LEADERSHIP AND UNREFLECTIVE DECISION-MAKING IN CRISIS: A WINDOW INTO THE INTERNATIONAL SYSTEM?

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ABSTRACT

This thesis suggests that unreflective decisions made by world leaders in moments of extreme crisis can be used as an access point to uncover their core assumptions about the international system. It builds a conceptual model by drawing on common heuristics from cognitive psychology to operationalise Vincent Pouliot's 'logic of practicality' into an observable phenomenon at the individual level of analysis. These are applied to analyze unreflective decision-making in the immediate milieu of a major crisis; attention focuses on the knee-jerk outbursts and purely reactive decisions that leaders make when they are first adapting to the crisis, understood here as a 'pre-cognizant stage' of decision-making. It is argued that these constitute 'arational' (non-rationalized rather than irrational) attitudes that leaders subconsciously and habitually reproduce as agents on the global stage. This takes the ontological discussion one level deeper than traditional theories of IR tend to consider.

It follows that the thesis is inherently experimental. Its focus is on establishing a possible new approach for further development, rather than obtaining concrete conclusions in its own right.

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Contents

1. INTRODUCTION

1.1 Outline

This paper argues that unreflective decisions made by world leaders in moments of extreme crisis can be used as an access point to uncover their core assumptions about the international system.

This is achieved by drawing on concepts from cognitive psychology to operationalise Vincent Pouliot's 'logic of practicality' into a set of measurable indicators. These are applied to analyze unreflective decision-making in the immediate milieu of a major crisis. Rather than retracing a causal chain from comprehension and rationalization towards ultimate outcome, attention is primarily given to the knee-jerk outbursts and purely reactive decisions that leaders make when they are first informed of the crisis: understood here as a 'pre-cognizant stage' of decision-making. By considering this 'unreflective' behavior, and unpacking the intuitions and assumptions that leaders seem to revert to under extreme duress, we can uncover their non-representational assumptions and beliefs about the world. It is argued that these constitute 'arational' (non-rationalized rather than irrational) attitudes that leaders subconsciously and habitually reproduce as agents on the global stage. This takes the ontological discussion one level deeper than traditional theories of IR tend to consider.

1.2. Identifying the Knowledge Gap

Most analyses of leadership in the International Relations corpus treat the individual as a fundamentally rational and reflective agent who operates both deliberately and consciously. In particular, studies of how leaders operate within international crises seem to postulate that whilst their subject may be substantively constrained – whether by the manoeuvres of a scheming opponent or the impediments of institutional gridlock – they are

metaphysically cognizant of what has occurred and, from this basis, operate towards specified objectives.

Yet research from the natural sciences shows we cannot entirely substantiate this notion. "Cognitive neuroscientists have established that people regularly perceive, feel, and act before they think; we respond to the world without rational reflection."[1] This evidence from psychology and neurology creates a theoretical gap which IR scholars need to address. In recent years, numerous studies have argued that scholars should begin reorienting their understanding of leadership to take unreflective and arational decision-making into account. (Kahneman and Renshon[2], Hopf[3], Adler and Pouliot[4], Erisen[5]).

My thesis is framed against the backdrop of this broader interdisciplinary turn, and adopts insights from political psychology to develop a model for analyzing unreflective decision-making in moments of international crisis. It postulates that the actions and decisions leaders act out under pressure betray their assumptions about the international system. My approach seeks to uncover these assumptions. Therefore, the model essentially offers a 'periscope' for cutting through murky waters to see how state leaders instinctively understand, act out, and thus perpetuate certain elements of the international system.

