Beyond the Realist Model
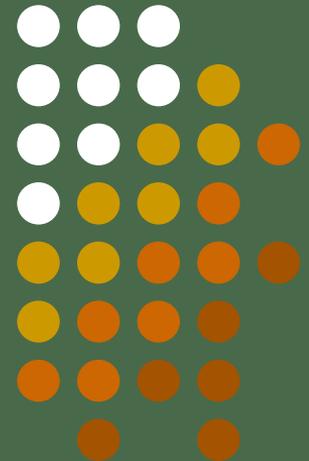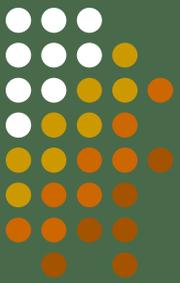
Realist Model

- National Interests Dominate National Security Policy-Making
  - States have clear unambiguous goals
  - Changes in leaders and institutions are overshadowed by
    - national interests
    - Geopolitical factors
  - Decisions are implemented faithfully

Decision-making in the Realist Model
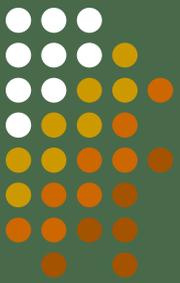
- Identification of major alternative courses of action (options)
- Accurate estimation of costs/benefits of options
- Resist premature cognitive closure
- Distinguish between possible & probable events

- Tolerate ambiguity
- Assess situation from others' perspective
- Distinguish between relevant & irrelevant information
- Resist premature action
- Adjust to real changes in situation
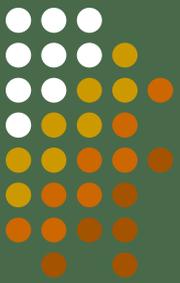
Other Models

- *Based on experimental studies in psychology & sociology, historical case analysis by historians & political scientists*
- Call into question the assumptions of the realist model
- Leaders Matter:
  - Individual Psychology & Crises (Holsti)
  - Individual Motivations & Psychology (Allison & Halperin), (Jervis)
- Group Dynamics Matters:
  - Pathologies of Group Psychology (Janis)
- Institutions Matter:
  - Organizational Behavior (Allison & Halperin)

Individual Psychology

Crisis & Stress

(Holsti)
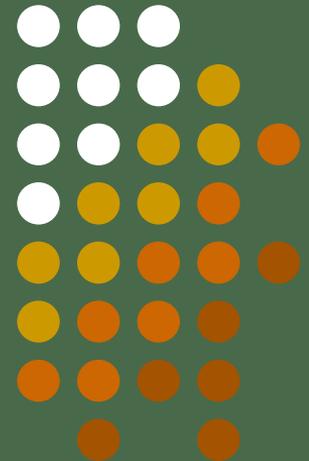
Crisis

- *situation of unanticipated threat to important values in a restricted decision timeframe*
  - High threat
  - Short time
  - High uncertainty

- ➔ **Stress**

Crisis Subverts Assumptions of Realist Model

- Curvilinear relationship between stress & performance
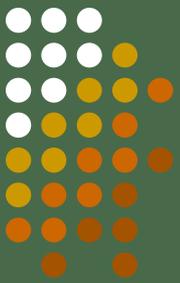
Stress & Performance

- Time pressure is not just about clock time
  - complexity & importance of task
- Crisis & stress ➜ acceleration of perception of time passage
  - ➜ truncate search for options
  - ➜ resort to stereotypes of adversary & historical metaphors for current situation
  - ➜ accept consonant information while filtering out dissonant information (cognitive dissonance)
  - ➜ interpret ambiguous information as supporting prior view
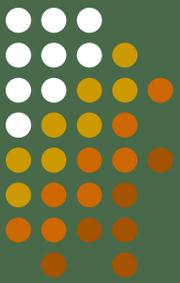
Stress & Performance

- skews cost/benefit analysis to reinforce preconceived assessments

- Solidify\ies decision-making group
  - Tendency to reduce "in" group size
  - select trusted friends & advisors (share common values, visions, histories, perceptions, & political fates with investment in current policies)
    - see JANIS for effects of this

Individual Psychology

Bureaucratic Politics

(Allison & Halperin)
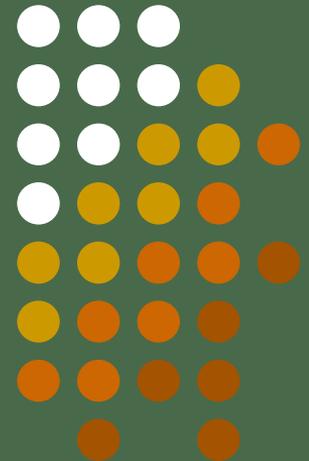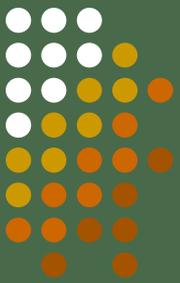
Bureaucratic Politics Model

