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WASHINGTON UNIVERSITY

University College

International Affairs

**FOREIGN POLICY MISMANAGEMENT  
DURING AMERICAN PRESIDENTIAL TRANSITIONS**

by

Linda Elyse Schulte

A thesis presented to the  
Graduate School of Arts and Sciences  
of Washington University in  
partial fulfillment of the  
requirements for the  
degree of Master of Arts

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## **ABSTRACT**

Despite vast literature on American foreign policy and presidential decision-making, little attention has been given to the problems associated with presidential transitions. The American presidential transition period is accompanied by three limitations that threaten the effectiveness of presidential authority. First, presidential authority is unclear in the ambiguity of the transition period. Second, new administrations struggle to incorporate overlapping initiatives and personnel into new policies and priorities. Third, inexperience can cripple a new administration in the first few months of a presidency. These limitations are illustrated by an analysis of two transitional foreign policy crises: the Bay of Pigs crisis overlapping the Eisenhower and Kennedy administrations and the Somalia intervention overlapping the Bush and Clinton administrations. This analysis demonstrates the importance of transitional limitations as independent variables which are magnified by other issues including groupthink, bureaucratic politics, and Congressional advocacy. The Transitional Limitations Model is introduced to explain the role of transitional limitations and multiple intervening variables in causing American foreign policy miscalculations during the presidential transition period.

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## INTRODUCTION

The American democratic system periodically allows for a rapid and dramatic turnover in executive leadership. Within a 24 hour period, a completely different team is guiding the direction and implementation of American policy at home and abroad. Remarkably, this rapid turnover is not the result of a violent revolution, but instead is an established and peaceful institution of the American democratic system. In the post-World War II period alone, the United States has experienced 11 presidential transitions. Of these transitions, 7 represented a complete turnover in executive leadership from one political party to another. The presidential transition period brings new personalities, procedures, policies, and priorities to the decision-making process. As this thesis will discuss, the period can also result in dramatic foreign policy miscalculations at the hands of inexperienced administrations.

Despite these dramatic implications, the presidential transition period is neglected in the literature examining American foreign policy crises. Only a handful of sources analyze the role of the transition period on American foreign policy. These include Campbell & Steinberg's *Difficult Transitions: Foreign Policy Troubles at the Outset of Presidential Power* (2008) and Mosher, Clinton, & Lang's *Presidential Transitions and Foreign Affairs* (1987). Many other sources address foreign policy crises that occurred during a presidential transition, but they overlook the obvious role of the transition period itself. Instead, these sources focus on other causes including bureaucratic politics, psychological influences on decision-making, and the role of Congress. These causes play an important role in transitional foreign policy crises, but their influence on presidential decision-making raises an important question that is not addressed by

existing analyses. Why are these factors allowed to dominate presidential decision-making? This thesis will address that question within the context of the presidential transition period. During the transitional foreign policy crises discussed, transitional limitations explain the dominating influence of non-presidential forces on foreign policy decision-making.

This thesis focuses on three limitations imposed by the presidential transition period: ambiguity, the holdover effect, and inexperience. The transfer of power from one administration to the next temporarily restricts the power and effectiveness of the presidency. Ambiguity stems directly from this transfer of power. Between the presidential election and inauguration, a power vacuum occurs as neither the outgoing nor the incoming administrations are able to govern effectively. The political mandate to govern is transferred 11 weeks before the official transfer of constitutional authority. Outgoing administrations must either defer decisions to the next administration or initiate policies that they will not be able to fully implement.

The holdover effect also stems directly from the transfer of power. The holdover effect refers to initiatives that overlap administrations. Most policies, especially in the foreign policy realm, cannot be brought to a neat conclusion at the end of a presidential term. Each new administration must decide how to respond to the policies and practices initiated by their predecessors. Similarly, new administrations will often reappoint officials in sensitive posts from the previous administration. The presence of holdover personnel has important consequences on the decision-making dynamics of the new team.

The third transitional limitation is perhaps the most obvious. Inexperience can cripple an administration during the first few months of a new presidency.

Administrations must learn how to deal with decisions at the presidential level. Most modern presidents have had very little experience with foreign policy. This experience is only gained with time in office. Additionally, administrations are most often comprised of officials who have never worked together before. This adds an additional challenge to the decision-making process, especially in a crisis situation when decisions must be made with very little time or information.

Together, these factors have a limiting impact on presidential decision-making that should be considered when examining transitional foreign policy crises. These limitations create a situation of “policy uncertainty.” For the purposes of this thesis, “policy uncertainty” refers to presidential indecision or inattention resulting in an absence of presidential leadership. Policy uncertainty is especially crippling in foreign policy when presidential leadership is necessary to both determine and communicate American interests abroad.

To illustrate the limitations of the presidential transition period, this thesis will focus on presidential decision-making during two transitional foreign policy crises: the Bay of Pigs crisis which overlapped the administrations of Dwight D. Eisenhower and John F. Kennedy in 1960-61 and the Somalia intervention which overlapped the administrations of George H.W. Bush and Bill Clinton in 1992-94. The striking parallels between these two crises illustrate the dangers of the presidential transition period. In each case, effective presidential decision-making was hindered by transitional limitations. The resulting policy uncertainty (presidential indecision or inattention) allowed other forces to dominate foreign policy decisions. In each case, the absence of presidential leadership resulted in a dramatic miscalculation with tragic consequences. These striking



parallels in crises thirty years apart demonstrate the prominence of transitional problems in the American democratic system.

Analysis of these cases also reveals that the causes prominent in existing literature are not as important to transitional foreign policy miscalculations as the limitations stemming from the presidential transition period. In this thesis, the relationship between transitional limitations and foreign policy miscalculations is illustrated by what I will refer to as the Transitional Limitations Model. The model relies on several accepted terms in political science research: independent variable, dependent variable, and intervening variable. An independent variable is a phenomenon which causes another phenomenon to occur. The dependent variable is the phenomenon that is caused by the presence of an independent variable (Johnson & Joslyn, 1995, p. 45). As Johnson and Joslyn explain, this two-factor relationship is not enough to examine most political science situations. In *Political Science Research Methods* (1995), they define intervening variables as a way to complete this analysis, “Intervening variables come between an independent and dependent variable and help explain the process by which one influences the other” (Johnston & Joslyn, 1995, p. 46). Using this terminology, the Transitional Limitations Model identifies transitional limitations as the independent variable which leads to the dependent variable of foreign policy miscalculation. This contrasts existing analyses which identifies factors including bureaucratic politics, groupthink, and the role of Congress as independent variables leading to the policy miscalculation. Using the Transitional Limitations Model, this thesis will argue that these analyses are incomplete because they fail to address the crucial role of the presidential transition period in deflecting presidential attention from American foreign policy. In a more complete

analysis, bureaucratic politics, Congressional advocacy, and psychological decision-making perspectives function as intervening variables which magnify the policy uncertainty generated by the presidential transition period.

## **AMERICAN FOREIGN POLICY DURING PRESIDENTIAL TRANSITIONS**

Ronald Reagan described the period as, “nothing less than a miracle,” while Nikita Khrushchev decried the “damn elections” that impeded normal diplomatic functions (Reagan and Khrushchev quoted in Mosher, Clinton, & Lang, 1987, p. 28). Regardless of your perspective, the 11 weeks between presidential elections and inaugurations has a profound impact on American foreign policy. During this period, a power vacuum often occurs: the newly elected administration lacks constitutional authority while the outgoing administration lacks the political will to govern effectively. Foreign governments sense the futility in dealing with a ‘lame duck administration,’ but it is difficult for the incoming administration to fill this void without the constitutional authority to govern. Incoming administrations are also careful to avoid the appearance of dual heads of state. During interparty transitions, which are often marked by significant policy differences between the outgoing and incoming administrations, this power vacuum is even more prominent.

Foreign policy decisions are especially vulnerable to the dangers of the transition period. These decisions are elevated to the world stage, and require delicate interactions with both allies and adversaries. Shortly after taking office, President John F. Kennedy noted the heightened danger of foreign policy decisions. “Domestic policy can only defeat us,” he said, “foreign policy can kill us” (Mosher et al., 1987, p. 13). Foreign policy decisions are also accompanied by a greater sense of urgency. While domestic affairs issues can usually be deferred until after the transition period has passed, decisions in the foreign policy realm generally require an immediate and strategically coordinated response.

Despite the incoherence and inexperience that marks the transition period, the American government must continue to function. Strategies must be planned and implemented, diplomatic maneuvers must continue smoothly, and international crises must be averted. The transfer of power from one administration to the next cannot signal a waning of American power and influence. Contrasting this need for consistency is the promise that each presidential campaign makes of new initiatives and an improved outlook on world affairs. Each new administration must reconcile these expectations with the realities of the office and the world situation. This interplay between expectation and reality comes to the forefront when new administrations must implement policies and initiatives put in place by the previous administration. In the months following inauguration, when the expectations for change are high, these administrations are forced to confront the legacy of their predecessor.

This thesis will examine the planning and implementation of responses to international crises that overlap administrations during the transition period. These overlap policies not only reveal the danger of the transition period, but also the limits of presidential power in the American democratic system. The new administration often lacks the experience and authority to effectively manipulate the levers of power available to the presidency. During these transitional crises, a time when presidential power is most needed, a leadership vacuum allows other forces to dominate presidential decision making. To fully understand the implications of the presidential transition period, I will start with an overview of foreign policy during presidential transitions. I will look at the foundations of presidential power within the contexts of American democracy and international crises. Then, I will examine how these foundations are threatened by the

transition period. Finally, I will introduce a model for examining policy mismanagement within the context of the transition period.

### **Presidential Power in the Context of American Democracy**

Two hundred and forty years after the signing of the Declaration of Independence, the American democratic system has evolved from a great experiment to a thriving, though imperfect, political system. Efforts to duplicate this system can be found around the world, with varying degrees of success. In 1992, political economist Francis Fukuyama went so far as to suggest that liberal democracy had achieved ‘universal validity’ on the world stage (Fukuyama, 1992). However, questions remain about the effectiveness of democracies in the foreign policy realm. These questions were first raised in the earliest years of American democracy. In 1841, Alexis de Tocqueville outlined these questions and concluded that democracy was a ‘decidedly inferior’ form of government in the field of foreign affairs. He argued that democracies lacked the centralization, determination, and discernment necessary for prudent and effective foreign policy. de Tocqueville wrote,

“...a democracy is unable to regulate the details of an important undertaking, to persevere in a design, and to work out its execution in the presence of serious obstacles. It cannot combine its measures with secrecy, and will not await their consequences with patience.” (de Tocqueville, 2007, p. 191)

Early statesmen resolved this issue with an isolationist foreign policy (Mastanduno, 1994). However, disengagement is no longer feasible in today’s interconnected world where America is looked to as a global leader.

America’s rise as a global superpower discredits de Tocqueville’s claim that democracy and effective foreign policy are incompatible. Scholar Kenneth Waltz concluded instead that, “American institutions facilitate rather than discourage the quick

identification of problems, the pragmatic quest for solutions, the ready confrontation of dangers, the willing expenditure of energies, and the open criticism of policies” (Waltz, 1967, p. 307). Michael Mastanduno supports this claim. He argued that the American democratic system is more an asset than a burden to the foreign policy making process. Mastanduno highlights three ways that the democratic system brings increased legitimacy and duration to American foreign policy. First, he argues that the inherent tension between Congress and the Executive can be an effective bargaining tool, allowing the Executive to appear reasonable and moderate to foreign governments. He adds that the need for public support lends legitimacy to foreign policy and can increase the duration of international commitments. Finally, Mastanduno argues that the openness of American democracy adds legitimacy because foreign leaders can actively track adherence to international commitments (Mastanduno, 1994, p. 261).

Waltz and Mastanduno agree that strong presidential leadership is a necessary component of effective democratic foreign policy. Waltz noted that periods of governmental effectiveness correspond directly with the administrations of bold and strong presidents (Waltz, 1967, p. 47). Mastanduno also argued that the legitimacy and duration of American foreign policy is dependent on effective presidential leadership. He wrote, “It may require time, effort, and the expense of political capital, but a determined President with a sense of foreign policy purpose can manage the constraints of the domestic political system” (Mastanduno, 1994, p. 261). As Waltz and Mastanduno demonstrate, presidential leadership can fill the gap of centralized decision making, determination, and discernment that de Tocqueville observed.

## **Presidential Power in the Context of International Crises**

The need for presidential leadership in foreign affairs is most prominent during international crises. Karl W. Deutsch (1982) identified four characteristics of international crises that explain the need for presidential leadership. First, the situation must represent a major turning point with multiple divergent outcomes possible. Next, the situation must require a decision. Third, the situation must involve primary national interests for at least one participant. Finally, the situation is acute rather than chronic, with a short time period to make a decision (Deutsch, 1982, p. 16). Deutsch's characteristics illustrate the need for centralized decision making, discernment, and demonstrated resolve in international crises. In the presence of a defined threat, when a rapid decision is necessary, strong presidential leadership is required to gather adequate information and determine the direction of an American response. No other entity in the American democratic system is equipped to fill this role.

During international crises, information about a foreign government's capabilities and intentions is crucial to the decision making process. However, the American democratic system presents multiple sources of information ranging from Congressional hearings to media reports to public opinion. In his 2001 book, *Democracy and Coercive Diplomacy*, Kenneth Schultz writes that the effort to communicate resolve is central to international crises (Schultz, 2001, p. 4). A government's decision to concede or escalate tensions is based on estimation. Decision makers must evaluate which course best advances their national interest. Rational governments will only wage war with a reasonable expectation of success. Consequently, war can be avoided if a government is

able to threaten consequences that are sufficiently burdensome and credible to deter hostility.

Schultz further argues that asymmetric information is the basis for international conflict. Asymmetric information is the situation that arises when, “states have information about their willingness and ability to wage war that other states cannot observe” (Schultz, 2001, p. 4). The risk of asymmetric information is exacerbated when multiple sources of information are present, as in a democratic system. Uncertainty results when foreign governments are unable to determine a rival’s capabilities and interests. The uncertainty of asymmetric information escalates the tension and danger of an international crisis. Decision makers are only able to advance their national interest by effectively demonstrating resolve and limiting the effect of asymmetric information. Schultz continues that, “Overcoming asymmetric information requires that actors find ways to reveal their resolve in a credible manner, given a strategic environment that encourages deception” (Schultz, 2001, p. 5). In the American democratic system, presidential leadership is necessary to overcome asymmetric information and present a unified front to foreign governments and domestic constituents. However, as this thesis seeks to demonstrate, presidential leadership is severely limited by the incoherence of the presidential transition period.

### **Defining the Transition Period**

The presidential transition period has not always been the frenetic blur of statements, appointments, and initiatives that we observe today. Prior to World War I, the transition period featured at most a series of informal meetings with trusted advisors (Campbell & Steinberg, 2008). When Herbert Hoover was elected in 1928, he took full



advantage of the four month period between the November election and his inaugural on March 4<sup>th</sup>. His transition included a two-month goodwill tour to Latin America and a month-long fishing trip in Florida (Burke, 2000). Four years later and in the midst of a severe economic crisis, the long transition period was more burden than pleasure for Franklin Roosevelt as he watched the country's banking system collapse before he took office in March (Neustadt, 1990). The passage of the Twentieth Amendment in 1933 moved the inauguration from March 4 to January 20 and shortened the transition period by half (Burke, 2000).

By 1960, awareness had grown of the vulnerability that the country faced during the transition period. Increased transition costs accompanied the increased awareness. Daily intelligence briefings for presidential candidates were arranged after the nominating convention (Mosher et al., 1987, p. 59). Task forces were formed to make recommendations on the issues and challenges facing the new administration. After the election, representatives of the incoming administration were even placed on government payroll to work side by side with their outgoing counterparts (Mosher et al., 1987, p. 158). Between the Truman/Eisenhower transition and the Eisenhower/Kennedy transition, total transition costs jumped from \$385,000 to \$1.3 million (Mosher, 1985). Despite the increased planning, the Eisenhower/Kennedy transition witnessed one of the clearest examples of transitional incoherency during the Bay of Pigs crisis. This crisis will be discussed in more detail later. After this experience, President Kennedy appointed the Commission on Campaign Costs which recommended increased support for candidates during the campaign and transition period. The Presidential Transition Act of 1963 allocated government funds to the transition process and set aside office space

and other resources for the transition teams (Mosher, 1985, p. 158). Proponents of the Act argued that transitional challenges and expenses were a public, not a partisan issue.

Legislation enacted in response to the Watergate scandal also smoothed the transition process. Prior to 1978, outgoing presidents could destroy or keep any documents, leaving nothing to brief the incoming administration. Mosher et. al (1987) describe the absence of documentation for the nation's highest office,

“It has also meant that every new president and his staff find that the White House ‘cupboards are bare’ – bare of the back-up records on foreign and national security affairs as well as on other matters. One former member of the national security staff remarked, with some exaggeration, that the only paper left for the newcomers was toilet paper.”

