

Bureaucracies and International Crises: What You Know Depends on Where You Sit*

Robert Schub[†]

Abstract

What determines what leaders know during international crises? While scholarship establishes that information can cause conflict, we know less about how leaders acquire it. I present an informational theory of bureaucracies and crises. Time-constrained leaders delegate information collection to advisers who lead bureaucracies. A division of labor between bureaucracies breeds comparative specialization among advisers. Some emphasize information on adversaries' political attributes which are harder to assess; others stress military attributes which are easier to assess. Bureaucratic role thus affects the content and uncertainty that advisers provide. I use automated and qualitative coding to measure adviser input in 5,400 texts from US Cold War crises. As hypothesized, advisers' positions affect the information and uncertainty they convey, not the policies they promote as canonical theories suggest. By expanding the analytical lens to include advisers and bureaucracies, this study shows how leaders acquire information, which in turn affects choices producing war and peace.

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[†]Assistant Professor, University of Nebraska–Lincoln, robert.schub@unl.edu.

1 Introduction

As he watched Basra residents react to the 2003 arrival of coalition forces, President Bush reportedly wondered aloud, “why aren’t they cheering?”¹ His surprise typifies the shortcomings that plagued prewar assessments of postwar Iraq (Bensahel 2007; Lake 2010; Rapport 2012; Saunders 2017; Lindsey 2020). Administration officials anticipated that stability would quickly follow Saddam’s ouster, allowing the US stay in Iraq to be brief. Instead, sectarian divides, the public’s disposition toward the US presence, and Iraqi governance capacity each proved worse than expected. Notably, these blindspots all concern Iraq’s *political* characteristics—its public opinion, domestic unity, and institutional strength—rather than its *military* characteristics—such as force quantities or qualities. To explain these apparent oversights, much recent international relations scholarship might grant analytical primacy to the leader’s personal traits, such as Bush’s dispositions or background experiences. This study expands the locus of analysis by bringing advisers and bureaucracies to the fore, suggesting that to understand leaders’ beliefs it helps to know who is in the room with them. Critically, Bush’s assessment emerged from an advisory process in which officials from bureaucracies best equipped and most disposed to evaluate the political conditions of adversary states enjoyed limited influence with the president. By contrast, officials from bureaucracies focused on military attributes assumed a privileged position (Bensahel et al. 2008; SIGIR 2009). Imbalanced input from these bureaucracies with specialized expertise helps illuminate why Bush marched to war with an inaccurate conception of the looming conflict.

As the Iraq War suggests, advisers and their bureaucracies play a critical and often overlooked role as information conduits for time-constrained leaders.² The information leaders possess affects their strategic choices which can lead to war (Fearon 1995). This study addresses the domestic mechanics and international consequences of how leaders acquire information. First, why do advisers develop differentiated expertise pertinent to international crises? Second, how do differences in who can competently provide information on the adversary’s political and military attributes affect the uncertainty that advisers convey? Third, and more speculatively, how do these adviser dynamics affect leader beliefs and, in turn, the likelihood of conflict?

¹Quoted in Draper (2020, p. 355).

²Some notable exceptions include George (1980), Janis (1982), Hermann (2001), and Saunders (2017, 2018).

To address these questions I develop and test an informational theory of bureaucracies and international conflict which suggests that the bureaucratic role an adviser occupies affects the input she provides to the leader, but in a vastly different way than previously theorized. Bureaucratic role affects the type of information advisers provide and uncertainty they express, not the policies that they promote. Leaders demand information; senior advisers can supply it. Akin to many principal-agent setups, agents (advisers) develop informational advantages over the principal (leader).³ In addition to being better informed than the leader, advisers are *differentially* informed compared to one another. Functional specialization between bureaucracies causes affiliated advisers to gather distinct types of information. Military advisers in a ministry of defense develop expertise on an adversary's military attributes while foreign policy advisers in a ministry of foreign affairs develop expertise on an adversary's political attributes. Advisers, consequently, emphasize different informational content when participating in deliberative processes. Bureaucratic position also affects the uncertainty advisers express as well as the content they emphasize. Some domains are relatively information rich while others tend to be information poor. I posit that information is more readily available on an adversary's military traits, making them subject to less uncertainty. Analysts can often observe force quantities, postures, and locations. Political characteristics—such as an adversary's resolve or domestic political landscape—are harder to assess and prone to greater uncertainty.

This study challenges the canonical account of how bureaucracies affect crisis processes and outcomes, as developed in Graham Allison's work which has over 18,000 citations.⁴ Allison's Bureaucratic Politics Model contends that bureaucracies' parochial interests, for instance on budgetary matters, cause advisers' preferences to diverge. Famously echoing Miles' Law, "where you stand depends on where you sit" (Allison 1969, p. 711). Foreign policy advisers in a ministry of foreign affairs promote diplomatic solutions while military advisers (in or out of uniform) advocate militarily aggressive policies. While joining a chorus of critics on this account's theoretical underpinnings,⁵ this study provides new evidence on its inappropriateness for describing advisory

³See Bendor, Glazer and Hammond (2001) and Gailmard and Patty (2012) for reviews of these vast literatures.

⁴Citation total based on Allison (1969, 1971), Allison and Halperin (1972), and Allison and Zelikow (1999) according to Google Scholar as of November 5, 2020.

⁵See Krasner (1972); Art (1973); Snyder and Diesing (1977); Welch (1992); Bendor and Hammond (1992).

processes during crises. Whereas Allison stresses preference divergences between bureaucracies, I show the salient difference is instead over information.

I assess the theoretical argument in the context of advisory processes during US Cold War crises. I collect and analyze a corpus of documents with over 5,400 speech segments from security deliberations at the highest levels of decision making, largely drawn from the Foreign Relations of the United States (FRUS) series. Texts span from Secretary of State Dulles advising Eisenhower on the Taiwan Straits to Secretary of Defense Schlesinger advising Ford during Saigon's fall. With qualitative approaches as well as automated text analysis tools including supervised learning and sentiment analysis, I generate measures capturing each bureaucracy's input for each crisis. Coupling speakers' original and private words with capabilities to analyze texts offers a new means to measure advisers' emphases and beliefs at a previously impossible scale. I measure a bureaucracy's advisory content (political vs. military), uncertainty, and relative hawkishness. The text-as-data approach builds on recent studies in international relations but differs in applying the method to internal advisory processes rather than external diplomatic messages (McManus 2017; Katagiri and Min 2019).

The analysis produces three findings. First, foreign policy advisers, operationalized as State Department officials, are substantially more likely to discuss an adversary's political attributes compared to colleagues from other bureaucracies. Second, these advisers express more uncertainty than those with different affiliations. Third, contrary to the conventional parochial view, an adviser's bureaucratic role does not predict the policy positions she advocates. Diplomats are as likely as counterparts from Defense to endorse the more militarily aggressive policy response. The findings strongly suggest bureaucratic role matters, but it matters in a different way than commonly assumed. Consistent with my theory, bureaucratic affiliation affects the type of information advisers provide and the certainty accompanying that advice, but not the hawkishness of the policies they champion.

