



Southern Political Science Association

Plans and Routines, Bureaucratic Bargaining, and the Cuban Missile Crisis

Author(s): Timothy J. McKeown

Source: *The Journal of Politics*, Vol. 63, No. 4 (Nov., 2001), pp. 1163-1190

Published by: [Cambridge University Press](#) on behalf of the [Southern Political Science Association](#)

Stable URL: <http://www.jstor.org/stable/2691811>

Accessed: 13/07/2011 14:43

Your use of the JSTOR archive indicates your acceptance of JSTOR's Terms and Conditions of Use, available at <http://www.jstor.org/page/info/about/policies/terms.jsp>. JSTOR's Terms and Conditions of Use provides, in part, that unless you have obtained prior permission, you may not download an entire issue of a journal or multiple copies of articles, and you may use content in the JSTOR archive only for your personal, non-commercial use.

Please contact the publisher regarding any further use of this work. Publisher contact information may be obtained at <http://www.jstor.org/action/showPublisher?publisherCode=cup>.

Each copy of any part of a JSTOR transmission must contain the same copyright notice that appears on the screen or printed page of such transmission.

JSTOR is a not-for-profit service that helps scholars, researchers, and students discover, use, and build upon a wide range of content in a trusted digital archive. We use information technology and tools to increase productivity and facilitate new forms of scholarship. For more information about JSTOR, please contact support@jstor.org.



Cambridge University Press and Southern Political Science Association are collaborating with JSTOR to digitize, preserve and extend access to *The Journal of Politics*.

<http://www.jstor.org>

Plans and Routines, Bureaucratic Bargaining, and the Cuban Missile Crisis

Timothy J. McKeown
University of North Carolina

Recent disclosures about the Cuban missile crisis suggest that organizational routines and plans did not significantly constrain U.S. government choices. Rather than constituting fixed barriers to innovation, routines and plans can be relatively plastic and subject to strategic alterations or misrepresentations. Although this can be partly understood in terms of organizational processes, plans and routines are both a response to and the context for strategic interaction by organizational participants. I present evidence of this and suggest why decision makers may not plan even when planning is possible and why plans may not be implemented even when they already exist.

If plans or routines govern much of what organizations do, then what governs their creation, adoption, and implementation? Without an account of their source, organization theories that are based on plans or routines can explain behavior only in the sense that they can cite the rules that govern observed action. While even this modest strategy is sometimes an advance over theories that emphasize calculation to the neglect of rule-governed behavior, a more satisfactory account requires empirical and theoretical treatment of the birth, persistence, and death of plans and routines.

This article revisits terrain first explored by Graham Allison (1969, 1971) in an effort to improve our understanding of the role of routines and plans in the conduct of the United States and Soviet governments in the 1962 Cuban missile crisis. This topic is attractive for several reasons. First, this crisis is the closest the world has ever come to thermonuclear war. Had U.S. troops invaded Cuba, they would have faced Soviet defenders armed with tactical missiles equipped with nuclear warheads. Any Soviet use of nuclear weapons against U.S. forces would almost certainly have led to general war. Second, the case is relatively well documented: in addition to the famous ExComm tapes (May and Zelikow 1997), declassification of the written record has been extensive. Third,

Acknowledgments: This research was assisted by an award from the Social Science Research Council of an Advanced Fellowship in Foreign Policy Studies with the support of a grant from the Ford Foundation. I am grateful to Peter Feaver, Martha Feldman, Alexander George, James March, and Michael Ting for their comments and suggestions on earlier drafts.

Allison has already established a strong case for the importance of organizational routines in the crisis, as well as a theory of how governmental action is affected by organizational processes (his Model II). His accounts have long defined the terms of debate about the role of organizational routines, not just in the missile crisis, but in U.S. foreign policy making more generally. (A new edition of his 1971 book (Allison and Zelikow 1999) draws upon recently opened archival material to present a more complete and accurate historical account. However, its theoretical framework is little changed from the first edition.) Fourth, Allison's work has generally been viewed as a compelling basis for the argument that bureaucratic factors play a central role in constraining governments' actions because the crisis is justifiably viewed as a least likely case for the importance of organizational routines (Eckstein 1975). If ever there were a situation where the involvement of leaders would override the effects of organizational factors, this would be it. If routines and plans played a significant role in shaping behavior in this case, one can presume that their importance is highly general.

This article makes two general points, one empirical and one theoretical. The empirical one is that a close examination of the evidence suggests that routines and plans did not closely constrain the U.S. response to the discovery of missiles in Cuba. This is so for several reasons. First, the amount of time that decision makers had to deal with the missile threat and to consider implementing countermeasures is much longer than commonly believed. Thus, a putative absence of plans and routines to deal with the threat in October 1962 raises the question of why such routines and plans were not developed as much as eighteen months earlier, when the first serious consideration of the possibility of Soviet offensive missiles in Cuba occurred within the executive branch of the U.S. government. Second, when decision makers found that they lacked plans to deal with this event as they desired, they obtained new plans or the modification of existing ones. This was done sufficiently quickly that new plans were available when the missiles were confirmed by aerial photography. Third, when leaders found plans and routines too constraining, they were able to override or evade them by personal interventions that either negated or "designed around" the obstacles created by the routines.

The general theoretical point is that while circumventing routines may be costly, leaders may find it both feasible and attractive to do so. This can be understood in terms of two sets of processes. The first, ironically, includes the very Model II-style processes that are often taken as providing a foundation for a view of organizations as rigid and stereotyped in their behavior. A richer conception of organizational processes suggests that a rule-governed organization is nonetheless capable of considerable variety and flexibility in its responses. The second set involves strategic interaction among organizational decision makers. Adherence to plans is cooperative behavior; defection is often costly, but sometimes worthwhile. In such a game, plans and routines matter not just because they might limit organizational responses, but because they

can be assets or liabilities in the bargaining, the bases for perceptions and positions, and the objects of political contention.

I discuss the U.S. government's response to the possibility of Soviet missiles in Cuba in terms of three puzzles. First, although the possibility that the U.S.S.R. would install offensive missiles in Cuba was recognized as early as April 1961 and although it was realized that this would pose an extremely serious challenge to the United States, planning to deal with this contingency was extremely limited, and the operations of October 1962 bore little resemblance to those planned earlier. Second, although the planning had identified a U.S. response to a Soviet military provocation—a blockade of Cuba—that response was deemed by decision makers to be extremely problematic, and they were dissatisfied with it. Nevertheless, planners did not search widely for a response that would avoid the problems associated with a blockade. Third, in the case of the air strike and the blockade, plans were produced, but they did not significantly constrain how these options were implemented. When leaders saw that implementing these plans would not produce the results that they wanted, they caused the plans—and organizational behavior—to be changed. In some cases they did this in a remarkably short period of time.

If leaders can reorient agency behavior by intervening in agency planning, then what explains these interventions? I argue that their attempts to reshape plans were a mix of problem-solving behavior and “politics.” The former arose in exactly the way Allison's Model II implies: when leaders wanted organizations to perform actions that were not part of these organizations' repertoire, they caused organizational planning to be redirected to expand the repertoire. However, their interventions in turn were shaped by their broader political objectives.

Plans and the Cuban Missile Crisis

Allison's organizational process model treats government action as limited by the routines or plans that agencies use. Because action typically involves the implementation of complicated tasks requiring a significant degree of preparation and coordination, the likelihood that a government will be able to improvise a successful response to an international crisis is taken to be low. An example that fits this theory well is the failed 1980 mission to rescue hostages held at the U.S. embassy in Tehran (Smith 1988). Failures to plan adequately and to train, rehearse, and “debug” mission procedures led to the failure of this highly risky mission, several deaths, and a humiliating defeat for the U.S. government. Although some of Allison's original examples of government behavior constrained by routines or plans have not fared well upon further examination (Welch 1992), subsequent revelations have also brought to light other instances of routines shaping behaviors. In addition to their treatment of air strike planning, Allison and Zelikow (1999, 197–242) discuss several other instances on the U.S. and the Soviet sides.

Theoretical critiques of Allison began to appear right after the publication of the first edition of *Essence of Decision* (Art 1973; Ball 1974; Krasner 1972). The most relevant criticism is offered by Bendor and Hammond (1992), who argue that even a complete reliance on routines to govern behavior need not entail organizational responses that are rigid and limited in variety. Their argument stresses how small numbers of simple decision rules can be combined and recombined to generate behavior of considerable complexity and variety. They criticize the notion that bounded rationality at the individual level portends bounded rationality for organizations, and they remind us that routines originally were viewed as aids to innovation because they ostensibly freed leaders from closely managing routine action (Simon 1947, 79–80, 88).

While this criticism is accurate and constructive, it does not speak to an issue that lies at the heart of any attempt to explain organizational behavior in terms of routines or plans. If routines or plans are easy to create and to change, then explaining organizational behavior in terms of them will simply displace the analytical puzzle, not solve it. Why assume that it is difficult to create and change routines or plans if one has not tracked their evolution over a period long enough to assess claims of rigidity?

