CHAPTER ONE

# Process, Politics, and Policy

On March 12, 1999, U.S. Secretary of State Madeleine Albright stood with the foreign ministers of Poland, Hungary, and the Czech Republic in the auditorium of the Harry S. Truman Library in Independence, Missouri. Albright chose the site because Truman was president in 1949, when America formally joined its Western European partners in alliance, and on this day she welcomed these three countries as the newest members of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO). The Czech-born Albright, herself a refugee from the Europe of Adolf Hitler and Josef Stalin, said quite simply on this day: "Hallelujah."[1]

Not everyone in the United States felt the same way. The dean of America's Russia experts, George F. Kennan, had called the expansion of NATO into central Europe "the most fateful error of American policy in the entire post-cold-war era."[2] Kennan was the architect of America's post–World War II strategy of containment of the Soviet Union, and like most other Russia experts in the United States, he believed that expanding NATO would damage beyond repair U.S. efforts to turn Russia from enemy to partner.

The U.S. decision to extend NATO membership to countries formerly belonging to the Warsaw Pact was highly controversial, and it was by no means inevitable. After the fall of the Berlin Wall in 1989 and the Soviet Union's collapse in December 1991, the Europe of the cold war—divided politically, militarily, economically, psychologically, and ideologically—had given way to a new Europe, one loaded with

question marks. Would the United States remain engaged now that the main reason for its military presence on the continent after the end of World War II had vanished? Would the Europeans seek to create their own identity, extending their community in the West to the postcommunist states in the East? Would the Russians be part of this new order, or would they turn inward, only to reemerge later as a threat to the West once again?

NATO, created in 1949 to protect Western Europe against a possible Soviet attack, had faced off against the Warsaw Treaty Organization for most of the cold war. At its core was the treaty's collective defense provision—article 5—which stated that an attack on any member of the alliance would be considered an attack on all. The treaty also made clear that member states were committed to democracy, free markets, and peaceful resolution of disputes. NATO thus served both as an institution of shared interests (protection against Soviet attack) and as an institution of shared values (promotion of democracy and peaceful relations among the members). And in article 10 the alliance had declared at its founding that it could invite any European state to join, provided that the country furthered NATO principles and that it contributed to the security of the other alliance members.

With the collapse of the Eastern bloc, NATO had to decide whether it should extend the article 5 guarantee to new countries that wanted to join the West's premier security institution. Originally comprising twelve members (Belgium, Canada, Denmark, France, Iceland, Italy, Luxembourg, the Netherlands, Norway, Portugal, the United Kingdom, and the United States), NATO had added four more countries over the years: Greece and Turkey in 1952, West Germany in 1955, and Spain in 1982. A united Germany had reaffirmed its commitment as a full member of the alliance in 1990. In the aftermath of the cold war, the alliance now had an opportunity to reach out to its former adversaries—the countries of central and eastern Europe, Russia, and the other New Independent States (NIS) of the former Soviet Union. But reaching out did not necessarily mean extending a membership invitation.

The stakes were high as the United States and its allies considered the unprecedented step of considering these states for membership. Bringing some of these countries into NATO could guarantee the security of nations that had often been sacrificed to great power politics in the past, and it might extend Europe's zone of peace and prosperity from the west toward the east. But if Moscow viewed this expansion as

a threat to Russia's core interests and ended its efforts to cooperate with the West, NATO's expansion would damage one of America and Europe's most important post–cold war interests: the development of a democratic, Western-oriented Russia.

When Bill Clinton took office in January 1993, the United States and its European allies had only just begun to address the new challenges. The war and genocide taking place in Bosnia added to the sense that NATO had not adequately addressed the difficulties of managing the post–cold war environment in Europe. And although the central Europeans had begun to press their case for joining NATO to ensure their own security in this new world order, few in the West had taken up their cause.

A year later, in January 1994, President Clinton stood in Prague with the central European leaders and vowed that it was no longer a question of whether NATO would enlarge, but simply a matter of when and how. Three-and-a-half years after those remarks, first in Paris with the signing of the NATO-Russia Founding Act in May 1997, and then in Madrid in July 1997, with the issuance of membership invitations to Poland, Hungary, and the Czech Republic, the United States and its European partners finally began to deliver on that promise.