The theory and results make several contributions at the nexus of domestic politics and international relations. First, a wave of international relations scholarship helpfully stresses the explanatory power of leaders' traits, such as their dispositions and beliefs (Saunders 2011; Yarhi-Milo 2014; Kertzer 2016; Whitlark 2017; Lupton 2018), background experiences (Colgan 2013; Horowitz and Stam 2014; Dafoe and Caughey 2016; Carter and Smith 2020), or institutional in-

centives (Chiozza and Goemans 2011; Croco 2011; Weeks 2014). This study shows the utility of expanding the locus of analysis to include advisers and bureaucracies. Leader beliefs frequently emerge from group processes, which suggests there is value to studying group inputs. Second, beyond widening the analytical lens, this study specifies the role advisers play and provides a real-world grounding for how leaders acquire the information that guides their strategic choices. Past work on a leader's information set emphasizes the vividness of sources (Yarhi-Milo 2014), advisory ordering principles (George 1980; Bendor and Hammond 1992), leader and adviser experience (Saunders 2017), and civil-military dimensions of information provision (Huntington 1957; Feaver 2003; Brooks 2008). I build upon these accounts by documenting the functional differentiation between officials, especially among civilian advisers, based on their bureaucratic position. I further theorize and show important variation in information abundance between political and military attributes of the adversary. Third, across dozens of cases, I find that the canonical account of bureaucratic parochialism during crises enjoys no empirical support. While echoing Allison's conclusion that bureaucracies affect international behavior, this study diverges by showing it is information, not preferences, that divides bureaucracies during crises. Fourth, disaggregating domestic information-transmission processes can yield fresh perspectives on the causes of international conflict. When leaders tap into the specialized information of each bureaucracy, expectations converge with those from theories that emphasize information availability in the international strategic interaction (Fearon 1995; Powell 2017). However, advisory processes may fall short of this benchmark with marginalization of core bureaucracies being a notable concern. Because bureaucracies bring distinct expertise, curtailing a bureaucracy's input causes leaders to miss important pieces of information as President Bush did preceding the Iraq War. An informational account of bureaucracies can thus be embedded into existing theories of international conflict to generate new explanations for why some crises resolve peacefully while others devolve into war.

2 Existing Account: Bureaucratic Position Affects Policy Preferences

The most prominent theory connecting bureaucratic affiliation to advisory input assumes preference heterogeneity among advisers. As first developed in Allison (1969), and reframed and expanded upon in subsequent work (Allison 1971; Allison and Halperin 1972; Allison and Ze-

likow 1999), advisers' parochial interests dictate or, more modestly, affect the policies they endorse. Where advisers stand on policy debates depends on the bureaucratic position they occupy. Because "priorities and perceptions are shaped by positions," advisers battle to shift policy in directions that advantage their bureaucracies (Allison and Halperin 1972, p. 44).⁶

The Bureaucratic Politics Model produces testable implications for the behavior of advisers during interstate crises. Advisers should endorse policies that advance their bureaucracies' interests, which requires a sense of bureaucracies' crisis interests. A fair reading might conclude that foreign policy advisers—i.e., those from a ministry of foreign affairs—prefer relatively peaceful policies while military advisers prefer relatively militaristic policies. A more generous reading might restrict the latter category to exclude advisers in uniform, focusing only on civilian defense advisers. Military personnel have cross-cutting considerations that might diminish the effect of parochialism. Risk perceptions, cost sensitivities (Huntington 1957), combat experiences (Horowitz and Stam 2014), mission preferences (Gelpi and Feaver 2002), and concerns about political constraints (Feaver and Gelpi 2004) all affect military attitudes toward the use of force. Focusing on gaps between civilian advisers affiliated with different bureaucracies skirts these complications and provides a cleaner test of Allison's account.

Allison's parochial theory of bureaucratic politics yields the following implication:

Parochial Expectation 1: During crises, civilian foreign policy advisers (those in foreign affairs ministries) endorse less militarily aggressive policies than civilian advisers with different bureaucratic assignments.

Some might contest this reading of the Bureaucratic Politics Model as overly sweeping, noting that parochial interests are contextually dependent. Marsh and Jones (2017), for instance, documents competing State Department interests before the Afghanistan surge and Libya strikes to explain Secretary Clinton's hawkish stances. This nuance, while valuable for any given case, undercuts the power and utility of the Bureaucratic Politics Model. At best it circumscribes our

⁶Many studies examine security advisers generally, analyzing decision-making bodies (Hermann and Preston 1994; Hermann 2001) or endorsing arrangements including multiple advocacy (George 1980), overlapping responsibilities (Rudalevige 2005), and prior experience (Saunders 2017). Others document recurring pathologies such as groupthink (Janis 1982). Bureaucratic affiliations, however, play little role in these accounts. Consequently, they do not generate implications for how input from ministers of defense and foreign affairs might differ.

ability to make testable predictions. At worst it renders the theory unfalsifiable, forcing scholars to infer bureaucratic interests from post hoc analyses of policy prescriptions. Presuming that Allison's account generates a falsifiable implication for how bureaucratic position affects adviser input during security crises, that implication must approximate Parochial Expectation 1.

Like numerous critics (Krasner 1972; Art 1973; Snyder and Diesing 1977; Welch 1992; Bendor and Hammond 1992), *I anticipate that the parochial theory receives little empirical support.*⁷ Several factors mitigate the presence and influence of preference divergences during international crises. First, leaders have tools to address the issue. Leaders can select advisers with aligned preferences which can supersede bureaucratic affinities (Krehbiel 1991; Bendor and Hammond 1992). Krasner (1972) makes the point succinctly, "The most important "action-channel" in the government is the President's ear. The President has a major role in determining who whispers in it." Senior advisers are likely "attuned" to the leader's interests (Betts 1991, p. 40).⁸ Even without allies, leaders have tools to dampen parochialism. Monitoring, which leaders are likely to engage in during high-stakes crises, limits adviser leeway to skew information to promote preferred policies. Sanctioning can elicit truthful advisory input provided advisers care whether the leader thinks them competent or retains their services (Meirowitz 2006). Leaders can dismiss advisers whose performance they deem inadequate. President Kennedy's dismissal of senior CIA officials, Allen Dulles and Richard Bissell, after the Bay of Pigs is illustrative.⁹ Second, when contemplating the use of military force, preferences may converge on conceptions of promoting general welfare. Allison (1969) (p. 711) himself hints at this inverse relationship between stakes and parochialism. Third, empirical anecdotes suggest that policy divergences are not ex ante predictable based on bureaucratic position (Snyder and Diesing 1977; Rhodes 1994). Secretary of State Clinton's hawkish stance on intervening in Libya as compared to Secretary of Defense Gates' dovish one is a recent counter-example. Advisers may compete to influence policy but not in the consistent

⁷This expectation applies to advisory input during crises. It does not speak to long-term strategy choices, the daily conduct of foreign policy, or the implementation of a leader's orders during crises.

⁸The relevance and utility of adviser selection diminishes under some conditions. Leaders may be constrained in their ability to select advisers—for instance, in a parliamentary coalition government (Preston and 't Hart 1999). Also, a competence versus loyalty tradeoff can undermine preference convergence (Lewis 2011).

⁹Extreme sanctioning, such as personalist dictators assassinating advisers, alters the dynamics. Advisers will likely converge on views aligned with their perception of the leader's preferences.

fashion that a parochial theory suggests.

3 An Informational Theory of Bureaucracies and Crises

I develop an informational theory of bureaucracies that specifies the types of information leaders seek, how easy it is to collect, and who provides it.

The Military and Political Information Leaders Need

Richard Neustadt (1990, p. 128-129) wrote of the US context, “A president is helped by what he gets into his mind. His first essential need is information.” This is especially true during international crises when leaders must assess what each side can expect to achieve in a military conflict and at what cost. With war as an outside option, optimal strategy decisions—such as how generous to be in crisis diplomacy—hinge upon expected payoffs to fighting. The probability of military victory and costs of fighting are key determinants of these payoffs and thus affect which peaceful settlements are preferable to conflict (Blainey 1988; Fearon 1995; Powell 1999). Both the probability of victory and war costs depend on military *and* political attributes. While broad, a distinction along these lines—military versus political—elucidates the information leaders must collect to guide their policy choices during crises. I contend the political is harder to assess than the military and thus subject to more uncertainty.

Military attributes affect the probability of victory and the costs incurred during fighting. These attributes include the quantity and quality of an adversary’s military assets and personnel (Friedberg 1987), defense spending (Lebovic 1995), doctrine (Biddle 2004), and force posture (Narang 2014). Leaders use this information to develop an accurate picture of the crisis landscape. The observable nature of many military characteristics simplifies the assessment process. Greater information allows advisers and leaders to form higher certainty estimates. While they are imperfectly observable, imperfect signals yield valuable information. Military demonstrations such as North Korean missile tests and public documentation such as Soviet pronouncements of 1950s personnel reductions facilitate assessments. Aerial surveillance technologies provide information for simple bean-counting or monitoring opponent positioning and posture as US detection of Soviet missiles in Cuba did. Assessing opponent doctrine poses a tougher challenge, but states

glean insights from recent conflicts and pronouncements. Hence, the tradition of non-combatants monitoring military engagements exemplified by US observers of the Crimean War. Information on military characteristics is not always abundant. States vary in transparency levels and occasionally have incentives to mask information (Meirowitz and Sartori 2008; Slantchev 2010). While acknowledging variation, military information is often available and obtainable.

