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Analogies, Choice and Foreign Policy

[In the 1930s], the world had a chance to stop a ruthless aggressor and missed it. I pledge to you: we will not make that mistake again.

Since World War II, such statements have become commonplace. So common, that it would be difficult to guess with any degree of certainty who made this statement and in what context. It could be Harry Truman reacting to the invasion of South Korea; Anthony Eden talking about Egypt's seizure of the Suez Canal; Presidents Kennedy, Johnson, or Nixon concerning the Vietnam War; Jimmy Carter responding to the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan; Ronald Reagan explaining his administration's policies toward the Sandinistas in Nicaragua; or Bill Clinton addressing the problems in the former Yugoslavia. While this specific allusion to the famous Munich analogy comes from a speech by George Bush concerning the Gulf War,¹ it could have been uttered in any of these situations.

At the same time Bush was invoking the lessons of the 1930s to explain why the United States must respond forcefully to Iraq's invasion of Kuwait, he also invoked a second well-known historical analogy by insisting that his policy would not lead to another Vietnam. Indeed, if there is one historical analogy that has overtaken Munich in prominence it is Vietnam. Similar to the Munich analogy, it is easy to think of situations where statesmen invoked the lessons of Vietnam to support particular policies. George Bush's invocation of these historical parallels is far from exceptional. The very prominence of these analogies demonstrates how often debates over foreign policy are conducted in terms of the lessons of history. Decision makers

often turn to historical analogies for guidance when faced with a novel foreign policy problem, but to which analogies will they turn?

The vast number of possible historical parallels presents a problem—a problem not only for policy makers who must decide which lessons of history are most applicable, but also a problem for analysts who want to understand why decision makers select the policy options they do. This problem is not limited to the study of historical analogies, it is one that afflicts the entire literature on the role that ideas play in the making of foreign policy. While this literature has greatly advanced our understanding of international politics, it suffers from an embarrassment of riches:

Ideas are a dime a dozen. For every idea that appears to play a major role in politics, tens of thousands play no role at all. Rarely do scholars explain why the idea they study had an impact when so many others did not.²

This book attempts to address this gap by examining the critical question, why does one idea affect foreign policy decisions while others are ignored?³ While knowing which idea a policy maker sees as relevant may help explain decisions, it is also important to ask why that idea was seen as relevant rather than others. When a policy maker turns to historical analogies, to which particular analogy will she turn? Which lessons matter?

It is important to note that historical analogies are not the only type of ideas that can influence policy. However, for students of foreign policy, historical analogies are a good place to start when asking which ideas matter. First, historical analogies give more specific policy-relevant information than broad constructs such as worldviews or ideologies. The link between the lessons of history and policy decisions is closer than the link between worldviews and policy decisions. Second, historical analogies offer a mechanism for explaining where ideas come from and how they might vary over time, in contrast to more static studies of the impact of specific ideas such as “Keynesianism” or the “cult of the offensive.”⁴ Finally, recent work has shown that historical analogies may be a particularly important cognitive resource for decision makers dealing with a discrete policy problem characterized by high levels of uncertainty, ambiguous information, and a constrained response time.⁵ As these conditions are present in most foreign policy crises, the privileged position given to histori-

cal analogies in the present study is justifiable. Moreover, as neither Jimmy Carter nor Ronald Reagan was renowned for his interest in history, the following cases are hard ones for the analogical approach. The use of historical lessons in these relatively ahistorical administrations offers strong support for the prominence given here to historical analogies.

For those interested in understanding the sources of foreign policy, it is important to study the role played by the lessons of history because when policy makers use analogies to help interpret a situation, these historical lessons have a great effect upon a decision maker's choice. By providing information concerning the expected results of different policy options, analogies "introduce choice propensities into an actor's decision making: they predispose the actor toward certain policy options and turn him away from others."⁶ The lessons of history help policy makers decide what specific policies will best further their interests by allowing them to form expectations regarding the likely consequences of different policy options. Thus, the analogical approach can provide a useful complement to the interest-based approaches that dominate explanations of foreign policy: analogies explain how a policy maker's interests get translated into specific foreign policy decisions.

Despite the importance of the lessons of history for foreign policy makers, there are still key areas of the analogical reasoning process that are only dimly understood. Specifically, little is known concerning the impact of domestic political considerations on the analogical reasoning process, too little attention has been paid to the vital question of what determines which specific analogies will be important for any particular decision, and the possibility that analogies can help determine the very interests policy makers are looking to pursue, beyond merely helping them figure out what specific policies will advance preexisting interests, has been ignored.