Even if routines or plans are costly to create and change and they govern behavior effectively, a Model II argument is only plausible to the extent that it addresses the short run (Welch 1992, 124). In the long run routines can be developed or modified so that organizational capabilities evolve. If organizations can forecast events, then they can prepare new routines for anticipated situations. (Indeed, this is a classic rationale for planning). The failure of organizations to do this when they possess timely warning of future contingencies is not explained merely by noting that change is costly. At least some of the time it should be worth paying those costs, particularly when the anticipated contingency is highly threatening.

When Allison first wrote, it seemed unproblematic to treat the missile crisis as very much a short-run phenomenon. Charles Hermann (1969, 36) offered what became a widely accepted judgment, that in comparison with other international crises, the Cuban crisis was marked by unusually strong surprise, strong threat, and intense time pressure. If so, then it is understandable why U.S. decision makers would be constrained by their alleged inability to fashion novel responses in the short time supposedly available.

Unfortunately, Hermann's assessment, though highly plausible based on the information available then, is wrong. Recognition of the necessity for preparing a response to Soviet missiles in Cuba appeared on agency agendas well before October 1962. In fact, the very existence of the White House tapes is due to John Kennedy's anticipation that a crisis involving Cuba was likely to occur in the late summer of 1962. As recounted by his secretary, Evelyn Lincoln, "During the time of the Bay of Pigs, there were certain people who said before that they were for the operation and after said they were against it. He

knew there was a crisis coming up with Cuba. So for history, he put in the tape recorder in order to take down the meetings” (Doyle 1999, 102).

The Latest Evidence

Anticipation, But No Planning

There is the remote possibility of an attempt to convert Cuba into a Russian base for strategic attack on the United States. If this happens, we would have to consider military intervention (National Security Council 1961).

—Interagency review, May 4, 1961

What’s lacking here is a real well thought out course of action, alternative courses of action (May and Zelikow 1997, 157).

—Robert McNamara in the ExComm, October 18, 1962

An organization that anticipates having to face a complicated, dangerous problem and that is uncertain that it will cope with it well would normally be thought to have a strong motivation to engage in planning, rehearsal, and training. This point is relevant because the U.S. government *did* show some awareness of the possibility of the Soviets placing missiles or other offensive weapons in Cuba well before October 1962.

Recently declassified documents show that finding Soviet ballistic missiles in Cuba was not as surprising as it was portrayed in such early accounts as Robert Kennedy’s *Thirteen Days* (1969) or Theodore Sorensen’s *Kennedy* (1965). Attorney General Robert Kennedy (1969, 23) started his narrative on October 16, when he and President Kennedy learned of the Soviet missiles; Theodore Sorensen (1965, 667) began his account on September 6, when he met with Soviet Ambassador Dobrynin. It is now known that U.S. decision makers began discussing the possibility of Soviet missiles in Cuba and a blockade as a response long before then. As the above 1961 quotation shows, they viewed the contingency as unlikely, but they did not discount it entirely. The declassified record also reveals that the initial assessment of the blockade was to *reject* it as a response to a significant Soviet provocation. Consider, for example, this February 1961 discussion:

Mr. Berle indicated that he had given considerable thought to the establishment of a naval blockade of Cuba as a weapon against the Castro regime. The matter of a naval blockade was then discussed. The Defense representative, Mr. Williams, reported that a blockade of Cuba was physically feasible. Such a blockade, to be effective, would require the stopping, boarding and searching of all vessels destined to Cuba, regardless of flag. The opinion was expressed by Mr. Williams that the Soviet Government would consider such treatment of its vessels as an act of war. He also stated that unless Cuba committed a unilateral aggression against the United States, the blockade of Cuban ports would in itself be considered an act of war and would violate two treaties to which we are a signator, including the Rio Treaty. Other aspects of a blockade were discussed, and Mr. Berle concluded that a blockade of ingress would create more problems for us than it would solve (Department of State 1961).

Here we witness Williams of the Department of Defense arguing that the blockade probably would violate two treaties, and the State Department's Berle concluding that it would "create more problems . . . than it would solve." These views are typical of this period. Thus, the October 1962 blockade now seems remarkable in a way that it previously did not. Rather than being an inspired revision of an old plan in the face of a novel and extremely threatening situation, it now appears to have been an option for meeting a dimly perceived threat that had been considered and reworked in a desultory and unenthusiastic fashion over an extended period.

Well before the Soviet arms build-up began—indeed, well before the Soviets had even established close relations with Castro—President Eisenhower remarked at the time of the 1959 decision to deploy Jupiter and Thor missiles to Italy and Turkey that such a move would be "provocative" toward the U.S.S.R. and equivalent to the Soviets installing missiles in Mexico or Cuba (Nash 1991, 23). Someone quite close to John Kennedy was also thinking along these lines in the spring of 1962: Attorney General Robert Kennedy asked the Special Group (Augmented)¹ on March 22 what the U.S. government's reaction should be if the Soviets established a missile base in Cuba (National Security Council 1962; McCone 1962). The timing of his query coincided with the Turkish and Italian bases for U.S. intermediate range ballistic missiles (IRBMs) becoming fully operational (Nash 1997, 103).

Well before October 1962, officials had also discussed a blockade as a countermeasure to a strengthening Soviet military role in Cuba or a Soviet move against Berlin. The possibility of an Organization of American States blockade of arms shipments to Cuba in response to expanding Cuban military capabilities or a foreign military base there was raised by National Security Advisor Walt Rostow in April 1961, right after the Bay of Pigs invasion (Chang and Kornbluh 1992, 17). In April 1962, a CIA estimate of the effects of a "total blockade" of Cuba was requested by the Department of State (1962a). On May 1, 1962, the chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff received a report on the forces required to blockade Cuba, either as a response to a Soviet move against Berlin, or as a separate issue (Joint Chiefs of Staff 1962). This was part of a multi-agency assessment of a blockade completed in response to Robert Kennedy's March 22 request.²

In an August 10 meeting with Secretary of State Dean Rusk, General Maxwell Taylor, Advisor McGeorge Bundy, and Robert Kennedy, Director of Central Intelligence John McCone argued that the Soviets might install missiles in Cuba. Former intelligence official Dino Brugioni relates that Taylor told him that no one in the group was shocked at the idea and that it had already occurred to him and probably most of the policy makers, saying "It certainly had been discussed in the intelligence community and by military contingency-

¹This was the interagency group that managed covert operations against Castro.

²An accompanying CIA study of the blockade option has been either lost or destroyed.

planning staffs." McCone continued to warn about Soviet missiles, but he did not call for a National Intelligence Estimate or discuss the issue with the United States Intelligence Board "as was his prerogative or, as some would say later, his duty" (Brugioni 1991, 96).

Misgivings, But No Search

A well-known theory of organizational decision making views it as strongly conditioned by the relationship between aspirations and achievements: when achievements are perceived to be falling short of aspirations, then a search for new alternatives is initiated; the search stops when an alternative that is "good enough" to attain aspirations is identified (Allison and Zelikow 1999, 171; Cyert and March 1963). What is remarkable about the blockade is that although decision makers repeatedly assessed it as an extremely problematic measure, this negative assessment did not spur a search for an alternative to the extant policy (e.g., covert action, diplomatic and economic isolation, and preparations for military intervention).

Eleven days after the August 10 meeting, McCone, Rusk, McNamara, McGeorge Bundy, Taylor, and others discussed the appropriate U.S. response to the placement of Soviet MRBMs in Cuba.³ The policy makers considered the merits of imposing a partial or full blockade, but Rusk and Bundy expressed misgivings. Arguing for a "very definite interrelationship between Cuba and other trouble spots, such as Berlin," they "felt that a blockade of Cuba would automatically bring about a blockade of Berlin; that drastic action on a missile site or other military installation of the Soviets in Cuba would bring about similar action by the Soviets with respect to our bases and numerous missile sites, particularly [in] Turkey and southern Italy" (McAuliffe 1992, 21–22). McNamara favored sabotage and guerrilla warfare, while Robert Kennedy queried McCone about the possibility of provoking Cuban action against the U.S. base at Guantanamo, presumably to provide a pretext for U.S. military intervention. Bundy also expressed interest in covert operations but recognized that they would involve "a high degree of attribution" to the U.S. McCone tried to dampen their enthusiasm by mentioning the lack of success of previous covert actions and the likelihood that Cuban internal security would become even more formidable.

McCone met with President Kennedy on August 22; they met again the next day in what has been described as a National Security Council meeting, this time accompanied by Rusk, McNamara, Roswell Gilpatric, Taylor, and Bundy. At both meetings McCone contended that the Soviets might be installing long-range missiles (McAuliffe 1992, 27–29). Although his view was not shared, he

³ McCone, Rusk, and McNamara met on August 17, but little documentation has surfaced. McCone recorded that he stated that circumstantial evidence pointed to Soviet construction of offensive missile sites but that Rusk and McNamara disagreed (Chang and Kornbluh 1992, 353).

induced the President to issue National Security Action Memorandum 181 (hereinafter NSAM 181), ordering a study of options that could be taken against an installation on Cuba capable of launching a nuclear attack against the U. S., as well as the implementation of Option B plus of Operation Mongoose⁴ “with all possible speed” (Chang and Kornbluh 1992, 61–62). The President also requested from McCone an analysis of the danger to the U. S. and the effect on Latin America of such missile installations (Cohn 1992, 221).⁵ None of these analyses is mentioned in the October ExComm deliberations, which suggests either they had not been completed, nobody had read them, or they had been read and promptly forgotten. (Indeed, part of the October 16 ExComm discussion concerned the need to begin precisely the studies that already should have been produced as a result of earlier directives (May and Zelikow 1997, 109)).