One could just as easily have expected NATO to dissolve as to expand when the deliberations over its future began. The political philosopher Thomas Hobbes noted more than three hundred years ago that alliances typically disintegrate after the threat against which they were created has disappeared; a recent example in American history was the collapse of the Grand Alliance among the United States, Great Britain, and the Soviet Union soon after the defeat of Nazi Germany in 1945.[3] Clinton had won the presidency by focusing on the economy, not by promising to extend America's most solemn commitment to defend others. Except for a few officials within the German Ministry of Defense, Europeans showed no eagerness to expand NATO's membership. While Russian president Boris Yeltsin had spoken on occasion of Russia's potential desire to join the alliance, the elite in Moscow across the political spectrum were violently opposed to NATO's extension into central Europe.

Most important, if one looked at the executive and legislative branches in the United States in 1993, it was hard to find individuals who thought enlarging NATO was a good idea. With the cold war over and the lessons of the 1992 campaign fresh, only a handful in

Congress showed any interest in NATO's future, and even fewer were thinking in terms of new membership. Resources for foreign policy were diminishing. Meanwhile, those within the bureaucracy who worked on NATO or Russian affairs, particularly those at the Pentagon, were almost completely opposed to expansion. The military was not eager to extend a commitment to defend new members in the event of armed attack, feared the effect on U.S.-Russian security cooperation, and wanted to be sure that new members could make a contribution to Western security.

There were, however, certain features of the domestic and international environment that created a permissive environment for the few proponents of enlargement in the administration and in Congress to push their policy forward. First, the United States was so powerful vis-à-vis both the Europeans and the Russians that once it decided to follow through, there was little that could be done to prevent enlargement from happening. The failure of the Europeans to manage Bosnia led to their greater willingness to follow America's lead. While the Russians could complain about American actions, they were undergoing too much economic and military collapse to block these actions.

Second, within the United States no large organized domestic political constituency opposed expansion; while enlargement never became a big issue for the public, enlargement supporters were able to outorganize the community (largely academics and columnists) that opposed the policy. Had there been any powerful domestic constituencies organized against expansion, as there have been, for example, on trade issues, it is difficult to imagine President Clinton pushing forward with a policy that his military did not initially favor.

Still, in the face of intense bureaucratic opposition, particularly from the Pentagon, how did the few supporters of NATO enlargement within the Clinton administration prevail? What role did domestic politics play in the evolution of this policy? And why did a Republican-controlled Senate in a time of peace overwhelmingly consent to a Democratic president's initiative creating a new American defense commitment in central Europe?

It was America that drove the alliance throughout this process. The allies did have to support America's efforts, and the NATO-Russia Founding Act was vital for securing the policy in Washington and in Brussels. Without the Dayton Peace Accords of November 1995 that ended the fighting in Bosnia, and the reelection of Boris Yeltsin as pres-

ident of Russia in July 1996, it is unlikely that the alliance would have sustained the enlargement effort, both because it would have been harder to justify and because the allies would have feared that Russia would end its Western orientation.

But despite needing allied support, all of the key decisions were made in Washington. The United States developed the program of military cooperation known as the Partnership for Peace. The United States decided on a two-track enlargement policy that would bring in new members but also create a formal agreement with Russia. The United States developed the substance of the NATO-Russia accord, although it asked NATO Secretary-General Javier Solana (with critical, if informal, U.S. assistance) to negotiate the accord to lessen hostility in Europe and in Russia. Finally, despite Italian and French interest in membership for Slovenia and Romania, America decided who would come into NATO in this first round of post–cold war enlargement. Thus to understand the development of NATO enlargement requires understanding the interplay of process, politics, and policy in Washington, D.C.

## The American Foreign Policy Process

How do policies typically develop within the United States government? A core feature of decisionmaking in the executive branch is bureaucratic politics. Over time, scholars studying the inner workings of the bureaucracy have developed three central propositions about the behavior of government officials. First, the decisions that come out of the executive branch typically reflect a compromise reached through the interaction of representatives from different government agencies rather than being the product of any single interest. Different offices and individuals cut deals with one another to ensure that any outcome takes account of their own parochial interests. Add these deals together, and you get a policy acceptable to a range of government interests.

Second, in these negotiations these parochial interests are largely a reflection of organizational roles; in other words, where you stand depends on where you sit. Secretaries of defense will take a stance reflecting the interests of the military, whereas secretaries of commerce will fight for the interests of American business. Agencies and the offices within them have particular missions, and thus from cabinet

members down to desk officers, an individual's approach to issues in many cases can be predicted based on that person's job title.