Consequently, the core objective of this thesis is to operationalise several cross-disciplinary theories into a new practical model, and demonstrate how this might be constructively applied and integrated into wider IR scholarship. Therefore, although the paper engages heavily with decision-making in the aftermath of 9/11 and the Falklands invasion, it is worth clarifying that these events are actually rather incidental to the thesis; they are

[1] Ted Hopf. "The logic of habit in International Relations", *European Journal of International Relations* vol.16, no.4 (2010), p539
[2] Daniel Kahneman and Jonathon Renshon. "Hawkish Biases", in Trevor Thrall and Jane Cramer eds., *American Foreign Policy and the Politics of Fear: Threat Inflation Since 9/11*, New York (2009), pp.79-96.
[3] Hopf, *op.cit.*
[4] Emanuel Adler and Vincent Pouliot, *International Practices*, Cambridge (2011).
[5] Elif Erisen, "An Introduction to Political Psychology for International Relations Scholars", *Perceptions* vol.17, no.3 (2012), pp.9-28.

chosen as illustrative case studies to test the model, rather than as the focus of the thesis in their own right. Other cases fitting the definition of an international crisis should be considered similarly appropriate as background units of analysis.

Therefore, the paper's real contribution to the IR corpus is not a new or enhanced way to understand leadership during 9/11 or the Falklands *per se*, but rather an experimental model that hooks and pivots on unreflective leadership during crisis to uncover core elements of the international system. I believe this represents an innovative new approach, and one that potentially has broader application within the discipline.

Having identified a gap in the literature, it is now necessary to construct the model. There are two critical stages to this. Firstly, a theoretical section is required to outline the background assumptions and logic on which the model is premised. Secondly, a methodology section is required to operationalise the chosen theoretical concepts and integrate them into a serviceable conceptual framework.

2. THEORY

2.2. Defining a 'Moment of Exception'

As seen above, this study tries to elucidate how world leaders perceive the international system by analyzing the attitudes and assumptions they involuntarily act out when first encountering an exceptional crisis situation. In a sense, this means clarifying an everyday belief system through the lens of exceptional practice. Consequently, there is a high premium on finding and selecting situations which are incontrovertibly aberrations from the norm, which in turn means developing a tight and particular definition of 'crisis'. This necessitates a transition away from some broad and inclusive definitions in IR theory which see crisis as a common and even structurally-determined component within the international system. For example, whereas many politicians "portray their tenure in office as a daily confrontation with crises," such a notion seems oxymoronic and of little use when we are trying to find 'moments of exception'.[6]

One popular definition is given by the political scientist Michael Brecher (1993), who identifies international crisis as "a change in type and or increase in intensity of disruptive interactions between two or more states, with a heightened probability of military hostilities, [which] in turn destabilizes their relationship and challenges the structure of an international system." However, this seems too broad to delineate a 'moment of exception'. It is a technical rather than applied definition, which for my purposes does not sufficiently differentiate 'crisis' from a broader theory of general conflict. There are also problems in perpetuating the pre-9/11 assumptions that international crisis specifically relates to interactions between sovereign states. The emergence of transnational terrorism and environmental disaster demonstrated that a state-centric understanding is insufficiently broad.

[6] Michael Brecher, *Crises in World Politics*, Oxford (1993), p3

From here, we might refer to events that have gained the status of 'flashbulb memories."[7] This is a theoretical term from cognitive psychology, and refers to those exceptionally rare events which are so traumatic that many individuals are seared with a vivid mental snapshot of "what they were doing and where they were" when they first heard the news.[8] In the United States, commonly cited examples are the Pearl Harbor attacks of 1941, the assassination of President Kennedy in 1963, and the 9/11 attacks in 2001. The 2011 Oslo bombing and Utøya massacre have gained a similar status in Norway.[9] It is reasonable to assume that if an event has gained 'flashbulb' status at a national level, it was something that disrupted the relatively passive actioning process and necessitated something exceptional in response.

This leads us back to a more restrictive tendency in IR literature, which sees crisis as "extraordinary decision-making activity in which existing decision patterns are disrupted by an emergency [that] threatens to inflict significant damage to national interests."[10] Unlike Brecher's definition, this frame corresponds with flashbulb memory theory and permits us to consider natural catastrophes and non-state human activity (specifically terrorism) as catalysts for international crisis. Hazlewood *et al* place emphasis on the psychologically shocking nature and consequences of the situation, rather than the motives and intentions of actors. This definition conceives of a 'moment of exception' as something that is sudden, unforeseen, and astonishing. This seems to tick the boxes for conducting an analysis of 'unreflective' acting out by leaders, and therefore it seems acceptable to borrow it as a blueprint for defining a 'moment of exception'.