The record of those discussions presents a picture of a series of bureaucratic false starts: options for responding to Soviet missiles are discussed from time to time, but the only sustained attention to them and the only tangible organizational result is the preparation of plans for military operations. There is little systematic, high-level assessment of the proper *political* response to a Soviet emplacement of missiles or other offensive weaponry. Apparently there were only two significant instances of political planning before October 1962. One was on September 7 when the White House requested an opinion from the State Department Legal Adviser on international legal problems confronting a blockade (Department of State, 1962b). The second was the stockpiling in West Berlin of food, coal, medicines, and industrial materials in case the Soviets blockaded that city again. However, the stockpiles were so large (a year’s supply of coal, for example) that they hardly could have been created on short notice; most likely they were enlarged after the Kennedy administration’s discovery in the summer of 1961 that West Berlin was not prepared to withstand a prolonged siege (Central Intelligence Agency, 1962; Shapley, 1993, 117–18).

From the standpoint of these revelations, the most remarkable aspect of U.S. planning was that except for the military elements, there was so little of it. It is the lack of planning in the face of directives to do so, rather than its constraining effects, that constitutes the true puzzle concerning the relationship between plans and the U.S. government’s behavior in this crisis. In spite of high-level

⁴Hershberg (1992, 251–52) quotes an Edward Lansdale memo of July 25, 1962 that defines Option B: “Exert all possible diplomatic, economic, psychological, and other pressures to overthrow the Castro-Communist regime without overt employment of US military.” Option A was to cancel operational plans and treat Cuba as a bloc nation; Option C was to commit to overthrowing Castro, including, if necessary, use of U.S. forces, and Option D was to use a provocation and overthrow Castro by U.S. military force. The B plus variant allowed the U.S. to seek to provoke a revolt against Castro that might require U.S. intervention to succeed.

⁵I have been unable to find a copy of either a written request for the latter study or the study itself. The text of NSAM 181 calls for a study of political, military, and psychological impacts of Soviet installation of surface-to-surface missiles, so it appears that this broader language replaced the original request for an analysis of impacts on just Latin America.

officials repeatedly identifying the installation of Soviet offensive missiles in Cuba as a possible threat, and in spite of their repeated requests for studies of how to meet that threat, little had been accomplished by August 1962. After the Soviet military build-up accelerated in late summer, the executive branch had from August to October in which to plan new responses; thus, decision makers were hardly limited to executing plans written before August. Although the decision makers' negative view in August of the blockade could have motivated them to order new plans for other political or military responses, they did not do so. As will become clear from examining the air strike option, there was nothing about the military planning process as such to suggest that novel responses could not have been created within 60 days. The number of alternatives available to leaders is endogenous to the planning process that produces them and that process had enough time to produce more alternatives. However, it clearly did not.

The Air Strike Option: Plans, but No Constraint

The case for Model II rests on organizations being unable to modify routines quickly. If the crisis is viewed as a 13-day event, then that view is at least plausible. However, the recent evidence suggests that a Model II account is unappreciative of just how quickly routines can be altered and how unconstraining they might be, even in the short run. The U.S. air strike planning process is the clearest case of this, and it is especially significant because it is the organizational characteristic that perhaps had the greatest impact on the outcome of the crisis. It is well known that at the outset of the crisis, most of the ExComm, including the President, favored launching an air strike against just the missile sites. What stifled their enthusiasm were the repeated warnings by the military that a "surgical" strike (a single raid against the missile sites) could not be guaranteed to destroy all missiles. Moreover, the military argued that the threat posed by surviving Cuban and Soviet air power to Florida or to U.S. invasion forces would have to be neutralized, thus requiring a larger attack. Had the military responded to early civilian interest in a "surgical" air strike with more alacrity and placed less emphasis on the need for preempting an attack on Florida by widespread air attacks on a long list of Cuban targets, it is much less likely that the crisis would have ended without open hostilities.

In Allison's original account, the military had to base its planning for air strikes and an invasion of Cuba that were not tailored to the special situation created by the existence of the Soviet missile sites. The military were thought to have simply "[taken] the existing contingency plan out of the safe," added missile site targets, and then presented it to the ExComm as "the" air strike option (Allison 1971, 125). The failure to propose an air strike plan that matched civilian preferences for a highly selective use of force was described in terms of organizational rigidity and a "misunderstanding" (Allison, 1971, 125) in which the military allegedly failed to grasp the political importance of limiting the

scale of damage of an air attack. As a result, they were allegedly unable to formulate an air strike plan that the civilians found appealing, in spite of the strong initial civilian inclination to approve an air strike.

Allison and Zelikow's (1999) revised account presents a substantially different picture. The alleged organizational rigidity of the planning for an air strike evaporates upon closer inspection; so does the "misunderstanding."

Prior to the photographic discovery of the missiles, the armed forces, at the direction of the White House, had already prepared three different plans of operations against Cuba. In August 1962, NSAM 181 had ordered the Department of Defense to study military options to "eliminate any installations in Cuba capable of launching nuclear attack on the U.S.," including "the pros and cons of pinpoint attack, general counterforce attack, and outright invasion." Unlike the directives for political planning, the directives to revise military plans were energetically implemented. As described by Allison and Zelikow,

The presidential order spurred an intense reevaluation of the air strike plan, which until then had been abstract and associated only with a general attack on Cuba. The new work on the air strike plan went to the U.S. Air Force's Tactical Air Command, headed by General Walter Sweeney. In August, spurred by both the presidential order and Sweeney's own concerns, Sweeney's staff began developing much more realistic strike plans, focused much more on the particular kinds of targets that were being identified in Cuba (1999, 225–26).

The White House continued to press the armed forces to update their air strike plans. On September 21 the President wrote the Secretary of Defense, asking his department to keep updating plans for Cuban air strikes, "taking into account the additions to their armaments resulting from the continuous influx of Soviet equipment and technicians" (Allison and Zelikow 1999, 226). Although the mid-October U-2 flights with their discovery of missiles and other targets led to many revisions, the movement of aircraft to Florida in preparation for an attack on Cuba had begun at least a week before these flights (Allison and Zelikow 1999, 227).

Allison and Zelikow construe these events as illustrating the importance of organizational processes: "Air strike options considered after the ballistic missiles were photographed on October 14 emerged from the organizational decisions and preparations taken weeks earlier" (Allison and Zelikow, 1999, 227). While that claim is not inaccurate, it neglects an implication that is more critical for a Model II understanding. A leader who understands that agencies operate on plans and routines can counteract and perhaps negate their tendency to respond in stereotyped ways to novelty by ordering the revision of plans, providing the resources needed for revision, and then closely supervising the revision process. That is exactly how the White House shaped air strike planning for Cuba. The President or his National Security Adviser repeatedly communicated with military officials, sometimes in face-to-face meetings, and made quite specific suggestions about how to prepare for these missions (Allison and Zelikow 1999, 226).

From the perspective of Bendor and Hammond (1992) it is not surprising that the results of this process were used to generate new options almost daily. After the missiles were photographed, and in preparation for the October 17 ExComm meeting, the Joint Chiefs approved a menu of five air strike options. Option I was an attack on missile and nuclear storage sites (52 sorties); this corresponded to what the ExComm had in mind when they discussed a “surgical” strike. Option II added the IL-28s and MiG21s as targets (104 sorties). Option III added other aircraft, SAMs, cruise missiles, and missile boats (194 sorties). Option IV added all remaining military targets except tanks (474 sorties). Option V added Cuban or Soviet tanks and was designed as the prelude to invasion (2,002 sorties) (May and Zelikow 1997, 119). This menu was then discussed by the ExComm. However, its content kept shifting as military planners kept adding more sorties to the options. The continual revision of the sortie numbers was noticed by the ExComm participants, and it became a source of irritation to some. On October 19, McNamara complained to the Joint Chiefs that they

[have] just talked to the President in very general terms. But every day the numbers [given] for airplanes we'll have in the air [unclear] is increasing. We should tell the President exactly what it would mean. What sorties do we want? (May and Zelikow 1997, 187).

Maxwell Taylor, a member of the Joint Chiefs, was a former commander of an airborne division. He advocated a large air strike partly because he thought it necessary to suppress local air power and air defenses to clear the way for planned paratroop drops into Cuba (May and Zelikow 1997, 85–86). (This is a clear example of policy preferences being shaped by bureaucratic role and experience). Taylor grew exasperated with the air strike planning and told his colleagues that the continual increase in sortie numbers was undermining the military's case for an air strike. Once, after the sortie numbers had again been raised, he complained to his fellow Chiefs, “What! These figures were reported to the White House. You are defeating yourselves with your own cleverness, gentlemen” (May and Zelikow 1997, 119).