An adversary's political attributes, which similarly can affect the probability of victory and war costs, are more difficult to assess because they are harder to observe. Limited observability means limited information which implies a high degree of uncertainty. Three forms of political traits illuminate the general point.

Resolve, or a state's steadfastness to a policy despite "temptations to back down" (Kertzer 2016), is the prototypical political attribute that affects expected conflict payoffs. Resolve encompasses a state's willingness to use force and the costs it will endure during fighting. Unfortunately for observers, resolve is typically unobservable ex ante. An adversary's verbal claims and past actions only yield credible information under circumscribed conditions given incentives to misrepresent (Fearon 1995)¹⁰ and contextual differences versus past interactions (Press 2005; Weisiger and Yarhi-Milo 2015). Assessing resolve is difficult even after conflict begins. Seven years after US combat troops arrived, Chairman of the Joint Chiefs Moorer was still surprised that the "North Vietnamese seem to be able to take unlimited losses."¹¹ *Domestic unity* is a second political trait. Great powers repeatedly attempt to influence which governments hold power in foreign states (O'Rourke 2018). An understanding of the leader's support is central to assessing the prospects of military efforts toward this end. Widespread domestic opposition to an incumbent increases the prospects for his successful displacement. So too do hostile elite factions. High-level military defections against Arbenz's regime were vital for CIA's 1954 operation in Guatemala. Tribal dynamics in Afghanistan proved critical in US efforts to support a functioning central government in Kabul. As with resolve, domestic unity is frequently difficult to observe, particularly in au-

¹⁰Cheap talk, under some conditions, credibly conveys information (Sartori 2002; Kurizaki 2007; Trager 2010). Alternatively, adversaries may send costly signals to convey resolve (Fearon 1994; Yarhi-Milo, Kertzer and Renshon forthcoming). However, states often struggle to provide relevant costly signals during a crisis.

¹¹Minutes of a Washington Special Actions Group Meeting, May 1, 1972, *FRUS*, Volume VIII, Vietnam, 1969-1976, Document 107.

tocracies which mask or inflate their domestic support. A third political trait concerns efforts to *translate military accomplishments into political objectives*. Force is an instrument to achieve desired political end-states. Military success must be translated into objectives, such as policy outcomes, for which the conflict was fought. Theories of war often abstract away this complication, yet most conflicts fall short of the ideal type of absolute war with absolute victory. Leader beliefs about an adversary's political landscape inform estimates about translating military gains into political gains. Estimates of the US payoff to the Iraq War rested on beliefs about what postwar policies it could install in Baghdad. This in turn depended on assessments of Iraqi military attributes crucial for *displacing* Saddam, but also Iraqi political attributes crucial for *replacing* Saddam. Translation difficulties between military and political outcomes are hard to assess beforehand.¹²

Assessing military and political attributes of the adversary allows leaders to estimate the expected value of conflict. International politics is often a realm of informational scarcity. Such scarcity is especially pronounced for political attributes. Accordingly, uncertainty is typically higher for an adversary's political, versus military, attributes.

Bureaucratic Position Affects Who Provides Military or Political Information

Leaders use information on the adversary's military and political attributes to assess what can be achieved through force and at what cost. Time and attention constraints mean leaders cannot be self-reliant during crises. Instead, a leader (principal) delegates information collection and provision tasks to advisers (agents). Compared to the leader, these agents become better, though not necessary completely, informed about adversary attributes. Advisers know more than the leader but are still frequently uncertain about adversary traits because uncertainty permeates much of international politics. Building on civil-military literature (Feaver 2003; Brooks 2008) and work on elite experience (Saunders 2017), I derive new implications for how information asymmetries between a principal and agent affect crisis advisory processes.

In addition to being better informed, advisers are *differentially* informed. Senior advisers lead the core bureaucracies of the national security apparatus. A prototypical setup entails a division of labor between bureaucracies to foster expertise and efficiency (March and Simon 1958). Functional

¹²Political objectives vary in their translation uncertainties (Edelstein 2008; Sullivan 2007). Installing a new form of government in Baghdad is subject to greater uncertainty than occupying newly acquired territory in the Sinai.

specialization between bureaucracies causes advisers to become differentially informed about adversary attributes. Military advisers study opponents' doctrines, arms development programs, troop levels, force locations, and fighting power. Soviet Defense Minister Malinovsky reportedly stressed to Khrushchev that Cuban forces could withstand a US assault for only three or four days during the Cuban Missile Crisis. Foreign policy advisers acquire a distinct information set to perform their assigned tasks. Embassies abroad provide insights into jockeying among domestic factions. US Ambassador to Iran William Sullivan's 1978 cable, "Thinking the Unthinkable," casting (belated) doubt on the Shah's viability offers a famous example.¹³ Amidst the Dien Bien Phu crisis, British Foreign Secretary Eden warned US officials that "Communism in Asia cannot (repeat not) be checked by military means alone. The problem is as much political as military."¹⁴ Due to their substantive portfolio, foreign policy advisers develop expertise in an adversary's political characteristics.

An adviser's informational expertise and emphasis follows from the substantive mission of her bureaucracy.¹⁵ What advisers emphasize when speaking to a leader follows from the adviser's assigned task. Limited "face time" with the executive incentivizes advisers to address issues in which they have specialized, potentially unique, knowledge. Moreover, leaders reprimand advisers who stray beyond their expertise. President Obama reportedly criticized Secretary of State Kerry for bringing him military plans for Syria (Goldberg 2016), which was outside the purview of Kerry's role. The process of providing information to the leader augments information divergences.

Delegation generates informational asymmetries between leaders and their advisers. Comparative specialization among the advisers generates differentiated areas of expertise and emphasis. A testable implication follows:

Informational Expectation 1: When advising leaders, foreign policy advisers discuss political (as opposed to military) attributes of the adversary more often than advisers

¹³Telegram from American Embassy Tehran to Secretary of State, 11/29/78, NLC-16-57-3-21-6, Jimmy Carter Library.

¹⁴State Department Telegram from Geneva to the Secretary of State, 30 April, 1954, Dulles – April 1954 (1), Box 2, Dulles-Herter Series, Eisenhower Files, Eisenhower Presidential Library.

¹⁵As discussed below regarding operationalization, some bureaucracies fall between the military and political ideal types. The empirical implication is weaker in these cases.

with different bureaucratic assignments.

Advisers in bureaucracies tasked with conducting foreign policy are more likely to discuss political, as opposed to military, attributes of the adversary when given an audience with the leader. A relative dearth of information makes political attributes subject to greater uncertainty than military attributes. Foreign policy advisers thus convey greater uncertainty than other advisers because they emphasize adversary attributes prone to high uncertainty. Critically, these foreign policy advisers have sufficient expertise to recognize informational gaps concerning political attributes and convey uncertainty accordingly. Military advisers who stray outside of their core competency to discuss political matters may convey excess certainty, failing to recognize what they do not know. Foreign policy advisers therefore convey more uncertainty than others because they emphasize high-uncertainty topics and they recognize informational deficits on these matters that other advisers might neglect.

Informational Expectation 2: When advising leaders, foreign policy advisers express greater uncertainty than advisers with different bureaucratic assignments.

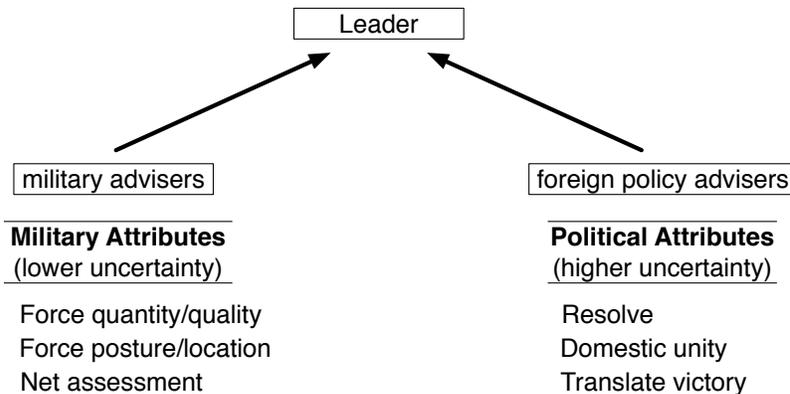


Figure 1: Delegation of information collection and provision tasks to advisers with differentiated domains of expertise. Uncertainty varies across domains.