(Mosher et al., 1987, p. 75)

In 1978, Congress passed the Presidential Records Act, mandating that presidential records become government property immediately following the end of an administration. This gave incoming administrations valuable background information and procedural guides to follow during the first year in office. Since 1978, very little legislation has been enacted to smooth the transition process. Despite the ever-increasing costs and personnel associated with the period, the policies and practices remain non-binding.

### **Presidential Power in the Context of the Transition Period**

The transfer of power from one administration to the next weakens the strength and effectiveness of presidential power. In *Presidential Power and the Modern Presidents*, Neustadt equates presidential power with the power to persuade (p. 28). He argues that effective presidential authority cannot exist in the absence of persuasion. Neustadt bases effective presidential authority on the presence of five factors (p. 18). First, the president's involvement must be unambiguous. There should be no doubt that

the orders come directly from the president and express his personal decision. Second, the president's meaning must be unambiguous. All of those involved should understand precisely what the president hopes to achieve. Third, appropriate publicity should be given to the presidential directive. Neustadt explains,

“Even when there is no need for ambiguity, no possibility of imprecision, no real discretionary leeway, and nothing to misunderstand, compliance may depend not only on the respondent's awareness of what he is to do but also on the awareness of others that he has been told to do it.” (Neustadt, 1990, p. 20)

Fourth, those receiving presidential orders should possess all requisite knowledge and the resources necessary to successfully implement the directive. Finally, Neustadt argues that presidential effectiveness rests on the knowledge of all involved that the president has the authority to make this request.

Neustadt's analysis highlights the danger of the transition period because each of these factors is threatened by the incoherence of the period and by the inexperience of new administrations. Neustadt's factors require clear authority, experience, and adequate command of resources. However, the limitations of the transition period threaten these requirements for presidential authority and challenge presidential effectiveness.

#### *Transitional Limitations on Presidential Power: Ambiguity*

Article II, Section I of the United States Constitution notes that, “The Executive power shall be vested in a President of the United States of America.” Despite this clear explanation of authority, America periodically experiences a lapse in executive leadership. During the 11 weeks between presidential elections and inaugurations, a power vacuum occurs: the newly elected administration lacks constitutional authority while the outgoing administration lacks the political will to govern effectively. In the final year of a presidential term, influence slowly wanes as domestic and international

focus shifts to the campaign. Foreign governments sense the futility in dealing with a ‘lame duck administration.’ Secretary of State Dean Acheson described his experience at a NATO Council meeting in 1952 after Eisenhower’s election,

“Our (foreign colleagues) treated us with the gentle and affectionate solicitude that one might show to the dying, but asked neither help nor advice nor commitment for a world we would not share with them. For this they were waiting for our successors.”  
(Acheson quoted in Mosher, 1985, p. 472).

Despite the ‘lame duck’ effect, it is difficult for incoming administrations to fill this void without the constitutional authority to govern. Incoming administrations are also careful to avoid the appearance of dual heads of state. This power vacuum is most prominent in interparty transitions, which are often marked by significant policy differences between the outgoing and incoming administrations. In the absence of the Cold War threat, significant foreign policy differences have emerged between the two parties, which add to the incoherence of presidential transitions.

Another concern during the transition period is that other nations will take advantage of this period of incoherence and relative weakness. Maurice Stans, director of the budget during the Eisenhower administration warned, “For an enemy, January 20 would be the ideal date for an attack on the United States,” (Stans quoted in Mosher et al., 1987, p. 14). This awareness of the vulnerability that the country faced during the transition period was confirmed in 1980 when the Soviet Union began offensive measures against Poland immediately following Reagan’s election (Campbell & Steinberg, 2008, p. 24).

### *Transitional Limitations on Presidential Power: Inexperience*

The dangers of transition do not end on Inauguration Day. In fact, the first few months of a presidency can be even more treacherous until the new administration gains presidential experience. Most modern presidents have little experience in foreign affairs prior to assuming the presidency and are ill-equipped to respond to world events within the first months of the administration. President Kennedy described this problem,

“If someone comes in to tell me this or that about the minimum wage bill I have no hesitation in overruling them. But you always assume that the military and intelligence people have some secret not available to ordinary mortals.”

(Kennedy quoted in Campbell & Steinberg, 2008, p. 27)

This hesitation is only improved with foreign policy experience, something post-WWII presidents have not had until the first few years of their terms.

Inexperience is amplified when a long period of time has elapsed since a political party last controlled the White House. President Bill Clinton experienced this in 1992 when he became the first Democratic president in twelve years. The time lapse added to the challenge of finding qualified people to fill administration slots, especially in foreign policy. Clinton described the challenge,

“... the fact that so many sub-cabinet positions had not been finalized had more to do with the fact that the Democrats had been out of power for twelve years. We had to replace a lot of people.” (Clinton quoted in Campbell & Steinberg, 2008, p. 11)

The challenge of finding qualified people for administration posts has increased exponentially in recent years. Campbell and Steinberg explain that the increased challenge is due in part to the creation of new government departments,

“...since 2000, the last election in which party control of the White House changed hands, a whole new set of agencies and their associate leadership positions have been created, most notably the Department of Homeland Security, the Office of the Director of National Intelligence (and the reformed intelligence

community bureaucracy), and the Homeland Security Council.” (Campbell & Steinberg, 2008, p. 31)

After an interparty transition such as Bush/Obama in 2009, each of these newly-created agencies are led by someone with little or no direct experience with the agency. A group learning process is created at both the departmental and presidential level. Compared to other democracies, the United States has a much larger percentage of administration posts that are filled by political appointment. Even after the agency leadership and Cabinet level positions are filled, second and third tier positions remain unfilled during the extensive vetting and approval process (Campbell & Steinberg, 2008).

During the transition period, policy creation and implementation are both significantly hindered by the inexperience of the new administration. The creation of effective, well-thought policy is very difficult for a new administration. In any presidency, campaign promises, platforms, and expectations must be reconciled with the realities of the office. Henry Kissinger, National Security Advisor and Secretary of State for President Nixon cautioned that,

“...the pledges of each new Administration are like leaves on a turbulent sea. No President-Elect or his advisors can possibly know upon what shore they may finally be washed by storm of deadlines, ambiguous information, complex choices, and manifold pressures which descends upon all leaders of a great nation,” (Kissinger quoted in Campbell & Steinberg, 2008, p. 42).

This inexperience severely limits presidential effectiveness during the first year of a new administration.

#### *Transitional Limitations on Presidential Power: Holdover Effect*

In addition to the limiting effects of ambiguity and inexperience, new administrations face another challenge during their first months in office. They must also deal with initiatives and personnel that carry over from the previous administration. Most

presidential policies and initiatives, especially in the foreign policy realm, do not come to a neat conclusion at the end of a presidential term. Dean Rusk, Secretary of State for the Kennedy administration, remarked on this trend:

“We pass our problems on to each other. During the Berlin Crisis of 1961-62, a reporter asked me what my hopes were with regard to the Berlin Crisis. I said, ‘I hope to be able to pass it along to my successor.’” (Rusk quoted in Mosher et al., 1987, p. 155)

Each new administration must decide how to manage the work they inherit from their predecessors. In many cases, the policies of previous administrations are not compatible with the priorities of the new administration. The policy may also contradict positions and commitments advanced during the presidential campaign. As new administrations quickly discover, presidents report to a much broader constituency than presidential candidates. Campbell and Steinberg explain that, “Other countries’ views figure little during the campaign (since they don’t vote), but take on much great significance when the new administration turns to them for support on national security priorities” (Campbell & Steinberg, 2008, p. 47). Despite this incompatibility, holdover policies are often too far entrenched to abandon without serious consequences and the new administration can be left with impossible choices.

Holdover personnel can also present challenges to the new administration. Administration officials in sensitive positions are often reappointed by the new administration to protect national security interests. During the Eisenhower/Kennedy administration, Kennedy reappointed CIA director Allen Dulles, who would play a major role in the Bay of Pigs debacle. Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff Colin Powell experienced the Bush/Clinton transition first-hand when his term extended into the first year of Clinton’s presidency. More recently, President Obama reappointed Robert Gates

as Secretary of Defense to ensure continuity for ongoing military operations in Iraq and Afghanistan. Holdover personnel bring valuable skills and experience, but they can also present challenges for the decision-making dynamics of the new team. Officials who are accustomed to the practices of the previous administration must adapt to new policies and procedures. These dynamics can also limit critical analysis during the decision-making process if loyalties to the previous administration's policies shift these officials from analysts to advocates.

This thesis's focus on transitional limitations should not be interpreted as an argument against the American democratic system. Transitional limitations are the unavoidable cost of the democratic process. However, this cost is accompanied by the benefits of legitimacy, flexibility, and new ideas. The case studies in this thesis demonstrate not only the weaknesses of American democracy, but also the strengths. Transitional crises present invaluable and irreplaceable lessons for new administrations. The flexibility of the American democratic system provided both the Kennedy and Clinton administrations with the opportunity to learn from their early mistakes. Additionally, the inherent accountability of a democratic system gives each administration added incentive to pursue those opportunities.

### **Reevaluating the Transition Period**

As these challenges suggest, it is insufficient to only consider the 11 weeks between the election and inaugural when examining the hazards of the transition period. In fact, the first few months of a new administration can be even more treacherous. President Eisenhower explained this danger when he cautioned that,



“... an emergency, arising at home or abroad during the first twenty-four hours after a new President takes his oath of office would demand decisions and actions which, by reason of the unfamiliarity of new officials with their duties and authority, might result in bewilderment and lack of intelligent reaction, with resultant damage to the United States.” (Eisenhower quoted in Campbell & Steinberg, 2008, p. 26)

As Eisenhower observed, the first year of any administration includes a significant learning curve which limits the effectiveness and leadership of the office.

In *The President's Agenda* (1999), Paul C. Light examines the counteracting trends that can be observed over a presidential term. Light quotes a Nixon aide who explained,

“The more we seemed to learn about the domestic system, the less we could do. We had our best shot at the start of the term but didn't have the opportunity to cash in. By the time we had the organization, the opportunity was closed.” (p. 36)

Light identifies these trends as the cycle of decreasing influence and the cycle of increasing effectiveness. The cycle of decreasing influence is based on political capital, time, and energy. Starting in the first months of the campaign, new administrations usually experience a drop in both public approval ratings and support in Congress. Light also observes that every administration in the last 50 years has experienced a loss in party House seats in the midterm Congressional election (Light, 1999, p. 36). These factors temper the improvements brought by the cycle of increasing effectiveness. The President and his staff develop sources of information and analysis. Lessons are learned from early mistakes. More effective decision-making processes are put in place as the new administration learns to work with themselves and within the Washington bureaucracy.

Light describes the phenomenon,

“Regardless of the President's initial expertise and information, the first year of the first term is characterized by a surprising level of confusion. As the President and his staff settle the chaos, the opportunities disappear. By the third and fourth

years, the President and the staff are fully trained for domestic choice, but the agenda must be restricted.”  
(Light, 1999, p. 38)

Light applies this phenomenon to the domestic agenda of presidents, but the phenomenon is even more applicable in the foreign policy realm.

Richard Neustadt also warned of the inexperience and incoherency of the transition period. He argued that it was insufficient to consider only the 11 weeks between election and inaugural. Instead, he expanded the definition of the transition period to include the early months of the administration. Depending on the effectiveness of the new administration and the events surrounding the transition period, varying amounts of time are required to work through the incoherence and ineffectiveness of the transition period. In most cases, these effects can be observed well into the first year of a new administration. A new presidency faces enormous pressure to act quickly and decisively on a broad range of issues. Each new administration represents a fresh start in American politics and the expectation for rapid improvement is encouraged by campaign rhetoric promising change. These high expectations are focused on the first hundred days of the new administration, mirrored after Roosevelt’s ‘Hundred Days’ which launched the nation’s recovery from the Great Depression with a series of broad and ambitious presidential initiatives (Alter, 2006). Neustadt warns that this mentality is dangerous because it leads to overconfidence and miscalculation in new administrations. Instead, he argues that the transition period must be viewed as a learning process that is both inevitable and legitimate (Neustadt, 1990, p. 232). Neustadt described his vision,

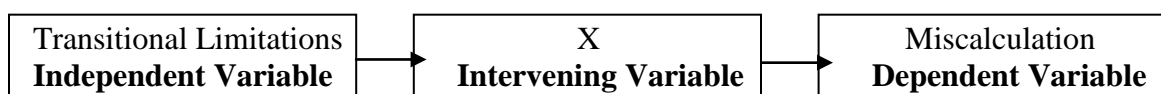
“Someday a President-Elect might feel that he could say to newsmen (and himself), ‘there won’t be any ‘Hundred Days,’ I can’t know how I really want to organize my White House, ask me again next year; we don’t yet understand how

campaign pledges fit events and trends as yet unknown to us. That's what four years are for.”  
(Neustadt, 1990, p. 232)

Rather than focusing on what can be accomplished in the first ‘Hundred Days,’ Neustadt suggests that new administrations and observers focus on the lessons that can be learned from the challenges of the transition period. Multiple examples of policy miscalculations during the transition period demonstrate the need for increased awareness of the limitations presented by this foundation of the American democratic system.

### **Overview of Transitional Limitations Model**

The transitional limitations of ambiguity, inexperience, and the holdover effect demonstrate the increased vulnerability of new administrations, especially during international crises. During these crises, other forces can become more influential in the absence of presidential initiative and leadership. Existing analyses of transitional foreign policy crises examine the influence of these forces, but they fail to account for the critical role of the transition period in allowing these forces to dominate presidential decision-making. Rather than presenting these forces as the primary cause of the policy miscalculation, these forces must be considered in the context of the presidential transition. Transitional limitations result in a dynamic of policy uncertainty (presidential indecision or inattention) in which American objective are unclear and policy drifts without the guidance of presidential leadership. Within this dynamic, other forces fill the void of presidential leadership, resulting in miscalculation. The following model illustrates this relationship:



In this relationship, transitional limitations allow X forces to replace presidential leadership and cause miscalculations. This model will be used to offer a more complete explanation of the transitional crises discussed in this paper.

### **Overview of Case Studies**

In the following chapters, I will examine the American response to two international crises that overlapped presidential administrations: the Bay of Pigs crisis during the Eisenhower and Kennedy administrations and the Somalia intervention during the Bush and Clinton administrations. In each of these cases, policy miscalculation at the presidential level resulted in American casualties and the public failure of a major military operation. In both instances, presidential effectiveness in both the outgoing and incoming administrations was limited by the transition period. Ambiguity, inexperience, and the holdover effect prevented adequate analysis and attention to the American response. In the following sections, I will examine the role of transitional limitations in each miscalculation. I will then discuss how the Transitional Limitations Model discussed above can fill in the gaps of existing analyses. The striking similarities between these two crises serve as a warning to new administrations to proceed cautiously when evaluating and implementing overlap policies from the previous administration.

## **THE BAY OF PIGS CRISIS, 1960-1961**

Within the first few months of President Kennedy's inauguration, his administration experienced a foreign policy crisis that Pierre Salinger recalled as "the greatest disaster of the Kennedy administration," (Salinger, 1966, p. 100) and that Arthur Schlesinger, Jr. described as "a horribly expensive lesson" (Schlesinger, 1965, p. 297). The Kennedy administration inherited an overlap policy from Eisenhower which called for an invasion of Cuba and subsequent overthrow of Fidel Castro. Existing analyses point to several factors at work during the crisis. These factors include groupthink, Irving Janis's theory that members of a cohesive group can unconsciously merge their arguments to a set of shared beliefs and norms, and bureaucratic politics, the study of how the inner workings of bureaucracies impact both the creation and implementation of foreign policy. What is lacking from these analyses is the role of the transition period in allowing these forces to dominate presidential decision-making. During the Bay of Pigs crisis, the ambiguity of the presidential transition period allowed a major initiative to gain momentum without adequate oversight. Policy uncertainty was magnified by Kennedy's inexperienced administration which was unable to reverse the momentum despite strong reservations about the plan. The botched invasion attempt was launched only months after Kennedy assumed office and his administration was neither prepared nor equipped to manage the resulting crisis.

In the following sections, I will give a brief overview of the crisis. I will then discuss the transitional limitations at work during the presidential transition period. Finally, I will look at how this framework relates to existing analyses of the crisis,

focusing on the theories of groupthink and bureaucratic politics. This relationship will be explained using the Transitional Limitations Model established in the previous chapter.

