

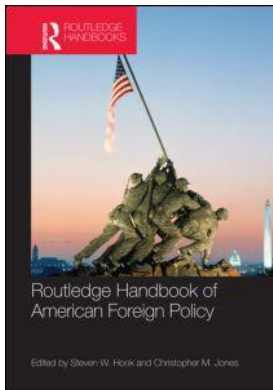
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Access details: *subscription number*

Publisher: *Routledge*

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## **Routledge Handbook of American Foreign Policy**

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### **Individual and Group Decision Making**

Publication details

<https://test.routledgehandbooks.com/doi/10.4324/9780203878637.ch10>

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**Published online on: 31 Aug 2011**

**How to cite :-** Mark Schafer. 31 Aug 2011, *Individual and Group Decision Making from: Routledge Handbook of American Foreign Policy* Routledge

Accessed on: 03 Oct 2023

<https://test.routledgehandbooks.com/doi/10.4324/9780203878637.ch10>

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# 10

## Individual and Group Decision Making

*Mark Schafer*

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Any model of foreign policy making that fails to include the role of humans, while perhaps parsimonious, is inherently underspecified. Every foreign policy decision must pass through human beings, regardless of rational, structural, or socially constructed constraints. In the end, human beings make decisions. And if we recognize that truism, then we must also recognize that psychology is an essential component of analyzing foreign policy decision making, because all human actors are psychological beings.

Rationalists and structuralists, while perhaps grudgingly acknowledging that humans do indeed sit in decision-making seats, might quickly argue that individual psychologies matter little given the powerful structural constraints or the inevitable rational choices they face. This argument suggests that individual decision makers have little effect and are instead bound by circumstances and forces that restrict their own choices and therefore the effects of their idiosyncrasies. I do not argue here that structural forces are irrelevant or that individuals are “radically irrational” (Simon 1985). Structural forces can be critically important in affecting foreign policy decisions, and most actors believe they are trying to maximize interests while minimizing costs. Yet even here it does not take long to imagine the role of psychology as it pertains to broad structural forces: human beings interpret those structural forces and make human assessments pertaining to interests and costs. And, not surprisingly given what we know about human beings, history is full of examples where humans miscalculated and misinterpreted the situation around them. While structural forces seem certain to matter in foreign policy decision making, it is equally certain that human beings make significant judgments when it comes to assessing those structural forces.

The logic applies most obviously to the leader in a decision-making episode (and perhaps most obviously to a dominating leader—which is, of course, a psychological variable). But it also applies to others in the decision-making process. The personalities of some advisors have been very prominent in U.S. foreign policy making in the past: John Foster Dulles, Henry Kissinger, and Dick Cheney, to name a few. But psychology comes into play, perhaps also importantly, for the advisors whose personality characteristics cause them to be more reserved or reticent in the process. Were there reticent personalities who kept themselves from advising against the Bay of Pigs invasion? The Gulf of Tonkin escalation? The invasion of Iraq in 2003?

Psychology matters not only for the leader of the group, but for all participants in the process, meaning there is a large multiplier effect associated with individual-level psychology in group decision making. But the effect of psychology is not just limited to the myriad

personalities in the room: there is also extensive research demonstrating that the group itself can take on important psychological norms that are more than the sum of the individuals' psychologies. Sometimes group psychology—the ingroup norms, procedures, precedents, and understandings—can significantly affect the quality of group decision making, an example of which is famously called “groupthink” (Janis 1972).

While the argument about the importance of psychology in foreign policy making is compelling, it generally has been the case that other subfields completely ignore psychological variables or dismiss their importance. In addition, the field of political psychology in international relations is a relatively young one, particularly in terms of the extent to which it has developed as a science marked by extensive empirical findings from well-validated and reliable measurements. Indeed, the latter seems to be at the heart of the slow development of this field; only in the last generation or two of scholars has there developed some initial methods for valid measurements of psychological characteristics. But that makes this field all the more exciting to review and study. Many of us believe intuitively that individuals and psychology matter, yet there is still much room for development of methods and empirical findings in these areas.