First, consider the problem of neglecting domestic politics and focusing exclusively on what the lessons of history have to say about the international ramifications of different policies. While foreign policy makers do often search the lessons of history to determine what actions will maximize their state's international gains, that is only part of the story. Because foreign policy can affect domestic issues, policy makers also worry about the domestic impact of their foreign policy. Therefore, policy makers may seek domestic lessons from prior events that focus on the internal repercussions of different

foreign policy stances, in addition to internationally focused ones. To clarify the terminology used here, an analogy or lesson is labeled as a domestic or an international one depending on the analogy's area of application, not its source. "Domestic analogies" and "domestic lessons" refer to historical lessons that give policy makers information concerning the domestic ramifications of their foreign policy options, regardless of whether these lessons are derived from previous domestic or international events. Conversely, "international analogies" and "international lessons" are ones that give policy makers information about the international consequences of different policy options, regardless of the source of these lessons.

The Munich analogy is a good example of an internationally focused analogy. The lessons of Munich tell policy makers interested in protecting the interests of their state to oppose any form of aggression, no matter how slight, because appeasement only encourages future challenges and strengthens the aggressor. However, policy makers who are also interested in retaining their domestic political positions may seek guidance from the lessons of history that speak directly to their domestic concerns. For this purpose, the lessons of Munich might be less relevant than some form of the Vietnam analogy that warns policy makers of the electoral danger of involving their nation in a costly and prolonged conflict over peripheral interests.⁷ Just as the Munich analogy could predispose a policy maker toward intervention, this domestically focused lesson of Vietnam could predispose a policy maker against intervention. Domestic analogies are just as capable of introducing "choice propensities" into the decision-making process as their internationally focused siblings, but have so far been ignored.

Second, because different historical lessons can lead policy makers to pursue different policies, the question of which analogy matters is a key element in explaining policy decisions. If a policy maker confronts an unfamiliar situation, why is one analogy seen as more relevant than another? Why is one lesson of history applied while others are ignored? To understand a foreign policy based upon any particular historical analogy, these questions must be answered.

Third, studies of the lessons of history and foreign policy have treated an actor's interests as exogenous to the analogical reasoning process. Interests are typically deduced from an actor's position in a certain material structure and analogies are used to explain why decision makers conclude that any particular policy will best advance

these preexisting interests. In short, interests are seen as prior to analogies. However, this rationalist approach to the lessons of history may unduly restrict the role that analogies can play in the decision-making process by ignoring the possibility that historical analogies may help determine the very interests decision makers are looking to further.

This chapter will address each of these problems by presenting a model of analogical reasoning that recognizes the interrelationship between international and domestic politics, helps answer the important question of why some historical analogies are seen as relevant for later decisions while others are ignored, and is open to the possibility that analogies can do more than simply allow decision makers to figure out what specific policies will advance their preexisting interests, but can also determine the interests themselves.

Analogies and Foreign Policy

The analogical approach to decision making is part of a larger cognitive approach that stresses the importance of an individual's beliefs in the decision-making process.⁸ The fundamental starting point for much of this work is the assumption that human rationality is "bounded."⁹ Humans have only limited cognitive capacities and have to deal with a potentially overwhelming amount of often ambiguous information. Given these limited capacities and unlimited amounts of available information, people adopt cognitive shortcuts when making decisions. This need may be especially acute for political decision makers given the complex, ambiguous, and highly changeable nature of most political contexts.¹⁰ One important shortcut people use to deal with this information overload is to use their preexisting beliefs as a guide in perceiving the environment, drawing inferences, and making decisions.¹¹

One way decision makers can use their pre-existing beliefs to help them comprehend an enormous amount of ambiguous information is to reason by analogy. The essence of analogical reasoning is the transfer of information from one situation (the base or source) to another situation (the target). The type of analogy most relevant to political decision making is the historical analogy. Historical analogizing consists of using a previous political event to help interpret a new situation. The importance of historical analogies for current

policies can be seen not only in the sometimes heated debates over what the correct lessons of certain analogies should be, but also in the extent to which historical analogies often pervade discussions of foreign policy issues.