Figure 1 summarizes an ideal-type arrangement and the variation in uncertainty levels for assessing political versus military attributes. To fix ideas, consider this implication in the US context. State Department officials are a useful proxy for those I term foreign policy advisers. The first expectation claims they are more likely to discuss political dimensions of an adversary and the second posits that this substantive emphasis, coupled with their expertise to recognize the inherent

difficulty of forming high-certainty assessments on the matter, makes State Department officials express a low degree of certainty. As discussed below, neither content emphasis nor degree of uncertainty directly affects policy hawkishness. Bureaucracies thus diverge in the information they provide, not the policies they champion.

4 Cases, Corpus, and Adviser Measures

In order to test the theoretical expectations, we need three main components. The first is a set of cases. The second is evidence on advisory processes during these cases. The third is a series of measures of advisory content, certainty, and policy prescription.

Cases

The analysis draws on 61 US crises during the Cold War from the Eisenhower to Carter administrations. Bounding the analysis to US Cold War crises holds potential confounding variables relatively constant. Keeping the state fixed mitigates concerns that variation in institutional structures drives the results. US institutional arrangements remained stable as the analysis begins after the 1947 National Security Act and ends before the 1986 Goldwater-Nichols Act altered the military chain of command. Background demographics of the individual advisers were remarkably stable. Gender, education, and race, all of which could affect advisory input, were near constants. Finally, bipolarity prevailed throughout this period, albeit with stretches of relative detente and animosity. Practical considerations—such as the availability of evidence—also recommend a US Cold War focus. The analysis requires access to information about advisory processes at the highest levels of decision making. Classification considerations mandate a lag between the events and their study. Pertinent declassified documents exist through the Carter administration. Additionally, the US provides a rich documentary record. More broadly, the global ramifications of US behavior make its advisory characteristics of general interest. I address generalizability concerns below.

I identify 61 *opportunities to use force* which represent instances in which the president and senior advisers considered and discussed using US force to strike abroad. The case qualification criteria is closest in spirit to Betts (1991), which similarly studies adviser behavior when both

peace and conflict were realistic options. Two sources contribute the majority of cases. First, I include crises from the International Crisis Behavior (ICB) data set with the US as an actor. ICB defines a crisis as a “situation deriving from change in a state’s internal or external environment which gives rise to decision makers’ perceptions of *threat to basic values, finite time for response, and the likelihood of involvement in military hostilities* [emphasis in original]” (Brecher and Wilkenfeld 1982, p. 383). Second, I include major military mobilizations from (Blechman and Kaplan 1978).¹⁶ Directing many military assets toward a possible conflict location indicates serious considerations about using force. Importantly, asset mobilization does not imply the actual use of force. Some mobilizations ended peacefully while others did not. Together, these two sources contribute 46 cases. An additional 15 observations come from several sources including some lower-level military mobilizations, confrontations from the Militarized Interstate Dispute data set (Ghosn, Palmer and Bremer 2004), and opportunities to strike the Soviet Union and China’s nascent nuclear programs.

The Supporting Information (SI) Section 1 lists the opportunities to use force (which I use interchangeably with ‘crises’) and provides information about the precipitating context. Some cases concern potential new uses of force—such as the 1958 turbulence in Lebanon or 1969 North Korean EC-121 spy plane incident. Others capture moments to potentially expand ongoing uses of force—such as 1953 deliberations surrounding the Korean War armistice and 1971 invasion of Laos during the Vietnam War. Sample censorship, in the sense of excluding cases where using force never received leader-level scrutiny, could introduce bias favoring the hypotheses. However, this inferential threat is likely limited barring some reason that advisers’ *relative* areas of specialization suddenly switch when under presidential scrutiny.

Constructing a Corpus

Measuring advisory input requires access to details about crisis advisory processes. Building on rich qualitative cases that reconstruct advisory processes, (e.g., George and Smoke 1974; Her-

¹⁶Specifically, I include level one and two uses of force (p. 50) with *level one* being “use of strategic nuclear unit plus at least one “major” force component” and *level two* is “two or three “major” force components used, but not strategic nuclear units,” where a “major” unit is two or more aircraft carrier task groups, more than one army battalion, or one or more combat wings.

mann and Preston 1994; Saunders 2017), I collect documentary evidence from presidential-level deliberations about using force to capture the *private* words of senior advisers at scale. Declassified documents published through the Foreign Relations of the United States (FRUS) series constitute the core sources for the analysis. FRUS volumes supplement State Department files with materials from presidential libraries, the Department of Defense, National Security Council, Central Intelligence Agency, and other agencies and individuals involved in crafting US foreign policy. Documents include National Security Council meeting minutes and transcripts, intra-elite memos (such as from Kissinger to Nixon), and minutes from elite conversations in unstructured (ad hoc meetings) and structured (briefings from the Joint Chiefs of Staff) settings. Because Carter-era FRUS volumes are incomplete, I gathered documents from the Carter Presidential Library and National Security Archive. Documents akin to those in FRUS are widely available.¹⁷ I supplement FRUS with transcripts from the Executive Committee of the National Security Council (ExComm) from the Cuban Missile Crisis. Collectively, these texts provide access to private statements that likely reflect sincere beliefs. For instance, when opting to intervene in the Laotian Civil War in 1964, Johnson told advisers “we should go ahead with the mission but that he had doubts about the action.”¹⁸ Presidents rarely voice such reservations publicly.

I select and prune documents to only include portions directly pertinent to the theory. Retained portions concern political or military attributes relevant for assessing potential conflict outcomes during the crises. Less cautious approaches that include all documents in a FRUS volume risk having the analysis swamped by noise or letting irrelevant documents undermine measurement validity. I restrict the corpus to memos sent to the president and transcripts from meetings which the president attended or was briefed on. Given his primacy in the decision-making process, I focus on advisory opinions to which he was privy.¹⁹

All transcripts are split into speaker-specific texts; thus, a Nixon-Kissinger dialogue produces Nixon texts and Kissinger texts. In total, the corpus includes 5,404 speech acts or statements by

¹⁷Partial exceptions include limited records immediately preceding the April 1980 Iran Hostage rescue attempt and from the Joint Chiefs of Staff.

¹⁸Memorandum of Conference with President Johnson, June 8, 1964, *FRUS*, Volume XXVIII, Laos, 1964-1968, Document 83.

¹⁹The 1976 North Korean Tree Trimming Incident meets the sampling criteria but is excluded because FRUS does not contain documents involving the president.

an advisor or president. These come from 382 distinct documents with 176 unique speakers. The extent of adviser input within the corpus accords with the historical record. SI Section 2 shows that text volume in the corpus reflects the prominence of key advisers, such as John Foster Dulles, Kissinger, and Brzezinski.

Some potential limitations to FRUS pose little inferential threat. Redacted segments within available texts are a limited risk because they typically concern targeting location details or covert sources rather than broad strategic considerations. Another concern is that entire documents remain classified or that FRUS historians excluded certain types of documents. Assessing either possibility is difficult at scale. However, a highly publicized dispute over declassification of materials for the FRUS volume on the 1954 Guatemala operation alleviates concerns.²⁰ It is reassuring that this one case is well known and researcher complaints have not reached a similar volume since. Slower and more restrictive declassification at the Pentagon or CIA could also skew the composition of FRUS volumes. But this only generates bias favoring the hypotheses in the unlikely scenario that non-State Department officials address political (vs. military) matters or express high uncertainty in the excluded documents but not the included ones.