- Government agenda-setting & option formulation
  - Driven by *bargaining* among hierarchically positioned players in a policy game)
    - individualistic conceptions of national interests & threats
    - domestic political interests
    - personal interests
    - organizational interests
      - Awareness of existing implementing agents' configuration, resources, operating procedures, etc. constrains decision game

Bureaucratic Politics Model

- Policy decisions follow from
  - Bargaining
  - Compromise

Decision ➜ "Action Games"

- Implementation by subordinate agencies
  - Cascading decisions to lower level decision-makers
  - $\sum$ decisions ≠ policy intent
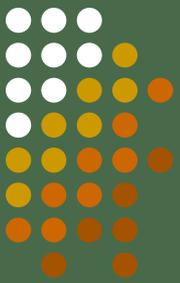
Consequences

- Decisions not a single rational choice
  - Or necessarily the "best" choice
- "Mixed" motive outcome
  - National interests may be subordinate to other interests

Group Think

(Janis)
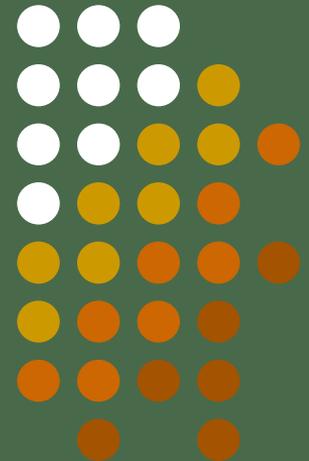
Pathologies of Small Group Decision-making

- Highly cohesive small group
- Isolation from larger policy making environment
- Lack of tradition of impartial/open leadership
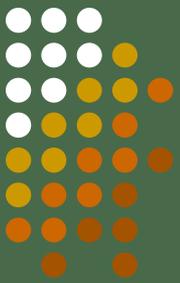
Manifestations

- Illusion of invulnerability, excessive optimism, under-estimate risks

- Unquestioned belief in group's morality, including ethical/moral foundation of decision

- Ability to discount information that might call into question past decisions by the group
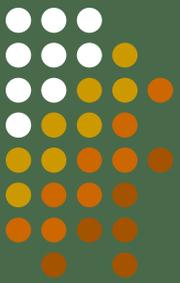
Manifestations

- Stereotyping adversary as evil, weak, or stupid and therefore not a reliable partner for negotiation & compromise

- Pressure to block deviation or dissention in the group from consensus

- Shared illusion of unanimity

Consequences

- Incomplete survey of objective and alternatives
  - Failure to reexamine previously dismissed alternatives
- Failure to fully analyze risks of preferred choice
- Poor information search
- Selective bias in processing information at hand
- Failure to work out contingency plans

Organizational Politics
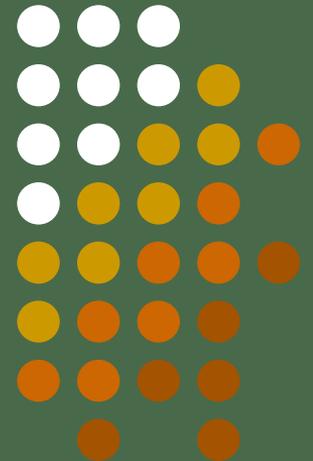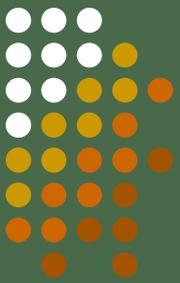
Organizational Politics

- Organizations define themselves by their missions
  - Develop a self-image & sense of purpose
- Large complex organizations need SOPs in order to function
  - SOPs help large organization operate, but constrain flexibility & innovation
  - Options are "build into" existing organizational missions, routines – but not all options
- Organizational SOPs & discretion can lead implementation to differ from decision

Misperception

(Jervis)
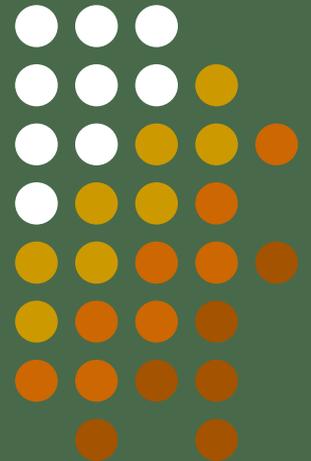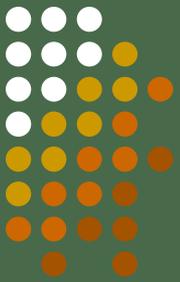
Hypotheses

- Decision-makers fit incoming information into existing theories & images
  - Decision-makers often fail to realize that information consistent with their theories may be consistent with other views
- Existing theories & images can easily resist piecemeal flows of new information
- Decision-makers often rush to judgment
  - Especially in the face of ambiguous information
- Implementation of decisions may convey a different message to the target than the sender intended

Hypotheses

- Decision-makers tend to see the behavior of others as more centralized, disciplined, coordinated, and controlled than it is.

- Decision-makers tend to believe that their intentions are easily & accurately perceived