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The CIA, "Pork Barrel" Politics

or

You can't get to West Virginia from here!

Core Course III Paper

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Report Documentation Page				Form Approved OMB No. 0704-0188	
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1. REPORT DATE 1994		2. REPORT TYPE		3. DATES COVERED 00-00-1994 to 00-00-1994	
4. TITLE AND SUBTITLE The CIA, 'Pork Barrel' Politics or You Can't get to West Virginia from here!				5a. CONTRACT NUMBER	
				5b. GRANT NUMBER	
				5c. PROGRAM ELEMENT NUMBER	
6. AUTHOR(S)				5d. PROJECT NUMBER	
				5e. TASK NUMBER	
				5f. WORK UNIT NUMBER	
7. PERFORMING ORGANIZATION NAME(S) AND ADDRESS(ES) National War College, 300 5th Avenue, Fort Lesley J. McNair, Washington, DC, 20319-6000				8. PERFORMING ORGANIZATION REPORT NUMBER	
9. SPONSORING/MONITORING AGENCY NAME(S) AND ADDRESS(ES)				10. SPONSOR/MONITOR'S ACRONYM(S)	
				11. SPONSOR/MONITOR'S REPORT NUMBER(S)	
12. DISTRIBUTION/AVAILABILITY STATEMENT Approved for public release; distribution unlimited					
13. SUPPLEMENTARY NOTES					
14. ABSTRACT see report					
15. SUBJECT TERMS					
16. SECURITY CLASSIFICATION OF:			17. LIMITATION OF ABSTRACT	18. NUMBER OF PAGES 15	19a. NAME OF RESPONSIBLE PERSON
a. REPORT unclassified	b. ABSTRACT unclassified	c. THIS PAGE unclassified			

Introduction

Thomas P. "Tip" O'Neill Jr. the past venerable Speaker of the House of Representatives once remarked that he had learned two valuable lessons from the only political race he ever lost. The most important one he learned from his father who told him that "all politics is local." Although the remark was not intended to refer to Congress, the parallel is obvious. As O'Neill himself noted, "you can be the most important congressman in the country, but you had better not forget the people back home."¹ It would be hard to find a more appropriate characterization of the US Government's policy making process today.

In this post-Cold War era, competition for budget resources, the search for the "peace dividend", and the all too natural tendency for politicians to "vote their constituency" has blurred the political distinction between national and local issues. For many congressmen, what is good for their state must be good for America.

Such dedication to "Pork Barrel" politics represents but one aspect of the dynamic and complex decision making process which the policymaker must understand and master to be successful. But such an understanding and mastery cannot be serendipitous. There must be some structure, nay, some analysis.

Graham Allison is one scholar who has provided such a structure for analysis. His study of governmental decision making and, in particular, his "Bureaucratic Politics" paradigm

provides an excellent framework to briefly study and dissect this process.²

Having the theoretical structure, we must also attempt to apply a real life example of the process in order to test the theory. For this undertaking I have chosen the decision by the CIA in 1991 to attempt to consolidate 21 of its leased sites in the Washington D.C. area into two locations in West Virginia. It is this decision, the challenge of it by the House Permanent Select Committee on Intelligence (HPSCI), and the ultimate outcome that represents bureaucratic politics at its finest.

In order to have a common frame of reference I will highlight the key elements of Allison's paradigm used in my analysis.

The Paradigm

The bureaucratic politics paradigm describes governmental decisionmaking, not as the product of structured organizations, but rather as a competitive game, played by individual actors at various hierarchal levels, using regularized channels of communication. The basic unit of analysis is the outcome or the political result.

The result however is not necessarily a solution to a problem but rather the outcome of bargaining, compromise and conflict amongst and between the players who have diverse interests and varying degrees of influence within the hierarchy.³ The political result may, in fact, not even solve the original problem, as will be the case in this example.