These areas are particularly relevant for American foreign policy. While the role of the United States in global politics is critical in the twenty-first century, its leader, the president of the United States, is often the personified symbol of America's role. We often hear such trite comments as “he is the leader of the free world,” or “he is the most powerful person in the world.” Put somewhat differently, if any leader's psychology matters in general, the psychology of the president of the United States matters even more in today's world. The same can be said of group decision making in American foreign policy. Indeed, many significant American foreign policy decisions seem to have the distinguishing imprint of the president and his administration: Harry Truman's decision to use the atomic bomb; John F. Kennedy's handling of the Cuban Missile Crisis; Lyndon Johnson's escalation in Vietnam; Richard Nixon's trip to China; Ronald Reagan's military spending; George W. Bush's war in Iraq. In each case, it is not difficult to imagine that a different personality in the Oval Office might have conducted matters very differently.

In the section that follows I review some of the scholarly literature in two main areas of political psychology in foreign policy making: individual-level psychology and group decision making. After that, I summarize some applications of these concepts in selected cases of U.S. foreign policy making. In the final section, I revisit some theoretical matters with a focus on remaining questions, puzzles, and research areas.

## Individuals in the Foreign Policy Process

One can argue that discussion of psychological effects in politics is as old as political discussion in general. Plato, Socrates, and Aristotle all had something to say about psychological phenomena in politics. But Harold Lasswell is frequently attributed (see Deutsch and Kinnvall 2002: 15) with starting political psychology as an academic field with the publication of his *Psychopathology and Politics* in 1930. Several others, working in the 1950s and 1960s, wrote seminal works regarding the field of foreign policy decision making that included psychological factors in their frameworks. These include Snyder, Bruck, and Sapin (1954, 1962), who devote an extensive section to “motives” in their groundbreaking work; Sprout and Sprout (1965), who write about the role of “cognitive behaviorism;” M. Brewster Smith (1968), who discusses object appraisal, ego defense, and engaged attitudes; and Brecher, Steinberg, and Stein (1969), who discuss the “psychological environment” including attitudes and elite images held by decision makers.

There are many different ways to dissect the literature on individual-level psychology. In the rest of this section I focus on two such divisions. The first is a methodological divide between idiographic and nomothetic research. The former, which focuses on one or a very small number of actors at a time, is generally qualitatively oriented, while the latter, which looks for broad patterns and generalizations across larger sets of subjects, is generally quantitatively oriented. The second divide is one based upon the psychological constructs used by researchers, and here I discuss the divide between personality/unconscious characteristics and cognitive/conscious characteristics.

Because idiographic approaches concentrate on one or a small number of subjects, their primary value is the extent to which they go in-depth on their subjects. These approaches often involve holistic or depth-psychology analysis of subjects. The product from such an analysis is often referred to as a psychobiography; it looks at the subject's whole life with the aim of explaining adult patterns of political behavior. Methodologically speaking, in a typical psychobiography, the research includes three components (Greenstein 1969; Winter 2003). The first is the phenomenology, or a specification of unexplained adult political behavior. The second component is the dynamic, which is an explanation of adult psychological characteristics that explain the phenomenology. The third component is the genesis, which goes back to childhood or adult formative years to provide an explanation for the origins of the dynamic. Researchers use a variety of methods to explicate the various components of a psychobiography including interviews, behavioral analysis, and biographical materials from the secondary literature. It is a bit like solving a puzzle by looking for clues throughout the various stages of the subject's life and then telling the story, using the biographical evidence, for each part of the psychobiography. Examples of idiographic research include Leites's (1951, 1953) study of Vladimir Lenin, Joseph Stalin, and the Soviet Politburo; George and George's (1956) analysis of Woodrow Wilson; Erikson's (1958) study of Martin Luther; Glad's (1980) psychological profile of Jimmy Carter; Post's (1993) study of Saddam Hussein; and Renshon's (1996) analysis of Bill Clinton.

The primary value of nomothetic approaches is the extent to which they discover broad, generalizable patterns across a larger sample of subjects. Here the information of value is about how one or a few psychological characteristics typically manifest in political behavior across a variety of individuals. The most common methods used in nomothetic research are laboratory based experiments, survey research, and content analysis.

Content analysis has become particularly instrumental in psychological research in the field of foreign policy analysis, where the focus is on elites in the process. And yet, precisely because of their elite status, it is virtually impossible to involve these subjects in experiments or conduct psycho-metric interviews with them. Because of this, over the last forty years or so researchers have developed techniques that let us assess psychological characteristics "at-a-distance," which means we determine indicators of psychology in subjects using available materials without having direct access to the subjects (Hermann 1980; Schafer 2000). The principle way this is done is by systematically content analyzing the verbal material of subjects, with the premise that what people say and how they say things is indicative of their underlying psychology. A simple example is seen in the old adage that we know an optimist when he refers to the glass as half full.

