the 1970 to 1975 period. After Gandhi assumed control of the Congress Party in 1969, she pursued a strategy of politicization. In an effort to increase the loyalty of the bureaucracy to her personal and political ambitions, she began to regularly use her appointment powers to install loyalists (including in the military), institutionalized new positions within the bureaucracy for political appointees, and altered the criteria for merit-based promotion in the IFS. The inclusion of bureaucratic elites in decision-making was contingent on their loyalty; information flows were also restricted based on allegiance to Gandhi herself. Her approach to policymaking was ad hoc and informal, allowing her the flexibility to exclude individuals from decision-making if they began to appear unreliable. Access to Gandhi was certainly uneven as she relied extensively on her select few trusted hands over the rest of the bureaucracy and her cabinet ministers.

There is evidence that Gandhi's politicization strategy was acutely felt within various bureaucratic institutions. Within the Indian Foreign Service (IFS), this period marked what diplomat J.N. Dixit described as "the process of gradual politicization."³²⁴ This shift contributed to a closer alignment between the Ministry of External Affairs (MEA) and the Soviet bloc. However, as Shashi Tharoor observes, officials were largely "conforming to the prevailing political dogmas...Mrs. Gandhi's calls for a 'committed bureaucracy' placed a premium on appearing to be on the right side of the rhetorical divide."³²⁵ Gandhi's tendency to accuse her critics of being under foreign influence may

³²⁴ Dixit, *My South Block Years*, 37.

³²⁵ Tharoor, *Reasons of State*, 184.

have fueled anxiety among civil servants. It became difficult for “individuals, institutions, and organizations in India to concentrate on performing their proper functions with competence and dedication; they also had to protect their reputations from accusations of being wittingly or unwittingly used by a foreign power.”³²⁶

P.N. Dhar reveals a broader cultural shift in government functioning after Gandhi’s political consolidation. Comparing the environment to that of a feudal court, he described how, from 1971 to 1975, he was inundated with requests for the prime minister: “it can only be done through your office”; ‘it can only be decided at the highest level’; ‘how will the prime minister feel about this suggestion’; ‘What is her mood like?’” Even personal assistants, he observed, were transformed into “minor power centres” by those seeking favors and contacts.”³²⁷ This shift in bureaucratic behavior illustrates how Gandhi’s politicization not only reshaped formal institutions but also altered the informal norms of policymaking within the state. The result was a culture of sycophancy and risk-aversion that weakened the capacity for independent bureaucratic judgment.

One signature tool of politicization was absent from those Indira Gandhi employed between 1970 and 1975: large-scale dismissals or resignations did not occur during Gandhi’s rule. There are a few possible reasons for this. First, at the time, India’s foreign policy bureaucracy, and especially the IFS, was under-resourced. The scale of the shortage becomes evident when examining the rapid expansion of India’s diplomatic footprint after independence. In 1948, India had 46 resident missions abroad headed by ambassadors. By 1965, that number had more than doubled to 101. During the same period, the number of countries covered through non-resident representation—

³²⁶ Mansingh, *India’s Search for Power*, 58.

³²⁷ Ibid.

such as those handled via concurrent accreditation—increased from nine to forty-five.³²⁸

Recognizing the strain this placed on the diplomatic corps, a government committee reviewing the IFS in 1966 concluded that “an expansion in the cadre from its present strength to about 550 over the next ten years would appear to be necessary, if the Foreign Service is to cope effectively with the country’s expanding commitments abroad and the demands which these will impose on it.”³²⁹ The Bangladesh crisis and the whole of government response required may have also deterred Gandhi from purging the foreign policy bureaucracy

Much has been written about Indira Gandhi’s personality as a driver of her decision-making style. She has been widely described as inherently insecure, authoritarian, or distrustful.³³⁰ Yet, as this chapter has shown, Gandhi *did* trust some individuals on the basis of interpersonal familiarity and social affinity. Her inner circle of Kashmiri Brahmin advisers helped her manage the Indo-Pakistan crisis with aplomb, securing India an overwhelming victory. Her organizational strategies varied systematically across time in response to changing political strength and a persistent distrust of bureaucratic elites. For example, Gandhi did not pursue politicization immediately upon taking office in 1966, despite being described as insecure or distrusting from the start. In the 1966–1969 period, her strategy was limited to insulation (e.g., building up the PMS, appointing P.N. Haksar), even though her personality and mistrust remained constant. It was only after she gained political dominance in 1969 that she moved to the full politicization of the foreign policy bureaucracy.

Another alternative theory posits that a leader’s experience in foreign affairs shapes how they organize policymaking. Although Gandhi had long been exposed to diplomacy through her father’s

³²⁸ Chairman N. R. Pillai et al., *Report of the Committee on the Indian Foreign Service* (New Delhi, Manager of Publications, 1966), 5, <http://archive.org/details/dli.ministry.20166>.

³²⁹ N. R. Pillai et al., 87.

³³⁰ Bandyopadhyaya, *The Making of India’s Foreign Policy*, 341.

leadership, she remained relatively inexperienced in international affairs when she assumed office.

According to Jost (2024), inexperienced leaders may feel threatened by the bureaucracy and thus restructure decision-making to limit bureaucratic access to information. This prediction is largely accurate in the first few years of Gandhi's office. However, this explanation falls short of the longer Gandhi was in office: as she grew more experienced in foreign policy over time, she did not become more inclusive. Instead, she continued to limit the role of non-trusted bureaucrats in core decision-making processes.

While she was often described as distrustful or authoritarian, her approach to foreign policymaking changed meaningfully over time, in line with shifts in political strength rather than personality traits. Nor did her extensive exposure to foreign affairs lead her to trust or rely on the professional bureaucracy. Instead, her decisions reflected persistent mistrust rooted in political and ideological conflict. My theory accounts for this variation by emphasizing the interaction between trust and political strength in shaping how leaders organize foreign policymaking.

Chapter 4. Trust in India: Circumvention under Manmohan Singh

When the Congress Party's United Progressive Alliance (UPA) unexpectedly won the 2004 elections, Dr. Manmohan Singh became the “accidental prime minister.”³³¹ The party leader, Italian-born Sonia Gandhi, was the wife of former prime minister Rajiv Gandhi and the daughter-in-law of Indira Gandhi. Since she was not born in India, she was forced to choose another leader to take the helm of the government. These peculiar circumstances would lead Manmohan Singh to become the country’s first true *bureaucrat* prime minister. An Oxford-educated economist, his experience in government service spanned multiple ministries, including the Ministry of Commerce, the Planning Commission, the Reserve Bank of India, and the Ministry of Finance.³³² In 1991, he was appointed finance minister by Prime Minister P.V. Narasimha Rao to manage a balance of payments crisis, during which time he spearheaded India’s economic liberalization reforms.³³³ Like the prime ministership, this appointment also came as a surprise. According to Singh, “I didn’t take it seriously. He [Rao’s secretary] eventually tracked me down the next morning, rather angry, and demanded that I get dressed up and come to Rashtrapati Bhavan [the presidential palace] for the swearing in.”³³⁴

As finance minister, he became known as the architect of India’s economic progress and emerged as a figure in Congress Party politics. He then became a member of the Rajya Sabha, India’s unelected upper house of parliament, and led the opposition to the ruling Bharatiya Janata

³³¹ Sanjaya Baru, *Accidental Prime Minister* (India Penguin, 2018).

³³² “DR. MANMOHAN SINGH,” Indian National Congress, accessed March 10, 2025, <https://inc.in/our-inspiration/dr-manmohan-singh>.

³³³ Sushmita Pathak, “Manmohan Singh, India’s Prime Minister from 2004 to 2014, Has Died,” NPR, December 26, 2024, sec. World, <https://www.npr.org/2024/12/26/1045646076/manmohan-singh-dies-india>.

³³⁴ Mark Tully, “Architect of a New India,” 2005, https://web.archive.org/web/20130701144359/http://www.alumni.cam.ac.uk/uploads/File/CAMArticles/Michalemas2005/cam_2005_46_profile1.pdf.

Party (BJP) coalition from 1998 to 2004.³³⁵ Yet he had no independent political base, having never won an election. He stood for election in 1999 for a seat in the Lok Sabha, the lower house of parliament, and lost.³³⁶ This lack of political stature is likely what led Sonia Gandhi to choose Singh to serve in her stead after the party won the 2004 elections: Manmohan Singh was a “political nonentity” that would keep the seat warm for one of her children to become prime minister later and allow Sonia to be the power behind the throne in the meantime.³³⁷ As one senior journalist wrote in a profile of Singh in 2011, Singh’s most attractive quality for Sonia Gandhi was “his complete inability to gain elected office on his own merits.”³³⁸ While other Congress party leaders may have been a threat to her family dynasty, Singh was not.

Despite his circumscribed political authority, Manmohan Singh had a clear vision for Indian foreign policy. His worldview centered on hastening the country’s transformation into an economic powerhouse by fostering a supportive international environment. He felt an economically resurgent India should deepen its relations with the United States to unlock American technology for its own development goals.³³⁹ Regarding the United States, Singh foresaw the economic and strategic benefits that would arise from inking a pact with the United States that would draw the country closer to the superpower than ever before. The groundwork for such a deal was laid under his predecessor Atal Bihari Vajpayee, whose government was responsible for negotiating the end of U.S. sanctions on India following its 1998 nuclear tests and initiating a series of high-level dialogues that laid the groundwork for a U.S. President George W. Bush’s transformational visit to India in December 2000. Vajpayee sought to break India out of its “nuclear apartheid,” a term coined by his

³³⁵ Sandeep Phukan, “Obituary: Manmohan Singh, a Gentleman Politician,” *The Hindu*, December 26, 2024, sec. India, <https://www.thehindu.com/news/national/manmohan-singh-a-gentleman-politician/article69030747.ece>.

³³⁶ Tully, “Architect of a New India.”

³³⁷ Clary, *The Difficult Politics of Peace*, 250.

³³⁸ Indrani Bagchi, “A Tale of Two Manmohan Singhs,” *Current History* 110, no. 735 (2011): 132.

³³⁹ Bagchi, 133.

foreign minister to refer to the punishments India had reaped by developing and testing nuclear weapons in defiance of the international nonproliferation regime.³⁴⁰ Building on the previous government's efforts, Manmohan Singh saw an opening for resolving this issue that had divided the United States and India since the heart of the Cold War.³⁴¹ Per veteran *Times of India* journalist Indrani Bagchi, the nuclear deal was intended to do more than help India buy nuclear power reactors or import fissile material to fuel its reactors. Rather, it was “about affording India access to technology across diverse sectors from pharmaceuticals to space” that it had been denied thanks to a combination of U.S. and international laws enforcing nonproliferation restrictions.³⁴² That the dispensation in Washington was predisposed towards India and a goal “to help India become a major world power in the 21st century” was icing on the cake.³⁴³

Perhaps even more than a belief in the necessity of closer U.S.-India ties, Manmohan Singh entered office with a firm conviction that reconciliation between India and Pakistan was both necessary and within reach. Motivated by an economic calculus, he felt that “the normalization of relations between India and Pakistan will open up enormous opportunities for an accelerated rate of economic growth.” His view was that while the territorial dispute over Jammu and Kashmir could not be resolved by redrawing borders, it was possible to “work towards making them irrelevant — towards making them just lines on a map” by encouraging the free flow of goods, people, and ideas across the contested borders.³⁴⁴ This would not only unlock opportunities for economic cooperation

³⁴⁰ Jaswant Singh, “Against Nuclear Apartheid,” *Foreign Affairs*, September 1, 1998, <https://www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/asia/1998-09-01/against-nuclear-apartheid>.

³⁴¹ Suhasini Haidar, “Manmohan Singh Left a Lasting Imprint on India’s External Relations,” *The Hindu*, December 26, 2024, sec. India, <https://www.thehindu.com/news/national/manmohan-singh-left-a-lasting-imprint-on-indias-external-relations/article69030897.ece>.

³⁴² Bagchi, “A Tale of Two Manmohan Singhs.”

³⁴³ Rajesh M. Basrur, *Subcontinental Drift: Domestic Politics and India’s Foreign Policy*, South Asia in World Affairs Series (Washington, DC: Georgetown University Press, 2023), 54.

³⁴⁴ “PM’s Speech on Launch of Amritsar - Nankana Sahib Bus Service,” Former Prime Ministers of India, March 24, 2006, <https://archivepmo.nic.in/drmanmohansingh/speech-details.php?nodeid=293>.

between India and Pakistan, but also the potential of the region connected with the economically thriving West and Central Asia. Himself born in today's Pakistan, Singh once famously said, "I dream of a day, while retaining our respective national identities, one can have breakfast in Amritsar, lunch in Lahore, and dinner in Kabul."³⁴⁵

Given Singh's background in government service as a bureaucrat, he shared many ideas, interests, and norms with elites within the foreign policy bureaucracy and broadly trusted their intentions. Still, both of his two top foreign policy priorities ran into resistance from the foreign policy bureaucracy. The sources of opposition were different on each case: on the United States, opposition emanated from the atomic energy establishment, which distrusted the Americans' willingness to assist India on matters relating to its nuclear program and the "old guard" of the MEA, who felt that the United States favored Pakistan and was set against India's rise. On Pakistan, the more hawkish corridors of the foreign policy bureaucracy, including the MEA, doubted the possibility that Singh's vision for peace could be realized without unthinkable sacrifices to India's national security.

In line with my theoretical expectations, Manmohan Singh chose an organizational strategy that reflected both his political weakness and his trust in the foreign policy bureaucracy: circumvention. Although broadly aligned on most foreign policy issues, wherever Singh and the bureaucracy differed, information leaks would abound and risk thwarting his foreign policy agenda. The UPA government "leaked like a sieve," recalled Bagchi. "You knew who was upset with who for what, because they thought nothing of calling editors or other people."³⁴⁶ There was reason not only to be afraid of leaks, but also of word reaching Sonia Gandhi before the ground was prepared

³⁴⁵ Steve Coll, "The Back Channel," *The New Yorker*, February 22, 2009, <https://www.newyorker.com/magazine/2009/03/02/the-back-channel>.

³⁴⁶ Interview with Indrani Bagchi, New Delhi, December 2023.

to convince her. According to Foreign Minister Natwar Singh, throughout UPA rule, “it was widely known that Sonia very discreetly monitored the functioning of the most important ministries in the government” through her personal bureaucratic connections.³⁴⁷ With so much escaping into public view, Singh’s approach to the bureaucracy varied depending on the sensitivity of the foreign policy issue at hand. How dire would the consequences be if the information found its way to the public? Singh thus ran a foreign policymaking process that was broadly inclusive of bureaucratic elites and prioritized competence. Yet it excluded much of the bureaucracy on the most politically sensitive issue of his tenure – Pakistan.

The result was an organizational strategy of *circumvention*: deliberative and inclusive of the bureaucracy on most issues, yet secretive and centralized on others. His government negotiated the nuclear agreement and its constituent parts in broad daylight: over the 39 months it took to conclude the agreement, Singh involved all relevant bureaucratic elites in the negotiations and secured their support one by one, including the publicly skeptical Indian nuclear establishment that fueled much of the media criticism of the deal. When the agreement was concluded, few could protest the end result as anything but a success for India. Put simply, the agreement allowed India to join the nuclear mainstream: it became the sixth country, after the five nuclear weapons states recognized by the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT), capable of retaining its nuclear weapons and still participating in international nuclear commerce. Seema Sirohi, a longtime Washington-based reporter, later reported that U.S. officials privately admitted “the Indians got the better of them.”³⁴⁸

In contrast, when it came to Pakistan, the government prioritized reaching a deal first over ensuring that a consensus within the government. Singh evidently believed that the hawks within the

³⁴⁷ K. Natwar Singh, *One Life Is Not Enough*, Kindle (Rupa Publications India, 2012), 320.

³⁴⁸ Seema Sirohi, *Friends With Benefits : The India-US Story* (HarperCollins, 2023), 195.

government could be made compliant, stating in what was supposed to be an off-the-record interaction just before becoming prime minister, “Short of secession, short of re-drawing boundaries, the Indian establishment can live with anything.”³⁴⁹ Instead of leading diplomacy himself or charging a serving minister or bureaucrat with the task, the prime minister named a special envoy for Pakistan, retired diplomat Satinder Kumar Lambah, to secretly negotiate with Pakistan. The backchannel was a continuation of the confidential talks on Kashmir which Pakistani President Pervez Musharraf and Indian Prime Minister Atal Bihari Vajpayee agreed to hold in 2004 just before the change in government in New Delhi.³⁵⁰ Out of the spotlight, perhaps the two sides could reach an agreement more quickly and without interference from the Indian or Pakistani establishments. Musharraf was keen to see an Indian response to his proposed four-point formula for resolving the Kashmir dispute, which concurred with Singh’s own view that a plausible solution could not include the redrawing of borders. There was enough ground for talks that Lambah directly and covertly negotiated with his Pakistani interlocutors over the course of the decade Manmohan Singh was in office. Between May 2003 and March 2024, 36 backchannel talks occurred, exactly half of which took place between April 2005 and August 2008.³⁵¹ The backchannel negotiations eventually became so advanced that the two sides had “come to semi-colons.”³⁵² But it never came to fruition. Musharraf was forced into exile and a major terror attack carried out by a Pakistan-based jihadi group wreaked havoc on the peace process, which has since then been in purgatory.

My research draws on over 20 semi-structured elite interviews with Indian diplomats, bureaucrats, as well as senior journalists I conducted in New Delhi, Washington, D.C., and online

³⁴⁹ Baru, *Accidental Prime Minister*, 180.

³⁵⁰ Shyam Saran, *How India Sees the World: Kautilya to the 21st Century* (Delhi: Juggernaut, 2018), 94.

³⁵¹ Satinder Kumar Lambah, *In Pursuit of Peace: India-Pakistan Relations Under Six Prime Ministers* (India Viking, 2023), 294–95.

³⁵² Coll, “The Back Channel.”

from July 2022 to May 2025. I used a snowball sampling recruitment strategy to contact those who were familiar with historical events or leader-bureaucracy relations under Manmohan Singh, as described in this chapter.³⁵³ Of those interviewed, six served in some capacity in the Prime Minister's Office (PMO) during Singh's tenure, eight served in the MEA, five were journalists reporting on foreign or defense affairs during UPA rule, four were part of the military or intelligence services or the National Security Council Secretariat (NSCS), and one was a U.S. government official.³⁵⁴ Out of the 15 total government-serving interviewees, an overwhelming 80 percent were part of the IFS. This overrepresentation of the IFS in my sample is not unexpected, given the dominance of the IFS in foreign policy positions in the PMO, NSCS, and across the government, as well as the relatively less influential power of the military in policymaking.³⁵⁵ While I aimed to speak with those who had knowledge of the government's behavior towards the United States and Pakistan during Singh's tenure, where interviews were unavailable, I relied on primary sources such as memoirs, newspapers, and government documents to triangulate the history described here.

This chapter will proceed as follows. First, I will explain the basis for Manmohan Singh's trust in the foreign policy bureaucracy. I will then define the sources of Manmohan Singh's political weakness. From there, the remainder of the chapter will be devoted to exploring the negotiations with the United States over the Indo-U.S. nuclear agreement and the negotiations with Pakistan over the Kashmir issue and related disputes. I will conclude with an overview of my findings and a discussion of alternative explanations.

³⁵³ The interview approach was reviewed and approved by the University of Chicago IRB, Protocol IRB22-0719. See Appendix B for details on interview questions and approach.

³⁵⁴ These numbers sum to more than 20 because individuals may have served in multiple positions throughout Singh's tenure.

³⁵⁵ Manjari Chatterjee Miller, "India's Feeble Foreign Policy: A Would-Be Great Power Resists Its Own Rise," *Foreign Affairs* 92, no. 3 (2013): 15. On the military's role in policymaking, see Mukherjee, *The Absent Dialogue*.

Bureaucratic Trust: Relating to the Bureaucracy

My theory expects that leaders' organizational strategy selection is shaped by how much they trust the bureaucratic elites in the foreign policy bureaucracy. I have argued that the basis of this trust is relational: trust is formed when there is an alignment of social identities between a leader and bureaucratic elites. Manmohan Singh, who spent two decades as a bureaucrat before becoming finance minister in 1991, put great faith in the foreign policy bureaucrats of his time. As prime minister, he was well-known for trusting bureaucrats more than his political colleagues.³⁵⁶

The relationships, ideas, and values he developed during his time as a bureaucrat formed the foundation of this trust.

The close personal relationships he developed with many senior bureaucrats through his years of public service were behind this trust. As one former diplomat who served in a high-ranking post in the MEA early in Singh's government reiterated, because of his many years in the bureaucracy and as finance minister, "he knew all of us [in the IFS]. He knew people by name." This interviewee described meeting Singh first when he was the deputy chairman of the Planning Commission (between 1985 and 1987). Shyam Saran, who would become the first foreign secretary Singh appointed, was a joint secretary in the PMO during Narasimha Rao's government, where he advised the PM on foreign, defense, and nuclear-related policy issues.³⁵⁷ Similarly, Singh's first national security adviser, J.N. Dixit, was the foreign secretary during the Rao years.³⁵⁸ Proximity to Rao was the case for Shivshankar Menon, who would later become the national security adviser and

³⁵⁶ Shantanu Nandan Sharma and Rakesh Mohan Chaturvedi, "Meet PM Manmohan Singh's Men Who He Trusts More than Most Politicians," *The Economic Times*, May 19, 2013, <https://economictimes.indiatimes.com/news/politics-and-nation/meet-pm-manmohan-singhs-men-who-he-trusts-more-than-most-politicians/articleshow/20125604.cms>.

³⁵⁷ T. P. Sreenivasan, "Shyam Saran: A Glorious Innings Come to an End," Rediff, accessed January 23, 2025, <https://www.rediff.com/news/column/shyam-saran-a-glorious-innings-come-to-an-end/20100222.htm>.

³⁵⁸ Haresh Pandya, "JN Dixit," *The Guardian*, January 6, 2005, sec. World news, <https://www.theguardian.com/news/2005/jan/06/guardianobituaries.india>.

foreign secretary. In 1992, Menon became joint secretary for North and East Asia at the MEA's Delhi headquarters, where he worked closely with Dixit and Rao on a border agreement with China.³⁵⁹

Singh's pre-government experiences also likely contributed to his trust in the bureaucratic elite. Educated in economics at Cambridge and Oxford, Singh moved comfortably within the cosmopolitan circles bridging academia and policymaking, both in Delhi and abroad, including those within India's diplomatic corps. The IFS, eager for its diplomats to gain acceptance in elite international circles, valued officers who conformed to the cosmopolitan norms of global diplomacy.³⁶⁰ Despite his humble origins in a poor Sikh family from rural Punjab, Singh's academic pedigree aligned with those of the Anglophone, upper-class diplomats who have historically dominated the IFS.³⁶¹ Even today, while the government of India has taken steps to democratize the civil services, the top ranks in the MEA continue to be largely controlled by the most socially and economically privileged members of the IFS.³⁶² Singh's Oxbridge credentials allowed him to accumulate the social capital required to understand and work comfortably alongside this elite.³⁶³

Singh shared the mannerisms and work habits of the foreign policy bureaucracy. Many of those I interviewed labeled Singh's approach to the job of prime minister "bureaucratic." One described his "respect" for bureaucrats.³⁶⁴ Known for his close attention to detail, he extensively read all files and briefings that were presented to him and chaired long meetings with officials until a

³⁵⁹ Shivshankar Menon, *Choices: Inside the Making of India's Foreign Policy* (Washington, D.C: Brookings Institution Press, 2016), 8.

³⁶⁰ K. Huju, "The Making and Unmaking of Cosmopolitan Elites: Hierarchy, Diversity, and Indian Diplomats in International Society" (Oxford, University of Oxford, 2020), chap. 5, <https://ora.ox.ac.uk/objects/uuid:549eeb4d-8da3-46a2-94c6-8165b97be723>.

³⁶¹ Dixit, *Indian Foreign Service*, 89–90.

³⁶² Huju, "The Making and Unmaking of Cosmopolitan Elites," 437.

³⁶³ Baru Sanjaya, *India's Power Elite* (India Viking, 2021), 46.

³⁶⁴ Interview 1.

consensus was reached.³⁶⁵ One official remarked that, unlike any other PM he had served under in eight years working in the PMO, Singh “meticulously noted down details of important issues on a notepad.”³⁶⁶ A senior Congress Party official said of Singh, “It takes a lot of time to convince him. I have to prepare the ground to make my arguments.”³⁶⁷

Political Strength: India’s Weakest Prime Minister

In May 2004, the Congress Party and its allies in the UPA secured enough seats in India’s lower house of parliament, the Lok Sabha, to form a government. Many had suspected that Sonia Gandhi, the Italian-born widow of former prime minister Rajiv Gandhi and Congress Party chief, would become prime minister herself. However, attacks on her foreign origin from Hindu nationalist right-wing party members led her to decline the post and name Manmohan Singh in her stead.³⁶⁸ Manmohan Singh’s lack of an electoral base made him a non-threat politically, and Gandhi likely envisioned a scenario in which she could control the reins of party politics while Singh governed competently. Sanjay Baru, Singh’s media adviser who later wrote a tell-all memoir, claims that Singh was “more accepting than another prime minister might have been of his limited power over his own partymen” because he knew that he, a technocrat by training, was not a natural fit for intensely political job of prime minister.³⁶⁹

At the start of UPA-1, Gandhi’s dominance behind the scenes was immediately evident. For this reason, L.K. Advani, a famous member of the Indian opposition, once famously referred to Manmohan Singh as the “weakest prime minister” India had ever seen, a moniker that followed him

³⁶⁵ Baru, *Accidental Prime Minister*, 34–35. Interview 1.

³⁶⁶ Jarnail Singh, *With Four Prime Ministers: My PMO Journey* (New Delhi: Konark Publishers, 2020), 260.

³⁶⁷ Sheela Bhatt, “Manmohan Singh Wasn’t a ‘Weak Pm’ – He Was a Shrewd Politician,” *The Indian Express*, January 4, 2025.

³⁶⁸ “Sonia Gandhi Declines Post as India’s Prime Minister,” PBS News, May 18, 2004, <https://www.pbs.org/newshour/show/sonia-gandhi-declines-post-as-indias-prime-minister>.

³⁶⁹ Baru, *Accidental Prime Minister*, 8.

well past the end of his prime ministership.³⁷⁰ When it came to the composition of the cabinet, Gandhi dispensed the ministerial posts, though she “consulted Dr Singh and close aides before finalizing the names.”³⁷¹ This added to the complications, since Singh’s counterparts on the cabinet were Congress party heavyweights like Pranab Mukherjee, Natwar Singh, and P. Chidambaram, each of whom likely privately harbors ambitions of one day becoming prime minister.³⁷² Pranab Mukherjee, who held various ministerial posts under Singh (external affairs, finance, and defense), had been a natural contender for the prime ministerial post in 2004, but was seen as too independent for Sonia Gandhi’s taste.³⁷³ According to Indrani Bagchi, a *Times of India* journalist who closely reported on foreign and defense affairs during UPA rule, the party leadership “exercised an enormous say in the decisions of the government...This created daylight between the prime minister and the party leadership, between the prime minister and the bureaucrats. They were always at pains to say that whatever the prime minister said was the goal [was the goal], but we could see that that was not always the case.”³⁷⁴

Throughout UPA-1, Singh’s authority remained hamstrung by the precarious of the Congress-led coalition built on the 2004 victory and the unrelenting behind-the-scenes power of Sonia Gandhi. In the 2009 elections, the UPA increased both its seat and vote shares. The result was a clear personal victory for Manmohan Singh, who became the first prime minister since 1962 to win reelection after completing a full five-year term.³⁷⁵ The victory placed a target on his back; Gandhi immediately went to work undermining the prime minister and allocating cabinet portfolios without

³⁷⁰ Bhatt, “Manmohan Singh Wasn’t a ‘Weak Pm’ – He Was a Shrewd Politician.”

³⁷¹ Baru, *Accidental Prime Minister*, 7.

³⁷² As Pranab Mukherjee notes in his memoir, he was the next obvious choice for prime minister after Sonia Gandhi. Pranab Mukherjee, *The Coalition Years 1996-2012* (Rupa Publications India, 2017), 71.

³⁷³ Baru, *Accidental Prime Minister*, 4.

³⁷⁴ Interview with Indrani Bagchi, New Delhi, December 2023.

³⁷⁵ Bagchi, “A Tale of Two Manmohan Singhs,” 134.

consulting the prime minister. “Bit by bit, in the space of a few weeks, he was defanged,” Baru writes.³⁷⁶ In July 2009, Manmohan Singh met with the new civilian leadership in Pakistan on the sidelines of the Fifteenth Summit of the Non-Aligned Movement in Sharm el-Sheikh. Their joint statement was attacked by the opposition BJP for suggesting that India had admitted to sponsoring terrorism

on Pakistani soil – something Pakistan had long sought to prove and which the Indian government consistently denied as baseless – and for decoupling terrorism from the dialogue process. For a week after the joint statement was signed and controversy had erupted, Congress Party representatives remained silent as rumors of Sonia Gandhi’s displeasure with Singh made headlines.³⁷⁷ According to Shivshankar Menon, then-foreign secretary, the media uproar that followed Sharm El-Sheikh was driven primarily by Indian domestic politics: the BJP wanted to deny success to a government which had just won reelection, while members of the ruling coalition “seemed to feel threatened by the media and other sections ascribing the UPA’s May 2009 election victory to Singh personally.”³⁷⁸ Abandoning Singh’s policy attempt at Sharm el-Sheikh was a way of eroding whatever independent authority the elections had provided him. It proved lasting. As his government became dogged by corruption scandals and Sonia’s son Rahul Gandhi emerged as the party’s heir apparent, it worsened.³⁷⁹ In the media, Singh was seen as a weak leader who was “clinging on to power in the face of humiliation” As columnist Rajdeep Sardesai put it, Singh’s

³⁷⁶ Baru, *Accidental Prime Minister*, 273.

³⁷⁷ “PM Faces Tough Political Test without Party Support,” *Mint*, July 29, 2009, <http://global.factiva.com/redir/default.aspx?P=sa&an=HNMINT0020090729e57t00004&cat=a&ep=ASE>; “Congress Backs PM on Indo-Pak Joint Statement,” India Today, July 27, 2009, <https://www.indiatoday.in/latest-headlines/story/congress-backs-pm-on-indo-pak-joint-statement-52943-2009-07-26>.

³⁷⁸ Menon, *Choices*, 76.

³⁷⁹ Gardiner Harris, “Indians Grow Impatient With Taciturn Premier Amid Troubles,” *The New York Times*, May 25, 2013, sec. World, <https://www.nytimes.com/2013/05/26/world/asia/india-grows-impatient-with-prime-minister-singh.html>.

“obsession with survival has come at a very heavy cost, not just to the credibility of the ruling arrangement, but to the prime minister’s own personal reputation.”³⁸⁰

As the remainder of the chapter will illustrate, vying for authority against Sonia Gandhi and his own ministers placed strict limitations on the amount of time and political resources Manmohan Singh could expend reshaping foreign policymaking. His consistent lack of control over the cabinet ministers leading the foreign policy bureaucracies hindered any decisions he may have wanted to pursue regarding the civil services. For example, he was reportedly reticent to constitute a high-level committee on the reform and modernization of the foreign service since he was never sure if his foreign ministers “would go along with the kind of reforms he may have had in mind.”³⁸¹

Manmohan Singh’s Organizational Strategy

Singh’s outlook towards the foreign policy establishment led to an organizational strategy towards the Indian career bureaucracy that broadly favored competency over loyalty and inclusion over exclusion. Unlike in the White House of the United States, an abrupt exit of all bureaucratic officers within the PMO is not a foregone conclusion; it depends on the personal prerogative of the PM and his staff. In Singh’s case, upon assuming office, he met with all PMO officers and asked that they continue in their positions until the completion of their tenures.³⁸²

Though an independently powerful Manmohan Singh would have likely selected a team of foreign policy advisers of the highest caliber, his reliance on the Congress party meant that any of his favored appointees could be vetoed by the party leadership.³⁸³ As a result, he had to contend

³⁸⁰ Rajdeep Sardesai, “Silence as a Curse,” *Hindustan Times*, May 2, 2013, <https://web.archive.org/web/20130504064728/https://www.hindustantimes.com/editorial-views-on/RajdeepSardesai/Silence-as-a-curse/Article1-1053942.aspx>.

³⁸¹ Baru, *Accidental Prime Minister*, 110.

³⁸² Singh, *With Four Prime Ministers: My PMO Journey*, 264–65.

³⁸³ For example, Manmohan Singh had favored his long-time personal friend Montek Singh Ahluwalia for the finance minister position, but Sonia Gandhi “ruled that out” and selected a Congress party elder instead. Ahluwalia became

with Cabinet ministers who openly contested his authority, such as Foreign Minister Natwar Singh, who saw Manmohan Singh as a “political greenhorn” and “novice in foreign affairs.”³⁸⁴ Singh also had to accommodate elites such as M.K. Narayanan, who eventually became National Security Adviser (NSA) after the sudden death of Dr. Singh’s first NSA, J.N. Dixit. Even before Dixit’s death, Sonia Gandhi had insisted upon finding a place for Narayanan within the government. This caused a bifurcation in the NSA role – Singh handed the remit of internal security to Narayanan, while Dixit handled all other matters.³⁸⁵ According to Sanjay Baru, the PM’s media adviser who wrote an explosive tell-all book on Manmohan Singh’s first government, Narayanan did an “elaborate namaste” in Sonia Gandhi’s direction at the Republic Day Parade the day after he became NSA.³⁸⁶ This explains why his “role in the PMO was not particularly appreciated by the Prime Minister himself,” as one journalist put it.³⁸⁷

The prime minister made efforts to assert his authority over foreign policy, determined as he was to “ensure that his writ would run at least in this sphere.”³⁸⁸ In general, Sonia and her loyalists largely left foreign policy matters to Singh, intervening only when party politics compelled them to do so.³⁸⁹ Still, Singh would recruit competent hands that were looked on favorably by the party leadership, even if it meant ruffling the feathers of career bureaucrats. Ruffled they were when he selected Shivshankar Menon as his second foreign secretary over many others who were ahead in the pecking order.³⁹⁰ Some of the 17 superseded candidates eventually went to court to contend the

deputy chairman of the planning commission and received cabinet rank. Neerja Chowdhury, *How Prime Ministers Decide* (New Delhi: Aleph Book Company, 2023), 455.

³⁸⁴ Baru, *Accidental Prime Minister*, 161.KES

³⁸⁵ Chowdhury, *How Prime Ministers Decide*, 459.

³⁸⁶ Baru, *Accidental Prime Minister*, 52–56.

³⁸⁷ Interview 2.

³⁸⁸ Baru, *Accidental Prime Minister*, 162.

³⁸⁹ Interview with Indrani Bagchi, New Delhi, December 2023.

³⁹⁰ “In Shiv Shankar Menon, the Best Person Has Won,” accessed June 18, 2024, <https://www.rediff.com/news/2006/sep/01tps.htm>.

appointment.³⁹¹ Yet Menon was not only a skilled diplomat with experience in sensitive posts; he also held a pedigree that was favored within the Indian Foreign Service and the Gandhi family.³⁹² His grandfather was India's first foreign secretary while his father and uncle had also held ambassador posts. They had served under Jawaharlal Nehru and his daughter Indira Gandhi, who was the mother of Rajiv Gandhi – Sonia Gandhi's deceased husband and the country's former prime minister.³⁹³ Singh also disregarded the bureaucratic hierarchy when appointing diplomat Shyam Saran as foreign secretary after the 2004 election, though Saran superseded only a handful of his colleagues.³⁹⁴ The priority Singh placed on the foreign secretary position was likely the consequence of his inability to select other key foreign policy posts – if he could have neither a pliant foreign minister nor an NSA of his choice, he would at least have a foreign secretary he could trust.

Getting the Deal Done: Negotiating with the United States

Major accounts of the origins of the nuclear deal place the initiative of the nuclear deal in the hands of the United States and particularly Condoleezza Rice, who was national security adviser and then secretary of state at this time.³⁹⁵ While it is true that George W. Bush and Secretary Rice were enthusiastic in their desire to bring the two countries closer, it is not entirely accurate that the United States conceived of civilian nuclear cooperation with India. Indian nuclear scientists were clamoring for fuel supplies for the Tarapur nuclear reactors, which were initially built with the help of the

³⁹¹ “Foreign Secretary’s Selection Illegal: IFS Officer Veena Sikri,” *The Times of India*, August 19, 2007, <https://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/india/foreign-secretarys-selection-illegal-ifs-officer-veena-sikri/articleshow/2291958.cms>.

³⁹² Interview with Sanjay Baru.

³⁹³ “Menon Is the Next NSA,” July 26, 2010, <https://web.archive.org/web/20100726224212/http://beta.thehindu.com/news/national/article84408.ece>.

³⁹⁴ “Shyam Saran to Be next Foreign Secretary,” *The Times of India*, June 10, 2004, <https://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/india/shyam-saran-to-be-next-foreign-secretary/articleshow/730103.cms>.

³⁹⁵ Dinshaw Mistry, *The US–India Nuclear Agreement: Diplomacy and Domestic Politics* (Cambridge ; New York: Cambridge University Press, 2014), 10.

Americans in the 1960s. When India conducted a peaceful nuclear explosion in 1974, the United States cut off fuel supplies for Tarapur.³⁹⁶ Since then, the nonproliferation regime built by the United States and its allies had prevented India from legitimately engaging in civil nuclear commerce. When Russia would ship fuel supplies to India for the Tarapur power station the United States nonproliferation lobby would cause an international commotion.³⁹⁷ The previous BJP government led by Prime Minister Atal Bihari Vajpayee put the prospects for civil nuclear cooperation on the radar of the Clinton and Bush administrations. In 2003 at the Council of Foreign Relations in New York, Brajesh Mishra, Vajpayee's trusted righthand man and national security adviser, was the first to suggest what would be the crux of the Indo-U.S. nuclear deal: the United States should amend its nonproliferation laws to accommodate India while India should place some portion of Indian nuclear reactors under safeguards.³⁹⁸

When Manmohan Singh became prime minister, the expectation in the Indian bureaucracy and in Washington was that the tilt to the United States would end as a large coalition of left-leaning parties that had historically been critical of the West came to power.³⁹⁹ But Manmohan Singh was personally committed to a mutually beneficial agreement that would yield diplomatic and economic dividends for India. Bagchi argues that the Indo-U.S. nuclear deal arose from “Manmohan Singh’s personal vision.” She recalled a moment when, on board the prime minister’s plane back from Washington, D.C. after signing the initial pledge to negotiate the deal in 2005, Singh proclaimed “the nuclear deal will be to India what the 1991 economic reforms were for the Indian economy.”⁴⁰⁰ In

³⁹⁶ C. Raja Mohan, *Impossible Allies: Nuclear India, United States and the Global Order* (New Delhi: Indian Research Press, 2006), 3.

³⁹⁷ Bureau of Public Affairs Department Of State. The Office of Electronic Information, “Russian Shipment of Low Enriched Uranium Fuel to India” (Department Of State. The Office of Electronic Information, Bureau of Public Affairs.), accessed June 25, 2024, <https://2001-2009.state.gov/r/pa/prs/ps/2001/592.htm>.

³⁹⁸ Mohan, *Impossible Allies: Nuclear India, United States and the Global Order*, 25.

³⁹⁹ Mohan, 38–39.

⁴⁰⁰ Bagchi, “A Tale of Two Manmohan Singhs,” 133.

part masterminded by Dr. Singh himself as finance minister, the reforms of 1991 opened up India's economy after decades of socialist policies. Scholars today see these reforms as responsible for the Indian economy's transformation into one of the largest and fastest growing in the world.⁴⁰¹ The enduring dividends of an agreement with the United States would certainly be diplomatic and symbolic, but Dr. Singh saw it as a way to bring an end to India's dependence on imported energy. According to Shyam Saran, "[Singh] was very much in favor of this deal because he did feel that this would be a game changer for India, not only in terms of opening up the diplomatic space for India, but also in terms of giving a fillip to energy security through further expansion of nuclear energy."⁴⁰² At the G-8 summit at Gleneagles, Singh would promote nuclear energy as a clean solution to India's energy woes.⁴⁰³ He also expressed concern to Bush about rising oil prices told Bush in New York at the sidelines of the United Nations General Assembly in September 2004, mere weeks after becoming prime minister.⁴⁰⁴ "The quest for energy security is second only in our scheme of things to food security," Singh stated in an interview in 2004 ahead of a summit with European leaders.⁴⁰⁵

From the deal's inception, vocal opponents from within and outside of the government assaulted the idea of civil nuclear energy cooperation with the United States. The opposition BJP were privately bitter that the Manmohan Singh government had been able to conclude their work of accelerating strategic cooperation with the United States and begin working towards a nuclear deal.⁴⁰⁶ The Left parties and the Congress party establishment were skeptical as

⁴⁰¹ Swaminathan S. Anklesaria Aiyar, "Twenty-Five Years of Indian Economic Reform," Policy Analysis (Cato Institute, October 26, 2016), <https://www.cato.org/policy-analysis/twenty-five-years-indian-economic-reform>.

⁴⁰² Interview with Shyam Saran, New Delhi, January 2024.

⁴⁰³ Mohan, *Impossible Allies: Nuclear India, United States and the Global Order*, 136.

⁴⁰⁴ Chowdhury, *How Prime Ministers Decide*, 411.

⁴⁰⁵ "Prime Minister Dr. Manmohan Singh's Interview with Financial Times," Ministry of External Affairs, Government of India, November 5, 2004, <https://mea.gov.in/interviews.htm?dtl/4554/prime+minister+dr+manmohan+singhs+interview+with+financial+time+s>.

⁴⁰⁶ Mohan, *Impossible Allies: Nuclear India, United States and the Global Order*, 44.

well, including Sonia Gandhi and other senior party leaders who were not convinced that the Indian public would accept such closeness with the United States.⁴⁰⁷ Beyond the electoral dynamics, the most powerful opposition to the deal emanated from the Indian foreign policy bureaucracy – specifically the Department of Atomic Energy (DAE) and some corridors of the MEA.