The paradigm is organized around four factors: Who are the players? What determines each players stand on the issue? What is each players relative influence or power? and how do these factors and each players actions interact to yield the political result?⁴

Two other elements help tie these factors together and link them to the governmental bureaucracy. First, are the action-channels used by the players: These are the structured means for taking action within the government. Second there are the rules of the game: These are Public Laws, Executive orders, regulations, protocol etc., within which the game is defined.⁵ That is not to say that all rules are absolute, or followed precisely, or even followed at all, simply that they bureaucratically define the boundaries. With this basic framework in mind let us now turn to our analysis.

The Political Result I

The game starts with the CIA seeking the authority and funding to close down 21 of its leased satellite offices and to reorganize some offices and associated functions to a site in West Virginia. This was the desired result from the CIA perspective and was in fact a "solution" to a legitimate requirement. The DCI at the time, the Honorable William Webster, explained to the HPSCI at their hearing on the consolidation proposal in 1991; "...the agency first started considering consolidation in 1956, realizing that the Langley compound was going to provide only a partial solution to space problems."

Webster also noted that the CIA's plans have always been in the interest of operational efficiency, security and reduction of long term costs. From Webster's position he saw this consolidation as being a legitimate CIA response to Congressional directives in 1990 to come up with "a plan for reducing out-year costs of meeting the agency's space requirements" ⁶

The Players

This case exemplifies the interaction between all of the categories of players noted in Allison's paradigm.⁷ However, the "Chiefs" play the most central role to this discussion and the final outcome and are principally represented as follows:

The DCI, William Webster

The Chairman of the Senate Appropriations Committee, Senator Robert C. Byrd, (D-W.Va.)

The Chairman of the House Permanent Select Committee on Intelligence, Congressman Dave McCurdy, (D-Okla.)

The Chairman of the Senate Permanent Select Committee on Intelligence, Senator David L. Boren, (D-Okla.)

Senator John W. Warner, (R-Va) (Member of the SSCI)

Congressman Frank R. Wolf (R-Va)

Other players representing "Indians" (political appointees and governmental officials)⁸ , included Rae Huffstutler, CIA Deputy Director for Administration, Diane Rankin, Acting Chief of the Facility Management Group of the CIA Office of Logistics, Frank Diluchio, Assistant Commissioner, GSA Office of Real Property Development⁹

In a more detailed analysis, "staffers" (subordinates to the Chiefs) as well as "Ad Hoc" players such as the press would necessarily be included. It should suffice to say that the "staffers" played a role in many "sub-games"¹⁰ leading up to the main decision point and the Washington press played a major role in informing the public and detailing the case without the constraints of bureaucratic protocol.

Having framed the central issue, and detailed the main players, let us now look at their stands on the issue and their relative power to influence the outcome.

The Players Unmasked--stands and power

Allison contends that each player will look at issues from their own parochial viewpoint (where they stand) and, as such, seek to achieve different goals based on a range of interests.¹¹ As with the outcome, interests are not always obvious or compatible with the key issue.

-William Webster, as the DCI has an obvious interest, insuring his agency can operate effectively in support of national security requirements, within the constraints of a decreasing budget and within the bounds of Congressional oversight and guidance. His constituents are the agency employees who gain or lose both personally and professionally from the consolidation and the intelligence community consumers who ultimately gain or lose by the degree of effectiveness of agency operations. Webster's power lies in the confidence and support provided by the President and in his ability to get

Congressional consensus for his requirements.

-Senator Byrd, on the other hand, appeared to have a much different portfolio of interests. In June 1990, he explained that he would use his new power as the Chairman of the Senate Appropriations Committee to funnel a billion dollars worth of Federal projects and agencies into his state, speaking in Clarksburg W. Va. he said" I expect in my term to bring a least a billion dollars to West Virginia in projects that I put into the bill"¹² Since he became Chairman Byrd has succeeded in moving the FBI fingerprint center (2,600 jobs), The Treasury Departments Bureau of the Public Debt (700 jobs), the data processing division of the Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco and Firearms (90 jobs).¹³

Adding 3000-5000 CIA jobs and a 1.2 Billion project would have been a nice crowning achievement. His interest in national security and a particular agency's overall efficiency and operating costs were directly proportional to the amount of "Pork Barrel" benefits he could provide to his only constituents, the citizens of West Virginia.