Measuring Advisory Input

I generate measures at the bureaucracy-crisis level by aggregating input from advisers affiliated with five bureaucracies: State, Defense, the Joint Chiefs of Staff (JCS), Central Intelligence Agency (CIA), and National Security Council (NSC) or White House staff.²¹ *State Department* serves as the main explanatory variable, proxying for foreign policy advisers who most clearly specialize in an adversary's political attributes. Jervis (2010, p. 41) notes, "the Embassy provide[s] the bulk of political reporting" on foreign states. Defense Department officials and members of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, who I distinguish between for reasons noted below, are specialists in the adversary's military attributes. These officials serve as proxies for the ideal types. CIA and the National Security Council staff (plus other White House advisers) lie along a continuum between them and produce ambiguous empirical expectations.²²

²⁰See McAllister et al. (2015) on the controversy and politics of FRUS.

²¹The final category includes vice presidents. Treasury officials assume a limited role in crisis deliberations.

²²On NSC responsibilities and their expansion over time, see Destler (1980); Preston (2001).

I derive analytically useful measures from the raw texts. Text analysis tools, which provide a replicable means of distilling advisory input from a mass of statements, enable this transformation for measuring content and certainty. Because these tools are less suited for measuring policy prescriptions, I qualitatively code the policy stances of State and Defense Department officials.

Political versus Military Adviser Content

Testing the informational theory of bureaucracies requires a measure of whether advisory content concerned military or political considerations. Supervised learning techniques, which classify texts into pre-specified categories (e.g., political versus military), offer an accurate and scalable method for this measurement task (Grimmer and Stewart 2013). Supervised methods follow a straightforward process. Human coders classify a subset of texts as either political or military. An algorithm uses this *training set* to “learn” which features (typically words) of texts are associated with each category. The algorithm then uses these features to sort the remaining texts between the categories.

Speaker texts in the full corpus range from a single word spoken during a meeting to memos exceeding 4,000 words. For uniformity, I split longer texts into portions containing 30 to 250 words, which proved optimal for hand-classifying texts. The training set consists of a random subset of memos and transcripts with 475 texts representing approximately 20% of the corpus’ total word count. Classification rules followed from the theory and were refined through iteratively applying these rules to the actual texts. Military texts address military capabilities, the quality of forces, and force locations. Political texts address the opponent’s commitment to the issues at stake (resolve), the domestic political landscape in target states, or challenges with translating battlefield outcomes to desired political end-states. Example texts in SI Section 3.1 typify content from each category. Overall, I coded 61% and 39% of the training set as military and political texts, respectively. A research assistant also coded the full training set. She produced identical codings for 82% of the 475 texts with further measures of inter-coder reliability provided in the SI. Several standard pre-processing steps—removing numbers and punctuation and stemming words—were performed before proceeding with the analysis.

I tested a variety of algorithms, including random forest models and support vector machines, and achieved the best performance with a simple naive Bayes classifier which accurately classified

88% of texts in 10-fold cross-validation checks. SI Section 3.2 provides additional details on the classifier and performance metrics such as *F*-scores. Beyond high accuracy, analysis shows that inaccurate classifications were clustered close to the cut point between the two categories. Figure 2 plots the 25 terms with the highest *relative* frequency for each category. Distinguishing terms clearly correspond to the intended category content. Word stems that most distinguish military texts include “forc,” “attack,” “nuclear,” “general,” “strike,” and “target.” Word stems to the right are indicative of political texts. State leaders—“Khrushchev,” “Nasser”—help distinguish these texts, as do references to “govern” and “talk.” The most telling term for political texts, “will,” concerns projections of how actors will respond to stimuli and their willpower or resolve. Appropriately, each connotation is political, rather than military.

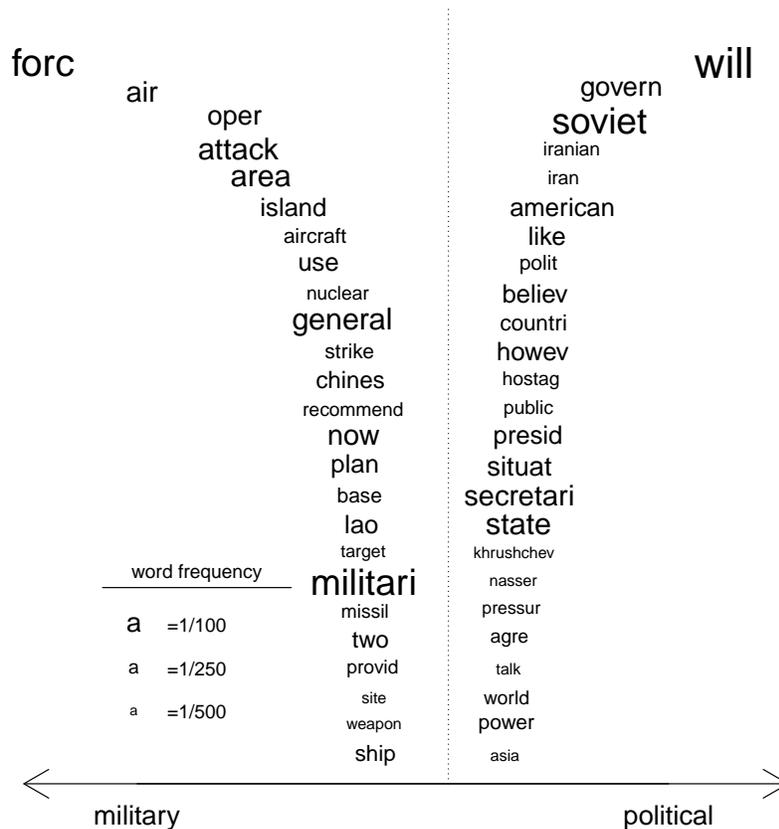


Figure 2: Terms with greatest frequency differences between military and political documents. Text size indicates overall frequency in training documents.

After validating the approach, I apply the algorithm to the full corpus at the bureaucracy-

crisis level of analysis. I aggregate all text from a bureaucracy's officials during a crisis—for instance, Defense officials during the *Mayaguez* seizure—and apply the classifier to the resulting text block. Each bureaucracy-crisis observation receives two scores—a continuous *Political Content Score* (mean= 0.55) and dichotomous *Political* content indicator (mean= 0.43). The second measure indicates whether an observation is classified as political or military. The continuous measure, described further in SI Section 3.2, standardizes raw text scores from the classifier to span between zero and one with greater values indicating more political content.

Adviser Uncertainty

Evaluating Informational Expectation 2 requires a measure of assessment uncertainty. Prior political science scholarship employs sentiment analysis using a specified wordlist to summarize text attributes (McManus 2017; Driscoll and Steinert-Threlkeld 2020). The critical step is identifying a dictionary that suits the substantive context of the analysis. While several dictionaries of uncertainty exist, I opt for the “If” Lasswell dictionary from General Inquirer which was created to measure concepts pertinent for political analysis and includes terms well-suited for the context of crisis deliberations (Namenwirth and Weber 2016). Words include “approximately,” “possibility,” and “unpredictable.”²³ The relative subtlety of uncertain sentiments, as compared to military content, favors a dictionary method over a supervised learning method. Words delineating between military and political content are frequent and stark, as Figure 2 shows. Words distinguishing certain from uncertain assessments are less frequent and obvious, making it harder for a learning method to discern distinguishing features. The 96 words in the uncertainty dictionary constitute just over 5% of words in the corpus. In comparison, the 96 words that most distinguish military texts constitute nearly 24% of the words in the corpus. The relative scarcity of uncertainty words means that other elements of the texts likely swamp the uncertainty features, thus limiting classification accuracy with supervised methods.

The sentiment measure reflects the relative frequency of uncertain words as a percentage of total words. It counts all uncertain words in a text and divides by the text's total word count. As with the adviser content measure, the uncertainty measure is generated at the bureaucracy-crisis

²³Dictionary is available at <http://www.wjh.harvard.edu/~inquirer/>. I add “risk” to the dictionary because decision makers often invoke risks.

level. SI Section 4 provides an example text and scoring. Overall, bureaucracy-crisis observations have a mean uncertainty score of 5.2%. SI Section 4 describes four validation approaches that use a hand-coded subset of texts, paired comparisons, qualitative knowledge, and an alternative uncertainty dictionary.