Given this pervasiveness, students of politics have long shown an interest in exploring how politicians use historical analogies and the implications this has for the decision-making process.¹² To understand how historical analogies can help policy makers deal with the condition of bounded rationality, consider Yuen Foong Khong's analogical explanation framework, a recent and enlightening attempt to apply the analogical approach to the study of foreign policy. Khong's framework portrays historical analogies as cognitive shortcuts that:

1. define the nature of the current situation,
2. assess the stakes involved,
3. provide possible policy prescriptions,
4. predict the likelihood of success of policy prescriptions,
5. assess the moral rightness of policy prescriptions, and
6. provide warnings associated with certain policy options.

To give a concrete example, consider the most famous historical analogy, the Munich analogy. Faced with the invasion of one country by another, the Munich analogy would: define this new situation in terms of the events of the 1930s and the failure of appeasement, assess the stakes involved in this new situation as potentially very high because the failure to stop aggression early then had led to a world war, recommend a policy of intervention to repel aggression, imply that such a policy would have a good chance of success if undertaken quickly and firmly, suggest intervention as the moral policy, and warn of the dangers of unchecked aggression.¹³

By providing this type of information, historical analogies greatly simplify the decision-making process by clarifying a complex and ambiguous reality and suggesting to decision makers what type of policy will best serve their interests. When analogies are used to evaluate policy options in this way, they will influence a decision maker's choice. Using the lessons of the thirties to interpret a new situation will clearly predispose a policy maker toward an aggressive policy, because all the information contained in that analogy reinforces the choice of an interventionist course.

To better understand the place of analogical explanations in the

study of foreign policy, it may help to examine a common criticism of the analogical approach; namely, that policy makers use historical analogies merely to justify their policy choices, and not to determine those policies. Thus, analysts who focus on analogies are criticized for being duped by the rhetoric of policy makers into mistakenly believing that analogies are anything more than useful propaganda devices invoked by policy makers to sell their policies. According to these critics, policy makers support the policies they do not because of their reading of the lessons of history, but because these policies further some conception of their objective interests. After discussing the content of this criticism and some of its problems, this section will argue that the dichotomy between idea- and interest-based explanations is a false one and show how the two can be complementary. Analogies can provide a useful complement to the interest based approaches that dominate explanations of foreign policy by demonstrating how the lessons of history help translate a policy maker's interests into specific foreign policy decisions. This is not to argue that there is no difference between ideas and interests or that the distinction is not a useful one, but rather that the two are not competitive explanations of behavior, but complementary ones.

Arthur Schlesinger criticized the analogical approach on the grounds that, "[T]he past is an enormous grab bag with a prize for everybody," and that policy makers select analogies from this grab bag merely to justify their policies and not to analyze, evaluate, and choose their policies. Schlesinger argues that "[T]he issue of history as rationalization somewhat diminishes the force of the argument that history is per se a powerful formal determinant of policy" because one "can never be sure . . . to what extent the invocation of history is no more than a means of dignifying a conclusion already reached on other grounds."¹⁴ Similarly, Jack Snyder argues, "Statesmen pick and choose among the available lessons of history until they find one that fits the strategy they want, for other reasons, to adopt."¹⁵

For these critics, explanatory power lies in these "other grounds" or "other reasons" and not in the historical analogies leaders invoke to justify their policies. Such assertions lead naturally to the question of what are these "other reasons" that drive policy? Most often, these other reasons are the analyst's formulation of the policy maker's objective interests. The specific content of these objective interests can vary depending on the particular theory espoused by the analyst. For example, realists can talk about objective national interests,

Marxists about objective economic interests, and theorists who focus on domestic politics can focus on an objective interest in retaining office. Regardless of the particular content of these interests, the logic of the critique is the same: It is these objective interests that determine a policy maker's position, not the lessons of history that they invoke merely to rationalize and in some cases cloak their pursuit of that interest.

One problem with this criticism of the analogical approach is that it leads to a logical contradiction. On the one hand, these critics contend that historical analogies do not influence a decision maker's policy choice; those choices are based on the decision maker's objective interests, not her reading of the lessons of history. On the other hand, these critics argue that policy makers invoke historical analogies to convince others of the correctness of their favored policy. However, for historical analogies to be effective justifications for policies, they must influence policy preferences. If the lessons of history did not influence policy preferences, they would be useless as propaganda tools. If everybody simply deduced their policy preferences from their objective interests, without any consideration of the lessons of history, then why invoke those lessons at all?