If there was rigidity in the air strike planning, it was not first-order (i.e., an unchanging, inflexible plan). Rather, the rigidity was second-order—an unwillingness or inability to alter the plan-writing process that when conducted in a context of growing target lists and rapidly increasing air assets, produced plans for a use of air power that were the antithesis of “surgical.” That rigidity cannot be understood without understanding the political strategy of the Joint Chiefs.

The Air Strike Options: Planning in the Service of the Joint Chiefs' Agenda

It is difficult to trace empirically the reasons for the weak response to directives for planning in the period between the spring of 1961 and late summer of 1962. Officials do not often write down why they do not take seriously the

directives of their superiors, nor are superiors fond of recording why they do not follow up on earlier directives they have issued. As a result, much of the analysis of the reasons for the weakness of the planning process rests on circumstantial evidence. However, in one domain—the 1962 air strike planning—the analysis can rely on relatively abundant documentation.

Allison correctly understood that the armed services were interested in eliminating the communist Cuban thorn and that their prior planning had been predicated on the assumption that this would be their mission (Allison 1971, 124–25). What he could not see then was that the way that the military presented the air strike option to the ExComm could be understood not as the result of a “misunderstanding” at all, but rather a calculated gamble on their part that the President could be persuaded to use force. If he were to be so persuaded, then they wanted to make the most of the opportunity by receiving prior authorization to implement an air strike plan that would prepare the way for an invasion. Once such a large attack had taken place, the level of casualties and destruction on Cuba would have been sufficiently great that an invasion would then seem a less drastic escalation than if it occurred without a preparatory air campaign.

The Chiefs came close to saying as much in a brief conversation among themselves in the aftermath of the October 19 ExComm meeting, where they had presented their views. After the meeting broke up, they stayed behind to talk briefly, unaware of the White House taping system. The tape caught the following: Shoup [Commandant, US Marines]: Somebody’s got to keep them from doing the . . . thing piecemeal. That’s our problem. . . . You got to go in and take out the . . . thing that’s going to stop you from doing your job (May and Zelikow 1997, 188; expletives deleted).

The next day, when the Chiefs privately discussed Cuba, General Wheeler declared, “I never thought I’d live to see the day when I would want to go to war” (May and Zelikow 1997, 203).

It is in light of these comments that the persistent proposals of the Chiefs for large air strikes can be understood. They did not want a war of limited objectives and limited means against Castro, but rather a military campaign to remove him from power. “Doing their job” meant eliminating Castro. This is highly consistent with the Chiefs’ general orientation to the use of force after the Korean War. The stalemate in Korea left them determined to avoid using U.S. military power in ways that were not likely to achieve a decisive outcome (the so-called “Never Again” doctrine) and wary of civilians’ ideas about limited war (Craig and George 1995, 258–74; Gacek 1994). It is not surprising that they would be unencouraging about the success of a “surgical” air strike and would respond to civilian concerns about not destroying all the ballistic missiles by trying to persuade them to adopt a broader strike rather than emphasizing the possibility of repeated re-strikes of the smaller target list. When the President asked the commander-in-chief of the Tactical Air Command if an air strike would destroy all the missiles, the general answered truthfully that it would not (Allison, 1971, 126). Welch (1992, 139) notes that what Kennedy

should have asked was whether an air attack would so disrupt the firing routines for these first-generation liquid fueled missiles that launch-under-attack or in the period immediately after the attack would be impossible. Although the danger of launch-under-attack was "negligible," the Air Force general "answered the question the President had asked, not the one he would have asked had he known more." But if Welch could divine the critical operational issue, the general probably could, too. Had he been trying to persuade Kennedy of the wisdom of attacking just the missiles, he might have been quick to volunteer the information that would have allayed the President's fears. Since he did not do so in a situation where the Chiefs wanted to prevent the civilians from "doing the . . . thing piecemeal," it is tempting to conclude that Sweeney wanted to answer truthfully, but in a way that did not encourage his superior to take a course of action that he viewed as insufficient. Hence, his reply was narrow rather than expansive and did not speak to the larger issues behind the President's question.

Given the Chiefs' interest in using as much force as possible once a decision to use force had been made, it also made sense for them to highlight the dangers of counterattacks from Cuban or Soviet aircraft. On this issue, they could capitalize on their monopoly of military expertise and the implicit threat to share their views with members of Congress and ultimately the public (Lebow 1990, 477). The linkage to domestic politics here is only implicit, but it no doubt was understood by all the participants: if the Chiefs recommend bombing Cuban airfields in addition to bombing the missile sites, and the administration rejects that advice and bombs only the missile sites, and if the Cubans retaliate by air attacks on Florida, then the White House would be in the difficult position of having chosen policies that would lead to the first significant hostile action by a foreign government on U.S. soil since the War of 1812. Its position would be even more difficult if newspapers were to print headlines reading, "JFK Could Have Prevented Air Attacks" and "White House Ignored Military Advice to Neutralize Cuban Air Threat."⁶

Finally, Allison and Zelikow are correct in claiming that air strike planners reached their conclusions about the likelihood of destroying all the missile sites because they relied on a database of experience with gravity bombs and a standard rule of thumb that the marginal costs of using more aircraft to strike a target than were necessary to yield a 90% probability of success could not be justified (Allison and Zelikow 1999, 227–28). However, that does not mean that the estimate of a 90% probability of success was taken as an absolute

⁶Although this is counterfactual speculation, it is consistent with the politics of another key national security decision: the sizing of the ICBM force. Although originally planned for 200 missiles, military and Congressional pressure for a larger program induced Eisenhower and Kennedy to expand it. Even though Kennedy learned that the missile gap was mythical, he asked Congress for 950 missiles because, as Robert McNamara explained, that was the smallest number that they could take to the Congress and "not get murdered" (Ball 1980, 43–45, 246).

constraint. The rule of thumb makes sense when targets are abundant and aircraft are scarce, but in a situation where a small number of targets are extremely critical, military planners can always assign more planes to the mission if they are available. (Anecdotal evidence on strategic nuclear war plans suggests that they possess extremely high levels of redundancy (Kaplan, 1983; Smith, 1997)). The military here chose not to override this rule and did not suggest it could be overridden, and the civilians either did not know enough to consider overriding it or were motivated not to discover any ways of making a limited air strike option appear more likely to succeed. The rule constrained the responses to the missiles only because the parties tacitly agreed not to override it. If there were enough aircraft to fly hundreds of sorties against a much longer target list, then there must have been enough to strike repeatedly at the missile sites, thereby achieving higher probabilities of destroying all the missiles. (Although the catastrophic consequences of even one missile reaching a U.S. target and the possibility of launches from bases that had not yet been discovered could still have made civilian leaders reluctant to approve air strikes, there was little discussion of these latter possibilities, so their salience for decision makers is difficult to assess.)

The problem with the Chiefs' strategy, as Maxwell Taylor seemed to realize, was that if a small air strike became less attractive, it might simply lead the civilians to prefer no air strike at all. That is essentially what happened soon after the discovery of the missiles. When military options were reconsidered on October 26, after it became apparent that the Soviets were not abandoning work on the missiles, the preferred air strike plan in the ExComm was a slight modification of the original "surgical" proposal to strike only the missile sites. (They added only the IL-28s to the target list (May and Zelikow 1997, 472.)) The intervening days had provided time to strengthen the air defense of Florida to the point where an air strike by the Cubans or Soviets was now judged to have very little chance of success. Hence, the need had passed for a strike aimed at targets that were not strategic weapons systems.

The "surgical" air strike option was never abandoned, and if air strikes had been initiated, it is likely that such a plan would have been used. Thus, even the military's monopoly of expertise, control of operational planning, strong aversion to the "surgical" strike, and efforts to achieve the adoption of an alternative plan were not enough to eliminate this option from serious consideration. Rather than establishing a case for the importance of organizational processes, the maneuvering around the air strike planning shows the capacity of the White House to continue to control decision making about the use of force, even in the face of military efforts to induce the abandonment of the civilians' preferred option. This control was achieved by directly ordering revision in plans, by devoting an unusual amount of attention to monitoring the revisions, by knowing enough about the planning process to be capable of exercising meaningful supervision and second-guessing the planners, by inducing the generation of other options so that White House was not solely dependent on military

solutions, and by maintaining a healthy degree of skepticism about the claims that military officers were making. As Levy (1986) suggests, organizational rigidity is partly a function of leaders' lack of effort to monitor and shape planning so that the leadership has options. When they make the effort, the planning process can be responsive to leaders' desire for more alternatives.