[7] Roger Brown and James Kulik, "Flashbulb Memories." *Cognition* vol.5, no.1 (1977), pp.73-99.
[8] Tali Sharot, Elizabeth A. Martorella, Mauricio R. Delgado, and Elizabeth A. Phelps, "How personal experience modulates the neural circuitry of memories of September 11", *Proceedings of the National Academy of Science of the United* States, 2 January 2007, pp.389-394.
[9] Simon Baron-Cohen, "Anders Breivik: cold and calculating, yes – but insane?", *The Guardian*, 1 December 2011.
[10] Leo Hazlewood, John J. Hayes, and James R. Brownell Jr., "Planning for Problems in Crisis Management: An Analysis of Post-1945 Behavior in the US Department of Defense", *International Studies Quarterly*, vol.21 no.1 (1977), p79

We should consider how this definition can be applied to select appropriate case studies. These must be events which disrupted existing decision patterns, threatened the national interest (either materially or normatively) and triggered extraordinary decision-making activity. The cases highlighted by cognitive psychologists suggest the best examples of this are likely to be violent and unprovoked attacks on a nation's sovereign territory. This focuses our attention on major terrorist attacks or unexpected acts of war.

2.3. The Centrality of Paramount Leaders in Moments of Exception

Having demarcated the 'moment of exception' we must next consider why it provides such a good opportunity for IR theorists trying to delineate the assumptions and intuitions that individual leaders make about the modern international system.

The first step is quite straightforward. When a major crisis or other unexpected event occurs, immediate responsibility for political action reverts almost exclusively to paramount leaders. They alone are vested with the political authority to take extraordinary decisions in response to extraordinary scenarios. Moreover, they are effectively isolated from the constraints and standard operating procedures of institutionalised practice. Consequently, these moments provide the IR theorist with a rare period when structure is frozen in relative stasis, and action is almost entirely dependent on agency. This is because the institutional structures of governance are not designed to process and react to extraordinary circumstances. Bureaucracies function according to formal and standardised operating roles appropriate for normal conditions, and a state of exception disrupts these conditions. To paraphrase the definition, "existing decision patterns are disrupted", because the bureaucratic machinery of government is simply not structured in a way that allows it to provide the immediate improvisations and *ad hoc* decision-making necessitated by a sudden

emergency.[11] The price of efficiency is inflexibility – bureaucracies provide solutions when the problem is anticipated, but in new and unexpected scenarios they lack the authority and institutional capacity to take autonomous action. Therefore, as the bureaucratic wheels grind to a halt, there is a period of inertia at the heart of government, and the paramount leadership temporarily assumes full responsibility for constructing and delivering the response.

A simplistic illustration of this is seen in the sudden resignation of Pope Benedict XVI in February 2013. In the immediate aftermath of this announcement, state foreign ministries and their national representatives to the Holy See were unable to articulate a coherent response. Government ministries around the world operated on the assumption that the interregnum only occurred after a papal death. When this tradition was unexpectedly broken, existing codes of practice, etiquette and appropriate institutional behaviour were rendered unsuitable. Government officials, including ambassadors and representatives at the Vatican, could not react swiftly. There was no protocol or established operating procedure to act out. Therefore, in the first few hours of this news breaking, it was left entirely for individual leaders to speak on behalf of their state.

Whilst the papal resignation was unexpected, there are obviously more clearly defined 'moments of exception' which have been more consequential for international politics. The paradigmatic case used in IR theory has been the Cuban Missile Crisis of 1962, when the discovery of covert missile placements barely 100 miles from the US mainland precipitated a tense standoff with the Soviet Union. Graham Allison's seminal text *The Essence of Decision* established the fundamental role of President Kennedy and Premier Kruschchev in mediating and resolving this crisis.[12] Whilst Allison certainly acknowledges that the institutional machinery of government was swiftly reanimated into operational crisis mode throughout October 1962, there is no doubt that in the immediate aftermath of the discovery all critical