The key to the development of these at-a-distance approaches has been the operationalizations of psychological characteristics, typically done by specifying lists of words or phrases that indicate the underlying characteristic. For instance, a person more disposed toward conflict is likely to use more conflict-oriented verbs in his or her rhetoric. Someone who uses more black-and-white terms, such as *absolutely*, *definitely*, and *always*, as opposed to more ambiguous terms, such as *possibly*, *maybe*, and *perhaps*, is presumed to be lower in conceptual complexity. And someone who has a high need for power is likely to use language with above-average

references to asserting power and influence over other people. While early studies using these techniques were coded by hand—one word or sentence or paragraph at a time—more recent developments have resulted in computer-based content analysis which not only significantly reduces coding time but also results in highly reliable assessments (Schafer 2000; Young 2001).

We turn now to our second divide, personality/unconscious vs. cognitive/conscious. This divide is certainly an imperfect one; indeed, it is one that is generally not recognized by psychologists at all, who generally consider “personality” to be the all-encompassing concept for mental and behavioral functioning (Greenstein 1969). Yet many in the field of political science have found the divide useful (Greenstein 1969; Schafer 2000; Schafer and Crichlow 2010). Cognition is mental functioning that involves relatively *conscious* thinking about a subject or object. Cognitive manifestations are such things as beliefs, prejudices, images, schemata, attitudes, and operational codes. What I refer to here as personality, on the other hand, are psychological factors generally considered to be more unconscious responses and reactions including such things as motives, ego-defense mechanisms, personality traits, and other components of depth psychology. Let us now turn to some of the specific contributions found in the literature in each of these two areas.

In the area of cognitive research in foreign policy making, let us consider three well-developed research programs: image theory, operational codes, and cognitive maps. The classic work on images is Kenneth Boulding’s (1956) well-known book *The Image*. His general argument is that cognitive shortcuts manifested as images have a significant effect on foreign policy decisions. Other classic contributions supporting the general argument come from Holsti (1970) and Jervis (1976). But the most cohesive and prolific research program dealing with images originated with Richard Cottam (1977) and has had several contributions by Richard Herrmann (1984, 1985; Herrmann et al. 1997; Herrmann and Fischerkeller 1995) and Martha Cottam (1985, 1986, 1992b, 1994).

This area of the literature is called image theory. Clearly grounded in psychological work associated with the cognitive revolution, the theory posits that individuals have inherent cognitive limitations, meaning they must constantly filter, interpret and limit the information they process. Developing an image of an opposing country (or a friendly one) is therefore not only a common occurrence but also a necessary one. They argue that images are likely to have three components in perceiving others as: a threat or an opportunity, culturally similar or culturally inferior, and more, less or similarly powerful. Various combinations of these three variables form ideal types of images such as the enemy (threat, culturally similar, similar level of power), and dependent ally (opportunity, inferior culture, lower level of power). Much of the research in this area has been qualitative and has examined the connection between images and behavior. These scholars found support for their hypotheses in two dyads: the U.S.-Soviet Union during the Cold War, when prevailing enemy images by each side resulted in containment and deterrence policies but no direct military conflict; and Iran-Iraq, where sometimes mutual enemy images (also marked by containment and deterrence policies) changed to enemy-degenerate images, and conflict was much more likely to erupt.

Nathaniel Leites well-known work, *The Operational Code of the Politburo* (1951), is credited with starting the operational code research program. Leites found that the psychological characteristics of Lenin and Stalin had an imprinting effect that was pervasive throughout the Soviet Politburo and resulted in unusual bargaining behavior with the United States. Alexander George (1969, 1979), building on the cognitive revolution in the 1960s, moved the research program away from the type of depth psychology that Leites used and toward a strictly cognitive approach. He specified two types of questions, philosophical and instrumental, that researchers should answer when constructing an operational code for a decision maker, the idea being that the belief system of the leader—manifested as his operational code—would help explain foreign policy propensities of the leader. A number of qualitative operational code

analyses were subsequently published using George's framework and generally supported the causal proposition (e.g., McLellan 1971; Walker 1977; Johnson 1977; Stuart and Starr 1981; Walker and Falkowski 1984).