### **Bay of Pigs Crisis Overview**

By the time President Kennedy assumed office, the small island nation of Cuba had come to play a major role in the escalating tensions between the United States and the Soviet Union. In 1958, Fidel Castro overthrew the dictator Fulgencio Batista and gained control of Cuba (Freedman, 2000). Castro's allegiances were unclear at the time of the Cuban Revolution. However, between 1958 and 1961, Castro's sympathies moved closer to the Communist Soviet Union while his policies and rhetoric became increasingly anti-American (Freedman, 2000, p. 124). Policy makers feared the repercussions of allowing the Soviet sphere of influence to extend so close to American soil and searched for a way to remove Castro from power. In January of 1960, President Eisenhower agreed with a CIA assessment that Castro must be overthrown. Two months later, Operation Pluto was launched (Freedman, 2000, p. 125). CIA operatives planned to secretly train a brigade of Cuban exiles to overthrow Castro with guerilla maneuvers (Freedman, 2000, p. 126). Fearing that guerilla maneuvers may not be enough to overcome Castro's forces, plans for a surprise invasion were later added. The operation also utilized the Cuban Revolutionary Council, a group of exiled Cuban leaders in the United States. The plan called for the Council to establish a provisional government in Cuba after Castro's overthrow (Schlesinger, 1965, p. 238). Ominously, on April 1, 1961, the code name for the operation changed from "Crosspatch" to "Bumpy Road" (Freedman, 2000, p. 139). President Kennedy gave his final approval for "Bumpy Road" in early April.

On the morning of April 14, air strikes were launched against Cuba in an attempt to weaken Castro's forces prior to the invasion. The first air strike inflicted little damage. Presidential advisor Arthur Schlesinger (1965) later reported that only five Cuban aircraft were destroyed. The air strikes also removed the element of surprise. After learning of the air strike, Castro ordered his troops to arrest any opposition forces in Havana. Following the air strike, Adlai Stevenson, the permanent U.S. representative to the United Nations, went before the UN General Assembly and denied any U.S. involvement in the air strikes (Schlesinger, 1965, p. 271). After learning that he had been misled by the administration, Stevenson expressed his strong displeasure in a phone call to President Kennedy. Kennedy responded by cancelling the second round of air strikes, against the advice of the CIA (Pious, 2008, p. 30).

The land invasion was launched two days later in the early morning hours of April 17. At every stage, the invasion was plagued by poor planning and misinformation. Richard Neustadt described the events as, "a classic demonstration of Murphy's Law: If anything can go wrong... it did" (Neustadt, 1990, p. 246). The brigade was immediately met by Castro's forces that were on alert after the failed air strikes and the brigade suffered heavy losses. Inexplicably, most of the communications equipment and all of the ammunition reserve was carried in one ship. That ship sank early in the operation, leaving the brigade with no communication and insufficient ammunition (Schlesinger, 1965, p. 274). Late in the operation, President Kennedy finally agreed to provide limited air cover to anti-Cuban B-26 flights over the Bay of Pigs. However, a time zone mix-up led the B-26s to arrive an hour before their jet covers. Four American volunteer pilots were killed when their undefended aircraft was downed by Cuban forces (Schlesinger,

1965, p. 278). At the end of the day, over 100 brigade members were killed and nearly 1,200 were taken prisoner by Castro's supposedly inferior forces (Pious, 2008, p. 31).

The failure had both immediate and long-term implications. Despite a temporary surge in domestic support, the crisis raised doubts about Kennedy's leadership among colleagues and foreign governments. It is impossible to predict whether the invasion plan would have been more successful without the challenges added by the transition period. However, limiting forces at work during the transition ensured the policy's failure. In the following sections, I will look at how presidential decision-making during the crisis was dominated by three transitional limitations: ambiguity, the holdover effect, and inexperience.

### **Transitional Limitations: Ambiguity**

From the earliest stages of the plan's development, critical analysis was limited by the ambiguity surrounding the transfer of power from one president to the next. As explained earlier, the transition period creates a void in presidential leadership. Influence slowly wanes in the final year of a presidential term as domestic and international focus shifts to the campaign. Foreign governments and domestic constituents are reluctant to deal with a 'lame duck' administration. Transitional ambiguity also manifests itself as outgoing administrations defer difficult questions to their predecessors. As discussed earlier, plans for the Cuban invasion emerged during the final year of Eisenhower's presidency and developed during the subsequent campaign and transition period. Eisenhower did not see Cuba as a national priority. While he was willing to allow the CIA to proceed with preliminary planning, he neither encouraged nor endorsed the idea (Etheredge, 1985, p. 3). His advisors deferred intense analysis to the incoming Kennedy



administration. Consequently, neither administration assumed complete ownership of the operation. Schlesinger explained:

“In the next weeks, government floated as in a void. Neither the outgoing nor the incoming administration wanted to make fundamental decisions, and most matters continued to move along existing tracks.” (Schlesinger, 1965, p. 233)

The decision to rely on conventional military forces rather than guerilla forces was made without Eisenhower’s knowledge or consent (Sorensen, 1965, p. 295). Schlesinger reported that this uncertainty pervaded even the CIA team assigned with supervision of the plan,

“The Special group itself was infected with interregnum uncertainties. Not wishing to anticipate the new administration it did not formally approve the new scheme or even subject it to very severe scrutiny.” (Schlesinger, 1965, p. 235)

The transitional ambiguity allowed planners on both sides of the transition to assume that responsibility and ownership rested elsewhere. Ultimately, neither party assumed ownership until the consequences of the ill-conceived plan were irreversible.

This ambiguity allowed the plan to gain momentum despite the crippling lack of ownership or analysis. By the time that President Kennedy was briefed on the plan in January, 1961, he was reportedly, “astonished at its magnitude and daring” (Sorensen, 1965, p. 295). Without final approval from either Eisenhower or Kennedy, the CIA was training a brigade of exiled Cubans in Guatemala for the invasion. The cooperation of the Guatemalan government was waning and the CIA was told that the brigade had to leave by the end of April (Etheredge, 1985, p. 13). This was one of several arguments used by CIA planners Dulles and Bissell to convince the Kennedy administration that a quick decision was necessary. The CIA also suspected that the Soviet Union was sending jet airplanes to update Castro’s air force. After these planes arrived on June 1, the CIA

argued that the invasion would be next to impossible (Schlesinger, 1965, p. 240). In reality, Castro's air force was much more formidable than the CIA realized and the Soviet jets were not the only thing preventing a successful invasion. Other factors creating pressure to act included the approaching rainy season in Cuba and growing media speculation about the presence of the brigade in Guatemala (Freedman, 2000, p. 136). Freedman describes the detrimental effect of this race to act from the perspective of General David Gray, the only contact between the CIA and the Joint Chiefs of Staff:

“Gray later acknowledged that because they were racing against the clock, with the rainy season approaching, Castro's forces being strengthened, Guatemala wanting the rebels out, some rebels threatening to desert, and newsmen sniffing around the whole operation, he ‘did not even have time to war-game the plan.’” (Freedman, 2000, p. 136)

The existence of this brigade also created what planners referred to as the ‘disposal problem.’ As the plan progressed, Dulles warned Kennedy that the plan could not be easily discarded,

Don't forget that we have a disposal problem. If we have to take these men out of Guatemala, we will have to transfer them to the United States, and we can't have them wandering around the country telling everyone what they have been doing. (Dulles quoted in Schlesinger, 1965, p. 242)

As Kennedy became increasingly preoccupied with deniability, he embraced Dulles' warning as his own. Schlesinger quotes Kennedy on April 7, the week before the attack,

If we have to get rid of these 800 men, it is much better to dump them in Cuba than in the United States, especially if that is where they want to go. (Kennedy quoted in Schlesinger, 1965, p. 257)

Without adequate time or information to critique the inherited plan, the Kennedy administration came to believe that implementation was the only alternative and that a Cuban invasion was inevitable.

### **Transitional Limitations: Holdover Effect**

Momentum for the operation was also pushed forward by the holdover effect. After assuming office, the Kennedy administration had to deal with both policies and personnel that carried over from the Eisenhower administration. Most presidential policies and initiatives, especially in the foreign policy realm, do not come to a neat conclusion at the end of a presidential term. Each new administration must decide how to manage the work they inherit from their predecessors. President Kennedy faced that decision when he was briefed on the Bay of Pigs plan shortly before he assumed office. Initial planning for the Bay of Pigs invasion was launched under the Eisenhower administration and carried over into the Kennedy administration. This overlap generated two diametrically opposed influences on the planning process: internal reluctance to take ownership of the plan and external political pressure to embrace the plan.

Internally, the Kennedy administration was reluctant to take ownership of a plan that was not of their making. Etheredge (1985) speculates that the administration resented the policy they inherited:

“They resented being trapped by his [Eisenhower] plan now when, having defeated him and what he stood for, they had obtained power. They would not be rid of the plan directly, but they could distance themselves, withhold the personal involvement that would make it their own and make it work, and allow it to screw up.” (Etheredge, 1985, p. 16)

Whether or not the distance was deliberate, Kennedy and his team were removed from key information that could have served as a warning of the incoming crisis. The administration never fully embraced the plan, even moments before it was launched. Kennedy reserved the option to call off the operation as late as twenty-four hours prior to the scheduled launch (Schlesinger, 1965, p. 234).

Despite internal reservations, the Kennedy administration could not completely disavow the plan. They faced tremendous political pressure to approve the operation. By the time Kennedy assumed office in January, 1961, the plan was rapidly progressing and the United States had suspended diplomatic relations with Cuba (Freedman, 2000, p. 127). On the eve of the Inauguration, Eisenhower gave Kennedy his recommendation that the emerging plan, “be continued and accelerated,” (Eisenhower quoted in Freedman, 2000, p. 127). The political pressure that faces any new president was magnified for the Kennedy administration because of Eisenhower’s undeniable foreign policy credentials. Kennedy feared appearing weak when compared with Eisenhower’s strong military experience. Eisenhower was a five-star Army general who served as Supreme Commander of the Allied forces in Europe during World War II and as Supreme Commander of NATO after the War. Ted Sorensen (1965) described the pressure on Kennedy to accept the overlap policy:

“He was in effect asked whether he was as willing as the Republicans to permit and assist these exiles to free their own island from dictatorship, or whether he was willing to liquidate well-laid preparations, leave Cuba free to subvert the hemisphere, disband an impatient army in training for nearly a year under miserable conditions, and have them spread the word that Kennedy had betrayed their attempt to depose Castro.” (Sorensen, 1965, p. 295)

A quote from Robert Kennedy confirms the pressure that the administration felt to approve the plan, “Eisenhower trained these people, it was Eisenhower’s plan, Eisenhower’s people all said it would succeed – and we turned it down.” (R. Kennedy quoted in Pious, 2008, p. 43)

Pressure to approve the plan also came from key officials who had been appointed during the Eisenhower administration. On the advice of Richard Neustadt, Kennedy left several sensitive officials in their posts after the transition including the planners of the

Cuban invasion: CIA director Allen Dulles and Director of Plans Richard Bissell (Sorensen, 1965, p. 230). Dulles and Bissell were both involved in the successful operation to overthrow Guatemalan President Jacob Arbenz in 1954 and believed that Castro could be overthrown with a comparable operation in Cuba. In their roles as carry-overs, Bissell and Dulles had to convince the new administration of the merits of the Cuban invasion plan. Schlesinger suggests that this limited critical analysis of the plan. He wrote,

Both Dulles and Bissell were at a disadvantage in having to persuade a skeptical new administration about the virtues of a proposal nurtured in the hospital bosom of a previous government – a proposal on which they had personally worked for a long time and in which their organization had a heavy vested interest. This cast them in the role less of analysts than of advocates, and it led them to accept progressive modifications so long as the expedition in some form remained. (Schlesinger, 1965, p. 241)

In this atmosphere, Dulles and Bissell became extremely protective of the plan and accepted several ill-advised modifications. With little input from other agencies, the plan's strongest advocates were also the only ones advising the administration on the merits of the plan (Schlesinger, 1965, p. 248). As a result, critical analysis was extremely limited.

### **Transitional Limitations: Inexperience**

Critical analysis of the plan was also limited by the inexperience of the Kennedy administration. As previously discussed, the transition period is inherently precarious because incoming presidents are often ill-equipped to respond to world events in the early moments of the administration. Inexperience contributed to the dramatic mismanagement of both the planning and implementation of the Cuban invasion in three key ways: inexperience dealing with information and decisions at the presidential level,

the use of ad-hoc decision-making processes that had not yet been tested during a crisis, and the administration's inexperience working with each other.

At the start of the crisis, Kennedy had only been in office for seventy-seven days (Schlesinger, 1965, p. 258). Like most modern presidents, Kennedy had little experience in foreign affairs prior to assuming the presidency. When then-candidate Kennedy was briefed on the plans during the transition period, his newly-assembled team lacked sufficient time or experience to critically examine the plans (Halperin & Clapp, 2006). Elected to the House of Representatives in 1946 and the U.S. Senate in 1952, Kennedy felt confident making decisions in the domestic realm. However, he did not yet trust his instincts on foreign policy. Kennedy himself described the problem,

If someone comes in to tell me this or that about the minimum wage bill I have no hesitation in overruling them. But you always assume that the military and intelligence people have some secret skill not available to ordinary mortals. (Kennedy quoted in Campbell & Steinberg, 2008, p. 27)

This hesitation is only lessened by foreign policy experience, something post-WWII presidents do not have until after the first few years of their term.

Even Kennedy's top foreign policy advisors had been removed from the process for several years prior to assuming office. Kennedy's administration began in 1961 after 8 years of Republican control of the White House. The policy makers with the most current foreign policy experience were Republican. Kennedy's Secretary of State Dean Rusk was a foreign affairs advisor for President Truman. During the Eisenhower administration, however, his role as head of the Rockefeller Foundation removed him from day-to-day foreign policy decisions. Secretary of Defense Robert McNamara was a statistician who had built his career at the Ford Motor Company (Janis, 1982, p. 17). McGeorge Bundy, Special Assistant for National Security Affairs, and Presidential

Advisor Arthur Schlesinger, Jr. were both noted intellectuals at Harvard University. The team brought a tremendous amount of intellect but, along with Kennedy, they lacked confidence with day-to-day foreign policy decisions. This confidence could only be gained with experience.

As Kennedy's quote suggests, inexperience led to an overreliance on the advice of military and intelligence officials. The administration did not have the experience or knowledge to realize that the assumptions surrounding their decision were faulty and ill-prepared. These assumptions penetrated all phases of planning and implementation. Rather than the ill-fated Bay of Pigs landing site, CIA planners Dulles and Bissell initially proposed landing an invasion force in the town of Trinidad. Schlesinger explained that the Trinidad landing site offered several advantages. First, the harbor and beachhead were conducive to an amphibious landing. Next, the town of Trinidad was far from any of Castro's forces. Finally, and most importantly, Trinidad offered a convenient escape route through the nearby Escambray Mountains. If the invasion did not succeed in toppling Castro's forces, the brigade could escape through the mountains and engage in guerilla activity (Schlesinger, 1965, p. 327). Under the illusion that U.S. involvement in the operation could be concealed, President Kennedy objected to the Trinidad landing site because he thought the location was too "spectacular," (Kennedy quoted in Freedman, 2000, p. 134). Instead he requested the CIA develop a quieter plan that would conceal U.S. involvement.

Kennedy sought advice from the Joint Chiefs of Staff on the three alternate plans presented by the CIA. In a written memo, the Joint Chiefs selected Zapata, or the Bay of Pigs, as the best of the three alternatives presented. The inexperienced administration did

not question the recommendation and misinterpreted a lukewarm statement as a full-fledged endorsement. Freedman describes this judgment error,

To get the full benefit of its evaluation when it came in the start of February required some reading between the lines – not so easy for a civilian leadership not yet used to military formulations. (Freedman, 2000, p. 131)

The Bay of Pigs landing site was surrounded by swamps and did not offer the option for the brigade to resort to guerilla combat. However, Kennedy was not aware that his decision removed the guerilla option. Entrenched in their positions as advocates rather than analysts, the CIA planners did nothing to correct his misperception (Pious, 2008, p. 36).

Unwilling to completely disengage from the plan, Kennedy became increasingly preoccupied with maintaining deniability. In his memoir *Kennedy*, Sorensen wrote that Kennedy's directive to avoid overt American involvement was established from the earliest days of the administration (Sorensen, 1965, p. 297). Kennedy's team naively believed that an international outcry could be easily avoided by concealing U.S. involvement in the operation. As the new administration soon learned, operations of this magnitude are not likely to remain concealed from the public or the media. Kennedy himself realized this soon before the invasion and complained, "I can't believe what I'm reading! Castro doesn't need agents over here. All he has to do is read our papers. It's all laid out for him!" (Kennedy quoted in Janis, 1982, p. 20). In fact, the deniability that Kennedy demanded was called into question within the first few hours of the operation when one of the Cuban Brigade planes had to make an emergency landing in Key West instead of returning to the discreet airbase in Guatamala (Schlesinger, 1965, p. 270).