[11] Margaret B. Takeda and Marilyn M. Helms, "Bureaucracy, meet catastrophe", *International Journal of Public Sector*, vol.19 no.2 (2006), p209.
[12] Graham T. Allison, *Essence of Decision: Explaining the Cuban Missile Crisis*, Boston (1971)

impetus was projected from leaders at the centre. Kennedy, Khrushchev, and a few other key individuals may have been working through (or with) the machinery of everyday government, but they were unshackled from its standard constraints. They were essentially operating from a stage beyond the everyday functions of government, which had been rendered redundant by these exceptional circumstances, and to which there was no natural or planned course of action. It fell to the offices of the paramount leader to break this deadlock, and the individuals who occupied them were ultimately responsible for the critical decision-making.

2.4. Unreflective Decision-Making and the Logic of Practicality

Having established why leaders are the critical characters during moments of exception, we must consider why these moments are useful for analysing the international system. Traditional analyses have tended to focus on crises because they provide an opportunity to trace the causal chain of decision-making in isolation from everyday constitutive rituals of international relations. Raw practice is laid bare, from comprehension to rationalisation to decision, and so it becomes easier to isolate possible instrumental logics and identify the apparent outcomes that leaders are trying to achieve.

However, these studies only begin to trace the decision-making process once leaders have recognised the situation before them, and are deliberating over potential responses. There is an implicit assumption that the important and consequential stage of decision-making begins when leaders are operating from an ontologically reflective viewpoint.[13] Even though Allison presents three possible 'models' of behaviour to explain the course of events during the Cuban Missile Crisis, and Bouchard[14] presents a comparative analysis of the 1967

[13] Vincent Pouliot, "The Logic of Practicality: A Theory of Practice of Security Communities", *International Organization*, vol.62 no.2 (2008), p276
[14] Joesph F. Bouchard, Command in Crisis. New York (1991)

and 1973 Arab-Israeli wars, neither justify why their analysis only starts at the point when the metaphorical 'chess board' has been set up and the pieces have been arranged.

Leaders are human beings, and subject to the same psychological stresses, cognitive biases, and heuristic tendencies as other individuals. When a moment of exception demands their attention, they do not automatically enter a cogent and reflective crisis mode, but rather slowly adapt to the situation. They misjudge and misunderstand new information, make errors, and improvise according to hope or 'best case' scenarios. It is a process of imperfect acclimatisation into partial control rather than immediate transition into supreme control. Moreover, during this period of adaptation they are often required to make quick decisions, give commands, and deal with a continual flow of new information. Urgent action is required to break the institutional duty, and leaders are not discharged of their official duty simply because the reality of the situation is still being absorbed.

So whilst Allison, Bouchard, and others analyse case studies from many possible perspectives, and place leaders under the scrutiny of different theoretical lenses, the analysis of crisis leadership is incomplete. They neglect to consider whether there might be something useful to learn from the prior stage of comprehension and adaptation, before the metaphorical hand has been dealt, when leaders are in fact receiving the cards. By drawing on theories from cognitive psychology, this presumption can be challenged. The transition period from the everyday into crisis mode itself represents a distinct and informative phase which can tell us a lot about the character and belief systems of an individual. This essentially means the period before he/she has started cogently processing and compartmentalising the information into a coherent and cogitated schema. From the instinctive decisions and verbalizations leaders make in these seconds and minutes, we can extrapolate certain core attitudes that bound their understanding of the world. Leaders intuitively and unreflectively draw on non-

representational attitudes about the world, and act out behaviour from this ontologically prior basis, rather than towards the rationalised outcomes they ostensibly seek to achieve.

For example, what are the assumptions that they intuitively leap to about the nature or the cause of the crisis? What knee-jerk attitudes or involuntary articulations do they express? Do they intentionally and explicitly revert to past experience as a heuristic device to guide their decisions? Is their demeanour one of reactionary anger or practical resolve? Do they focus on certain pieces of information that (even without the benefit of hindsight) seem relatively insignificant or inconsequential, and are there any obvious explanation for this? Such queries help us delve into the unreflective actions of world leaders, and unearth the subconscious attitudes and assumptions they hold about the international system.