Beginning in the late 1990s, Stephen G. Walker and his colleagues developed an at-a-distance, quantitative research program for measuring the operational code (Walker, Schafer, and Young 1998). An extensive body of literature has emerged from this research program with multiple studies comparing leaders, advisors, changes over time, and connections to policy behavior (e.g., Crichlow 2006; Drury 2006; Feng 2006, 2005; Malici 2005, 2006; Marfleet 2000; Marfleet and Miller 2005; Robison 2006; Schafer and Crichlow 2002; Schafer et al. 2006; Schafer and Walker 2001, 2006, 2007; Stevenson 2006; Thies 2006; Walker and Schafer 2000, 2006, 2007; Walker et al. 1998, 1999, 2003).

While image theory focuses on the image of one specific country at a time, and operational code expands the scope of inquiry to a broad belief system regarding the self and others, cognitive mapping is the broadest and most ambitious of the three cognitive research programs. Indeed, cognitive maps give us enough specific information that, conceptually speaking, should enable one to derive images and operational codes from them, along with many other factors. The general idea with cognitive maps is that researchers look for all causal connections between concepts in a subject's consciousness and connect these together in one "map." Obviously it is a massive undertaking, and, indeed, whole cognitive maps can take up extensive space and become inordinately complex. Yet the causal connections between concepts allow for complex analysis of the subject's cognitions, thus providing maximum information. The seminal work on cognitive maps was written by Axelrod (1972, 1976), though others made important early contributions as well (Bonham and Shapiro 1976; Roberts 1976; Hart 1976). Research on cognitive maps has provided insights on expert advice to policy makers (Bonham and Shapiro 1976), adjustments in cognitive content in response to a major event (Bonham et al. 1978), Jimmy Carter's response to the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan (Young 1994), and process versus causal reasoning in international negotiations (Bonham, Sergeev, and Parshin 1997).

Let us look at two areas of personality research: traits and motives. The concept of the personality trait has been around the study of human psychology for a long time, and there is nearly an endless list of constructs that have been given the name "trait." Arguing that there are five higher-order traits from which all other lower-order traits derive, Digman (1990) gave rise to what has become perhaps the most significant and researched area dealing with the "Big Five" traits: extroversion, openness to experience, warmth/agreeableness, conscientiousness, and neuroticism (see also Costa and McRae 1992; Goldberg 1993). Winter (2003) suggests that traits are things that are relatively easily seen in individuals, more or less apparent upon first impressions. He also argues that they have much less explanatory power for political behavior than other personality characteristics, namely motives, which is the heart of his own research program. Others argue, however, that Big Five research is the most extensive collection of empirical findings in all of psychology (Digman 1990).

Another major research program pertaining to personality research in political psychology focuses on motives. Motives, often referred to as "needs," are generally thought of as unconscious drives to accomplish wanted end states or to avoid unwanted end states. McClelland (1951, 1961) made some of the early and important theoretical and empirical contributions. In more recent times, Winter (1980, 1987, 1993) has been the most prolific scholar using motive imagery as an analytical tool in political psychology, particularly focusing on needs for power, affiliation and achievement. Winter codes for motive imagery in the verbal material of subjects. Among the findings from this research program are:

- those with higher need for power tend to be more aggressive and favor more hostile foreign policies (Winter 1987, 1993),

- those higher in need for affiliation tend to be more peaceful and cooperative, except under conditions of threat (Winter 1992, 1993), and
- those scoring high on need for achievement tend to be better entrepreneurs, but not successful politicians (McClelland 1961; Winter 2002).

The final research program I cover here crosses over the personality/cognitive divide by including some psychological characteristics from each side. Leadership Trait Analysis (LTA) has its origins in Hermann's early work (1980). She laid the groundwork for much of the at-a-distance psychological research we see in the field today. Though the names of some of the characteristics have changed and adapted over the years, the core of the research program remains in place (Hermann 1980, 1984, 1987, 1999). Today LTA includes seven different psychological characteristics: need for power, distrust, conceptual complexity, self-confidence, belief in ability to control events, task (vs. relationship) orientation, and in-group bias (Hermann 1999). This research program includes one characteristic associated with the motive research tradition (need for power), several associated with cognitions (distrust, in-group bias, conceptual complexity), and some that can be characterized as traits (control, self-confidence, and task orientation). Hermann's 1980 article was an important breakthrough in demonstrating how at-a-distance methods can give us quantitative indicators of leaders' psychological characteristics that are statistically linked with foreign policy behaviors by states. Some other work using these psychological characteristics connected them to the quality of group decision making (Schafer 1999; Schafer and Crichlow 2010). For instance, higher levels of distrust in the leader resulted in poorer decision-making structures and more problematic information processing by the group (Schafer and Crichlow 2010).