The DAE's reluctance was the natural result of the decades-long U.S. policy of castigating India over its nuclear program and denying India of crucial dual-use technologies. With this long shadow of U.S. interference in India's nuclear program, the nuclear bureaucracy was suspicious that the deal was an American plot to impose restrictions on the work of Indian nuclear scientists. Those aligned with the nuclear establishment did not believe the United States had anything to offer India except for fuel supply. One nuclear engineer and chairman of the Atomic Energy Regulatory Board, A. Gopalakrishnan, wrote, "the U.S. has no worthwhile expertise in the design, construction, operation, maintenance, or safety of any type of reactors existing or envisaged in the Indian nuclear power program."⁴⁰⁸ He admitted that American cooperation of fuel supplies would be helpful but argued that efforts to bring this about would result in loss of "self-respect and sovereignty in nuclear issues which their predecessors painfully built-up and preserved."⁴⁰⁹ After decades of putting Indian in the nuclear doghouse, the nuclear bureaucracy could not fathom that the United States would disturb the international nonproliferation regime or their own laws to *help* India. The DAE also had its suspicions about Manmohan Singh, who had a reputation as a dove who opposed potential nuclear testing in 1995 and cut the department's budget as finance minister.⁴¹⁰ They had also been burned once before by the Americans over Tarapur. According to Saran, "it was a difficult task for

⁴⁰⁷ Chowdhury, *How Prime Ministers Decide*, 422–23.

⁴⁰⁸ Quoted in Mohan, *Impossible Allies: Nuclear India, United States and the Global Order*, 138–39.

⁴⁰⁹ Mohan, 142.

⁴¹⁰ Baru, *Accidental Prime Minister*, 211.

us as bureaucrats but also the Prime Minister himself to try and convince say the Department of Atomic Energy, that as far as their key interests are concerned, especially the strategic program, this would not in any way be impacted by what we would negotiate.”⁴¹¹

In the MEA and elsewhere in the Indian bureaucracy, the contingent opposed to the deal objected on grounds that were more ideological than technical. The United States had not been a reliable partner to India in the past. Many feared that “India would be sacrificing its sovereignty and letting American imperialism in the back door,” per one foreign service officer serving in the MEA at the time.⁴¹² India’s enduring foreign policy doctrine of non-alignment would be in tatters. Bagchi recalls that the old guard of the MEA was full of “nonproliferation ayatollahs who thought the nuclear deal was the biggest betrayal ever.”⁴¹³ According to the Atomic Energy Commission (AEC) Chairman and the Secretary of the DAE Anil Kakodkar, information from the DAE’s sympathizers in the MEA allowed him to get ahead of what the prime minister and the negotiators were up to. “Through them I would also receive the next day’s news in advance,” he recalls in his memoir.⁴¹⁴

These opponents were not shy with the media nor unaware of how to weaponize the domestic politics surrounding the deal. As Basrur argues, the atomic energy establishment was able to wield “inordinate power” over the deal by “enter[ing] into an informal with the Left Front and an influential section of the media to put enormous pressure on the government to ensure that its concerns were given due attention.”⁴¹⁵ *The Hindu*, a leading English-language newspaper, released critical commentary featuring the perspective of the nuclear establishment throughout every stage of

⁴¹¹ Interview with Shyam Saran, New Delhi, January 2024.

⁴¹² Interview 3.

⁴¹³ Interview with Indrani Bagchi, New Delhi, December 2023.

⁴¹⁴ Anil Kakodkar and Suresh Gangotra, *Fire and Fury: Transforming India’s Strategic Identity* (Rupa Publications India, 2019), 108.

⁴¹⁵ Basrur, *Subcontinental Drift*, 64.

the nuclear agreement. The newspaper connected the DAE and the political Left, since *The Hindu*'s editor-in-chief and the head of Communist Party of India (Marxist) (CPI(M)) had both been active in the socialist-leaning Students' Federation of India as university students.⁴¹⁶ The CPI(M), though a coalition partner of the Singh-led UPA government, opposed a partnership with the United States on ideological grounds and fought the deal in the political arena from start to finish. *The Hindu* provided an outlet for the DAE to air its concerns, which therefore fueled the CPI(M)'s accusations that India was bowing to the Washington's neocolonial plot.

How did the Manmohan Singh government manage to achieve an overhaul of the U.S. nonproliferation regime and India's traditional foreign policy principles in the face of such vociferous opposition? He did not enforce his will upon them. Rather, Singh's deep-seated confidence in the expertise and competence of the Indian foreign policy bureaucracy compelled him to accommodate the deal's detractors even if it meant bad publicity. Suhaisini Haidar, a journalist reporting on foreign affairs at the time, stressed that Singh was "fully aware of what positions the nuclear establishment was taking" but "allowed all of them to air their views publicly in source-based stuff to the media...and I think it was allowed so that everyone felt like they had said the thing they wanted to."⁴¹⁷ Singh calculated that leaks to the media could not be prevented given the sensitivity of the prospects of civil nuclear cooperation with the United States but could be *tolerated* as long as it ushered in a consensus within the government. "That was something the prime minister was very clear about – whatever you go with to negotiate with the Americans, there should not be any kind of difference on our side," recalled Shyam Saran. Singh's approach was patient, he says. "Even if it was

⁴¹⁶ Basrur, 64.

⁴¹⁷ Interview with Suhaisini Haidar, New Delhi, December 2023.

delaying matters, even if we ended up with not quite the ideal situation that was okay as long as all the stakeholders were on board.”⁴¹⁸

By reaching out to and including all the deal’s loudest internal critics in discussions, he could persuade them that their concerns were going to be accommodated. “Kakodkar was in every discussion. He sat in on every negotiation. That made it easier for [the nuclear bureaucracy] to sell [the deal] to their people,” Bagchi recounted.⁴¹⁹ Once elites like Kakodkar were supportive of the deal, the rest of the nuclear bureaucracy would fall in line. If he instead excluded them, “the agreement was dead because they would go public. Or even if they didn’t go public, people would sense that there was a divide. And then the nationalist forces that didn’t want the agreement would be galvanized.”⁴²⁰

Three key moments during this period illustrate Singh’s strategy clearly: the first was the meeting on July 17th, 2005 between the prime minister and the rest of the Indian delegation at the Blair House in Washington to discuss the text of the joint statement announcing the agreement; the second was formation of an apex committee to serve as interlocutor between the MEA and the DAE; and the third was the concluding negotiations between the United States and India over the 123 Agreement.

Negotiating the Joint Statement

The groundwork had been laid for a deal on nuclear cooperation since Singh entered office in September 2004. This included a visit from Condoleezza Rice to New Delhi in which Rice “conveyed in unambiguous terms” Bush’s seriousness about pursuing a deal for civil nuclear

⁴¹⁸ Interview with Shyam Saran, New Delhi, January 2024.

⁴¹⁹ Interview with Indrani Bagchi, New Delhi, December 2023.

⁴²⁰ Interview 11, Washington, D.C., May 2025.

commerce with India.⁴²¹ Numerous members of the Indian bureaucracy had been involved in talks with the U.S. officials, including External Affairs Minister Natwar Singh and NSA M.K. Narayanan, but the primary interlocutor was Foreign Secretary Shyam Saran. Rice's aid Philip Zelikow told Saran that he wanted the secretary to act as a "secure and confidential channel" between Bush and Singh prior to the July 2005 prime ministerial visit to Washington, where the agreement would be launched publicly.⁴²² Having engaged with U.S. officials to draft the portion of the joint statement devoted to civil nuclear cooperation over the next several months, Saran went ahead of the PM's delegation by a few days to finalize the text. When Singh's full delegation arrived on July 17th, it included Saran, Narayanan, Natwar Singh, and Montek Singh Ahluwalia.⁴²³ To represent the nuclear establishment's views, Anil Kakodkar was asked to join the delegation just prior to prime minister's departure.⁴²⁴

That evening Singh held a meeting among the delegation about the negotiated text of the joint statement that lasted nearly three hours. The meeting, according to a PMO official who attended it, was a "bloodbath" because "the Indian side was split right down the middle on the way forward."⁴²⁵ According to Saran, Narayanan and Kakodkar were opposed to the drafted text, concerned that the current formulation would eventually restrict India's strategic autonomy. One deeply held hesitation was with respect to placing nuclear reactors under IAEA safeguards. They wanted to guarantee that *India* would select which reactors it would place under safeguards and they did not want to commit to placing all their reactors under safeguards in one shot. Rather, they wanted to gradually implement the safeguards over multiple phases to ensure they were satisfied with the arrangements.⁴²⁶ "Our arguments that the nuclear deal would serve to bring India into the

⁴²¹ Saran, *How India Sees the World*, 176.

⁴²² Saran, 177.

⁴²³ Interview 4, New Delhi, December 2023.

⁴²⁴ Kakodkar and Gangotra, *Fire and Fury*, 98.

⁴²⁵ Interview with Venkatesh Varma, New Delhi, December 2023. Varma was a director in the PMO at the time.

⁴²⁶ Mohan, *Impossible Allies: Nuclear India, United States and the Global Order*, 156.

nuclear mainstream, lead to the dismantling of the technology-denial regime operating against us and make for a significant diplomatic gain were not sufficient to dispel the serious reservations among some of the senior delegation members,” he later wrote.⁴²⁷

As was his wont, Manmohan Singh opted to go no further without a consensus on the joint statement. According to an attendee, “I think he didn’t want to intervene on the technicalities of the debate...But he was very clear on what his role was, which is: does the deal reflect a consensus within the government? He sensed it did not.” The next day Rice appealed to the Indian delegation to give the deal another chance, emphasizing that she had been authorized to accommodate India’s demands as much as possible. Singh asked Anil Kakodkar to write down changes he wanted to see in the drafted text. “It was only when Kakodkar said he was satisfied with the changes that the prime minister gave the go-ahead,” recalled Saran.⁴²⁸

The finalization of the joint statement represented a win for those in the Indian foreign policy bureaucracy who favored a more pragmatic approach to international politics. Since the May 1998 nuclear tests, some of the country’s top diplomats had been rewriting the Indian script on nuclear issues, replacing language lambasting injustice of the nuclear order with rhetoric emphasizing India’s track record as a “responsible” nuclear power.⁴²⁹ After decades of restrictions imposed by the international nuclear order led by the United States, India had the potential to become – at least in the eyes of its leader – a “responsible state with advanced nuclear technology” with the “same benefits and advantages as other such states.”⁴³⁰ In exchange for this recognition as well as “full civil nuclear energy cooperation trade with India,” which included fuel supplies for the Tarapur reactors,

⁴²⁷ Saran, *How India Sees the World*, 182.

⁴²⁸ Saran, 184.

⁴²⁹ Mohan, *Impossible Allies: Nuclear India, United States and the Global Order*, 224–26.

⁴³⁰ Mohan, 154.

India committed to what would be an object of intense negotiations over the next year: identifying and separating its civilian and military nuclear facilities and programs. This would prove to be the most contentious aspect of the deal for the nuclear bureaucracy, which had always resisted the notion of separating its facilities and programs.⁴³¹

The inclusive, consensus-based approach to decisionmaking had been successful for Manmohan Singh in Washington. Giving Kakodkar a seat at the table and such a substantial role in the negotiations ensured that the DAE and its affiliated agencies were temporarily on board with the deal, which would turn out to be important once the news broke in India and the backlash to the deal began pouring in. Kakodkar even gave an interview contradicting the concerns of the opposition and others in the nuclear establishment in August 2005.⁴³² The joint statement reaffirmed that India alone would alone select which facilities it would like to place under safeguards, that those safeguards would be negotiated between India and the IAEA, and that the safeguards would be applied in phases rather than all at once.⁴³³ The next phase of the nuclear deal – negotiating a plan for the separation of India’s nuclear facilities that would gain the approval of the United States, the Indian public, and the international community – would once again threaten to eliminate the nuclear bureaucracy’s support and undo India’s opportunity to escape from the nuclear netherworld.

From Vision to Reality: August 2005 to May 2006

From August 2005 to May 2006, Manmohan Singh faced the challenge of reconciling two opposing perspectives on the nuclear agreement. One view, held predominantly by those in the MEA and the PMO, saw the nuclear agreement as India’s big opportunity to become recognized as

⁴³¹ Mohan, 155.

⁴³² T. S. Subramanian, “Identifying a Civilian Nuclear Facility Is India’s Decision,” *The Hindu*, August 12, 2005, sec. NEWS.

⁴³³ Saran, *How India Sees the World*, 184.

a nuclear weapons state and legitimately engage in international nuclear commerce. On the other hand, those in the DAE and its affiliated agencies perceived the agreement as a way to gain much-needed nuclear fuel supplies for their reactors. These differences meant the two sides could not see eye to eye on which nuclear power reactors to place under international safeguards. The MEA-PMO view favored placing many reactors on the civilian list (and therefore under safeguards) to showcase their good faith commitment to nonproliferation and to put India in a position to engage in global nuclear trade. This view was exemplified by Shyam Saran in a speech at the Institute for Defence Studies and Analyses (IDSA) in fall 2005:

The objective of the agreement is to advance India's energy security through full civilian nuclear energy cooperation. It is legitimate for our partners to expect that such cooperation will not provide any advantage to our strategic programme and hence the need to separate it from our civilian nuclear sector. But *it makes no sense for India to deliberately keep some of its civilian facilities out of its declaration for safeguards purposes, if it is really interested in obtaining international cooperation on as wide a scale as possible.* This would be quite illogical.⁴³⁴

In contrast, the DAE view favored placing few reactors on the civilian list – only those which it could not fuel with its limited fuel supplies.⁴³⁵

This led to friction between the two bureaucratic factions, who were struggling for control over the direction of the deal. Singh asked Shyam Saran to continue to negotiate with the Americans over the contents of the separation plan. This was a poor outcome in the eyes of the DAE, who saw NSA Narayanan as the proper negotiator. Narayanan himself saw the nuclear domain as “his exclusive domain” and was unhappy with Singh’s choice to put Saran in the

⁴³⁴ Saran, 368. Emphasis my own.

⁴³⁵ Mistry, *The US-India Nuclear Agreement*, 82–83.

negotiator position to begin with.⁴³⁶ According to Venkatesh Varma, an Indian diplomat who was in the PMO in a mid-level position at the time, late 2005 saw “complete chaos on the Indian side, with the [MEA] proceeding independently on its own, while the DAE had difficulties agreeing to the former’s approach.”⁴³⁷ Saran’s speech at IDSA was not received well by the atomic energy bureaucracy, who saw it as evidence that the MEA was prepared to bow to the Americans. Dismayed, the DAE complained to the PMO about such public statements being made without the consent of or collaboration with the DAE.⁴³⁸ M.R. Srinivasan, a member of the AEC, publicly expressed concerns over Saran’s IDSA speech and the notion that the foreign secretary was speaking for the government on technical nuclear issues. “At least, it is my impression that [Saran] did not consult with [Kakodkar] before he made his speech at the IDSA. I am troubled that such an important issue has been dealt with in this manner by the Foreign Secretary. I will, therefore, once again stress the necessity for ensuring that senior technical experts available to the Government of India are fully involved before such policy decisions are taken,” he said.⁴³⁹

Manmohan Singh’s solution was to set-up an apex committee to resolve the differences between the MEA-led negotiating team and key members of the atomic and national security bureaucracy. Chaired by Narayanan, the committee included representatives from the MEA, the military, the PMO, and the atomic energy bureaucracy. On the nuclear side, both Kakodkar and Principal Scientific Adviser R. Chidambaram, a nuclear physicist who played a role in developing

⁴³⁶ Saran, *How India Sees the World*, 179.

⁴³⁷ Venkatesh D.B. Varma, “A Scientist and a Diplomat,” in *India Rising: Memoir of a Scientist*, by R. Chidambaram and Suresh Gangotra, Kindle (Gurugram: Penguin Random House India, 2023), 205.

⁴³⁸ Interview 4.

⁴³⁹ Chaitanya Ravi, “Nuclear Partition: The Debate over India’s Nuclear Separation Plan and the Fast Breeder Reactor,” in *A Debate to Remember: The US-India Nuclear Deal*, ed. Chaitanya Ravi (Oxford University Press, 2018), 70, <https://doi.org/10.1093/oso/9780199481705.003.0002>.

India's nuclear weapons program, were present.⁴⁴⁰ Its core function would be to give the DAE a direct line to the PMO to explicate its problems with the technical details that were being negotiated as part of the nuclear deal. As one person aware of the motivation for the committee formation put it, "the DAE was given a platform to say, explain to us what your problem is?"⁴⁴¹ The committee would hold discussions among its members and decide what they could tolerate in an agreement with the Americans. The national security adviser became the interlocutor, relaying the negotiating brief the committee had decided on to Saran and the negotiating team. Per Saran, his input on the brief was limited. "Irrespective of whatever my views would have been as to what position we should take, I was usually given a negotiating brief that we cannot go beyond this, or we must stick to this."⁴⁴² Saran was dissatisfied with his position with this process, writing later "[i]t often turned out that I was negotiating with [U.S. Under Secretary of State Nicholas] Burns on one side and the PMO on the other."⁴⁴³ He had limited insight into the thought that went into the negotiating brief, often left in the dark about how they reached their decisions.⁴⁴⁴ The institution of the apex committee had tilted the bureaucratic struggle in the favor of the nuclear bureaucracy.

The result of this process was strained negotiations between the U.S. and Indian negotiators that nearly delivered a death knell to the agreement. Unlike in most other countries, India's nuclear reactors and facilities served both military and civilian (energy) purposes. Fissile material produced by India's nuclear facilities served both civilian and weapons purposes as determined by the DAE.⁴⁴⁵ The exact quantity of fissile material required to grant India operational

⁴⁴⁰ Members of the apex committee included Anil Kakodkar, Chairman, AEC; R. Chidambaram, the PSA; T.K. Nair, Principal Secretary to the PM; Admiral Arun Prakash, Chief of Staff Committee; Sujata Mehta, Joint Secretary, PMO. Varma, "A Scientist and a Diplomat," 203.

⁴⁴¹ Interview with Venkatesh Varma, New Delhi, December 2023.

⁴⁴² Interview with Shyam Saran, New Delhi, January 2024.

⁴⁴³ Saran, *How India Sees the World*, 184.

⁴⁴⁴ Interview 10.

⁴⁴⁵ See discussion in Mohan 232-235.

flexibility in its nuclear weapons program was undoubtedly a cause for much internal debate in the apex committee and the PMO, though for obvious reasons the details of those discussions remain highly classified. Certainly, it was a subject of public debate, with former Prime Minister Vajpayee arguing that any separation of civilian and military facilities would be “very difficult, if not impossible” and would “deny us any flexibility in determining the size of our nuclear deterrent.”⁴⁴⁶

In the initial proposal from the negotiating team in December 2005, India offered to place 10 reactors – less than half of its 22 total reactors – on the civilian list.⁴⁴⁷ Circulating among U.S. government officials and select members of the U.S. Congress, the draft plan received ample public and private scrutiny from non-proliferation adherents. Some officials saw it as “insulting”⁴⁴⁸ while others attacked it as “not defensible or credible.”⁴⁴⁹ One U.S. government official at the time felt that “parts of the bureaucracy [in India] knew it was unworkable... But they set up India essentially for a negotiation and they were going to engage in a scorched earth policy on what they would give up.”⁴⁵⁰ In a draft plan that Washington had sent to New Delhi in September 2005, the United States had located nearly all of India’s reactors on the civilian list. They may have reasoned that given the amount of weapons-grade uranium and plutonium India already had produced and stockpiled, there would be no need for an abundance of reactors outside of safeguards.⁴⁵¹ Many in New Delhi thought that the Americans were privately targeting between 16 and 18 reactors.⁴⁵² After the third

⁴⁴⁶ Zia Mian and M.V. Ramanna, “Wrong Ends, Means, and Needs: Behind the U.S. Nuclear Deal With India,” *Arms Control Today* 36, no. 1 (January 1, 2006).

⁴⁴⁷ This number included four reactors that were built with external assistance and therefore were already under international safeguards and two reactors being constructed with Russian cooperation. Mistry, *The US-India Nuclear Agreement*, 69; Raja C. Mohan, “Fast Breeding Reactionaries,” *The Indian Express*, January 23, 2006, <https://indianexpress.com/article/news-archive/fast-breeding-reactionaries/>.

⁴⁴⁸ Mohan, “Fast Breeding Reactionaries.”

⁴⁴⁹ Siddharth Varadarajan, “Make the Indo-U.S. Nuclear Deal More Transparent,” *The Hindu*, January 19, 2006.

⁴⁵⁰ Interview 11, Washington, D.C., May 2025.

⁴⁵¹ “India Defends Nuclear Deal with US,” *Hindustan Times*, December 22, 2005.

⁴⁵² Mistry, *The US-India Nuclear Agreement*, 69.

round of talks in late January 2006 saw no progress, it seemed unlikely that the two sides would resolve their disagreements before Bush's visit to India in early March. In a press conference, U.S. negotiator Nicholas Burns acknowledged there were "still further ways to go. We both sides realize that we have our work cut out for the next several weeks ... And we'll have to see if we can be successful. I hope we can."⁴⁵³

A second and related issue that threatened to unravel the nuclear deal was the question of India's prototype fast breeder reactors (PFBR), in particular the one under construction at Kalpakkam near Chennai. Since breeder reactors generate more fissile material than they consume while generating nuclear energy, the question of whether the fissile supplies produced by India's current and future PFBRs would be safeguarded was a critical one for both the United States and India.⁴⁵⁴ The atomic energy bureaucracy also viewed the nascent breeder technology as a way to transition the country away from reliance on the indigenously scarce uranium to its plentiful reserves of thorium.⁴⁵⁵ There had been early speculation that the U.S. side would pressure India to classify the PFBR as civilian. When asked whether the PFBR would be placed under safeguards in an interview in August 2005, Kakodkar dismissed the notion. "The PFBR is a proto-type. Why should it go under safeguards? When technology becomes mature, it is a different story."⁴⁵⁶ In January 2006, the United States formally asked India to place the under-construction breeder reactor under international safeguards.⁴⁵⁷ DAE scientists did not hold back in voicing their concerns to the media. In the left-leaning newspaper *The Hindu*, nuclear scientists speaking anonymously voiced concerns that "IAEA

⁴⁵³ Amit Baruah, "Deal Unlikely during Bush Visit, Says Nicholas Burns," *The Hindu*, January 21, 2006, Factiva.

⁴⁵⁴ "How a Breeder Reactor Works," New York Times, accessed July 15, 2024, https://archive.nytimes.com/www.nytimes.com/interactive/2011/06/18/world/asia/JAPAN_NUCLEAR.html?_r=0.

⁴⁵⁵ Ravi, "Nuclear Partition," 56.

⁴⁵⁶ Subramanian, "Identifying a Civilian Nuclear Facility Is India's Decision."

⁴⁵⁷ Mistry, *The US-India Nuclear Agreement*, 70.

inspections will seriously compromise the quality and scope of ongoing research” of the breeder program.⁴⁵⁸

The question of the separation plan was unresolved heading into February 2006 after three failed rounds of talks. Crucially, the DAE’s insistence on placing the breeder outside of safeguards had the added effect of shortening the overall number of reactors on the civilian list. This is because the DAE insisted on the need for several reactors to fuel the breeder and those reactors would also have to remain unsafeguarded.⁴⁵⁹ The DAE also rejected a U.S. offer to keep the breeder outside safeguards for seven years so they can further develop the technology without inspections.⁴⁶⁰ With the deadline of Bush’s visit to India at the start of March looming, the media campaign against the DAE became animated and divisive. Supporters of the nuclear deal – the majority of Indian strategic analysts – were calling upon Manmohan Singh to intervene decisively to ensure the DAE did not spoil the deal with its “rather meager and hardly credible” civilian list.⁴⁶¹ Simultaneously, there were many reports, some with anonymous “official” sources, that were accusing the DAE of being obstructionist for refusing to place the breeder program under safeguards.⁴⁶² One individual who was close to the nuclear bureaucracy at this time stressed that it was the “concerted press campaign to isolate and corner the DAE” which caused Kakodkar to go public with his concerns about the negotiations in an interview to *The Indian Express* on February 6, 2006.⁴⁶³ The breeder program was the most prominent topic of the interview. Though numerous nuclear scientists had previously

⁴⁵⁸ “Indo-U.S. Nuclear Deal: Safeguards for Breeder Reactors a Key Obstacle,” *Siddharth Varadarajan* (blog), January 21, 2006, <https://svaradarajan.com/2006/01/21/indo-u-s-nuclear-deal-safeguards-for-breeder-reactors-a-key-obstacle/>.

⁴⁵⁹ Ravi, “Nuclear Partition,” 65.

⁴⁶⁰ Mistry, *The US-India Nuclear Agreement*, 70–71.

⁴⁶¹ Mohan, “Fast Breeding Reactionaries.”

⁴⁶² Varadarajan references the “smear campaign” that caused the DAE scientists to feel “bitter and aggrieved.” Siddharth Varadarajan, “Question Mark over Indo-U.S. Nuclear Deal,” *The Hindu*, February 7, 2006, Factiva.

⁴⁶³ Interview 4. Pallava Bagla, “The Fast Breeder Programme Just Cannot Be Put on the Civilian List,” *The Indian Express*, February 8, 2006.

highlighted concerns that the breeder program needed to be free of safeguards for research and development purposes and to protect India's indigenous intellectual property, Kakodkar chose to go further, framing the issue as one of Indian self-reliance, energy independence, and national security. The breeder program, he argued, would allow India's indigenously produced nuclear fuel to constitute a larger share of India's overall nuclear fuel resources than imported fuel. "Both from the point of view of maintaining long-term energy security and for maintaining the 'minimum credible deterrent', the Fast Breeder Programme just cannot be put on the civilian list. This would amount to getting shackled and India certainly cannot compromise one for the other," he said in no uncertain terms.⁴⁶⁴ Although Kakodkar chose not to elaborate at length regarding the national security rationale, his allusion to India's nuclear doctrine of credible minimum deterrence hinted that the atomic energy establishment was interested in harnessing fissile materials from the breeder program to expand the country's nuclear arsenal.⁴⁶⁵

After Kakodkar's public statement in defiance of the Manmohan Singh government, the prospects for a successful deal appeared slim. The strategic community in New Delhi faulted the ill-conceived self-importance of scientists within the nuclear establishment. As Manoj Joshi wrote, "Now when the government has come up with a deal that will enable India to join the global mainstream on nuclear research ... the scientists are resisting. The autarkic picture of the Indian nuclear power program spelt out by its chairman Anil Kakodkar in an interview recently is more in

⁴⁶⁴ Bagla.

⁴⁶⁵ Prominent South Asian nuclear scientists seemed to believe this explanation over the research autonomy or intellectual property explanations. Per one study, "at 80 percent capacity the PFBR could produce on the order of 135 kg of weapons grade plutonium every year ... This would amount to about 25–30 weapons worth of plutonium a year, a four- to fivefold increase over India's current weapons plutonium production capacity." Zia Mian et al., "Fissile Materials in South Asia and the Implications of the U.S.-India Nuclear Deal," *Science & Global Security* 14, no. 2–3 (December 2006): 133, <https://doi.org/10.1080/08929880600993022>.

keeping with the era of the closed Indian economy of the Seventies. Today, almost all cutting edge research in nuclear power...is being done through international, not national projects.”⁴⁶⁶

In the immediate aftermath of Kakodkar’s interview, which came at a time when the Left parties were castigating the government for bowing to U.S. pressure to vote at the United Nations against Iran, intra-bureaucratic tensions rose to a fever pitch. *The Times of India* reported one anonymous official declaring, “it’s now the rest of the government versus the DAE.”⁴⁶⁷ Kakodkar’s statements had resonated with others who had reservations about the deal, including eight retired Indian ambassadors who demanded that the details of the separation plan be made public.⁴⁶⁸ Despite the intense criticism being leveled at the government, Singh responded to Kakodkar in a measured fashion, summoning him to a meeting a few days after the interview, continuing to negotiate with the Americans, and preparing to make a statement in parliament at the end of February.⁴⁶⁹ To resolve the clear divisions within the government, Manmohan Singh enlisted a third party – cabinet secretary B.K. Chaturvedi – to mediate between Kakodkar and Saran, who represented the DAE and MEA views respectively.⁴⁷⁰

The following weeks saw internal debates and negotiations with the United States. As of February 22nd, a despondent Singh believed the deal would not go through.⁴⁷¹ A breakthrough appeared to occur when Burns visited India on February 23-24th for eleventh hour negotiations, when a gap of only “10%” existed between the Indian and U.S. positions and Singh described the

⁴⁶⁶ Manoj Joshi, “Firing Blanks,” *The Hindustan Times* (1924-), February 10, 2006, sec. The Edit Page.

⁴⁶⁷ Indrani Bagchi, “Atomic Energy Chief Muddies Waters on N-Deal,” *The Times of India*, February 7, 2006, <https://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/india/atomic-energy-chief-muddies-waters-on-n-deal/articleshow/1403393.cms>.

⁴⁶⁸ “Atomic Reaction: Nuclear Deal Only Part of Indo-US Entente,” *The Times of India*, February 9, 2006, sec. Editorial Opinion.

⁴⁶⁹ Bhaskar Roy, “PM Pulls up Kakodkar for Atomic Reaction,” *Times of India*, February 8, 2006, <https://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/india/pm-pulls-up-kakodkar-for-atomic-reaction/articleshow/1405394.cms>.

⁴⁷⁰ Ravi, “Nuclear Partition,” 87.

⁴⁷¹ Baru, *Accidental Prime Minister*, 214.

discussions as “fruitful.”⁴⁷² The Indian side had finally settled their intra-bureaucratic divisions and decided on a separation plan. Singh publicly said he expected U.S. side to accept just days before Bush’s March 2nd visit to New Delhi.⁴⁷³ The final civilian list would not place the fast breeder reactor and related facilities under safeguards. Singh publicly committed to this decision before parliament on February 27th, after which backtracking would have proven cost prohibitive politically.⁴⁷⁴ While the negotiations continued late into the night, the U.S. and Indian sides reached an agreement in which the nuclear energy bureaucracy achieved most of its goals: no breeder reactor under safeguards for a total of 14 total reactors under safeguards. They made a few compromises, agreeing to institute “perpetual safeguards” on all civilian reactors, to work towards the Fissile Material Cutoff Treaty (FMCT), and to place a voluntary moratorium on nuclear testing.⁴⁷⁵

One critical compromise that occurred late during the Bush visit was on the issue of fuel supplies for reactors. The U.S. delegation made the concession that India had the right to take “build fuel reserves to last the lifetime of each Indian civilian reactor and the right to take ‘corrective action’ in case of disruption of fuel supplies” – thus deflecting the criticism that India could wind up in another Tarapur-like situation in which the U.S. decides to restrict the nuclear fuel supplies and India ends up without the means necessary to fuel its power reactors.⁴⁷⁶ In other words, India would not accept permanent safeguards without a guarantee of nuclear fuel for the reactors in perpetuity.

⁴⁷² “India, US Inch Closer to N-Deal,” *The Times of India*, February 25, 2006, sec. Nation; Mistry, *The US-India Nuclear Agreement*, 68.

⁴⁷³ Indrani Bagchi, “PM Puts Ball in Bush’s Court: Terms N-Separation Plan Credible, Hopes US Will Accept It,” *The Times of India* (1861-), February 27, 2006, sec. Nation.

⁴⁷⁴ “FBR out of Safeguards List: PM,” *The Times of India*, February 28, 2006,
<https://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/india/fbr-out-of-safeguards-list-pm/articleshow/1431318.cms>.

⁴⁷⁵ Basrur, *Subcontinental Drift*, 64.

⁴⁷⁶ Saran, *How India Sees the World*, 188–89. Varma attributes credit for the “corrective measures” idea to R. Chidambaram and Kakodkar. Varma, “A Scientist and a Diplomat,” 206.

With these details ironed out, the government formally submitted to Parliament a separation plan of its nuclear facilities in May 2006.⁴⁷⁷

Concluding the Deal: May 2006 to August 2007

This 13-month period – from July 2005 to May 2006 – in which the technical terms of the quid pro quo agreement between the United States and India were in flux featured the most intense period of bureaucratic friction. Even after the separation plan went to parliament in May, the agreement was still far from settled. The Bush administration had to submit a bill to the U.S. Congress to authorize nuclear cooperation with India, which required several more rounds of negotiations with Indian policymakers. The ensuing legislative debate in the United States had ramifications for India’s domestic and bureaucratic politics, sparking outcry from the left, right, and nuclear scientists who had opposed the deal from the start.⁴⁷⁸ It also gave rise to similar intragovernmental divergences between the DAE and the MEA. Would the compromises and assurances the United States made in July 2005 and March 2006 continue to stand? Or would the United States find a way to change the goalposts in this legislation?

This debate was not settled until August 2007, when the Section 123 Agreement was signed into U.S. law.⁴⁷⁹ While there were numerous technical details to negotiate, the top issue was India’s insistence that it should be allowed to reprocess spent fuel from nuclear reactors. India’s nuclear

⁴⁷⁷ A.S. Bhasin, *Negotiating India’s Landmark Agreements* (Gurugram: Penguin Random House India, 2024), 250.

⁴⁷⁸ Mistry, *The US-India Nuclear Agreement*, 118–24.

⁴⁷⁹ The term “123 Agreement” refers to Section 123 of the U.S. Atomic Energy Act, which requires the conclusion of a peaceful nuclear cooperation agreement for significant transfers of nuclear material or equipment from the United States. “123 Agreements for Peaceful Cooperation,” U.S. Department of Energy, December 12, 2024, <https://www.energy.gov/nnsa/123-agreements-peaceful-cooperation>. For the text of the Agreement for Cooperation between the Government of the United States of America and the Government of India concerning peaceful uses of nuclear energy (123 Agreement), see “U.S. and India Release Text of 123 Agreement,” U.S. Department of State (Department Of State. The Office of Electronic Information, Bureau of Public Affairs., August 3, 2007), <https://2001-2009.state.gov/r/pa/prs/ps/2007/aug/90050.htm>.

program had three stages and required the reprocessing of spent fuel from its first-stage reactors to fuel the second-stage breeder reactors.⁴⁸⁰ However, the U.S. Atomic Energy Act prohibits the reprocessing of U.S.-origin fuel without prior approval.⁴⁸¹ India's anxieties could again be traced to its experience with the Tarapur reactor, which left India with "mountains of spent fuel" for which the United States never gave its consent for reprocessing.⁴⁸² Second, the U.S. draft agreement initially included a clause that the United States could terminate the agreement if India waived its unilateral moratorium on nuclear testing and detonated a nuclear device.⁴⁸³

As these details were negotiated, bureaucrats from within the nuclear establishment continued to interfere in the negotiations. "The media was being briefed by various parts of the bureaucratic establishment, in separate, often dissonant voices,"⁴⁸⁴ Baru notes that DAE officials during this time period "played their own games."⁴⁸⁵ On July 28, 2006, "senior Indian officials" speaking anonymously to *The Hindu* reported that the United States wanted to keep India from "meaningfully collaborating with non-nuclear weapons states that have already mastered the fuel cycle." They also brought the reprocessing issue to light, leaking that the White House's draft of the 123 Agreement did not contain any provisions to allow India the right to reprocess spent fuel. This report contradicted – and was likely motivated by – a July 14th question-and-answer session in which Shyam Saran reiterated that India would be free to reprocess the spent fuel from the safeguarded reactors.⁴⁸⁶ Similarly, when Burns traveled to Delhi for negotiations in June 2007, a senior official

⁴⁸⁰ Reprocessing refers generally to the processes used to separate spent nuclear reactor fuel into nuclear materials that may be recycled for use in new fuel and material that would be discarded as waste. "Reprocessing," U.S. Nuclear Regulatory Commission, May 15, 2023, <https://www.nrc.gov/materials/reprocessing.html>.

⁴⁸¹ Mistry, *The US-India Nuclear Agreement*, 136.

⁴⁸² Indrani Bagchi, "Menon Leaves for US to Break N-Deal Logjam," *The Times of India*, April 29, 2007, <http://global.factiva.com/redir/default.aspx?P=sa&an=TOI0000020070428e34t0000k&cat=a&ep=ASE>.

⁴⁸³ Mistry, *The US-India Nuclear Agreement*, 133.

⁴⁸⁴ Interview with Suhaisini Haidar, New Delhi, December 2023.

⁴⁸⁵ Baru, *Accidental Prime Minister*, 224.

⁴⁸⁶ Siddharth Varadarajan, "Questions Arise on Reprocessing Restrictions," *The Hindu*, July 28, 2006.

involved in the negotiations reported anonymously that "the U.S. side is simply unwilling to accept our right to reprocess", controveering Foreign Secretary Shivshankar Menon's claim that the talks were "intensive, productive, and constructive."⁴⁸⁷ An April 2007 report based on "extensive interaction with officials close to the [negotiating] process" proposed numerous ways that the United States was attempting to undermine or weaken previously negotiated terms and refusing to cooperate on the reprocessing issue. A quoted official even speculated that the United States broadcasting that an American concession on reprocessing was a "such a big deal" as a "psy-op" to get India to concede on other issues.⁴⁸⁸

To get the detractors on board, Manmohan Singh's continued to adopt an inclusive, consensus-building strategy. Kakodkar, who had likely been placated being brought into the fold as a key adviser, continued to be included in delegations traveling to Washington for negotiations, including a critical delegation in July 2007.⁴⁸⁹ It is also clear that the DAE continued to remain a highly influential actor in the negotiations. During February 2007 talks in Washington, Menon presented India's draft of the 123 Agreement to the U.S. negotiators drafted by DAE officials. The draft was seen in Washington as unworkable, noting that it was "authored by the skeptics in India's nuclear establishment who remained concerned about U.S. efforts to 'entrap' India and constrain its strategic program."⁴⁹⁰ The draft included controversial text about reprocessing and U.S. sanctions in case India were to test its nuclear weapons in the future.⁴⁹¹ Even as their top officials were setting the terms of the negotiations, DAE officials were leaking their displeasure to the press, with one

⁴⁸⁷ Siddharth Varadarajan, "Stalemate on Reprocessing Issue," *The Hindu*, June 3, 2007.

⁴⁸⁸ Siddharth Varadarajan, "India Feels U.S. Backsliding on Prior Commitments," *The Hindu*, April 25, 2007, <http://global.factiva.com/redir/default.aspx?P=sa&an=THINDU0020070424e34p0009j&cat=a&ep=ASE>.

⁴⁸⁹ Bhasin, *Negotiating India's Landmark Agreements*, 260.

⁴⁹⁰ The US Embassy, New Delhi, cable, March 13, 2007 quoted in Mistry, *The US-India Nuclear Agreement*, 133.

⁴⁹¹ "Time Is the Main Threat to Nuclear Deal," *Hindustan Times*, February 25, 2007,

<http://global.factiva.com/redir/default.aspx?P=sa&an=HINTM000020070226e32p000gr&cat=a&ep=ASE>.

official in the department's Strategic Planning Group lambasting cooperation with the United States in favor of Russia. "In stark contrast to long debates and wrangling on the Indo-US nuclear deal, the Russians have not curtailed India by hiding behind the fig leaf of non-proliferation or by making it contingent on India to align with Russian foreign policy," the official was quoted as saying just days ahead of the talks in Washington.⁴⁹² Of the eight publicized meetings between negotiating teams that occurred between January and July 2007, officials atomic energy establishment were present in the March 2007 (New Delhi)⁴⁹³, May 1 (Washington)⁴⁹⁴, June 1-2 (New Delhi)⁴⁹⁵, and July 17-20 (Washington)⁴⁹⁶ negotiations.

To deal with the remaining skeptics within the DAE and MEA, Singh's more hawkish advisers began briefing the media and other detractors on the developments of the negotiations to bring them on board.⁴⁹⁷ In August 2006, Singh, Kakodkar, Narayanan, and R. Chidambaram held a 90-minute meeting with eight senior retired nuclear scientists who had been outspoken in their resistance to the deal.⁴⁹⁸ After securing their support, Kakodkar and Narayanan continued to include them in decision-making, reassuring them on issues like the U.S. legislation authorizing the 123

⁴⁹² Indrani Bagchi, "N-Deal in Danger If Talks Don't Gather Pace," *The Times of India*, February 18, 2007, sec. India, <http://global.factiva.com/redir/default.aspx?P=sa&an=TOI0000020070217e32i00003&cat=a&ep=ASE>.

⁴⁹³ "India, US Narrow down Differences on Civil Nuclear Deal," *Organisation of Asia-Pacific News Agencies*, March 27, 2007, <http://global.factiva.com/redir/default.aspx?P=sa&an=OANA000020070327e33s001mi&cat=a&ep=ASE>.

⁴⁹⁴ Aziz Haniffa, "Why Nicholas Burns Put off India Visit," *Rediff*, May 23, 2007, <https://www.rediff.com/news/2007/may/23ndeal.htm>.

⁴⁹⁵ Siddharth Varadarajan, "Stalemate on Reprocessing Issue," *The Hindu*, June 3, 2007, sec. FRONT PAGE, <http://global.factiva.com/redir/default.aspx?P=sa&an=THINDU0020070602e36300007&cat=a&ep=ASE>.

⁴⁹⁶ Mistry, *The US-India Nuclear Agreement*, 131–32.

⁴⁹⁷ Pallava Bagla, "Implementation of Hyde Act Would Mean Shifting of Goalposts," *The Hindu*, January 17, 2007, sec. NEWS, <http://global.factiva.com/redir/default.aspx?P=sa&an=THINDU0020070116e31h00060&cat=a&ep=ASE>.

⁴⁹⁸ Rajeev Deshpande and Srinivas Laxman, "Scientists Aboard, Oppn to Lose Sting," *The Times of India*, August 27, 2006, <http://global.factiva.com/redir/default.aspx?P=sa&an=TOI0000020060826e28r00004&cat=a&ep=ASE>.

Agreement.⁴⁹⁹ Narayanan was also explicitly tasked with bringing the DAE establishment on board as they sought to slow-roll the negotiations.⁵⁰⁰

Despite the strategy adopted by Singh to get the DAE holdouts on board, there were signs that the negotiations were threatening to unravel. In April 2007, Nicholas Burns was quoted as saying "I don't question India's goodwill," Burns said. "But there is a fair degree of frustration in Washington that the Indian government has not engaged seriously enough or quickly enough with both the United States and the IAEA."⁵⁰¹ News reports emphasized U.S. impatience with India's "greedy" demands and cited the Bush administration's concerns over its ability to shepherd the 123 Agreement through Congress.⁵⁰² In May 2007, Burns and Menon met in Washington to reach a compromise on the key outstanding issues. The Indian delegation included a "senior AEC official who had the authority to give his stamp of approval if the language alleviated the scientific establishment's concerns." The U.S. team was pushing to leave the nuclear testing and reprocessing issues out of the agreement's text, but the Indian side rejected this compromise due to concerns from the atomic energy establishment, who saw that leaving the reprocessing issue open was not acceptable to the atomic energy establishment given their experience with a perceived U.S. betrayal at Tarapur..⁵⁰³ As one official said in late May, "We simply cannot take chances, given the US record on this issue, and we do need to nail it down because we cannot sell the deal internally otherwise."⁵⁰⁴

⁴⁹⁹ Javed Ansari, "'PM Will Consult All on N-Deal,'" *DNA - Daily News & Analysis*, December 16, 2006, sec. INDIA, <http://global.factiva.com/redir/default.aspx?P=sa&an=DNADAI0020070104e2cg0016l&cat=a&ep=ASE>.