Examination of alleged organizational constraints in the blockade tends to support these conclusions. Although the blockade force was planned in May 1962 to consist merely of twelve destroyers and two surveillance aircraft (Joint Chiefs of Staff 1962), the naval force actually deployed was many times that size. The Navy had no difficulty scaling up the operation to accommodate the possibility of wider military action against Cuba. Although a desire for organizational autonomy and the prevention of civilian meddling may well have motivated some of the Navy's resistance to moving the blockade line westward, they were also concerned about their ships being exposed to attacks from Cuban-based aircraft (a view shared by Robert McNamara, his alleged difference of opinion with the Navy about the location of the blockade line notwithstanding (May and Zelikow 1997, 328)). It is not clear whether the conclusion that Cuban air capabilities were less than originally thought because their forces were found to be in a lower state of readiness was merely a post hoc rationalization by the Navy or a factor that contributed to the decision to move the line westward (Young 1990, 79). In any case, the blockade line was moved, and the alleged rigidity of plans was not a significant constraint. Although McNamara and the Navy argued about the Navy's conduct of the blockade (Brugioni 1991, 236; Shapley 1993, 176–78), the outcome shows organizational flexibility, not rigidity.

Another incident that Allison and Zelikow (1999) cite to illustrate the potency of plans is more illustrative of their plasticity, their use as objective-seeming devices to obfuscate organizational self-interest, and the capacity of leaders to negate their constraining effects, provided they take time to learn what lies behind them and to override them personally. In their discussion of how the President's command to U.S. missile bases in Turkey not to return fire if attacked was treated by the U.S. military, Allison and Zelikow (1999, 197–98) note that the Joint Chiefs of Staff objected to the order and none was initially sent. Their objections were twofold: first, to the procedural point that the President's standing order would "compromise their standing instructions" to the missile bases; second, that the war plans for NATO specified that in the event of a nuclear attack on a NATO country, NATO would immediately execute the European Defense Plan, "which is nuclear war" (May and Zelikow 1997, 222–23). The President learned of the failure to carry out the instruction only because of a direct question he posed to a Defense Department official during a briefing on a different point. Once the official truthfully answered that the instruction had not been carried out and explained why the Chiefs had objected, the civilians' response was first to find a quotation from existing plans or orders that would accomplish the substantive purpose the President desired

while not seeming to contradict directly the policy embodied in the plans (“Bundy: ‘. . . simply say, “The President directs your attention again to umptyump section”’ . . . Taylor: ‘I can send a personal message to the commander saying: “Be sure you can fully understand paragraph so-and-so of your orders.”’”) Only when they were not able to find such a passage did they resort to a cable to the NATO commander stating that without specific presidential authorization, the weapons were to be destroyed or rendered inoperable if any attempt were made to fire them. The discussion of this point in the October 22 Ex-Comm meeting concluded with the following exchange among the President, Bundy, and Paul Nitze of the Defense Department (May and Zelikow 1997, 223):

President Kennedy: Well, let’s do it again, Paul.

Nitze: I’ve got your point and we’re going to get that. [Laughter, probably at Kennedy’s insistent refusal to take it on faith that military standing orders would be observed, and Nitze’s discomfort at giving in to him.]

Bundy: Send me the documents, and I will show them to a doubting master. [Laughter]⁷

The more abundant source of examples of organizations mechanically following routines that are ill-suited to the situation is not the U.S. government, but rather the Soviet government (Allison and Zelikow 1999, 206–17). The simplest explanation for this lies in the fact that unlike the U.S. case, the top Soviet leadership seldom second-guessed the organizations charged with implementing this mission or closely monitored its implementation. Khrushchev originated the idea of installing the missiles in Cuba, but once his plan was adopted, he did not devote the attention to organizational details that the Kennedy White House did. Khrushchev and the Politburo did not bother to assign his intelligence agency responsibility for assessing the likely reaction of the United States government to the Soviet missile deployment (Fursenko and Naftali 1997, 75). Since Soviet leaders lacked any equivalent of the U.S.’ National Security Council staff and made high-level foreign policy decisions simply by consulting in person or by telephone among themselves, their ability to monitor and alter the implementation of directives was more limited than their U.S. counterparts.⁸ Khrushchev sometimes brought his personal interest to bear—for example, when he directed that surface-to-air missiles in Cuba be made operational before installing ballistic missiles. However, the failure of top-level officials to monitor implementation—the local commander understood these missiles to be for protection against air attacks and did not attempt to shoot down the U-2 flight that found the ballistic missiles—left the Russians more vulnerable to organizational pathologies than their U.S. counterparts (Allison and Zelikow 1999, 214; Fursenko and Naftali 1997, 192). In the absence of high-level attention, Soviet

⁷ Bracketed text is included in May and Zelikow (1997) as editorial commentary.

⁸ Interview with Prof. Victor Sergeyev, March 15, 2000, MGIMO University, Moscow.

planners often reverted to organizational defaults that sometimes served Soviet interests poorly. The dictatorial regime exhibited intermittent and inconsistent control from the top and frequently succumbed to routine-itis, while the democratic regime performed better.

Theorizing about the Adoption and Change of Routines

Routines and plans are terms used to describe programmed behavior (Miller, Galanter, and Pribram 1960). "Routine" is often reserved for a highly concrete, highly operational activity performed by lower level personnel, while "plan" connotes a more abstract and general program created by higher level personnel to guide the implementation of various routine (and sometimes nonroutine) actions. This article focuses on "plans" in the sense that historical participants understood the term: as written documents proposing and evaluating concrete activities of the executive branch of the U.S. government. While one may have low-level routines without a high-level plan or have a high-level plan that does not rely on routines, most often routines are nested within plans. That is usually so in the plans discussed here.

In contrast to studies of routines that treat them as cognitive constructs (Cohen and Bacdayan 1994) or as rules that are implicit in observed patterns of behavior (Pentland and Rueter 1994), routines here are treated as tangible and social. In this context "birth" and "adoption" are easily separated: "Birth" refers to the drafting of a written document, while "adoption" refers to its formal approval by the relevant decision makers.

It is also easy to separate "adoption" from "implementation." The President as Commander-in-Chief always can refuse to implement any military plan when the contingency for which it was designed and approved has materialized. He likewise is free to reject any plan created by the National Security Council or other agencies, as long as the rejection does not violate statute law or the Constitution. Only when the President or someone delegated by him to make the decision has ordered the plan to be implemented is implementation said to have begun.

The theoretical insight that is suggested by the above evidence is simple: the adoption of a plan or routine is a negotiated agreement involving the interested organizational parties, all of whom have their own parochial interests. Thus, plans or routines are in effect political settlements. The President in this scheme is just another player, though one endowed with some extraordinary advantages—unique formal authority, ability to set the agenda and to mobilize public opinion, and *de facto* leadership of a political party. In the tradition of Neustadt (1990), obedience to presidential directives is problematic rather than assumed. The fact that the President sits at the top of a hierarchy does not guarantee that his orders will be promptly and faithfully executed.

The immediate theoretical antecedents to this position are offered by Nelson and Winter (1982, 107–12) and Allison himself, in the form of his "bureaucrat-

ic politics" model (Model III). In Allison's accounts, "bureaucratic politics" (i.e., bargaining among bureaucratic subunits) coexists with organizational routines but is not connected theoretically to the latter. Allison and Zelikow do not attempt to explain the origins of routines or plans, arguing only that they evolve incrementally, but that under dire circumstances, large changes in behavior may occur (Allison and Zelikow 1999, 144). Although they briefly mention the possibility that organization rules can be viewed as negotiated bargains (1999, 156), they do not develop this idea, and they conceive of routines as problem-solving technologies (akin to computer programs, restaurant menus, or football playbooks). However, the fact that they do not explore the connection between Model II and Model III processes is no reason why the connection cannot be made.

Nelson and Winter argue that a routine can be viewed as a truce between conflicting interests within an organization:

Like a truce among nations, the truce among organization members tends to give rise to a peculiar symbolic culture shared by the parties. A renewal of overt hostilities would be costly and would also involve a sharp rise in uncertainty about the future positions of the parties. Accordingly, the state of truce is ordinarily considered valuable, and a breach of its terms is not to be undertaken lightly. . . . In particular, a contemplated action otherwise sensible both for the organization and for the member taking it may have to be rejected if it is likely to be interpreted as "provocative"—that is, as signaling a lessened commitment to the preservation of the truce and a corresponding willingness to risk overt conflict for the sake of modifying the routine in a manner favored by the member who initiates the change. (Nelson and Winter 1982, 111)

If plans are akin to peace treaties, then a decision to plan is akin to a decision to seek revision of an agreement. Sometimes the revisions can proceed peacefully—as when, for example, a Pareto improvement is proposed—but there is no guarantee that this must be so. Correspondingly, decisions to avoid planning are decisions to avoid conflict. Subunits may be reluctant to plan because they fear that the outcome will be a settlement that will be worse than the status quo. When planning is seen as risky, subunits may prefer to avoid it.

Finally, just as a deterrent threat often inspires aggressors to work around the threat in an effort to achieve their objectives without directly confronting the deterring state (George and Smoke 1974), so too can decision makers work around existing routines or plans when the outcomes that they desire cannot be achieved through them, but only in other ways. Unless task complexity is unusually high or time pressure is more severe than in this case, events during the missile crisis suggest that they often are able to do this.

