

gested that "organizational process" and "bureaucratic politics" each constituted additional facets of the foreign policy reality. They, each in their own way, shaped and influenced what information and alternative courses of action were available to central decision-makers, predisposed those decision-makers to adopt particular positions (frequently for parochial reasons), and impaired the execution of policy choices, once made. By focusing on these other aspects of the policy process, one could gain richer understanding of foreign policy. At least as important as this point about contrasting perspectives, however, was the observation that the formal rational choice assumptions of the "Rational Actor Model" did not accommodate the limitations of human decision makers. Instead, Allison suggested that Simon's notion of "bounded rationality" provided a more plausible model of human decision-making behaviour.⁹⁶

Since Allison's *Essence of Decision*, a number of studies have been published that have developed Allison's ideas (or concerns similar to his). These studies (and the thinking behind them) can be divided into two very basic groups. The bulk of them have attempted to "rehabilitate" notions of rationality, seeing no practical alternative descriptive, explanatory or prescriptive decision-making model. Most often this entails revising rational decision making assumptions – i.e. making them less rigorous – so that they can somehow accommodate human limitations. This is sometimes called "scaling rationality to human dimensions". These efforts externalize the limitations of human information processing and decision-making and treat them as *constraints* on the fundamental human capacity to produce rational choices. These "scaling" efforts also incorporate quite constrained and probabilistic interpretations of the decision-making environment. Although the various limitations of human beings as information processors, risk evaluators and choice makers are frequently acknowledged in some detail, this

"neo-rational" approach still clings to the basic central concept of rational choice. That concept pictures choice in the following stylized terms:

Decision makers construct an explicit causal model of the policy-making environment, using logical analysis and empirical inquiry. They are open to refining the model as additional information becomes available. When preparing to make a decision, they identify the consequences that the courses of action they are contemplating will produce on the basis of the understanding of the environment their causal model provides. They then assess the outcomes they have projected in terms of their objectives, carefully measuring and comparing the costs and benefits attached to the alternative policies. By this approach they identify and select optimal courses of action and more reality in desired directions.⁹⁷

The alternative and less common approach has been to question the necessity of retaining fundamentally rational assumptions at the core of our understanding of human decision-making. Here, the inclination has been to reject such heroic measures and simply replace the rational model with alternative assumptions that better capture the way in which human minds deal with information and choice problems.⁹⁸ Steinbruner is probably the best known analyst working in this tradition but others have also pursued the effort to develop a model of "non-rational" but nevertheless effective decision-making. These attempts place great weight on cognitive phenomena but do not necessarily abandon rationality. One theorist, for instance, argues that "rationality" ought to be viewed as the conscious attempt, undertaken by inherently non-rational "cognitive decision makers", to employ a set of learned *techniques* (i.e. the canons of rational choice) in order to structure and then make a "rational" choice. The major difference distinguishing these two approaches (or paradigms, to use Steinbruner's language) is the centrality of rational assumptions. The first group insists on retaining rational choice, in some recognizable form, at the core of its

⁹⁶ *Ibid.*, pp. 71-72, 253-255, and 328 (note 6). Simon's original work appears in "A Behavioral Model of Rational Choice," *Quarterly Journal of Economics*, February 1955.

⁹⁷ Miriam Steiner, "The Search for Order in a Disorderly World: Worldviews and Prescriptive Decision Paradigms", *International Organization*, vol. 37, no. 3, p. 376. This is an exceptionally interesting, thought-provoking article.