These assumptions may have been called into question with proper analysis of the plan. Instead information was closely guarded on a “need to know” basis. The covert nature of the operation resulted in inadequate vetting of the plan by the appropriate government departments. Even the Intelligence Branch of the CIA was not consulted (Schlesinger, 1965, p. 248). Further consultation could have corrected the faulty premise that Castro’s air force was ineffective and weak. Janis describes the administration’s incredible miscalculation:

Their overoptimistic outlook would have been rudely shaken if they had allowed their deliberations to focus on the potentially devastating consequences of the obvious drawbacks of the plan, such as the disparity in size between Castro’s military forces of two hundred thousand and the small brigade of fourteen hundred exiles. In a sense, this difference made the odds against their longshot gamble 200,000 to 1,400 (over 140 to 1).  
(Janis, 1982, p. 36)

Schlesinger speculated that the Intelligence Branch would have also warned that Castro enjoyed a higher level of public support than the planners expected (Schlesinger, 1965, p. 248). The ultimate success of the invasion plan depended on internal revolts within Cuba which did not occur. Any evaluation of popular support for Castro within Cuba would have questioned the veracity of this claim (Pious, 2008, p. 33). The dominant advice given to the president came from the plan’s principal advocates: Dulles and Bissell. By restricting consultation on a “need to know” basis, the inexperienced administration unknowingly restricted access to necessary information. Kennedy’s team did not have adequate experience to question the faulty information they received.

The team’s inexperience is also evident in the decision-making processes at work during the crisis. Only three months into the new administration, the foreign policy team was adapting to the new decision-making procedures implemented by Kennedy. In a

departure from the highly formalized, bureaucracy-dependent process of Eisenhower, Kennedy preferred informal arrangements with the advisors he trusted most. Ad-hoc task forces were created in response to foreign policy problems. While tempering the formality that characterized Eisenhower's White House, the task forces also limited critical analysis. The Taylor Commission, which was appointed by President Kennedy after the Bay of Pigs crisis, highlighted concerns with Kennedy's decision-making procedures,

Top level direction was given through ad hoc meetings of senior officials without consideration of operational plans in writing and with no arrangement for recording conclusions and decisions reached. (Taylor Commission quoted in Stern, 1997, p. 173)

Changes made to these procedures following the crisis indicate that these processes stemmed from the inexperience of the administration. Determined not to step into a similar fiasco, President Kennedy dramatically modified his decision-making procedures after the Bay of Pigs crisis. Schafer & Crichlow explain,

“He introduced a system where some advisors were assigned the role of challenging assumptions and asking hard questions. He included a larger number of advisors in the process and brought in outsiders who had different kinds of expertise and could challenge intra-administration perspectives. Concerned that his own presence might hinder free discussion at meetings, he pointedly stepped out of some meetings, allowing his advisors to speak their minds more freely and reducing the potential appearance of leader bias.”  
(Schafer & Crichlow, 2010, p. 10)

Several of these new procedures were prominent in the administration's response to the Cuban Missile Crisis a few years later.

Another challenge for the inexperienced administration was dealing with the crisis while officials were still learning to work with each other and within the larger

government bureaucracy. In examining the crisis, *Harper Magazine's* John Fischer described the problem:

“Every President needs about twelve months to get his executive team organized, to feel his way into the vast and dangerous machinery of the bureaucracy ... While [Kennedy] was still trying to move in the furniture, in effect, he found the roof falling in and the doors blowing off.” (Fischer quoted in Sorensen, 1965, p. 291)

In a departure from the highly formalized, bureaucracy-dependent process of Eisenhower, Kennedy preferred informal arrangements with the advisors he most trusted. Most information was conferred in verbal briefings and few details were recorded (Freedman, 2000, p. 127).

Along with the “need to know” mentality, this decision-making process also prevented critical analysis. No mechanism was in place to prevent compartmentalism and relevant voices were left out of the discussion. Robert Kennedy and Ted Sorensen, two of Kennedy’s closest advisors, were not directly involved in the Bay of Pigs plan (Schlesinger, 1965, p. 296). Both Secretary of State Dean Rusk and the Joint Chiefs of Staff were discouraged from consulting knowledgeable colleagues at the State and Defense departments (Mosher, 1987). By the time the plan was implemented, Kennedy had very little accurate information. Schlesinger wrote that, “... he [Kennedy] had in fact approved a plan bearing little resemblance to what he thought he approved.” (Sorensen, 1965, p. 310).

The administration had also not yet learned the strengths and weaknesses of their colleagues. This further limited the administration’s capacity to critically evaluate information. Janis (1982) explains:

“Kennedy himself did not yet know the strengths and weaknesses of his newly appointed advisors. For example, the President did not realize, as he did later,

that the new Secretary of State was inclined to defer to the military experts and to withhold his objections to the Defense Department toughness in order to avoid charges of State Department softness.” (Janis, 1982, p. 31)

Interactions within the administration were governed by protocol and formality (Janis, 1982, p. 31). Frank conversations may have revealed that many members of Kennedy’s team were suppressing strong reservations about the viability of the operation. Among Kennedy’s closest advisors, Secretary of State Dean Rusk and Special Assistant Arthur Schlesinger, Jr. both expressed grave concerns about the plan. Rusk warned repeatedly that an invasion of Cuba would likely be condemned by the Organization of American States and the United Nations (Freedman, 2000, p. 133). He cautioned that international condemnation was too high a price, even if the invasion was successful in toppling Castro. Schlesinger delivered a memo to the president expressing his own opposition to the plan. He warned of the stakes involved:

“...the image of intelligence, reasonableness and honest firmness which has had such an extraordinary effect in changing world opinion about the U.S. and increasing world confidence in U.S. methods and purposes... It is this reawakening of world faith in America which is at stake in the Cuban operation.” (Schlesinger, 1965, p. 255)

However, neither Schlesinger nor Rusk was successful in overturning the momentum of the plan. Schlesinger even described his opposition as “timid,” (Schlesinger, 1965, p. 255). Concerns were also discussed by second-tier advisors including Chester Bowles, Thomas Mann, and Roger Hilsman at the State Department. While these doubts and reservations were discussed at all levels of the administration, the overwhelming consensus was that the invasion plan had developed past the point of withdrawal.

The dominant role of inexperience in the Bay of Pigs breakdown is reinforced by Kennedy’s actions following the crisis. He immediately implemented new decision-

making policies and procedures in hopes of moving beyond the early missteps of his administration. Internally, Kennedy addressed the “need to know” mentality that limited analysis of the plan. Schlesinger explained,

“In the future, he made sure that he had the unfettered and confidential access of his own people ... The Bay of Pigs gave us a license for the impolite inquiry and the rude comment.” (Schlesinger, 1965, p. 296)

Following the crisis, Kennedy also relied less on the experts and more on the officials that he most trusted (Schlesinger, 1965, p. 296). Schlesinger reported that these lessons played a major role in Kennedy’s handling of the Cuban Missile Crisis, “...he preserved a taut personal control over every aspect of the situation; the Bay of Pigs had not been in vain” (Schlesinger, 1965, p. 818). This evidence of lessons learned supports the claim that inexperience was the primary cause for mismanagement of the crisis. Kennedy also appointed General Maxwell Taylor chair of a Cuba Study Group designed to identify lessons from the Bay of Pigs fiasco. Robert Kennedy and Allen Dulles were also members of the Taylor Commission. The Commission concluded that the preoccupation with deniability eliminated any possibility for the operation’s success. Freedman argues that this conclusion overlooks the administration’s inexperience as a primary cause of the crisis,

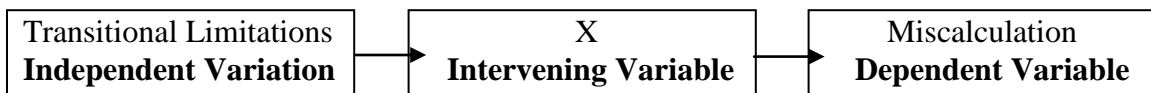
The weakness in the decision making reflected the problems of an administration that had not yet sorted out its lines of responsibility. Kennedy was still learning whom he could trust, how to take advice, and how to balance different types of risk, including the extent to which he should worry about domestic critics when making foreign policy. (Freedman, 2000, p. 146)

It is impossible to predict whether the invasion plan would have been more successful without the challenges added by the transition period. However, the holdover effects,

ambiguity, and inexperience that accompanied the Eisenhower/Kennedy transition ensured the policy's failure.

### **Applying the Transitional Limitations Model to Existing Analysis**

Transitional crises like the Bay of Pigs demonstrate the increased vulnerability of new administrations. During these crises, a power vacuum allows other forces to replace presidential initiative and leadership. Inexperience and ambiguity can be observed to varying degrees during any presidential transition. These variables, however, do not cause miscalculations alone. The case studies in this paper follow the causal relationship illustrated below:



In this relationship, transitional limitations create policy uncertainty (presidential indecision and inattention) which allows X forces to replace presidential leadership, resulting in policy miscalculations. During the Bay of Pigs crisis, groupthink and bureaucratic politics were two of the intervening variables at work.

Traditional analyses of the Bay of Pigs incident point to dysfunctional forces including groupthink and bureaucratic politics as the reason for the procedural breakdown and resulting crisis. They do not explain, however, why these forces were allowed to play such a prominent role in presidential decision making. The Transitional Limitations Model outlined above fills this gap. Transitional limitations created a dynamic of policy uncertainty in which American objectives were unclear and American foreign policy drifted without a cohesive direction. During the Bay of Pigs crisis, the transition period created the policy uncertainty that allowed transitional limitations to

govern the foreign policy process. In the following sections, I will examine the role of groupthink and bureaucratic politics through the Transitional Limitations Model to demonstrate how this framework offers a more complete explanation of the Bay of Pigs crisis.

### **Overview of Janis's Groupthink Theory**

Irving Janis introduced the groupthink concept in 1972 as an explanation for what he saw as seemingly unthinkable miscalculations by decision makers. Drawing on his background in group psychology, Janis posited that members of a cohesive group can unconsciously merge their arguments to a set of shared beliefs and norms. Group members subconsciously prioritize group harmony and unanimity over critical analysis and reasoning. Janis explains, "Groupthink refers to a deterioration of mental efficiency, reality testing, and moral judgment that results from in-group pressures" (Janis, 1982, p. 9). In this way, groupthink presents a huge barrier to effective decision making.

The Bay of Pigs was Janis's prime example of mismanagement at the highest levels. Janis asked the same question that emerged immediately following the crisis, "How could bright, shrewd men like John F. Kennedy and his advisors be taken in by the CIA's stupid, patchwork plan?" (Janis, 1982, p. *vii*). Janis's answer was that groupthink plagued the team's decision making process and prevented critical analysis of the CIA's plan. Using firsthand accounts from Arthur Schlesinger, Ted Sorensen, and others, Janis identified six flawed assumptions of the Kennedy administration that led to the Bay of Pigs crisis. First, the administration naively believed that U.S. involvement in the operation could be concealed from the public and the media. Next, the administration vastly underestimated the capability of Castro's air force. Third, Kennedy and his team

accepted without question the CIA's assurance that morale was high within the exile brigade. They also blindly believed the CIA's estimate that the small exile brigade would be able to easily control the beachhead. Fifth, the administration underestimated popular support for Castro and expected the invasion to spur a large scale uprising in Cuba. Finally, the planners assumed that the exile brigade could easily retreat into the Escambray Mountains (Janis, 1982, p. 26). As events unfolded, it became clear that all of these assumptions were tragically miscalculated. Each of these assumptions was perpetuated by the inexperience and ambiguity of the presidential transition period.

### **Groupthink within the Transitional Limitations Model**

Janis presents groupthink as the independent variable that caused the miscalculation. This explanation is incomplete without considering the limitations of the transition period. Due to the nature of the American democratic system, the responsibility for responding to international crises rests with the president. During the Bay of Pigs crisis, the Kennedy administration failed to perform this vital role. Within the Transitional Limitations Model, transitional limitations create the power vacuum which allows groupthink to emerge as a dominant force in the decision making process. The role of groupthink in the Bay of Pigs decision-making process can be illustrated as follows:



This relationship emerges when examining the six flaws in the administration's process that Janis identifies as symptomatic of groupthink. Each of these flaws is rooted in the



transitional framework discussed above: inexperience, transitional ambiguity, and the holdover effect.

First, Janis argues that the Kennedy administration entered office with an “illusion of invulnerability” and “unlimited confidence” that encouraged risk-taking and discouraged realistic evaluation of the consequences involved. As previously discussed, the Kennedy administration vastly underestimated Castro’s capabilities and blindly accepted the CIA’s overconfident assertions. The administration’s overconfidence only partially explains why the “illusion of invulnerability” was so prevalent among officials who should have known better. The administration’s inexperience and untested procedures also perpetuated false information. Kennedy had the written endorsement of General Lemnitzer & Admiral Burke of the Joint Chiefs of Staff as well as the approval of Secretary of State Dean Rusk and Secretary of Defense McNamara (Sorensen, 1965, p. 296). Kennedy was not yet familiar with the strengths and weaknesses of his team. He accepted the endorsements with very little analysis and did not critically evaluate the lukewarm endorsements he received from his advisors. This flaw clearly stemmed from transitional limitations.

Transitional limitations also preceded Janis’s second flaw. He argues that the administration also experienced the “illusion of unanimity” which stifled debate and opposition in group meetings. Janis explains,

“...the assumed consensus was an illusion that could be maintained only because the major participants did not reveal their own reasoning or discuss their idiosyncratic assumptions and vague reservations.” (Janis, 1982, p. 38)

Janis’s explanation overlooks the primary cause of the “illusion of unanimity.” Both Sorensen and Schlesinger point to inexperience as a primary reason for the lack of critical

scrutiny of the plan. The administration was still learning how to work with each other and within the complex governmental bureaucracy. Schlesinger noted that Secretary of Defense Robert McNamara had little attention to devote to the plan because he “was absorbed in the endless task of trying to seize control of the Pentagon” (Schlesinger, 1965, p. 250). Sorensen explained that multiple false assumptions arose because,

“...of the newness of the President and his administration. He did not fully know the strengths and weaknesses of his various advisors. He did not yet feel he could trust his instincts against the judgments of recognized experts. He had not yet geared the decision-making process to fulfill his own needs, to isolate the points of no return, to make certain he was fully informed before they passed, and to prevent reshaped alternatives from being presented to him too late to start anew. Nor were his advisors as frank with him, or as free to criticize each other’s work, as they would later become.” (Sorensen, 1965, p. 304)

Following the Bay of Pigs crisis, Kennedy modified his decision-making process to facilitate critical scrutiny. He established the Special Group Counterinsurgency to oversee all interagency counterinsurgency efforts (Freedman, 2000, 147). This new group addressed the problem of inadequate oversight by allowing closer collaboration between the President and key officials planning operations overseas. Kennedy’s attention to these weaknesses in the remaining years of his presidency is further proof that the administration’s inexperience was a major factor in the Bay of Pigs miscalculation.

Janis’s third and fourth flaws are closely related to the “illusion of unanimity” and were also preceded by transitional limitations. He notes that key members of the decision making process, including Arthur Schlesinger and Secretary of State Dean Rusk, suppressed personal doubts in favor of group consensus. Similarly, several key members, including Robert Kennedy, made a concerted effort to suppress the doubts of others in the group.

Janis also argues that President Kennedy discouraged analysis by allowing the CIA to dominate meetings. According to the firsthand accounts of Schlesinger and Sorensen, Kennedy and his team accepted the CIA's assessment of the situation in Cuba with little scrutiny. Kennedy himself admitted to being unwilling to question his military and intelligence advisors when he first assumed the presidency (Campbell & Steinberg, 2008, p. 27). The administration was unaware that CIA agents were deliberately misleading the exile brigade with false promises of U.S. participation in the invasion (Janis, 1982, p. 22).

Finally, Janis suggests that CIA planners Allen Dulles and Richard Bissell were given favored status as new members of the group, tempering critical analysis. Janis explains,

“It seems that Allen Dulles and Richard Bissell, despite being holdovers from the Eisenhower administration, were not considered outsiders by the inner core of the Kennedy team... The core members of the team would certainly want to avoid antagonizing or alienating them. They would be inclined, therefore, to soft-pedal their criticisms of the CIA plan and perhaps even to suspend their critical judgment in evaluating it.” (Janis, 1982, p. 45)

Along with the Bay of Pigs plan itself, Dulles and Bissell were both holdovers from the Eisenhower administration. With the change of administration, they became the primary representatives of a plan that predated anyone else in the administration. As previously discussed, this situation shifted their role from analysts to advocates and limited critical analysis from those most familiar with the plan (Schlesinger, 1965, p. 241). Janis's explanation of Dulles and Bissell's roles overlooks this holdover effect. Not only was the administration reluctant to question Dulles and Bissell, but the two men were much stronger advocates than they had been during the Eisenhower administration. Each of the flaws resulted from transitional limitations. Strong presidential leadership and effective

executive decision-making would have eliminated the flaws that Janis highlights. Groupthink was only allowed to dominate presidential decision-making because of transitional limitations.