Byrd's power was obvious, he had served in the Congress since 1959, spent at least 11 years as the Democratic leader in the Senate and was chairman of the most powerful committee in congress, the Senate Appropriations Committee.¹⁴ He knew the art of the deal and the intricacies of the legislative process better than most. Central to his power and influence was his ability to effectively control the Federal purse and cut deals to help

deserving colleagues on the hill.

-Representative McCurdy, as Chairman of the HPSCI, had to be concerned with the oversight process and the expenditure of monies appropriated in the Intelligence Authorization Acts. But there were also some not so apparent interests. First, there had been a high degree of legislative and personal competitiveness between McCurdy and his counterpart in the Senate, David Boren, also a Democrat from Oklahoma. Second, since assuming his position as Chairman, McCurdy had been an activist in attempting to increase the legislative equities of the House with regards to intelligence oversight.

McCurdy was also in the process of developing a reorganization plan for the intelligence community, in an attempt to seize the initiative from Boren and the SSCI. Part of the intent was to increase the HPSCI's control and involvement in the business of intelligence. The consolidation issue, as it was ultimately framed by the HPSCI and some opponents of the CIA, provided McCurdy an excellent springboard to establish new rules of the road.

Lastly, the manner in which the issue was disclosed to the HPSCI, almost by accident rather through normal channels, made it clear that the HPSCI had been left in the dark on the consolidation issue. McCurdy felt as though he had been personally snookered. Thus, a legislative issue also took on a personal dimension.¹⁵ McCurdy exercised power through his position as chairman and through a coalition of liberal

democratic members who had axes to grind against the CIA.

-Senator Warner's interest was much the same as Senator Byrd, jobs for his state, but with a small twist. Warner apparently formed a coalition with Byrd. Warner would lend his support as a senior Republican member of the SSCI for a compromise on the consolidation to the tune of about 2000 jobs at a location in Prince William County, Virginia.¹⁶ Warner was in a position to have funding language included in the classified annex of the Senate Intelligence Authorization bill. This coalition also provided a foil for Warner to mute opposition in Virginia.

It does not appear that Warner had a controlling role aside from his coalition with Byrd, although he was accused of being a principal by Rep. Frank R. Wolf (R-Va). Wolf publically accused Byrd and Warner of "secretly concluding a deal that leaves many questions unanswered."¹⁷

-Representative Wolf was a spoiler on this issue. He represented the 10th district in Virginia which stood to lose rather than gain jobs. The CIA headquarters is in his district as well. He, as McCurdy, was kept in the dark and in fact may have been misled by CIA officials. He naturally expected to be informed of such a momentous move with his district being the most affected.

Wolf became the most vocal and outspoken "Chief". Aside from his constituent interests, Wolf took the moral and legislative high ground and he actively lobbied the halls of

congress in opposition to the consolidation. One of his numerous "Dear Colleague" letters posed the question "When is the Central Intelligence Agency the Decentralized Intelligence Agency?" His retort was "when 3,000 CIA employees are moved 2 hours away from the nation's capitol."¹⁸ In the same letter he also highlighted a few of the contentious issues, as he did in his HPSCI testimony on 30 July 1991. The cost (1.2 Billion), the process which excluded the White House, the House of Representatives, OMB, and GSA and the implication that the CIA made a political decision to deal with Senator Byrd so that money would be forthcoming.¹⁹ Wolf used his power as representative of the most affected region to become a lightning rod for opposition. He further enhanced his position by forming a coalition with McCurdy.