For a concrete example, consider Jack Snyder's *Myths of Empire*. Snyder's central interest is in explaining why overexpansion has been the fate of so many great powers. His explanation focuses on the coalition building and logrolling that takes place among domestic interest groups that have parochial interests in some form of expansion. To explain how this imperial coalition becomes capable of hijacking the state and using it for its parochial interests, Snyder argues that members of this coalition invoke the "myths of empire" to justify and gain support for their belligerent policies. For Snyder, historical analogies are one form of these myths of empire. For example, a policy maker interested in enhancing her prospects for reelection with a successful war may invoke the Munich analogy to justify and drum up support for an aggressive policy. In this formulation, the Munich analogy does not lead this policy maker to favor an aggressive policy, it is only a convenient rationalization for a policy designed to further her objective interest in remaining in power domestically. This cloaking of parochial interests in the garb of the national interest through the medium of the Munich analogy allows the members of this imperialistic coalition to gain outside support and implement their policies.¹⁶ Thus, Snyder finds himself

caught in a contradiction. When discussing how members of the imperial coalition come to favor certain policies, historical analogies are irrelevant myths. However, when discussing how this group gains political support, suddenly these myths of empire have the power to influence policy preferences. If ideas, like historical analogies, are useful for influencing the policy preferences of others, what is the theoretical basis for the claim that the particular content of the ideas held by those voicing these myths of empire are irrelevant to the policy-making process?¹⁷ Why are ideas important for some people and not others? Paradoxically, the portion of the critic's argument that contends that historical analogies are mere justifications designed to drum up support, implicitly assumes the point they are ostensibly criticizing; that ideas, like historical analogies, can influence an individual's policy preferences.

In addition to this problem of logical coherence, dismissing the importance of ideas in the decision-making process in favor of an exclusive focus on objective interests also leads to empirical problems. For example, in spite of Snyder's rejection of idea-based explanations, he is often unable to explain many of the instances of overexpansion he finds without giving ideas/historical analogies an explanatory role independent of objective interests. To account for these cases where overexpansion cannot be explained without reference to the ideas held by policy makers, Snyder employs the concept of ideological "blowback."¹⁸ Blowback refers to the phenomenon where domestic elites come to believe their own propaganda, forgetting the instrumental origin of these myths of empire. For Snyder, blowback could occur if "cynical, mobilizing elites inadvertently socialized successor elite generations to believe the imperial myths, failing to explain their instrumental origins," or if "as a result of some subconscious psychological process" these manipulative myth makers come to believe their own fictions.¹⁹ Some form of ideological blowback occurs in a number of Snyder's cases. For example, in discussing the overexpansion of the United States in the 1960s, Snyder contrasts the policy makers of the early 1950s, who, he claims, used myths of empire such as the Munich analogy and the related domino theory instrumentally, with the policy makers of the 1960s who were what he calls "true believers" in these myths of empire.²⁰

Despite Snyder's attempts to treat blowback as merely an interesting anomaly that pops up in some of his cases, this phenomenon points to a serious problem for Snyder and for any theoretical

approach that attempts to draw a direct link from objective interests to specific policy positions. Blowback brings this entire approach into question because it shows that ideas such as historical analogies are not mere rationalizations, but can sometimes be a key determinant of a policy maker's choice. If the "true believers" base their policies on their beliefs, how can the beliefs of other decision makers be considered irrelevant? Again, why are ideas important for some people and not others? Instead of seeing "true believers" as anomalies whose beliefs impede the rational pursuit of their objective interests, it would be more consistent to see all decision makers as dependent on their beliefs. If U.S. policy makers in the 1960s based their policies on a belief in the domino theory, but the policy makers in the early '50s did not believe the domino theory, what beliefs did the earlier group base their policies on? Instead of explaining the actions of the latter group as simply the pursuit of their objective interests, and explaining the actions of the former in terms of their mistaken beliefs in the myths of empire, it would be more consistent to view both groups as pursuing their objective interests, but differing in their beliefs concerning what policies will best realize their interests. This means that the key difference between the "true believer" and what Snyder considers to be the normal decision maker is not that for the former beliefs matter, and for the latter they do not; the difference centers on the content of their beliefs. Blowback points to the limitation of a purely interest-based analysis because it shows that given similar objective interests, policy makers can choose very different policies depending on the beliefs they hold.