Recognizing that information processing constraints may not be as powerful as heretofore believed does not imply discarding Model II in toto. Rather, it suggests that the kinds of information processing constraints an organization chooses to surmount and the ways that it chooses to surmount them are partly the product of political calculations. Sometimes it pays to devote the effort to overcoming these constraints, and sometimes it does not.

Revising Theory in Light of the Empirical Findings

The above evidence suggests that routines and plans are not necessarily highly constraining, even in the short run. Instead, they can be and were manipulated to serve the policy objectives of the decision makers who controlled these processes. The failures to plan political responses to the missiles and to search for alternatives to the blockade suggest that the argument of Model II can readily be inverted. Foreign policy making is not necessarily constrained by too much planning. Rather, a lack of political planning places a premium on the improvisational skills of top-level officials when weakly anticipated events suddenly become crises.

One might object that since decision makers saw Soviet ballistic missiles as improbable, the failure to plan is simple to understand: planning was simply not worth the trouble. Although this interpretation is plausible, it faces several difficulties. First, even though decision makers may have assigned the outcome a low probability, they also viewed it as extremely unfavorable to U.S. government interests. Thus, the contingency was important in an expected utility sense because the probability was offset by the large magnitude of the utility loss. Second, it is clear that top-level officials repeatedly asked for analyses and plans for the contingency of Soviet offensive missiles in Cuba. If one can observe government agencies churning out plans in circumstances where it is fairly certain that top level decision makers will ignore them (Feldman 1989), then *ceteris paribus* one would expect that when decision makers ask for plans, this will be all the more reason for them to be produced. Third, military planning did go forward, even though political planning did not. This suggests that the sources of the lack of the latter lie not in general processes, but rather in more context-specific differences between military and political spheres. Finally, if decision makers pay little attention to probabilities (Beach 1983, 1990, 170), then the assumption upon which the argument is based is false: whatever probability assessments decision makers formed (assuming that they were formed), they were unconnected to the progress of planning because they had no bearing on decision makers' allocation of effort to ensuring that the planning was completed.

Explaining the lack of political planning is no easier than explaining any other nonevent. However, from observed behavior one can make some informed guesses. First, it is apparent that the President and other high officials were deeply concerned about the likelihood and consequences of leaks (May and Zelikow 1997, 63–64). If a serious high-level, interagency review of the Jupiter missile deployment or possible responses to Soviet missiles in Cuba had been undertaken, it would have been difficult to prevent knowledge of it from reaching high-level officials in the relevant national security organizations. The possibility that plans would then leak might have been a deterrent to conducting such a review. The way that the White House requested a State

Department legal opinion on the blockade supports this interpretation. The request was transmitted in a Friday afternoon telephone call, with the injunction that the opinion was to be prepared “as soon as possible” (Department of State 1962b). The response was delivered the next Monday. Thus, it was written over the weekend, when offices would have been nearly empty, and the request for an immediate response provided the necessary bureaucratic cover for the legal adviser to transmit his response directly to McGeorge Bundy without clearing it with other offices in the State Department. Here, routines hindered planning rather than facilitating it, so they were circumvented. (Allison and Zelikow (1999, 240) also offer an example of a Soviet “work-around”—using radio broadcasts rather than normal diplomatic channels to communicate with the U.S. This was done to save time). If military planning is not subject to interagency review, and if the security around it is tighter, this could partly explain why only it was conducted.

A second difficulty is that because plans for foreign policy (as opposed to changes in the laws or in budgets) can never be binding on the President, planners are aware that whatever they create may be discarded by the President when the time comes to use it.⁹ For example, while the military was developing plans for invading Cuba in the summer of 1962, the President was telling members of the Cuban exile community that the U.S. would not invade (Allison and Zelikow 1999, 84). (Welch (1992) notes other instances where President Kennedy discarded planned responses when the contingency that the plans were supposed to address finally materialized.) Presumably, this would lead sophisticated officials to devalue planning. In turn, presidents who are aware of how these officials view the situation will tend to hold their plans in low esteem because they will realize that senior officials made little commitment to the planning process. However, senior military officials were strongly motivated to secure new military plans and supervise their prompt production. If the use of force were considered, they wanted to be able to show that they could accomplish national objectives by using it. Although they probably realized that Kennedy was skeptical of their claims, they knew that they would have no chance at all if they did not have a plan that appeared to be capable of achieving the given objective.

A third reason for the lack of planning is the lack of resources. If civilian high-level officials are chronically overloaded, and if their attention is dominated by “fires in the in-basket” (Leacacos 1968), then they will find the time that they might be able to devote to planning being whittled away by the constant demands of day-to-day decision making. As noted by Daft and Becker (1978, 168), organizations have queuing rules for problems; those deemed to be low priority may be repeatedly neglected. I suggest below why Cuba did not move up quickly in the queue. Because this is an information-processing constraint when viewed in the short run, it appears consistent with the general

⁹I am indebted for this insight to Peter Feaver.

thrust of Model II. However, when viewed in the long run, the question of why leaders did not invest in more decision-making capacity must be addressed.

Although the President or cabinet officials could conceivably circumvent their personal limitations on resources for planning political responses by delegating authority for planning to staff, the staff available in 1962 to perform *political* contingency analysis was limited: aside from the NSC staff, the only other plausible site for such an effort would have been Policy Planning in the Department of State. These small, general purpose units were unlikely to be used for this purpose by an administration that had taken office on the presumption that the Eisenhower NSC system had been far too bureaucratic and planned too much. This meant that “slack” search—using spare organizational resources to develop policy innovations (Levinthal and March 1981)—was highly unlikely. The military had far more resources to devote to military contingency planning than the civilians had for political contingency planning; the Joint Chiefs of Staff had a Joint Staff of about 400 (Stevenson 1997, 4), and the Navy’s Atlantic Fleet staff also was involved in operational planning for action against Cuba (Young 1990). Simply in terms of the resource disparity, it is easy to see why military contingency planning was far more highly developed than its political counterpart and why the military responded to the directives for planning in NSAM 181 far more promptly and completely than civilian agencies did.

Delegating planning to staff also creates a new difficulty, even if the staff can perform the task: political contingency planning inevitably involves political considerations, not least of which is domestic politics. In such a situation it would hardly be surprising if officials were reluctant to delegate the preparation of contingent responses to staff. Particularly in a foreign policy bureaucracy where overtly “political” (i.e., domestic partisan politics) considerations are viewed as “out of bounds” for staff (Anderson 1981), the President or people directly responsible to him may well conclude that since any formal policy review process cannot explicitly recognize these domestic political concerns, there is little value in it. Assessing the political consequences of actions against Castro would engage these concerns much more directly than an assessment of narrowly military problems facing some use of military forces.

Where officials are known to be divided, a decision to plan is a decision to place a conflictual item on the agenda. From the time it became aware of the Bay of Pigs operation, the Kennedy White House knew that opinions on what to do about Castro were sharply divided on means, even if there was little disagreement about ends. There is little reason to initiate a review of policy if one believes that there is a good chance that it will produce conclusions that one does not like. For opponents of the established policy, there correspondingly is not much reason to press for a policy review if one believes that it will simply ratify the status quo. As long as one had hope that the problem of what to do about Castro would be “overtaken by events,” postponing a reconsideration of Cuban policy might seem expedient. (This may account for the failure of McCone to initiate the National Intelligence Estimate process. Although it is

possible that he did not assign the contingency enough importance to merit a formal estimate, his willingness to take this issue to the President, when he knew that he was alone in his views, suggests otherwise.) While the military were in a weak position to press for a change in policy, they could at least prepare their case (as embodied in their attack plans) so that if events caused a reconsideration of military options, they would be ready.

Political contingency planning also might not have occurred simply because it would have been very hard to do. One would have to know what resources would be available, as well as the resources and intentions of the other actors. One would have to state one's own objectives clearly enough for them to form a basis for operational decisions, and then assume that they would remain stable until the plan were implemented or abandoned. Particularly when faced with an adversary such as the Soviet Union, about whose internal political workings the United States government remained largely ignorant, formulating conjectures about responses to various U.S. actions amounted to little more than guesswork. Such planning also inevitably involves the analyst in a candid assessment of the weaknesses and limitations of one's own government and policy. It is often politically prudent not to discuss such matters (Wirtz 1998, 122).

Finally, political contingency planning, particularly for the implementation of highly unpalatable alternatives, may be avoided because officials want to avoid any measure that would appear to weaken their commitment to a course of action.¹⁰ Creating an alternative is the reverse of Schelling's (1960) "bridge burning" as a commitment tactic: it makes one's own government and possibly other governments aware that an option is available. If the option is a "fallback" position, it might therefore make the adoption of the "fallback" seem more likely. Since the status quo Cuba policy was much closer to civilian than to military preferences, it would have been reasonable for the civilian agencies to avoid analyses that might reach conclusions that policies that they did not particularly like were feasible or even desirable.