Adviser Policy Prescriptions

Assessing the competing Parochial Theory requires measures of bureaucracies' policy stances during crises. I take a qualitative approach, measuring *relative* hawkishness to evaluate whether bureaucratic affiliations drive advisers' policy prescriptions. The concept is not amenable to automated text measurement because words representing the aggressive policy in one crisis may represent the dovish posture in another. Advocating for conventional force represents the dovish stance when others suggest using nuclear force but the hawkish stance when others suggest sending arms.

I evaluate the positions of the Secretaries of State and Defense as well as senior officials in each bureaucracy. I restrict the focus to *civilian* advisers from State and Defense which offers the cleanest test of the theoretical contention. These bureaucracies represent the ideal cases in terms of parochial benefits to diplomacy versus force. CIA and NSC have mixed interests that produce ambiguous implications. A strictly civilian approach sidesteps the aforementioned complicating issues from civil-military relations (Betts 1991; Feaver and Gelpi 2004). Moreover, it disaggregates the "civil" side of civil-military dynamics. I code *Relative Aggressiveness* based on FRUS, the secondary literature, and memoirs of participants when necessary. Following Betts (1991), the measure takes one of three values. Either Defense is more hawkish, there is no substantive difference, or State is more hawkish. SI Section 1 describes all sources and codings.

5 Results: Adviser Content, Uncertainty, and Prescriptions

The findings strongly support an informational theory of bureaucracies, rather than a parochial theory. Three results show that foreign policy advisers discuss more political content, convey greater uncertainty, and advocate for substantively indistinguishable policies compared to advisers from other bureaucracies. The three measures described in the previous section constitute the

outcome variables while foreign policy advisers, operationalized as *State Department*, serves as the explanatory variable (SI Section 5.1 provides summary statistics). I use ordinary least squares (OLS) regression with the bureaucracy-crisis as the unit of analysis and present specifications without and with case fixed effects, which account for unobserved invariant components of each case. Models with fixed effects show how bureaucratic affiliation affects advisory input when holding the case fixed. Each bureaucracy assesses the same situation, meaning that differences are not attributable to selection into crisis participation. The models are bivariate because case-level control variables are collinear with the fixed effects, though the SI presents robustness tests with covariates instead of fixed effects. To ensure adequate inputs for text-based measures, I limit the sample to the 168 bureaucracy-crisis observations with at least 100 words, though results are robust to using alternative cutoffs.²⁴

Bureaucratic Position Affects Advisory Content

The results presentation first shows that State Department officials are more likely to emphasize political attributes compared to counterparts from other bureaucracies. Differentiated functional responsibilities between bureaucracies encourages comparative specialization. Tasked with conducting foreign policy, State Department officials specialize in an adversary's political characteristics.

Descriptively, State Department officials are far more likely to discuss political content compared to officials from other bureaucracies. Figure 3 decomposes the data for the five bureaucracies. The left and right panels respectively show the *Political Content Score* and *Political* indicator measures. The left panel plots all observations with solid diamonds showing mean scores by bureaucracy. Beyond confirming State's tendency to emphasize political content, the figures confirm another expectation: advisers in the Defense Department and JCS tend to emphasize military content. On the binary measure, members of the JCS strictly limit themselves to military content while CIA and NSC/White House officials occupy a middle ground.

Regressions results align with the descriptive patterns. Table 1 reports results from specifications with content as the outcome variable and *State Department* as the explanatory variable.

²⁴Potential observations have insufficient text due to either corpus limitations or lack of participation during crises. Fixed effect specifications account for differential participation patterns depending on crisis attributes.

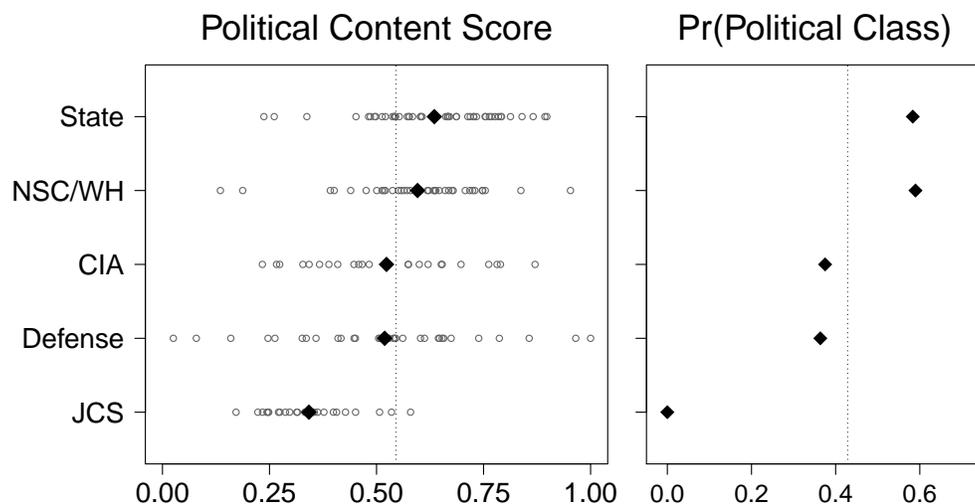


Figure 3: Text content by bureaucracy. NSC/WH indicates National Security Council or White House staff. Vertical lines show means for all observations. *Left*: Continuous *Political Content Score* observations with diamond indicating bureaucracy mean. *Right*: Percentage of observations in political class.

Models vary the outcome variable coding (*Political Content Score* in 1-3, *Political* in 4-6), the inclusion of fixed effects which guards against the possibility that State only participates in cases with elevated political concerns, and sampling criteria. Models 3 and 6 prune the sample to ideal type bureaucracies—State, Defense, and JCS. If the theory is correct that specialization dictates advisory content, then divergences should be especially pronounced within this subset.

The *State Department* explanatory variable has a positive coefficient, indicating more political content, across all specifications. The relationship is statistically significant in all models using the continuous measure. Whereas the average bureaucracy input concerns neutral content (*Political Content Score* = 0.55), State Department officials stress, on average, more political content (coefficients ≥ 0.09). This effect becomes more pronounced when restricting the comparison to Defense and JCS officials, as Model 3 reports. Consider the crisis sparked by North Korea shooting down an EC-121 reconnaissance plane. Defense and the JCS had an average *Political Content Score* of 0.35. The model predicts a State score of 0.51, or substantially more tilted toward political content. State’s actual input was even more politically-oriented with a score of 0.89. These patterns in the data accord with the historical record. Defense officials discussed the advantages of airstrikes compared to mining North Korean harbors or establishing a blockade. In contrast, State

Table 1: Bureaucratic Role and Advisory Content

	<i>Political Content Score</i>			<i>Political Class</i>		
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)
State Department	0.13*** (0.03)	0.09*** (0.03)	0.16*** (0.04)	0.22** (0.08)	0.11 (0.08)	0.30*** (0.09)
Constant	0.51*** (0.02)	0.70*** (0.07)	0.61*** (0.09)	0.37*** (0.04)	0.78*** (0.20)	0.57** (0.23)
Observations	168	168	105	168	168	105
Case Fixed Effects	N	Y	Y	N	Y	Y
Only 'Ideal' Types	N	N	Y	N	N	Y
Outcome Mean	0.55	0.55	0.53	0.43	0.43	0.38

* $p < 0.1$, ** $p < 0.05$, *** $p < 0.01$

Notes: OLS with bureaucracy-crisis observations as unit of analysis. Fixed effects not shown for models that include them. Models 3 and 6 limit the sample to State, Defense, and JCS observations.

officials considered Soviet reactions and North Korean responses to diplomatic overtures. Using the binary outcome coding produces similar, though less robust results. In Model 4, moving from another bureaucracy to the State Department produces a 60% increase in the relative probability of political content (22% points \pm 16% at the 95% confidence interval). When including fixed effects, the effect diminishes and is no longer statistically significant. However, when restricting the sample to the ideal types, I again find a strong and statistically significant effect. Further analysis confirms that while State Department provides the most political content, the gap compared to NSC is limited, at least when using the binary outcome and fixed effects.