⁵⁰⁰ Baru, *Accidental Prime Minister*, 224–25.

⁵⁰¹ Barbara Slavin, "India's List of Demands May Scuttle Nuclear Deal ; U.S. Had Hoped to Rein in Nation's Atomic Program," *USA Today*, April 12, 2007, sec. NEWS,

<http://global.factiva.com/redir/default.aspx?P=sa&an=USAT000020070412e34c0000d&cat=a&ep=ASE>.

⁵⁰² "US Hawks Slam 'Greedy' India over Nuclear Deal," *The Times of India*, April 13, 2007, <https://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/world/us/us-hawks-slam-greedy-india-over-nuclear-deal/articleshow/1900639.cms>; "Right to Reprocess Spent Fuel Major Snag," *Hindustan Times*, May 29, 2007, <http://global.factiva.com/redir/default.aspx?P=sa&an=HNTM000020070530e35t00038&cat=a&ep=ASE>.

⁵⁰³ Haniffa, "Why Nicholas Burns Put off India Visit."

⁵⁰⁴ "Right to Reprocess Spent Fuel Major Snag."

These issues were put to rest to India's satisfaction in July 2007 in Washington after four days of intense talks between the U.S. and Indian delegations, after which India's cabinet committees formally approved of the text of the 123 Agreement.⁵⁰⁵ In these final talks, India sent a large delegation to the talks which included Menon, Narayanan, Kakodkar, the DAE's director of strategic planning, and representatives from the MEA and PMO.⁵⁰⁶ The solution to the testing issue was that either party could terminate agreement, but it required that parties to consider the security-related circumstances that could possibly prevent termination (like testing by other countries).⁵⁰⁷ It also notably gave the United States the right to demand the return of its supply to India's nuclear fuel stockpile in the event of an Indian test, but only after significant consultations between the two sides that considered India's security considerations. To resolve the reprocessing issue, India offered to create a new reprocessing facility and to place it under IAEA safeguards.⁵⁰⁸ The Indian team appeared to be elated with these outcomes. *The Hindu*, the Indian newspaper which had published reports skeptical of the deal from the start, published an interview with Narayanan, who declared "this is as good a text as one can possibly get."⁵⁰⁹ Kakodkar called it a "a very good deal" that would

⁵⁰⁵ Bhasin, *Negotiating India's Landmark Agreements*, 260.

⁵⁰⁶ Mistry, *The US-India Nuclear Agreement*, 131–32.

⁵⁰⁷ Mistry, 133.

⁵⁰⁸ "US Says India's Offer to Commit New Facility Made a Difference," *The Press Trust of India Limited*, July 28, 2007, <http://global.factiva.com/redir/default.aspx?P=sa&an=PRTRIN0020070730e37s0000l&cat=a&ep=ASE>.

⁵⁰⁹ "Indo-US Nuclear Deal 'as Good a Text as One Can Possibly Get' - India Official," *BBC Monitoring South Asia*, July 28, 2007, <http://global.factiva.com/redir/default.aspx?P=sa&an=BBCSAP0020070728e37s004jx&cat=a&ep=ASE>.

not hinder India's nuclear program.⁵¹⁰ In the United States, the media questioned India's commitment to non-proliferation,⁵¹¹ non-testing,⁵¹² and ties with Iran.⁵¹³

With the 123 Agreement was finalized, there was still much left to be done for Indian policymakers; India still needed to gain various forms of approval from the Nuclear Suppliers Group (NSG), the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA), and the U.S. Congress. But the bureaucratic politics threatening the deal were resolved. What remained was for Sonia Gandhi, Pranab Mukherjee, and other Congress Party leaders to protect the deal from political gamesmanship by the Left Parties, which were part of the coalition government with the Congress, and the opposition BJP.⁵¹⁴

Talking to Pakistan

The slow-moving, consensus-building approach that Manmohan Singh adopted to attain the nuclear deal with the United States contrasts starkly with the secrecy with which he guarded the negotiations with Pakistan. The secrecy of the backchannel reflects the political sensitivity of the Kashmir issue within Indian domestic politics. Relations with Pakistan are highly salient to the Indian public because of its importance to Indian nationalism and relevance to the Hindu-Muslim cleavage that permeates Indian politics.⁵¹⁵ Perceived Pakistani support for terrorist attacks in

⁵¹⁰ PC, "Indian Officials Hail US Nuclear Accord," *Agence France Presse*, July 28, 2007, <http://global.factiva.com/redir/default.aspx?P=sa&an=AFPR000020070728e37s005hb&cat=a&ep=ASE>.

⁵¹¹ SOMINI SENGUPTA; David E. Sanger contributed reporting from Washington, "In Its Nuclear Deal With India, Washington Appears to Make More Concessions," *The New York Times*, July 28, 2007, sec. Foreign Desk; SECTA, <http://global.factiva.com/redir/default.aspx?P=sa&an=NYTF000020070728e37s00048&cat=a&ep=ASE>.

⁵¹² "India Retains 'Sovereign Right' to Explode Nuclear Device: US," *The Press Trust of India Limited*, August 4, 2007, <http://global.factiva.com/redir/default.aspx?P=sa&an=PTRIN0020070806e38400021&cat=a&ep=ASE>.

⁵¹³ Bret Stephens, "Bad Company; Before the U.S. Makes a Nuclear Deal with India, It Should Insist on an End to Ties with Iran.," *The Wall Street Journal (Online and Print)*, July 30, 2007, <http://global.factiva.com/redir/default.aspx?P=sa&an=WSJO000020100828e37v00dh4&cat=a&ep=ASE>.

⁵¹⁴ Basrur, *Subcontinental Drift*, 65–68.

⁵¹⁵ Vipin Narang and Paul Staniland, "Democratic Accountability and Foreign Security Policy: Theory and Evidence from India," *Security Studies* 27, no. 3 (July 3, 2018): 428, <https://doi.org/10.1080/09636412.2017.1416818>.

disputed state of Jammu and Kashmir and throughout India during the time rendered discussions over cross-border trade and movement extraordinarily difficult for hardline elites within the government and opposition to stomach. Shyam Saran confirmed to this author that compared to the nuclear deal, the issues of territory, security, and sovereignty under discussion were “far more sensitive” in Indian politics.⁵¹⁶ “They were not similar kind of negotiations at all,” he said.

If news of a tentative deal reached the public, a negative reaction among the opposition parties and Singh’s own coalition members would surely have spelled an ignominious end for the deal. Fear of this prospect was worsened by two issues. The first was the longstanding opposition to India-Pakistan rapprochement within the permanent bureaucracy, including the MEA. “The Indian bureaucracy, like the general public, did not favor a rapprochement because of repeated terror attacks that made any Indian outreach seem like a sign of weakness,” one interviewee suggested.⁵¹⁷ A former ambassador confirmed that within the Indian foreign policy bureaucracy “there’s always been a very strong view that any initiative with regard to Pakistan is a waste of time.”⁵¹⁸ These hawkish sentiments were a difficult reality for previous Indian leaders. The Indian government under Prime Minister V.P. Singh was unable to pursue a more conciliatory policy towards Pakistan despite incentives to do so because “the permanent bureaucracy felt hawkish towards Pakistan. This was especially true of the Ministry of External Affairs, despite the dovish views of its minister.”⁵¹⁹ The permanent bureaucracy within the foreign ministry were “quite opposed” to the 2001 Agra Summit in which Vajpayee and Musharraf met over three days to move forward with a resolution to the Kashmir conflict.⁵²⁰ Manmohan Singh encountered the hawkishness of the foreign policy

⁵¹⁶ Interview with Shyam Saran, New Delhi, January 2024.

⁵¹⁷ Interview with Indrani Bagchi, New Delhi, December 2023.

⁵¹⁸ Interview 5.

⁵¹⁹ P. R. Chari, Pervaiz Iqbal Cheema, and Stephen P. Cohen, *Four Crises and a Peace Process: American Engagement in South Asia* (Washington, D.C: Brookings Institution Press, 2007), 83.

⁵²⁰ Interview 5.

bureaucracy firsthand in early 2005, when Musharraf sought permission to attend a cricket match in Delhi, after which there were to be formal discussions. According to Baru, both Saran and Narayanan were opposed to the plan, though Singh quickly gave the go-ahead.⁵²¹ Still, he describes “considerable resistance within the government to the idea of a Musharraf visit” while parliament was in session.⁵²² The second issue was the propensity of senior officials to leak selectively to move policy, as was common throughout Singh’s tenure. As Pakistani Foreign Minister Kurshid Kasuri wrote of the backchannel, “[i]t is unthinkable that so many exchanges of non-papers could have remained confidential in the absence of a backchannel. In Pakistan and India, hardly anything remains secret; to make matters worse, the leakages would almost always be selective and tendentious.”⁵²³

The PMO took extreme steps to protect the secrecy of the backchannel talks. This included using “private travel agents, booking hotel rooms next to each other in other countries, in Dubai, Bangkok, Central Asia, and all the rest, finding time on the sideline of conferences.”⁵²⁴ To protect the secrecy of the talks, when Lambah would brief the PM – which he did 68 times between 2005 and 2007⁵²⁵ – his name would never make it onto the prime minister’s daily program sheet, which was printed and circulated to key PMO, security, and intelligence officials daily.⁵²⁶ As a result, few senior bureaucrats within the PMO or the MEA were familiar with the content of the ongoing talks. Even to this day, the number and identity of those who were aware of the contents of the highly sensitive negotiations remains unclear. Lambah reported on the backchannel talks directly to the

⁵²¹ Baru, *Accidental Prime Minister*, 181.

⁵²² Baru, 182.

⁵²³ Khurshid Mahmud Kasuri, *Neither a Hawk nor a Dove: An Insider’s Account of Pakistan’s Foreign Policy*, First edition (Karachi: Oxford University Press, 2015), 307–8.

⁵²⁴ Interview with Suhaisini Haidar, New Delhi, December 2023.

⁵²⁵ Lambah, *In Pursuit of Peace*, 302.

⁵²⁶ Baru, *Accidental Prime Minister*, 186.

prime minister, although even within the PMO the details were sparsely shared.⁵²⁷ Besides Lambah and the prime minister, the only other person consistently looped into the details of the talks was Jaideep Sarkar, a member of the Indian Foreign Service serving in the PMO.⁵²⁸ Sarkar appears to have served as the point-person within the PMO for all things related to the backchannel, including guarding the papers related to the backchannel, taking notes in meetings between Lambah and the PM, and note-taking during backchannel talks.⁵²⁹ When Sarkar would accompany Lambah on the negotiations, he would take leave, “reporting sick or leaving word that he was helping his son prepare for exams,” according to another PMO official.⁵³⁰ Underscoring his involvement in the substance of the backchannel diplomacy, Lambah’s memoir notes that Sarkar “provided significant help and contributions in the formulation of the backchannel agreement.”⁵³¹

Other foreign policy bureaucrats that Lambah describes having “various sessions” with throughout the course of the talks include the national security adviser (Narayanan), foreign secretaries (Menon and Saran), the Indian high commissioners to Pakistan, the chief of army staff, the defense secretary, and the director-general of military operations.⁵³² This supports the Pakistani interlocutor’s suspicion that the prime minister “took five or six of his colleagues and aides into confidence” on the backchannel.⁵³³ It is, however, unlikely that all these figures had a comprehensive sense of the details of the negotiations. In his memoir, Shyam Saran states that as foreign secretary he was aware of the “broad contours of the talks” but even he was not privy to the intricate details.⁵³⁴ He writes that in foreign secretary-level talks sometime in 2007, he responded to various

⁵²⁷ Clary, *The Difficult Politics of Peace*, 264.

⁵²⁸ Lambah, *In Pursuit of Peace*, 292.

⁵²⁹ Lambah, 292.

⁵³⁰ Baru, *Accidental Prime Minister*, 186.

⁵³¹ Lambah, *In Pursuit of Peace*, 292.

⁵³² Lambah, 303.

⁵³³ Kasuri, *Neither a Hawk nor a Dove*.

⁵³⁴ Saran, *How India Sees the World*, 95.

proposals by the Pakistani government arising from Musharraf's "four-point formula" for the peace process. Saran's answers were based on Manmohan Singh's general stance on the need for borders to be made progressively irrelevant. However, he notes that there was ambiguity regarding whether the framework negotiated in the backchannel talks aligned with his response towards the Pakistani government's proposals.⁵³⁵

The PM's choice to keep even the most senior members of the MEA and the PMO in the dark regarding the backchannel negotiations appears deliberate. As the conclusion of an agreement became increasingly feasible, the Singh government began to inform more cabinet and other political figures, probably to ensure that they had the support of the Congress Party establishment if a deal were to become a reality. Lambah secured the approval of Sonia Gandhi and External Affairs Minister Pranab Mukherjee on November 9, 2006, on the progress in the discussions up to that time.⁵³⁶ Lambah met frequently with Mukherjee during his time as foreign minister. In his memoir, Lambah describes meeting Mukherjee before each new meeting with the Pakistani interlocutor. "I would discuss the strategy with him and brief him on what transpired during the meeting," he wrote.⁵³⁷ The frequency with which Lambah met with Mukherjee runs against the expectations of my theory. Singh could hardly be said to have circumvented the MEA if his envoy was consistently briefing the Indian foreign minister, himself organizationally connected to the bureaucratic elites of the MEA. Yet Lambah does not describe similar strategic planning sessions with the former foreign minister Natwar Singh in his memoir. This indicates that the unique political authority Mukherjee commanded as a prominent Congress Party politician close to the Gandhi family was likely responsible for the decision to inform him of the negotiations. His foreign policy expertise –

⁵³⁵ Saran, 87.

⁵³⁶ Lambah, *In Pursuit of Peace*, 302.

⁵³⁷ Lambah, 303.

Mukherjee twice held the foreign policy portfolio – also made him one of the political figures most likely to play spoiler to a tentative agreement, so securing his buy-in at an early stage was critical.

Progress on the backchannel seldom translated into progress in “official” channels, although the two often touched on similar issues. The potential for demilitarizing the Siachen Glacier was of great interest to the PM. On a visit to Siachen in June 2005 – the highest battleground in the world – Singh declared to troops that the time had come “to convert this battlefield into a peace mountain.”⁵³⁸ Prior to planned defense secretary talks in May 2006, Manmohan Singh asked Shyam Saran obtain consensus on a possible mutual withdrawal from the glacier from the Indian foreign policy bureaucracy.⁵³⁹ According to Saran’s account, he consulted and brought on board senior bureaucrats in the defense, home, and finance ministries as well as the army and intelligence chiefs. However, the prospect of demilitarization fell apart when Army Chief J.J. Singh and Narayanan voiced their sudden opposition in a meeting of key cabinet ministers and bureau chiefs.⁵⁴⁰ Baru suggests that Sonia Gandhi may have been an absent veto player in this meeting, wary of letting Singh take credit for resolving a longstanding issue in India-Pakistan relations.⁵⁴¹ Clary speculates that she may have feared that conciliation over Siachen would have endangered the weak coalition government.⁵⁴² According to Saran, the prospects over another longstanding territorial dispute over the Sir Creek estuary were scuttled along with the end of the Siachen deal.⁵⁴³

⁵³⁸ Ajay Kaul, “PM for Conversion of Siachen from Battlefield to Peace Zone,” *Organisation of Asia-Pacific News Agencies*, June 12, 2005.

⁵³⁹ Saran, *How India Sees the World*, 82.

⁵⁴⁰ Saran, 83. One former general articulated that the reason for the army’s hesitancy likely stems from the much greater difficulty of the terrain on the side of the Saltoro mountain range occupied by Indian troops. If Pakistan was to renege on the deal and occupy the glacier, it would be impossible for Indian troops to retake their former positions. Interview 6.

⁵⁴¹ Baru, *Accidental Prime Minister*, 188.

⁵⁴² Clary, *The Difficult Politics of Peace*, 266.

⁵⁴³ Saran, *How India Sees the World*, 83.

Although the backchannel talks had made significant headway, the tide turned against peace as Musharraf struggled to confront multiple domestic political crises. According to then-Foreign Secretary Shivshankar Menon, the Pakistani government had asked that India wait for Musharraf's political fortunes to improve before they went public with the progress from the backchannel—though they never did.⁵⁴⁴ After Musharraf fell from power and newly elected Pakistani president Asif Ali Zardari assumed office in 2008, Manmohan Singh did not abandon his ambition of achieving a lasting peace with Pakistan. Zardari too signaled his willingness to continue the progress made in the backchannel.⁵⁴⁵ Then, a team of Pakistan-based terrorists carried out a series of coordinated terror attacks in Mumbai that killed a 166 people and injured over 300. Although the government managed to avoid war despite the cries for revenge by the media, the opposition, and public opinion, the Mumbai attacks “put an end to an already limping peace process.”⁵⁴⁶

Though the backchannel saw little movement after the attacks, Singh made a high-profile attempt to recover Indo-Pakistani relations. As mentioned earlier in the chapter, the controversial joint statement at Sharm El-Sheikh in 2008 triggered political uproar in India. Hawks in the opposition BJP attacked the government while coalition partners and the Congress Party seniors failed to support him. This effectively put an end to the hope of reconciliation between India and Pakistan during Singh’s tenure.⁵⁴⁷ Menon, who assisted with drafting the statement and defended the joint statement before parliament, later called it “another opportunity squandered in a long list of missed half chances in India-Pakistan relations.”⁵⁴⁸

⁵⁴⁴ Menon, *Choices*, 75–76.

⁵⁴⁵ Clary, *The Difficult Politics of Peace*, 278.

⁵⁴⁶ Menon, *Choices*, 71.

⁵⁴⁷ Clary, *The Difficult Politics of Peace*, 284.

⁵⁴⁸ Menon, *Choices*, 77.

Discussion

My theory of leader strategy selection has great explanatory power in the context of Manmohan Singh. **Table 6** illustrates the contrasting organizational strategies employed by Singh in his two major foreign policy initiatives: the Indo–U.S. nuclear deal and the India–Pakistan backchannel talks. In the nuclear case, Singh faced significant resistance from the DAE and some officials within the Ministry of External Affairs MEA. Because the issue had relatively low public salience and the opposition was technocratic rather than ideological, Singh adopted a strategy rooted in inclusion. He brought dissenting bureaucrats into the negotiating process, created formal mechanisms like the apex committee to resolve disputes, and tolerated public leaks as a means of airing internal disagreements. Instead of ignoring or attempting to quash the dissent the defiant atomic energy bureaucracy, Manmohan Singh instead sought to get them on board first by constituting the apex committee and later by forcing the leading representatives to reason with one another, with the PMO acting as a mediator. One official said that the committee “helped the PM and the NSA in the formulation of a more comprehensive national position rather than [the] MEA pulling in one direction and the DAE in the other.”⁵⁴⁹ Although the DAE’s rationale for placing the breeder reactor outside safeguards was questionable – neither the research autonomy explanation nor the national security rationale is a fully satisfying reason for refusing to place the reactor under safeguards – Manmohan Singh capitulated to the DAE’s demand and stood by it in parliament. As one bureaucrat close to the action relayed to this author, Singh “allows the debate to run its course, but draws a line...takes it onto himself and commits on behalf of the government in parliament...This is what India will do and this is what India cannot do.”⁵⁵⁰ This supports the notion

⁵⁴⁹ Interview 4.

⁵⁵⁰ Interview 4, New Delhi, December 2023. The interviewee later added, “Singh took charge of the policy red lines but only after a lengthy and often bitter internal debate.”

that Manmohan Singh's socially derived *trust* in the bureaucracy made him comfortable enlisting the support of those who were most critical of his agenda, even if he had good reason to believe that those same people were leaking information to the media.

Table 6. Manmohan Singh's Organizational Strategy

	Indo-U.S. Nuclear Deal	Pakistan
Issue salience	Low	High
Source of bureaucratic opposition	DAE, some in the MEA	Permanent bureaucracy
Organizational tools used	Including DAE, MEA in all major negotiations Consensus-based decision-making Creating apex committee to resolve MEA-DAE differences Persuading skeptics Tolerating leaks	Appointment of trusted adviser – Sati Lambah Tightly controlled information flows – few briefings, no reports shared with bureaucracy No bureaucratic representation at negotiations Strict compartmentalization between backchannel, official channel
Logic	Inclusion	Exclusion

By contrast, Singh treated negotiations with Pakistan—especially over Kashmir—as a politically explosive issue with high public salience and deeply entrenched bureaucratic resistance. In this case, Singh pursued a logic of exclusion: he empowered a single trusted envoy, Sati Lambah, restricted information flows, and maintained strict compartmentalization between the backchannel

and official diplomatic channels. The contrast between these two approaches underscores how leaders tailor organizational tools to the political stakes of an issue and the nature of bureaucratic resistance.

There are a few alternative explanations to consider. The first is that Manmohan Singh's personality was behind why he pursued his foreign policy priorities in this way, rather than his trust in the bureaucracy or his domestic political strength. If this explanation were correct, we would expect to see similar tools employed in Singh's pursuit of the Indo-U.S. nuclear deal and the peace deal with Pakistan. As this chapter describes, Singh's government pursued each of these goals very differently, varying broadly in terms of how much it included the bureaucracy in decision-making. A similar line of reasoning would apply to an alternative explanation based on Singh's experience in foreign affairs. If his extensive prior foreign policy experience explained Singh's choice of organizational strategy, we would expect him to pursue both priorities in similar ways, rather than systematically differently.

Another perspective to consider is that the nature of the desired outcome with the United States and Pakistan were different enough so as to demand different approaches. That is, the two cases are apples and oranges. One U.S. official proposed this explanation to me, arguing “ “foreign policy is so much within the purview of the Prime Minister, in a way that atomic energy is not, he could run his Pakistan policy with a very small cohort of friends whom he trusted, in a way that he could not with atomic energy.”⁵⁵¹ It is true that the highly technical details of the nuclear deal necessitated some degree of inclusion of the atomic energy bureaucracy so as to guard against accusations that the deal would impair India’s nuclear program. However, one can imagine a counterfactual in which the skeptics in the nuclear bureaucracy would have been asked to provide

⁵⁵¹ Interview 10, Washington, D.C., May 2025.

their input directly to the PM rather than to consult and form a consensus with other bureaucracies. In fact, the degree to which the skeptics of the DAE, AEC, and MEA were asked to directly participate in the foreign policymaking process was unprecedented. When Manmohan Singh placed the DAE across the table from the MEA and other members of the foreign policy bureaucracy in July 2005, it was “absolutely traumatic” for the atomic energy bureaucracy.⁵⁵² The DAE had never before been asked to defend its objectives to others in the foreign and security policy bureaucracy. The nuclear establishment had been “totally shut out from light – from the world, from any accountability, everything. They wore the invisibility cloak of national security and did not have to answer questions.”⁵⁵³ This was a radical departure from the typical foreign policymaking process to which they were accustomed. But the strategy was ultimately successful in generating buy-in amongst the most hardcore skeptics within the bureaucracy. One U.S. official involved in the negotiations at the time emphasized that “they came around to understanding that if they could get the deal they wanted, they would actually come out ahead.”⁵⁵⁴

The secrecy with which the backchannel was regarded and its exclusion of key bureaucratic elites is a stark departure from the open and inclusive handling of nuclear agreement negotiations. In the case of the backchannel talks, the extreme secrecy may have undermined the prospects of a deal in the end. As one interviewee argued, “Half the problem with the Pakistan deal was that they didn't build enough internal support… They didn't do enough in terms of briefing within the establishment, briefing the Congress Party, briefing all the rest of them.”⁵⁵⁵ Given the stark contrast of the highly inclusive nature of the U.S.-India negotiations next to the highly secretive and

⁵⁵² Interview 4, New Delhi, December 2023.

⁵⁵³ Interview with Indrani Bagchi, New Delhi, December 2024.

⁵⁵⁴ Interview 10, Washington, D.C., May 2025.

⁵⁵⁵ Interview with Suhaesini Haidar, New Delhi, December 2023.

exclusionary peace talks with Pakistan, it stands to reason that the difference in approaches cannot be attributed to subtle differences between the two agreements. Moreover, while neither deal would have to legally receive approval from the Indian parliament, both would have to be sold to the public if the coalition were to survive the public eye.

A final alternative explanation is that Singh's domestic political strength may have been the overriding explanation for the strategy used, rather than the interaction of bureaucratic trust and strength. Comparing Singh to the politically powerful current prime minister of India, Narendra Modi, one interviewee suggested that "Modi would have sorted the issues out in two days."⁵⁵⁶ According to this account, on the Indo-U.S. nuclear deal Manmohan Singh was *too* politically weak to buck the DAE without being accused of selling out to the United States, and so he was forced to include them and capitulate to their demands.⁵⁵⁷ To an extent, this seems plausible. Singh recognized that he needed the nuclear scientists on his side to protect himself politically. If he could gain their buy-in, he could convince the public that the agreement would not harm India's national security.

One counterargument is that the consultative process Manmohan Singh enacted was the result of a conscious decision to force the atomic energy bureaucracy into deliberations with other bureaucratic stakeholders. Wresting a measure of control of the nuclear domain from them was not the action of a politically constrained prime minister afraid of bucking the nuclear establishment. The later actions of the Manmohan Singh government also undercut the notion that Singh had too little political support to stand up to the deal's opposition. After the 123 Agreement was finalized and approved by the Indian Cabinet, the Left Parties threatened to withdraw their support for the government over deal if it were not negotiated. This would seriously weaken the strength of the

⁵⁵⁶ Interview 7, New Delhi, December 2023.

⁵⁵⁷ Basrur, *Subcontinental Drift*, 59.

coalition and threaten Singh's premiership. In response, Singh declared "I told [the Left Parties] it is not possible to renegotiate the deal. It is an honorable deal, the Cabinet has approved it, we cannot go back on it. I told them to do whatever they want to do. If they want to withdraw support, so be it."⁵⁵⁸ After prolonged negotiations between the UPA and the Left had stalled progress on the IAEA safeguards agreement, Singh told Sonia Gandhi that he would resign if the nuclear deal continued to be blocked by the Left parties' threat.⁵⁵⁹ Gandhi eventually agreed to proceed without the Left, which withdrew support from the government in July 2008.⁵⁶⁰ Singh was both stronger and more influential than this account allows.

⁵⁵⁸ Manini Chatterjee, "'Anguished' PM to Left: If You Want to Withdraw, so Be It," *The Telegraph*, August 7, 2007, <https://www.telegraphindia.com/india/anguished-pm-manmohan-singh-to-left-if-you-want-to-withdraw-so-be-it/cid/2073642>.

⁵⁵⁹ Baru, *Accidental Prime Minister*, 245.

⁵⁶⁰ "Left Withdraws Support to UPA Govt," *The Times of India*, July 8, 2008, <https://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/india/left-withdraws-support-to-upa-govt/articleshow/3210008.cms>.

Chapter 5. Trust and Distrust in Late Cold War America: Nixon, Carter, and Bush the Elder

This chapter examines the foreign policy processes of Richard Nixon, Jimmy Carter, and George H. W. Bush to explore how trust and mistrust shape presidential strategies of bureaucratic engagement. While all three presidents operated in the closing decades of the Cold War, they varied markedly in their institutional choices, the role afforded to foreign policy professionals, and their willingness to tolerate internal dissent. Nixon, distrustful of the foreign policy establishment, centralized decision-making in the White House, sidelined traditional agencies, and relied heavily on secret backchannels. Carter entered office promising inclusivity and transparency, yet his reliance on a divided leadership team led to selective circumvention and policy disarray. Bush, by contrast, trusted the expertise of the national security bureaucracy and deliberately cultivated a cohesive, collegial policymaking team—an approach that helped contain dissent and avoid policy overreach during key moments in the Gulf War. By tracing these cases, the chapter highlights the enduring consequences of leaders' orientations toward the bureaucracy, revealing how a leader's trust in the bureaucracy enables trust and coordination, while mistrust invites leaks, in-fighting, and disorder in policymaking.

The U.S. presidential political system is advantageous arena for theory-building and testing for a few reasons. First, the bureaucracies relevant to foreign policy have been in existence since the 1947 National Security Act, which established the Central Intelligence Agency (CIA), the National Security Council (NSC), the Department of Defense (DOD), and the Joint Chiefs of Staff (JCS).⁵⁶¹ Since then, all American presidents since 1947 have made choices about bureaucratic inputs against a consistent

⁵⁶¹ "National Security Act of 1947," accessed March 20, 2024, <https://www.dni.gov/index.php/ic-legal-reference-book/national-security-act-of-1947>.

formal institutional backdrop. Second, the longevity and strength of major bureaucratic agencies like the departments of State and Defense also implies the existence of well-developed organizational cultures that give rise to distinct norms, beliefs, and interests. This should ease some of the difficulties of identifying the organizational cultures of bureaucratic agencies. Finally, the extensive literature on U.S. foreign policymaking and bureaucratic politics provides a useful baseline against which to assess the novel expectations of my theory.⁵⁶²

Presidential systems provide greater analytical clarity for assessing a leader's political strength. Unlike parliamentary systems in which leaders are indirectly elected and often rely on shifting coalitions, presidents are directly elected for fixed terms, making their electoral support more visible and quantifiable. As Juan Linz observes, "Winners and losers are sharply defined for the entire period of the presidential mandate. There is no hope for shifts in alliances, expansion of the government's base of support through national-unity or emergency grand coalitions, new elections in response to major new events, and so on."⁵⁶³ This institutional rigidity reduces the need to track intra-party bargaining or elite contestation—key dynamics in parliamentary systems—when evaluating presidential strength. Instead, in presidential systems like the United States, public opinion plays a more central role than party dynamics in shaping the leader's political authority over the course of their term.

Second, presidential systems tend to feature more streamlined foreign policy processes due to the clear separation of powers between the executive and legislative branches. For instance, the U.S.

⁵⁶² See Allison and Halperin, "Bureaucratic Politics"; Graham Allison, "Conceptual Models and the Cuban Missile Crisis: Rational Policy, Organizational Process, and Bureaucratic Politics" (*American Political Science Review*, 1968); George, *Presidential Decisionmaking in Foreign Policy*; Allison and Zelikow, *Essence of Decision*; Zegart, *Flawed by Design*; Halperin, Clapp, and Kanter, *Bureaucratic Politics and Foreign Policy*; Milner and Tingley, *Sailing the Water's Edge*; Saunders, *The Insiders' Game*; Jost, *Bureaucracies at War*.

⁵⁶³ Juan J. (Juan José) Linz, "The Perils of Presidentialism," *Journal of Democracy* 1, no. 1 (December 1990): 56, <https://doi.org/10.1353/jod.2005.0026>.

president holds unilateral authority to appoint the heads of key bureaucratic agencies and many of their subordinates, with some appointments requiring no congressional approval.⁵⁶⁴ By contrast, the influence of prime ministers over such appointments in parliamentary systems is often more ambiguous. In India, for example, while the prime minister formally approves the appointments of ambassadors and high commissioners, the official appointment is issued by the president, reflecting a more opaque and layered process.⁵⁶⁵

While my theory applies to all regime types, testing it against the behavior of American presidents is a crucial measure of its generalizability to institutionalized democracies. In autocracies or less institutionalized democracies such as India or Turkey, leaders might be expected to exercise greater discretion in reshaping the foreign policymaking process to suit their preferences. By contrast, in consolidated democracies like the United States, one might assume that entrenched checks and balances would constrain such efforts. Yet research by Terry Moe and others has argued that presidents face strong institutional incentives to centralize power and politicize control over the bureaucracy through appointments and structural design.⁵⁶⁶ For example, Richard Nixon's decision to bypass the State Department by centralizing foreign policy in the White House and conducting major diplomatic initiatives through secret backchannels exemplifies how leaders may strategically

⁵⁶⁴ Theodore C. Sorensen, "Foreign Policy in a Presidential Democracy," *Political Science Quarterly* 109, no. 3 (1994): 515–28, <https://doi.org/10.2307/2152617>.

⁵⁶⁵ Debnath Shaw, "Making of India Foreign Policy," <https://www.mea.gov.in/distinguished-lectures-detail.htm?764>.

⁵⁶⁶ For a selection of relevant works in American politics, see Moe, "The Politicized Presidency"; MATHEW D. MCCUBBINS, ROGER G. NOLL, and BARRY R. WEINGAST, "Administrative Procedures as Instruments of Political Control," *The Journal of Law, Economics, and Organization* 3, no. 2 (October 1, 1987): 243–77, <https://doi.org/10.1093/oxfordjournals.jleo.a036930>; Moe and Wilson, "Presidents and the Politics of Structure"; William G. Howell, *Power Without Persuasion: The Politics of Direct Presidential Action* (Princeton University Press, 2003); Nolan McCarty, "The Appointments Dilemma," *American Journal of Political Science* 48, no. 3 (2004): 413–28, <https://doi.org/10.2307/1519907>; Lewis, *The Politics of Presidential Appointments*; Rachel Augustine Potter, *Bending the Rules: Procedural Politicking in the Bureaucracy* (Chicago, UNITED STATES: University of Chicago Press, 2019), <http://ebookcentral.proquest.com/lib/uchicago/detail.action?docID=5749398>; Andrew Rudalevige, *By Executive Order: Bureaucratic Management and the Limits of Presidential Power* (Princeton University Press, 2021), <https://doi.org/10.2307/j.ctv17nmzjz>.

circumvent institutional checks. Indeed, the pressures of partisan polarization and inter-branch rivalry can intensify presidents' incentives to reassert control over foreign policy by reshaping or bypassing formal procedures from within.

Table 7 summarizes the core organizational strategies employed by each president, their level of trust in the bureaucracy, and their domestic political strength. Nixon, who viewed the bureaucracy with deep suspicion, pursued an *insulation* strategy, minimizing bureaucratic input and consolidating control in the White House. Carter, despite his rhetorical commitment to openness, encountered internal divisions and exercised selective inclusion, ultimately adopting a strategy of *circumvention* when cooperation broke down. In contrast, George H. W. Bush, who trusted the professionalism of the national security bureaucracy, embraced an inclusive approach and pursued *integration*, deliberately fostering coordination and cohesion across agencies. The variation across these cases illustrates how a leader's trust orientation and willingness to include the bureaucracy shape the broader institutional design of foreign policymaking.

Table 7. Summary of Empirical Findings

President	Bureaucratic Neutrality	Inclusivity	Strategy
<i>Nixon</i>	Somewhat loyal	Exclusive	Insulation
<i>Carter</i>	Somewhat neutral	Selectively exclusive	Circumvention
<i>H.W. Bush</i>	Broadly neutral	Inclusive	Integration

The chapter draws on a diverse set of qualitative data sources to analyze U.S. foreign policymaking under Presidents Nixon, Carter, and George H. W. Bush. It relies heavily on primary

sources, including declassified government documents such as the *Foreign Relations of the United States* (FRUS) series, presidential memoirs (e.g., Nixon, Carter, Bush, and Kissinger), White House diaries, and archival materials from the Jimmy Carter Presidential Library like Zbigniew Brzezinski's donated papers. These are complemented by contemporaneous media accounts, memoirs of key aides, and scholarly analyses. Through triangulating internal memos, public statements, policy directives, and insider recollections, the paper reconstructs how a president's level of trust in the foreign policy bureaucracy shaped organizational strategies and policymaking dynamics.

This chapter begins by evaluating each president's level of trust or mistrust in the U.S. foreign policy bureaucracy, tracing how these attitudes were shaped by their personal histories, political experiences, and early interactions with Washington elites. It then considers each leader's domestic political strength at the time they entered office, including their electoral mandates and partisan relationships in Congress, to assess the scope of their authority to restructure the policymaking process. The next section analyzes how each president engaged with the bureaucracy in practice—examining the extent to which they incorporated career officials into decision-making, relied on formal institutional channels, and prioritized competence over loyalty in key appointments. These organizational choices reveal each leader's broader strategy for managing foreign policy and controlling bureaucratic influence. The chapter concludes by addressing alternative explanations, such as leadership style or foreign policy experience, and reflects on the broader implications of these findings for theories of presidential power, institutional design, and bureaucratic politics in highly institutionalized democratic systems.

Bureaucratic Trust and Distrust in the United States

Nixon

Nixon's distrust of bureaucratic elites in the foreign policy establishment is well-documented. It began to form in the early 1950s, the era of America's postwar hysteria over communism. As a member of the House Committee on Un-American Activities (HUAC) from 1948 to 1951, Representative Nixon became known as the face of the investigation of Alger Hiss, a State Department employee who was ultimately revealed to have committed espionage for the Soviet Union.⁵⁶⁷ Nixon attacked President Truman's administration, including the Justice and State Departments, for failing to investigate evidence about Hiss and his associates. "Why did a parade of top administration officials, including Supreme Court justices, diplomats, and administration advisers throw the great weight of their influence against the government in its presentation of the case against Hiss, but volunteer to speak as character witnesses for him?" Nixon was quoted publicly after Hiss was indicted.⁵⁶⁸ As Eisenhower's running mate in 1952, Nixon continued to assail the Democrats and their ideological allies in the State Department for a "policy of appeasement and weakness" towards global communism.⁵⁶⁹ Attacking the Democratic candidate Adlai Stevenson's State Department experience, Nixon accused him of holding a "Ph.D. from Dean Acheson's [President Truman's Secretary of State] cowardly college of Communist containment."⁵⁷⁰ In one rally in Pennsylvania in 1952, Nixon said he would rather have a "khaki-clad President than one clothed in State Department Pinks," a derogatory reference to Stevenson's alleged pro-communist sympathies.⁵⁷¹

⁵⁶⁷ John A. Farrell, *Richard Nixon: The Life*, Kindle (New York London Toronto Sydney Auckland: Doubleday, 2017), chap. "HUAC".

⁵⁶⁸ "Nixon Blasts Truman View on U.S. Reds: Representative Cites Alger Hiss Case as Example of Danger," *Los Angeles Times*, April 26, 1950.

⁵⁶⁹ "Nixon Speech Clothes Adlai In 'State Department Pinks,'" *The Washington Post*, October 10, 1952.

⁵⁷⁰ Farrell, *Richard Nixon*, 202.

⁵⁷¹ "Nixon Speech Clothes Adlai In 'State Department Pinks.'"

It follows that Nixon's Red Scare tactics precipitated the dislike he later would feel emanating from the foreign policy establishment. After all, the accusations leveled by Senator Joe McCarthy, who Nixon continued to support as vice president, did real damage to the State Department. Employees were accused of being "card-carrying members of the Communist party" or security risks.⁵⁷² Fearing the eye of Congressional and public scrutiny, the State Department purged hundreds of employees who were suspected homosexuals on the basis that "such individuals are susceptible to blackmail and are exposed to other pressures because of the highly unconventional character of their personal relationships."⁵⁷³ Nixon maintained friendly relations socially but a careful distance politically from McCarthy during the vice presidency, occasionally questioning his "reckless talk and questionable methods" but never openly breaking with the senator's pursuit of communist sympathizers.⁵⁷⁴

Unsurprisingly, Nixon located his enemies within the foreign policy establishment – and the broader Washington establishment – long before he became president. During his 1968 presidential campaign, Nixon announced his intention to "clean house" at the State Department if elected.⁵⁷⁵ Shortly after winning, Nixon met with his soon-to-be National Security Adviser Henry Kissinger. Kissinger's account of the meeting indicates that the topic of conversation were the

⁵⁷² "History of the Bureau of Diplomatic Security of the United States Department of State" (Department of State, October 2011), 122, <https://2009-2017.state.gov/m/ds/rls/rpt/c47602.htm>.

⁵⁷³ "History of the Bureau of Diplomatic Security of the United States Department of State," 129.

⁵⁷⁴ Alistair Cooke, "MR NIXON TAKES A MIDDLE ROAD: Fairness 'Even to a Bunch of Traitors' THOUGHTS ON McCARTHY," *The Manchester Guardian*, March 15, 1954.

⁵⁷⁵ Willard Edwards, "Nixon Pledge Shakes State Department: Vows to Clean House If Elected," *Chicago Tribune*, October 16, 1968, <https://www-proquest-com.proxy.uchicago.edu/docview/168858737/6F6920FE284E421DPQ/1?accountid=14657&sourcetype=Historical%20Newspapers>; "Nixon's Eye on State Department," *The Guardian*, October 15, 1968, <https://www-proquest-com.proxy.uchicago.edu/docview/185330181/6F6920FE284E421DPQ/3?accountid=14657&sourcetype=Historical%20Newspapers>.

bureaucratic elites that Nixon felt had scorned and disdained him as Dwight Eisenhower's vice president. He recounts,

He had a massive organizational problem, [Nixon] said. He had very little confidence in the State Department. Its personnel had no loyalty to him; the Foreign Service had disdained him as Vice President and ignored him the moment he was out of office...He felt it imperative to exclude the CIA from the formula of policy; it was staffed by Ivy League liberals who behind the façade of analytical objectivity were usually pushing their own preferences. They had always opposed him politically.⁵⁷⁶

Clearly, the State Department and the CIA were not to be trusted. In general Nixon and his associates harbored paranoid suspicion of the journalists, Congress members, and bureaucrats who were permanent members of the establishment that oiled the wheels of national politics. "The Nixon team drew the wagons around itself from the beginning; it was besieged in mind long before it was besieged in fact," Kissinger recalls.⁵⁷⁷

Carter

At first glance, Carter may seem like a Washington outsider with little reason to trust the foreign policy bureaucracy. He entered presidential politics with no national political experience and would oftentimes speak in populist tropes. During his campaign, he criticized the federal bureaucracy as being "wasteful" and "disorganized."⁵⁷⁸ After winning the Democratic nomination for the 1976 presidential race, he lambasted a "bloated and confused" bureaucracy that allowed the powerful to "discover and occupy niches of special influence and privilege."⁵⁷⁹ But Carter was not Nixon. As he

⁵⁷⁶ Kissinger, *White House Years*, 40.

⁵⁷⁷ Kissinger, 56.