A third general proposition is closely tied to the second: how these individuals perceive what is at stake is also a reflection of bureaucratic role. Thus, argue proponents of the bureaucratic politics model, what you see also depends on where you sit. In a discussion of military intervention, for example, a Treasury Department official will see a threat to global markets, a State Department official will see a threat to diplomatic interests, and a Pentagon representative will think in terms of military missions.[4]

There are certain kinds of decisionmaking processes, such as the development of budgets, that lend themselves to a study of bureaucratic actors fighting for turf and protecting or seeking to expand missions and resources. The notion that compromises form based on interactions among individuals who reflect their agency or department interest is often quite powerful in these cases. But over the years analysts have put forward critiques of each of the three general propositions about bureaucratic politics.

First, critics have argued that the notion of decisionmaking as the product of bureaucratic bargaining does not account for the hierarchical setting in which decisions are made. National security advisers are more important than desk officers; most significant, the president is not one player among many but rather the one player who can trump the others. Bureaucratic politics may indeed drive many decisions that do not reach the president's radar screen or on which bureaucratic actors have outside supporters (for example, in Congress) who can constrain him. But when the president cares about an issue, decisions reflect his preferences rather than bureaucratic bargaining.[5]

Second, critics of the bureaucratic politics model argue that players take positions based on factors other than where they sit. Hawks and doves, for example, often form their general approach to policies long before they step into a government position. Individuals thus develop their beliefs about issues such as the proper role of military force during their earlier experiences, and these beliefs will shape their preferences once they assume office.[6]

Furthermore, one key official does not have a readily identifiable bureaucratic role to shape that person's preferences: the assistant to the president for national security affairs—better known as the national security adviser—who sits in the West Wing of the White House and

who oversees a small staff that works directly for the president. As one scholar of American foreign policy has written, "This office enjoys an advantage over other bureaucratic organizations in the field of foreign affairs because it has no constituency other than the president himself. Indeed it was created for precisely the purpose of providing the president with assistance in framing national security policy from an organization that had no function other than that of serving him, no allies in Congress, and no bureaucratic interests or identity of its own to advance or protect."[7] Understanding the beliefs held by the national security adviser as well as that official's views of the president's needs is crucial for any analysis of American foreign policy.

Finally, there have also been a large number of studies drawing on psychological experiments that argue that prior beliefs color one's perceptions of a situation. Individuals have prior expectations providing them with "cognitive maps" that aid them in processing information. Because the limits of the human brain mean that we cannot process all of the information available to us when we make decisions, we take mental shortcuts in approaching most problems in life. Often when we confront a new situation, we draw analogies to experiences in our past. It has been common in the post–World War II period, for example, for policymakers to view conflicts through the lenses of the 1938 Munich accords that appeased German aggression; the 1941 Japanese surprise attack on Pearl Harbor; and, in the past two decades, the war in Vietnam. How decisionmakers define problems, assess stakes, and evaluate choices is greatly dependent on prior expectations shaped by the beliefs they hold and may not necessarily reflect bureaucratic position.[8]

In studying any decision, then, we want to be alert to issues of bureaucratic politics and beliefs, as well as to the level of presidential involvement. Did officials argue for or against a policy because of the agency they represented? Did individuals have longstanding beliefs about the issues that colored their perceptions of what was at stake? And how well did they understand what the president wanted and why he wanted it?

## *The Nature of Presidential Decisionmaking*

Whatever one finds in the daily workings of the bureaucracy, no initiative as important as that of NATO enlargement can proceed without the involvement of the president. Initiatives like NATO enlarge-

ment, however, develop over a period of time in which at any given moment the nature of the policy is highly ambiguous, and the president may or may not be aware of where an issue stands in his own government.

Ambiguity is not an exclusive feature of the Clinton administration. When choosing from a menu, any president likes to pick the policy that least forecloses his future options, since he wants to have flexibility to change course if he desires.[9] It is also not unusual for presidents to show different levels of enthusiasm for a policy at different times and in different places. As scholar and practitioner Morton Halperin has written, "Because many issues come at him at once and from many different directions with many different pressures involved, a President's behavior is characterized, perhaps to a surprising extent, by . . . uncommitted thinking. He will often respond at any one time to whichever pressures are momentarily strongest, whether they come from particular elements in the bureaucracy, from foreign governments, or from his own domestic political concerns."[10]