Robustness checks in SI Section 5.2 use crisis-level control variables rather than fixed effects, randomization inference to address small sample concerns, logistic regression for the binary outcome coding, and the individual-speaker as the unit of analysis where individuals are nested within bureaucracies (n=629) to address aggregation concerns. Results hold across all specifications, corroborating that bureaucratic role drives adviser specialization.

Bureaucratic Position Affects Adviser Uncertainty

Consistent with Information Expectation 2, foreign policy advisers express greater uncertainty than their counterparts during crises. Officials from State are more likely to discuss an adversary's

political attributes which carry greater uncertainty due to limited information. Moreover, State officials have expertise to recognize informational gaps.

Uncertainty is 12% higher in State Department observations compared to other agencies (5.6% vs. 5.0%). Figure 4 decomposes the sample by bureaucracy and content to yield additional insights. State is the most uncertain of all bureaucracies when averaging across the full sample (left panel). JCS observations offer the starkest contrast with an average score below 4.4%. This result stems from the substance that bureaucracies emphasize (as shown above, State stresses political content) *and* the requisite expertise to recognize informational deficits. The center panel shows that State Department officials express greater uncertainty than others when discussing political matters (5.8%). Political assessments from advisers speaking beyond their core competency may exhibit unwarranted certainty as they fail to recognize what they do not know. Specialization in the political domain makes State Department officials cognizant of difficulties gaining clarity on adversaries' political traits. For military content (right panel), which is prone to greater certainty due to higher observability, experts in the domain at JCS recognize informational abundance and convey certainty accordingly. Competency thus widens the political-military uncertainty gap. The shaded regions show that when the ideal type bureaucracies—State, Defense, and JCS—discuss their areas of expertise, they provide dramatically different degrees of uncertainty. Descriptive patterns indicate that State Department officials are not inherently prone to greater uncertainty. They express comparable sentiments to those in other bureaucracies when wading into military affairs. Instead State's uncertainty is high when, due to domain expertise, it recognizes informational blindspots regarding the adversary's political traits.

Models 1 and 2 in Table 2 employ the full sample without and with case fixed effects. Fixed effects guard against the possibility that State officials only participate in information-poor cases. Both specifications produce similar results: State officials express 12% ($\pm 11\%$) more uncertainty relative to other advisers. Deliberations before the 1965 intervention in the Dominican Republic typify overall patterns. The average bureaucracy *Uncertainty* score was 5.4%. Model 2 predicts a State Department score of 6.0%. In reality, State officials expressed even more uncertainty (7.8%), representing a 45% relative increase over others. Documents from the crisis corroborate this pattern. Defense officials expressed certainty that two or fewer US divisions could stabilize the island. State Department officials, attuned to political factions on the ground, conveyed a lack of certainty

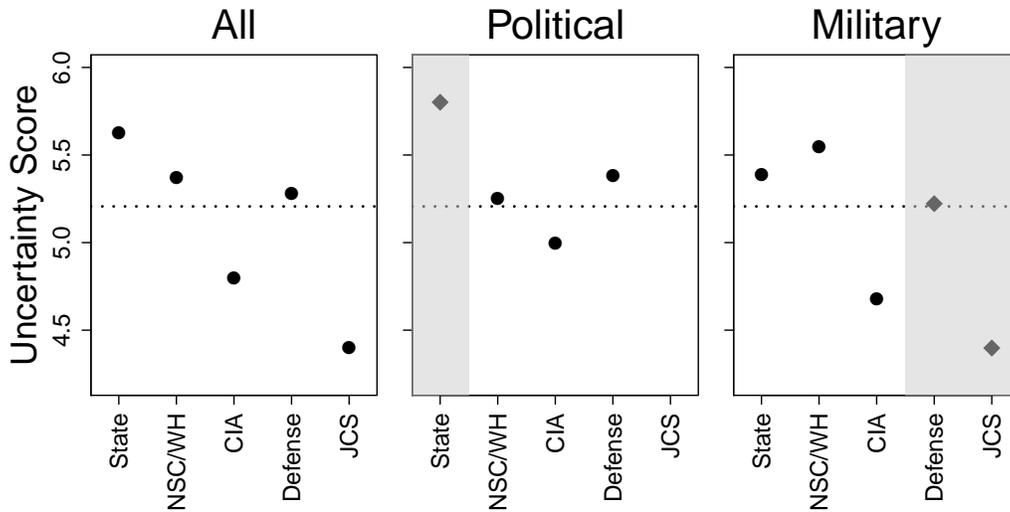


Figure 4: Mean uncertainty by bureaucracy. Dashed horizontal line shows overall mean. Diamonds in shaded regions indicate ideal type bureaucracies speaking in area of expertise. Left, center, and right panels respectively plot all observations, political content observations, and military content observations.

with Undersecretary of State Mann noting that “loyalties of the troops outside the capital are still uncertain.”²⁵

State’s relative uncertainty becomes even more pronounced when subsetting the sample to ideal-type bureaucracies. Defense and JCS serve as the baseline in Model 3. Substantively, State advisers conveys 18% ($\pm 14\%$) more uncertainty than military advisers. Limiting the sample to “expert” observations—i.e., State discusses political and Defense/JCS discuss military attributes—produces even larger relative effects ($38\% \pm 27\%$).

SI Section 5.3 shows results hold when employing crisis-level control variables, randomization inference, an alternative uncertainty dictionary measure, a placebo dictionary test, and the individual-speaker as the unit of analysis. An alternative explanation might emphasize that individuals selecting into the State Department systematically differ from others. Evidence suggests that they are more liberal (Clinton et al. 2012; Milner and Tingley 2015) and more likely to be generalized trusters (Rathbun 2012). Given the impossibility of randomly assigning advisers to bureaucracies, I cannot rule out this alternative. However, it is telling that State Department of-

²⁵Telephone Conversation Between the Under Secretary of State for Economic Affairs (Mann) and President Johnson, April 26, 1965, *FRUS*, Volume XXXII, Dominican Republic; Cuba; Haiti; Guyana, Document 22.

Table 2: Bureaucratic Role and Certainty

	<i>Uncertainty</i>			
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)
State Department	0.59** (0.28)	0.61** (0.29)	0.91** (0.36)	1.59*** (0.57)
Constant	5.04*** (0.15)	6.24*** (0.66)	5.11*** (0.89)	4.21*** (1.09)
N	168	168	105	73
Case Fixed Effects	N	Y	Y	Y
Only 'Ideal' Types	N	N	Y	Y
Only 'Expert' Types	N	N	N	Y
Outcome Mean	5.21	5.21	5.24	5.17

* $p < 0.1$, ** $p < 0.05$, *** $p < 0.01$

Notes: OLS with bureaucracy-crisis observations as unit of analysis. Fixed effects not shown for models that include them. Models 3 and 4 limit the sample to 'ideal' types—State, Defense, and JCS observations. Model 4 further restricts the sample to 'expert' observations where an 'ideal' type discusses its area of expertise.

officials are notably uncertain when assessing political attributes but not when assessing military attributes. Recognition of informational scarcity on political traits, as opposed to pre-existing dispositions, appears to drive the uncertainty results.

Parochialism and Policy?

For Allison and Zelikow (1999, p. 307), “[k]nowledge of the organizational seat at the table yields significant clues about a likely stand.” Are State Department officials actually less militarily aggressive than their civilian counterparts at Defense? I expect parochialism dissipates in crises because leaders wield tools—adviser selection and sanctioning—that encourage honest communication.

Consistent with my expectation, bureaucratic “seat” does not predict where advisers “stand.” Table 3 shows State and Defense advocating substantively indistinguishable positions in nearly half of the cases. When diverging, they are almost equally likely to assume the hawkish position. Pentagon civilians call for more aggressive actions in 30% of cases while State officials do so in 25% of cases. Statistical tests confirm what the table makes immediate: State Department officials

are not especially dovish. Whether treating the outcome codings as linear or ordinal, tests fail to reject the null hypothesis of no difference between the bureaucracies.

Table 3: Counts of Relative Aggressiveness by Bureaucracy

	<i>More Aggressive Bureaucracy</i>		
	Defense	Similar	State
Overall Count	18	28	15
<i>One sample tests: p-values</i>			
T-test	0.61		
Wilcoxon	0.61		

Notes: Neither test precludes the null hypothesis of no difference between the bureaucracies. T-test codes outcomes as 0, 1, and 2. “Similar” serves as median value for Wilcoxon test.