At its base, the debate between those who treat historical analogies as policy guides versus those who see them as mere propaganda tools is a debate over the role of ideas as a source of behavior versus the role of objective interests as a source of behavior. Where analysts such as Snyder explain foreign policy in terms of the objective interests of the actors, the analogical approach explains behavior in terms of the ideas that policy makers hold about the world around them. Unfortunately, these two approaches are too often treated as mutually exclusive competing approaches. Do ideas, such as historical analogies, determine foreign policy, or do interests determine foreign policy? The purpose of this section, and this book as a whole, is to show why this phrasing of the question is not useful and to demonstrate the value of integrating insights from both approaches.

The main weakness of all interest-based explanations is in speci-

fyng how an actor's interests lead to a preference for some policy over another. The logic of all such approaches is to deduce an actor's interests given that actor's place in a particular system and then assume that those interests give the actor specific preferences for some policies over others. It is in the latter step, the jump from an individual's objective interests to preferences for specific policies, where interest-based explanations run into trouble; trouble that a focus on ideas such as historical analogies can help alleviate. The link between interests and policy preferences is problematic, and policy makers will need devices such as historical analogies to tell them what particular policies will further their interests.²¹ To clarify, the argument here is not that economic, political, or bureaucratic factors do not endow an actor with objective interests; rather, the argument is that these interests alone cannot explain what policies an actor will decide to adopt in pursuit of these interests. The office holder may well have a permanent and rational interest in holding his job, but his pursuit of this interest will be influenced by the ideas he holds concerning the likely consequences of various actions; information historical analogies can provide. For example, positing that during a foreign policy crisis a leader will be driven by an interest in remaining in power does not answer the question of what policy this leader will favor. Would his interest in remaining in power be better served by compromising and facing the criticism of the hawks or by pursuing a policy of escalation that risked involving his nation in a bloody and prolonged conflict? Simply knowing his interests does not answer this question. The answer depends upon the policy maker's definition of the situation and his appraisal of the expected costs and benefits of the different options.

By giving policy makers this type of information, historical analogies can influence the decision making process by helping them decide what particular option will best further their interests. To continue with the above example, whether this hypothetical leader believed that escalation would lead to another Vietnam or a quick victory like the one achieved by the Thatcher government in the Falklands would certainly affect his estimation of what particular policy would be in his domestic interest. If he thought escalation would lead to another Vietnam, his interest in remaining in power would manifest itself in a conciliatory policy. However, if he believed that the current situation was more analogous to the Falklands war, his interest in remaining in power would manifest itself in an aggres-

sive policy. Knowing an individual's interests does not tell you what policy he will favor, but combining these interests with a focus on the historical analogies the decision maker uses to define the situation can tell you why a policy maker favors a particular policy. Thus, the dichotomy between ideas versus interests as a source of behavior is a false one, because people have ideas about what policies will further their interests.²² The following sections will explore three existing gaps in knowledge about the analogical reasoning process and offer a model of analogical reasoning that can help fill those gaps.

Domestic Politics and Historical Analogies

[Many analysts] treat the professional politicians involved in the making of foreign policy as though they were not politicians at all.

—F. H. Harrington, "Politics and Foreign Policy"

Little is known about the impact of domestic political considerations on the analogical reasoning of foreign policy makers. Consider the absence of any concerns for domestic politics in the most commonly discussed analogies: the World War I analogy focuses on the dangers of war started by inadvertent escalation spirals, the Versailles analogy emphasizes how policy makers can avoid the mistakes made by the peacemakers after World War I that helped lead to World War II, the Munich analogy concentrates on the dangers of letting aggressors go unchecked, the Korean analogy centers on the dangers of a peripheral war escalating due to the intervention of another major power, and the Vietnam analogy warns decision makers against the high international costs of getting trapped in the quagmire of another state's civil war. All these analogies focus on the international consequences of various policies, not their domestic consequences. Analogies are road maps that help policy makers maximize the national interest by guiding them through unfamiliar and uncertain terrain by giving them information about the international ramifications of particular policies.²³

Interestingly, this focus on the international implications of historical lessons is even prevalent in studies of analogies and foreign policy that begin from the premise that most foreign policy makers start their careers as domestic politicians. Starting from this premise, these authors argue that the relevant lessons for these individuals will

not come from previous international events, but from the domestic events that were important during their rise to domestic prominence. The argument is that the lessons learned from these domestic events will be the ones turned to when these actors are later empowered to make decisions in the international arena.²⁴ However, this position still neglects much of the importance of domestic politics by implicitly accepting the assumption that foreign policy makers are concerned solely with the international consequences of their actions.