These typical ambiguities have been exacerbated, however, by the personal style of William Jefferson Clinton. He is known by friends and foes alike for his ability to shift positions without hesitation. As Bob Woodward has written in his in-depth study of the Clinton White House, "[Presidential adviser George] Stephanopoulos knew that it was a mistake to assume that any one moment with Clinton, any one conversation, day, or even week reflected Clinton's true feelings or unchanging fundamental attitude about something."[11] And in foreign policy, the president's convictions were generally much weaker than his attitude toward domestic issues such as race relations or health care. Particularly in the first two years of his presidency, Bill Clinton left most foreign policy debates to his advisers so he could concentrate on his domestic agenda.[12]

## *Policy and Political Entrepreneurs*

The ambiguities inherent in presidential decisionmaking provide opportunities for top-level individuals who are keen on pushing particular projects. These are the policy entrepreneurs who must know when the window is open for them to get their ideas on the agenda. Because these windows do not stay open, it pays, as scholar John Kingdon wrote, to "strike while the iron is hot."[13]

There were a number of "compelling problems" that opened the window for NATO enlargement. First was the general concern about instability in central and eastern Europe. In September 1993 National Security Adviser Anthony Lake stated that the administration's strategic vision centered on the enlargement of the community of democracies and market economies to promote peace and prosperity. But where? The central and eastern Europe region, located adjacent to the transatlantic community and showing prospects for success, was a perfect place to demonstrate that the administration could implement its vision. Second, the Clinton administration needed to show that America could continue to lead in the post–cold war world. The president's January 1994 trip to Europe, his first there since assuming office a year earlier, provided a window for demonstrating that the administration had a NATO policy, as did his trip six months later to Warsaw. Finally, Republican inclusion of NATO enlargement as part of the foreign policy plank in their September 1994 Contract with America pushed the window open even further as did continual pressure from the central and eastern Europeans and their supporters in the United States. NATO enlargement could fulfill both a political and policy need for President Clinton, if he had entrepreneurs who could take advantage of the opening.

What characterizes a policy entrepreneur? A policy entrepreneur needs both access and strong beliefs to outmaneuver a bureaucracy that opposes his way of thinking. If you do not have access to the president or to his top advisers, you cannot be an entrepreneur, especially on issues of strategic importance.[14] And strong beliefs lead to persistence, which can overcome bureaucratic lethargy. Morton Halperin has noted that part of what characterizes someone who can move a policy is also personality: "One must be willing to confront those who seek to usurp one's power and to deal with them in an ungentlemanly way. . . . A reputation for chutzpah also helps."[15]

One of the best means to outmaneuver the bureaucracy is through presidential speeches, and access and beliefs are central to using these opportunities. As former secretary of state Henry Kissinger described in his book on American foreign policy: "Many of his [the president's] public pronouncements though ostensibly directed to outsiders, perform a perhaps more important role in laying down guidelines for the bureaucracy. The chief significance of a foreign policy speech by the President may thus be that it settles an internal debate in Washington (a

public statement is more useful for this purpose than an administrative memorandum because it is harder to reverse)."[16]

## *The Political Environment*

Critics of NATO enlargement inside and outside the administration would argue that the president pursued this policy purely for political gain, to win the "Polish vote" and to outflank the Republicans who supported expansion.[17] Meanwhile, the top officials within the administration took great pains in interviews to argue that domestic politics were irrelevant. Neither of these arguments is correct. Political considerations are an inevitable part of crafting a major foreign policy initiative, particularly one that requires support from two-thirds of the Senate. But this fact of American democracy does not mean that the policy adopted had no strategic rationale.[18]

Even if explicit evidence of politics is lacking, we know they figure into the calculations of leaders who face the public at the polls and who also have other agenda items that are affected by how a given policy plays out.[19] The same officials who in interviews deny the role of politics usually add that they understood the political context within which the NATO enlargement decisions took place. And even if his foreign policy advisers were not always thinking about politics, the president and his political advisers surely were. There is nothing new about a story in which the president chooses from among the different options placed before him based in part on his own political calculus.[20] A key player in the enlargement story, National Security Adviser Anthony Lake, understood this well. As an academic writing in the 1980s, Lake and two coauthors wrote, "As politicians, Presidents must be sensitive (as national-security Cabinet members and their bureaucracies often are not) to broad public sentiment, and also to their partisan and electoral interests."[21]

Politics should be part of any good entrepreneur's calculation, especially if the policy requires presidential involvement.[22] The policy entrepreneur may be pushing a policy forward both because he is thinking of strategic interests *and* because he is thinking about partisan politics and winning elections. Policy entrepreneurs may also be political entrepreneurs. But this does not mean that a decision is made solely for domestic political reasons; rather, domestic political calculations are part of the set of inputs that lead to a policy initiative.