For Vincent Pouliot, the stage of unreflective action constitutes a coherent behavioural paradigm which he calls 'the logic of practicality.'[15] This is roughly defined from the premise that the actions of individuals "do not derive from conscious deliberation or thoughtful reflection – instrumental, rule-based, communicative, or otherwise. Instead, practices are the result of inarticulate, practical knowledge that makes what is to be done appear 'self evident' or commonsensical."[16] Crucially, the 'logic of practicality' is considered ontologically prior to three other logics identified by distinct schools of IR theory: the rationalist 'logic of consequences' as outlined by realist theory, the normative 'logic of appropriateness' as outlined by liberalist theory, and the communicative 'logic of arguing' as outlined by Habermasian constructivist theory. For Pouliot, these three logics of action "suffer from a representational bias in that they focus on what agents think about instead of what they think from."[17]

Pouliot's theory is one that essentially applies to individuals as constitutive elements of structures, where 'practice' is a self-perpetuating and non-rationalised element of the

[15] Pouliot, *op.cit.*
[16] Pouliot, *op.cit.*, p258
[17] Pouliot, *op.cit.*, p257

international system. The example given is a G8 summit, where etiquette and scheduling seem self-evident to all parties, and deviations are treated with derision, despite the lack of formalised rules of conduct.[18] However, I believe that this 'logic of practicality' is equally applicable to the unreflective outbursts and decision-making of individual leaders operating in exceptional circumstances. We therefore need to consider an appropriate methodology for operationalizing this ontologically prior theory of action and applying it at an individual level of analysis.

[18] One need only think of the substantial attention and scorn piled on President Silvio Berlusconi for disrupting the 'normal' flow of these summits.

3. METHODOLOGY

3.1. Analytical Framework: Operationalizing the Logic of Practicality

The logic of practicality remains a conceptual logic of action pitched within structural and systematised dynamics of the everyday. Hitherto, no attempt has been made to refine it at an individual level of analysis, and deploy it to observe and understand the concrete action made by individual leaders in distinct situations. Yet this reorientation could be extremely valuable, especially in providing an important corrective to a fundamental tenet of rational choice theory: that humans work from an 'ontologically' sound knowledge base.

The logic of practicality shows that decision-making can be systematised and comprehensible to outside observation but not simultaneously rational. Instead, the concept implies that individuals may be thinking towards a certain outcome, but this cannot be separated from the mindset from which they are thinking.[19] Leaders do not function as separate units in and of themselves – they cannot transcend their own context – and this means that even the most cogent and internally consistent mindset will not necessarily act out in direct relation to reality. These background 'idiosyncrasies' have often confused traditional analyses of leadership, and remain an area of oversight that are difficult to reconcile with both sides of the realist (consequences) and liberal (appropriateness) logics of action.

Instead, the logic holds that people are socialised into their contexts and act out accordingly. Decisions made under pressure will necessarily reflect this socialisation. Given that psychological theory demonstrates that people rely on heuristic decision-making when placed under pressure – wherein they struggle to process an incomprehensible weight of information and therefore settle for 'self-evident' or 'best-fit' options – we gain the ability to speculate on the background assumptions that could account for the discrepancy between an 'optimal' decision and the one that was actually made.

[19] Pouliot, *op.cit.,* p261

3.2. Cognitive Bias and Decision-Making

Having established the potential benefits that might be gained by modifying and redeploying Pouliot's approach, it is important to actually establish how to detect the logic of practicality playing out in practice. For this, it is necessary to return to the interdisciplinary crossover between IR theory and behavioural psychology. The leading scholar in this field, Daniel Kahneman, Emeritus Professor in Psychology and Public Affairs at Princeton, has proven the fruitful potential of this intersection. In particular, he has opened discussion on 'System 1' thinking, "a fundamentally adaptive system that automatically, effortlessly, and intuitively organizes experience and directs behaviour."[20] This is reliant on permeable implicit learning absorbed through everyday engagement with the outside world. In a recent collaboration with Jonathon Renshon, Kahneman asserts that national leaders making decisions in the international political arena, and particularly in conflict situations, are frequently afflicted by a specific set of cognitive biases that draw on System 1 'cognitive unconsciousness'. These are considered to be general features of cognition and preference and constitute "predictable errors in the way that individuals interpret information and make decisions" under pressure.[21] There are a set of four cognitive biases, illusions and heuristics which are particularly relevant for analysing leadership in a moment of exception:[22]