### **Overview of Bureaucratic Politics Theories**

Existing analysis of the Bay of Pigs crisis also points to bureaucratic politics as a primary reason for the breakdown. Bureaucratic politics is the study of how the inner workings of bureaucracies impact both the creation and implementation of foreign policy (Krieger, 2001, p. 95). Within the American political system, this phenomenon manifests itself in two ways. First, the theory suggests that bureaucrats will take different positions on an issue depending on the department where they work. For example, an official immersed in State Department culture will take a different stance than one from the Department of Defense. Another part of the bureaucratic politics theory is the argument that foreign policy decisions do not represent one voice, but the maneuvering and compromises of different bureaucratic departments. Bureaucratic politics is an unavoidable byproduct of the American democratic system. However, when policy uncertainty allows bureaucratic politics to dominate the presidential decision-making process, the maneuvering becomes a dysfunctional and often dangerous force. Several existing analyses of the Bay of Pigs plan argue that this maneuvering led to the breakdown and resulting crisis. Like Janis's groupthink model, the bureaucratic politics models do not offer a complete explanation of the crisis without the lens of the transitional framework.

In *Bureaucratic Politics and Foreign Policy*, Halperin & Clapp highlight the Bay of Pigs crisis as an example of bureaucratic maneuvering. In the early days of an

administration, bureaucracies and officials vie for influence and leadership in the new government. Halperin & Clapp argue that the CIA presented the Cuban invasion plan from a position of strength. This advantage allowed the CIA to limit input from other departments (Freedman, 2000, p. 125). Halperin & Clapp (2006) explain,

“White House officials are sometimes able to control a briefing presented to the president, and they use that power to keep out undesirable information...in the case of the Bay of Pigs, both the State Department Bureau of Intelligence and Research and the CIA’s Intelligence Branch were not informed of the impending invasion and were thus unable to report to the president their own view that an invasion was unlikely to spark the uprising in Cuba that the operations branch of the CIA was promising.”

(Halperin & Clapp, 2006, p. 170)

Halperin & Clapp further argue that bureaucratic maneuvering not only restricted but also distorted the information given to President Kennedy.

“When, however, the advocates of a certain policy are able to keep out of the process those with alternative sources of information and expertise, the distortions can be very great.” (Halperin & Clapp, 2006, p. 175)

The CIA was able to effectively limit alternative analyses, ensuring that the information received by President Kennedy was biased and one-sided.

As planning progressed, another symptom of bureaucratic maneuvering emerged: the principal agent problem. The principal agent problem occurs when the leader is unaware of actions taken by a subordinate. As Ted Sorensen argues in *Kennedy* (1965), the principal agent problem was another contributing factor in the Bay of Pigs crisis. Both Eisenhower and Kennedy viewed the invasion as a “contingency plan,” and neither realized the full extent of the operation until it was close to implementation. Sorensen argues that this mentality allowed the bureaucracy to govern presidential decision-making:

“Instead of the President telling the bureaucracy that action was necessary and that they should devise certain means, the bureaucracy was telling the President that action was necessary, and that the means were already fashioned – and making his approval, moreover, appear to be a test of his mettle.” (Sorensen, 1965, p. 306)

Along with controlling presidential decisions, the bureaucracy also acted independent of a presidential mandate. As discussed earlier, Kennedy was increasingly preoccupied with deniability as he became convinced that implementation was unavoidable. Both Kennedy and Eisenhower explicitly prohibited overt American involvement in the invasion.

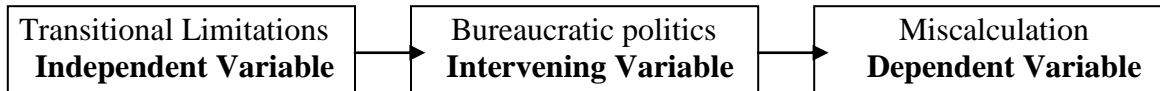
Despite this prohibition, CIA planners proceeded with the expectation of American involvement. The CIA expected that Kennedy’s opposition to overt involvement would waver if the success of the operation was threatened. Realizing that the success of the operation could rely on the involvement of American forces, they believed that the President would relent if given the choice between open involvement or failure. A quote from Allen Dulles after the crisis supports Sorensen’s observation that the bureaucracy was effectively controlling the presidency:

“We felt that when the chips were down – when the crisis arose in reality, any action required for success would be authorized rather than permit the enterprise to fail.” (Dulles quoted in Pious, 2008, p. 37)

The CIA even led the Cuban Brigade to expect overt American involvement if necessary. Only when the Brigade was abandoned on the Zapata beachhead did they realize that American support was not coming. By limiting information and acting independently of the presidency, the bureaucracy did exert dominating influence during the Bay of Pigs crisis. Existing analysis however, does not recognize the role of the transition in allowing this influence to emerge.

## **Bureaucratic Politics in the Transitional Limitations Model**

Once again, examining the existing analyses through the transitional framework offers a more complete analysis of the Bay of Pigs crisis. In this model, transitional limitations create the policy uncertainty that allows bureaucratic forces to dominate presidential decision-making, leading to a tragic miscalculation.



Both of the existing bureaucratic politics analyses discussed in the previous section offer a clearer explanation of the Bay of Pigs crisis when examined within this framework.

Halperin & Clapp argue that bureaucratic maneuvering allowed the CIA to restrict the information presented to President Kennedy in the months leading up to the invasion. Multiple accounts of the crisis verify that the CIA did dominate the Bay of Pigs decision process. However, Halperin & Clapp overlook the primary reason for the CIA's bureaucratic advantage. As previously discussed, Allen Dulles was a holdover from the Eisenhower administration and was reappointed by President Kennedy immediately after he assumed office. Dulles did not have to face the same learning curve as the other agency directors and cabinet secretaries. Allen Dulles's status as a holdover from the Eisenhower administration gave the CIA an advantage over other departments in Kennedy's administration and allowed the department to dominate presidential decision-making. In a conversation with Arthur Schlesinger following the crisis, Kennedy acknowledged that he failed to critically examine information from Dulles:

“I probably made a mistake in keeping Allen Dulles on. It's not that Dulles is not a man of great ability. He is. But I have never worked with him, and therefore I can't estimate his meaning when he tells me things... Dulles is legendary figure, and it's hard to operate with legendary figures.” (Kennedy quoted in Schlesinger, 1965, p. 276)

The holdover effect explains both why and how the CIA presented unexamined and distorted information to the president about the crisis. As previously discussed, Dulles and Bissell both became advocates for the policy rather than analysts. This problem was magnified by the unfamiliarity of Kennedy's team with presidential decision-making. The administration lacked experience and confidence in the foreign policy realm. This led them to accept distorted information without question. The holdover effect and inexperience created policy uncertainty which allowed bureaucratic maneuvering to dominate presidential decision-making.

Transitional limitations also explain why the principal agent problem was allowed to emerge during the crisis. As previously discussed, transitional ambiguity allowed the plan to progress with very little presidential oversight. Schlesinger noted that the planners pushed CIA operatives to move forward with training in Guatemala even before the incoming Kennedy administration had been briefed on the plan (Schlesinger, 1965, p. 234). Even after the plan was approved, it was easy for the CIA operatives to take advantage of the administration's inexperience to disregard Kennedy's requests.

Inexperience also prevented the Kennedy administration from questioning the CIA's assessment of the situation in Cuba after they were briefed on the plans. Dramatic miscalculations may have been revealed if the administration had asked the right questions or consulted the proper sources. Following the crisis, Kennedy realized that his administration had willingly accepted flawed assumptions without question or analysis. Schlesinger described this realization:

“He [Kennedy] felt that he now knew certain soft spots in his administration, especially the CIA and the Joint Chiefs. He would never be overawed by professional military advice again.” (Schlesinger, 1965, p. 290)



Sorensen also acknowledges that inexperience led the administration to accept information they would have otherwise questioned.

“He [Kennedy] should never have believed that it would be arrogant and presumptuous of him, newly arrived on the scene, to call out the plans of the renowned experts and the brave exiles. He should never have permitted the project to proceed so early in his first year, before he knew the men he was listening to and while he was still full of deep-rooted doubts.” (Sorensen, 1965, p. 306)

All of the lessons that the Kennedy administration learned following the crisis reveal the role of inexperience in the plan’s failure. Coupled with the ambiguity of the transition period and the dysfunction of holdover policies and advisors, this inexperience created policy uncertainty that allowed presidential decision-making to be dominated by groupthink and bureaucratic politics.

## **SOMALIA INTERVENTION, 1992-1994**

Thirty years after the Bay of Pigs disaster, a parallel crisis developed in the transition period between the Republican administration of George H.W. Bush and the Democratic administration of Bill Clinton. In the last months of his presidency, President Bush launched a relief operation designed to stem the humanitarian crisis in Somalia. Despite overly-optimistic estimates of the Bush administration, American forces were still on the ground in Somalia when President Clinton assumed office on January 20, 1993. Without a clear policy direction, the operation lingered until widespread condemnation necessitated a quick exit in March, 1994. The launch and outcome of the intervention paralleled those of the Bay of Pigs crisis. Once again, a policy initiated in the final days of an outgoing administration dominated the first few months of a new administration. Once again, presidential attention was deflected from the crisis by the dysfunctional forces at work during the transition period. Once again, the dynamics of the transition, combined with multiple intervening variables, led to a policy miscalculation and disastrous consequences. The striking parallels between these two crises demonstrate the prominence of transitional dysfunction in American foreign policy and further highlight the danger that this period poses to future administrations.

In the following sections, I will give a brief overview of the crisis. I will then use the transitional framework introduced earlier to analyze the role of the transition period in the crisis. Finally, I will look at how these limitations relate to existing analyses of the crisis. These existing analyses focus on the prominent influence of Congress as well as the role of bureaucratic politics and the principal agent problem. The bureaucratic politics analyses focus on the conflicting goals of different government departments

during the operation. Analyses using the principal agent problem examine how the mission in Somalia evolved based on the decisions of agents in the field without the oversight of those in charge of the operation. Both of these relationships will be explained using the transitional model discussed in the previous chapters.

### **Overview of the Somalia Intervention**

The humanitarian crisis that sparked the intervention had been building since Somalia emerged from the colonial period as a fragile and volatile nation. In the late 1860s, the Somaliland territory was divided into three parts: the French territory surrounding the port of Djibouti, the British territory in the northeast, and the Italian territory in the south (Brune, 1998, p. 14). Not only were these divisions completely incompatible with pre-existing clan boundaries, but they also isolated those living in Somaliland territories in modern-day Kenya and Ethiopia (Brune, 1998, p. 14). By ignoring firmly entrenched cultural and political dynamics, the colonial divisions laid the foundation for years of political strife and civil warfare.

By 1960, the British and Italian colonies gained their independence and formed a unified state. Independence, however, did not automatically bring a functioning central government. Brune (1998) explains the cultural and political barriers to forming a centralized Somali nation:

“The state’s pastoral economy had a subsistence level of living and clans and sub-clans were not ready for rule by a central government. Somalia’s inter-clan relations had local ethical rules but lacked an overarching concept of law essential to a modern centralized nation.” (Brune, 1998, p. 14)

The new nation erupted in violence and civil strife as clans struggled for power in the new system. In this chaotic political climate, General Mohammed Siad Barre overthrew the Somali government in 1969. The rebellion was supported by the Soviet Union and

his regime embraced Communist ideology (Brune, 1998, p. 14). This close relationship deteriorated when the Soviet Union attempted to extend its influence into Somalia's neighboring rival, Ethiopia. Ultimately, the Soviets forced Somalian troops from the disputed Ogaden province in Ethiopia (Brune, 1998, p. 14).

During the Cold War, American officials closely followed events in Somalia as the competition for spheres of influence extended to Africa. In return for military assistance, the Somalis granted the United States access to the northwestern port of Berbera. Berbera's proximity to the Persian/Arabian Gulf gave it great geo-strategic importance for the American military (Cohen, 2000, p. 197). This strategic importance sharply declined with the end of the Cold War as American relationships overseas shifted in the rapidly changing political climate. Following Iraq's invasion of Kuwait, Saudi Arabia granted a request from the U.S. to build military bases on Saudi soil. Herman Cohen, Assistant Secretary of State for African Affairs between 1989 and 1993 wrote that African ports and airfields rapidly went from "primary staging areas" to "backup contingency facilities" (Cohen, 2000, p. 203). With the downgrade came a sharp decline in nearly every form of U.S. involvement in Somalia. Economic aid was reduced from \$36 million in 1983 to \$8.7 million in 1988 and was later completely eliminated by President Reagan in 1989 (Brune, 1998, p. 15). By 1991, the U.S. diplomatic and intelligence presence in Somalia had completely evaporated.

Meanwhile, conditions in Somalia continued to deteriorate. During Barre's regime, he was widely criticized for monopolizing the state's limited resources in a war with neighboring Ethiopia. With a failed economy and rampant corruption, Barre faced growing criticism. Uprisings erupted in the spring of 1988 and rebels successfully

overthrew the Barre regime on January 26, 1991 (Brune, 1998, p. 15). Somalia once again erupted in chaos as nearly 13 clans and sub-clans fought for control. Two factions rose to the top, led by Generals Mohamed Farah Aideed and Mohamed Ali Mahdi (Brune, 1998, p. 17). Violence between the Aideed and Ali Mahdi factions dominated Somalia. The growing violence soon precipitated an unprecedented humanitarian crisis (Natsios, 1997, p. 12). Cohen explains how food aid became a pawn of the warring factions:

“To stay in business, the armed factions had to generate revenue to pay their fighters. In the general chaos, the main source of income was humanitarian food aid. Much of the armed action was designed to control food, which had effectively become the coin of the realm. Tens of thousands of hungry people were thus denied access to food, because the fighting had also disrupted normal crop production and food market operations.” (Cohen, 2000, p. 205)

In March, 1992, the United Nations estimated that over 300,000 Somalis had died and 3,000 more were dying each day. Nearly 500,000 were living in refugee camps in Kenya or Ethiopia and more than 70 percent of the livestock was dead (Rutherford, 2008, p. 38). Andrew Natsios, later appointed Special Coordinator for Somalia Relief by President Bush, reported that Somali food prices had inflated by nearly 1,200 percent in just a few months (Natsios, 1997, p. 12). During this period, the United Nations made several unsuccessful attempts to broker a cease-fire between the warring factions (Brune, 1998, p. 13).

Meanwhile, the Bush administration was in the midst of yet another round of Middle East Peace talks, following the rapid success of the Persian Gulf War. Bush had recently introduced the idea of a ‘new world order’ as justification for U.S. engagement in the world. He argued that aggression must not be allowed to threaten the world community, but that the U.S. must protect a ‘new world order’ based on peace, security,

freedom and the rule of law (Jones, 2008, p. 537). As the administration was determining the implications of this new commitment, the Somalia crisis began to attract the attention of State Department officials. On March 25, 1992, Assistant Secretary of State Herman Cohen declared a state of disaster in Somalia (Woods, 1997, p. 152). Following Cohen's disaster declaration, the economic aid that was suspended during the Reagan administration was quickly reinstated. In March, 24,270 metric tons of food aid was sent through the International Committee of the Red Cross, followed by 20,000 metric tons through the World Food Program in April. In a matter of weeks, the United States became Somalia's largest humanitarian donor (Woods, 1997, p. 153).

On April 24, 1992, the United Nations Security Council passed Resolution 751 which established United Nations Operations in Somalia I or UNOSOM I (Rutherford, 2008, p. 28). In the middle of the 1992 presidential campaign, President Bush was facing increasing calls from the international community to supplement UNOSOM I with American resources. On August 13, 1992, Bush approved several recommendations which dramatically increased American involvement in Somalia. He launched Operation Provide Relief, which flew nearly 2,500 emergency food airlifts to Somalia and refugee camps in Kenya. He offered U.S. transportation to U.N. security forces in Somalia and encouraged the U.N. to host a donor conference. Finally, Bush committed an additional 145,000 tons of food to Somali aid efforts (Woods, 1997, p. 155).

It soon became clear to administration officials that airlifts alone would not resolve the crisis. Cohen explained:

“Military food airlifts look good, show the flag in a dramatic way, and provide needed relief to people in the vicinity of the airports. But, a single Hercules C-130 sortie delivers only six tons of food. In Somalia, ten sorties a day from Mombasa barely dented the surface of the food problem.” (Cohen, 2000, p. 210)

Officials realized that increased security was needed to allow humanitarian aid to reach all regions of the starving nation (Cohen, 2000, p. 210). The Deputies Committee of the National Security Council was charged with developing a strategy to resolve the crisis. Immediately following his loss to President-elect Clinton in the November election, President Bush reviewed three options presented by the Deputies Committee. First, the United States could continue its support for UNOSOM I – the coalition of United Nations forces already working in Somalia. Second, the United States could substantially augment UNOSOM I forces with the addition of U.S. quick reaction forces and a mandate to use force. Finally, the United States could lead a large-scale intervention to secure Somalia. Bush met with the Joint Chiefs on November 25 and selected the last option – the most dramatic intervention scenario. As part of Operation Restore Hope, U.S. forces would lead a multinational coalition into Somalia, staying only long enough to secure relief operations before withdrawing (Brune, 1998, p. 21).