The Game

In reconstructing the game it is important to note that much of the bargaining and positioning between the CIA and Senator Byrd's office, which led to the original outcome, ostensibly took place at the "Staffer" level. Understandably, there is little available documentation. Much of the action officer work that led to the original CIA decision such as the hiring of consultants, reviewing proposals and costing the effort was not well documented in accessible, unclassified records and in some cases documentation was nonexistent.²⁰

Additionally, while much of the work of the "staffers" and "Indians" is relevant, this discourse largely only captures the action and interaction of the "Chiefs". It is thus possible to

infer, from the public findings disclosed during and after the fact, a general sense of the process.

In simplest terms, the CIA had been planning for years to consolidate offices in order to improve security, operational efficiency and save money. It had special rules granted to it to unilaterally undertake such consolidation action under the Central Intelligence Agency Act of 1949 (50 U.S.C. 403j)²¹ Within the CIA structure the Office of Logistics handles leasing, real property acquisition etc.

The Agency established a criteria for their requirements, hired a consultant and reviewed the proposals that met the criteria. Of 200 sites the Agency narrowed the options to the top four. Around April 1991 a West Virginia Site that had not been previously included nor, apparently, met the existing criteria appeared.²² While the CIA had plausible explanations, the implications were clear to the opposition.

On 11 June 91 the Intelligence authorization bill passed the House. It included language encouraging the DCI to undertake a review of facilities with an eye toward consolidation.²³ Apparently the HPSCI was unaware that 32.9 Million dollars was due to be included in the Senate Bill as a fait accompli.²⁴

On 20 June Senators Byrd and Warner made a joint announcement that CIA had developed a plan to relocate 21 offices to two locations, one in West Virginia and one in Virginia. This took the HPSCI by complete surprise.

In response, a furious McCurdy, held an open hearing on the

consolidation and at this point the case moves to a new level of gamesmanship. With public disclosure, a strong coalition between McCurdy and Wolf and Byrd's hand in the cookie jar, Senator Boren agrees to changes in the conference report for the Intelligence Authorization Act. The CIA was directed to play by new rules and the original desired outcome was irrevocably changed.

The Political Result II

The CIA, with the active participation of Congress, principally the HPSCI, continued to study feasible options under the new rules which include OMB and GSA involvement. In December 1991, Byrd and Warner made public statements that the move will take place even within the new guidelines.²⁵

On March 30, 1992 the new DCI, Robert Gates, wrote a letter to Congressman McCurdy, Senator Byrd, Senator Boren and their ranking minority members. In it he wrote, "After reviewing intelligence priorities and prospective budgetary circumstances, I have decided to suspend CIA's facilities consolidation project. While the need to consolidate scattered CIA facilities is important, and ultimately probably would save money, in the current budgetary environment--and with uncertainty about the already high cost of the project--higher priority intelligence requirements must take precedence."²⁶ The original issue had come full circle.

Conclusion

This brief study reinforces the idea that the governmental decision making process, as with all political things, is

dynamic, uncertain and subject to the winds of change.

In this case it is clear that the parochial interests and perceptions of the major players, as to the nature of the "real" issue, framed the battle, or the game as Allison calls it.

The CIA had a valid requirement but process got in the way. From the perspective of Congressman McCurdy the requirement had to take a back seat to proper public disclosure and greater bureaucratic involvement. From Senator Byrd's perspective it was simply business as usual. For others it represented another attempt by an already rampant CIA to do their own thing. For still others like myself we simply marveled at the game, began to see bureaucratic politics for what it really was, an enigma within a paradox, and continued to wonder how America ever put a man on the moon.

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3. Allison, 162.
4. Allison, 164.
5. Allison, 170.
6. The Honorable William Webster, Testimony before the House Permanent Select Committee on Intelligence, Hearing on CIA Consolidation, (Washington DC: US GPO, 1991) 55-57.
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24. Congressional Staff Notes, CIA Consolidation Summary, 25 March, 1992.

25. Chet Lunner, "Sen. Warner: CIA Move a certainty," The Fairfax Journal, 4 December 1991, 1.

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