## Decision Making by Groups

Perhaps the most well-known research program pertaining to group decision making in foreign policy is the area of groupthink. Made famous by Irving Janis's (1972) work, the concept remains popular and important in the field today. Groupthink is flawed group decision making marked by high levels of in-group cohesion that result in premature consensus or poorly considered policy choices. The idea is that, in the name of group cohesion, there is pressure to agree with the group, thus reducing critical questioning of the already-preferred group choice. The conformity pressures may take the form of someone pressuring another group member or someone self-censoring to maintain group cohesion.

One of the most vivid cases of groupthink occurred early in the Kennedy administration with the U.S.-backed Bay of Pigs revolt in Cuba. Janis documents how, in the name of group cohesion and supporting the president, the group failed to engage in critical thinking and question the most basic and flawed assumptions of the policy. When one member of the group gestured toward asking some questions, he was quickly chastised and told that his job was not to ask hard questions, but to support the president—a classic occurrence of groupthink. The outcome of the case is well known: a “perfect failure” (Janis 1982).

Though much of Janis's work focused on the narrow connection between consensus seeking and poor outcomes, the concept of groupthink is often broadly symbolic of the notion of almost any flawed decision making as a result of poor group norms and processes. Janis has had his share of critics. While most of them focus on conceptual problems with the narrow concept of consensus-seeking or with quibbles about some of his cases, virtually no one has argued that variance in quality of decision making by groups is irrelevant. McCauley (1989) argues that group cohesion is not the problem but that structural and procedural faults are the key factors in affecting quality group decision making. Whyte (1998) also criticizes Janis's

focus on group cohesion and suggests instead that the problem is really one of group efficacy. Similarly, Hart (1990) argues that Janis muddles together two very different faults in group decision making: collective over-optimism and collective avoidance. Kramer (1998) believes that Janis places too much emphasis on group procedures when the heart of the problem is often political calculations being made by the group.

Janis's conceptualizes faulty decision making in stages. Antecedent, situational conditions can increase the pressure for concurrence seeking in the group. This can lead to symptoms of groupthink, which in turn can result in symptoms of defective decision making. The final stage is the outcome of the case, which, when groupthink is present, increases the likelihood of poor outcomes. Schafer and Crichlow (1996, 2002, 2010) later re-conceptualized these stages into three sets of independent variables that affect each other and the dependent variable of outcomes. Their three sets of independent variables are: situational constraints and pressures on decision makers; group structures pertaining to how the decision-making apparatus is set up; and information processing factors that take place during the policy process.

While Janis supports his argument with a handful of select cases, Schafer and Crichlow (2010) investigate a much larger set of cases, which allows them to run statistical hypothesis tests. Several of their findings are worth noting here. First, unlike Janis's anticipation that situational pressures such as stress and short timeframe will hinder decision making, Schafer and Crichlow do not find that these factors correlate (positively or negatively) with poor decision processing or poor outcomes. Second, *a priori* group structures have a large and significant effect on the quality of information processing and on outcomes, particularly in terms of national interests. Finally, the quality of information processing during the case also affects outcomes in terms of national interests, and, importantly, in terms of conflict levels: the more distorted the information processing is during decision making, the more likely the group will choose to escalate conflict in the case. Factors within the control of decision makers have the greatest effects on outcomes; situational factors outside of their control typically do not adversely affect the process.

Allison (1971) has also made major contributions to our understanding of foreign policy decision making and the effects of group and governmental procedures. Allison was highly skeptical that states functioned in a way that resembled the cost-benefit analysis of rational-actor models. In his well-known work analyzing the Cuban Missile Crisis, Allison posits two different models that demonstrate the less rational and more human elements of decision making. His organizational process model posited that much of decision making is driven by such things as standard operating procedures, a short-term focus, and the first solution decision makers come across that seems to minimally satisfy state needs (see also Simon 1957). His governmental politics model sees each advisor as biased toward solutions coming from his or her own bureaucracy ("where you stand depends upon where you sit"), and policy choices have more to do with political infighting, manipulation, and who has more influence with the leader, none of which fits with rational actor models. Another area of research demonstrating the psychological effects of groups on decision making is group polarization. There is a tendency for groups in decision making to choose a more extreme option than members would have chosen while working alone (Moscovici and Zavalloni 1969; McCauley 1972). While early research found groups shifting in a riskier direction, more recent research shows that the tendency may go in either direction, depending upon the underlying predispositions of the group's members. For instance, Bray and Noble (1978) find that groups shifted toward more severe action if members were more authoritarian, while groups shifted toward less severe action if the members were less authoritarian.