The plasticity of the air strike plans and their opportunistic presentation by the Joint Chiefs suggest a more fundamental limitation in an analysis that focuses only on routines. At least in this case, routines were less a strait-jacket and more a weapon in the hands of decision makers in their struggle to have their preferred courses of action adopted. An expert can be tempted to assert that "we have to do it this way" in order to achieve the adoption of policies desired on parochial grounds. That seems to have been what occurred in regard to the air strike proposals. The strategy did not work then, partly because the President and other civilians in the ExComm were exceptionally wary of the advice of the uniformed military after the Bay of Pigs (Barlow 1981; McMaster 1997). Moreover, the President was also using the planning process strategically by letting the Chiefs continue to plan for an air strike and invasion, by listening to their proposals, and by carefully leaving the door open to the im-

¹⁰I am grateful to Alexander George for this suggestion.

plementation of such measures. McMaster (1997, 29) suggests that doing so was Kennedy's way of making sure that the Chiefs retained enough hope in the eventual adoption of their policies that they were dissuaded from openly breaking with the administration. Thus, from both the President's and the Chiefs' perspective, planning was a means to an end, not an end in itself. Although the air strike case has appeared to be an example of the resistance of bureaucracies to redirection, a more complete understanding reveals not rigidity but rather its opposite: the ease with which planning can be harnessed by high-level decision makers to serve their particular agendas.

Conclusion

A model of organizational behavior in which actions are governed by routines, while routines evolve via mutation and natural selection, offers a simple but powerful alternative to models resting on rational calculation. It accords well with the observations that organizations use routines to perform tasks and that human calculational ability is limited—even when organizations distribute calculational tasks among subunits, there is no guarantee that the resulting performance will mimic that of a hypothetical omnisciently rational calculator.

Such a view of organizations is cast at an extremely high level of abstraction. For example, it can be applied to bacteria just as readily as to governments (Axelrod 1984). Because organizations are intelligent in a way that bacteria are not, it is worthwhile to ask what is lost by using a model that ignores human capacities to anticipate events and to act strategically.

This case provides some answers to that question. First, relations between superiors and subordinates are not mechanical—compliance with directives is not automatic. Superiors and subordinates know this, and it shapes the kinds of directives that superiors send, when and how subordinates choose to comply, and how superiors respond to noncompliance. As a result, the implementation of routines is problematic.

Second, dissatisfaction with current alternatives does not automatically lead to the development of new ones. Developing alternatives is costly and risky and cannot be presumed to be an invariant consequence of dissatisfaction with current options. In a situation of strategic interaction, organizational decision makers may believe that a new menu of alternatives would leave them in a worse position than the status quo.

Third, the recognition within government that plans and routines are the appropriate way to control a government's activity means that discussions about activities often become discussions about plans and routines. Justifying proposed actions in terms of appropriate standards—prior statements of policy and procedures and adherence to the norm of rationalistic problem-solving behavior—is more likely to succeed than justifications couched simply in terms of self-interest (Anderson 1981; Clarke 1999; Feldman and March 1981). Interests are thus to some degree constrained by the discussion of plans as well as cloaked by it.

Fourth, “the decision processes we observe seem to be infused with strategic actions and negotiations at every level and every point” (March 1981; 1999, 31). Although this seems especially true in this case, an examination of bargaining and politicking in organizations is a complement to and not a substitute for the examination of other processes that shape the selection and implementation of organizational rules: learning processes, diffusion processes, sense-making and interpretation, and apolitical problem-solving.

Much U.S. national security planning resembles the process depicted here. It typically involves several organizational subunits operating under uneven or intermittent hierarchical control from presidential appointees or the President himself. Although it sometimes is “fantasy” planning in Clarke’s (1999) sense (see, for example, his discussion of civil defense plans for nuclear war and post-attack recovery), much of it involves contingencies with substantial probabilities of being implemented, in worlds that are well understood. While there may be few parochial stakes in fantasy planning other than legitimating one’s position in the eyes of outsiders, the same cannot be said for planning more generally. If that is so, then empirical and theoretical inquiries into the way that organizations plan and implement plans need to be conducted with an eye to detecting subunits’ strategic behavior and modeling its effects.

This analysis also raises the question of how the pattern of declassification is related to the evolution of scholarly explanations. Early accounts tended to promote an “inspired improvisation” view of U.S. behavior, while the later (but still incomplete)¹¹ declassifications support an interpretation that is less flattering. Because declassification is not random and proceeds using guidelines that are themselves classified, the analyst is playing a game with the declassifying authorities. First, the authorities choose what to release; then the analyst chooses an explanation for events. This is unlike analyzing a random sample or experimentally manipulating stimulus conditions. Since what is known is a product of strategic interaction, analyzing how the declassification game is played ought to be an important methodological concern for scholars who rely on archival research. Trachtenberg’s (1999) pioneering analysis of sequential declassification reviews provides a tantalizing sample of what can be learned when this topic is pursued in a systematic way.

Since the evidence now suggests that the President was considerably less constrained by plans and routines than Allison’s original account claimed, one might conclude that this research has merely restored the pre-Allison understanding of international crisis as a time when top-level decision makers exert unusually close control. Although some routines were redesigned or ignored, that alone does not compel the analyst to revert to a Model account. That understanding is deficient because it is insensitive to the degree to which government actions in crisis are a result of bargaining, the role of plans and routines

¹¹ For example, neither Robert Kennedy’s papers on the crisis nor the President’s daily briefings prepared by the CIA for this period are declassified.

as bargaining resources, and the constraints on the capacity of leaders to impose their will on subordinate organizations. It is also unmindful of the influence of politics as usual—the sentiments of the public and organized interests (McKeown 2000).

When the focus moves from the short to the long run, explaining organizational behavior solely by reference to the constraining effects of plans and routines is inadequate. What then is an appropriate way to treat the impact of plans and routines on the actions of governments?

The most sensible approach is to view plans and routines through the lens of strategic interaction (Allison's Model III). Plans and routines shape high-level bargaining in several ways. The most obvious way is that the bargaining is often over what plan or routine will be adopted. The fact that they are often the objects of political struggle suggests that Allison was correct to call attention to their general importance. Second, as the discussion of Presidential directives to U.S. forces in Turkey suggests, decision makers who wish to direct the behavior of subordinate organizational actors may tend to rely on invoking existing plans rather than personal commands. This makes sense in a world where the justification for a policy matters. When directives can be framed simply as asking for implementation of existing policy, they are probably more difficult to resist. Third, plans or routines determine the default policy and thus the status quo point for bargaining. Fourth, as Allison noted, organizations often have difficulty executing options for which there is no plan or routine and thus can expand or shrink their range of alternatives by expanding or shrinking their planning, training, and rehearsal activities. Fifth, the information upon which policy choices are based is often gathered by routines.

For all these reasons, the relation between Model II, which is devoted to the effects of routines on organizational behavior, and Model III, which is devoted to the effects of high-level bargaining, is intimate. Specifying their linkages more precisely is one of the more important pieces of unfinished theoretical business left from Allison's original contribution. While one may want to preserve the distinction between the two models for some purposes (as a pedagogical strategy, for example), the distinction between the two now seems much more artificial than it did when Alison first offered his theoretical account more than 30 years ago.

Manuscript submitted 16 May 2000

Final manuscript received 4 December 2000

References

- Allison, Graham T. 1969. "Conceptual Models and the Cuban Missile Crisis." *American Political Science Review* 63(3): 689–718.
- Allison, Graham T. 1971. *Essence of Decision: Explaining the Cuban Missile Crisis*. Boston: Little, Brown.