On December 3, the United Nations approved the creation of a U.S. led multinational force – Unified Task Force or UNITAF. U.S. General Joseph P. Hoar was appointed commander of the force on December 4 (Brune, 1998, p. 21). Hoping to avoid a prolonged conflict, President Bush assigned very limited goals to the operation. These included gaining control of the Mogadishu port and airfield, deploying coalition security forces at strategic locations in the hunger zone, opening roads, and ensuring security for humanitarian operations (Woods, 1997, p. 159). During the operation's most active point in January, 1993, approximately 25,800 U.S. forces were stationed in Somalia (Johnston & Dagne, 1997, p. 196).

Most of the operation's limited goals were accomplished a few weeks after UNITAF forces arrived in Somalia. The Mogadishu port was open and humanitarian aid was traveling securely across several of the nation's highways. Aideed and Ali Mahdi reached a fragile truce and violence was halted in most major cities (Woods, 1997, p. 159). Kenneth Rutherford, who worked as a credit union training officer in Somalia in 1993, describes the transformation:

“... four months after the U.S. military forces landed in Somalia, the number of deaths per day in Bordera dropped from more than 300 in November, 1992 to fewer than five in April, and in Mogadishu the price of an AK-47 went from under \$50 to almost \$1,000 because of the weapon searches and confiscations.” (Rutherford, 2008, p. 119)

These initial successes were quickly overshadowed as the operation lingered in Somalia without a clear policy direction.

The Bush administration had defined short-term goals for the operation. However, these short term goals were not enough to ensure long-term security for Somalia and the Clinton administration struggled to identify a clear directive for future intervention. The debate suffered from a lack of presidential attention and military operations continued well beyond the initial withdrawal date (Rutherford, 2008). Without a clear directive for future involvement, the mission of the operation shifted from restoring order to nation building. This mission shift became disastrous for the effort as U.S. and U.N. forces launched a campaign against clan leader Mohammed Farah Aideed. The peacekeeping force lost legitimacy by choosing sides in the conflict. On October 3, 1993, the administration was shocked by reports of heavy American casualties in Somalia. Eighteen U.S. Army Rangers were killed and 78 were wounded in a battle



with General Aideed's supporters in Mogadishu (Woods, 1997, p. 165). Albright described the dismay of administration officials who felt blindsided by this outcome:

“I was appalled. In our meetings we talked about what had happened and why. At home, at night, I questioned every aspect of what we had done. I had been part of the decision that had led to this. What had we done wrong? It was a nightmare.” (Albright, 2003, p. 182)

A national outcry instantly erupted in response to the casualty reports. President Clinton responded on October 7, 1993 by announcing the complete withdrawal of all U.S. troops by March 31, 1994 (Brune, 1998, p. 33). Withdrawal of the U.N. troops followed in March of 1995 after peacekeeping efforts collapsed without U.S. support (Brune, 1998, p. 33). In the following sections, I will look at how presidential decision-making during the crisis was dominated by the same three transitional forces that ensured the failure of the Bay of Pigs policy: ambiguity, the holdover effect, and inexperience.

### **Transitional Limitations: Ambiguity**

During the transition period, executive leadership and momentum are often replaced with ambiguity and inaction. Outgoing administrations are crippled by the ‘lame duck’ phenomenon. Foreign governments and domestic constituents sense the futility of an administration with only a short time remaining in office. However, incoming presidents cannot constitutionally govern until sworn into office on January 20. As previously discussed, this creates a void in presidential leadership that is especially prevalent in times of crisis. Transitional ambiguity can be observed during the Somalia intervention in two ways. First, the Bush administration did not devote full attention to the crisis until after the presidential campaign ended. Also, the Bush administration failed to adequately consider long-term consequences of the policy, leaving the next administration with nearly impossible choices. The absence of presidential attention

during the Bush administration mirrors the transitional inattention observed in the Bay of Pigs crisis discussed in the previous chapter.

First, I will examine how the transition period and accompanying presidential campaign severely limited the response of the Bush administration as the humanitarian crisis in Somalia was gaining international attention. This lapse in presidential attention resulted from both structural and political factors. Structurally, the re-election campaign deprived the administration of time and resources that could have been devoted to the growing list of international crises. In the late summer of 1992, there was a growing consensus that immediate action was needed to save lives in Somalia and that only the United States had the means necessary to accomplish such an action. Articles appeared in *The New York Times* and *The Washington Post* respectively entitled “The Hell Called Somalia” and “Bush, UN Face Pressure to Aid War-Torn Somalia.” A Senate resolution passed in both houses on July 31 called for support of food aid delivery in Somalia. At the end of July, President Bush instructed the State Department to be “forward-leaning” on Somalia (Rutherford, 2008, p. 43).

Just after this instruction, and in the midst of multiple other international crises in the Middle East, Haiti, and Yugoslavia, President Bush dismantled the highest levels of the State Department in a last-minute attempt to salvage his struggling presidential campaign. On August 13, he appointed Secretary of State James Baker as White House Chief of Staff with a mandate to run the White House and direct the final months of Bush’s presidential campaign (Rosenthal, 1992). Moving with Baker to the White House were four of his top aides from State including State Department spokeswoman Margaret Tutwiler who was named White House Communications Director and Undersecretary of

State for Economic Affairs Robert B. Zoellick who took over as Deputy Chief of Staff. At the time, *New York Times* reporter Andrew Rosenthal commented that Bush had, “gutted the top ranks of the State Department,” (Rosenthal, 1992). Deputy Secretary of State Lawrence Eagleburger was named Acting Secretary of State and was left to reassemble the department with only five months remaining in the administration.

The shift uprooted policies and procedures that had guided the State Department for nearly four years. Robert Gallucci, Assistant Secretary of State for Political-Military Affairs later reported that he had no idea how to get his proposal for a Somalia intervention to Acting Secretary Eagleburger. In the absence of established policies, Gallucci sent his proposal to Eagleburger’s assistant, who shared it with Eagleburger, who later discussed it with President Bush (Rutherford, 2008, p. 72). Eagleburger later noted his reaction to Gallucci’s proposal, “It was the two memos from Gallucci that got me focused. Until that time, I was not really focused on it.” (Eagleburger quoted in Rutherford, 2008, p. 72). This proposal prompted President Bush’s November conversation with the Joint Chiefs of Staff where he initiated UNITAF operations in Somalia. Due to the pressures of the campaign, all of this occurred outside of State Department procedures with inexperienced personnel.

The lapse in presidential attention was also the result of political pressures from the campaign. As a presidential candidate, Bill Clinton painted his opponent as overly focused on foreign affairs and ignorant of domestic issues. Several administration officials noted that this campaign issue delayed Bush’s response to the Somalia crisis. Richard Clarke, the National Security Council’s Director of International Programs said later, “There was no way Bush was going to make a decision for U.S. forces to intervene

during the campaign,” (Clarke quoted in Rutherford, 2008, p. 54). Clarke acknowledged the concern that intervening in Somalia would validate Clinton’s accusations (Rutherford, 2008, p. 66). In this way, the campaign deprived the Bush administration of the political will to intervene in Somalia until after the election, leaving very little time to formulate a clear policy directive for the intervention.

Transitional ambiguity can also be observed in the Bush administration’s inadequate consideration for the long-range consequences of the intervention. As previously discussed, the Bush administration outlined detailed short-term goals for the operation which were achieved shortly after U.S. forces arrived in Somalia. Further planning, however, was limited by the brief time that the Bush administration remained in office after the operation was launched. Planning only began in earnest after the November election, when Bush had less than three months remaining in office. With limited time and a limited mandate to govern, the Bush administration failed to analyze how these short-term goals would fit into a longer-range plan.

The administration’s short-sightedness began from the earliest conversations of a possible intervention. President Bush even entertained the unrealistic possibility that the operation could be completed before Clinton assumed office on January 20, 1993. In his memoirs, Colin Powell, Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff during the Somalia intervention, details a conversation in the Oval Office with Vice-President Dick Cheney and National Security Advisor Brent Scowcroft just after Thanksgiving, 1992 when President Bush decided to proceed with the military operation:

“I like it,” the President said after I finished. “We’ll do it.” Brent Scowcroft looked uneasy. “Sure, we can get in,” he said. “But how do we get out?” “We’ll do it and try to be out by January 19,” the President concluded. “I don’t want to stick Clinton with an ongoing military operation.” Cheney and I eyed each other.

“Mr. President,” Dick said, “we can’t have it both ways. We can’t get in there fully until mid-December. And the job won’t be done by January 19.” I appreciated that Dick had spoken up, since after January 20 I would be the only one in the room left holding this particular bag.”  
(Powell, 1995, p. 565)

Powell’s account suggests that nearly everyone in the Bush administration aside from the president recognized the incongruence of a “quick exit” strategy. Henry Kissinger, former Secretary of State, even publicly suggested that Somali warlords should take advantage of the administration’s short-sightedness by pausing their power struggle until after the planned U.S. withdrawal (Brune, 1998, p. 21). With only a few months remaining in office, however, these concerns were deferred to the next administration.

The administration also deferred warnings of the long-range consequences of a proposed intervention. In an analysis of U.S. decision-making during the Somalia intervention, Woods examines the administration’s response to a memo by Kenyan Ambassador Smith Hempstone that contained sharp warnings about the long-range hazards of an intervention. In characteristically sharp language, Hempstone wrote,

“If you liked Beirut, you’ll love Mogadishu ... The Somali is treacherous. The Somali is a killer. The Somali is as tough as his country and just as unforgiving. The one “beneficial” effect a major American intrusion into Somalia is likely to have may be to reunite the Somali nation against us, the invaders, the outsiders, the kaffirs who may have fed their children, but also have killed their young men.” (Hempstone quoted in Rutherford, 2008, p. 80)

Woods suggests that long-range concerns such as these were not simply overlooked, but were deliberately deferred to the incoming administration:

“The sharpness of the Washington response, I believe, had ... more to do with the nagging doubt that not only was he possibly right, but, in particular, he should not be raising problems that could be, should be, left to the incoming administration and to the UN. The silencing of Hempstone and other doubters at this early point in the drama was mainly a decision, by reflex, to kick those basic concerns downstream to those who would later be responsible.” (Woods, 1997, p. 169)

Given the need for U.S. involvement in previous U.N. interventions, the Bush administration had no reason to believe that U.N. forces would be able to take over security of Somalia after a U.S. withdrawal (Brune, 1998, p. 20). Despite this, the Bush administration did not have a plan for what would happen after UNITAF forces left Somalia. This lapse in long-range planning left the Clinton administration with an operation that was unsustainable considering the deteriorating situation in Somalia and the inadequate strength of U.N. forces. Once again, ambiguity from the transition period limited presidential oversight and critical analysis of an extensive military operation.

In this case, the danger of transitional ambiguity was magnified by the political dynamics surrounding the outgoing administration. Unlike the Eisenhower administration that departed after two full terms in office, the Bush administration was voted out of office. Expecting another four years to achieve their goals, the administration was left with only a few months to shape President Bush's legacy. Several observers have suggested that this dynamic provided incentive for the administration to launch an ambitious military operation with inadequate time, resources, or policy direction. Prior to losing the election, the Bush administration demonstrated reluctance to engage in further humanitarian operations. In addition to running arrears on U.N. dues, the United States had just devoted over \$2 billion for peacekeeping costs in Cambodia (Rutherford, 2008, p. 21). Former Assistant Secretary of State Herman Cohen described the trend as "disaster fatigue" (Cohen, 2000, p. 207). The decision to intervene in Somalia sharply contrasted this trend.

Analysts have suggested that the Bush administration used the Somalia operation as an opportunity to salvage Bush's legacy during the remaining months in office.

Stevenson describes the operation as “sure-fire redemption, for the sake of the Bush administration’s place in history,” (Stevenson, 1995, p. xii) and Brune (1998) wrote that the intervention, “may have been his (Bush’s) final attempt to demonstrate U.S. support for a new world order.” (Brune, 1998, p. 13) National Security Advisor Brent Scowcroft described the intervention as an opportunity to disprove critics who claimed that the Bush administration failed to intervene in Bosnia because it was a Muslim country. He noted,

“...for me, Somalia gave us the ability to show they were wrong ... It was a Southern hemisphere state; it was black; it was non-Christian; it was everything that epitomized the Third World.” (Scowcroft quoted in Rutherford, 2008, p. 181)

Voted out of office, many in the Bush administration viewed the Somalia crisis as their only remaining opportunity to send a message to the world. This mindset was an impetus for launching an ambitious military operation that did not have the resources or mandate to ensure security in Somalia for longer than a few weeks or months. These political dynamics heightened the dangers of transitional ambiguity and left the Clinton administration with a short-sighted policy that failed to consider future consequences.

### **Transitional Limitations: Holdover Effect**

As previously discussed, policies and initiatives do not come to a neat conclusion at the end of a presidential term. This trend is especially prevalent in the realm of international politics which continues unabated despite domestic circumstances. The holdover effect observed during the Bay of Pigs crisis was also at work during the Somalia intervention and created a chain reaction of policy mismanagement. The policy, which was carried over from the Bush administration, proved incompatible with the priorities of the new Clinton administration. This resulted in a lack of presidential

attention which led to a transfer of decision-making to lower level officials and the absence of executive oversight.

During the Somalia intervention, the changing dynamics of post-Cold War politics magnified the impact of the holdover effect. In the absence of the Cold War threat, significant foreign policy differences developed between the two American political parties. No longer were the two parties united against a common enemy. The unifying focus dissolved with the collapse of the Soviet Union. Debates intensified over the appropriate focus of American foreign policy and the appropriate level of American involvement in world affairs. During the presidential campaign, Clinton seized upon the isolationist mindset that was growing in the American public in the wake of the Cold War. He repeatedly criticized Bush for his level of involvement overseas. Clinton suggested that Bush was preoccupied with foreign affairs, neglecting domestic policy and leading the country to an economic recession (Rutherford, 2008, p. 66).

Clinton's focus on domestic affairs did not waver after he assumed office on January 20. As President-elect, Clinton was not opposed to the intervention. In fact, he expressed his support for the operation several times during the transition period. After losing the November election, the Bush administration made a concerted effort to keep Clinton's team apprised of plans in Somalia. Admiral David Jeremiah, who served as deputy to the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, was dispatched to brief Clinton and his advisors on the military operation. As President-elect, Clinton endorsed Bush's plan to send forces to Somalia (Woods, 1997, p. 158). Despite this public support, the intervention became incompatible with the priorities of the Clinton administration as



Clinton and his team focused on other areas. Ultimately, the Clinton administration was not able to shoulder the burden assumed by their predecessors.

The Somalia intervention suffered from a lack of executive oversight as the White House, State Department, and Defense Departments all focused on other priorities.

Clinton was elected with a mandate to end the economic recession and focus on domestic conditions. Throughout his presidency, he was most comfortable in the domestic realm.

In a compilation of foreign policy documents during the Clinton presidency, Rubinstein, Shayevich & Zlotnikov explain that Clinton's discomfort in the realm of foreign affairs did not go unnoticed:

“Smart, articulate, impressively informed, and energetically involved as Clinton could be on domestic matters, he seemed unfocused, almost unengaged, and ad hoc in his response to foreign policy issues. Critics lamented the absence of a coherent vision or strategic outlook.” (Rubinstein, Shayevich & Zlotnikov, 2000, p. 4)

In his earliest days in office, Clinton was focused on a new economic plan to reduce the federal deficit. He established the National Economic Council and pledged to reform health care within the first 100 days of his administration (Jones, 2008). Clinton's team was also preoccupied with his campaign pledge to remove the ban on gays serving in the military (Powell, 1995, p. 571).

Overwhelmed by a number of international crises, the new State Department was unable to fully compensate for the president's inattention. State Department officials were consumed by relations with China, political instability in Haiti, and a burgeoning crisis in Liberia (Rutherford, 2008, p. 105). American officials were also still adapting to the increased variety of threats presented by the post-Cold War world. In a speech at American University on February 26, 1993, Clinton described the new challenges:

“The change confronting us in the 1990’s is in some ways more difficult than previous times because it is less distinct. It is more complex and in some ways the path is less clear to most of our people still today ...” (Clinton quoted in Rubinstein et al., 2000, p. 9)

Strategies of containment, deterrence, and détente no longer applied after the collapse of the Soviet Union. The United States was still adapting to its role as a unipolar power. Without the rubric of Cold War alliances, the geopolitical significance of world events was becoming increasingly difficult to predict. The intervention in Somalia became lost in the transition as State Department officials struggled to adapt to their new roles in a new world.

