FOREIGN AID, FOREIGN POLICY AND BUREAUCRATIC POLITICS: THEORIES AND POLICY MOTIVES

Foreign aid allocations are generally explained in terms of international politics or state-centric models of foreign policy. In fact, foreign aid allocations were recently used as an empirical measure of how the end of the Cold War may have changed the underlying determinants of U.S. foreign policy (Meernik et al., 1998). While the entirety of research findings related to the various foreign aid programs around the world are too extensive to be briefly summarized, analyses have repeatedly demonstrated that aid allocations do tend to reflect the international political roles and interests of individual aid donors.

As might be expected, this international perspective is also integral to the theoretical foundations for the study of foreign aid. Analysts have generally examined foreign aid in the context of one or more of the three most widely adopted paradigms of international relations. A strategic motive for aid fits with a realist, security and conflict-oriented conceptualization of world politics. A Marxist, or structuralist/globalist perspective supports an economic motive, and the humanitarian motivation for providing aid represents a liberal, pluralist or idealist view of world politics. Variables representing all three of these motives have found support in studies of foreign aid allocations and it is presumed that policies, calculations and decisions regarding the volume, direction and terms of aid routinely cut across these three boundaries. However, the distinctions between these worldviews, and the motives for aid they suggest, provide a particularly useful organizational tool for reviewing the academic studies of foreign aid flows.

D. A. Van Belle et al., Media, Bureaucracies and Foreign Aid: A Comparative Analysis of the United States, the United Kingdom, Canada, France and Japan © Douglas A. Van Belle, Jean-Sébastien Rioux and David M. Potter 2004
Underrepresented in the scholarly literature on foreign aid are studies of how foreign policy influences from sources other than the international political arena affect foreign aid allocations. Given the recent emphasis on domestic aspects of foreign policy (i.e. Putnam, 1988; Mintz, 1993; Van Belle, 1993; James and Rioux, 1998) combined with Ruttan’s (1996) arguments regarding the importance of domestic factors in the U.S. foreign aid program, the limited effort to look inside or beyond the state is a bit troubling. Thus, aside from a few classic case studies (e.g. Poe, 1992) and a few empirical studies produced by Imbeau (1988, 1989), Noël and Thérien (1995) and Thérien and Noël (2000) linking domestic political ideologies with levels of aid, relatively little empirical work has been published assessing the donor-side motivations and processes of foreign aid policy (see Schraeder et al., 1998).

In the context of foreign aid research, this book addresses this by examining the role of the news media in foreign aid allocations. The media can be thought of as both part of the domestic sources of foreign policy and a critical non-state actor in global politics. An extensive body of literature has emerged regarding the news media’s impact on other aspects of foreign policy (e.g. Neuman, 1996; Strobel, 1997); however, prior to the initial analysis of television news and U.S. foreign aid (Van Belle and Hook, 2000), the linkage between media coverage and aid behavior has been overlooked.4

Four Perspectives on the Determinants of Foreign Aid Allocations

The four perspectives we use to describe the dynamics of foreign aid include the three predominant analytic perspectives on foreign aid just mentioned as well as an introduction to the basics of a fourth: a foreign policy analysis, linkage politics or domestic sources of foreign policy perspective. This fourth perspective is loosely based upon an internally oriented “domestic political imperatives” model of foreign policy decision-making (Van Belle, 1993). The domestic imperatives perspective argues that there is a domestic primacy in the process of foreign policy decision-making and, among other things, it models the role of the news media content as a generalized influence on the domestic political context of foreign policy choice. This provides a conceptual linkage between news media coverage and the foreign policy decisions that foreign aid is argued to represent.

Realism and the Strategic Motive

Throughout its various incarnations (Carr, 1946; Morgenthau, 1948; Waltz, 1979), realism has always focused on power, anarchy and the resultant