Research has also shown that working in groups tends to exacerbate well-known psychological biases that occur at the individual level. For instance, the fundamental attribution error (Ross 1977) finds individuals tending to blame internal flaws of others for their poor



behavior while blaming external circumstances for the same behavior in self (e.g., “he got into a fight because he is mean” whereas “I got into a fight because others forced me to”). Group attribution bias demonstrates that this propensity is intensified when individuals work in groups (Allison and Messick 1985). And, while social identity theory and the minimal group paradigm have long demonstrated that individuals are quick to discriminate against members of the outgroup (Tajfel 1978; Brewer 1979), this phenomenon is exacerbated when individuals work in a group setting (Quattrone and Jones 1980; McDermott 2004).

There is also extensive research that investigates the effect of group development—the stages and longevity of a group—on its processes and effectiveness (Tuckman 1965; Tuckman and Jensen 1977; Stern 1997; Stern and Sundelius 1997). This literature investigates such questions as whether new groups tend to be less effective than more established groups, whether older groups may have entrenched patterns or unhealthy signs of group cohesion, and whether groups tend to go through predictable, patterned stages of development.

Finally, there is a body of literature that combines the two main areas we have looked at in this chapter: individual-level psychology and group phenomena. The basic hypothesis is that psychological traits of the leader or a key advisor will have a significant effect on how the group functions as a decision-making body. For instance, could it be that if the leader has a low level of conceptual complexity we will see more biases and short-circuited information processing in the group? Or, if a leader is distrustful, will the group demonstrate more outgroup biases, or be more closed off to information that does not support the group’s preferred position?

Some of the best conceptual work in this area has been done by Thomas Preston and Margaret Hermann (Preston 2001; Hermann 2001; Hermann and Preston 1994; Hermann et al. 2001). In addition to their conceptual work, these researchers have provided empirical support using Hermann’s LTA at-a-distance methods to assess psychological characteristics of leaders in conjunction with case studies and process tracing. Schafer and Crichlow (2010), also using LTA, contribute quantitative data on both sides of the equation in support of some of these propositions. They find that indeed psychological characteristics of the leader, such as distrust, in-group bias, and need for power, have statistically significant effects on the quality of group decision making.

## Psychological Effects in American Foreign Policy

The literature in foreign policy analysis associated with groups and individual-level psychology is rich with examples and applications pertaining to American foreign policy. Indeed, the previous section included references to some of the most famous cases and studies: explaining Woodrow Wilson’s intransigence with the U.S. Senate regarding the League of Nations (George and George 1956); understanding unusual Soviet bargaining behavior early in the Cold War (Leites 1951, 1953); explaining the “perfect failure” in decision making regarding the Bay of Pigs (Janis 1982); and investigating human organizational effects in the Cuban Missile Crisis (Allison 1971). In this section I present a few expanded case studies that help exemplify some of the effects of groups and individuals on American foreign policy making.

Let us begin where we left off with Janis’s treatment of the Kennedy administration and the Bay of Pigs. In the same book, Janis (1982) covers another Kennedy case later in the administration, the Cuban Missile Crisis, and argues that the transformation from a perfect failure to highly effective decision making is striking. Very soon after the 1961 Bay of Pigs incident, President Kennedy publicly took personal blame for the fiasco and pledged to the American public that the administration would make several structural changes. Kennedy assigned some advisors the role of challenging assumptions and asking hard questions. He broadened his circle of advisors and brought in outsiders who had different kinds of expertise

and could challenge intra-administration perspectives. He personally stepped out of some meetings, allowing his advisors to speak their minds more freely and reducing the potential appearance of leader bias. Each of these created structures and processes that allowed for more critical thinking and better information processing (Janis 1982).