⁵⁷⁸ Maeve Carey, "The Senior Executive Service: Background and Options for Reform" (Congressional Research Service, September 6, 2012), 8, <https://www.congress.gov/crs-product/R41801>.

⁵⁷⁹ Jimmy Carter, *The Presidential Campaign 1976* (Washington: United States Government Printing Office, 1978), 349.

began to plan his bid for the presidency, he became acquainted with many members of the Washington-based foreign policy establishment through the Trilateral Commission.⁵⁸⁰

His criticism of the foreign policy bureaucracy was rooted in the way past U.S. presidents had used their hold over the bureaucracy for political patronage—especially Nixon—and the public’s resulting dissatisfaction with the competence and integrity of the bureaucracy.⁵⁸¹ In his campaign, he pledged to make diplomatic appointments “exclusively on a merit basis, in contrast to the political patronage that has characterized appointments under the Nixon-Ford admin.”⁵⁸² Speaking on the quality of appointed diplomats, his support of careerists was apparent:

When I go into an embassy...and see our ambassador, our representative there, a fat, bloated, ignorant, rich, major contributor to a Presidential campaign who can't even speak the language of the country in which he serves, and who knows even less about our own country and our consciousness and our ideals and our motivation, it is an insult to me and to the people of America and to the people of that country.⁵⁸³

Later, when asked to clarify on this quote, he was more explicit:

The point I make is that whether they are actually fat or thin, that they are appointed because there are political interrelationships and not because of quality. Now, the last time I was in Europe, for instance, out of 33 ambassadors who served in the whole European theater, only three of them were professional diplomats.⁵⁸⁴

Carter’s negative attitude towards the diplomatic bureaucracy was therefore grounded in his skepticism of political appointees rather than career bureaucrats.

⁵⁸⁰ Jonathan Alter, *His Very Best: Jimmy Carter, a Life*, Kindle (New York: Simon & Schuster, 2020), 199.

⁵⁸¹ Carey, “The Senior Executive Service: Background and Options for Reform,” 10.

⁵⁸² Carter, *The Presidential Campaign 1976*, 683.

⁵⁸³ Carter, 78.

⁵⁸⁴ Carter, 104.

In a similar vein, Carter was vocally supportive of handling foreign affairs democratically and openly, respecting standard bureaucratic processes. This rhetoric was likely a response to the mounting criticism of the Nixon administration's illegal wiretapping of NSC aides, journalists, and government officials and its covert actions, such as the bombing of Cambodia, which had led to the falsification of Congressional reports.⁵⁸⁵ "We've ignored or excluded the American people and the Congress from participation in the shaping of our foreign policy," Carter lamented in his debate with Gerald Ford in 1976. "If the President sets the policy openly, *reaching agreement among the officers of the government*, if the President involves the Congress and the leaders of both parties rather than letting a handful of people plot the policy behind closed doors, then we will avoid costly mistakes and have the support of our citizens in our dealings with other nations," he later stated.⁵⁸⁶ This rhetoric may have been intended to score political points against the incumbent Republican administration during the presidential campaign, but it also reflected Carter's genuine belief in the importance of restoring democratic norms and accountability in foreign policymaking. He consistently advocated for a more transparent and participatory process, grounded in the conviction that foreign policy should reflect the values of the American public and be subject to institutional checks.

One bureaucracy which Carter was skeptical of was the Pentagon, which he called "the most wasteful bureaucracy in Washington."⁵⁸⁷ Carter's doveish attitude made him skeptical of the defense bureaucracy. He pledged to "eliminate as much as possible the waste that presently exists in the Defense Department"—"many troops overseas, too many military bases overseas"—and to rectify the "spreading out of the Defense Department in areas that I think could best be handled by civilian

⁵⁸⁵ David S. Broder, "Exploiting 'National Security,'" *The Washington Post* (1974-), June 19, 1974; Seymour M. Hersh Special to The New York Times, "Senators Are Told U.S. Bombed Cambodia Secretly After Invasion in 1970," *The New York Times*, August 8, 1973, sec. Archives, <https://www.nytimes.com/1973/08/08/archives/senators-are-told-us-bombed-cambodia-secretly-after-invasion-in.html>.

⁵⁸⁶ Emphasis my own. Carter, *The Presidential Campaign 1976*, 67–68.

⁵⁸⁷ Carter, 81.

agencies of government.”⁵⁸⁸ But this attitude does little to resemble the personalized, intense distrust that Nixon harbored towards the foreign policy bureaucracy.

Bush the Elder

George H. W. Bush brought unparalleled experience within the foreign policy bureaucracy to the presidency. A consummate Washington insider and the son of a senator, Bush had served as ambassador to the United Nations, director of the CIA, the second-ever U.S. emissary to the People’s Republic of China, and vice president.⁵⁸⁹ His deep foreign policy expertise was matched by an intimate familiarity with the national security bureaucracy—one that far exceeded that of Carter and even Nixon. Crucially, unlike Nixon, Bush’s experience did not breed resentment toward the bureaucracy; it fostered respect and trust. When contemplating the people and procedures that would define policymaking under his administration, Bush knew he would be a “hands-on” president when it came to foreign policy. However, he also wanted to rely on “department experts” as well as cabinet secretaries and national security adviser “for more studied advice.”⁵⁹⁰ He was skeptical of the notion, which he attributed to Vietnam and Watergate, that “all public servants could be bought or were incapable of telling the truth.”⁵⁹¹

Over the course of his career, Bush developed relationships with a remarkably capable group of advisers who would go on to form one of the most professional and effective national security teams in modern U.S. history. As David Rothkopf notes, this group “is often described in universities today as the model of a well-functioning NSC and interagency process.”⁵⁹² Bush trusted not only the

⁵⁸⁸ Carter, 305.

⁵⁸⁹ Daalder and Destler, *In the Shadow of the Oval Office*, 172.

⁵⁹⁰ George H. W. Bush and Brent Scowcroft, *A World Transformed* (Westminster: Vintage, 2011), 18.

⁵⁹¹ Bush and Scowcroft, 17.

⁵⁹² David Rothkopf, *Running the World: The Inside Story of the National Security Council and the Architects of American Power* (S.l.: PublicAffairs, 2009), 261.

foreign policy process but also the professionals who made it work—and he understood the importance of maintaining cohesion and coordination across agencies. Having served under Nixon, Ford, and Reagan, Bush had seen firsthand the pitfalls of internal power struggles. He “had witnessed the inevitable personality conflicts and turf disputes that would spring up between cabinet members, advisers, and departments.”⁵⁹³ Determined to avoid those mistakes, Bush deliberately cultivated a collaborative culture. As one foreign service officer observed:

When Bush came in, he wanted to unlearn the lessons of the Reagan administration. He hated the leaks. He wanted the administration to work together. He wanted people who were in the key positions to be able to work together, and he wanted them to know that he expected their staffs to work together.⁵⁹⁴

Bush’s instincts were proceduralist and inclusive. During the presidential transition, Henry Kissinger urged him to open a secret backchannel to Moscow. Bush ultimately refused. “I was wary,” he recalled. “I wanted to be sure we did not pass the wrong signals to Moscow, with some in our Administration saying one thing while others were conducting secret negotiations that might be sending out contradictory signals.”⁵⁹⁵ His early decision to avoid secret, off-the-books diplomacy reflected his confidence in the formal institutions of U.S. foreign policy and his desire for coherence, transparency, and disciplined interagency coordination.

⁵⁹³ Bush and Scowcroft, *A World Transformed*, 18.

⁵⁹⁴ Rothkopf, *Running the World*, 266. Under Reagan, foreign policymaking was marked by internal conflicts and lack of coordination among key agencies and advisers, leading to turf wars, leaks, and an often-chaotic interagency process.

⁵⁹⁵ Bush and Scowcroft, *A World Transformed*, 26.

The Political Landscape of the Late Cold War

Table 8. Political Strength of U.S. Presidents in the Late Cold War

President	Election	Popular	Electoral	Divided	Other	Political
	Year	Vote	Vote	Govt	Factors	Strength
Nixon	1968	43.4%	301	Yes		Weak
Nixon	1972	60.7%	520	Yes	Watergate	Weak
Carter	1976	50.1%	297	No		Weak
H.W. Bush	1988	53.4%	426	Yes		Strong

Source: The American Presidency Project

Nixon

When Richard Nixon secured his victory in the presidential election in 1968, a *New York Times* article remarked that it was not apparent if Nixon “could claim a clear mandate for any particular policy direction.”⁵⁹⁶ The Republican nominee had won with a meager 43.4% of the popular vote over Democratic candidate Hubert Humphrey – the lowest share of the popular vote gained by any sitting president since Woodrow Wilson emerged victorious in a three-way race over Taft and Roosevelt in 1912. Moreover, while Nixon had been the frontrunner for the Republican nomination for the majority of the race, there were fears within the GOP that Nixon was still too conservative for the country.⁵⁹⁷ These fears were bolstered by his 1960 loss in the presidential race to John F. Kennedy and the 1962 gubernatorial race in California as well as the pattern of repeated Democratic victories since

⁵⁹⁶ David S. Broder, “Nixon Wins With 290 Electoral Votes; Humphrey Joins Him in Call for Unity: Democratic Edge In House Senate Trimmed Slightly National Unity Emphasized The Problems Remain Nixon Narrowly Wins Presidency In Epic Comeback Lost 2 From 1960 Victory Took Shape Late Nixon Landslide Seen Food for Speculation,” *The Washington Post, Times Herald*, November 7, 1968.

⁵⁹⁷ Ward Just, “Nixon Seen Assured Of GOP Nomination: Nixon Seen GOP Choice,” *The Washington Post, Times Herald (1959-1973)*, May 30, 1968.

Eisenhower.⁵⁹⁸ Historians attribute the victory Nixon pulled off to two feats. First, he appealed to the racial anxieties of white voters amid a changing social order in the south. Second, Nixon had managed to push on the Johnson administration's failures in Vietnam, rousing skepticism that the peace offensive in Vietnam was a political ploy by Johnson-Humphrey and exploiting divisions within the Democratic party over the war.⁵⁹⁹

When Nixon did assume power, Democrats retained control over both the Senate and the House of Representatives.⁶⁰⁰ Democratic control of Congress would not immediately impede Nixon from achieving his campaign promise of ending the war in Vietnam "with honor." Most Americans supported vigorous efforts to end the war, with 39 percent of the public naming the war the most important problem facing the country in a May 1969 Gallup poll.⁶⁰¹ In a post-election Gallup poll about how the president-elect should end the war, the top three responses of those surveyed were "stop the war" at 45 percent, "continue peace talks" at 17 percent, and "honorable peace" at 10 percent.⁶⁰² Opposition in Congress would only later serve to burden Nixon later when his efforts to hit North Vietnam into submission by bombing Cambodia and Laos into submission proved futile and Congress cut off funding for the war in 1973.⁶⁰³ Privately Nixon knew that support from Congress was tenuous. Concerned about the forthcoming midterm elections, he told the NSC in 1970, "If we had no elections, it would be fine. The reality is that we are working against ... a clock."⁶⁰⁴

⁵⁹⁸ Arlen R. Large, "GOP Jockeying: Nixon's Broad Support Could Still Be Undercut By Demand for 'Winner' Some Delegates Shun Firm Commitments, Keep an Eye On Rockefeller and Reagan Campaign Strategy Crumbles GOP Jockeying: Nixon's Broad Support Could Still Be Undercut," *Wall Street Journal* (1923-), April 19, 1968.

⁵⁹⁹ Farrell, *Richard Nixon*, 345.

⁶⁰⁰ Farrell, 371.

⁶⁰¹ Gallup, "Gallup Poll # 1969-0781: Vietnam/Supreme Court," 2007, <https://doi.org/10.25940/ROPER-31087761>.

⁶⁰² Gallup, "Gallup Poll # 1968-0772: Richard Nixon/The Year 1969," 2007, <https://doi.org/10.25940/ROPER-31087752>.

⁶⁰³ Farrell, *Richard Nixon*, 367.

⁶⁰⁴ Farrell, 365.

With 60.7% of the popular vote, Nixon's reelection in 1972 was an electoral landslide. But shortly after taking office for a second term, his attention began to be diverted. The Watergate scandal, triggered by the 1972 break-in at the Democratic National Committee headquarters and the subsequent cover-up by Nixon's aides, quickly dominated headlines. Televised Senate hearings in 1973 riveted the country, uncovering layers of corruption that implicated the highest levels of the administration. As the scandal fully captured the nation's attention in the early months of 1973, Nixon was subsumed by fears of his own political survival. He eventually resigned in August 1974 in the face of likely impeachment.⁶⁰⁵

Carter

Like Nixon in his first term, Carter also secured the White House in a narrow victory, winning just 50.1% of the popular vote.⁶⁰⁶ An unlikely candidate for the presidency, he invented the outsider bid for the presidency, capitalizing on the "desire and thirst for strong moral leadership" in the aftermath of the Nixon-Ford years.⁶⁰⁷ Of the nine contenders for the party's nomination, Carter was the least well known, yet he quickly emerged as the frontrunner in the primaries and maintained a steady lead over Republican Gerald Ford throughout most of the general election campaign.⁶⁰⁸

One major difference between Carter and Nixon was that, while Nixon grappled with a divided government throughout his presidency, Carter enjoyed Democratic control of Congress for all four years. Nevertheless, he struggled to command his own party, which had "become essentially a

⁶⁰⁵ History Staff, "The Watergate Scandal: A Timeline," HISTORY, October 9, 2018, <https://www.history.com/articles/watergate-scandal-timeline-nixon>.

⁶⁰⁶ All polling data in this section, unless otherwise noted, is from the American Presidency Project. John Woolley and Gerhard Peters, "Statistics, Data and Mapping," The American Presidency Project, accessed May 26, 2025, <https://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/statistics/elections>.

⁶⁰⁷ Hamilton Jordan quoted in Alter, *His Very Best*, 198.

⁶⁰⁸ Jeffrey M. Jones, "Gerald Ford Retrospective," Gallup.com, December 29, 2006, <https://news.gallup.com/poll/23995/Gerald-Ford-Retrospective.aspx>.

collection of interest groups with alliances constantly in flux.”⁶⁰⁹ Congressional Democrats regarded Carter’s lack of a clear ideology and weak political ties in Washington with suspicion. As one aide put it, “He was a conservative to the conservatives, he was a moderate to the moderates and he was a liberal to the liberals.”⁶¹⁰ His Southern background further deepened the distrust of the party’s liberal faction.⁶¹¹ As a result, party-line votes were rare during his presidency, and his poor relationships with Democrats in both the House and Senate hindered his ability to drive his agenda through Congress.⁶¹² Senator Ted Kennedy’s attempt to wrest the 1980 Democratic nomination from Carter stands as a stark testament to the divisions within the party.⁶¹³

After an initial honeymoon period, Carter’s popularity with the public—which had propelled him to the nomination and the presidency—began to erode after 1978 and collapsed after 1979. His image suffered amid economic stagnation, an energy crisis, and the prolonged hostage crisis at the U.S. embassy in Iran.⁶¹⁴ Although he began his presidency with approval ratings near 70%, by June 1979 he had plummeted to 29%—making him one of only five presidents to fall below 30% approval. In a resounding defeat to Ronald Reagan in 1980, Carter secured just 41% of the popular vote to Reagan’s 50.7%.

Bush the Elder

George H. W. Bush won the 1988 presidential election by a commanding margin, defeating Democratic nominee Michael Dukakis by 7.7 percentage points in the popular vote. A clear

⁶⁰⁹ Alter, *His Very Best*, 285.

⁶¹⁰ Jon Ward, *Camelot’s End: Kennedy vs. Carter and the Fight That Broke the Democratic Party* (New York Boston: Twelve, 2019), 99.

⁶¹¹ Ward, 103.

⁶¹² Alter, *His Very Best*, 286; Peter Baker, “Carter Never Took to Washington. The Feeling Was Mutual,” *The New York Times*, January 7, 2025, sec. U.S., <https://www.nytimes.com/2025/01/07/us/politics/jimmy-carter-washington.html>.

⁶¹³ See Ward, *Camelot’s End*.

⁶¹⁴ Jeffrey M. Jones, “Jimmy Carter Retrospective,” Gallup.com, December 29, 2024, <https://news.gallup.com/opinion/gallup/235277/jimmy-carter-retrospective.aspx>.

demonstration of broad national support, his victory remains the most recent in which a presidential candidate secured over 400 electoral votes and carried more than 40 states. (It was, however, although smaller than Ronald Reagan's in 1984).⁶¹⁵ Within the Republican party, Bush had been Reagan's natural successor and frontrunner.⁶¹⁶ After a rocky start to the primaries in which Bush lost the Iowa caucus to Bob Dole, he dominated the remaining primary contests. The *New York Times* reported that Bush's victory "confirmed the Republican Party as the dominant force in Presidential politics and reflected the country's general satisfaction with eight years of Republican government under Ronald Reagan."⁶¹⁷ Although, like Nixon, Bush faced a Congress controlled by the opposing party—Democrats held majorities in both the House and the Senate throughout his presidency—he entered office with considerable domestic political strength. His electoral win, reputation for moderation, deep Washington experience, and strong bipartisan relationships allowed him to govern effectively despite partisan divides.

This strength was evident in the confirmation of his top appointees. James Baker, his trusted ally and nominee for secretary of state, was confirmed without difficulty.⁶¹⁸ While Bush did face one high-profile setback—his initial nominee for secretary of defense, former Senator John Tower, was rejected by the Senate in a rare and contentious vote over allegations of misconduct—he recovered quickly. Bush nominated Congressman Dick Cheney as Tower's replacement, and Cheney was

⁶¹⁵ B. Drummond Ayres, "Electoral College's Stately Landslide Sends Bush and Quayle Into History," *The New York Times*, December 20, 1988, sec. U.S., <https://www.nytimes.com/1988/12/20/us/electoral-college-s-stately-landslide-sends-bush-and-quayle-into-history.html>.

⁶¹⁶ Phil Gailey, "Politics; The Loneliness of The Front-Runner," *The New York Times*, October 9, 1985, sec. U.S., <https://www.nytimes.com/1985/10/09/us/politics-the-loneliness-of-the-front-runner.html>.

⁶¹⁷ E. J. Dionne Jr, "THE 1988 ELECTIONS; BUSH IS ELECTED BY A 6-5 MARGIN WITH SOLID G.O.P. BASE IN SOUTH; DEMOCRATS HOLD BOTH HOUSES How the Poll Was Taken," *The New York Times*, November 9, 1988, sec. U.S., <https://www.nytimes.com/1988/11/09/us/1988-elections-bush-elected-6-5-margin-with-solid-gop-base-south-democrats-hold.html>.

⁶¹⁸ William J. Eaton and Douglas Jehl, "Baker, Dole, Darman Confirmed Unanimously," *Los Angeles Times*, January 26, 1989, sec. Politics, <https://www.latimes.com/archives/la-xpm-1989-01-26-mn-1978-story.html>.

confirmed swiftly and with broad support.⁶¹⁹ That Bush was able to assemble a highly respected national security team with minimal resistance, despite lacking congressional control, speaks to his domestic political dominance. His decisive electoral win and reputation for competence in foreign policy enabled him to shape his administration on his own terms.⁶²⁰

Bush remained relatively popular for much of his presidency, with his ratings only sinking in the fourth year of his term. Following the success of Operation Desert Storm—a swift and decisive military campaign by a U.S.-led multilateral coalition to expel Iraqi forces from Kuwait—his approval ratings soared to 89 percent, among the highest ever recorded for a U.S. president. However, by late 1991, his approval had fallen below 50 percent, driven primarily by a worsening domestic economy.

⁶²¹ One commentator observed that “Bush's barren domestic record, amid great economic distress, exposed his admitted preference for working on international problems.”⁶²² The economic downturn, combined with his decision to raise taxes after pledging not to, eroded support from both conservatives and swing voters.⁶²³ With the Cold War over, Bush also found himself unable to deploy the familiar Republican strategy of portraying his Democratic opponent as soft on communism. Against Bill Clinton, who emphasized economic renewal and represented a new generation of leadership, Bush appeared increasingly out of touch and struggled to articulate a compelling vision for

⁶¹⁹ Bush and Scowcroft, *A World Transformed*, 21-22.

⁶²⁰ Lawrence Eagleburger, “Bush: Foreign Affairs Sense,” *The New York Times*, November 6, 1988, sec. Opinion, <https://www.nytimes.com/1988/11/06/opinion/bush-foreign-affairs-sense.html>.

⁶²¹ “George Bush Public Approval,” The American Presidency Project, accessed May 26, 2025, <https://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/statistics/data/george-bush-public-approval>.

⁶²² Thomas Omestad, “Why Bush Lost,” *Foreign Policy*, no. 89 (1992): 73, <https://doi.org/10.2307/1149074>.

⁶²³ Jeffrey Frankel, “The Lesson from George H.W. Bush’s Tax Reversal,” The Belfer Center for Science and International Affairs, December 13, 2018, <https://www.belfercenter.org/publication/lesson-george-hw-bushs-tax-reversal>.

the future both at home and abroad.⁶²⁴ Despite his foreign policy achievements and relative domestic political strength for the bulk of his tenure, Bush ultimately lost the 1992 election to Clinton.

The Enemy Within: Nixon and the Bureaucracy

My theory of leader strategy selection predicts that Nixon would insulate himself and his office from the bureaucracy, relying primarily on informal tools to expand the size, responsibilities, and resources of the executive office, adopting and implementing policies without the knowledge of bureaucratic agencies, and even monitoring elites within the bureaucracy. As expected, he did so: redesigning the National Security Council (NSC) system to sideline the State Department, which he deeply distrusted, enacting secret backchannel negotiations with China and the Soviet Union, and empowering subcabinet-level committees to circumvent cabinet officials William Rogers and Melvin Laird. This structure allowed Nixon and Kissinger to bypass the bureaucracy, consolidate decision-making, and tightly control access to the president.

Centralization to the White House

Before Nixon had even been inaugurated, he had both solicited and approved a new National Security Council system designed by Henry Kissinger and his aides. The new NSC system left the council itself intact; it would remain the principal forum for mid- and long-range decisionmaking. The new system's central innovation was the creation of the NSC Review Group, which would develop papers and "frame the issues to be decided by the NSC."⁶²⁵ This change was a direct response to the president-elect's refusal to preserve the Senior Intergovernmental Group (SIG), a functionally analogous group chaired by the Under Secretary of State. "Firmly persuaded of the Foreign Service's

⁶²⁴ For example, see "Presidential Debate at the University of Richmond," The American Presidency Project, October 15, 1992, <https://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/documents/presidential-debate-the-university-richmond>.

⁶²⁵ *Foreign Relations of the United States (FRUS), 1969-1976*, vol. II, doc. 1.
<https://history.state.gov/historicaldocuments/frus1969-76v02>

ineradicable hostility to him,” Nixon refused to consider preserving the SIG. “Influence of the State Department establishment must be reduced,” the new national security adviser wrote in his notes in an early meeting with Nixon.⁶²⁶ The new system gave Kissinger, who would chair the Review Group instead of a State Department official, the authority to summarize policy options and influence the facts that were forwarded to the president prior to NSC meetings.⁶²⁷ In response to a memo outlining the arguments from the Foreign Service against the proposed system, Kissinger wrote to the president-elect, “The only way the President can ensure that all options are examined, and all the arguments fairly presented, is to have his own people – responsive to him, accustomed to his style, and with a Presidential rather than departmental perspective – oversee the preparation of papers.”⁶²⁸

The new NSC system reduced the influence that the Secretary of State William Rogers and the Secretary of Defense Melvin Laird could exert on the foreign policy process. Even the question of the NSC restructuring had evaded the inputs of these two principals: Nixon had approved the memorandum outlining the NSC reorganization the day *before* he assembled Laird, Rogers, and Kissinger all together and informed them that he had approved the new structure, thereby “depriving the meeting of its subject, though [Laird and Rogers] did not know this.”⁶²⁹ Moreover, since the Review Group met at the subcabinet level, Kissinger was able to avoid direct confrontation with Laird and Rogers.⁶³⁰

The situation worsened because the NSC met less and less often over the course of Nixon’s tenure.⁶³¹ Daalder and Destler (2011) argue that the primary aim of the NSC system slowly shifted

⁶²⁶ Kissinger, *White House Years*, 42.

⁶²⁷ Jean A. Garrison, *Games Advisers Play: Foreign Policy in the Nixon and Carter Administrations* (Texas A & M University Press, 1999), 8.

⁶²⁸ FRUS 1969-1976, vol. II, doc. 3.

⁶²⁹ Kissinger, *White House Years*, 43.

⁶³⁰ Daalder and Destler, *In the Shadow of the Oval Office*, 72.

⁶³¹ Asaf Siniver, *Nixon, Kissinger, and US Foreign Policy Making: The Machinery of Crisis*, Illustrated edition (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011), 48.

from ensuring the president's preparedness for important decisions to implementing "detailed action along policy lines already decided (or to be addressed by Nixon outside of the system)." ⁶³² This drift in focus was accompanied by the proliferation of subcabinet-level committees like the Washington Special Actions Group (WSAG), which were structurally similar to the NSC Review Group in that they vested power in Kissinger and excluded Rogers and Laird from the committee. These entities were ostensibly intended to synthesize interagency analysis on specific issue areas, but instead were seen as a way for the NSC to pressure the bureaucracy to supply information and analysis it would otherwise reserve for itself. In August 1969, when the NSC was reportedly only getting a "only a trickle of analysis on Vietnam issues" from the bureaucracy, Kissinger and the NSC Director of Program Analysis Laurence Lynn convinced Nixon to sign-off on the creation of a Vietnam Special Studies Group (VSSG). ⁶³³ In May 1970, Lynn wrote to Kissinger that the VSSG had been successful in obtaining good analysis on Vietnam by obtaining a "non-bureaucratic response" due to the "firm direction from the NSC". ⁶³⁴

Institutionalizing greater responsibility and influence for the NSC staff was a contested and uneven process. During the 1968 transition Kissinger recruited staffers on the basis of merit from both within and outside of the bureaucracy, placing a premium on gathering diversity of viewpoints and later boasting in his memoir that he refused to hire six people who had been promised political appointments. ⁶³⁵ But the varied ideological composition of the staff opened Kissinger up to Nixon's suspicions that they were not loyal to his mission – suspicions that later caused Nixon to order warrantless FBI wiretaps of three NSC aides. ⁶³⁶ Moreover, Kissinger's penchant for closely guarding

⁶³² Daalder and Destler, *In the Shadow of the Oval Office*, 71.

⁶³³ FRUS 1969–1976, vol. 2, doc. 67.

⁶³⁴ FRUS 1969–1976, vol. 2, doc. 108.

⁶³⁵ Kissinger, *White House Years*, 17.

⁶³⁶ Daalder and Destler, *In the Shadow of the Oval Office*, 66.

access to Nixon and the other principals, failing to brief his subordinates on policy developments, and overworking his employees lowered staff morale. Two staff members resigned in a letter noting that the working atmosphere between officials within the government had “depressed” them. Compared to the Johnson administration, they had been “unprepared for the atmosphere of suspicion, manipulation, and malice which we have seen over the last year.”⁶³⁷ Only nine of 28 recruits endured beyond April 1971. The lost recruits were replaced with a still-competent group that were less eclectic in their views and more compliant. This group’s size increased to 54 aides in 1971 – the largest the NSC staff had ever been at the time.⁶³⁸

Making Policy Without the Principals

The true significance of the NSC reforms can be found not in the authority they formally granted the NSA, but in how easily it allowed him to function outside of the system without the knowledge of the foreign policy bureaucracy. Kissinger writes,

Though this was not envisioned at the beginning, the [NSC system] made possible the secret negotiations in which as time went on I was increasingly involved. Nixon and I could use the interdepartmental machinery to educate ourselves by ordering planning papers on negotiations that as far as the bureaucracy was concerned were hypothetical; these studies told us the range of options and what could find support in the government. We were then able to put departmental ideas into practice outside of formal channels.⁶³⁹

Kissinger’s secret backchannel negotiations with foreign powers were often prolonged initiatives, persisting for months without the knowledge of State or Defense. It was the primary

⁶³⁷ *FRUS 1969–1976*, vol. 2, doc. 106.

⁶³⁸ Daalder and Destler, *In the Shadow of the Oval Office*, 68.

⁶³⁹ Kissinger, *White House Years*, 46.

instrument Nixon chose to select for improving U.S.-Soviet relations and opening relations with China. Just after inauguration in February 1969, Nixon set up a confidential direct channel between Kissinger and the Soviet Ambassador Anatoly Dobrynin, of which no one outside of the NSC was unaware. This pattern of secrecy extended to communications with U.S. ambassadors stationed abroad, such as U.S. Ambassador to Pakistan Joseph Farland, who helped Kissinger lay the groundwork for Nixon's visit to China. In a December 1971 meeting with his closest advisers, Nixon remarked "there have been more backchannel games played in this administration than any in history because we couldn't trust the God damned State Department."⁶⁴⁰

Outside of the NSC system, Nixon was inaccessible to all but a handful of advisers. Rogers and Laird seldom met with or spoke to him without Kissinger. Kissinger, because of his control over the NSC machinery, controlled all communications to the president even for Rogers and Laird. Rogers went to H.R. Haldeman, Nixon's loyal Chief of Staff, in February 1971 to try to find ways to "direct communications to the [president] directly, rather than via Henry."⁶⁴¹ Rogers' concerns were representative of shared concerns among State Department bureaucrats that "communications from the Secretary to the President, or at other levels, either do not get through to the President or are presented in a way that does not give full force to the State position," as a memo from an NSC staffer concerned about the deterioration of the relationship with State explained to Kissinger.⁶⁴²

The inaccessibility may be in part attributable to the discomfort Nixon felt when imposing his will on his advisers directly – a characteristic Kissinger describes in depth in his *White House Years*. However, it also follows from Nixon's suspicions, which often were reaffirmed, that both Laird and

⁶⁴⁰ FRUS 1969–1976, vol. 2, doc. 29.

⁶⁴¹ H. R. Haldeman and Stephen E. Ambrose, *The Haldeman Diaries: Inside the Nixon White House* (New York, NY: G. P. Putnam's Sons, 1994), 362.

⁶⁴² FRUS 1969–1976, vol. 2, doc. 67.

Rogers were too trusting and uncritical of their own bureaucracies. In 1972, Nixon sneered that Rogers “just constantly defends the god-damned Department, and he says nothing is wrong … He has pandered so much to be liked by his colleagues at the State Department that the State Department runs him rather than his running the State Department.”⁶⁴³ Nixon suspected that Rogers and Laird, under the influence of bureaucratic forces, would oppose his plans and subsequently find a way to sabotage them bureaucratically. When the departments were consulted through the subcabinet NSC committees like the WSAG, which dealt with crisis decisionmaking, the details of those meetings would sometimes leak to the press to put pressure on the Nixon administration. In February 1971, a story leaked that the president had met with the WSAG about military operations in Laos, during which members of the group had tried to persuade Nixon not to move ahead with the military plans. Haldeman describes Nixon’s adverse reaction to the leaks, which he took as a test of his resolve to go to battle with the bureaucracy. Kissinger and Nixon both agreed that “if P now allowed himself to be talked out of [the operations], in effect by the press reports which had been leaked from State and Defense, he would lose any hope of controlling the bureaucracy.”⁶⁴⁴

Even when Rogers and Laird met with Nixon about a forthcoming policy decision, the president had often already chosen the path forward based on information acquired and deliberated upon with Kissinger and other executive elites *outside* of the NSC system. In April 1970, Nixon decided to launch military operations against North Vietnam in Cambodia based on backchannel communications between Kissinger and the Ambassador to Vietnam Ellsworth Bunker and General Abrams. Rogers and Laird opposed the operations, both on substantive grounds and because Nixon decided which military options to pursue without the consultation of either secretary.⁶⁴⁵ After to

⁶⁴³ FRUS 1969–1976, vol. 2, doc. 340.

⁶⁴⁴ Haldeman and Ambrose, *The Haldeman Diaries*, 351.

⁶⁴⁵ FRUS 1969–1976, vol. 2, doc. 261

deciding to go ahead with the planned operations, Nixon held a meeting the next day to “lay down the law to Rogers and Laird” about the planned operations.⁶⁴⁶ Later, a story emerged in the press that Laird and Rogers had opposed the decision, which Nixon and his team took to be the result of a leak.⁶⁴⁷

Incomplete Overhaul: The Frustrated Push for Loyalists

The neutrality of the foreign policy bureaucracy remained relatively intact under Nixon, despite the distrust he had for its elites. Nixon’s senior political appointees were selected based on a mix of competence and loyalty, apart from William Rogers, who was appointed Secretary of State. Nixon selected Rogers, a lawyer who had served with Nixon in the Eisenhower administration as Attorney General, based on his ignorance of matters of foreign policy. Nixon considered this an asset “because it guaranteed that policy direction would remain in the White House.”⁶⁴⁸ In some cases, Nixon chose to preserve the neutrality of certain roles, like the CIA director position. According to Kissinger, CIA director Richard Helms was not someone whom Nixon personally trusted. “He felt ill at ease with Helms personally, since he suspected that Helms was well-liked by the liberal Georgetown social set to which Nixon ascribed many of his difficulties,” Kissinger recounts.⁶⁴⁹ Nixon had wanted to remove Helms, whom he had inherited from the Johnson administration, but Kissinger objected on the grounds that it was dangerous to turn the CIA director position into a “political plum” that changed with every incoming president, which was not the norm at the time.⁶⁵⁰ Nixon also preserved Chairman of the JCS Earle Wheeler’s position, allowing him to conclude his term and extending it for another year after that.

⁶⁴⁶ Haldeman and Ambrose, *The Haldeman Diaries*, 229.

⁶⁴⁷ Haldeman and Ambrose, 237.

⁶⁴⁸ Kissinger, *White House Years*, 19.

⁶⁴⁹ Kissinger, 87.

⁶⁵⁰ Kissinger, 23.

Despite his generalized suspicion of the foreign policy bureaucracy, Nixon had only limited success in installing the loyal and removing the disloyal within the departments and agencies. In early February 1969, Nixon recognized with dismay that most of the early appointments to State had been “either State Department careerists or at best pro-Rockefeller types” and moved to quickly remove the ambassadors who were obvious political appointees from past Democratic administrations.⁶⁵¹ Over the next year, Nixon successfully appointed several ambassadors he felt would be loyal to him, or who would at least counter what he felt was the State Department’s “usual game of promoting their favorites and kicking out those who may disagree with their policies from time to time.”⁶⁵² There was also a list that circulated between Nixon, Kissinger, and a former Foreign Service Officer about the State Department personnel thought to be disloyal to the Nixon administration and in need of replacement, though it is unclear if any action was taken against these individuals.⁶⁵³ By September 1969, Nixon had issued 38 percent non-career and 62 percent career appointments in the State Department. Compared to the past three presidential administrations, the proportion of career ambassadors appointed during the Nixon era was slightly *above* average.⁶⁵⁴

Nixon’s only partial success can be attributed to his limited political resources. Haldeman’s diary notes that Nixon felt “we haven’t done enough to get in good new people that are ours. He’s right. Problem is need to deal with Democratic Congress.”⁶⁵⁵ Since Congressional approval was needed for most high-level appointments, Democratic control of Congress probably restrained Nixon from installing flagrant loyalists to essential bureaucratic positions. But another problem was Nixon’s inability to obtain buy-in from his Cabinet on the need to make the bureaucracies more responsive to

⁶⁵¹ *FRUS 1969–1976*, vol. 2, doc. 296. Nelson Rockefeller had run against Nixon in the 1968 Republican Party Presidential Primaries and was considered a moderate Republican.

⁶⁵² *FRUS 1969–1976*, vol. 2, doc. 298.

⁶⁵³ *FRUS 1969–1976*, vol. 2, doc. 320.

⁶⁵⁴ *FRUS 1969–1976*, vol. 2, doc. 308.

⁶⁵⁵ Haldeman and Ambrose, *The Haldeman Diaries*, 25.

his political and personal interests. “P isn’t tough enough with his Cabinet officers. Won’t *make* them fire incumbents and/or take our political recommendations,” added Haldeman.⁶⁵⁶

Haldeman was right, at least as far as the State Department was concerned. The lack of responsiveness to the White House’s demand for more loyalists in Foggy Bottom can be traced to Rogers himself. Concerned that State was being sidelined in favor of the NSC, one State Department official pointed out in a memo to the Under Secretary of State Elliot Richardson, “Why hadn’t [Rogers] ever gotten the message that by not making greater changes and by not bringing in more new loyalists, he was simply ensuring [Kissinger’s] dominance?... Nixon needed greater confidence in the Department as a whole and more new faces was a strong step in that direction.”⁶⁵⁷ As his first term neared its end, Nixon recognized that he had failed to clean house the way he wanted when he first became president. Speaking to Haldeman about his hopes for a second term, he aspired to “really do something about the government... Tear the State Department to pieces, and Defense. Don’t just preside over the huge morass.”⁶⁵⁸ This ultimately did not happen as Nixon’s presidency became enfeebled by the Watergate controversy.

Watergate and the Second Term that Would Have Been

The changes that Richard Nixon made to the foreign policy process during his tenure would not last. The NSC reorganization and other institutional reforms were issued via national security directives known as National Security Decision Memoranda (NSDM).⁶⁵⁹ As with executive orders, changes issued by national security directives are unlikely to endure because subsequent presidents

⁶⁵⁶ Haldeman and Ambrose, 25.

⁶⁵⁷ *FRUS 1969–1976*, vol. 2, doc. 307.

⁶⁵⁸ Haldeman and Ambrose, *The Haldeman Diaries*, 736.

⁶⁵⁹ NSDMs were a type of national security directive used during the Nixon administration. Unlike executive orders, national security directives remain highly classified and are only directed to the National Security Council and the senior members of the executive branch.

can easily reverse them through their own directives. Nixon's NSDM2, which reorganized the NSC system, was later revoked by a directive issued by Jimmy Carter. Moreover, despite the difficulties of working in an administration overtly hostile to the bureaucracy, there is little evidence that Nixon caused a mass exodus of bureaucrats from any agency. The extensive evidence of bureaucratic resistance to Nixon's insulation strategy suggests that perhaps instead of creating an environment that was difficult for bureaucrats to withstand, the competitive atmosphere inspired policy-motivated bureaucrats to undermine the administration's priorities.

The permanent changes Nixon desired might have materialized if his second term had not become absorbed by the Watergate controversy. After securing a second term in 1972, Nixon set the stage for a serious change-up in the administration by removing Helms and Laird and replacing them with those within the administration Nixon felt had demonstrated their loyalty and were ideologically sympathetic to his views. Helms was to be replaced by James Schlesinger, who agreed with Nixon that Helms was "a captive of the Georgetown set."⁶⁶⁰ Elliot Richardson, who had been a reliable senior-level appointee at State, replaced Laird as Secretary of Defense. On November 7, 1972, the day of his reelection, Nixon had a long conversation with H.R. Haldeman about the changes he wanted to make to the bureaucracy in his second term. In the meeting, he wanted Rogers' replacement to prioritize "cleaning up the State Department" and reiterated his desire "to ruin the foreign service. I mean ruin it—the old foreign service—and to build a new one. I'm going to do it." Nixon did not shy away from vocalizing his demand for loyalty over competence. In the foreign service, he said, "we'll have to see what promotions we want to put through. The most important thing is loyalty."⁶⁶¹

⁶⁶⁰ Haldeman and Ambrose, *The Haldeman Diaries*, 784.

⁶⁶¹ FRUS 1969–1976, vol. 2, note 347.

Despite this grandiose vision, Nixon's second term did not amount to much in terms of long-lasting transformation. After the Watergate scandal had captured the nation's attention and Nixon feared for his own political survival, he abandoned any hopes of dominating the bureaucracy. In September 1973, he replaced Rogers with Kissinger as secretary of state. As Kissinger later reflected,

It was a painful decision for Nixon because it symbolized — perhaps more than any of the Watergate headlines — how wounded he was. He had never wanted a strong Secretary of State; foreign policy, he had asserted in his 1968 campaign, would be run from the White House. And so it had been. If Nixon was ready to bend this principle it showed how weak he had become.⁶⁶²

This weakness coincided with a disinterest in foreign policy.

I found it difficult to get Nixon to focus on foreign policy, to a degree that should have disquieted me. In the past, even in calm periods, he had immersed himself in foreign policy to enliven the job of managing the government, which ultimately bored him. Now it was difficult to get him to address memoranda.⁶⁶³

In a fight for his political survival, Nixon resorted delegating foreign policymaking to the Kissinger's State Department rather than "ruining" the bureaucracy. "Nixon no longer had the margin of maneuver or the personnel for the intricate minuets with which he had managed affairs in the first term," Kissinger wrote. "Both he and I had been reduced to fundamentals. He governed by more conventional procedures."⁶⁶⁴

⁶⁶² Henry Kissinger, *Years of Upheaval*, First Edition (Boston: Little Brown & Co, 1982), 31.

⁶⁶³ Kissinger, 143.

⁶⁶⁴ Kissinger, 353.

Inclusive Intentions, Strategic Circumvention: Carter's Foreign Policy Process in Practice

President Carter entered office committed to an inclusive, deliberative foreign policymaking process that would reject the secrecy and centralization of the Nixon-Kissinger era. He built a collegial team with diverse perspectives—most notably Zbigniew Brzezinski and Cyrus Vance—and encouraged open debate through restructured NSC procedures and regular face-to-face meetings. Carter also prioritized meritocratic appointments, allowing Cabinet officials to select experienced bureaucrats for key roles. However, over time, Brzezinski's growing influence and Carter's limited control over departmental appointees led to increasing friction, especially with the State Department. These tensions came to a head during the China normalization process, when Brzezinski sidelined Vance and conducted secret negotiations, leading to bureaucratic disarray, morale issues, and complications with the Soviet Union over the Strategic Arms Limitation Treaty (SALT) II. While Carter never fully abandoned his inclusive ideals, selective circumvention and internal rivalries undermined the coherence and effectiveness of his foreign policy process.