The most fruitful approach to policy is to understand how strategy and politics intersect, not which prevails over the other. Returning to our earlier discussion, it is also not enough to debate *whether* the president can dominate his bureaucracy or whether he is overly constrained by it. The issue is *how* individuals operating within highly ambiguous environments enable the president to dominate on issues of concern to him. They do so by operating in both the political and policy realms and by using such tactics as writing the president's remarks to prevail in bureaucratic debates. None of what takes place inside the executive branch occurs in a vacuum: political pressures shape the development of administration initiatives, even those that are developed to respond to strategic imperatives.

## Entrepreneurship and NATO Enlargement

There are different types of entrepreneurial skills, including the ability to conceptualize a policy and the ability to enforce a decision. Conceptualization alone is insufficient to move the policy process. In his book on policy entrepreneurship, Bush administration official Richard Haass quoted his former colleague Condoleezza Rice as saying, "You don't have a policy unless you can get it done. You can have the best policy in the world on paper, it can be intellectually beautiful and elegant, but if you can't get it done, it never happened."[23] It is possible that one individual could possess both skills, but in the enlargement process, Anthony Lake played the role of conceptualizer and Assistant Secretary of State Richard Holbrooke was the enforcer. Lake and the president laid out the vision between September 1993 and July 1994, and Holbrooke then had the "chutzpah" to move the policy forward in the fall of 1994.

But even after Lake and Holbrooke had set up and pushed the policy forward, it still had to be implemented. Deputy Secretary of State Strobe Talbott, concerned about the effects of enlargement on U.S.-Russian relations, took over the policy in the spring of 1995 to run its two tracks: enlargement into central Europe and an agreement between NATO and Russia. And even after the success of this effort in 1997, with the signing of the NATO-Russia Founding Act in May and the NATO invitation summit in July, the policy still required support from two-thirds of the U.S. Senate. Not trusting the bureaucracy at the State

Department to run the process, the new national security adviser, Samuel R. Berger, tapped former National Security Council staffer Jeremy Rosner to run the ratification campaign. Assisted by key staffers on Capitol Hill and by lobbyists, Rosner's efforts overwhelmed the countervailing pressure by enlargement opponents seeking to build momentum against Senate consent.

## Process, Politics, and Policy

Bureaucrats look out for their parochial office or agency interests. Policy entrepreneurs take advantage of "policy windows" to change an agenda in ambiguous settings. Presidents choose policies in an environment that is shaped and constrained by their political needs. But while process and politics are important, the substance of the policy is ultimately what all the debating and maneuvering is about.

NATO's enlargement provoked tremendous controversy because different individuals had markedly different visions of how best to shape the post–cold war environment in Europe. Some who favored enlargement were following in the footsteps of President Woodrow Wilson and believed that the development of democracies and market economies in central and eastern Europe could create peace and prosperity there. They believed that the prospect of membership in the West's premier security institution would be powerful incentive for elites to continue on the path to reform. Other supporters focused more on the need for stability along Germany's eastern border, fearing that unrest there might lead Germany to believe that it had to undertake unilateral security efforts in eastern Europe. Still other enlargement supporters had not rid themselves of the specter of the threat from Moscow and saw the end of the cold war as providing an opportunity to extend NATO's geostrategic reach should Russia ever again seek to dominate its European neighbors.

Passions ran just as strongly on the other side. Those who saw the end of the cold war as a chance to cooperate with Russia to reduce the dangers of nuclear war by safely dismantling and storing thousands of Russian nuclear warheads were appalled by NATO expansion; these opponents believed that Moscow would react to NATO's inclusion of former Warsaw Pact nations as a direct affront and would abandon its efforts to cooperate with the West. Still others thought NATO had

become over time the most effective military alliance in history, and they feared that adding new states in the east would dilute its ability to deal effectively with problems that might arise in Europe and elsewhere.

Process, politics, and policy. The stakes were high, and proponents and opponents were equally passionate about their position on NATO enlargement. Examining in detail how the smaller number of proponents defeated the opposition, and why the politics favored enlargement supporters not only helps us understand the reason the United States developed this major initiative but also provides larger lessons for those seeking to understand how America makes its foreign policy choices.