Another example of significant change in an administration can be seen in the Reagan White House. Many scholars have suggested that the quality of decision making early on in the Reagan administration was very problematic, with high levels of in-fighting, biased information processing, and poor structures and procedures (Preston 2001; Kowert 2002; Schafer and Crichlow 2010). One case that exemplifies the problematic decision making in the administration is the Strategic Defense Initiative (SDI), which was Reagan's dream to construct a protective anti-ballistic missile "umbrella" for the United States. Problems with the decision making in the case start at the individual-level with Reagan himself. He was no foreign policy expert, knew nothing of the science involved, and had virtually no intellectual background in the theoretical underpinnings of nuclear deterrence and the concept of mutual assured destruction. Yet his personal cognitions and biases, virtually in isolation, drove the process forward.

In terms of group decision making, the structural and information processing faults were at a very high level (Schafer and Crichlow 2010: 109–111). These included such things as the White House hiding the idea from all major foreign policy advisors (the secretaries of state and defense did not even learn about the proposal until a couple of days before the public announcement was made; see Shultz 1993). There were no methodical procedures, including no meeting of the foreign policy team prior to the decision. There was very little information-seeking in the case, and for what little was done (Reagan met with the Joint Chiefs of Staff once early on), the information was processed in a highly biased way. While the Chiefs thought the broad idea of missile defense had potential, Reagan interpreted that to mean the science was solid and the Chiefs wholly backed the idea of moving forward, something that was clearly not the case (see Shultz 1993: 250). The two advisors who genuinely knew about the proposal engaged in extreme gatekeeping (keeping information from others in the process), and there were obvious pressures for consensus (Schafer and Crichlow, 2010; see also Cannon 1991; Shultz 1993; Talbott 1988).

By the second term of the Reagan presidency, however, the quality of the decision-making process improved notably. This could be seen in the case of the Reagan administration helping to ease Ferdinand Marcos out of power in the Philippines. Here again Reagan's own biases were prominent; Marcos had been a loyal anti-communist partner to the United States during the Cold War, and Reagan felt a strong, personal commitment to him. By this time, however, Reagan was more willing to listen to his advisors and let the process run its course. There was much less in-fighting in the administration; the group reached out to outsiders and area experts to get the best information available; there were intra-administration pressures on advisors to keep their personal biases in check and to eliminate biased-driven gatekeeping (see Shultz 1993); and the administration carefully considered its objectives and alternatives (Bonner 1987; Brands 1992; Schafer and Crichlow 2010).

We turn now to one more case of American foreign policy making, the George W. Bush administration's decision to invade Iraq in 2003. The case is a very interesting one, not only because it illustrates some problematic group decision making, but also because data on the psychological traits of Bush provide some fascinating insights on the connection between individual-level psychology and decision making. It is also one of the most written-about cases in modern times, so the evidence base is abundantly clear and powerful (see, for example, Clarke 2004; Fallows 2004; Hersh 2004; Rothkopf 2005; Danner 2006; Isikoff and Corn 2006; Ricks 2006; Suskind 2006; Mazarr 2007; Gellman 2008; Woodward 2002, 2004, 2006, 2008).

Let us begin with some of Bush's psychological characteristics, as reported by Schafer and Crichlow (2010). Their study included a sample of nine leaders, and, compared to the others, Bush scored well above average on belief in ability to control events and need for power, he scored highest in the sample on distrust, and lowest in the sample on self-confidence. Even a casual analysis would suggest that this is not a great combination of traits: someone who is low in confidence but high in distrust and who also has strong propensities to control and dominate. Let us now look at how these traits manifested in the decision-making apparatus for the administration. In several cases, the fit is remarkable.

One troubling feature regarding the decision-making structures in the Bush administration during this time is that there were remarkably few structures at all. Instead, the process, if it can be called that, was personalistic, centered around Bush, and highly controlled and closed off. As Under Secretary of State Richard Armitage reported to Ron Suskind (2006: 225), "Bush wanted centralized, loyal, secretive power with clear lines of authority so his orders could be followed immediately." Danner (2006; 87) reports that Bush was "deeply distrustful of the bureaucracy, desirous of quick decisive action, impatient with bureaucrats and policy intellectuals." He rarely sought any advice (Mazarr 2007), relied heavily on his own instincts (Woodward 2006: 11), and was remarkably incurious (Fallows 2004; Suskind 2004). Even Bush himself essentially bragged about his isolation, "I have no outside advice. Anybody who says they're an outside adviser of this administration on this particular matter is not telling the truth" (Lemann 2004: 158).