Meanwhile, the Defense Department was consumed with a “Bottom-Up Review” initiated by Defense Secretary Les Aspin immediately after his appointment. Determined to reform the Defense Department, Aspin ordered a review of all Defense Department activities. Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff Colin Powell describes the scope of the review:

“Theoretically BUR meant starting with a clean slate, as if the current armed forces did not exist, and then building a new force to match current defense missions. This approach had a test-tube reasonableness, except that instead of starting from scratch, the new administration had inherited existing strategies, forces, treaty obligations, commitments, and crises all around the world.” (Powell, 1995, p. 579)

Aspin’s comprehensive review consumed the department. As Powell suggests, it prevented Defense Department officials from adequately engaging in existing military operations that required oversight. It wasn’t until August of 1993 that Aspin devoted resources to the crisis, asking his staff for a viable strategy for success in Somalia (Woods, 1997, p. 163). By this time, however, the intervention had spiraled out of

control. Woods (1997) argues that the Aspin strategy could have improved the chaos in Somalia if initiated earlier:

“Had there been time and a U.S. commitment to vigorously assist the UN to pursue the broad Aspin agenda, the unfavorable drift of events might yet have been reversed ... But even as efforts to implement this agenda proceeded, the orders to the Rangers stood; the hunt for Aideed was being intensified, and the possibility of having time to pursue the Aspin agenda was about to be extinguished.” (Woods, 1997, p. 164)

Critical analysis of the military operation should have been initiated within the Department of Defense at the start of the Clinton administration. However, the department’s time and resources were monopolized by the Bottom-up Review. Like the State Department, the Defense Department was consumed by the demands of the transition and was unable to fill the void of executive leadership.

In the absence of executive oversight, most policy decisions during the crisis were made by the Deputies Committee of the National Security Council (Woods, 1997, p. 160). Secretary of State Warren Christopher later admitted that the work of the Deputies Committee protected administration officials from engaging in the Somalia intervention (Stevenson, 1995, p. 92). Admiral Jeremiah also later agreed that the administration devoted inadequate attention to the crisis. In a report commissioned by the Joint Chiefs of Staff to evaluate the crisis, Walter S. Poole reported Jeremiah’s analysis of the situation:

“In Jeremiah’s view, the White House kept operating for some time in a campaign mode, skeptical about the views of officials carried over from the Bush administration and of those who had not been on the election team. Partly as a result, he believed, the US government never committed enough resources to UNOSOM II.” (Poole, 2005, p. 39)

This disconnect between executive decisions and executive officials left the Clinton administration woefully uninformed about the details of the operation until it began to

unravel in the fall of 1993. Meanwhile, the mission of the operation in Somalia reflected the lack of attention and oversight as it drifted from unsustainable to crisis point.

### **Transitional Limitations: Inexperience**

Transitional ambiguity and the holdover effect do not fully explain the role of the transition period during the Somalia intervention. Another major factor was the inexperience of President Clinton and his team in dealing with crises and decisions at the presidential level. As discussed in the previous chapter, the effectiveness of the new Kennedy administration was limited because his administration followed 8 years of Republican control of the White House. During the Bush/Clinton transition, this problem was magnified. Clinton became the first Democratic president in twelve years, following two Republican administrations. This time lapse magnified the limiting factor of inexperience during the first year of Clinton's term. Inexperience led to three shortfalls during the mismanagement of the Somalia intervention: the absence of qualified personnel, the use of untested decision-making procedures, and a dramatic miscalculation of U.N. expectations and capabilities.

First, the presidential transition resulted in a sudden lack of qualified officials to provide critical analysis during the crisis. Between the Kennedy and Clinton administrations, the growing complexity of American foreign policy had dramatically increased the number of presidential appointees by almost 400 percent (Campbell & Steinberg, 2008, p. 37). The twelve year gap between Democratic administrations added to the challenge of finding qualified people to fill administration posts. Long nomination and confirmation delays exacerbated the problem. Clinton announced all Cabinet level nominations before Christmas in 1992 (Drew, 1994, p.33). Other mid-to-upper level

foreign policy positions remained unfilled as Clinton's primary focus was domestic affairs. Adding to the delay was the record-setting duration of Senate confirmations for Clinton's nominees. The Brookings Institution reported that it took the Senate an average of 41 days to confirm Clinton's nominees in 1993, an increase of 37% longer than the average confirmation of Reagan's nominees in 1981 (Loomis, 2001).

Most officials, even in the highest posts, lacked experience and confidence at the presidential level. U.S. Ambassador to the United Nations (who would later succeed Warren Christopher as Secretary of State in the Clinton administration) described herself as "new on the job and eager to earn my place as a full member of our foreign policy team" (Albright, 2003, p. 179). As with any new administration, Clinton's team had not yet learned to work with each other and within the larger government bureaucracy. The new officials examined foreign policy decisions using procedures that were untested in a crisis situation. As previously discussed, other transitional pressures pushed the Somalia intervention from the desks of top administration officials to the Deputies Committee of the National Security Council. In a report commissioned by the Joint Chiefs of Staff to study the strategic failure of the Somalia intervention, Walter S. Poole noted that "imprecision and drift seemed to reign," at these meetings (Poole, 2005, p. 4).

Decision-making procedures did not improve even when discussions did reach the highest levels of the administration. Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff Colin Powell, who served under the Bush administration, stayed in his post during the first 9 months of the Clinton administration to complete his term. He described his frustration with early policy meetings in the Clinton White House:

"...the discussions continued to meander like graduate-student bull sessions or the think-tank seminars in which many of my new colleagues had spent the last

twelve years while their party was out of power. Backbenchers sounded off with the authority of cabinet officers. I was shocked one day to hear one of Tony Lake's subordinates, who was there to take notes, argue with him in front of the rest of us." (Powell, 1995, p. 576)

President Clinton's leadership style failed to resolve the growing policy uncertainty in the realm of foreign affairs. This unstructured and informal foreign policy decision making process would continue to challenge the administration well into the second term. As previously discussed, Clinton preferred to focus on domestic and economic issues. His team was expected to handle foreign policy so that he could focus on domestic affairs (Hyland, 1999). This lack of structure exacerbated the challenges of entering the White House and left the administration without a clear foreign policy vision or purpose, as evidenced by the Somalia intervention.

In the absence of effective decision-making procedures, Clinton's team failed to clearly articulate their strategy in Somalia. The inability to effectively communicate was most prominent in the weeks before the battle with Aideed's forces in Mogadishu. It was becoming increasingly clear to administration officials that they had miscalculated the strength of Aideed's militia and the support he enjoyed within Somalia (Johnston, 1997, p. 199). The Clinton administration was also beginning to question Howe's focus on capturing Aideed. In the weeks prior to the Mogadishu battle, Secretary of Defense Les Aspin began referencing an exit strategy and discussions turned to a diplomatic solution (Poole, 2005, p. 3). Officials, however, failed to communicate this change to military officers on the ground in Somalia. The communication failure resulted from the ineffective decision-making procedures established early in the operation. In his Joint Chiefs report, Poole explained that policy shifts lost their emphasis as they were filtered through the Deputies Committee:

“Secretary of Defense Aspin spoke of devising an “exit strategy” from Somalia; the Joint Chiefs also started working out a course of action. But, policy adjustments by the Deputies Committee were so finely nuanced that lower echelons did not interpret them as major changes and field commanders could not translate them into concrete actions.” (Poole, 2005, p. 3)

Secretary Aspin further muddied the situation when he discussed the administration’s policy in Somalia during a speech at the Center for Strategic and International Studies in August. In his remarks, Aspin referenced efforts to find a diplomatic solution while simultaneously affirming the administration’s commitment to capturing Aided (Rutherford, 2008, p. 153). Had the administration devoted adequate attention to their Somalia policy, they may have realized that these goals were incompatible. The incoherency of the administration’s position reached a climax in September, 1993 when U.S. Army General Thomas Montgomery requested additional artillery for his units serving in Somalia. Aspin denied the request, citing the administration’s renewed focus on a diplomatic solution (Rutherford, 2008, p. 156). Rutherford describes the implications of this decision. These implications were unobserved by administration officials:

“The administration started backing away from the military option by withholding support for its troops but without giving them the command to stop the attacks or informing them that the diplomatic option had already been adopted. Aspin’s decision to turn down Montgomery’s request highlighted the impossibility of the two-track policy – continuing military operations without support for the field, and a tentative decision to go diplomatic that was implemented only in Washington, D.C.” (Rutherford, 2008, p. 138)

After American casualties in Mogadishu a few months later, Aspin was heavily criticized for declining Montgomery’s request. Officials later determined that additional artillery would not have prevented the October casualties (Rutherford, 2008, p. 138).

However, the decision does exemplify the policy uncertainty that developed amidst the chaos of the transition period.

The inexperience of the Clinton administration can also be observed in their ineffective coordination with the United Nations. Throughout the intervention, the Clinton administration dramatically misinterpreted the expectations of the U.N. and overestimated their capabilities. Before entering office, President Bush had extensive experience with the United Nations, even serving as the U.S. Ambassador to the U.N. under the Nixon administration. Bush also had the benefit of three years as a global leader in the changing international community. Despite the failure of short-sightedness discussed earlier, the Bush administration did establish clear boundaries between U.S. and U.N. responsibilities. Embracing the misguided concept that the U.N. could function independently with an operation at this level, the Clinton administration was not as vigilant in enforcing this boundary. This was exemplified in the confusion between the U.N. and the Clinton administration over the issue of disarmament.

Bush administration officials drafted U.N. Security Council Resolution 794 which authorized the U.S.-led mission in Somalia. Reacting to Congressional concerns that this was a police action rather than a humanitarian program, these officials deliberately avoided mentioning a disarmament program. Woods explains that Bush administration officials viewed disarmament as a critical issue in the U.S./U.N. relationship:

“From Washington’s perspective, this constant reaffirmation of the limited nature of UNITAF responsibilities was also necessary to fend off continuous efforts by the UN to get UNITAF to do what Washington felt should properly be left to the follow-on UN forces themselves.” (Woods, 1997, p. 161)



Additionally, strategists within the U.S. military saw disarmament in Somalia as unrealistic because of the value Somalis placed on individual security and gun ownership (Poole, 2005, p. 2).

This caution was lost, however, in the absence of executive oversight during the transition. UN Secretary General Boutros-Ghali insisted that U.S. forces participate in disarmament efforts and the Clinton administration was not engaged enough to resist. U.S. forces gradually became more involved in disarmament efforts, even to the point of searching private homes for weapons and raiding arms markets (Lyons & Samatar, 1995, p. 42). On May 19, 1993, President Clinton even expressed support for a “program to collect heavy weapons” in an effort to clarify long-range goals for the intervention. The Clinton administration, without a clear understanding of Somali culture or U.N. capabilities, had casually removed one of the safeguards against extended U.S. involvement. In addition to further blurring the line between U.S. and U.N. responsibilities, this foray into disarmament intensified public animosity toward the United States and reinforced public support for General Aideed leading up to the October confrontation in Mogadishu.

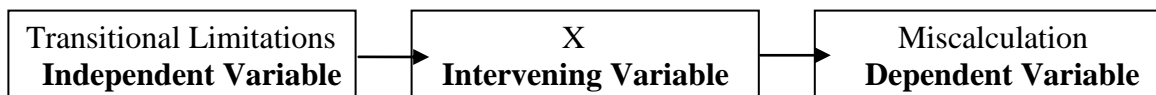
All of these problems stemmed from the inexperience of the new administration. In the midst of multiple international crises, the administration lacked the personnel, decision-making structures, or skills necessary to effectively formulate policy.

### **Applying the Transitional Limitations Model to Existing Analyses**

As explained above, the transitional problems of ambiguity, inexperience, and holdover policies limited presidential leadership during the Somalia crisis. Existing analyses of the Somalia crisis identify multiple causes for the policy failure in Somalia.

Among the causes discussed are bureaucratic uncertainty leading to mission drift and the prominent role of Congressional advocacy. Existing analyses point to these factors as the primary causes of policy failure. I will argue that these analyses are incomplete.

Bureaucratic uncertainty and Congressional advocacy are both inherent in the American democratic system and do not independently cause policy miscalculation. Rather, these factors are secondary causes that were only allowed to replace presidential leadership because of the policy uncertainty (presidential indecision and inattention) surrounding a presidential transition. The transitional limitations of ambiguity, inexperience, and the holdover effect created a power vacuum which allowed other forces to dominate presidential decision making. Similar to the Bay of Pigs crisis, miscalculations during the Somalia intervention follow the causal relationship illustrated below:



During the Somalia intervention, the intervening variables at work included bureaucratic politics, especially the principal agent problem, and Congressional advocacy. In the following sections, I will examine how these causal factors offer a more complete explanation of the Somalia crisis when examined within the context of the presidential transition period.

### **Overview of Bureaucratic Politics**

Bureaucratic politics is the study of how the inner workings of bureaucracies impact both the creation and implementation of foreign policy (Krieger, 2001, p. 95). As discussed in the Bay of Pigs analysis, theories of bureaucratic politics can be divided into two categories. First, bureaucratic politics theorists argue that bureaucrats will take different stances on an issue because of the department they represent. Other theories

focus on the argument that foreign policy decisions do not represent one voice, but the maneuvering and compromises of different bureaucratic systems. The latter category of bureaucratic politics has been suggested as a cause for both of the transitional crises discussed in this paper: the Bay of Pigs crisis and the Somalia intervention. This striking parallel reinforces the necessity of strong executive leadership to direct bureaucratic impulses into coherent policy.

In a report published by the Office of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, Walter S. Poole examines the conditions and circumstances that led President Bush to intervene in Somalia, as well as the circumstances which eventually necessitated a quick withdrawal. Poole's report argues that conflicting objectives of the State and Defense Departments led to imprecision and drift which ultimately undermined the success of the Somalia intervention (Poole, 2005, p. 4). His account reveals that conflicts between the State and Defense Departments raged throughout the operation's development and implementation. From the earliest discussions of a possible intervention, State Department officials argued that only U.S. forces were capable of resolving the crisis and saving lives in Somalia. Members of the Defense Department countered that such involvement constituted a long-term commitment that the United States could not afford to uphold. Poole describes an exchange between Assistant Secretary of State Herman Cohen and Deputy Assistant Secretary of Defense Robert Wolthuis during a meeting of the Policy Coordinating Committee on Somalia in August, 1992 that illustrates this debate:

“Mr. Robert Wolthuis, Deputy Assistant Secretary of Defense (Global Affairs) reminded conferees that Operation PROVIDE COMFORT aiding the Kurds in Northern Iraq, already had taken more than \$1 billion from Defense's budget. But every time the conferees started talking about specifics and limitations upon Defense assets, Cohen would interrupt, ‘Remember, people are dying.’” (Poole, 2005, p. 9)

Cohen's own account of the intervention supports Poole's assertion that the early discussions were consumed by conflicts between the State and Defense Departments. In *Intervening in Africa*, Cohen describes negativism from the Joint Chiefs of Staff and the Defense Department about the Somalia intervention which led to a stalemated bureaucracy (Cohen, 2000, p. 208).

Poole argues that because of this bureaucratic infighting, U.S. objectives in Somalia became a "constantly shifting target," (Poole, 2005, p. 70). In the absence of clearly defined policy goals, the mission gradually shifted from the security of food aid delivery to the creation of a viable and functioning nation in Somalia. This new focus was championed by State Department officials. Madeleine Albright, who served as U.S. Ambassador to the U.N. and later Secretary of State, described the new mission of the Clinton administration:

"We will embark on the unprecedented enterprise aimed at nothing less than the restoration of an entire country as a proud, functioning and viable member of the community of nations." (Hyland, 1999, p.56)

This statement represented a dramatic shift in the scope and duration of the intervention. In June of 1993, the intervention's objectives took another dramatic turn, this time led by Defense officials. On June 17, Admiral Howe issued a warrant for the arrest of General Aideed, complete with a \$25,000 reward for his capture (Poole, 2005, p. 3). Bureaucratic conflicts continued through the final weeks before the Mogadishu battle when State Department officials began searching for a diplomatic solution amidst ongoing military operations. The events of October 3 shifted the objective in Somalia once again. The public outcry over American casualties in Mogadishu was finally enough to prompt presidential attention. The Clinton administration abandoned all other goals in Somalia

and worked towards an immediate exit. Poole argued that the operation failed because it followed the changing whims of different bureaucratic departments (Poole, 2005, p. 70).