No Palace Guard: Inclusive Decision-making

In the shadow of the Nixon-Kissinger duo, Carter began his presidency with the pledge that he would do things differently—foreign policy would be made openly, avoiding marginalizing dissenting voices, and without “anonymous aides—unelected, unknown to the public, and unconfirmed by the Senate—wielding vast power in the White House basement.”⁶⁶⁵ The immediate question of the transition lay in how to reform the NSC system, which had been a lightning rod for criticism of Kissinger's dominance in national security and foreign affairs. But for all the moral disgust Carter harbored towards Nixon's policies, the NSC system that he institutionalized was not a radical

⁶⁶⁵ Betty Glad, *An Outsider in the White House* (Ithaca, New York: Cornell University Press, 2009), 7.

departure from that of the former president. It included a national security assistant “to help the President manage the national security bureaucracy” and a NSC staff “to monitor the implementation of the Presidential policy by the bureaucracy, serve as an honest broker between agencies and provide an independent and ‘disinterested’ source of analysis, advice and staff work.” Echoing Nixon’s insistence on having “all options examined”, Carter’s transition team sought reform the NSC system to “*create policy choices*, to open up the bureaucracy so that alternatives are not smothered and issues are not fuzzed over, and that all relevant facts and data are brought to bear on decisions.”⁶⁶⁶ Still, the transition team was mindful of the disadvantages of the Nixon-Kissinger system, describing “the considerable irritation and hostility toward the system” that can develop among advisers because of the barriers between the president and his foreign policy team.⁶⁶⁷ After a study of the NSC system, transition staffers recommended that the NSC committee structure be revised so that the secretaries of state and defense chair committees on policy issues, rather than the NSA chairing most of the committees as Kissinger had.⁶⁶⁸ Carter himself wanted a simpler NSC system in which there were only two committees: the Policy Review Committee (PRC), which would be chaired by the head of the department that was primarily responsible for the issue being discussed (usually the State Department), and the Special Coordinating Committee (SCC), to be chaired by the NSA.⁶⁶⁹ If a meeting of agency principals arrived at recommendations for policy actions, the NSA would submit a Presidential Directive (PD) to Carter for signature. If the meeting had no recommendations, then the summary of the discussions would be circulated to him.⁶⁷⁰ The system, according to National Security Assistant Zbigniew Brzezinski, was good at “engaging Carter’s principal associates, on the Cabinet level, in an

⁶⁶⁶ FRUS 1977-1980, vol. XXVIII, doc. 3. <https://history.state.gov/historicaldocuments/frus1977-80v28>

⁶⁶⁷ FRUS 1977-1980, vol. XXVIII, doc. 2.

⁶⁶⁸ FRUS 1977-1980, vol. XXVIII, doc. 5.

⁶⁶⁹ FRUS 1977-1980, vol. XXVIII, doc. 7.

⁶⁷⁰ Cyrus Vance, *Hard Choices: Critical Years in America’s Foreign Policy* (New York: Simon and Schuster, New York, 1983), 37.

ongoing process of discussion and debate. It was, to be sure, time-consuming, but it also meant that any decision that went up to the President had been fully vetted.”⁶⁷¹

In a system that required a collegial and competent team of principals, Carter drafted several Washington insiders he had met as part of his membership in the Trilateral Commission, a collection of investment bankers, multinational corporation heads, and foreign policy elites assembled by David Rockefeller that rejected the politics of containment and sought a new era of U.S. foreign policy rooted in interdependence between the United States, Europe, and Japan.⁶⁷² Each member of Carter’s foreign policy circle was a member of the commission: Columbia University professor National Security Assistant Zbigniew Brzezinski, lawyer and experienced diplomat Secretary of State Cyrus Vance, Secretary of Defense Harold Brown, and Vice President Walter “Fritz” Mondale.⁶⁷³ While their membership in the commission may seem to suggest a shared ideology, Brzezinski and Vance held “diametrically opposing views” on the Soviet Union.⁶⁷⁴ Several advisers warned Carter against selecting Brzezinski. Former Secretary of Defense told Carter that the “innovative and often provocative” Brzezinski was “not enough of an honest broker to fill this post” and was certain to “clash with the gentle and collegial Vance.”⁶⁷⁵ According to Stu Eizenstat, Carter’s reaction to the warnings was indifference: “I like hearing different opinions. I can handle it.”⁶⁷⁶ Later, Carter wrote, “The different strengths of Zbig and Cy matched the roles they played, and also permitted the natural competition

⁶⁷¹ Brzezinski, *Power and Principle*, 66.

⁶⁷² Jerry Wayne Sanders, *Peddlers of Crisis: The Committee on the Present Danger and the Politics of Containment*, 1st ed (Boston, MA: South End Press, 1983), 175–78, <https://catalog.lib.uchicago.edu/vufind/Record/580094?sid=74613294>.

⁶⁷³ Including the vice president in the inner circle of foreign policy was a Carter innovation. “If you get an order from Fritz, it’s as if it’s an order from me,” he told his staff. Alter, *His Very Best*, 289.

⁶⁷⁴ Stuart Eizenstat, *President Carter: The White House Years*, First edition (New York: Thomas Dunne Books, St. Martin’s Press, 2018), 66, <https://catalog.lib.uchicago.edu/vufind/Record/11596766?sid=74613304>.

⁶⁷⁵ Jimmy Carter, *Keeping Faith: Memoirs of a President*, University of Arkansas pbk. ed (Fayetteville, AR: University of Arkansas Press, 1995), 51, <https://catalog.lib.uchicago.edu/vufind/Record/11301966>. See also Glad, *An Outsider in the White House*, 26.

⁶⁷⁶ Eizenstat, *President Carter*, 66.

between the two organizations to stay alive. I appreciated those differences. In making the final decisions on foreign policy, *I needed to weigh as many points of view as possible.*⁶⁷⁷

Carter made a concerted effort to foster a collegial decision-making atmosphere among his top advisers despite their differences. His main vehicle for this was a regular foreign affairs breakfast held every Friday at 7:30 a.m., which covered "the range of questions involving international and defense matters...to minimize any misunderstandings among this high-level group."⁶⁷⁸ The breakfasts began as a small, informal gathering of Carter, Vance, Mondale, and Brzezinski, but soon expanded to include Brown.⁶⁷⁹ This was Carter's "favorite meeting of the week."⁶⁸⁰ He often preferred to use these breakfasts for substantive discussions, reserving formal NSC meetings for only the most serious issues.⁶⁸¹ Occasionally, major decisions were made at these gatherings; for instance, Carter decided to dispatch Vance to the Middle East during a breakfast at Camp David in July 1978.⁶⁸² Carter also encouraged his senior advisers to meet regularly without him. Vance, Brzezinski, and Brown held a weekly "VBB" luncheon with recommendations from these meetings forwarded to the president for decision.

The inclusivity of the decision-making process was reinforced by Carter's leadership style, which emphasized openness to opposing viewpoints. According to Vance, Carter's approach to his senior officials was "unpretentious and open-minded," marked by careful listening and a desire for "the fullest discussion before making decisions."⁶⁸³ He was, if anything, "willing to permit debate to go on too long" in his effort to absorb "every detail and nuance" before reaching a conclusion. Carter

⁶⁷⁷ Emphasis my own. Carter, *Keeping Faith*, 54.

⁶⁷⁸ Carter, 56.

⁶⁷⁹ Brzezinski, *Power and Principle*, 68.

⁶⁸⁰ Carter, *Keeping Faith*, 46.

⁶⁸¹ Brzezinski, *Power and Principle*, 67–68.

⁶⁸² Jimmy Carter, *White House Diary*, 1st edition (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2010), 210.

⁶⁸³ Vance, *Hard Choices*, 35.

encouraged frankness, welcomed disagreement among his advisers, and insisted on confronting "unpleasant facts, hard options, [and] difficult decisions" rather than being shielded from them. His commitment to open deliberation shaped the design of his policy process, which relied heavily on frequent face-to-face meetings with his top advisers. When the system worked as intended, it worked exceptionally well. Reflecting on the 1978 Camp David negotiations, Carter described the atmosphere as one of seamless collaboration: "We had a superb team effort. I never saw any evidence of jealousy or disharmony among us. Our discussions were freewheeling. I worked closely with Cy and got my best advice from him, Fritz, and Zbig."⁶⁸⁴

As the presidency went on, the inclusive spirit of the policymaking process was subtly eroded. Since the SCC or PRC participants were unable to review the draft PDs or summaries that went to the president, the NSA had the "power to interpret the thrust of discussion or frame the policy recommendations of departmental participants." Vance later wrote, "The summaries quite often did not reflect adequately the complexity of the discussion or the full range of participants' views... Sometimes, when the summaries or PDs with the president's marginal notes, or his initials or signature arrived back at the State Department by White House courier (often marked for my "eyes only"), I found discrepancies, occasionally serious ones, from my own recollection of what had been said, agreed, or recommended."⁶⁸⁵

The perception that Brzezinski was becoming a Kissinger-like figure—dominating rather than managing the interagency system—became widespread. Vance, in particular, resented Brzezinski's prominent role in speaking publicly on foreign policy, a responsibility he believed properly belonged to the secretary of state.⁶⁸⁶ Through his close access to and influence over the president, Brzezinski

⁶⁸⁴ Carter, *White House Diary*, 244.

⁶⁸⁵ Vance, *Hard Choices*, 37.

⁶⁸⁶ Vance, 34.

gradually pushed Carter toward an organizational model more reminiscent of the Nixon-Kissinger years than what Carter had initially envisioned. Although Carter "pledged that none of the members of my staff would dominate members of the cabinet," as he wrote in his diary in January 1977, in practice Brzezinski actively modeled himself after Kissinger and sought to position himself as the architect of foreign policy, relegating Vance to a more limited, implementation-focused role.⁶⁸⁷

Leaks from the State Department fueled media coverage that both intensified the friction between Vance and Brzezinski and fed public perceptions of an inconsistent and disorganized foreign policy. Concerned about the damage caused by the image of an administration in disarray, Brzezinski warned Carter in a January 1979 national security report: "as an Administration, we have not dispelled the notion that we are amateurish and disorganized and that our policies are uncertain and irresolute." He attributed this not to the administration's policies themselves, but to the way "almost anyone in the bureaucracy feels free to talk to the press, discuss and distort the most intimate decision-making processes, and generally promote themselves or their personal policy preferences." Brzezinski singled out the State Department in particular, writing, "one cannot have a discussion with any journalist in this city without gaining the very clear impression that the leaks and misinformation coming out of the State Department are of unprecedented proportions." He concluded that only "a significant shake-up, particularly in the State Department," could remedy the situation. Brzezinski urged Carter to assume "tight personal control of all actions affecting our relationship with the Soviet Union," warning of the "potential for great disarray, given the different ideological views in your Administration."⁶⁸⁸ After Vance resigned over the handling of the Iranian hostage crisis, Brzezinski again emphasized the problem of "leaks and a lack of discipline in the State Department ranks," cautioning Carter that "there

⁶⁸⁷ Glad, *An Outsider in the White House*, 27.

⁶⁸⁸ FRUS 1977-1980, vol. XXVIII, doc. 7.

will be a particular temptation by the State Department bureaucracy to even the score (meetings on this subject have already been held at Foggy Bottom)." He stressed the importance of promoting "teamwork and discipline" to avoid further infighting and negative press. Brzezinski then briefed Carter on specific State Department officials he believed needed to be "brought into line" for their disloyalty.⁶⁸⁹

Brzezinski gradually succeeded in shaping Carter's view of the State Department. Carter later complained about the "lethargy and inertia of State—the almost total lack of initiative or innovation."⁶⁹⁰ He acknowledged that the leaks often arose from the State Department, motivated by simple disagreements or actions he himself had authorized, like a speech or interview by Brzezinski.⁶⁹¹ But Carter disliked discord among his advisers and understood that tensions ran both ways. In February 1979, he observed that "Zbig is too competitive and incisive, Cy is too easy on his subordinates, and the news media aggravate the inevitable differences."⁶⁹² Carter also acknowledged that part of the problem stemmed from his own limited interaction with the State Department bureaucracy, admitting, "I hardly know the desk officers in State but work closely with NSC people."⁶⁹³ By 1980, he more openly recognized these organizational shortcomings; in a meeting with State Department officials at Camp David, he admitted that the NSC had "created problems" for State and that he had been "isolated" from the Department, resulting in "inadequate communication."⁶⁹⁴

In sum, despite having selected a dominant and divisive NSA, Carter remained committed to an inclusive decision-making process throughout his tenure. He never veered fully into a Nixon-Kissinger-like system in which bureaucratic agencies and elites were left completely in the dark and

⁶⁸⁹ FRUS 1977-1980, vol. XXVIII, doc. 24.

⁶⁹⁰ Carter, *White House Diary*, 363.

⁶⁹¹ Carter, *Keeping Faith*, 53.

⁶⁹² Carter, *White House Diary*, 289.

⁶⁹³ Carter, 289.

⁶⁹⁴ FRUS 1977-1980, vol. XXVIII, doc. 25.

excluded from decision-making. Yet there were selected instances in which Brzezinski convinced Carter to tighten the flow of information on salient issues like the normalization of relations with China, which we will return to later in the chapter.

Return of the Meritocracy

In addition to maintaining a relatively inclusive policymaking process, Carter also made a concerted effort to prioritize competence over loyalty in appointments. Believing in the need for “experienced, intelligent, open-minded” people, he “asked his transition staff to identify the most qualified people available.”⁶⁹⁵ This translated into a substantial number of experienced bureaucrats filling the top positions within the bureaucracy and the executive office. Across the departments, Carter allowed his cabinet officers to select appointees at the subcabinet level.⁶⁹⁶ Vance chose to appoint a large number of career officials to fill the senior openings in the State Department.⁶⁹⁷ Career Foreign Service Officer (FSO) Anthony Lake was named director of policy planning; Richard Holbrooke, assistant secretary of state for East Asian affairs, had been a staff assistant to several ambassadors; Harold Saunders, assistant secretary for the Near East and South Asia, had been President Lyndon Johnson’s NSC expert on the Middle East.⁶⁹⁸

This extended to U.S. diplomatic representation abroad. After pledging to eliminate the practice of appointing “unqualified persons to major diplomatic posts”, Carter lowered the percentage of non-career ambassador appointments by 9 percent, down to 23 percent from the high of 32 percent under Nixon in January 1978.⁶⁹⁹ To ensure that even those without diplomatic experience were

⁶⁹⁵ Stephen Hess, *Organizing the Presidency*, Rev. ed (Washington, D.C: Brookings Institution, 1988), 133–34, <https://catalog.lib.uchicago.edu/vufind/Record/942694?sid=74613348>.

⁶⁹⁶ Brzezinski, *Power and Principle*, 13.

⁶⁹⁷ Vance, *Hard Choices*, 42.

⁶⁹⁸ Glad, *An Outsider in the White House*, 24; “Harold Saunders: The Original ‘Peace Processor,’” Association for Diplomatic Studies & Training, accessed April 28, 2025, <https://adst.org/harold-saunders-original-peace-processor/>.

⁶⁹⁹ Jimmy Carter Presidential Library (JCP), Chief of Staff files, Box 38, Folder 14.

competent, Carter established a 20-member advisory board to screen all names submitted and to pass on the names of both career and non-career persons who might be qualified for a specific ambassadorship.⁷⁰⁰

Even Brzezinski tapped into a large number of bureaucrats to fill openings on his NSC staff. David Aaron, Brzezinski's number two in the NSC, was a former foreign policy aide of Mondale in the Senate.⁷⁰¹ In March 1977, Brzezinski sent a list of the policy-oriented NSC staff to the president with the bold claim that that "we have the most high-powered staff in NSC history."⁷⁰² Of the 26 staffers (excluding Brzezinski and his deputy, David Aaron), 14 had prior experience within the executive branch, five had State Department experience, four had experience in the Department of Defense, two were from the CIA, five were military officers, and four had prior Congressional experience.⁷⁰³ There was even some cross-pollination with State during the administration—Vance recruited from the NSC to fill an opening for the director of politico-military affairs and Brzezinski recruited an FSO to fill the opening in the NSC staff this caused.⁷⁰⁴ Others on the NSC staff were academics, with 18 of them holding PhD's and eight coming straight from universities.⁷⁰⁵ Per Brzezinski, he "very deliberately sought to balance three different groups: professionals from within the bureaucracy; forward-looking and more liberal foreign affairs experts from the non-Executive part of the Washington political community; and some strategic thinkers from academia whose views closely corresponded to my own."⁷⁰⁶

⁷⁰⁰ Bernard Gwertzman, "Carter Ambassadors—Competence Before Politics," *The New York Times*, June 19, 1977, sec. Archives, <https://www.nytimes.com/1977/06/19/archives/carter-ambassadorscompetence-before-politics-selection-of-envoys.html>.

⁷⁰¹ Glad, *An Outsider in the White House*, 22.

⁷⁰² JCPL, Records of the Office of the National Security Adviser, Agency Files (NSA8), Box 10, Folder 10.

⁷⁰³ This aligns with Brzezinski's claim that he cut down the "policy-oriented NSC staff" from over 50 to no more than 30. Brzezinski, *Power and Principle*, 74.

⁷⁰⁴ JCPL, Zbigniew Brzezinski Collection, Subject Files, Box 42, Folder 3.

⁷⁰⁵ JCPL, Records of the Office of the National Security Adviser, Agency Files (NSA8), Box 10, Folder 10.

⁷⁰⁶ Brzezinski, *Power and Principle*, 73–74.

Carter may have acutely felt the consequences of prioritizing competence over loyalty in his appointments. Brzezinski later argued that Carter's decision to allow cabinet officers to select their own subcabinet-level appointees was a mistake, as it "deprived himself of more effective personal and political control over the upper echelons of the State Department."⁷⁰⁷ Carter eventually grew concerned that the State Department bureaucrats were more loyal to Vance than to the White House, and that Vance, in turn, was more loyal to them. Although he considered Vance "philosophically closest" to him among his cabinet officers, Carter later reflected that "his loyalty was to the State Department bureaucracy." After Vance's departure from State, "it became more obvious that Cy had been bogged down in details and captured by the State Department bureaucracy."⁷⁰⁸ Carter's perceived lack of control over the State Department bureaucracy was coupled with Brown's allegiance to the Defense Department. Brown often insisted on increases to defense spending and "propounded uncritically the Defense Department perspective."⁷⁰⁹

Circumvention and the China Tilt

Carter's decision to forge ahead down the path towards improving relations between China and the United States was not a foregone conclusion when he took office in January 1977. Carter's moralistic foreign policy vision was already receiving substantial pushback from the hawkish foreign policy establishment. If the Nixon-Kissinger attempt to normalize relations with Beijing had received abundant hostility from the hawks, Carter's certainly would. Moreover, Carter's early inclination was to normalize relations with not just China, but all countries with whom the United

⁷⁰⁷ Brzezinski, 13.

⁷⁰⁸ Carter, *White House Diary*, 425.

⁷⁰⁹ Brzezinski, *Power and Principle*, 46.

States did not have diplomatic relations.⁷¹⁰ This included Vietnam—a potential obstacle for U.S.-China convergence as Beijing's relations with Hanoi were poor. Finally, the Carter administration sank considerable domestic political capital in 1977 into negotiating the Panama Canal Treaties and getting them ratified in the Senate.⁷¹¹

Brzezinski felt strongly that the United States should rapidly complete normalization with China for strategic reasons. Since the Sino-Soviet split, the Moscow and Beijing were on unfriendly terms. A closer U.S.-China relationship would send a strong signal to the Soviet Union on areas of friction such as SALT II. Brzezinski felt that normalization, followed by an extension of economic and security ties, was necessary “to offset the Soviet military buildup and to prompt the Soviet Union into greater recognition of its stake in a reasonable accommodation with the United States.”⁷¹² Vance, on the other hand, felt that the matter should be approached cautiously to “avoid any tilt towards China” and without jeopardizing “the well-being and security of the people of Taiwan.”⁷¹³ On Taiwan, Carter was also hesitant. In July 1977, Carter met with Leonard Woodcock, the head of the United Auto Workers who Carter had appointed to be the U.S. representative to the People’s Republic of China. He told Woodcock bluntly: “I thought normal relations [with China] were advisable, I believed I could sell it to the American people, and I would be willing to take on the political responsibility of doing so. The only remaining obstacle is our commitment not to abandon the peaceful existence of the Chinese who live on Taiwan.”⁷¹⁴ The Chinese, on the other hand, were determined that

⁷¹⁰ Carter’s diary entry from February 23, 1977 reads “My inclination is to alleviate tension around the world, including disharmonies between our country and those with whom we have no official diplomatic relationships, like China, North Korea, Vietnam, Cambodia, Laos, Cuba, and I’ll be moving in this direction.” Carter, *White House Diary*, 27.

⁷¹¹ Glad, *An Outsider in the White House*, 97–106.

⁷¹² Brezinski to Carter, February 7, 1977, JCPL, Zbigniew Brzezinski Collection, Geographic Files, Box 8, quoted in Glad, 121.

⁷¹³ On tilt towards China, see Vance, *Hard Choices*, 114. On jeopardizing the people of Taiwan, Vance 76, quoting a memorandum he sent the president on April 15, 1977.

⁷¹⁴ Carter, *White House Diary*, 68.

normalization would require U.S. accession to three nonnegotiable conditions: the cessation of U.S. diplomatic relations with Taiwan, withdrawal of all U.S. military forces and installations, and abrogation of the U.S.-Taiwan defense treaty.⁷¹⁵ Carter knew that “the difficulty would lie in assuring China’s willingness to accommodate our requirements for unofficial relations with Taiwan and our permanent interest in its peaceful existence.”⁷¹⁶

By late July 1977, Carter had decided to “proceed slowly” on normalization with China.⁷¹⁷ The process began with sending Secretary of State Cyrus Vance to Beijing in August for exploratory talks. Vance conveyed that the United States intended to maintain unofficial ties with Taiwan—a position previously rejected by the Chinese and, unsurprisingly, rebuffed again.⁷¹⁸ The failure of Vance’s visit, however, created an opening for Brzezinski to press for a more assertive approach. Discreetly maneuvering behind the scenes, Brzezinski sought and secured an invitation to China, then persuaded Carter to send him in place of Vice President Walter Mondale.⁷¹⁹ Ahead of the May 1978 trip, Brzezinski, along with Vance and Brown, submitted a joint memorandum to the president which outlined a path towards normalization by the end of the year.⁷²⁰ Although Brzezinski had nominally agreed that the purpose of his visit was to “set the stage” for formal talks beginning in June, his mandate was considerably broader than Vance’s had been.⁷²¹ Carter authorized him to accept China’s three conditions for normalization and to signal that the United States was prepared to remove all remaining obstacles to an agreement. What had been conceived as a “consultative, low-key mission”

⁷¹⁵ Vance, *Hard Choices*, 77.

⁷¹⁶ Carter, *White House Diary*, 191.

⁷¹⁷ Carter, 191.

⁷¹⁸ Vance, *Hard Choices*, 79; Glad, *An Outsider in the White House*, 123.

⁷¹⁹ Brzezinski 203-205.

⁷²⁰ Vance, *Hard Choices*, 115.

⁷²¹ Memorandum for the President from Zbigniew Brzezinski, May 25, 1978, JCPL, Plains Files, President’s Personal Foreign Affairs Files, Box 1, Folder 16. According to Vance, Brzezinski “agreed to limit himself to a statement confirmed that Leonard Woodcock would begin making our normalization proposal in the month of June.” Vance, 115.

quickly evolved into “a genuinely major undertaking.”⁷²² During the visit, the Chinese proved more receptive than expected—particularly to continued U.S. commercial ties with Taiwan, including defense trade. This flexibility may have been encouraged by Brzezinski’s repeated use of anti-Soviet rhetoric during the visit.⁷²³ In his report to Carter afterward, Brzezinski acknowledged that he had “moved the normalization dialogue further than we had anticipated,” and advised that “perhaps the time has come to table a draft normalization communique while edging into the hardcore problems.”⁷²⁴

Brzezinski’s trip inflamed the intra-bureaucratic rivalry between the NSC and the State Department. Vance was irritated by public anti-Soviet remarks that Brzezinski had made during the visit. While visiting the Great Wall of China, Brzezinski joked with his hosts that the last one to the top would oppose the Russians in Ethiopia—a joke that was later reported in the *New York Times*.⁷²⁵

Vance’s complaint was that Brzezinski had “allowed his trip to be characterized as a deliberate countermove by the United States at a time of worsening relations with Moscow over the Horn of Africa and other issues.”⁷²⁶ Making matters worse, just after returning from China, Brzezinski went on *Meet the Press*, where he denounced Soviet actions as violating “the code of détente.”⁷²⁷ Carter chastised Brzezinski for his comments, telling him “You’re not just a professor; you speak for me. And I think you went too far in your statements.”⁷²⁸ There were also signs that Brzezinski—perhaps with Carter’s consent—was starting to circumvent the State Department. Richard Holbrooke from the State

⁷²² Brzezinski, *Power and Principle*, 208.

⁷²³ Fox Butterfield, “Brzezinski in China: The Stress Was on Common Concerns,” *The New York Times*, May 24, 1978, sec. Archives, <https://www.nytimes.com/1978/05/24/archives/brzezinski-in-china-the-stress-was-on-common-concerns-news-analysis.html>.

⁷²⁴ Memorandum for the President from Zbigniew Brzezinski, May 25, 1978, JCPL, Plains Files, President’s Personal Foreign Affairs Files, Box 1, Folder 16.

⁷²⁵ Butterfield, “Brzezinski in China.”

⁷²⁶ Vance, *Hard Choices*, 116.

⁷²⁷ Glad, *An Outsider in the White House*, 127; Brzezinski, *Power and Principle*, 220.

⁷²⁸ Brzezinski, *Power and Principle*, 220–21.

Department was excluded from high-level talks with the Chinese, which included only Brzezinski's China aide Oksenberg and Woodcock. Later, Holbrooke had a confrontation with Oksenberg when he asked to see a transcript of the meetings and was denied—as per Brzezinski's instructions.⁷²⁹ While it is possible that Brzezinski acted alone to sideline the State Department, he claimed that he was "bound by the President's clear instructions to keep the meeting small and confidential."⁷³⁰

Ultimately, while Vance's visit to China was considered a failure, Brzezinski's was seen as a resounding accomplishment. Carter later reflected that Brzezinski had "a very successful visit, having obviously established good rapport with the Chinese leaders." The visit changed how Carter went about enacting his China policy:

From then on, I was leery channeling my proposals through the State Department, because I did not feel that I had full support there and it was and is an enormous bureaucracy that is unable and sometimes unwilling to keep a secret. It seemed obvious to me that premature public disclosure of our intensifying diplomatic effort could arouse a firestorm of opposition from those who thought that Taiwan should always be the 'one China'. I decided that no negotiating instructions to Ambassador Leonard Woodcock would ever be channeled through the State Department; they would be sent directly from the White House.⁷³¹

A few procedures began to emerge at the president's behest.⁷³² The first, as outlined by Carter, included routing messages to and from Woodcock in Peking through a special "Alpha" channel

⁷²⁹ Rothkopf, *Running the World*, 190; Brzezinski, *Power and Principle*, 213.

⁷³⁰ Brzezinski, *Power and Principle*, 213.

⁷³¹ Jimmy Carter, Zbigniew Brzezinski, and Richard N. Gardner, "Being There," *Foreign Affairs* 78, no. 6 (1999): 166, <https://doi.org/10.2307/20049602>.

⁷³² "The President wrote on the bottom of the memo: "Cy—Devise special procedures; leaks can kill the whole effort. We should limit the dispatches and the negotiating information strictly—maybe just to the PDB* group. Avoid any public hints of degree of progress. I don't trust (1) Congress, (2) White House, (3) State, or (4) Defense to keep a secret. JC." Brzezinski, *Power and Principle*, 224.

accessible to all but Carter's closest advisers.⁷³³ Second, the president aimed to prevent leaks by asking both Brzezinski and Vance to select just one aide each to keep informed of the China normalization issues. Vance kept Holbrooke and his deputy, Warren Christopher, informed while Brzezinski chose Oksenberg.⁷³⁴

From June to December 1978, negotiations over normalization continued, with Brzezinski and Carter engaging with Ambassador Chai Zemin, the head of the Chinese liaison office in Washington, and Woodcock engaging with Chinese counterparts in Peking.⁷³⁵ Despite the broader exclusion of the State Department from the process, Vance and his key aides remained in the loop and shared the view that normalization with China was a desirable objective—provided that two conditions were met: (1) China accepted continued U.S. sales of nonoffensive arms to Taiwan, and (2) Beijing did not publicly contradict a unilateral U.S. statement, issued at the time of normalization, emphasizing the importance of a peaceful resolution to the Taiwan issue.⁷³⁶ Brzezinski claims that as of June 1978 “we were working in tandem; the State Department and the NSC shared the same position on normalization of relations with China, especially in view of the momentum generated by my visit to Beijing.”⁷³⁷

Intra-bureaucratic friction began to emerge as the talks continued into the fall. The first issue emerged over how tightly Vance was controlling the flow of information on normalization within State. In October 1978, Brzezinski accused Vance of bringing along four members of his team to consult a lawyer over concluding the Mutual Defense Treaty with Taiwan. Brzezinski also complained that several members of the China desk within the State Department were also included in sensitive

⁷³³ Declassified messages from the Alpha channel are available at JCPL, Zbigniew Brzezinski Collection, Geographic Files, Box 9.

⁷³⁴ Vance, *Hard Choices*, 116.

⁷³⁵ Glad, *An Outsider in the White House*, 128.

⁷³⁶ Brzezinski, *Power and Principle*, 229.

⁷³⁷ Brzezinski, 223.

talks with Huang Zhen, apparently contrary to Carter's orders.⁷³⁸ But the more serious conflict was over how rapidly the talks were moving and the precedence they took over other U.S. foreign policy objectives, including SALT II talks and the normalization of relations with Vietnam. Regarding Vietnam, the State Department was moving ahead with an initiative, spearheaded by Holbrooke, to form a diplomatic relationship. In September 1978, Holbrooke and a Vietnamese diplomat agreed in principle to initiate relations, which irked Brzezinski, who questioned the State Department's motives for the timing of such a move.⁷³⁹ In mid-October, Carter decided to stall on Vietnam normalization after receiving a negative reaction on the prospect from the Chinese.⁷⁴⁰

On SALT II, Vance already believed that Brzezinski's loose use of anti-Soviet banter during his Peking visit was "particularly risky" given where negotiations stood at the time.⁷⁴¹ "Improvements in US-PRC relations and heightened levels of Sino-American cooperation may lead Moscow to inject the 'China factor' into future SALT negotiations and other aspects of the diplomacy of détente," Secretary Brown warned Carter.⁷⁴² As SALT negotiations progressed in fall 1978, an issue of timing arose: Carter did not want SALT and normalization, both of which would require Congressional approval, to be completed simultaneously "for this would greatly overload the political circuits and strain the administration's ability to guide these two great issues safely through public and congressional debate."⁷⁴³ Brzezinski, perhaps motivated by a desire to delay the SALT conclusion, repeatedly criticized the progress of the negotiations in his weekly reports to Carter. In response to one particularly harsh assessment of the talks, Carter wrote candidly in the margins: "Zbig – you

⁷³⁸ NSC Weekly Report #74, Brzezinski to Carter, October 6, 1978, Zbigniew Brzezinski Collection, Subject Files, Box 42, Folder 1.

⁷³⁹ Brzezinski, *Power and Principle*, 228; Vance, *Hard Choices*, 122.

⁷⁴⁰ Brzezinski, *Power and Principle*, 228; Carter, *White House Diary*, 194–95.

⁷⁴¹ Vance, *Hard Choices*, 116.

⁷⁴² FRUS 1977-1980, vol. XIII, doc. 9. <https://history.state.gov/historicaldocuments/frus1977-80v13>

⁷⁴³ Vance, *Hard Choices*, 116.

comment as though you've not been involved in the process & that everyone has been wrong except you.”⁷⁴⁴

In October, Brzezinski, Woodcock, and Carter met to discuss a path forward for the negotiations. Vance was reportedly excluded from the meeting.⁷⁴⁵ Carter told Brzezinski to draft a communique on normalization and send it to the Chinese. It is unclear, but seems unlikely, that Vance was informed or asked to assist in drafting.⁷⁴⁶ The communique, per Carter's instructions, had an announcement date of January 1.⁷⁴⁷ To influence China into moving quickly, Brzezinski told Chai that if obstacles persisted, normalization would have to be delayed far into 1979 to accommodate SALT and a Carter-Brezhnev summit.⁷⁴⁸ Woodcock completed his final presentation for Chinese leaders on December 4.⁷⁴⁹ When he did not receive an immediate reply, on December 11 Brzezinski called on the ambassador to invite the Chinese leadership to Washington in January for a visit to formally announce normalization.⁷⁵⁰ On December 12, Woodcock had a decisive meeting with Deng Xiaoping, after which he cabled Washington that the Chinese had accepted their proposals.⁷⁵¹ Seizing the moment, Brzezinski called Chai and suggested that an announcement be made on December 15th and a visit scheduled for later in January. Carter informed Vance, who was in the Middle East and agreed to fly back to Washington for the announcement.⁷⁵² As the announcement date neared, the deal threatened to unravel over issues of arms sales to Taiwan, which the Chinese had understood would

⁷⁴⁴ NSC Weekly Report #81, Brzezinski to Carter, December 2, 1978, Zbigniew Brzezinski Collection, Subject Files, Box 42, Folder 1.

⁷⁴⁵ Patrick Tyler, “The (Ab)Normalization of U.S.-Chinese Relations,” *Foreign Affairs* 78, no. 5 (1999): 112, <https://doi.org/10.2307/20049453>.

⁷⁴⁶ Tyler, 113.

⁷⁴⁷ Brzezinski, *Power and Principle*, 229.

⁷⁴⁸ Brzezinski, 229.

⁷⁴⁹ Glad, *An Outsider in the White House*, 128.

⁷⁵⁰ Brzezinski, *Power and Principle*, 230.

⁷⁵¹ Glad, *An Outsider in the White House*, 128.

⁷⁵² Brzezinski, *Power and Principle*, 231.

halt immediately. On December 14, Deng told Woodcock that they expected the U.S. to cease all new arms sales with Taiwan upon signing the deal.⁷⁵³ The U.S. had intended to only halt offensive arms sales after one year and to continue nonoffensive arms sales in perpetuity to protect the security of Taiwan.⁷⁵⁴ A misunderstanding emerged as vague American counterproposals were cabled to Woodcock in Beijing: after a pleasant meeting between Chai and Brzezinski, it became clear that China thought the U.S. had agreed to end all “new commitments” of arms sales to Taiwan.⁷⁵⁵ The text of the counterproposals had left it “implicit” that the sale of nonoffensive arms to Taipei could continue after one year.⁷⁵⁶ With the announcement merely a few hours away, the Chinese eventually relented.⁷⁵⁷

It appears that the highest levels of the State Department were excluded from the final stages of the normalization negotiations. According to Vance, he met with Christopher, Holbrooke, Brzezinski, and Oksenberg to review Woodcock’s instructions for the December 13 meeting with Deng just before departing for the Middle East. Vance was not concerned about leaving Washington, later recalling that he had “assumed then that there would be more than two weeks to take critical preparatory steps after I got back.”⁷⁵⁸ However, Vance was stunned when Carter called to inform him that the Chinese had accepted the proposals and that the administration now aimed to move the announcement up to December 15. “This news came as a shock,” he wrote. “At a critical moment, Brzezinski had blacked Christopher and Holbrooke out of the decision-making for about six hours, and they had been unable to inform me of what was taking place.”⁷⁵⁹ This period of circumvention appears to have occurred on December 13, after the pivotal Woodcock-Deng meeting, which left

⁷⁵³ Glad, *An Outsider in the White House*, 128.

⁷⁵⁴ Brzezinski, *Power and Principle*, 231.

⁷⁵⁵ Tyler, “The (Ab)Normalization of U.S.-Chinese Relations,” 119–20.

⁷⁵⁶ Tyler, 120.

⁷⁵⁷ Brzezinski, *Power and Principle*, 231–32.

⁷⁵⁸ Vance, *Hard Choices*, 118.

⁷⁵⁹ Vance, 118–19.

several points unresolved. Brzezinski and Oksenberg drafted the final U.S. counterproposals while deliberately excluding Christopher—who was running the State Department in Vance’s absence—and Holbrooke. Only when Christopher grew suspicious of White House activity did he and Holbrooke learn of the impending announcement and the final negotiations. Upon reviewing the counterproposal drafts, Holbrooke flagged ambiguities regarding the U.S. right to sell arms to Taiwan—concerns that Brzezinski apparently disregarded.⁷⁶⁰ This ambiguity resurfaced during a subsequent meeting between Brzezinski and Chai, nearly causing the agreement to unravel.

Carter’s decision to sideline the State Department during the final stages of normalization with China had significant unintended consequences. The first casualty was the ongoing SALT II talks with the Soviet Union. Many in the foreign policy bureaucracy had warned that a sudden deepening of U.S.-China relations could exacerbate Soviet threat perceptions. Vance, who was simultaneously negotiating SALT II, encountered a “testy” Gromyko in Geneva from December 21–23, where they were supposed to finalize the agreement. “The Soviets felt that the timing and the characterization of normalization were deliberately provocative and intended to be publicly perceived as such,” Vance later recalled.⁷⁶¹ While he did not object to the substance of normalization, Vance criticized “the manner and timing of the announcement. The use of anti-Soviet code words such as ‘hegemony’ in the language of the U.S./PRC communiqué, as well as some of the backgrounding of the press, stimulated visceral Soviet fears of a de facto U.S.-PRC alliance.”⁷⁶² At least one scholar has argued that normalization with China delayed the conclusion of SALT II by four to six months.⁷⁶³ It may also

⁷⁶⁰ Tyler, “The (Ab)Normalization of U.S.-Chinese Relations,” 116–17; Rothkopf, *Running the World*, 191–92.

⁷⁶¹ Vance, *Hard Choices*, 111.

⁷⁶² Vance, 112.

⁷⁶³ Dan Caldwell, *The Dynamics of Domestic Politics and Arms Control: The SALT II Treaty Ratification Debate* (Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 1991), 49, <https://catalog.lib.uchicago.edu/vufind/Record/1134920?sid=74614950>.

have contributed to the Senate’s failure to ratify the treaty, as normalization did little to sway hawkish lawmakers.⁷⁶⁴

The broader bureaucracy also suffered. The rushed and exclusive manner in which Brzezinski advanced normalization left officials sidelined and unprepared. Although he had secured an agreement, there were “ambiguities and disagreements” with China over the Taiwan Relations Act that could be “attributed to the lack of planning.”⁷⁶⁵ “The early weeks of 1979 were especially frenzied,” Brzezinski wrote. “Normalization had come with such suddenness, and the circle of people involved had been kept so tight, that adequate preparations for the various issues cascading upon the bureaucracy could not have been undertaken earlier.”⁷⁶⁶ It fell to the State Department to manage the fallout.

These dynamics deepened a morale crisis within the State Department that persisted throughout Carter’s presidency. Mid-level officials felt marginalized, viewing themselves as “victims of a distrusted policy process, with Brzezinski using his access to Carter to misrepresent and undercut their efforts to serve the president and his policies.”⁷⁶⁷ These frustrations fueled leaks and intensified the ongoing friction between State and the NSC. During the Iranian revolution in 1979, Carter became convinced that the U.S. ambassador and other State Department officials were leaking to the press and undermining his policies.⁷⁶⁸ He confronted mid-level staff, accusing them of “disloyalty and excessive leakage.”⁷⁶⁹ The next day, he also chastised NSC staffers, “criticiz[ing] them for an attitude of contention and competition with State.”⁷⁷⁰ The exchange likely worsened morale at State, where

⁷⁶⁴ Glad, *An Outsider in the White House*, 141.

⁷⁶⁵ Brzezinski, *Power and Principle*, 415.

⁷⁶⁶ Brzezinski, 415.

⁷⁶⁷ Daalder and Destler, *In the Shadow of the Oval Office*, 115.

⁷⁶⁸ Daalder and Destler, 114.

⁷⁶⁹ Brzezinski, *Power and Principle*, 389; Carter, *White House Diary*, 288–89.

⁷⁷⁰ Carter, *White House Diary*, 289.

many officials had little direct interaction with the president. After Vance resigned over Carter's handling of the Iranian hostage crisis, the president convened a meeting with Vance's successor, Edward Muskie, along with senior officials from both State and the NSC. The purpose was to address the strained relationship between the two institutions. At the meeting, Carter acknowledged that the NSC had "created problems" for the State Department, though he added, "there is a lot more respect for the State Department in the White House than the State Department officers would think."⁷⁷¹

Competence, Camaraderie, and Control: The Structure of Bush's Foreign Policy

President George H. W. Bush's foreign policy team was distinguished by its combination of personal trust, professional competence, and institutional cohesion. Drawing on long-standing relationships, Bush assembled a team that valued pragmatic problem-solving over ideological rigidity. This ethos shaped not only top-level dynamics but also mid-level interagency processes, such as the Deputies Committee, which fostered inclusive deliberation and minimized bureaucratic dysfunction. The effectiveness of this integrated approach was evident in moments of high-stakes policymaking, including the internal resolution of disputes over German reunification and the restrained execution of the Gulf War. In both cases, the administration's structure and culture enabled dissenting voices to be heard and incorporated—preventing premature or overly ambitious actions, such as a rush to war or the pursuit of regime change in Iraq. Ultimately, Bush's reliance on a cohesive, trusted team helped steer U.S. foreign policy through a turbulent period with strategic discipline and bureaucratic harmony.

Organizing for Trusted Competence: Bush's Foreign Policy Team

Given his vast network accumulated from years of public service, Bush knew personally many qualified national security and foreign policy experts whom he could trust to advise him on foreign

⁷⁷¹ FRUS 1977-1980, vol. XXVIII, doc. 25.

policy. While Bush prioritized competence, he also factored trust into his selections for his top posts. “He looked to people he had known for a long time, friends who would work with him and with each other—who together would constitute a well-knit team,” write Daalder and Destler (2011).⁷⁷² In Brent Scowcroft, he found a national security adviser whom he knew personally from his time in the Ford administration with “deep knowledge of foreign policy matters” and an eclectic career spanning the Air Force, Joint Chiefs of Staff, and the Defense Department.⁷⁷³ Critically, Scowcroft had served as deputy national security adviser (and briefly, national security adviser) under both Nixon and Ford.⁷⁷⁴ Bush selected Scowcroft to fill the position in part because he was well-versed in arms control and defense—two areas Bush knew he was not strong in.⁷⁷⁵

At State, Bush selected James Baker, his longtime friend, as Secretary of State. Baker, who helped to run four presidential campaigns, had a reputation as a “pragmatic problem-solver and political can-doer” but lacked substantial experience in foreign affairs.⁷⁷⁶ However, his past government experience as Reagan’s chief of staff and secretary of the treasury had exposed Baker to foreign policy “weeds.” He had played a key role in trade negotiations with Canada during the Reagan administration, with the outgoing U.S. ambassador to Canada crediting him with clinching the agreement.⁷⁷⁷ Upon nominating Baker, Bush said of his long-time friend, “His seven-and-a-half years as a member of the National Security Council, his proven skills as a negotiator and the personal respect

⁷⁷² Daalder and Destler, *In the Shadow of the Oval Office*, 175.