This view of a foreign policy maker's interests is too limited because it does not consider that the individuals who make up the state and act on behalf of the state have interests that are separate from the interests of the state as a whole. In addition to seeking to advance the interests of the state internationally, policy makers also have an interest in maintaining and advancing their domestic political positions. Given this desire for political survival, policy makers will naturally be concerned with the domestic impact of different foreign policy options. As a result, studies of analogies and foreign policy cannot neglect domestic politics. Besides internationally focused analogies, policy makers will also need analogies to help them determine which particular policies will further their domestic interests. Just as internationally focused analogies can influence a decision maker's choice by offering information concerning how different options will affect the interests of her state, domestically focused analogies can also "introduce choice propensities" into the decision-making process by giving the policy maker information concerning how different options will affect her domestic interests. Thus, domestic interests and analogies may be just as important in explaining foreign policy as international interests and analogies. Policy makers need analogical road maps to illuminate the links between their interests and specific decisions in the domestic arena, as well as the international one.

The argument of this section is not that internationally focused historical analogies are irrelevant to the decision-making process, but that any theory of analogical reasoning in foreign policy that ignores the domestic side of analogies is inadequate and that a complete analogical approach to foreign policy would include both domestic and international analogies. Sometimes internationally focused analogies will be the key factors in determining a state's foreign policy; sometimes domestically focused analogies will play that key role; and sometimes a state's foreign policy will be influenced by both types

of analogies and the tradeoffs they present to policy makers. Given this, an important question for those interested in explaining foreign policy is what determines which type of analogy will be important in any given decision making context? The purpose of the next section is to explore this question.

Choosing an Analogy

A second aspect of the analogical reasoning process that is not well understood is the issue of analogy selection. When a foreign policy maker has to choose a policy, why is one particular analogy seen as relevant while others are ignored? Without an adequate answer, there is no way to develop a complete analogical theory of decision making.²⁵ Any analysis that leaves this question unanswered can only provide explanations of decisions after the fact. Knowing which analogies policy makers have seen as relevant, one can use that information to explain their decisions. However, to develop a theory capable of generating falsifiable predictions, one would have to be able to explain which analogy a particular decision-making environment is likely to produce. Unfortunately, most scholars interested in the process of analogical reasoning have spent little time on this issue, choosing instead to focus on exploring how analogies, once invoked, can influence a decision maker's choice. The result is that the selection of a source analogue remains the least understood step in the process of analogical reasoning.²⁶

This section's emphasis on analogical *choice* is a marked departure from conventional wisdom, which sees remarkably little choice in the analogue choice process. Typically, analogies are viewed as forcing themselves upon unsuspecting policy makers who are helpless to resist their allure. The policy maker is a prisoner to a particular analogy. In contrast, the argument here is that it is more useful to view policy makers as conscious consumers and creators of analogies. While policy makers are constrained by their beliefs, they are also capable of deliberately selecting a specific analogy based on explicit judgments regarding which potential historical parallel holds the information that is most useful for them. To be clear, this analogical freedom of choice does not mean that the selection process is a purely instrumental one where policy makers already know what policy they want to implement and then decide what analogy will be most effec-

tive in selling that policy. Instead, while most policy makers often know what interests they want to promote,²⁷ they often do not know what specific policy will further those interests, so they turn to historical analogies for crucial information concerning what policy will best advance their interests. Before decision makers can determine which analogy will help them sell a particular policy, they need to determine which analogy will help them choose a particular policy.

To help understand why policy makers choose the analogies they do, this section offers a three-factor model of analogical choice. The first factor is a decision maker's historical experience. Policy makers are most likely to apply historical lessons from recent events, events that occurred during the formative years of their careers, and events that were emotionally involving. The second factor is the policy maker's estimate of the level of international and domestic threats she is facing. If a policy maker faces an international threat, she will look into her historical repertoire for lessons that give information regarding the international ramifications of different options. Conversely, facing a domestic threat, she will search her repertoire for lessons that speak to the domestic consequences of different options. The third and final factor is the decision maker's estimates of causal similarities. For a policy maker to conclude that an analogy can help her realize her goals, she must believe that the cause and effect relations that were at work in the past say something about the cause and effect constraints she is currently facing. Table 1.1 offers a summary of this three factor model of analogical choice. The following elaborates on each of these three factors, discussing how and where each builds on and departs from the current orthodoxy.