Aggressiveness occasionally depended upon who led the bureaucracy. Carter’s Secretary of State Cyrus Vance never adopted the most aggressive posture. His consistency is atypical though. Other secretaries varied depending on the context. Secretary of State Rogers opposed bombing Cambodia in 1969 while Secretary of Defense Laird approved of it.²⁶ They flipped positions three years later. Laird opposed using B-52s against industrial complexes in Hanoi and Haiphong in 1972²⁷ whereas Rogers consented to the *Linebacker II* bombing.

6 Discussion, Generalizability, and Implications

Foreign policy advisers—State Department officials—can simultaneously emphasize political attributes, express uncertainty, and occasionally endorse hawkish policies. Highly-certain doves and uncertain hawks are not oxymoronic. Certain the adversary is militarily strong, doves support making policy concessions. Believing the adversary to be irresolute, even if uncertain in this judgment, hawks advise leaders to increase their demands. A focus on political or military dimensions of the adversary does not dictate policy recommendations. Secretaries Rusk and Dulles offer examples of being attuned to political attributes while advocating aggressive positions. Rusk con-

²⁶Editorial Note, *FRUS*, Volume VI, Vietnam, January 1969-July 1970, Document 41.

²⁷Memorandum From Secretary of Defense Laird to President Nixon, December 12, 1972, *FRUS*, Volume IX, Vietnam, October 1972-January 1973, Document 166.

sistently contributed to escalatory decisions in Vietnam while evaluating the viability of leaders in Saigon. Rusk questioned whether Diem and Khanh merited support and how to use military leverage to extract governance concessions from them (Pelz 1981; Freedman 1996). Months before the Tonkin Gulf incidents, Rusk said that “we do not go to war for a government which is more interested in quarreling than in fighting the Viet Cong.”²⁸ Dulles similarly stressed political considerations while endorsing an aggressive policy regarding Lebanon in 1958. During an NSC meeting, he raised two political factors that would complicate a US intervention: Soviet and Arab responses (George and Smoke 1974). Evaluating foreign countries’ policy priorities, which affect their resolve, calls for the State Department’s political judgment. Dulles provided this judgment yet still endorsed US troops landing on Beirut’s beaches. Cognizance of political considerations does not imply an aversion to force.

Generalizability

How transportable are the findings to other states? I specify conditions needed for the implications to hold. The theory minimally requires that a state’s leader solicits information from multiple advisers. In addition to delegation, the theory requires differentiation among state bureaucracies. The widespread presence of both military institutions and ministries of foreign affairs suggests that bureaucratic specialization is nearly ubiquitous. That said, some conditions are less likely to hold in certain institutional arrangements. First, states vary in the authority leaders have to select and sanction advisers. Leaders of coalition governments in parliamentary democracies may not share preferences with advisers from different parties and coalition maintenance circumscribes leaders’ abilities to dismiss advisers. These advisers may enjoy greater latitude to advance parochial interests during crisis deliberations. Second, multiple bureaucracies must enjoy access to the leader. If a single bureaucracy dominates information provision processes, then affiliated advisers may encroach into all content areas. Military juntas, though empirically rare today, might exhibit this tendency. Third, leader sanctioning must not be so severe as to stifle advisory input. Extreme sanctioning, including death, by displeased personalist dictators could suppress the dynamics this study documents. Former regime members in Iraq indicate that no one dared

²⁸Summary Record of the National Security Council Executive Committee Meeting, May 24, 1964, *FRUS*, Volume I, Vietnam, 1964–1968, Document 172.

challenge Saddam's narrative before the Iraq War (Lake 2010). Fourth, there must be a genuine division of labor among bureaucracies. Overlapping responsibilities shrink the divides in advisory content (political vs. military). Expansion of the US NSC staff—which has grown from the 20s to an estimated 500 during the Obama administration (Ries 2016, p. 32-35)—generates greater bureaucratic overlap which could dampen bureaucracies' relative specialization compared to the Cold War era.

Implications for War and Peace

Advisers serve as the conduit through which information about adversaries moves from the international environment to leaders. The information they provide shapes the beliefs leaders form and bargaining strategies they adopt. If advisers working with incomplete information indicate the adversary has low resolve, leaders are likely to be less generous at the negotiating table, which increases the likelihood of conflict (Fearon 1995). Beyond placing the domestic information transmission process on firmer ground, this study highlights perilous pre-conditions to conflict. Differentiation in specialization means a leader who marginalizes a bureaucracy creates informational blindspots. Because each bureaucracy offers potentially unique information, curtailing any bureaucracy's input leaves leaders with distorted, or at least incomplete, views of the strategic environments they face. These distortions can foster conflict. President Bush sidelined the State Department before the Iraq War, which arguably contributed to his poor assessment of the prospects for postwar stability. This assessment increased the apparent value of war, reducing the relative appeal of the status quo. President Kennedy similarly marginalized State Department advisers before authorizing the Bay of Pigs invasion. Relying on the plan's architects from CIA, he believed widespread latent opposition to Castro would emerge in sympathy with the beachhead landing. This distorted belief inflated the operation's expected value, again rendering the status quo less attractive. Specialization among bureaucracies mandates that leaders solicit input from each bureaucracy.

7 Conclusion

Leaders seek information during crises to optimize strategic choices that have the potential to lead to war. They look to senior advisers heading the state's national security bureaucracies to provide that information. By expanding the analytical lens to encompass those at a leader's side, this study develops an informational theory of bureaucracies. Bureaucracies matter during crises, but not in the way suggested by canonical international relations scholarship. A division of labor fosters differentiated expertise and emphasis across advisers and their respective bureaucracies. Where you sit affects the type of information you collect and provide. Adopting a text-as-data approach, new measures show that foreign policy advisers (State Department officials) are 60% more likely to emphasize the adversary's political traits compared to counterparts from other bureaucracies. Because of differences in the content they emphasize, advisers differ in the uncertainty they express. While uncertainty pervades international politics, it is especially true regarding political (versus military) traits. Consistent with the expectation, foreign policy advisers convey greater uncertainty than peers in other bureaucracies. Contrary to the parochial view, bureaucratic position does not affect an adviser's policy stance during a crisis.

The study suggests fruitful avenues for future work. Scholars may assess whether these findings hold in other time periods or places, particularly under other institutional regimes where leaders have different tools for managing common principal-agent difficulties. Similarly, study of whether the dynamics identified during crises apply outside of them—such as for budget allocation matters—could reveal scope conditions. More broadly, I document the information that advisers provide but not how leaders use it. Precisely how these adviser-level inputs aggregate to form leader-level beliefs is a long-standing challenge in international relations theory and demands further inquiry (Powell 2017).

The findings offer several implications for the literatures on bureaucracies and conflict as well as for policy. First, during crises, "where you stand depends on where you sit" is a poor heuristic for analyzing advisory processes. A mapping from bureaucratic role to policy prescription may be appropriate in other contexts, but it lacks an empirical basis during crises and is a dubious point of departure for analyses. Instead, what you know depends on where you sit. Second, I unpack several elements underpinning informational accounts of war. Clarity on the domestic

political process by which leaders collect and use available information on their adversaries is an essential step in the causal chain linking informational environments to leader beliefs to strategic choices and ultimately to war. It reveals conditions—such as a dysfunctional or sidelined bureaucracy—that can distort information collection and interpretation in a state receiving signals about adversaries. It further shows differences in information abundance across adversary attributes. Reduced observability of the adversary’s political traits compared to military traits makes the political realm subject to heightened uncertainty. The findings indicate that domain expertise is critical to knowing what you do not know when it comes to these political attributes.

Third, and most policy-relevant, the findings speak to the danger of curtailing a bureaucracy’s involvement during advisory processes. Due to their comparative specializations, marginalizing any one institution can mean forfeiting unique information and expertise. Such cases sever the connection between the information that is conceivably available about the adversary and the information a leader actually possesses. Marginalization thus breeds informational blindspots. Emerging ignorant from cursory advisory processes, leaders risk blundering into conflict.

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