⁷⁷³ Bush and Scowcroft, *A World Transformed*, 18.

⁷⁷⁴ Daalder and Destler, *In the Shadow of the Oval Office*, 171.

⁷⁷⁵ Bush and Scowcroft, *A World Transformed*, 19.

⁷⁷⁶ Roy Gutman, “James Baker: Bush’s Right-Hand Man Takes Center Stage,” *Newsday*, January 22, 1989, <https://www.proquest.com/docview/278050126/76AB7BF1822F41FDPQ/4?accountid=14657&sourcetype=Newspapers>.

⁷⁷⁷ Gutman.

in which he is held will allow him again to demonstrate the highest standards of performance as our next secretary of state.”⁷⁷⁸

The other top foreign policy posts—defense secretary and chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff—were to be filled by Dick Cheney and Colin Powell respectively.⁷⁷⁹ Cheney was a congressman from Wyoming who had risen to number two in the Republican house leadership and was a ranking member of the Select Committee on Intelligence.⁷⁸⁰ Critically, he knew all the key players of the administration personally, having worked with both Scowcroft and Bush as CIA director under Ford.⁷⁸¹ Powell was a military man who had served as Reagan’s national security adviser, someone whom “Bush and everyone else much admired.”⁷⁸²

Bush’s appointments produced a foreign policy team marked by “deep camaraderie” and “enormous experience,” composed largely of individuals who had served together before.⁷⁸³ As Baker recalls, “We not only enjoyed one another’s company, we trusted one another. That’s not to suggest we didn’t disagree...But our differences never took the form of the backbiting of the Kissinger-Rogers, Vance-Brzezinski eras or the slugfests of our national security teams during the Reagan years.”⁷⁸⁴ As Roger Porter, an assistant to the president under Bush, later reflected:

⁷⁷⁸ “JAMES BAKER’S CREDENTIALS,” *Boston Globe (Pre-1997 Fulltext)*, November 10, 1988, sec. EDITORIAL PAGE.

⁷⁷⁹ The day after the election, Bush “had bumped into Powell near their West Wing offices and asked the general whether he might consider staying on—as national security adviser for a while, or otherwise as Baker’s deputy or to head the CIA. Powell, then a three-star, wasn’t ready to hang up his uniform, and instead took a command assignment that got him his fourth star.” Daalder and Destler, *In the Shadow of the Oval Office*, 178. Even then, Bush feared that elevating Powell, a junior four-star general, to the military’s highest post would ruffle feathers in the military, but was persuaded by Cheney to bring him on. Bush and Scowcroft, *A World Transformed*, 23.

⁷⁸⁰ Bush and Scowcroft, *A World Transformed*, 22.

⁷⁸¹ Daalder and Destler, *In the Shadow of the Oval Office*, 177.

⁷⁸² Daalder and Destler, 178.

⁷⁸³ Bush and Scowcroft, *A World Transformed*, 25.

⁷⁸⁴ James A. Baker and Thomas M. DeFrank, *The Politics of Diplomacy: Revolution, War, and Peace, 1989-1992* (New York: G.P. Putnam’s Sons, 1995), 21–22.

You had a senior team that not only knew one another, but had worked with one another within the executive branch. And I had the opportunity of seeing Baker and Scowcroft and Bush and Cheney during the Ford administration working with one another. And I think the fact of their experience, which tended to be a happy one, made them able to start in a way that many teams are unable to.⁷⁸⁵

This collegial, problem-solving ethos extended into the bureaucracy, where Bush allowed his top advisers to select their own staff and delegated significant authority to mid-level officials.⁷⁸⁶ “Almost all of us, not just at the top level, but at a level or two down also knew each other from in and out of government,” said Richard Haass, Scowcroft’s senior Middle East person.⁷⁸⁷ On arms control, Bush empowered a special interagency group—chaired by the NSC’s senior director for arms control and defense policy—to forge consensus on complex issues like warhead limits, troop and tank counts, and chemical weapons verification measures.⁷⁸⁸ The result was a team that had “worked together for years” and “preferred pragmatic problem solving over ideological posturing.”⁷⁸⁹ As former NSC Senior Director David Gompert explained, these individuals were chosen “because of their professionalism and their experience—brought in on merit and not political or ideological grounds.”⁷⁹⁰ The administration’s success on arms control owed much to the competence and cohesion of this team. Overall, “[y]ou didn’t get the feeling that this was an administration where food fights would be tolerated for long,” recalls Haass. “The work-to-bullshit ratio was better in this

⁷⁸⁵ Ivo H. Daalder and I. M. Destler, “Oral History Roundtables: The Bush Administration National Security Council” (The National Security Council Project, April 29, 1999), 4, <https://www.brookings.edu/wp-content/uploads/2016/07/19990429.pdf>.

⁷⁸⁶ Bush and Scowcroft, *A World Transformed*, 25.

⁷⁸⁷ Daalder and Destler, “The Bush Administration National Security Council,” 4.

⁷⁸⁸ Daalder and Destler, *In the Shadow of the Oval Office*, 189.

⁷⁸⁹ Daalder and Destler, 190.

⁷⁹⁰ Rothkopf, *Running the World*, 279.

administration than any other...and less of your calories went into the bureaucratic game...There was also less concern about leaks than in any other administration.”⁷⁹¹

Informal but Inclusive: Foreign Policy Decision-making under Bush

People were only one part of the picture. Bush was also “determined to make our decision-making structure and procedures so well defined that we would minimize the chances” of “personality conflicts and turf disputes.”⁷⁹² Formal NSC meetings included not only those members who were statutorily required. “The President instructed that, at a minimum, whenever important issues of relevance to a particular department or agency were discussed, he wanted that individual present.”⁷⁹³ However, the president also preferred informal, albeit still inclusive, policymaking structures. Bush regularly made foreign policy decisions with the “Big Eight”, a group which included Bush, Baker, Scowcroft, Cheney, and Powell, along with Vice President Dan Quayle, Bush’s chief of staff John Sununu, and Director of Central Intelligence William H. Webster.⁷⁹⁴ Smaller meetings, often just between Bush, Scowcroft, and Baker (or Cheney during the Gulf War), were also crucial to Bush’s way of functioning.⁷⁹⁵

While top-level decision-making was inclusive, the president’s priorities were also not withheld from the rest of the bureaucracy. Per Bush’s desire to avoid personality conflicts and bureaucratic disputes, Scowcroft’s focus as national security adviser was not on using the NSC to push his own policies forward, but to manage the inter-agency process as an “honest broker.”⁷⁹⁶ One avenue that he used to pursue this goal was the Deputies Committee, which was the key forum for vetting and

⁷⁹¹ Daalder and Destler, “The Bush Administration National Security Council,” 4.

⁷⁹² Bush and Scowcroft, *A World Transformed*, 28.

⁷⁹³ Bush and Scowcroft, 29.

⁷⁹⁴ Daalder and Destler, 8. Deputy NSA Bob Gates would also attend the Big Eight meetings. Daalder and Destler, 32.

⁷⁹⁵ Daalder and Destler, *In the Shadow of the Oval Office*, 179.

⁷⁹⁶ Bush and Scowcroft, *A World Transformed*, 32.

analyzing policy analysis in the Bush administration.⁷⁹⁷ When the decision-making process broke down over a failed coup in Panama, the committee was re-energized and allocated crisis management responsibilities.⁷⁹⁸ The committee assumed responsibility for “meeting regularly at times of crisis, summarizing information, developing options, and following up on any decisions that the president had made.”⁷⁹⁹ Chaired by Deputy NSA Bob Gates, the committee consisted of the second-in-command in all key departments and agencies, including State, Defense, JCS, and others as needed. Gates, who was in close touch with both Bush and Scowcroft, would be able to resolve any differences that arose among the deputies, if needed, by leaving the meeting to ask the president his thoughts.⁸⁰⁰ Although the deputy NSA chaired the committee, State Department officials—even those who were not members of the committee—did not have difficulty getting their ideas heard.⁸⁰¹

There was substantial effort made to avoid even the appearance of exclusion or marginalization. After the Tiananmen square protests of spring 1989, President Bush searched for a “measured response” that would allow the United States to remain engaged with the Chinese government. Scowcroft dropped off a letter with the Chinese ambassador asking Deng if he would like to “receive a special emissary who could speak with total candor” on the developments.⁸⁰² When Deng responded positively, Scowcroft and Lawrence Eagleburger, the deputy secretary of state, traveled to China in secret in June 1989.⁸⁰³ This was not Reagan, Nixon, or even Carter administrations

⁷⁹⁷ Oral history, 10

⁷⁹⁸ Bush had repeatedly called for the ouster of strongman Manuel Noriega, but when approached by coup plotters, the administration opted to do nothing. He was “excoriated” in the media. Daalder and Destler 184.

⁷⁹⁹ Daalder and Destler, *In the Shadow of the Oval Office*, 184–85.

⁸⁰⁰ Daalder and Destler, 184–86.

⁸⁰¹ Daalder and Destler, “The Bush Administration National Security Council,” 10.

⁸⁰² Rothkopf, *Running the World*, 189.

⁸⁰³ Baker and DeFrank, *The Politics of Diplomacy*, 108–10.

in which the NSA was allowed to “go operational” without State Department participation and knowledge.⁸⁰⁴

Integration in Practice: From Berlin to Baghdad

A key indicator of integration is how conflicts among diverse voices within an administration are resolved in the midst of real policy debates. A leader who has enacted a genuine integration strategy ensures that all advisers have meaningful opportunities to speak truth to power and that decisions are not made until all perspectives have been heard. On the issue of German reunification, a serious disagreement between the NSC and the State Department threatened to disrupt the otherwise collegial foreign policymaking process under President Bush. Philip Zelikow, who served in both institutions during this period, recalled “a lot of hostility” within the State Department and the White House over how much the U.S. should concede to Moscow and whether reunification should be primarily a German-led process.⁸⁰⁵ Bush himself was not alarmed by the prospect of a reunified Germany, but his advisers were divided. On one side, Scowcroft’s NSC and officials in the State Department’s European Affairs bureau argued that reunification should not be dictated by external powers, including the Soviet Union. On the other, Secretary of State James Baker and the State Department’s Policy Planning Staff supported a more active international role, proposing the “Two-plus-Four” framework that would include both German states and the four World War II powers—the U.S., USSR, UK, and France—as guarantors of the process.⁸⁰⁶

⁸⁰⁴ Baker and DeFrank, 109.

⁸⁰⁵ Daalder and Destler, *In the Shadow of the Oval Office*, 186–87.

⁸⁰⁶ Baker and DeFrank, *The Politics of Diplomacy*, 198–99; Daalder and Destler, “The Bush Administration National Security Council,” 197.

The breakthrough came from within the NSC. Scowcroft and Gates created an ad hoc committee on European security, modeled after the Deputies Committee but expanded to include three senior State Department officials.⁸⁰⁷ Within a few weeks, tensions eased. Zelikow later called this a turning point: “Both sides ended up being very happy that we had a common strategy for how we were going to make it work, and the hostility just dissipated.” He also credited the absence of press leaks with preserving the space for compromise: “Not a whisper of it, as far as I can tell, ever got in the press. And because not a whisper of it got into the press, it didn’t fester.”⁸⁰⁸

The U.S. response to the Iraqi invasion of Kuwait in August 1990 was another area in which there was a serious opportunity for diverse viewpoints to be disregarded and the momentum of war to lead to “mission creep.” But, as Saunders’ (2017) study of Bush’s management of the Gulf War has argued, dissenting voices were heard and may have even prevented Bush from acting on his impulse to remove Saddam Hussein from power.⁸⁰⁹ Preoccupied with managing the ramifications of the fall of the Soviet Union in 1989, the Bush administration had continued the Reagan policy of using Iraq to balance Iran and had not expected dictator Saddam Hussein to act so belligerently towards Kuwait, even as intelligence came to the attention of the NSC.⁸¹⁰ Bush’s anger at Saddam’s perceived betrayal was visceral. After an initial NSC meeting proved inconclusive, another NSC meeting occurred the day after the invasion. The Bush-Scowcroft duo was united in making the case for U.S. stakes in the region, direct military U.S. intervention, and Saddam’s toppling.⁸¹¹

From then on, the use of force was inevitable. Operation Desert Shield was executed shortly; U.S. forces were mobilized to Saudi Arabia to deter further Iraqi action. But Bush remained eager to

⁸⁰⁷ Daalder and Destler, *In the Shadow of the Oval Office*, 186–87.

⁸⁰⁸ Daalder and Destler, “The Bush Administration National Security Council,” 15.

⁸⁰⁹ Saunders, “No Substitute for Experience,” 238–41.

⁸¹⁰ Daalder and Destler, *In the Shadow of the Oval Office*, 292–93; “Oral History: Rick Atkinson,” PBS Frontline, n.d., <https://www.pbs.org/wgbh/pages/frontline/gulf/oral/atkinson/1.html>.

⁸¹¹ Bob Woodward, *The Commanders*, Kindle (Riverside: Simon & Schuster, 2002), 265–68.

go further to remove Saddam from Kuwait—only to be met by a reluctant military with Colin Powell as the chief “brakeman.” According to Rick Atkinson, who authored a book of the Gulf War, “Powell was the voice who was loudest and most influential in deciding when enough was enough.”⁸¹² In October 1990, when Scowcroft pressed for offensive options against Saddam’s forces in Kuwait, Cheney and Powell reviewed the options and were ultimately reluctant to oblige the president, telling him that the military was “not ready” for such an operation and ensuring that he “comprehend[ed] the stakes, the costs and the risks, step by step.”⁸¹³

Bush and Scowcroft did not tolerate dissent indefinitely. By November, the president faced a critical choice: whether to continue a strategy of deterrence and defense or to pursue offensive military action against Saddam Hussein.⁸¹⁴ While Cheney advocated for war, Powell and the other Joint Chiefs remained hesitant. “None of the chiefs was itching for a fight. They did not want an offensive operation if there was any other honorable way out for the United States,” Woodward writes.⁸¹⁵ Yet during a Situation Room meeting with Bush, Baker, Cheney, and Scowcroft, Powell refrained from forcefully pressing the case for containment as he had earlier, “now sens[ing] that he had less permission to speak up, having already made the case for containment to the President.”⁸¹⁶ According to Woodward’s account, Paul Wolfowitz at the Pentagon felt the White House had “transitioned into the decision on the offensive option without a lot of clear thought,” with “little or no process where alternatives and implications were written down so they could be systematically weighed and argued.”⁸¹⁷ In the meantime, the United States began mobilizing an international coalition and

⁸¹² “Oral History: Rick Atkinson.”

⁸¹³ Woodward, *The Commanders*, 354–55.

⁸¹⁴ Woodward, 369.

⁸¹⁵ Woodward, 364.

⁸¹⁶ Woodward, 370.

⁸¹⁷ Woodward, 371.

deploying troops to the Middle East in preparation for Operation Desert Storm, scheduled to begin on or after January 15, 1991, if Saddam had not withdrawn from Kuwait.⁸¹⁸

While Powell and his generals could not prevent the offensive altogether, they succeeded in restraining President Bush in two crucial ways. First, they persuaded him to delay military action until sufficient forces were in place to ensure a decisive victory. Bush, though receptive to their advice, grew impatient. As Powell recalled, the president repeatedly pressed: “When are we going to be ready? When can we go?” Comparing the experience to placating a restless monarch, Powell remarked, “Dealing with the President was like playing Scheherazade, trying to keep the king calm for a thousand and one nights.”⁸¹⁹ Second, the military leadership helped confine the political objective to the expulsion of Iraqi forces from Kuwait, resisting calls for regime change. “We hoped that Saddam would not survive the coming fury,” Powell later wrote, “but his elimination was not a stated objective. What we hoped for, frankly, in a postwar Gulf region was an Iraq still standing, with Saddam overthrown.”⁸²⁰

They were not alone in urging restraint. In January 1991, during the air campaign of Operation Desert Storm, Richard Haass was tasked with crafting the administration’s exit strategy. Recognizing Bush’s desire to see Saddam removed, Haass pushed back: “I know what you want, I just don’t see how it’s going to happen.”⁸²¹ He warned that pursuing regime change “goes beyond our domestic writ; it goes beyond our international writ; it goes beyond what the Coalition would sustain; and most important of all, it would require an indefinite occupation of Iraq.”⁸²² Though disappointed, Bush

⁸¹⁸ The January 15 date comes from United Nations Security Council Resolution 678, which authorized the coalition to remove Iraqi troops by “all necessary means.” UN Security Council, “S/RES/678(1990)” (UN, November 29, 1990), <https://digitallibrary.un.org/record/102245>. On the slow troop buildup, Woodward, 416.

⁸¹⁹ Colin L. Powell and Joseph E. Persico, *My American Journey: An Autobiography* (New York: Random House, 1995), 498. ⁸²⁰ Powell and Persico, 490.

⁸²¹ Christian Alfonsi, *Circle in the Sand: The Bush Dynasty in Iraq* (New York: Vintage Books, 2007), 162, <http://archive.org/details/circleinsandbush0000alfo>.

⁸²² Alfonsi, 161.

ultimately came to share this view. Reflecting years later, he and Scowcroft cited the “incalculable human and political costs” and the prospect of an indefinite occupation as key reasons for their decision not to remove Saddam from power.⁸²³

Discussion

My theory of leader strategy selection holds up well across three U.S. presidencies spanning 25 years. **Table 9** outlines the organizational tools associated with each strategy in my theory and indicates which tools are supported by empirical evidence in each case. The case of Richard Nixon is notable in demonstrating that prior experience working with the foreign policy establishment does not necessarily foster trust in the system. In Nixon’s case, it reinforced his suspicion of institutional actors. Nixon was a politically constrained yet deeply distrustful leader who, alongside his national security adviser, sought to exclude the foreign policy bureaucracy from core decision-making. Despite his desire for greater control, he ultimately refrained from widespread bureaucratic politicization in his first term—not out of confidence in the bureaucracy, but due to limited political capital. After an overwhelming second electoral victory in 1972, Nixon began his second term with ambitions of “ruining” the State Department and flooding the bureaucracy with loyalists. The Watergate scandal derailed those plans, and Nixon resorted to delegating foreign policymaking to the State Department under the supervision of Kissinger instead. This departure from theoretical expectations is best understood as an outlier shaped by the extraordinary circumstances of 1972 to 1974.

In Carter’s presidency, he initially sought to build an inclusive, meritocratic policymaking process and surrounded himself with experienced professionals. Yet his limited control over

⁸²³ Bush and Scowcroft, *A World Transformed*, 489.

Table 9. Summary of U.S. Presidents' Organizational Tools

President	Nixon	Carter	Bush
Strategy	Insulation	Circumvention	Integration
Decision-making	Inclusive decision-making infrequent, may be largely for show ✓ Exclusive, secretive decision-making common ✓	Collegial, consensus-based, inclusive decision-making common ✓ Exclusive, secretive decision-making on politically salient issues only ✓	Collegial, consensus-based, inclusive decision-making ✓ Alternative viewpoints encouraged ✓
Delegation	Top priorities delegated to executive office for implementation, kept secret ✓	On politically salient issues <u>only</u> , secretive delegation to trusted insiders, outsiders possible ✓	Clear division of labor between executive & bureaucratic elites ✓
Personnel changes	Limited loyalist appointments ✓	Few loyalist appointments; generally values competence in appointees ✓	Standard use of appointment powers ✓ Prioritizes competence over loyalty in appointments ✓
Other tools	Increases in executive office responsibilities, size, & resources ✓ Restricted information flows ✓ Extensive bureaucratic monitoring ✓ Uneven leader access across elites ✓	Relatively even leader access across elites ✓ Some reliance on outside expertise for advice	Preserves existing institutional norms ✓ Regular, informal coordination common ✓ Even leader access across elites ✓
Checkmark indicates evidence present.			

departmental appointees, rising bureaucratic infighting—particularly between the NSC and State—and the strategic demands of key foreign policy initiatives such as normalization with China led him to selectively circumvent the very institutions he had pledged to empower. The result was a hybrid

strategy of circumvention: Carter never fully abandoned his inclusive ideals, but political constraints and mounting policy pressures gradually pushed him toward a more centralized and discretionary approach to foreign policymaking. Carter's case is notable because, despite his stated commitment to collegial and inclusive policymaking, his administration experienced some of the most intense bureaucratic infighting in modern U.S. history. This contradicts the expectation that a leader's personal preference for collegialism alone can determine organizational outcomes.

By contrast, Bush entered office with both political strength and deep personal trust in the foreign policy bureaucracy. Drawing on long-standing relationships and a shared ethos of professionalism, Bush integrated the bureaucracy into policymaking, empowered experienced officials, and cultivated a collegial and procedurally disciplined interagency process. His cohesive approach enabled coordination and dissent management without requiring significant structural circumvention, illustrating how trust and competence can reinforce one another in shaping an effective bureaucratic strategy. However, the Gulf War case shows that although bureaucratic empowerment can enhance coordination and implementation, it may also give rise to groupthink dynamics in high-stakes crisis situations.

Other factors, such as foreign policy experience, may have played a role in influencing the evolution of organizational strategies. As noted, Nixon's foreign policy experience did little to persuade him to empower bureaucrats and integrate decision-making. In Carter's case, a lack of foreign policy experience does not appear to have made Carter more suspicious of the bureaucracy in the decisions he made early on to structure policymaking, a finding that runs against Jost's (2024) argument that inexperienced leaders will feel threatened by the bureaucracy and restructure decision-making accordingly. Carter's inexperience in foreign policy may have made it easier for his hawkish adviser, Zbigniew Brzezinski, to influence the administration in such a way that the administration

ultimately “abandoned Carter’s initial inclinations towards liberal reformism in favor of a traditional Cold War containment strategy” and grew increasingly distrustful of the State Department bureaucracy.⁸²⁴ Yet it was Carter’s own decision “to hold information closely so that our efforts would not be subverted” by the bureaucracy that led to the China circumvention, not a Brzezinski-led *fait accompli*.⁸²⁵ Moreover, despite circumventing the majority of the State Department on the China normalization, the majority of other policy areas saw a relatively coordinated interagency approach. Bush’s extensive foreign policy experience may have contributed to his willingness to trust the bureaucracy, but the evidence suggests this was not because it enhanced his political strength and ability to withstand bureaucratic threats, as Jost (2024) suggests. Rather, it stemmed from his personal familiarity with key bureaucratic actors and his belief that they should be empowered to perform their roles without the burden of proving their loyalty. Still, because I code Bush as a strong leader, it remains uncertain how he might have behaved under conditions of greater political vulnerability. Notably, even as his domestic popularity declined toward the end of his term, there was little evidence of substantive change in his foreign policy approach.

Leader personality is often cited as a major determinant of organizational strategy, particularly in highly institutionalized systems like the United States, where formal powers are relatively predetermined. In the cases of Carter, Nixon, and Bush, certain personality traits do appear to correlate with their approaches to bureaucratic management. Nixon’s deep suspicion of elites and his secretive, adversarial disposition contributed to a foreign policy process defined by insulation, centralization, and the marginalization of traditional agencies. Carter, by contrast, was idealistic and intellectually curious, with a preference for deliberation and consensus. These traits informed his

⁸²⁴ David Skidmore, *Reversing Course: Carter’s Foreign Policy, Domestic Politics, and the Failure of Reform* (Nashville: Vanderbilt University Press, 1996), 27.

⁸²⁵ Carter, Brzezinski, and Gardner, “Being There,” 165.

initial efforts to build an inclusive and collegial policymaking team. Bush's pragmatic, managerial temperament—combined with a deep familiarity with the national security bureaucracy—helped cultivate a highly integrated and functional interagency process. While these patterns are consistent with broad personality-based accounts, they also face important limitations. First, structural factors such as political strength and prior bureaucratic relationships often intersect with personality in shaping outcomes. Second, the assumption that personality alone drives organizational choices risks overlooking strategic behavior: Carter's selective circumvention of State during China normalization, for instance, reflected not indecisiveness but calculated concern over leaks and political backlash.

Another possible reason for differing organizational strategies is the influence of key advisers. In each case, advisers had a strong impact on the foreign policy process. Henry Kissinger's intellectual strength and close connection with Nixon led to a centralized structure that sidelined cabinet officials. This empowered the NSC to serve as the main policy hub. In Carter's administration, Zbigniew Brzezinski's assertiveness and clear strategy contrasted sharply with the more cautious, consensus-driven Cyrus Vance. The rivalry between them, fueled by Carter's relaxed leadership style, disrupted the interagency process and led to selective bypassing of the State Department. For Bush, having trusted advisers like Brent Scowcroft and James Baker created a collaborative and disciplined atmosphere that matched and reinforced Bush's own inclusive tendencies. These patterns suggest that the dynamics among advisers are crucial in shaping how foreign policy is organized and carried out.

However, this explanation may overstate adviser independence by implying that advisers create structure without considering presidential preferences. Kissinger's significance came not just from his bureaucratic skill but also from Nixon's choice to empower him over others. Similarly, Brzezinski's ability to work around Vance depended on Carter's tolerance and eventual support for

his tactics, especially in the case of China. Second, presidents play an important role in managing or not managing adviser rivalries. Bush's careful efforts to create a cohesive team and enforce procedural discipline show that it is not just the qualities of advisers but also the president's approach to leadership that shapes interagency relations. Thus, while advisers are key to forming and executing organizational strategy, their influence is best seen as dependent on presidential support, the political context, and the institutional limits they operate within.

Chapter 6. Radical Politicization: Erdoğan versus the Secular Establishment in Turkey

“I came from politics; I don’t know about the ways *mon chers* behave. And I don’t want to know,” declared Recep Tayyip Erdoğan, the leader of Turkey’s Justice and Development Party (hereafter referred to as the AK Party or AKP) and the undisputed ruler of the country since 2002. Erdoğan was speaking about secular-leaning diplomats in the ministry who resisted Erdoğan’s pivot away from Turkey’s traditional Western-oriented foreign policy. By using the derogatory term *mon cher*, Erdoğan was implying that Turkish diplomats are “snobbish, Western-influenced status seekers who are disconnected from the traditions and values of the Turkish nation.”⁸²⁶ In response, seventy-two retired ambassadors wrote a letter of protest against Erdoğan’s hostile and condescending attitude towards Turkish diplomats and foreign policy.⁸²⁷

This clash reflects more than a mere disagreement. Rather, it reveals Erdoğan’s deep-seated mistrust of the foreign policy establishment and the ideological divide between his vision and that of the bureaucratic elite. Erdoğan’s distrust of Turkey’s foreign policy establishment is not incidental but rooted in a long history of tension between political Islam and the secular military-bureaucratic state. Having been educated outside elite secular institutions and influenced by early involvement in Islamist political movements, Erdoğan came to view the bureaucracy as a stronghold of Western-oriented, secular values that are fundamentally misaligned with his conception of Turkey’s identity and interests. This foundational mistrust would shape his approach to governance, compelling him

⁸²⁶ Damla Aras, “Turkey’s Ambassadors vs. Erdoğan,” Middle East Forum, January 1, 2011, <https://www.meforum.org/middle-east-quarterly/turkey-ambassadors-vs-erdogan>.

⁸²⁷ Berkay Gülen, “Turf Wars in Foreign Policy Bureaucracy: Rivalry between the Government and the Bureaucracy in Turkish Foreign Policy,” *Foreign Policy Analysis* 18, no. 4 (October 1, 2022): 9, <https://doi.org/10.1093/fpa/orac021>.

to confront and ultimately reconfigure the institutions that he argued had long excluded actors like himself from shaping national policy.

Since its founding, the Turkish state has been shaped by the nationalist and secularist ideals of Mustafa Kemal Atatürk, the military officer and statesman who led the Turkish War of Independence and became the republic's first president in 1923. Kemalism—often described more as a state-building project than a cohesive ideology—sought to modernize Turkey by replacing centuries of Ottoman-Islamic governance with a secular, Western-oriented order. In the Western imagination, Atatürk has often been portrayed as a “benevolent dictator” tasked with the monumental challenge of dismantling Islamic despotism in favor of liberal modernization.⁸²⁸

At the core of Kemalism are secularism and civic nationalism; adherence to these principles became the primary criterion for inclusion in the Turkish national identity.⁸²⁹ This framework stood in direct opposition to alternative conservative and ethno-religious ideologies, such as pan-Turkism or political Islam, that sought to fuse Turkishness with religious or ethnic identity.⁸³⁰ Over time, as Turkey transitioned to multi-party democracy, successive political and intellectual elites reinterpreted Kemalism, giving rise to both liberal and conservative variants. Yet despite these shifts, it remained the dominant ideological axis around which all major political actors were forced to orient themselves.⁸³¹ As Zarakol (2011) observes, Atatürk's Westernizing vision left such a deep imprint that “even contemporary Turkey is still marked by the worldview of the interwar period.”⁸³²

⁸²⁸ James D. Ryan, “The Republic Of Others: Opponents Of Kemalism In Turkey’s Single Party Era, 1919-1950” (University of Pennsylvania, 2017), 10, <https://repository.upenn.edu/dissertations/AAI10683539/>.

⁸²⁹ Umut. Uzer, *Identity and Turkish Foreign Policy: The Kemalist Influence in Cyprus and the Caucasus*, vol. 52, Library of International Relations ; (London: I. B. Tauris, 2011), 46.

⁸³⁰ Uzer, 52:50–51.

⁸³¹ See Nicholas Danforth, “Memory, Modernity, and the Remaking of Republican Turkey: 1945-1960,” *Georgetown University-Graduate School of Arts & Sciences* (Georgetown University, 2015), <https://repository.library.georgetown.edu/handle/10822/1029883>; Ryan, “The Republic Of Others: Opponents Of Kemalism In Turkey’s Single Party Era, 1919-1950.”

⁸³² Ayse Zarakol, *After Defeat: How the East Learned to Live with the West* (Cambridge University Press, 2010), 143.

For much of Turkey's republican history, a durable Kemalist consensus—akin to the Nehruvian consensus among Indian foreign policy before Indira Gandhi—shaped the outlook of the foreign policy bureaucracy. The bureaucratic elite believed Turkey should be inward-looking, non-expansionist, and adhere to Atatürk's motto “peace at home, peace in the world.”⁸³³ His orientation emerged in the aftermath of the Ottoman Empire's collapse, when the newly established republic inherited a cadre of bureaucrats from the imperial system.⁸³⁴ During the nineteenth century, Ottoman leaders had begun to formalize diplomatic and translation functions to better integrate the empire into the European state system.⁸³⁵ Many of the same officials and intellectuals who participated in the secular, nationalist Young Turk movement would go on to form the backbone of the Republican People's Party (CHP) and the Kemalist state apparatus.⁸³⁶ This continuity fostered strong institutional support for Kemalist principles within both the Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MFA) and the Turkish Armed Forces (TAF). A clear division of labor between the military and the foreign ministry helped sustain a unified foreign policy orientation, one that prioritized alignment with the West and largely avoided entanglement in Middle Eastern affairs.⁸³⁷

When Erdoğan and the AKP came to power after the 2002 elections, it knew that the secular military and bureaucracy opposed what it saw as the party's ideological violation of the secular

⁸³³ Uzer, *Identity and Turkish Foreign Policy*, 52:39–43.

⁸³⁴ Uzer, 52:58.

⁸³⁵ Carter V. Findley, “The Foundation of the Ottoman Foreign Ministry,” *International Journal of Middle East Studies* 3, no. 4 (October 1972): 388–416, <https://doi.org/10.1017/S0020743800025186>.

⁸³⁶ See Ihsan Yilmaz, *Creating the Desired Citizen: Ideology, State and Islam in Turkey* (Cambridge University Press, 2021); Erik J. Zürcher, *The Young Turk Legacy and Nation Building: From the Ottoman Empire to Atatürk's Turkey*, Library of Modern Middle East Studies (London: I.B. Tauris, 2010), <https://books.google.com/books?hl=en&lr=&id=g-iKDwAAQBAJ&coi=fnd&pg=PT6&dq=The+Young+Turk+Legacy+and+Nation+Building&ots=nKBEFpBHP&sig=j2XM8o0qQIzTRfigzf8cTwl59WM#v=onepage&q=The%20Young%20Turk%20Legacy%20and%20Nation%20Building&f=false>.

⁸³⁷ Gülen, “Turf Wars in Foreign Policy Bureaucracy,” 10–12.

principles that Turkey was founded on, including its traditional, Western-oriented foreign policy.⁸³⁸ Unlike other examined leaders who distrusted their foreign policy bureaucracies, Erdoğan faced a unique challenge: the legacy of military tutelage in Turkish politics. He was also apprehensive that the TAF, which had executed three coups throughout the nation's history in guardianship of Turkish secularism, might again intervene as it had with former Islamist politicians, potentially ousting him and forcing him into political exile. This looming threat influenced Erdoğan's initial strategic approach. Rather than immediately sidelining the foreign policy bureaucracy, he pursued a more cautious, tactical approach—co-opting parts of the state apparatus and aligning with pro-European Union (EU) reforms that weakened the military's institutional autonomy (2002-2007)—before gradually moving toward politicization once his power was secure (2007-2018). Given the recency of this case and the extensive international and scholarly attention paid to Erdoğan's management of the Turkish bureaucracy, this chapter draws primarily on publicly available primary and secondary sources, including online archives, news reports, and scholarly analyses.

The case of Erdoğan (2002-2018) pushes the boundaries of my theory of leader strategy selection and serves as a valuable opportunity for theoretical refinement and extension. First, Erdoğan's tactical accommodation of the foreign policy bureaucracy in the 2002-2007 period must be understood in the context of Turkey's history of military interventions into politics and his concern about provoking backlash if he pushed against the military's will in any policy domain, including foreign policy. The other cases we have examined have not included a direct threat from the politically powerful military onto a leader's political tenure. This case suggests that when the military retains significant political autonomy and a credible threat of intervention, even a distrustful

⁸³⁸ Gareth Jenkins, "Symbols and Shadow Play: Military-JDP Relations, 2002–2004," in *The Emergence of a New Turkey: Democracy and the AK Party*, ed. M. Hakan Yavuz, Utah Series in Turkish and Islamic Studies (Salt Lake City: University of Utah Press, 2006), 186, <http://pi.lib.uchicago.edu/1001/cat/bib/11120773>.

and electorally strong leader may initially opt for a strategy other than immediate politicization, especially in domains traditionally associated with the military's institutional prerogatives.

Second, it highlights how the locus of distrust can shift after a period of successful politicization. Erdoan initially relied on the Gulen Movement to help marginalize the secular military-bureaucratic elite, but as the alliance fractured, he came to view Gulenist influence within the state as a threat, prompting a second wave of politicization aimed at purging their presence and consolidating personal control. This dynamic extends the theory by showing how leaders may cycle through multiple phases of politicization as new threats emerge within previously allied networks—pointing to a promising avenue for future research on how shifting perceptions of threat can reorder bureaucratic strategies over time.

This chapter proceeds in five sections. The first section situates Erdoan's mistrust of the foreign policy bureaucracy within the broader historical context of civil–military relations and the legacy of Kemalist dominance in Turkish state institutions. The second section traces the early years of AKP rule (2002–2007), showing how Erdoan tactically accommodated the foreign policy and military establishment while pursuing EU accession as a shield against military intervention. The third section analyzes the shift between 2007 and 2013, during which Erdoan moved to weaken the secular elite and centralize foreign policymaking authority, including by relying on Gulenist allies to reshape the bureaucracy. The fourth section examines the breakdown of the Erdoan–Gulen alliance and the second wave of politicization that followed, culminating in the post-2016 purges and constitutional transformation of Turkey's executive institutions. The final section evaluates my theory's explanatory power and discusses alternative explanations and theoretical extensions.

Anti-Kemalist, Anti-Western Resentment

Direct evidence of Erdoğan's views on the foreign policy establishment before he came to power is limited. Still, his formative social and political experiences suggest a deep-rooted mistrust of these institutions. For decades, Turkish foreign policy was shaped by "Turkey's elite, rich, Westernized communities and their secularist, Kemalist ideology"—a world far removed from Erdoğan's own upbringing in a deeply religious family in a crime-ridden, poor neighborhood of Istanbul called Kasımpaşa.⁸³⁹ Erdoğan speaks fondly of his early years in Kasımpaşa, an area known for sustaining "a strong conservative moral ethos and a deep sense of solidarity among its poorest dwellers."⁸⁴⁰

Since Kemalism mandated freedom from religion in government, education, and public policy, Erdoğan's father, who wanted him to receive an Islamic education, enrolled him in an İmam Hatip school—a religious school founded to train Muslim preachers (hatips) and imams for state employment following the closure of madrasas by the state.⁸⁴¹ This period profoundly shaped Erdoğan, as he later reflected:

My İmam Hatip period means everything to me. I have attained my life path over there.

İmam Hatip High School taught me to love the country and the people serving this country, to worship, love just for the sake of God, not to oppress, environmental consciousness, socialisation, solidarity and the pleasure to want the same things for others as I wish for myself...İmam Hatip has made me the man I am today.⁸⁴²

⁸³⁹ Soner Çağaptay, *The New Sultan: Erdogan and the Crisis of Modern Turkey* (London ; New York, NY: I.B. Tauris & Co. Ltd, 2017), 16, <https://catalog.lib.uchicago.edu/vufind/Record/13562511?sid=74646783>.

⁸⁴⁰ M. Hakan Yavuz, *Erdogan: The Making of an Autocrat*, Edinburgh Studies on Modern Turkey (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2021), 38, <https://catalog.lib.uchicago.edu/vufind/Record/12639800?sid=74646783>.

⁸⁴¹ Çağaptay, *The New Sultan*, 21; Yavuz, *Erdogan*, 40.

⁸⁴² Yavuz, *Erdogan*, 40.

Although Erdogan's family was religious, the experience at the İmam Hatip school deepened his devotion to Islam and his Muslim identity. The curriculum required students to study the Qur'an, practice Islamic prayers, cultivate their ability to preach Islam, and adopt an oppositional stance toward the secular system while supporting Islamic activism.⁸⁴³ For those enrolled in the schools, the Turkish Republic "represented the worst anti-Islam and anti-Ottoman worldview. For them, the West was inherently anti-Islamic, imperialistic and materialistic with the goal of destroying Islam through the efforts of westernised local agents (Kemalists)."⁸⁴⁴ These experiences were a far cry from those of the secular, Westernized elites who dominated the Turkish state, including its foreign policy establishment; they would later shape Erdogan's enduring skepticism of those institutions.

Erdogan's early political experiences also shaped his suspicious outlook towards bureaucratic establishment. At a young age he became involved in the Milli Türk Talebe Birliği (MTTB, or the National Turkish Student Union), an influential student organization that was a stronghold of conservative and Islamic nationalism, offering an ideological alternative to the growing influence of socialist and leftist student movements during the Cold War. He then launched his political career within Necmettin Erbakan's National Outlook Movement, the primary vehicle for Islamist politics in Turkey during the 1970s and 1980s. Through the movement's youth wing and its associated National Salvation Party (MSP), Erdogan embraced a vision of political Islam that rejected the secular Kemalist state and sought to restore Islamic values and Ottoman heritage in public life.⁸⁴⁵

Throughout the 1980s and 1990s, as an Islamist politician and eventually mayor of Istanbul, he witnessed—and personally experienced—exclusion, legal repression, and surveillance by the secular military-bureaucratic establishment. When the MSP was banned after the 1980 coup, the

⁸⁴³ Yavuz, 44.

⁸⁴⁴ Yavuz, 45.

⁸⁴⁵ Yavuz, 53–54.

Welfare Party (RP) became Erkaban's vehicle for the Islamic political movement in Turkey.⁸⁴⁶ In the 1995 elections, the RP became the senior coalition partner in government, propelling Erkaban to the prime ministership. In response, the military launched a “soft coup” in 1997, with the end result of ousting Erkaban, banning the RP, closing the Imam Hatip schools, and rigidly dismantling all sources of Islamic cultural and social expression in Turkey.⁸⁴⁷ Erdoğan was removed from his elected mayoral office, imprisoned, and banned from politics after delivering a divisive speech in which he referenced a poem by Turkish nationalist Ziya Gökalp:

The minarets are our bayonets,
The domes are our helmets,
The mosques are our barracks,
The believers are our soldiers.⁸⁴⁸

His brief imprisonment—he only served four months of his ten-month sentence—reinforced his view of the state apparatus as hostile to his political identity and ambitions. His eventual split from Erbakan in the late 1990s reflected Erdoğan's desire for a more broad-based, electorally viable Islamist politics, but the core mistrust of the Kemalist state remained central to his worldview.⁸⁴⁹

It is reasonable to infer that by the time he rose to national power in 2002, these formative experiences had cemented a deep-seated mistrust of traditional elites in key state institutions, including the foreign policy bureaucracy. Erdoğan's “core identity and values are derived from his

⁸⁴⁶ Yavuz, 117.

⁸⁴⁷ Yavuz, 123.

⁸⁴⁸ “Erdoğan: Turkey's All-Powerful Leader of 20 Years,” *BBC News*, June 13, 2011, sec. Europe, <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-europe-13746679>.

⁸⁴⁹ Yavuz, *Erdoğan*, 127–28.

Muslim identity, his operational code which shapes his policy preferences is based on pragmatic and his anti-Western and anti-Kemalist resentment.”⁸⁵⁰

Erdogan's Road to Power

Erdogan's road to the power he holds in Turkey today was not a short one. With the help of younger, pragmatic politicians with similar Islamist political origins, he founded the AKP in 2001. The party immediately rose to national prominence in the 2002 Turkish national elections, when the AKP secured 34.3 percent of the popular vote and two-thirds of the seats in parliament. The establishment CHP, in contrast, won only 19.4 percent of the votes.⁸⁵¹ The AKP's overwhelming dominance in these elections can be in part attributed to the unpopularity of the establishment. As one scholar writes, “Widespread popular dissatisfaction with the economy and political parties encouraged many people either not to vote or to vote against the existing parties and try the uncontested AKP instead.”⁸⁵² Three parties that had formed a coalition government after the 1999 election and two opposition parties failed to meet the 10 percent national threshold required to constitute a party in the Turkish parliament.⁸⁵³ These five parties were thrown out of parliament, with the AKP was the sole beneficiary. Although the AKP had branded itself as economically liberal, pro-European integration, that even a moderate-conservative party with Islamist origins could govern without coalition partners for the first time since the establishment of the Turkish Republic in 1923 marked a paradigm shift in Turkish politics.⁸⁵⁴

⁸⁵⁰ Yavuz, 80.