Factor One: The Historical Repertoire

A useful starting point for any discussion of why policy makers choose the analogies they do is what Kahneman and Tversky call the availability heuristic. The availability heuristic is the tendency for people to form judgments on the basis of events they can easily call to mind. One demonstration of this effect is that when asked, people routinely estimate that the number of words in the English language that begin with the letter *r* is greater than the number of words that have *r* as the third letter, even though the latter far outnumber the former. The reason for this, according to Kahneman and Tversky, is that it is simply easier for people to think of words that begin with *r*

Table 1.1
Which Lessons Matter?: A Three Factor Model
of Analogical Choice

<i>Factor 1:</i> A Policy Maker's Historical Repertoire	Usually consisting of recent events that occurred during the formative stage of one's political career, and emotionally vivid events such as those experienced firsthand or those that had far-reaching consequences.
<i>Factor 2:</i> Estimates of the Relative Level of International and Domestic Threats	If policy makers are facing a relatively large international threat, they will turn to analogies that speak to the international consequences of different policy options. Conversely, facing a domestic threat, they will turn to analogies that speak to the internal ramifications of different options.
<i>Factor 3:</i> Estimates of Causal Similarities	Of the relevant international or domestic analogies, policy makers will accept as relevant only those analogies whose causally relevant factors seem to be present in the current situation.

as opposed to words that have an *r* as the third letter, so people judge the former to be more prevalent.²⁸

The implication of the availability heuristic is that some analogies are simply brought to mind more easily and thus are more likely to be used as source analogues.²⁹ These analogies are salient analogies. Theorists interested in exploring why policy makers choose the analogies they do have taken two broad strategies in determining which analogies will be salient for particular policy makers. The first is to limit the time frame from which a policy maker's salient analogies will be drawn and the second is to limit the types of events that will be the sources for salient analogies. These two strategies have the same goal, they are both attempts to get at the issue of what analogy a policy maker will select by narrowing the range of possible source analogues that a policy maker will choose from. Given the virtually infinite number of past events that a policy maker could potentially use as a historical analogy, knowing the time from which she is likely to choose and the types of events she is likely to choose from are a useful first cut at determining what particular analogy she is likely to select.

One way of getting at the question of why one analogy is selected as relevant while others are ignored is to restrict the time frame from which analogies are likely to be drawn. This strategy is taken by those who stress the importance of recency in determining salience. All things being equal, more recent events will be easier to remember and therefore more likely to be used to interpret a new situation. This goes a long way in narrowing the range of possible analogies because out of the entire universe of historical events, it means that only recent events, say, those occurring within the policy maker's lifetime, are likely to be source analogues. This idea of recency is captured and refined by the concept of generational learning. Generational learning arguments combine the idea of recency with a primacy argument and assert that events that occur in the early years of a policy maker's political career, at a time when her basic political beliefs are being formed, will be especially salient and therefore likely to be used as source analogues. Thus, entire generations of leaders are predisposed to use the lessons of history based on events that occurred during their formative years. For example, the generation that came of age during World War II will be more likely to see current events in terms of the Munich analogy, while the cohort of leaders that came of age in the 1960s and 1970s in the United States

will be more likely to invoke the lessons of Vietnam when dealing with foreign policy questions.³⁰

Another way of narrowing the spectrum from which policy makers may choose their analogies is to specify the particular types of events policy makers are likely to use as a basis for historical lessons. This strategy is taken by those who stress the importance of vividness in determining salience. Vivid analogies are those that are emotionally involving for the decision maker, such as analogies based on personally experienced events or events that had important consequences for the policy maker or his state. One implication of the vividness hypothesis is that historical events in which the policy maker played a personal role are likely to be quite salient.³¹ For example, Lyndon Johnson's view from Congress of the domestic beating that Harry Truman and the Democratic Party suffered after the communist victory in China may have led him to use those events as a lens through which to interpret the situation he was facing in Vietnam in the 1960s. Thus, one reason Johnson was willing to escalate the war in Vietnam was his determination not to have his domestic agenda and domestic political prospects destroyed by charges that he had "lost Vietnam."³² A second implication of the importance of vividness is that events with far-reaching consequences for a decision maker or his state, such as major wars or depressions, are also more likely than other events to be used as historical analogies later.³³