In *Humanitarianism Under Fire*, Kenneth Rutherford's analysis of the targeted search for Aideed reveals another facet of bureaucratic politics at work during the crisis – the principal agent problem. The principal agent problem occurs when a subordinate acts without the direction or even knowledge of superiors. As in the Bay of Pigs crisis, the absence of executive leadership allowed subordinates to direct policy without direction or explicit approval from superiors. Admiral Howe's arrest warrant on General Aideed was supported by Boutros-Ghali and the United Nations, but took the Defense Department by surprise (Brune, 1998, p. 30). Howe's previous request for American Special Forces to hunt Aideed was initially denied by Secretary Aspin on June 9 (Rutherford, 2008, p. 134). While Chairman Powell eventually granted Howe's request for additional gunships and strike planes to attack Somali strongholds, he continued to resist proposals to hunt Aideed. Defense Department reluctance was overpowered on June 13, however, after Somali civilians were killed during a violent altercation between Aideed's forces and U.N. Peacekeepers. Howe responded quickly by issuing a warrant for Aideed's arrest and a \$25,000 reward for his capture. Rutherford describes how the Defense Department was trapped into supporting Howe's public verdict:

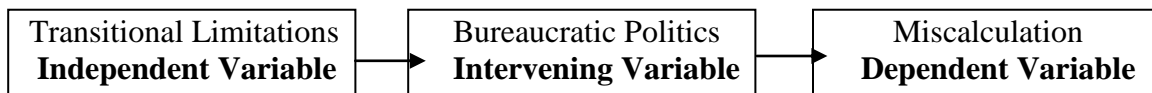
“Although the Aidid arrest and reward edict was cleared by UN headquarters, it caught Defense Department officials by surprise, but there was little they could do. Posters proclaiming “WANTED Aidid for REWARD of \$25,000” were displayed in Mogadishu...” (Rutherford, 2008, p. 136)

General Powell and Secretary of Defense Aspin both expressed reservations about sending additional troops, but ultimately supported the request from the field, sending 400 elite U.S. Delta and Ranger forces to Somalia (Brune, 1998, p. 31). The decision to

commit U.S. forces to the hunt for Aideed precipitated the October 3 battle in Mogadishu and dealt the final blow to a failing operation. By advancing conflicting goals and acting independently of the presidency, the bureaucracy did exert dominating influence during the Somalia intervention. Existing analyses, however, fail to recognize the role of the presidential transition in allowing this influence to emerge.

### **Bureaucratic Politics within the Transitional Limitations Model**

Examining the existing analyses through the Transitional Limitations Model offers a more complete analysis of the Somalia intervention. In this model, transitional limitations created the policy uncertainty which allowed bureaucratic forces to dominate presidential decision-making.



Both of the existing bureaucratic politics analyses discussed in the previous section offer a clearer explanation of the Bay of Pigs crisis when examined within this model.

Poole argues that rampant imprecision and bureaucratic infighting prevented effective policy-making and facilitated the mission creep from a humanitarian intervention to a revenge mission (Poole, 2005, p. 70). In his analysis, bureaucratic imprecision was the independent variable that caused the policy miscalculation. This analysis overlooks an important element of the crisis. Competing bureaucratic interests do not cause policy miscalculations independently. Despite the fact that bureaucratic interests are inherent in the American democratic system, miscalculations on this scale represent anomalies in American foreign policy, not the norm. In fact, bureaucratic departments are designed to advance competing interests while the presidency is

designed to direct these competing interests into coherent foreign policy. Halperin & Clapp (2006) explain the ideal role of the president in American foreign policy:

“In any foreign policy decision widely believed at the time to be important, the President will almost always be the principal figure determining the *general* direction of actions ... Furthermore, the President serves as the surrogate for the national interest. Many senior participants look to the President as to a blueprint for clues to the national security. His perception and judgment of what is in the national interest are dominant in the system. A strong President – with a clear sense of direction and leadership – can have a very strong influence on the images shared by bureaucratic participants, Congress, and the public.” (Halperin & Clapp, 2006, p. 16)

Bureaucracies were designed to inform and implement American foreign policy, not to govern American objectives. In the American democratic system, one of the primary roles of presidential leadership is to represent American interests abroad, with one voice that rises above competing domestic agendas.

Considering the appropriate roles of the bureaucracy and the presidency, Poole’s analysis raises the question of why competing bureaucratic interests were allowed to replace presidential leadership, govern foreign policy, and blur American objectives. The Transitional Limitations Model completes Poole’s analysis of the role of bureaucratic politics. As discussed above, transitional pressures consumed the executive departments of the Bush and Clinton administrations, diverting attention from the crisis and allowing other factors to dominate presidential decision-making. Rather than independently causing the policy miscalculation, competing bureaucratic interests magnified the policy uncertainty created by transitional limitations. Bureaucratic politics only explains the miscalculation of the Somalia intervention within the context of the presidential transition period.

The Transitional Limitations Model is confirmed by the emergence of the principal agent problem during the crisis. As discussed above, even the bureaucracies were consumed by transitional pressures. The State Department was overwhelmed by responding to multiple international crises. The Defense Department was consumed by Aspin's "Bottom-up Review." With attention diverted elsewhere, one general in the field was able to dramatically shift American objectives in Somalia. This highlights the fact that policy uncertainty (presidential indecision and inattention) not bureaucratic interests were the cause of the miscalculation in Somalia. If the Somalia intervention had been directed by strong presidential leadership, the actions of one general in the field would have represented a minor power struggle, instead of a complete shift in the direction of American foreign policy. Bureaucratic politics emerged as an intervening variable only in the absence of presidential attention and leadership.

### **Congressional Advocacy**

Other analyses have focused on the role of congressional advocacy in determining the course of the operation in Somalia. In their discussion on the role of Congress in the Somalia intervention, Johnston and Dagne (1997) argue that Congressional influence played a critical role in all key points of the intervention:

“The 102<sup>nd</sup> (1991-1992 Congress played a crucial role in getting the United States to act to save starving Somalis; the Democratic-controlled 103<sup>rd</sup> Congress (1993-1994) forced the withdrawal of U.S. troops, a step that resulted in subsequent UN withdrawal.” (Johnston & Dagne, 1997, p. 191)

Johnston & Dagne provide an overview of Congressional activity surrounding the Somalia crisis and argue that this activity determined presidential decision-making. In January 1992, two ranking members of the Senate Africa Subcommittee, Senators Paul Simon and Nancy Kassebaum, initiated a call for action in Somalia (Woods, 1997, p.



152). Between January and June of 1992, state department officials were called to testify before House and Senate committees six times on the Somali crisis (Woods, 1997, p. 155). During that same period, members of Congress participated in an extensive letter writing campaign to key policymakers including President George Bush and Secretary of State James Baker. Public hearings were also used to focus media attention on the growing crisis and several members of Congress even visited Somalia in fact-finding delegations (Johnston, 1997, p. 193). President Bush acknowledged the role of Congress in a public letter on December 10 which explained his decision to launch UNITAF (Rutherford, 2008).

Despite their support for U.S. engagement in Somalia, Johnston & Dagne argue that the scale of the proposed invasion took members of Congress by surprise. When the 103<sup>rd</sup> Congress was called into session in January, several members questioned whether Operation Restore Hope was consistent with the 1973 War Powers Resolution. Even though many members had pushed for U.S. engagement, they criticized President Bush for initiating and President Clinton for supporting a military operation of this scale without congressional approval (Johnston, 1997, p. 200). In July 1993, Senator Robert Byrd (D – W.V.) registered his criticism on the Senate floor:

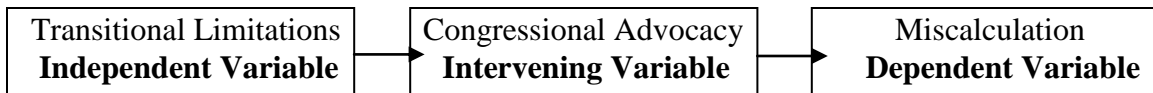
“I do not remember voting to grant the U.S. military the authority to chase down competing African warlords and conduct house-to-house searches in Mogadishu to confiscate weapons.” (Byrd quoted in Johnston & Dagne, 1997, p. 198)

On October 3, reports of American casualties in Mogadishu spurred a bipartisan push for immediate withdrawal. After extensive debate and a critical compromise with Senator Byrd, Congressional leaders in both parties supported the White House’s withdrawal deadline of March 31, 1994. Johnston and Dagne argue that the Clinton administration’s

failure to address the concerns of Congressional leaders eventually forced this withdrawal.

### **Congressional Advocacy within the Transitional Limitations Model**

Johnston and Dagne's analysis highlights an important variable at work during the Somalia intervention, but it ignores critical dynamics that shaped presidential decision-making and Congressional action during the crisis. Similar to Poole's bureaucratic politics analysis, this analysis overlooks the appropriate roles of Congress and the Presidency. Congressional influence can certainly be observed during the crisis, but it does not function as an independent variable. Rather, congressional advocacy was allowed to emerge as a dominant force during the intervention because of transitional pressures on the executive department. This relationship is explained using the Transitional Limitations Model.



During the intervention, transitional limitations created policy uncertainty (presidential indecision and inattention) which allowed congressional advocacy to exert influence on presidential decision-making. Ultimately, the miscalculation was caused by transitional uncertainty, while the details of that miscalculation were shaped by congressional advocacy and other intervening variables.

In *Who Rules the Roost?* (2002), Andrew Bennett examines the relationship of Congress and the Executive in American foreign policy. Bennett argues that the foreign policy is at its best when the two branches work together, relying on their respective strengths:

“Each branch has unique comparative advantages that it can bring to bear to save the other branch from its particular form of excess. The presidency offers the possibility of a foreign policy that is decisive, proactive, and when necessary, secret, and the Congress offers diversity of opinion, deliberation, democracy, openness wherever possible, and consensus building. The question is whether we can achieve a ‘balance between Congress and the president – a clearer identification of the areas where each has a comparative advantage over the other’ (Mann, 1990, p. 4).” (Bennett, 2002, p. 49)

In an ideal foreign policy relationship between Congress and the Executive, Congress acts in an advisory capacity and the President takes decisive action after considering multiple sources of opinion. During the Somalia intervention, transitional limitations prevented both branches from fulfilling these ideal roles during both the Bush and Clinton administrations. The Bush administration consulted Congress, but failed to fulfill an essential presidential responsibility to consider long-range consequences. The Clinton administration failed to consult Congress, part of a broader absence of presidential attention to the entire policy. In both administrations, Congressional advocacy did not drive the policy failure, but only magnified the transitional limitations on presidential attention.

Congressional advocacy for U.S. engagement in Somalia began building in January of 1992. However, President Bush did not respond to this until after losing the election in November of 1992. As previously discussed, the military operation had long-range consequences which the Bush administration deferred to the incoming administration. The administration acknowledged Congressional pressure to intervene in Somalia, but did not look beyond the few months they had remaining in office. Bennett argues that the need for long-range planning is one of the key reasons why the presidency is best equipped to make foreign policy decisions:

“... Presidents have to worry about both policy risk, or the risk that a foreign policy will fail to achieve its objectives, and political risk, or the risk of being blamed by voters for failures in foreign policy ... Members of Congress can therefore advance foreign policies that are unrealistic in the international arena but popular with voters at home, safe in the knowledge that presidents will either oppose these policies or suffer the political blame for policy failure if they adopt them.” (Bennett, 2002, p. 51)

As Bennett suggests, the ultimate responsibility to consider long-range consequences of foreign policy decisions rests with the presidency. Even though Congress advocated for an ill-conceived intervention in Somalia, the failure to consider long-range consequences is a failure of the presidency, not of Congress. Congressional advocacy is only an intervening variable that magnified the policy uncertainty of a presidential transition.

Similarly, Congressional advocacy had only an ancillary effect on the miscalculations of the Clinton administration. Johnston and Dagne argue that the Clinton administration’s failure to address the concerns of Congressional leaders caused the policy shifts which undermined initial U.S. success in Somalia. This analysis overlooks the fact that the Clinton administration was just as inattentive to the policy itself as they were to Congressional concerns over the policy. As previously discussed, the Somalia intervention was a holdover policy from the Bush administration. This policy soon dropped from the attention of President Clinton and his team as they devoted time and resources to the new administration’s priorities. Congress did exert influence on presidential decision-making after the Mogadishu battle by demanding a quick exit. However, this influence was only exerted after American policy in Somalia had been completely derailed by presidential inattention and inexperience relating to the transition period. In his memoirs, President Clinton reveals that his decision to follow Congressional demands to withdraw in Somalia was driven by other priorities:

“Moreover, there was no support in Congress for a larger military role in Somalia, as I learned in a White House meeting with several members; most of them demanded an immediate withdrawal of our forces. I strongly disagreed, and in the end we compromised on a six-month transition period. I didn’t mind taking Congress on, but I had to consider the consequences of any action that could make it harder to get congressional support for sending American troops to Bosnia and Haiti, where we had far greater interests at stake.” (Clinton, 2004, p. 552)

Clinton did accede to Congressional demands to withdraw from Somalia, but he did so to protect the other priorities of his administration. The Somalia intervention was not a priority for the Clinton administration and consequently did not receive the attention and analysis that a military operation of that size demands. Ultimately, this inattention derailed the Somalia policy, not Congressional advocacy. Congressional advocacy only functioned as an intervening variable during the crisis, filling the void of executive leadership left in the wake of the presidential transition.

## CONCLUSION

Despite several attempts throughout the post-war period to smooth the transition process with policy and legislation, events during the Somalia intervention are strikingly parallel to those of the Bay of Pigs crisis thirty years earlier. Both policy miscalculations were driven by the same transitional limitations: ambiguity, the holdover effect, and inexperience. In both crises, transitional ambiguity prevented adequate oversight as the outgoing administration deferred decisions to an incoming administration that was unwilling to take ownership. During the Bay of Pigs crisis, transitional ambiguity allowed an ill-conceived plan to gain momentum despite a crippling lack of ownership or analysis. Thirty years later, transitional ambiguity allowed the Bush administration to launch an extensive military operation with only a few months remaining in office by deferring consideration of long-term consequences to the next administration. Each crisis also demonstrated the struggle of new administrations to deal with policies and personnel held over from the previous administration. For the Kennedy team, the holdover effect generated two diametrically opposed influences on the planning process: internal reluctance to take ownership of the plan and external political pressure to embrace the operation. The holdover effect also shifted the role of CIA planners from analysts to advocates, as they were placed in the position of defending the previous administration's actions. For the Clinton administration, the holdover effect resulted in an ongoing military operation that was incompatible with the priorities of the new administration. In both cases, the holdover effect severely limited critical analysis of a major military operation. Finally, each crisis revealed the danger that inexperience poses to new administrations. Both the Kennedy and Clinton administrations struggled to formulate

effective policy decisions while learning to work with each other and within the governmental bureaucracy. The Bay of Pigs operation and the Somalia intervention also suffered from ad-hoc decision-making processes that had not yet been tested during a crisis.

The limitations imposed by the transition period diverted presidential leadership and attention from major military operations. In the absence of executive leadership, other forces dominated the decision-making process. During the Bay of Pigs crisis, members of the Kennedy administration unconsciously merged their arguments to a shared set of beliefs and norms in a process that Irving Janis identified as groupthink. During the Somalia intervention, congressional advocacy exerted undue influence on the presidential decision-making process. Bureaucratic politics played a role in both crises. In the absence of strong presidential leadership and direction, policies were derailed by bureaucratic maneuvering and infighting. The Transitional Limitations Model illustrates how transitional limitations allowed all of these forces to temporarily replace presidential leadership and derail American foreign policy. These parallels demonstrate the continued threat of the transition period to the direction and implementation of American foreign policy.

This thesis fills a void in the existing literature on presidential decision-making in American foreign policy. Foreign policy during American presidential transitions remains a neglected area of the field. Many existing analyses address foreign policy crises that occurred during a presidential transition, but they overlook the obvious role of the transition period itself. Instead, these sources focus on other causes including bureaucratic politics, groupthink, and the role of Congress. These factors play an

important role in the transitional foreign policy crises discussed in this thesis, but their influence on presidential decision-making raises an important question that is not addressed by existing analyses. Why are these factors allowed to dominate presidential decision-making? The Transitional Limitations Model introduced in this thesis answers that question. During the Bay of Pigs crisis and the Somalia intervention, factors such as groupthink, Congressional advocacy, and bureaucratic politics serve as intervening variables that magnify the crippling impact of transitional limitations on presidential power.

This paper should not be interpreted as an argument against the American democratic system. Transitional limitations are the unavoidable cost of the democratic process. However, this cost is accompanied by the benefits of legitimacy, flexibility, and new ideas. The case studies in this paper demonstrate not only the weaknesses of American democracy, but also the strengths. Transitional crises present invaluable and irreplaceable lessons for new administrations. Both the Kennedy and Clinton administrations emerged from the crises with stronger decision-making procedures and a broader realization of the demands and limitations of the presidency. Immediately after the crisis, Kennedy remarked, “We got a big kick in the leg – and we deserved it. But maybe we’ll learn something from it” (Schlesinger, 1965, p. 290). In his memoirs, Clinton similarly discussed the Somalia crisis as a learning experience for his administration:

“After Black Hawk Down, whenever I approved the deployment of forces, I knew much more about what the risks were, and made much clearer what operations had to be approved in Washington. The lessons of Somalia were not lost on the military planners who plotted our course in Bosnia, Kosovo, Afghanistan, and other trouble spots of the post-Cold War world...” (Clinton, 2004, p. 554)



The flexibility of the American democratic system provided both the Kennedy and Clinton administrations with the opportunity to learn from their early mistakes. Additionally, the inherent accountability of a democratic system gave each administration added incentive to pursue those opportunities. These are just a few of the benefits that far outweigh the transitional limitations discussed in this thesis. The presidential transition period will remain an unavoidable threat to the cohesion of American foreign policy. Future administrations must recognize this vulnerability not as a weakness that can be overcome, but as a learning process that is inherent to the American democratic system.

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