⁸⁵¹ Yavuz, 129.

⁸⁵² M. Hakan Yavuz, *Secularism and Muslim Democracy in Turkey*, Cambridge Middle East Studies 28 (Cambridge, UK ; New York: Cambridge University Press, 2009), 79, <https://catalog.lib.uchicago.edu/vufind/Record/11826142?sid=74646971>.

⁸⁵³ E Fuat Keyman, “The AK Party: Dominant Party, New Turkey and Polarization,” n.d., 22.

⁸⁵⁴ Meltem Muftuler-Bac, “The New Face of Turkey: The Domestic and Foreign Policy Implications of November 2002 Elections*,” *East European Quarterly* 37, no. 4 (Winter 2003): 429–30.

As of 2002, Erdoğan was the undisputed leader of the newly dominant AKP. But that the new parliament represented only 55 percent of the national vote in the last election and 65 percent of voters did not vote for the AKP was not lost on him.⁸⁵⁵ Neither were the lessons he had learned watching Erbakan and the Islamists who came before him. He knew he could not abandon his moderate, center-right platform too early, or the military might exercise its power as a decider in Turkish politics. Indeed, even after the AKP was elected, Erdoğan was not able to become prime minister until March 2003, as he was still technically banned from politics following his prison sentence. As Çağaptay writes, “what mattered to him most during these early days was political survival.”⁸⁵⁶

By 2007, “Erdoğan was able to convince Turkish business interests, the media, and civil society at home, as well as the EU and the United States abroad, of his commitment to genuine moderation and his conservative democratic credentials.”⁸⁵⁷ From 2002 to 2007, Turkey reaped the economic benefits of the austerity measures implemented by the coalition government in 2001. Erdoğan was able to take credit for eliminating chronic inflation, which made him immensely popular with voters.⁸⁵⁸ He also instrumentalized the EU accession process to establish his reputation as a moderately liberal Muslim leader and legitimize his moves to improve Turkey’s democratic institutions, including reducing the formal powers and influence of the military.⁸⁵⁹

By far Erdoğan’s most significant achievement in consolidating power during this time in came in his confrontation with the military in 2007. As secular president Ahmet Necdet Sezer prepared to step down in April, Erdoğan unexpectedly nominated Abdullah Gül—then foreign

⁸⁵⁵ Muftuler-Bac, 431.

⁸⁵⁶ Çağaptay, *The New Sultan*, 90.

⁸⁵⁷ Çağaptay, 103.

⁸⁵⁸ Soner Cagaptay, *The New Sultan: Erdogan and the Crisis of Modern Turkey* (Bloomsbury Publishing, 2020), 91.

⁸⁵⁹ Yavuz, *Erdogan*, 133; Cagaptay, *The New Sultan*, 94.

minister and a key AKP figure with roots in Erbakan’s Islamist movement—for the presidency. The secular establishment, particularly the TAF, viewed Sezer as a crucial bulwark against a full AKP capture of the state and sought to block Gül’s election. On April 27, 2007, the military issued an online “e-memorandum” warning of Islamist threats to Turkey’s secular order should Gül assume the presidency. In response to mass secularist rallies in Ankara and Istanbul, and amid military pressure, the Constitutional Court annulled the parliamentary vote for Gül on procedural grounds. Though Gül withdrew temporarily, Erdoğan, who commanded far broader and deeper popular support than Erbakan had ever enjoyed, called the military’s bluff by calling snap elections in July 2007. Framing itself as the champion of democratic change against a military-backed status quo, the AKP won 47 percent of the popular vote.⁸⁶⁰ This victory decisively shifted the balance of power in Erdoğan’s favor, marking the beginning of the military’s retreat from overt political influence. As the later sections of this chapter will detail, between 2007 and 2011, repeated confrontations between Erdoğan and the military contributed to the erosion of military tutelage in Turkey.

From 2007 on, the AKP entered a period of electoral dominance. In 2011, the AKP secured 49.8 percent of the vote and 327 of 550 seats in parliament. This was the first time in Turkey’s history that a party won three consecutive elections, each with a higher vote share than before.⁸⁶¹ The victory came on the heels of the passing of the 2010 referendum on constitutional reform, which reduced the influence of the military, restructured the judiciary, and placed further curbs on the power of the secularist establishment.⁸⁶² While Erdoğan framed this referendum as necessary for the EU accession process, opponents argued that the referendum would further concentrate power

⁸⁶⁰ Çağaptay, *The New Sultan*, 110–11; Keyman, “The AK Party: Dominant Party, New Turkey and Polarization,” 22; Yavuz, *Secularism and Muslim Democracy in Turkey*, 240–41, 257.

⁸⁶¹ Meltem Müftüler-Baç and E. Fuat Keyman, “The Era of Dominant-Party Politics,” *Journal of Democracy* 23, no. 1 (January 2012): 85–87.

⁸⁶² Müftüler-Baç and Fuat Keyman, “The Era of Dominant-Party Politics.”

to the executive branch.⁸⁶³ Erdoğan also remained the unquestioned leader of the party at this time, while the parliamentary opposition from the social democratic left and nationalist right was “weak and somewhat fragmented.”⁸⁶⁴

Erdoğan further strengthened his personal control over the party and the government after 2011.⁸⁶⁵ During this period, he increasingly centralized decision-making within the AKP, consolidated his leadership over key state institutions, and positioned himself as the dominant figure in Turkish politics.⁸⁶⁶ In 2014, Erdoğan won the country’s first direct presidential election, securing 52 percent of the vote and becoming Turkey’s twelfth president.⁸⁶⁷ Erdoğan departed from the traditional expectation of presidential neutrality by continuing to chair cabinet meetings and directly influencing government affairs, while ensuring the appointment of Ahmet Davutoğlu, a loyal ally, as both party leader and prime minister.⁸⁶⁸ Senior AKP figures such as Abdullah Gül and Bülent Arınç voiced occasional criticisms but were unable to challenge Erdoğan’s position within the party.⁸⁶⁹ While Erdoğan had always dominated the party, this centralized intra-party dynamic was a change from the relatively pluralistic party structure of the 2002-2011 period.⁸⁷⁰ Through tight control over leadership succession, personal networks, and the strategic use of public narratives emphasizing stability and continuity, Erdoğan successfully maintained his dominance over both the party—which

⁸⁶³ Evan Hill, “The Referendum Explained,” Al Jazeera, accessed June 4, 2025, <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2010/9/13/major-reforms-cast-as-a-power-grab>.

⁸⁶⁴ Müftüler-Baç and Fuat Keyman, “The Era of Dominant-Party Politics,” 86.

⁸⁶⁵ Ziya Öniş, “Turkey’s Two Elections: The AKP Comes Back,” *Journal of Democracy* 27, no. 2 (April 2016): 143, <https://doi.org/10.1353/jod.2016.0021>.

⁸⁶⁶ Öniş, 143–44; Sinan Ulgen, “Sleepless in Ankara: The Post-Erdoğan Government’s Big Challenges,” Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, August 4, 2014, <https://carnegieendowment.org/posts/2014/08/sleepless-in-ankara-the-post-erdogan-governments-big-challenges?lang=en>.

⁸⁶⁷ Prior to the 2014 election, the president was elected by parliament. Ulgen, “Sleepless in Ankara”; “Previewing Turkey’s Parliamentary Election: Status Quo, Executive Presidency, or Progressive New Chapter?,” Event Transcript (Washington, D.C.: The Brookings Institution, June 15, 2015).

⁸⁶⁸ Öniş, “Turkey’s Two Elections,” 146; Ulgen, “Sleepless in Ankara.”

⁸⁶⁹ Öniş, “Turkey’s Two Elections,” 147; “Previewing Turkey’s Parliamentary Elections,” 34.

⁸⁷⁰ Karabekir Akkoyunlu, “The Five Phases of Turkey’s Foreign Policy under the AKP,” *Social Research: An International Quarterly* 88, no. 2 (2021): 251.

took on a “politburo-like structure dominated by Erdoğan loyalists”⁸⁷¹—and the broader political landscape.⁸⁷²

From 2011 until the end of the period of this study in 2018, Erdoğan met significant challenges to his rule, including mass protests (Gezi Park, 2013), a sweeping corruption scandal implicating his inner circle (2013), electoral setbacks (June 2015 parliamentary elections), and an attempted military coup (July 2016).⁸⁷³ As is his wont, he leveraged these crises to consolidate power.

Table 10. Major Developments on Erdogan’s Road to Power

Year	Development
2001	Founded the Justice and Development Party (AKP) with allies from Islamist movements.
2002	AKP won 34.3% of the vote and secured two-thirds of the seats in parliament.
2003	Erdoğan became Prime Minister after the legal ban was lifted.
2007	Confronted the military over Abdullah Gül's presidential candidacy; won snap elections with 47%.
2010	Passed constitutional referendum weakening military and judiciary influence.
2011	AKP won its third consecutive election with 49.8% of the vote; Erdoğan consolidated party control.
2013	Gezi Park Protests, anti-corruption probe into AKP
2014	Elected President with 52% of the vote; retained control over government.
2016	Survived attempted coup; declared state of emergency and initiated mass purges.
2017	Won the constitutional referendum that abolished the PM office and expanded presidential powers.

⁸⁷¹ Çağaptay, *The New Sultan*, 125.

⁸⁷² Öniş, “Turkey’s Two Elections,” 152–53; “Previewing Turkey’s Parliamentary Elections,” 9–10.

⁸⁷³ Suzan Fraser, “Key Dates in Recep Tayyip Erdogan’s 20-Year Rule of Turkey,” AP News, March 14, 2023, <https://apnews.com/article/turkey-erdogan-key-dates-elections-82af9b0c0c5d09a9a9bdb1e2bf1b5b08>.

2018	Won presidential election under the new executive system, formalizing de jure authority.
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He used the Gezi Park protests to polarize public opinion,⁸⁷⁴ the 2013 corruption scandal to justify mass purges of the police and the judiciary,⁸⁷⁵ and the 2016 failed coup to justify a two-year state of emergency and further sweeping purges.⁸⁷⁶ Yet it was not through narrative alone that Erdoğan was able to remain firmly in power. Rather, he turned towards structural reforms and electoral authoritarianism to consolidate his position as Turkey's unchallenged leader. The April 2017 constitutional referendum, passed under emergency conditions and amid an uneven playing field, legally abolished the office of prime minister, vastly expanded presidential powers, and gave Erdoğan sweeping authority over the judiciary and bureaucracy.⁸⁷⁷ Elections that followed, including the June 2018 presidential and parliamentary contests, were conducted under what Eissenstat terms a system "rigged just enough"—retaining democratic trappings while systematically disadvantaging the opposition through media control, manipulation of electoral oversight bodies, legal repression, and structural barriers.⁸⁷⁸ With the transformation of Turkey to a presidential system in 2017 and his election as president in 2018, "Erdoğan thus transitioned from the de facto control he had been exercising in the previous parliamentary system of government, since his election to the presidency in August 2014, to de jure management of what he has been calling 'New Turkey.'"⁸⁷⁹ Through this

⁸⁷⁴ "Turkey Seeks Life Term for Suspects over 2013 Gezi Park Protests," Al Jazeera, accessed June 4, 2025, <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2019/2/20/turkey-seeks-life-term-for-suspects-over-2013-gezi-park-protests>.

⁸⁷⁵ Ayla Jean Yackley, "Turkish PM Purges Police, Facing Biggest Threat of His Rule," *Reuters*, December 20, 2013, sec. World, <https://www.reuters.com/article/world/turkish-pm-purges-police-facing-biggest-threat-of-his-rule-idUSBRE9BJ0RU/>.

⁸⁷⁶ Peter Kenyon, "Turkey's State Of Emergency Ends, While Erdogan's Power Grows And 'Purge' Continues," *NPR*, July 26, 2018, sec. World, <https://www.npr.org/2018/07/26/632307755/turkeys-state-of-emergency-ends-while-erdogans-power-grows-and-purge-continues>.

⁸⁷⁷ Howard Eissenstat, "After the June Elections: No Brakes on Turkey's Authoritarian Slide" (Project on Middle East Democracy, August 2018), 3–4.

⁸⁷⁸ Eissenstat, 5–10.

⁸⁷⁹ Bulent Aliriza, "Erdogan Takes Total Control of 'New Turkey,'" July 18, 2018, <https://www.csis.org/analysis/erdogan-takes-total-control-new-turkey>.

blend of constitutional engineering and controlled electoral competition, Erdoğan entrenched an executive-centered regime with few remaining institutional checks on his power. **Table 10** summarizes the significant developments on his road to power.

Contesting the Secular Foreign Policy Establishment

When Erdoğan assumed power in 2002, he inherited a foreign policy apparatus firmly embedded in the secular, Western-oriented traditions of the Kemalist republic. This section examines the evolution of Erdoğan's approach to the secularist foreign policy bureaucracy, with particular attention to the TAF and the MFA. As an Islamist politician with no prior foreign policy experience and an outsider to these elite institutions, Erdoğan regarded the establishment with a combination of suspicion and strategic pragmatism throughout his tenure. Despite his electoral strength from 2002 to 2007, he lacked effective control over the military, which constrained his authority. For the purposes of testing my theory, I code Erdoğan as politically weak during this period. It is only after he successfully curbed the military's influence that I code him as politically strong (see **Table 11**).

Table 11. Empirical Coding of Independent Variables

	2002-2007	2007-2016
Political Strength	Low	High
Distrust	High	High

2002-2007

In this initial period of Turkish foreign policy under the AKP, Erdoğan instrumentalized a push for Turkish integration in the European Union to gain legitimacy both at home and abroad and

to take on the traditionally powerful TAF. Understanding foreign policymaking in this period requires situating it within the context of Erdoğan's early political vulnerability, distrust of the secular bureaucratic establishment, as well as a key intervening variable: the enduring influence of the Turkish military. Unlike other leaders examined in this study, Erdoğan appears to have used a hybrid organizational strategy that resembles elements of the insulation, politicization, and integration strategies. He empowered career diplomats, centralized foreign policy to the Prime Minister's Office (PMO) by relying on key foreign policy advisers like Ahmet Davutoğlu, and curtailed the formal authority of the military over foreign policy and domestic politics. This suggests that the perceived threat from the military may have been sufficiently acute to incentivize Erdoğan to tactically pursue Europeanization and rely on professional diplomats while simultaneously laying the groundwork for a foreign policy more aligned with his long-term ideological vision.

Although the legislative harmonization process tied to EU accession began in 2001, before the AKP came to power, the party significantly advanced these reforms after its electoral victory. Between 2002 and 2006, the AKP introduced six additional reform packages that amended existing laws to enhance human rights protections, implement stronger measures against torture, expand freedom of expression and the press, and improve the rights to association, assembly, and protest.⁸⁸⁰ The drive for EU accession it proved to be a smart tactical move in a few ways. First, it granted Erdoğan and the AKP popular legitimacy at home and abroad. Integration with the EU was widely supported within Turkey, with 65 percent of Turks viewing integration as good for Turkey.⁸⁸¹ Erdoğan also recognized that cultivating U.S. and EU backing would bolster his position vis-à-vis the secular military establishment and provide an external anchor for the AKP's reform agenda,

⁸⁸⁰ Moira Goff-Taylor, "The Shifting Drivers of the AKP's EU Policy," The Wilson Center, May 31, 2017, <https://www.wilsoncenter.org/publication/the-shifting-drivers-the-akps-eu-policy>.

⁸⁸¹ Goff-Taylor.

thereby bolstering its odds of political survival.⁸⁸² The military, which had been tactically supportive of EU integration as a way of integrating Turkey in the West and improving Turkey's international standing, might be more willing to comply with Erdoğan's foreign policy vision if they saw it as Western-oriented.⁸⁸³ As Turkey pursued accession, its foreign policy began to be seen in Europe as "much more open to cooperation, dialogue and to the notion of searching for 'win-win' outcomes to international conflicts."⁸⁸⁴

The Europeanization push also provided Erdoğan an excuse to reduce the military's formal role in Turkish domestic politics and foreign policy. Before Erdoğan's term, it was implicitly understood that Turkey's human rights and governance issues were standing in the way of EU accession.⁸⁸⁵ Early on in the accession talks, Brussels made it clear that the EU wanted its generals subjected to civilian control as per the Copenhagen Criteria. This provided Erdoğan the perfect political cover with which to rebalance the TAF's role in politics without provoking its ire.⁸⁸⁶ In the seventh EU harmonization package of 2003, Erdoğan managed to alter the composition, duties, and functions of the Turkish National Security Council (MGK) under this cover.⁸⁸⁷ Established in 1961 by a military junta to institutionalize military tutelage in Turkey, the MGK's formal duty until 2003 was to advise the council of ministers in formulating foreign and national security policy.⁸⁸⁸ In

⁸⁸² Nathalie Tocci, "Europeanization in Turkey: Trigger or Anchor for Reform?", *South European Society and Politics* 10, no. 1 (April 1, 2005): 80, <https://doi.org/10.1080/13608740500037973>.

⁸⁸³ The TAF under the Chief of Staff Hilmi Ozkok (until his retirement in 2006) vocally supported the EU accession process, although they had some reservations concerning EU reform process "in regard to the possible weakening of Turkey's hand in its struggle against political Islam and Kurdish separatism." Gözde Yilmaz, "From Europeanization to De-Europeanization: The Europeanization Process of Turkey in 1999–2014," *Journal of Contemporary European Studies* 24, no. 1 (January 2, 2016): 90, <https://doi.org/10.1080/14782804.2015.1038226>.

⁸⁸⁴ "Turkey's Foreign Policy in Turbulent Times," Chaillot Papers (Paris: EUISS, 2006), 18.

⁸⁸⁵ "Turkey's Foreign Policy in Turbulent Times," 16–17.

⁸⁸⁶ Soner Çağaptay, *Erdogan's Empire: Turkey and the Politics of the Middle East* (London ; New York: I.B. Tauris, 2020), 76, <https://catalog.lib.uchicago.edu/vufind/Record/12007735?sid=74646783>.

⁸⁸⁷ Nili Satana, "The New Civil-Military Relations in Turkey," Middle East Institute, October 18, 2022, <https://www.mei.edu/publications/new-civil-military-relations-turkey>.

⁸⁸⁸ Kaynar, "Political Activism of the National Security Council in Turkey After the Reforms," *Armed Forces & Society* 43, no. 3 (2017): 526.

practice, the MGK had functioned as the more decisive of the dual legs of the executive decision-making system in Turkey, in addition to the council of ministers, and determined policy matters as wide-ranging as school curricula, television broadcasting, and the formation of electoral alliances.⁸⁸⁹ The 2003 reforms demoted the MGK to a purely advisory council, increased civilian presence on the previously military-dominated body, and reduced the frequency of their meetings.⁸⁹⁰ Crucially, it also altered the position of the secretary general of the MGK to a civilian-held, rather than military-held, position.⁸⁹¹ Similar reforms extended civilian control over the Supreme Military Council, the highest decision-making body on military promotions, dismissals, and appointments.⁸⁹² These reforms of military influence would prove critical later on as Erdoğan began to move away from Europeanization and towards his long-term foreign policy ideology, which clashed with that of the secular establishment.

Until at least 2005, the push for EU accession involved empowering career diplomats. The Secretariat General for European Union Affairs (EUSG) was founded within the MFA in 2000 after Turkey became a recognized EU candidate country, though it was moved to the PMO in July 2000 before the AKP's electoral victory and operated semi-autonomously. After the AKP came to power and began to push for EU integration, the MFA and the EUSG were the two main agencies involved in the negotiations.⁸⁹³ Although both were comprised of career diplomats, the PM granted greater authority to those within the EUSG, who were likely hand-selected by the PM and thus seen as more amenable than those in the MFA. The EUSG was responsible for coordinating Turkey's

⁸⁸⁹ Umit Cizre Sakallioglu, "The Anatomy of the Turkish Military's Political Autonomy," *Comparative Politics* 29, no. 2 (1997): 158, <https://doi.org/10.2307/422077>.

⁸⁹⁰ Çağaptay, *The New Sultan*, 94.

⁸⁹¹ "Secretariat-General of the NSC," accessed June 10, 2025, <https://www.mgk.gov.tr/en/index.php/secretariat-general/about-us>.

⁸⁹² Emin Fuat Keyman and Sebnem Gümüşçü, *Democracy, Identity and Foreign Policy in Turkey: Hegemony through Transformation, Islam and Nationalism* (Hounds mills, Basingstoke, Hampshire: Palgrave Macmillan, 2014), 46–47.

⁸⁹³ Gülen, "Turf Wars in Foreign Policy Bureaucracy," 13.

alignment with the EU's political criteria, managing financial cooperation, and overseeing the screening and negotiation of individual policy areas covered by EU law known as *acquis chapters*.⁸⁹⁴ EUSG directors reportedly received "standing instructions from the PM" that negotiations should not stall "regardless of the roadblocks coming from the EU or the Turkish bureaucratic agencies."⁸⁹⁵

Still, there were signs that the Erdogan's government was not entirely comfortable with the bureaucrat-dominated EUSG. With EU accession negotiations scheduled to begin in October 2005, Erdogan appointed Ali Babacan, a trusted ally and then-economic minister, as chief negotiator for the talks.⁸⁹⁶ This appointment marked a shift in control over the accession process and signaled Erdogan's preference for loyal political appointees over career diplomats. Babacan would rely on technical support from a high-level steering and monitoring committee, including the EUSG Secretary General, officials from the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, State Planning Organization, and PMO, and Turkey's Permanent Representative to the EU.⁸⁹⁷ However, this restructuring foreshadowed broader efforts to centralize foreign policymaking authority and broadly reduce the influence of bureaucratic agencies on Europeanization after 2007.

Even as the Europeanization drive was in full force, Erdogan began to simultaneously enact a foreign policy more aligned with the ideology of his conservative and Islamist political movement. Yavuz (2020) explains:

For conservative and Islamically oriented communities, there is a deep nostalgia for the Ottoman Empire...They are nostalgic for a return to Ottoman grandeur, and therefore they support confrontation, not appeasement, with the 'others' who resist the Turkish

⁸⁹⁴ "Commission Staff Working Document: Turkey 2006 Progress Report" (Brussels: Commission of the European Communities, August 11, 2006), 6, https://www.mfa.gov.tr/data/AB/Illerlemeraporu_en_8Kasim2006.pdf.

⁸⁹⁵ Gulen, "Turf Wars in Foreign Policy Bureaucracy," 14.

⁸⁹⁶ "Erdogan names Babacan as his pick for Chief Negotiator for EU talks," May 25, 2005,

<https://www.hurriyet.com.tr/gundem/erdogan-names-babacan-as-his-pick-for-chief-negotiator-for-eu-talks-322113>.

⁸⁹⁷ "Commission Staff Working Document: Turkey 2006 Progress Report," 6.

leadership's objectives of becoming a regional power... On the other hand, secularist Turks not only identify the past of the Ottoman Empire as the source of backwardness but they are adamant about getting rid of this Islamo-Arab legacy in order to nurture what they see as the true cultural and ethnic roots of the Turkish nation.⁸⁹⁸

The AKP government thus pursued an ambitious strategy of regional engagement, leveraging historical ties and shared cultural affinities to reposition Turkey as a central player in the Middle East. This shift was guided in large part by the strategic vision of foreign policy adviser Ahmet Davutoğlu, who emphasized the importance of “zero problems with neighbors” and deepened ties with countries such as Syria, Iran, and Iraq.⁸⁹⁹ Labeled “Strategic Depth” by Davutoğlu, this approach aimed to reassert Turkey’s influence across the Middle East, Balkans, and other former Ottoman territories, framing its ambitions in terms of regional cooperation and friendly relations.⁹⁰⁰ High-level visits, trade agreements, and security dialogues underscored a deliberate pivot toward the region. The push to improve ties with Syria, for example, was dramatic. Turkey-Syria relations had been unfriendly during the Cold War and suffered from setbacks over Syria’s support of the Kurdish militant group in battling the government in Ankara as recently as 1999. In January 2004, Assad visited Ankara, becoming the first Syrian president to visit Turkey for the first time in 57 years.⁹⁰¹ The government pursued a trade-oriented and open-border approach to Syria, with the two countries signing a free trade agreement in 2004.⁹⁰²

⁸⁹⁸ M. Hakan Yavuz, “The Neo-Ottoman Foreign Policy of the AKP,” in *Nostalgia for the Empire: The Politics of Neo-Ottomanism* (Oxford University Press, 2020), 180, <https://doi.org/10.1093/oso/9780197512289.003.0008>.

⁸⁹⁹ Bülent Aras, “Davutoğlu Era in Turkish Foreign Policy,” Policy Brief (Ankara: Foundation for Political, Economic, and Social Research, May 2009).

⁹⁰⁰ Cagaptay, *The New Sultan*, 45.

⁹⁰¹ Cagaptay, 99–100.

⁹⁰² Francesco D’Alema, “The Evolution of Turkey’s Syria Policy,” IAI Working Papers (Istituto Affari Internazionali, October 2017), 5–6.

This push towards a neo-Ottoman foreign policy coincided with organizational choices we would expect from a leader who is broadly distrustful of the foreign policy bureaucracy: centralizing foreign policy formulation to the PMO. While the Prime Minister has always held constitutional authority over foreign affairs, the assertiveness of the Turkish Armed Forces' Office of General Staff (OGS) has historically limited that power, particularly on national security issues.⁹⁰³ After the AKP's 2002 electoral victory, Davutoğlu became chief adviser to the PM and would serve in this role until 2009, when he became foreign minister. A professor of international relations, his appointment was his foray into politics.⁹⁰⁴ By many accounts, he emerged as the most influential strategist of Turkish foreign policy during this period. Usul and Özcan (2010) compare him to Henry Kissinger, noting that he functioned as an adviser and held "executive-like functions" in foreign affairs.⁹⁰⁵ Others described him as Turkey's "shadow foreign minister."⁹⁰⁶ One of the most visible manifestations of his influence was the controversial decision to engage with Hamas after their 2006 electoral victory, culminating in a visit by exiled leader Khaled Mashal to Ankara in February 2006.⁹⁰⁷ The MFA, quick to distance itself from such a move, clarified that the AKP, not the ministry, invited the Hamas leader.⁹⁰⁸ With Davutoğlu operating from within the PMO and the military's influence on the decline, decisions on diplomacy and security increasingly emanated from the prime minister's inner circle. At times, Erdogan even overruled the military. As Gülen (2022) notes, an illustrative example from the early 2000s involved the PMO's decision to support the

⁹⁰³ Gülen, "Turf Wars in Foreign Policy Bureaucracy," 10–11.

⁹⁰⁴ Bülent Aras, "From 'Hoca' to 'Prime Minister': Davutoğlu's Ascendance in Turkish Politics" (Wilson Center, n.d.).

⁹⁰⁵ Ali Resul Usul and Mehmet Özcan, "Understanding the 'New' Turkish Foreign Policy: Changes within Continuity Is Turkey Departing From The West?," *Uluslararası Stratejik Araştırmalar Kurumu*, no. 21 (2010): 101–23.

⁹⁰⁶ "Seven Key Moments in Ahmet Davutoglu's 17 Years with the AKP," Middle East Eye, accessed June 11, 2025, <https://www.middleeasteye.net/news/davutoglu-biography-review-17-years-political-life>.

⁹⁰⁷ Aras, "Davutoğlu Era in Turkish Foreign Policy," 10; "Hamas Visits Ankara: The AKP Shifts Turkey's Role in the Middle East | The Washington Institute," accessed June 11, 2025, <https://www.washingtoninstitute.org/policy-analysis/hamas-visits-ankara-akp-shifts-turkeys-role-middle-east>.

⁹⁰⁸ Çağaptay, *The New Sultan*, 158.

legalization of public Kurdish language use as part of EU reforms, despite opposition from the OGS.⁹⁰⁹

Towards the end of this period, the momentum that had been pushing Turkey towards EU integration began to wane. Europe itself appeared to be an unwilling partner in the process, with some member states questioning the desirability of Turkey's membership bid and the Union tightening the conditions for accession broadly.⁹¹⁰ As the path towards EU integration gradually fell out of reach—and out of favor with the Turkish public—Erdoğan hastened this neo-Ottoman pivot towards the region, increasingly criticizing Israel and improving ties with Iran. Having “already extracted what he wanted out of the EU accession process – a defanged Turkish TAF”⁹¹¹, the government then “cherry-picked which areas and which issues within these areas to reform.”⁹¹² As the post-2007 period would reveal even further, Erdoğan’s support for Europeanization proved to be both tactical and ephemeral, as was his cooperation with the bureaucracy.

2007-2016

In 2007, Erdoğan’s most consequential step in consolidating power arrived when he successfully confronted the military’s attempt to block Abdullah Gül’s presidential bid, called snap elections in response, and secured a decisive AKP victory. After this successful showdown with the TAF, Erdoğan went to even more extreme lengths to dismantle the military bureaucracy in the Sledgehammer and Ergenekon trials. The success of these trials was only possible with the help of the Pennsylvania-based cleric Fetullah Gülen, the leader of an Islamist movement whose followers

⁹⁰⁹ Gülen, “Turf Wars in Foreign Policy Bureaucracy,” 11.

⁹¹⁰ Çağaptay, *Erdogan’s Empire*, 80; Ziya Öniş and Şuhnaz Yılmaz, “Between Europeanization and Euro-Asianism: Foreign Policy Activism in Turkey during the AKP Era,” *Turkish Studies* 10, no. 1 (March 2009): 13–14, <https://doi.org/10.1080/14683840802648562>.

⁹¹¹ Çağaptay, *Erdogan’s Empire*, 80.

⁹¹² Yılmaz, “From Europeanization to De-Europeanization,” 90.

had begun infiltrating Turkey’s military, police, and judiciary in the 1990s and gained an even greater foothold under Erdoğan.⁹¹³ Erdoğan and his Gülenist allies justified these trials and the investigations preceding them as legitimate inquiries into the secularist “deep state” within the TAF, which was nefariously conspiring against the democratically elected AKP. Sending thousands to prison based on scarce evidence, the trials were understood both inside and outside of Turkey as a way for the government to eradicate Erdoğan’s Kemalist political opponents within the military.⁹¹⁴

As mentioned above, the 2010 constitutional referendum also increased Erdoğan’s power and decreased that of the military. By mid-2011, dozens of high-ranking military officers—including generals and admirals—had been arrested or were under investigation in the trials. The top commanders of the Turkish armed forces resigned simultaneously in protest in July 2011. One Turkish journalist wrote at the time: “In the past, when the military expressed dissatisfaction with the government, the government would leave. Nowadays, when the government expresses displeasure to the top generals, the top generals are leaving.”⁹¹⁵

As Erdoğan successfully curtailed the military’s influence over politics and policy, he turned his attention to the MFA, seeking to politicize the institution and diminish the dominance of secularist ideology in shaping foreign policy. This shift led to confrontations with secular-leaning diplomats in the ministry who resisted Erdoğan’s pivot toward regional engagement and remained committed to Turkey’s traditional Western-oriented foreign policy. In addition to Erdoğan’s attacks on diplomats mentioned at the top of this chapter, there was also at least one dramatic resignation. In December 2009, Turkey’s ambassador to Washington, Nabi Sensoy, resigned during Erdoğan’s

⁹¹³ Howard Eissenstat, “Rests the Crown: Erdoğan and ‘Revolutionary Security’ in Turkey,” Project on Middle East Democracy, POMED, December 2017, 2–3, https://pomed.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/12/Eissenstat_171220_FINAL.pdf.

⁹¹⁴ Dexter Filkins, “Show Trials on the Bosphorus,” *The New Yorker*, August 13, 2013, <https://www.newyorker.com/news/daily-comment/show-trials-on-the-bosphorus>.

⁹¹⁵ Cagaptay, *The New Sultan*, 117.

visit to the U.S. capital.⁹¹⁶ While officially framed as a protocol issue, the real motivation for his resignation was his frustration at being sidelined by the AKP’s foreign policy team and disagreements with the government’s approach to the Middle East.⁹¹⁷

The public tensions between Erdoğan and the MFA were partly driven by the changes the prime minister had begun to make to the foreign policymaking process. When Davutoğlu became foreign minister in 2009, Aras (2009) predicted that the foreign minister might experience “serious internal problems and obstacles while trying to reconcile his vision with the bureaucratic mechanisms of Turkish foreign policy.”⁹¹⁸ Nevertheless, Davutoğlu, Erdoğan, and others in the AKP government rapidly politicized the foreign policy bureaucracy to include more politically loyal appointees, thereby reducing the influence of career bureaucrats. First, Akkoyunlu (2021) indicates that the ministry under Davutoğlu began to accept non-career candidates such as academics and prime ministerial advisers as ambassadors and subsequently appointed them to career jobs in the foreign ministry—a move that was resisted by career diplomats.⁹¹⁹ Greater control over appointments across the bureaucracy was enabled by the AKP’s hold on the presidency, which we may recall was won in a hard-fought battle with the military in 2007. For example, Hakan Fidan, an academic who had served in the PMO and traveled abroad several times on secretive diplomatic visits with Davutoğlu, was named head of the National Intelligence Organization (MIT) in 2010.⁹²⁰

⁹¹⁶ Kevin Bogardus, “Turkish Ambassador Quits Days after Prime Minister’s U.S. Visit,” Text, *The Hill* (blog), December 10, 2009, <https://thehill.com/business-a-lobbying/71631-turkish-ambassador-quits-days-after-prime-ministers-us-visit/>.

⁹¹⁷ Aras, “Turkey’s Ambassadors vs. Erdoğan.”

⁹¹⁸ Aras, “Davutoğlu Era in Turkish Foreign Policy,” 15.

⁹¹⁹ Gülen, “Turf Wars in Foreign Policy Bureaucracy,” 12; Akkoyunlu, “The Five Phases of Turkey’s Foreign Policy under the AKP,” 250.

⁹²⁰ SÜLEYMAN KURT, “Hakan Fidan Becomes next Head of Turkish Intelligence,” Today’s Zaman, April 2010, <https://web.archive.org/web/20131031121214/http://www.todayszaman.com/news-207819-hakan-fidan-becomes-next-head-of-turkish-intelligence.html>.

Fidan, who continues to be seen as a trusted loyalist of Erdogan, served in the role until 2023 when he became the foreign minister.⁹²¹

Second, the overall size of the foreign policy bureaucracy grew. The ostensible reason for the expansion in some areas, such as opening 15 new embassies in Africa and two in Latin America by 2010, was to support Turkey's aspirations to play a more active role in international relations—one of Davutoğlu's foreign policy principles.⁹²² In reality, the expansion of the bureaucracy increased the number of political appointees—followers of Fethullah Gülen and allies of the AKP government—who could serve in the bureaucracy.⁹²³ In the foreign ministry, the directorate generals (organizational units similar to bureaus in the U.S. State Department) grew from 15 to 25 under the new foreign minister.⁹²⁴ The expansion of the embassies abroad and the directorate generals within the foreign ministry increased the number of high-level posts available but reduced the chance of any individual diplomat becoming an ambassador in a high-prestige location.⁹²⁵ It also substantially increased the workload and responsibilities for the average foreign ministry bureaucrat. As Aras (2015) explains:

The new embassies operate with a limited number of personnel and are not necessarily diplomats' first choice for postings. The number of personnel is the highest it has ever been, and there seems to be a will to continue in this direction. However, the departments in the Ministry still suffer from a lack of personnel and, thus, a heavy workload.⁹²⁶

⁹²¹ "Spymaster Turned Chief Diplomat to Play Key Role during Erdogan's next Five Years," The Arab Weekly, August 6, 2023, <https://thearabweekly.com/spymaster-turned-chief-diplomat-play-key-role-during-erdogans-next-five-years>.

⁹²² Ahmet Davutoglu, "Turkey's Zero-Problems Foreign Policy," *Foreign Policy* (blog), May 20, 2010, <https://foreignpolicy.com/2010/05/20/turkeys-zero-problems-foreign-policy/>.

⁹²³ Akkoyunlu, "The Five Phases of Turkey's Foreign Policy under the AKP," 250.

⁹²⁴ Bülent Aras, "Reform and Capacity Building in the Turkish Foreign Ministry: Bridging the Gap between Ideas and Institutions," *Journal of Balkan and Near Eastern Studies* 17, no. 3 (July 3, 2015): 8, <https://doi.org/10.1080/19448953.2015.1063271>.

⁹²⁵ Aras, 11.

⁹²⁶ Aras, 13.

The shortage of qualified personnel to fill the vacant new posts grew especially after the purge of state institutions that followed the 2016 attempted coup d'état, which we will discuss in the next section.

Third, the AKP government began to vest new power in non-MFA foreign policy agencies, such as the Ministry of European Union Affairs and TIKA. The former was created from the EUSG in 2011 to wrest control of Europeanization from the foreign policy bureaucracy. As Gülen (2022) puts it, “the government decided to realize its own foreign policy ideals by forming a ministry in charge of EU affairs, rather than reaching a consensus with the [EUSG] bureaucrats.”⁹²⁷ As long as it existed, the majority of the Ministers of EU Affairs were AKP politicians. Its first appointed minister, Egemen Bağış, was described in 2009 as “Erdoğan’s confidant. No one in government, other than Foreign Minister Ahmet Davutoğlu, has the same degree of access to Erdoğan.”⁹²⁸ The latter—TIKA—was founded as a directorate of the MFA responsible for development aid in 1992 and later placed under the PMO before the AKP came to power. When Erdoğan came to power in 2002, TIKA operated just 12 field offices; by 2013, it had expanded to 28 offices across 25 countries and was running development projects in over 100 countries.⁹²⁹ The expansion of TIKA’s budget, responsibilities, and decision-making role was perceptible to the MFA, which it gradually supplanted in certain areas of foreign policy. After the AKP reorganized TIKA by executive order in 2011, it was not required to coordinate with the MFA or the ambassadors in the countries in which they were operating.⁹³⁰ Gülen (2022), who interviewed dozens of bureaucrats in TIKA and the MFA, confirmed this fact in an interview with a noncareer diplomat:

⁹²⁷ Gülen, “Turf Wars in Foreign Policy Bureaucracy,” 14.

⁹²⁸ Güldener Sonumut, “Pragmatic Negotiator,” POLITICO, October 28, 2009, <https://www.politico.eu/article/pragmatic-negotiator-2/>.

⁹²⁹ Hakan Fidan, “A Work in Progress: The New Turkish Foreign Policy,” *Middle East Policy* 20, no. 1 (2013): 91–96, <https://doi.org/10.1111/mepo.12006>.

⁹³⁰ Gülen, “Turf Wars in Foreign Policy Bureaucracy,” 14–15.

It is not practical for TIKA to work with the MFA since the TIKA director and deputy directors are able to personally reach the prime minister and the president to consult. The agency also did not need the MFA support because it has access to first-hand information through its local offices and is able to share local intelligence with the PMO. *The agency works like a second MFA* because TIKA has been directed by people with fewer bureaucratic connections but more political ties to the government.⁹³¹

Led by appointees aligned with the AKP's foreign policy agenda, these newly established bureaucratic bodies functioned as parallel institutions capable of bypassing or overruling the MFA.

Shifting Distrust: Erdoğan versus the Gülenists

The locus of Erdoğan's distrust within the foreign policy bureaucracy began to shift in the early 2010s. From the secularist officials his government had already sidelined, it turned to a new internal adversary: the Hizmet movement led by Fethullah Gülen.⁹³² As discussed above, Gülen's followers had gained significant influence within key state institutions, particularly the police, judiciary, and segments of the military, throughout AKP rule.⁹³³ The origins of the AKP–Gülenist alliance date back to the party's early years in power, when Erdoğan found Gülenist cadres useful in his efforts to neutralize the military and weaken secular control over the bureaucracy.⁹³⁴ Although the alliance endured into the early 2010s, "the elimination of this common foe also gradually brought to the fore their differences and rival hegemonic ambitions."⁹³⁵

⁹³¹ Interview by Berkay Gülen with former director of Strategic Research Centre, MFA, February 20, 2018, Ankara. Gülen, 15.

⁹³² Cameron Glenn, "Profile: Fethullah Gulen," Wilson Center, July 18, 2016, <https://www.wilsoncenter.org/article/profile-fethullah-gulen>.

⁹³³ Gonul Tol, Matt Mainzer, and Zeynep Ekmekeci, "Unpacking Turkey's Failed Coup: Causes and Consequences," Middle East Institute, August 17, 2016, <https://www.mei.edu/publications/unpacking-turkeys-failed-coup-causes-and-consequences>.

⁹³⁴ Akkoyunlu, "The Five Phases of Turkey's Foreign Policy under the AKP," 247.

⁹³⁵ Akkoyunlu, 252.

By the early 2010s, disagreements over foreign policy began to strain the relationship. Erdoğan's increasingly assertive foreign policy—described as “anti-Israel, pro-Iran, and Muslim Brotherhood-focused—clashed with Gülen's more pro-Western outlook.⁹³⁶ In 2010, Gülen publicly condemned the Turkish-led Gaza flotilla for attempting to breach the Israeli blockade without official approval, a rebuke that sharply contrasted with Erdoğan's celebration of the activists and harsh criticism of Israel.⁹³⁷ Gülen also opposed Erdoğan's pivot away from EU membership and NATO alignment.⁹³⁸ Tensions deepened over the Kurdish peace initiative, which the government launched in 2009. Gülenist officials actively sought to undermine the process, including leaking a 2012 meeting between Turkish intelligence and the Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK).⁹³⁹ The break between the two camps became unmistakable in 2013. That year, Gülen publicly criticized the government's heavy-handed crackdown on the Gezi Park protests, and Gülenist prosecutors launched a sweeping anti-corruption probe targeting Erdoğan's inner circle.⁹⁴⁰ Voice recordings implicating Erdoğan and his family in corruption were also leaked to the press via widespread wiretapping operations orchestrated by Gülenist sympathizers within the police and bureaucracy.

Following the 2013 rupture, Erdoğan accused the Gülen movement of betrayal and increasingly suggested that it had aligned itself with elements of the secular military-bureaucratic establishment—the very forces both had once opposed. “Do not forget, the dirty fight of those who

⁹³⁶ M. Hakan Yavuz, “A Framework for Understanding the Intra-Islamist Conflict Between the AK Party and the Gülen Movement,” *Politics, Religion & Ideology* 19, no. 1 (January 2, 2018): 24, <https://doi.org/10.1080/21567689.2018.1453247>.