In many cases the effects of recency, generational learning, and vividness interact to make certain analogies particularly salient. A good example of this is the often noted influence of lessons derived from the last major war. Recency, generational learning, and vividness all help explain why, in the words of Robert Jervis, "generals are prepared to fight the last war, [and] diplomats are prepared to avoid it."³⁴ In summary, the first step in determining what event a decision maker will use as a source analogue is to narrow the possibilities from all historical events to a much smaller list of salient analogies. Other things being equal, more recent events, events that occurred during the formative years of a policy maker's political career, and events that are emotionally involving because they were personally experienced or because they had important consequences for a policy maker or his state are more likely to be used as the basis for lessons of history.

In this respect, the conventional wisdom regarding analogical choice is helpful. Not all historical analogies are created equal; some

are more likely than others to be invoked. Using the ideas of recency, generational learning, and vividness, it is possible to construct a list of salient historical analogies for individual policy makers from which they are likely to choose. Compiling this list is the first step toward determining why a specific policy maker chooses a certain source analogue. However, this is only a first step. Contrary to the strongest arguments of the generational learning proponents, cohorts of policy makers are never limited to just one historical lesson. Similarly, the lessons of the last war do not banish all other possible analogies. Thus, while arguments about salience are useful in pointing to the inherent limitations of anyone's historical repertoire, the question of why a particular analogy gets chosen remains.

Factor Two: International and Domestic Threats

Policy makers turn to analogies because they give them information about the expected consequences of different courses of action. This information helps policy makers "determine which of many means will" allow them to "reach desired goals and . . . further their objectives."³⁵ An analogy that gives information that is unrelated to a policy maker's goal will be of no use to that policy maker. As Keith Holyoak argues, "An analogy is . . . ultimately defined with respect to the system's goals in exploring it."³⁶ The second factor in the model of analogical choice offered here focuses on how those goals and the threats policy makers perceive to those goals will influence their decisions regarding which particular analogy is most relevant.

This emphasis on goals leads back to the earlier discussion of international versus domestic analogies. As argued there, the literature on analogies and foreign policy generally assumes that policy makers are seeking solutions that will maximize some notion of the national interest. However, this assumption is problematic because policy makers also have domestic interests. One negative consequence of this assumption has been a neglect of how these domestic goals can influence the analogical choice process. In conducting a foreign policy, a decision maker can be trying to further international goals, domestic goals, or some combination of the two. Because decision makers are turning to analogies for information concerning what policies will help achieve their goals, those goals will determine what type of information a policy maker is looking for, and therefore will help influence what particular analogy is selected.

To determine which particular analogy a policy maker will select from her repertoire of historical lessons, one question that needs to be asked is, what objective is the policy maker trying to further? Is the policy maker chiefly concerned with the international interests of her state? Or, conversely, is the issue more important domestically and as a result, is she more concerned with protecting her domestic goals? Or, are both types of goals important? The answers to these questions will help determine what particular analogy a policy maker will see as relevant. In those cases where a policy maker is facing an issue that threatens the state's external goals, or poses an opportunity for the furthering of those international interests, she will want information about the international ramifications of different options. As a result, she will look through her cognitive reserve of historical lessons for an analogy that contains information about the international consequences of different foreign policies. Conversely, facing an internal threat or opportunity, the pertinent question is, what are the domestic implications of different policies? Given the importance of her domestic goals in this case, the relevant analogies will contain information concerning cause and effect relationships in the domestic arena.³⁷ The relative level of international or domestic threat/opportunity present in any particular foreign policy situation will determine the relevance of one type of analogy (domestic or international) over another.

This conjecture brings us one step closer to answering the question of why policy makers choose the analogies they do. Instead of being concerned with a decision maker's entire repertoire of historical analogies, a policy maker's goals make only a subset of that repertoire relevant. While this step by itself does not tell what particular analogy a policy maker will select as relevant, it does bring us closer to that goal by narrowing the possible number of relevant analogies. A policy maker's goals, be they international or domestic, tell the policy maker what subset of his stockpile of analogies may contain information pertinent to his current problem. Which analogy from that subset is a policy maker going to choose?

Factor Three: Causal Similarities

To account for a policy maker's selection of a particular analogy from her stockpile of historical lessons, analysts have naturally appealed to the concept of similarity. Often drawing on Kahneman