There was an inordinate level of bias—against Saddam Hussein and for regime change—in the administration even before 9/11. After the terrorist attacks, this bias turned the administration's focus toward Iraq almost immediately, and it never left. There were significant pressures to conform to this view, even to the point where the administration conducted a "purge" of advisors and bureaucrats who raised questions contrary to the administration's preferred view (Ricks 2006: 103). Armitage reported that someone higher up than Defense Secretary Rumsfeld did not want people who would let "the facts get into the equation" (Ricks 2006: 104), a classic rendition of groupthink. Gatekeeping was extensive in the administration. There was an illusion of invulnerability that pervaded the White House. Normal intelligence operations were ignored, circumvented, or treated with undue hostility. Objectives and alternatives were not carefully reviewed. Both the situation and the outgroup were stereotyped (Schafer and Crichlow 2010).

In short, the quality of decision making was terrible. Yet notice how closely some of these problems seem to be direct extensions of Bush's psychological characteristics. Bush's administration was:

- highly distrustful of very good information coming from regular governmental sources;
- highly controlling of the entire process, which was frequently centralized around Bush's own gut instincts; and
- dominating and forceful not only regarding the opponent but also regarding anyone in the administration who diverged from the preferred viewpoint.

It is not always the case that the effect of a leader's psychological traits can be so clearly seen in an administration. In this case, however, the connection is powerful.

## Conclusion

Try picking out most any chapter on the history of American foreign policy and telling the story without mentioning key individuals—a near impossible task. Presidents such as

George Washington, Thomas Jefferson, Abraham Lincoln, Theodore Roosevelt, Woodrow Wilson, Franklin Roosevelt, Harry Truman, Lyndon Johnson, Richard Nixon, Ronald Reagan, and George W. Bush all loom large over the history of American foreign relations. All of them left their own personal imprint on policy that we associate strictly with them as individuals. Intuitively speaking, individual psychological effects in decision making are hard to deny.

Yet, as this chapter has demonstrated, we no longer need to rely simply on intuition to support that proposition. Though many still consider political psychology a young field, there is an extensive body of literature that provides solid evidence regarding the role of psychology in decision making. Methods have developed that let us measure different components of a leader's psychology, and these methods have allowed us to discern specific patterns between individual-level psychology and state behavior. For example, those with higher need for power are likely to be more hostile (Winter 1987, 1993). Those who are more distrusting are likely to have worse decision-making procedures in their administrations (Schafer and Crichlow 2010), and a leader's cognitive conflict orientation is a strong signifier of a state's decision to implement sanctions (Drury 2006).

We also know that there are significant effects on foreign policy when humans work in groups and organizations (which is virtually always the case): groups tend to cause more polarized policy choices (Moscovici and Zavalloni 1969; McCauley 1972); individuals are frequently highly influenced by the bureaucracy they represent (Allison 1971); and poor decision-making structures in an administration have a strong, probabilistic effect on poor outcomes in terms of national interest (Janis 1982; Schafer and Crichlow 2002, 2010). As Snyder, Bruck, and Sapin (1962: 65) argued long ago, "the state is its decision makers." In order to understand foreign policy making, we must understand that it is first and foremost a human endeavor.

So why is it the case that many subfields in international relations continue to ignore psychological factors? One answer is that psychology is a complicated, muddled area in which to conduct research. While psychology may always be a part of decision making, it is not always easy to include it in our models. Put somewhat differently, while there is ample evidence that psychology matters, the quantity (and perhaps quality) of psychological data available pales in comparison to that available in the conflict subfield of international relations in which we find major datasets already in place, such as the Correlates of War studies, the International Crisis Behavior Project, and the Kansas Event Data Set.

The most important challenge for the field of political psychology is development of much more extensive and widely available data. Along with this, the field needs to continuously work on additional operationalizations of variables and ongoing validity checks for those that are in use. Compared to fifty years ago, the "science" of political psychology has come a tremendous distance thanks to the pioneering work of people like Margaret Hermann, Stephen G. Walker, David Winter, Phillip Tetlock, Michael Young, and others. But there is still a long way to go.

Other research challenges include better incorporation of psychological data with other mainstream data-based research, more assessment of the connection of individuals to the quality of the process, more integrated data of cognitive and personality constructs, and more analysis of learning effects with psychological factors as dependent variables. Clearly, there is much work to be done. Yet equally clear is that the role of psychology in foreign policy making cannot be ignored. The foundations of this subfield are now very well established, and there is an excellent base of research to build upon. It is an exciting time to be a political psychologist, a time with many excellent research opportunities.

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