- Allison, Graham T., and Philip Zelikow. 1999. *Essence of Decision: Explaining the Cuban Missile Crisis*. 2nd edition. New York: Longman.
- Anderson, Paul A. 1981. "Justifications and Precedents as Constraints in Foreign Policy Decision-making." *American Journal of Political Science* 25(4): 738–61.
- Art, Robert J. 1973. "Bureaucratic Politics and American Foreign Policy: A Critique." *Policy Sciences* 4(4): 467–90.
- Axelrod, Robert. 1984. *The Evolution of Cooperation*. New York: Basic Books.
- Ball, Desmond J. 1974. "The Blind Men and the Elephant: A Critique of Bureaucratic Politics Theory." *Australian Outlook* 28(1): 71–92.
- Ball, Desmond J. 1980. *Politics and Force Levels: The Strategic Missile Program of the Kennedy Administration*. Berkeley: University of California Press.
- Barlow, Jeffrey G. 1981. "President John F. Kennedy and His Joint Chiefs of Staff." Ph. D. diss. University of South Carolina. Ann Arbor: University Microfilms International.
- Beach, Lee R. 1983. "Muddling Through: A Response to Yates and Goldstein." *Organizational Behavior and Human Performance* 31: 47–53.
- Beach, Lee R. 1990. *Image Theory: Decision Making in Personal and Organizational Contexts*. New York: John Wiley.
- Bendor, Jonathan, and Thomas H. Hammond. 1992. "Rethinking Allison's Models." *American Political Science Review* 86 (2): 301–22.
- Brugioni, Dino A. 1991. *Eyeball to Eyeball: The Inside Story of the Cuban Missile Crisis*. New York: Random House.
- Central Intelligence Agency. 1962. "Memorandum for the Director from Abbot Smith, Acting Chairman, Office of National Estimates, re: Survivability of West Berlin, 23 October." John F. Kennedy Library, Theodore Sorensen papers, Boxes 49-51, Cuba-subject-standing committee, 9/62–10/62.
- Change, Laurence, and Peter Kornbluh, eds. 1992. *Cuban Missile Crisis, 1962: A National Security Archive Documents Reader*. New York: New Press.
- Clarke, Lee. 1999. *Mission Improbable: Using Fantasy Documents to Tame Disaster*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- Cohen, Michael D., and Paul Bacdayan. 1994. "Organizational routines are stored as procedural memory—Evidence from a laboratory study." *Organization Science* 5: 554–68.
- Cohn, Elizabeth. 1992. "President Kennedy's decision to impose a blockade in the Cuban missile crisis: Building consensus in the ExComm after the decision." In *The Cuban Missile Crisis Revisited*, ed. James A. Nathan. New York: St. Martin's.
- Craig, Gordon A., and Alexander L. George. 1995. *Force and Statecraft: Diplomatic Problems of Our Time*, 3rd edition. New York: Oxford University Press.
- Cyert, Richard M., and James G. March. 1963. *A Behavioral Theory of the Firm*. Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall.
- Daft, Richard L., and Selwyn W. Becker. 1978. *The Innovative Organization: Innovation Adoption in School Organizations*. New York: Elsevier.
- Department of State. 1961. "Memorandum for the Record re: Meeting on Cuba, Washington, February 7, Office of Mr. Thomas Mann, Assistant Secretary of State." *Foreign Relations of the United States* (hereafter *FRUS*) Cuba 1961–62, Document 38. Downloaded, Department of State website: www.state.gov/www/about_state/history/frusonline.html.
- Department of State. 1962a. "Memorandum from the Chief of Operations, Operation Mongoose (Lansdale) to the Special Group (Augmented). April 19." *FRUS* 1961–63 X, Cuba, Document 328.
- Department of State. 1962b. "Memorandum for Mr. McGeorge Bundy from Abram Chayes re: international law problems of blockade, September 10." John F. Kennedy Library, Theodore Sorensen papers, Box 49-51, Cuba-standing committee 9/62–10/62.
- Doyle, William. 1999. *Inside the Oval Office: The White House Tapes from FDR to Clinton*. New York: Kodansha America.

- Eckstein, Harry. 1975. Case Study and Theory in Political Science. In *Handbook of Political Science*, Vol. VII, eds. F. I. Greenstein and N. W. Polsby. Reading, MA: Addison-Wesley.
- Feldman, Martha. 1989. *Order without Design: Information Production and Policy Making*. Stanford: Stanford University Press.
- Feldman, Martha, and James G. March. 1981. "Information in Organizations as Signal and Symbol." *Administrative Science Quarterly* 26: 171-86.
- Fursenko, Aleksandr, and Timothy Naftali. 1997. *One Hell of a Gamble: Khrushchev, Castro, and Kennedy, 1958-1964*. New York: W. W. Norton.
- Gacek, Christopher M. 1994. *The Logic of Force: The Dilemma of Limited War in American Foreign Policy*. New York: Columbia University Press.
- George, Alexander L., and Richard Smoke. 1974. *Deterrence in American Foreign Policy: Theory and Practice*. New York: Columbia University Press.
- Hermann, Charles F. 1969. *Crises in Foreign Policy: A Simulation Analysis*. New York: Bobbs-Merrill.
- Hershberg, James G. 1992. "Before the 'Missiles of October': Did Kennedy Plan a Military Strike against Cuba?" In *The Cuban Missile Crisis Revisited*, ed. James A. Nathan. New York: St. Martin's.
- Joint Chiefs of Staff. 1962. "Memorandum from the Director of the Joint Staff (Riley) to the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff (Lemnitzer), May 1." *FRUS*, Document 332.
- Kaplan, Fred. 1983. *The Wizards of Armageddon*. New York: Simon and Schuster.
- Kennedy, Robert F. 1969. *Thirteen Days: A Memoir of the Cuban Missile Crisis*. New York: W. W. Norton.
- Krasner, Stephen D. 1972. "Are Bureaucracies Important? (Or Allison Wonderland)." *Foreign Policy* 7 (Summer): 159-79.
- Leacacos, John P. 1968. *Fires in the In-basket: The ABC's of the State Department*. Cleveland: World Publishing Co.
- Lebow, Richard Ned. 1990. "Domestic Politics and the Cuban Missile Crisis: The Traditional and Revisionist Interpretations Reevaluated." *Diplomatic History* 14(4): 471-92.
- Levinthal, Daniel, and James G. March. 1981. "A Model of Adaptive Organizational Search." *Journal of Economic Behavior & Organization* 2(4): 307-33.
- Levy, Jacki S. 1986. "Organizational Routines and the Causes of War." *International Studies Quarterly* 30 (2): 193-222.
- March, James G. 1981. "Decisions in Organizations and Theories of Choice." In *Perspectives on Organizational Design and Behavior*, eds. Andrew Van de Ven and W. Joyce. New York: Wiley.
- March, James G. 1999. *The Pursuit of Organizational Intelligence*. Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishers.
- May, Ernest R., and Philip D. Zelikow, eds. 1997. *The Kennedy Tapes: Inside the White House During the Cuban Missile Crisis*. Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press of Harvard University.
- McAuliffe, Mary S., ed. 1992. *CIA Documents on the Cuban Missile Crisis*. Washington, DC: Central Intelligence Agency.
- McCone, John. 1962. "Notes on Special Group Meeting, Washington, March 22." *FRUS*. Document 316.
- McKeown, Timothy J. 2000. The Cuban Missile Crisis and Politics as Usual. *Journal of Politics* 62(1): 70-87.
- McMaster, H. R. 1997. *Dereliction of Duty: Lyndon Johnson, Robert McNamara, the Joint Chiefs of Staff and the Lies That Led to Vietnam*. New York: HarperCollins.
- Miller, George A., Eugene Galanter, and Karl H. Pribram. 1960. *Plans and the Structure of Behavior*. New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston.
- Nash, Philip. 1991. "Nuisance of Decision: Jupiter Missiles and the Cuban Missile Crisis." *Journal of Strategic Studies* 14(1): 1-26.
- Nash, Philip. 1997. *The Other Missiles of October: Eisenhower, Kennedy, and the Jupiters 1957-1963*. Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press.
- National Security Council. 1961. "Paper Prepared for the National Security Council by an Inter-agency Task Force on Cuba, May 4." *FRUS* Document 202.

- National Security Council. 1962. "Memorandum for the Special Group (Augmented), May 31." *FRUS* Document 341.
- Nelson, Richard R., and Sidney G. Winter. 1982. *An Evolutionary Theory of Economic Change*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press.
- Neustadt, Richard E. 1990. *Presidential Power and the Modern Presidents: The Politics of Leadership from Roosevelt to Reagan*. New York: Free Press.
- Pentland, Brian T., and Henry H. Rueter. 1994. "Organizational Routines as a Grammar of Action." *Administrative Science Quarterly* 39: 484–510.
- Schelling, Thomas C. 1960. *The Strategy of Conflict*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press.
- Shapley, Deborah. 1993. *Promise and Power: The Life and Times of Robert McNamara*. Boston: Little, Brown.
- Simon, Herbert A. 1947. *Administrative Behavior*. New York: Macmillan.
- Smith, R. Jeffrey. December 7, 1997. "The Dissenter: Gen. George Lee Butler Rose to Be Chief Commander of America's Nuclear Forces." *Washington Post Magazine*.
- Smith, Steve. 1988. "Policy Preferences and Bureaucratic Position: The Case of the American Hostage Rescue Mission." In *Bureaucratic Politics and National Security: Theory and Practice*, eds. David C. Kozak and James M. Keagle. Boulder: Lynne Rienner.
- Sorensen, Theodore C. 1965. *Kennedy*. New York: Harper & Row.
- Stevenson, Charles A. 1997. "The Joint Staff and the Policy Process." Presented to the annual meeting of the American Political Science Association, Washington, DC.
- Trachtenberg, Marc. 1999. Declassification Analysis: The Method, and Some Examples. Available at <http://www.history.upenn.edu/trachtenberg/documents/doclist.html>.
- Welch, David. 1992. "The Organizational Process and Bureaucratic Politics Paradigms: Retrospect and Prospect." *International Security* 17(2): 112–45.
- Wirtz, James. J. 1998. "Organizing for Crisis Intelligence: Lessons from the Cuban Missile Crisis." In Blight, James G. and Welch, David A., eds. 1998. *Intelligence and The Cuban Missile Crisis*. Portland, OR: Frank Kass.
- Young, John M. 1990. "When the Russians Blink: The U.S. Maritime Response to the Cuban Missile Crisis." Occasional Paper, History and Museums Division, Headquarters, U.S. Marine Corps, Washington, DC.

Timothy J. McKeown is associate professor of political science, University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill, NC 27599-3265.