⁹³⁷ Joe Lauria, “Reclusive Turkish Imam Comes Out Against Flotilla,” *Wall Street Journal*, June 4, 2010, sec. World News, <https://www.wsj.com/articles/SB10001424052748704025304575284721280274694>.

⁹³⁸ Yavuz, “A Framework for Understanding the Intra-Islamist Conflict Between the AK Party and the Gülen Movement,” 24–25.

⁹³⁹ Keyman, “The AK Party: Dominant Party, New Turkey and Polarization,” 20.

⁹⁴⁰ “Islamic Scholar Gülen Criticizes Turkish Gov't Response to Gezi Protests,” *Hurriyet Daily News*, March 20, 2014, <https://www.hurriyetdailynews.com/islamic-scholar-gulen-criticizes-turkish-govt-response-to-gezi-protests-63849>; Yavuz, “A Framework for Understanding the Intra-Islamist Conflict Between the AK Party and the Gülen Movement,” 25.

betrayed their homeland under the guise of Hizmet is the fight for revitalizing the old Turkey,” he declared.⁹⁴¹ In May 2016, the AKP government officially designated the Gülen movement a terrorist organization.⁹⁴² During this period, Erdoğan and his inner circle became gripped by a deep sense of fear and suspicion. As Yavuz (2018) notes, “Erdoğan’s fear of the Gülenists became obsessive, yet it also has arisen from a strong basis in reality—the Gülenists sought to kill him and his family while he was vacationing.” At the same time, the Gülenists, recognizing Erdoğan’s determination to crush the movement, feared mass arrests, torture, and purges.⁹⁴³

The AKP-Gülenist war reached a boiling point when, on July 15, 2016, a faction of the TAF attempted a coup d'état. Erdoğan blamed Gülen’s “parallel state” for the coup attempt, although this allegation remains unproven. Evidence of direct orders from Gülen himself remains elusive, and revealed WhatsApp messages from the coup plotters suggested that a combination of Gülenist, Kemalist, and other anti-Erdoğan military officers orchestrated the coup.⁹⁴⁴ After the coup, Erdoğan detained, dismissed, and arrested thousands of military officers and state employees. The scale of the purges is hard to overstate. One Turkish military analyst estimated that the coup caused a 38 percent reduction in the number of generals and an 8 percent reduction in officers in the TAF.⁹⁴⁵ About half of the generals who had been arrested were promoted to their rank in 2013 or later, suggesting that the Gülenists had used the purges from the Ergenekon trials to promote more followers to high-ranking positions in the military.⁹⁴⁶ The purges also extended to the diplomatic corps of the MFA.

⁹⁴¹ “Turkish President Erdoğan: I Was Fooled, Betrayed by Gülen - Türkiye News,” *Hürriyet Daily News*, December 27, 2014, <https://www.hurriyetdailynews.com/turkish-president-erdogan-i-was-fooled-betrayed-by-gulen-76156>.

⁹⁴² Eissenstat, “Uneasy Rests the Crown,” 3–4.

⁹⁴³ Yavuz, “A Framework for Understanding the Intra-Islamist Conflict Between the AK Party and the Gülen Movement,” 26.

⁹⁴⁴ Jacinto, “Turkey’s Post-Coup Purge and Erdoğan’s Private Army.”

⁹⁴⁵ Metin Gurcan, “How Post-Coup Purges Depleted Turkey’s Military,” *Al-Monitor*, accessed December 21, 2021, <https://www.al-monitor.com/originals/2016/09/turkey-military-needs-two-year-fill-ranks-emptied-by-purge.html>.

⁹⁴⁶ Tol, Mainzer, and Ekmekci, “Unpacking Turkey’s Failed Coup.”

Foreign Minister Mevlut Çavuşoğlu dismissed dozens of honorary consuls based on the accusation that those individuals supported the Gülenist movement. He said, “We cannot allow people working against Turkey, trying to destroy Turkey, seeking to smear Turkey’s image, and spreading disinformation and slander about Turkey to be honorary consuls. It’s that simple.”⁹⁴⁷ Çavuşoğlu revealed in response to a parliamentary inquiry in October 2022 that 662 ministry employees had been removed from public service since July 20, 2016.⁹⁴⁸

After purging much of the secular establishment from the foreign policy bureaucracy, Erdoğan turned his attention to dismantling the Gülenist networks that had taken root in the same institutions. To fill the resulting vacancies, Erdoğan required new and unlikely bedfellows, including a secular ultranationalist left-wing group led by a man who had been imprisoned under the Ergenekon trials, Dogu Perincek.⁹⁴⁹ Erdoğan also brokered a tentative rapprochement with Kemalist elements, exonerating and promoting ten Kemalist colonels who had been imprisoned in the Sledgehammer/Ergenekon trials to positions as brigadiers and rear admirals.⁹⁵⁰ In the wake of these purges, appointments to key bureaucratic and military positions increasingly prioritized personal loyalty over merit, with selections based on ties to religious networks, political affiliations, or proximity to Erdoğan and his family.⁹⁵¹ In short, the disintegration of the intra-Islamist alliance had the politicizing effect of expelling senior figures within the government and replacing them with a

⁹⁴⁷ Fehim Tastekin, “War on Gulenists Undermines Turkish Diplomacy,” Al-Monitor, accessed November 3, 2021, <https://www.al-monitor.com/originals/2015/01/turkey-gulenist-schools-diplomacy.html>.

⁹⁴⁸ Turkish Minute, “Turkey’s Foreign Ministry Appoints Erdoğan’s Advisors, Bureaucrats as Ambassadors,” *Turkish Minute* (blog), December 4, 2024, <https://turkishminute.com/2024/12/04/turkey-foreign-ministry-appoint-erdogan-advisors-bureaucrats-as-ambassadors/>.

⁹⁴⁹ Akyol, “The AKP’s Strange Bedfellows”; Mahmud, “How an Ultra-Secularist Gained Clout in Turkey’s Islamist Government.”

⁹⁵⁰ Tol and Taspinar, “Erdoğan’s Turn to the Kemalists.”

⁹⁵¹ Sinem Adar and Gunter Seufert, “Turkey’s Presidential System after Two and a Half Years,” SWP Research Paper (Berlin, Germany: German Institute for International and Security Affairs, April 2021), 17, <https://www.swp-berlin.org/publikation/turkeys-presidential-system-after-two-and-a-half-years>.

more pliant generation of loyalists.⁹⁵² As Erdoğan tightened his grip over state institutions and the party, he even forced Davutoğlu to resign as prime minister in 2016—a role he had been serving in while Erdoğan ruled as president and de facto head of state—over suspicions of disloyalty and foreign policy disagreements. His replacement was widely seen as a devoted Erdoğan loyalist.⁹⁵³

The purging of the foreign policy bureaucracy coincided with Turkey’s transition from a parliamentary to a presidential system, ratified by constitutional referendum in 2017. This reform concentrated executive power in the presidency by abolishing the office of the prime minister and subsuming the authority of the Council of Ministers. Most notably, it granted the president unilateral authority to appoint ministers and senior civil servants without parliamentary approval. The revised constitution also expanded the scope of presidential decrees, allowing the president to legislate by decree even in areas already covered by law during a state of emergency.⁹⁵⁴ Erdoğan has made extensive use of this mechanism, including to place the Office of the General Staff under the Defense Ministry and to restructure the Supreme Military Council and the MGK.⁹⁵⁵ Even pro-AKP politicians have voiced concern that the Presidency, along with the Interior and Justice Ministries, now dominate government operations while insulating themselves from external influence.⁹⁵⁶

This centralization has significantly reduced the influence of institutions such as the MFA on policymaking and fostered a broader climate of fear, mistrust, and dysfunction within the bureaucracy. A 2019 report by Nenet and Strand found that MFA officials described poor communication and a breakdown in internal coordination, often due to mutual mistrust and doubts about colleagues’ competence. Bureaucrats also expressed reluctance to propose new initiatives in

⁹⁵² Akkoyunlu, “The Five Phases of Turkey’s Foreign Policy under the AKP,” 255.

⁹⁵³ Akkoyunlu, 256.

⁹⁵⁴ Adar and Seufert, “Turkey’s Presidential System after Two and a Half Years,” 9.

⁹⁵⁵ “Turkish General Staff Put under Defense Ministry - Turkey News,” *Hürriyet Daily News*, accessed December 21, 2021, <https://www.hurriyettailynews.com/turkish-general-staff-put-under-defense-ministry-134576>.

⁹⁵⁶ Adar and Seufert, “Turkey’s Presidential System after Two and a Half Years,” 18.

the absence of clear political directives under the ambiguous new system.⁹⁵⁷ Akkoyunlu (2021) summarizes the current system: “Turkish foreign policy has moved away from being a highly professionalized bureaucratic process with limited personal or popular input under tutelary control to a highly de-institutionalized arrangement under the personalized control of a micromanaging strongman.”⁹⁵⁸

Discussion

According to my theory of leader strategy selection, I would expect Erdogan to adopt insulation as his organizational strategy from 2002 to 2007 and politicization from 2007 onwards. My theory holds only partially in the first period but explains the 2007-2018 period well. As **Table 12** summarizes, the organizational tools Erdogan employed during the 2002–2007 period reflect a hybrid strategy blending elements of insulation, politicization, and integration. To insulate himself from bureaucratic resistance, Erdogan centralized foreign policymaking within the PMO and appointed trusted allies such as Ali Babacan to key positions on EU accession. At the same time, he managed to reduce the TAF’s formal powers in politics and policy by restructuring and reducing the duties of the MGK and civilianizing the Supreme Military Council. Concurrently, Erdogan also engaged in integrationist practices by empowering career diplomats within the MFA and the Secretariat General for EU Affairs to advance the EU accession process. This mix of strategies illustrates how Erdogan adapted to the dual pressures of military oversight and technocratic resistance by selectively drawing on different organizational tools to consolidate control while pursuing international legitimacy in the form of Europeanization during this period.

⁹⁵⁷ Siri Neset et al., “Turkish Foreign Policy: Structures and Decision-Making Processes,” *CMI Report R* 2019:3 (2019), <https://www.cmi.no/publications/6854-turkish-foreign-policy-structures-and-decision-making-processes>.

⁹⁵⁸ Akkoyunlu, “The Five Phases of Turkey’s Foreign Policy under the AKP,” 261.

Table 12. Erdogan's Organizational Tools (2002-2007)

Organizational Tool	Timeframe	Representative Strategy
Centralizing foreign policymaking to PMO	2003-2007	Insulation
Limited appointment of loyalists (e.g. Babacan)	2005-2007	Insulation
Legally reduced the TAF's formal role in politics and foreign policy	2003-2007	Politicization
Empowered career diplomats in EU accession	2003-2007	Integration

Table 12 captures the intensification of Erdogan's politicization strategy between 2007 and 2018, as he moved decisively to restructure Turkey's foreign policy bureaucracy and eliminate alternative centers of power. The most visible expressions of this strategy were large-scale dismissals and forced resignations, targeting first the secularist military-bureaucratic elite and, later, former Gülenist allies. These purges were accompanied by the appointment of loyalists, many without prior diplomatic experience, into key posts across the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and intelligence services. Erdogan also created and empowered parallel institutions such as the Ministry of EU Affairs and TIKA to bypass the traditional foreign policy establishment, allowing greater executive control over external engagements. Legal and institutional changes further altered bureaucratic career paths and diluted the influence of career diplomats. Throughout this period, the PMO remained central to policymaking, but its relative importance likely declined as the broader politicization of the bureaucracy rendered it increasingly compliant with Erdogan's foreign policy vision and as Erdogan himself was forced to serve as president to comply with term limit rules from 2014 onwards. However, the 2017 transition to a presidential system marked another turning point, ushering in a

new phase of personalized centralization in which foreign policymaking became even more tightly concentrated in Erdoğan's hands.

Table 13. Erdoğan's Organizational Tools (2007-2018)

Organizational Tool	Timeframe	Target	Representative Strategy
Large-scale resignations and dismissals	2010-2012, 2016-2017	Secularists, Gülenists	Politicization
Extensive appointment of loyalists	2003-2007	Secularists, Gülenists	Politicization
Creation and empowerment of parallel institutions (e.g. TIKA)	2011-	Secularists	Politicization
Legal changes to bureaucratic career trajectories (e.g. MFA expansion)	2009-2011	Secularists	Politicization
Centralization of foreign policymaking to presidency	2017-	Secularists, Gülenists	Politicization

Before the 2010s, Erdoğan relied on Gülenist cadres to help dismantle secularist dominance in the military and judiciary, but after the shared threat was neutralized, tensions between the AKP and the Gülen movement escalated. Following the 2013 corruption probes and the 2016 coup attempt—both attributed to Gülenist actors—Erdoğan induced a second wave of politicization (primarily via purges) to eliminate their influence. This highlights how the locus of distrust can shift after an extended period of successful politicization. The second wave of politicization that Erdoğan pursued after 2016 offers a valuable case for understanding how leaders adapt once their original target of distrust has been eliminated—often by identifying and turning against a new real or

perceived threat. It also demonstrates that sources of distrust need not be limited to pre-tenure experiences; emerging threats during a leader's time in office can also drive significant organizational change. This dynamic builds on the theory by illustrating how leaders may engage in successive phases of politicization as new threats arise from within former allies.

The tools Erdoğan employed during this period offer a valuable opportunity to refine and expand the scope of my theory, particularly when it comes to how political strength and the threat of military intervention shape leaders' choices. In IR, research on authoritarian coup-proofing has shown how powerful autocrats often take deliberate steps to weaken their militaries to prevent being overthrown.⁹⁵⁹ Scholars have suggested that Erdoğan embraced these classic coup-proofing tactics most clearly after 2016, once his grip over state institutions and the AKP had solidified.⁹⁶⁰ By contrast, in the earlier years of his tenure—when his political power was more constrained and the military retained significant institutional influence—Erdoğan acted more cautiously. He relied on non-military bureaucrats to advance his foreign policy goals and gradually eroded the military's political role, initially through mechanisms characteristic of “stealth authoritarianism” before directly confronting the military during the 2007 presidential crisis.⁹⁶¹ This progression underscores that a leader's organizational strategy is contingent on institutional structures, political dynamics, and the historical legacies of bureaucratic influence. It suggests that specific types of threats, such as a military's history of political intervention, can significantly shape a leader's approach to managing the bureaucracy, leading to patterns of behavior that fall outside the expectations of my original theoretical framework.

⁹⁵⁹ Talmadge, *The Dictator's Army*.

⁹⁶⁰ Ayşegül Kars Kaynar, “Post-2016 Military Restructuring in Turkey from the Perspective of Coup-Proofing,” *Turkish Studies* 23, no. 3 (May 27, 2022): 383–406, <https://doi.org/10.1080/14683849.2021.1977631>.

⁹⁶¹ Ozan O. Varol, “Stealth Authoritarianism,” *Iowa Law Review* 100, no. 4 (2015 2014): 1673–1742.

Still, there are important alternative explanations to consider. One possibility is that Erdoğan's organizational choices were simply part of a broader pattern of executive aggrandizement or personalist rule. From this perspective, his centralization of authority, purging of rivals, and expansion of presidential powers were not responses to specific threats, but part of a generalized strategy to eliminate all potential veto players. While it is true that Erdoğan's rise reflects elements of executive aggrandizement, this explanation risks overlooking the targeted and sequential nature of his interventions. His reorganization of the foreign policy apparatus wasn't indiscriminate; it unfolded in response to distinct threats at different times. He first moved against the secular military elite, then confronted resistance in the diplomatic corps, and eventually turned against Gülenist networks that had once been his allies. Notably, in the early 2000s, Erdoğan still empowered career diplomats and supported EU accession, despite discomfort with the Western-oriented bureaucracy. This shows that he could tolerate ideological differences when he viewed those actors as tactically useful or not yet threatening. This pattern points to selective trust and calculated adaptation, rather than unchecked consolidation of power.

Another alternative is that Erdoğan's inexperience in foreign policy, rather than his distrust of the foreign policy bureaucracy, determined his organizational strategy. While Erdoğan's inexperience in foreign policy likely heightened his dependence on advisers and shaped his early reliance on the existing bureaucracy, it alone cannot explain the shift in his organizational strategies we observe over time. Inexperienced leaders often rely heavily on bureaucratic expertise without seeking to politicize or marginalize it (e.g. see Chapter 5). What distinguishes Erdoğan's case is that his inexperience intersected with a preexisting ideological disjuncture and status as an outsider of the secular military-bureaucratic establishment. This mix of factors produced a deeper mistrust of the foreign policy elite that shaped his organizational choices. Moreover, Erdoğan's long arc of

institutional transformation, ranging from empowering the EUSG to sidelining the MFA, expanding parallel institutions like TIKA, and purging secular and later Gülenist actors, suggests a pattern of strategic organizational control motivated by mistrust, not simply a lack of expertise. His eventual turn against previously empowered actors like Davutoğlu further demonstrates that loyalty and alignment, not just competence, guided his choices about bureaucratic inclusion.

Chapter 7. Conclusion

Summary of Findings

In this dissertation, I have explored how political leaders resolve the tension inherent to their relations with their foreign policy bureaucracy. That is, foreign policy bureaucracies can both undermine leaders (e.g. slow-rolling policy initiatives, pushing for their own parochial priorities, and weaponizing information via leaks) and help them (e.g. advising them on policy, supplying them with information and intelligence, and managing the day-to-day tasks of inter-state relations). Drawing on insights from international relations, American politics, civil-military relations, and formal theory, I argue that leaders strategically structure the policymaking process to assert greater control over how their foreign policy goals are implemented.

In Chapter 2, to explain the variation in how leaders organize foreign policymaking, I focused on two key factors: a leader's level of distrust toward the foreign policy bureaucracy and their degree of domestic political strength. Leaders do not operate in a vacuum; they must assess both the reliability of bureaucratic actors and their own political capacity to shape institutional behavior. High levels of distrust lead leaders to undervalue bureaucratic input and heighten perceptions of risk associated with inclusion. At the same time, political strength determines the extent of resources and authority a leader can marshal to subordinate or bypass the bureaucracy.

I also developed a novel typology of the organizational strategies leaders use to get their way on foreign policy despite anticipated bureaucratic resistance. In each strategy, leaders change foreign policymaking institutions, rules, and norms to generate varying levels of bureaucratic inclusion and loyalty to their parochial interests. Some leaders may opt to *integrate* the bureaucracy into policymaking by including all bureaucratic elites in decision-making and preserving the permanent bureaucracy's expertise. Through *politization* leaders may overuse their appointment powers, fire

bureaucrats en masse, and institutionalize new rules for recruitment and promotion to bring in trusted loyalists, encourage devotion among those serving, and root out those perceived as disloyal. In contrast, leaders may *insulate* themselves from the bureaucracy. They conduct decision-making in secret, tightly control the flow of information, and limit their accessibility to bureaucratic elites. Leaders may also circumvent by selectively bypassing their bureaucracies only on politically explosive policy issues.

Through comparative case studies of Indira Gandhi, Manmohan Singh, American presidents Nixon, Carter, and Bush, and Turkish leader Recep Tayyip Erdogan, the empirical portion of this dissertation (Chapters 3-6) draws on archival research and elite interviews to test the explanatory power of my theory of leader strategy selection. In Chapter 3, I show that Indira Gandhi's (1966-1975) deep-rooted mistrust toward India's Ministry of External Affairs prompted her to exclude traditional bureaucratic elites from policymaking processes systematically. Gandhi centralized foreign policy authority within her secretariat, privileging loyalty over institutional expertise. As her political strength grew after 1970, Gandhi aggressively politicized the bureaucracy through appointments based on ideological commitment rather than professional merit, fundamentally reshaping India's foreign policy institutions toward personalized and ideologically driven decision-making.

In Chapter 4, I demonstrate that Prime Minister Manmohan Singh (2004-2014) had substantial trust in India's foreign policy bureaucracy and consequently emphasized competence and inclusion in policymaking. However, his limited domestic political strength constrained his organizational choices. While broadly inclusive on initiatives such as the U.S.-India nuclear agreement, Singh strategically circumvented bureaucratic channels during sensitive diplomatic negotiations with Pakistan to avoid leaks and internal opposition. Singh's case illustrates how trust-driven leaders manage bureaucratic relationships pragmatically under political weakness.

In Chapter 5's analysis of the United States in the late Cold War period, I illustrate that Nixon, Carter, and Bush exhibited diverse approaches shaped by varying levels of bureaucratic trust and political strength. Nixon, highly distrustful and politically constrained, insulated decision-making by centralizing foreign policy within a tightly controlled White House circle, marginalizing established bureaucratic institutions. Carter, more trusting yet politically vulnerable, aimed for bureaucratic inclusion but resorted to selective circumvention amid bureaucratic fragmentation. In contrast, George H.W. Bush's high trust and robust political position enabled a fully inclusive and integrated policymaking process, exemplifying coherent and effective management of bureaucratic resources.

In Chapter 6, I argue that Recep Tayyip Erdoğan's evolving relationship with Turkey's foreign policy establishment reflected a dynamic interplay of mistrust and shifting political strength. Initially constrained by powerful secular military elites, Erdoğan adopted a cautious insulation strategy while centralizing policy authority in his office. As Erdoğan consolidated political power post-2007, his mistrust prompted aggressive politicization, sidelining traditional diplomatic bureaucracies, installing loyalists, and creating parallel institutions to further his personalized vision for Turkish foreign policy. Erdoğan's trajectory highlights mistrust's transformative power when combined with political consolidation.

This finding suggests that while my theoretical framework applies to a wide range of political systems, cases with legacies of military tutelage may introduce additional constraints on leader strategy. In such settings, the military's historical role as guardian of the state, particularly over foreign and security policy, may deter even electorally dominant leaders from pursuing aggressive bureaucratic transformation early in their tenure. Yet, as the Turkish case shows, these leaders may also harbor the deepest forms of distrust. Erdoğan's initial accommodation of the foreign policy

establishment, followed by systematic politicization as he consolidated power, points to a potential sequencing dynamic in which early deference gives way to later transformation. Future research could extend this line of inquiry by systematically examining cases where militaries have historically held formal and informal authority over foreign policy, such as Pakistan, Thailand, Egypt, and Indonesia, to assess whether legacies of tutelary governance produce distinct patterns in leader-bureaucracy relations and the timing of institutional change.

While my theoretical framework offers broad explanatory power in accounting for how leaders strategically structure the policymaking process to achieve their foreign policy objectives, it also raises important questions about the broader implications of these choices. In particular, the findings suggest three areas for further exploration: foreign policy effectiveness, institutional design, and international political alignments. I will address each of these sets of implications in the following sections.

Foreign Policy Effectiveness

While politicizing or bypassing the bureaucracy may grant leaders greater control in the short term, these strategies may undermine the quality, coherence, and long-term effectiveness of foreign policy. As discussed in Chapter 1, past research has already shown that degrading information flows (e.g. Jost 2024), encouraging loyalty over merit in promotions (e.g. Talmadge 2014), and pressuring bureaucratic agencies to respond to their interests (e.g. Rovner 2011) can cause leaders to miscalculate, decrease their militaries' battlefield effectiveness, and invite intelligence failures. Building on this foundation, my research contributes three additional dimensions through which foreign policymaking can be compromised, grounded in the theoretical framework and empirical findings of this dissertation.

First, research in American politics shows that when leaders politicize bureaucracies, not only does competence suffer, but so too does bureaucratic motivation and initiative (e.g. Lewis 2010, Gailmard and Patty 2012). My research suggests that excluding bureaucracy through circumvention or insulation can damage bureaucracies in ways similar to those that have been theorized about bureaucratic politicization. That is, sidelined bureaucrats may disengage from policy processes, reduce effort, or resist implementation in subtle ways, particularly when they perceive decisions as uninformed or illegitimate. For example, during the Nixon and Carter administrations, bureaucratic exclusion contributed to morale problems in the State Department, despite the absence of politicization. Moreover, exclusionary strategies appear likely to provoke an atmosphere of hostility resulting in infighting, which itself is time-consuming: differing outlooks on the Middle East held by the White House and State Department during the Nixon era that the NSC's Middle East expert spent almost “as much time mediating between Rogers and me as between the Arabs and the Israelis.”⁹⁶² Leaders who ignore the bureaucracy in policy formulation but leave it to implement policies that have already been decided upon risk being subtly subverted from below, since bureaucrats who oppose a leader’s agenda may intentionally slow-roll decisions. As Brzezinski observed, “I was often amazed at how skillful the State Department was in delaying the execution of decisions which it had not in the first place favored.”⁹⁶³ Consensus-building during the policy formulation process would encourage buy-in at an earlier stage. In sum, exclusion, like politicization, can degrade bureaucratic performance, undermining both the effectiveness and responsiveness of foreign policymaking institutions.

⁹⁶² Kissinger, *White House Years*, 241.

⁹⁶³ Brzezinski, *Power and Principle*, 73.

Second, and relatedly, bureaucratic exclusion can undermine policy effectiveness in a number of ways. First, it can disrupt the flow of information across the government. Secretive meetings between leaders and their emissaries and foreign leaders and diplomats can “leave critical people in the dark,” as H.W. Bush pointed out in Chapter 5.⁹⁶⁴ However, it can also invite infighting and leaks that damage an administration’s public image. As detailed in Chapter 5, Jimmy Carter’s presidency featured some of the most intense bureaucratic conflict in modern U.S. history, particularly between the NSC and the State Department. This internal discord contributed to a widespread perception of inconsistency. Both Secretary of State Cyrus Vance and National Security Adviser Zbigniew Brzezinski acknowledged that the public saw the administration as “inconsistent and uncertain” and “in disarray.”⁹⁶⁵ Brzezinski attributed this perception to the State Department, writing to Carter that the administration’s “so-called zig-zags...have been exaggerated by an absence of a strong public voice by the Secretary and *by leaks and a lack of discipline in the State Department ranks.*”⁹⁶⁶ Leaks served as a safety valve for bureaucrats frustrated by their exclusion from key decisions, but they ultimately undermined public credibility. Perhaps more worryingly, when infighting because of exclusion becomes public—often through leaks—foreign states may exploit these internal divisions. As Henry Kissinger observed of the Nixon administration, “the conduct of both the White House and the State Department made the Soviets aware of our own internal debate and they did their best to exploit it.”⁹⁶⁷

If excluding the bureaucracy leads to morale issues, internal conflicts, and harmful leaks that foreign actors can take advantage of, then inclusion might seem like a safer and more stabilizing

⁹⁶⁴ Bush and Scowcroft, *A World Transformed*, 36.

⁹⁶⁵ Vance, *Hard Choices*, 102. Memorandum From the President's Assistant for National Security Affairs (Brzezinski) to President Carter, January 26, 1979, *FRUS 1977–1980, Volume XXVIII*, doc 18.

⁹⁶⁶ *FRUS 1977–1980, Volume XXVIII*, doc 24.

⁹⁶⁷ Kissinger, *White House Years*, 75.

option for leaders. However, inclusion comes with its own challenges. The biggest challenge is the need to build agreement among groups with different preferences and institutional interests. Manmohan Singh's effort to secure the Indo-U.S. civil nuclear deal shows this issue. From the initial joint statement in July 2005 to the signing of the Section 123 Agreement in August 2007, the deal faced ongoing bureaucratic resistance and lengthy interagency negotiations. This 25-month delay brought the agreement dangerously close to the end of President George W. Bush's second term, making its passage through the U.S. political system much less certain. Singh's situation shows that while inclusion may lower internal conflict and improve legitimacy, it can also slow down policy implementation and threaten urgent diplomatic goals.

Third, more controlling strategies can produce high-variance, inconsistently effective, and incoherent foreign policies. The Turkish case illustrates this dynamic clearly. Early in his tenure, Erdoğan emphasized improving relations with Europe and prioritized Turkey's accession to the European Union. However, by the mid-2000s, he began to reorient Turkish foreign policy toward establishing Turkey as a regional power with deeper ties to the Middle East, Africa, Latin America, and Asia. But as Turkey sought to diversify partnerships strategically and have “zero problems with neighbors,” Erdoğan’s ideological orientation to support Islamist movements and countries also simultaneously motivated certain foreign policy moves. This led to sharp vacillations in Turkish foreign policy. In Syria, Turkey initially cultivated close ties with Bashar al-Assad, then pivoted to supporting regime change and armed opposition groups after the Arab Spring, eventually intervening militarily in northern Syria.⁹⁶⁸ In Egypt, Erdogan supported the Muslim Brotherhood and Mohamed Morsi in 2012–2013, then became sharply opposed to Sisi’s military regime, leading

⁹⁶⁸ Çağaptay, *The New Sultan*, 163–64; Galip Dalay, “Turkey Has Emerged as a Winner in Syria but Must Now Use Its Influence to Help Build Peace,” Chatham House, July 12, 2022, <https://www.chathamhouse.org/2024/12/turkey-has-emerged-winner-syria-must-now-use-its-influence-help-build-peace>.

to years of estranged relations, followed by attempts at rapprochement in the 2020s.⁹⁶⁹ Erdogan's approach to the United States has exhibited similar inconsistency: while publicly condemning U.S. actions and aligning with adversaries like Russia, he has pursued selective cooperation on issues like NATO, counterterrorism, and regional security when it suits his strategic interests.⁹⁷⁰ Turkey's relations with Russia, too, have been likened to a "roller coaster" ride.⁹⁷¹ The inconsistencies were compounded by the increasing politicization of the bureaucracy and centralization of power in the hands of Erdogan. Akkoyunlu (2021) links the two, writing: "the concentration of institutional power and silencing of independent voices within the party and the foreign affairs bureaucracy meant that checks-and-balance and advisory mechanisms no longer functioned efficiently. Davutoğlu, in particular, appeared insistent on pursuing his dream even after his vision of a neo-Ottoman Middle East had clearly failed."⁹⁷² Taken together, these patterns underscore how leaders with a controlling approach to foreign policymaking, characterized by the exclusion of dissenting voices and highly personalized decision-making, may produce not only erratic strategic shifts but also a foreign policy apparatus increasingly unmoored from institutional coherence or long-term strategic planning.

⁹⁶⁹ Çağaptay, *Erdogan's Empire*, 107–8; Umut Uras, "Turkey and Egypt Appoint Ambassadors to Restore Diplomatic Ties," Al Jazeera, July 4, 2023, <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2023/7/4/turkey-and-egypt-appoint-ambassadors-to-restore-diplomatic-ties>.

⁹⁷⁰ Kayan Fehmi, "Turkey: Nato's Most Peculiar Optimist," American University, August 28, 2024, <https://www.american.edu/sis/centers/transatlantic-policy/articles/20240804-turkey-natos-most-peculiar-optimist.cfm>; Sinan Ulgen, "Redefining the U.S.-Turkey Relationship," Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, July 26, 2021, <https://carnegieendowment.org/research/2021/07/redefining-the-us-turkey-relationship?lang=en>.

⁹⁷¹ Devrim Şahin and Ahmet Sözen, "Russia and Turkey: A Roller Coaster Relationship between Securitization and Cooperation," *Uluslararası İlişkiler Dergisi* 20, no. 79 (October 17, 2023): 87–104, <https://doi.org/10.33458/uidergisi.1319286>.

⁹⁷² Akkoyunlu, "The Five Phases of Turkey's Foreign Policy under the AKP," 254–55.

Institutional Design & Legacies

The study sheds light on the dynamic nature of institutional design, showing that foreign policy institutions are not static but often subject to restructuring based on leaders' perceptions of trust and their political calculus. This opens up new avenues for research not only on how institutions are designed, but also on the legacies they leave behind for future leaders.

While the bulk of the existing literature focuses on formal institutions that influence policymaking, insights from my research suggest that informal, ad-hoc institutions may be just as influential. Many of the leaders examined in this dissertation have favored informal mechanisms over formal procedures, such as those found within the U.S. National Security Council. Informalism itself is not necessarily a sign of exclusion: George H. W. Bush relied heavily on a close-knit team of trusted advisers—James Baker, Brent Scowcroft, and others—who operated with a high degree of informal coordination and flexibility across agencies. While they worked within formal structures, their ability to act quickly and cohesively often depended on ad-hoc task forces, personal trust, and improvisational decision-making rather than rigid institutional hierarchies. Indeed, informal meetings can help resolve differences in a collegial manner, as seen in Carter's Friday foreign policy breakfasts. However, ad-hocism has its drawbacks. It relies on the leader to be proactive in keeping all necessary actors in the loop. The inter-ministerial committee of secretaries that Gandhi assembled to manage the East Pakistan crisis is one example of an ad-hoc body that was effective precisely because other officials “were called in by the core group when their expertise was required.” Finally, as this dissertation has shown, ad-hocism can also become a tool of exclusion when employed by leaders who distrust existing institutions, as demonstrated by Nixon’s marginalization of the State Department or Erdogan’s creation of parallel institutions to bypass Turkey’s secular foreign policy bureaucracy. These dynamics underscore the need for future research

to take seriously the informal dimensions of foreign policy decision-making, particularly in comparative contexts where formal institutions may be weak, distrusted, or deliberately circumvented.

This dissertation also sheds light on how leaders leave behind enduring legacies through their organizational strategies. Given that creating new institutions, recruiting new expertise, and rewriting rules are costly political endeavors, it can be challenging for future leaders to amend the changes left by their predecessors, especially when those changes result from a strong, distrustful leader's politicization strategy. Politicization reshapes recruitment patterns, redistributes institutional power, and embeds ideological commitments designed to outlast the leader's tenure. These bureaucratic legacies can constrain successor governments, reduce the pool of competent or neutral officials available to implement policy, and entrench inefficiencies or ideological biases within the policymaking process. This dynamic parallels Zegart's (2000) argument that the CIA, DoD, and NSC bore the institutional birthmarks of the political bargains that created them. Similarly, the bureaucracies examined in this dissertation carry the imprint of leaders who reorganized them to consolidate control, neutralize opposition, or circumvent institutional resistance. Even today, Gandhi's design choices surrounding the Research & Analysis Wing, an intelligence agency created early in her tenure, continue to influence Indian policymaking. As a result, leaders inheriting politicized bureaucracies may find themselves forced to operate within those constraints or expend significant political capital to undo them.

International Partnerships & Alignments

One insight from my dissertation research is that leaders who distrust the foreign policy bureaucracy for reasons related to their past experiences, peer networks, and identity traits may also aim to reorient their country's traditional foreign policy tenets. That is, this mistrust may drive them

to pursue alternative strategic visions, including efforts to diversify or redirect international partnerships toward new allies. These moves are not just geopolitical shifts but also acts of institutional defiance—ways for leaders to circumvent or challenge the preferences of an entrenched bureaucratic elite perceived as aligned with the old order. For example, Erdogan's growing mistrust of the Western-oriented foreign policy establishment paralleled his push to deepen ties with non-Western actors, including Russia, the Gulf states, and emerging powers in Africa and Asia. Similarly, his identity as a Muslim politician within Turkey's secularist state institutions coincided with his calls for an “Islamic alliance” against Israel and support for Hamas in the Israel-Palestine conflict.⁹⁷³ Indira Gandhi likewise shifted India in a distinctly pro-Soviet direction during the Cold War in ways that aligned with her distrust of the bureaucracy. This case suggests that bureaucratic distrust may be both a cause and a consequence of efforts to realign a state's foreign policy orientation.

In other cases, even trusting leaders may seek to reorient foreign policy. Manmohan Singh's careful shepherding of the Indo-U.S. civil nuclear agreement marked a new period in U.S.-India convergence. The nuclear issue had hobbled U.S.-India relations since India's peaceful nuclear explosion in 1974. Bush “sensed the removal of the nuclear dispute would help overcome the deep distrust of America in India and open the door for a new strategic partnership.”⁹⁷⁴ Indeed, nearly two decades after the United States and India signed the July 2005 accord, the real impact of the deal has been felt in other areas of the bilateral relationship like diplomatic engagement, defense

⁹⁷³ “Turkey's Erdogan Calls for Islamic Alliance against Israel | Reuters,” accessed June 18, 2025, <https://www.reuters.com/world/middle-east/turkeys-erdogan-calls-islamic-alliance-against-israel-2024-09-07/>; “Understanding Turkey's Response to the Israel-Gaza Crisis,” *Brookings* (blog), accessed June 18, 2025, <https://www.brookings.edu/articles/understanding-turkeys-response-to-the-israel-gaza-crisis/>.

⁹⁷⁴ Mohan, *Impossible Allies: Nuclear India, United States and the Global Order*, 5.

cooperation, and technology collaboration rather than nuclear cooperation itself.⁹⁷⁵⁹⁷⁶ There remain those in New Delhi who are skeptical of the U.S. dependability and harbor nostalgia for Russia's role as a "reliable and long-term partner" for India.⁹⁷⁷ But the India-U.S. relationship of old has been forever changed. Much of this progress can be credited to Manmohan Singh, who won hardcore skeptics over to support the deal and ushered in this new era of U.S.-India relations.

As strategic relations around the world are being redefined in the era of intensifying great power competition, how and when countries realign has profound implications for global peace and security. Many leaders pledge to transform their countries' foreign relations, but it is difficult to discern when rhetoric will have an impact on the international system. This is particularly common in a rapidly changing geopolitical landscape in which many leaders in Europe, Asia, and North America have rhetorically committed to distancing themselves from the postwar liberal order that has grown increasingly unpopular with voters worldwide, even in places that were once its strongest proponents.⁹⁷⁸ One key factor shaping whether leaders can deliver on foreign policy shifts is their ability to erode or bypass bureaucratic resistance. Leaders who adopt particular organizational strategies may be better positioned to reorient their countries' international partnerships. In both the Indira Gandhi and Erdoğan cases, foreign policy transformation was accompanied by the overt

⁹⁷⁵ Ashley J. Tellis, "Completing the U.S.-India Civil Nuclear Agreement: Fulfilling the Promises of a Summer Long Past," Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, accessed December 25, 2023, <https://carnegieendowment.org/2023/11/27/completing-u.s.-india-civil-nuclear-agreement-fulfilling-promises-of-summer-long-past-pub-91043>.

⁹⁷⁶ Of course, the governments were each motivated by their own strategic considerations: the Bush administration and all U.S. presidents since have perceived India as a potential partner against the growing influence of China in Asia. For its part, India has been committed to improving its own defense capabilities through defense cooperation with the United States while resisting any closer alignment or tangible military commitment. Ashley J. Tellis, "America's Bad Bet on India," *Foreign Affairs*, May 1, 2023, <https://www.foreignaffairs.com/india/americas-bad-bet-india-modi>.

⁹⁷⁷ Ashley Tellis, "'What Is in Our Interest': India and the Ukraine War," Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, April 25, 2022, <https://carnegieendowment.org/research/2022/04/what-is-in-our-interest-india-and-the-ukraine-war?lang=en>.

⁹⁷⁸ Rebecca Adler-Nissen and Ayşe Zarakol, "Struggles for Recognition: The Liberal International Order and the Merger of Its Discontents," *International Organization* 75, no. 2 (ed 2021): 611–34, <https://doi.org/10.1017/S0020818320000454>.

politicization of the foreign policy apparatus. In contrast, Nixon and Carter pursued a rapprochement with China by excluding the bureaucracy, although Nixon's exclusion was far more sweeping. Manmohan Singh, by comparison, chose to engage even the most skeptical bureaucratic actors to advance the U.S.-India nuclear deal. A promising direction for future research is to test which organizational strategies are most effective in enabling leaders to overcome bureaucratic resistance and implement major foreign policy realignments.

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Appendices

Appendix A.

Example of official communications between ministries⁹⁷⁹

1. FM / Secy-I ✓
2. Secy to FM
3. Ambassador DP Dhar
4. Defence Secretary



(T.N. Kaul)
7.4.1969

⁹⁷⁹ P.N. Haksar Papers, Installment III, Subject File No. 203, Prime Ministers Museum and Library, New Delhi.

Example of "Top Secret" and "Personal" communications between Indira Gandhi's advisers⁹⁸⁰



D.P. Dhar,
Ambassador.

TOP SECRET / PERSONAL

EMBASSY OF INDIA,
MOSCOW.

No. MOS/AMB/377/71

April 4, 1971.

With kind personal regards,

(D.P. Dhar)

Shri T.N. Kaul,
Foreign Secretary,
Ministry of External Affairs,
NEW DELHI.

Copy to:

Shri P.N. Haksar,
Secretary to Prime Minister,
Prime Minister's Secretariat,
NEW DELHI.

⁹⁸⁰ P.N. Haksar Papers, Installment III, Subject File No. 227, Prime Ministers Museum and Library, New Delhi.

Appendix B.

General interview questions on foreign policymaking in India included:

- Tell me about your experiences working on foreign affairs in India. How did you get into this field? How long have you been working on these issues?
- During Manmohan Singh's prime ministership, what was your specific role? How often did this role necessitate that you interact with key players in PMO?
- Can you talk about how the foreign policymaking process under Singh worked? Before Prime Minister Singh came into office, what was the foreign policymaking process like? What changes did you see after he came into office?
- Can you describe Prime Minister Singh's perceptions of the bureaucracy before coming into office? Were they favorable? Were the incoming PM's beliefs widely recognized across the foreign policy bureaucracy?
- Did the prime minister tend to involve bureaucrats from many ministries and other stakeholders in decision-making?
- Dr. Singh is often said to have been a "weak" PM because of his dependency on his Party. Do you think that this aspect affected the foreign policy moves made under his leadership? What about foreign policymaking, i.e. the appointments he made to key positions like ministers, secretaries, or PMO positions?

Specific questions about historical events were also asked per the background of the individual.

Examples include:

- During the negotiations of the deal, there were several points of contention: US insistence on a moratorium on nuclear testing, the issue of perpetual safeguards in exchange for US guarantee

of a lifetime supply of fuel supplies for each Indian civilian reactor, the number of civilian reactors that India would have to place under safeguards, which reactors to place under safeguards, and the passing of the Hyde Act. Which of these issues were the most internally contested? At any point did internal gridlock seem like it was going to prevent the deal?

- Why did the PM choose Lambah as a special envoy as opposed to a serving official to lead the backchannel negotiations?
- There are several accounts of the July 2004 meeting at Blair House that describe the DAE (i.e. Kakodkar) as the one standing in the way of the joint statement that had been negotiated prior to Dr. Singh's arrival in the US. Ultimately, Dr. Singh said that the joint agreement would not go ahead without Kakodkar's approval. Why do you think he did that? Did he agree with Kakodkar's objections or did he simply realize he needed the DAE on board?
- What were the reasons for the secrecy surrounding the backchannel negotiations?