a) Illusion of Capacity and Control

[20] Daniel Kahneman, *Maps of Bounded Rationality: A Perspective on Intuitive Judgment and Choice,* Princeton University Prize Lecture (2002), available at {http://web.cenet.org.cn/upfile/37554.pdf}, accessed 03 April 2014, p449

[21] Kahneman and Renshon, *op.cit.,* p79

[22] These indicators are extracted from Daniel Kahneman and Jonathon Renshon, 'Hawkish Biases', in Thrall and Cramer, *American Foreign Policy and the Politics of Fear: Threat Inflation Since 9/11*, (New York: Routledge Press, 2009), pp.79-96. Some are adopted verbatim; others are reinterpreted or parsed from broader categories and paraphrased. For example, Kahneman and Renshon categorise 'Illusion of Capacity', 'Illusion of Control', and 'Unrealistic Optimism' together under the single label of 'Positive Illusions'. I have reconstructed these into a slightly different indicator as I believe that they are not mutually inclusive; the presence of one positive illusion in the mind of a leader in crisis does not necessarily imply the presence of another.

This heuristic predisposes people to take an unrealistically positive view of the self, and in particular overrate their own abilities to influence events. Whether at an individual or national level, people are instinctively prone to focus on the resources as their disposal in absolute terms, whilst giving little weight to constraints, limitations, or unavoidable 'costs' that will be incurred in deploying them. In other words, leaders are inclined to overlook information that conflicts with positive self-assessments, and therefore maintain an unjustified illusion of their objective capacity and ability to manage situation. They also display an instinctive preference for strategies that engender a feeling of control, even if is illusory and leads to objectively worse outcomes. In a competitive situation, an illusion of capacity and control encourages the individual to believe that outcomes are dependent on his/her own actions and abilities, and inclines them to downplay (or discount entirely) those external dynamics which they are unable to influence.

Consequently, these illusions tend to veer individuals into unrealistic optimism about eventual outcomes. This is a tendency to conflate predictions of what will occur with what one would like to happen. People generally believe that the probability of positive outcomes is higher for themselves than their opponents, because they maintain an unrealistic perception of their own levels of capacity and control over events, but are unable to factor in the unknown externalities. This heuristic is compounded in paramount leaders because success over opponents will have been their normal experience in domestic politics. However, in the international arena, leaders are prone to overlook the capacities and abilities of competitors. This is called 'reference group neglect'.

b) Illusion of Transparency

People are inclined to overestimate the extent to which their own intentions are clear to others, which means they do not make sufficient allowances for differences in perspective.

This can cause problems with friends and allies, as the individual instinctively assumes that reasons for a chosen course of action are self-evident and as such will be endorsed by friends and allies who share the same overall objectives. However, within the extremely stressful and time-critical environment of a crisis, leaders are prone to settle on a decision that 'satisfices'. This is a decision-making heuristic for finding solutions quickly and under pressure; it entails cycling through options until one is found that is both satisfactory and sufficient, even if it would not be the 'optimal' choice.[23] As allies are likely to maintain a different intersectional threshold of 'satisfactory' and 'sufficient' outcomes, 'satisficing' is less transparent than the decision-maker presumes.

The transparency illusion is equally troublesome with opponents, especially when leaders neglect to provide reassurances when their intentions are benign rather than pernicious. By definition, unreflective decision-making is reactive rather than calculating, so in the high-pressure urgency of a crisis situation leaders are especially unlikely to consider how a decision may be perceived elsewhere. Nor do they instinctively take potential fallout or consequences of satisficing into account.

c) Fundamental Attribution Error (FAE)

A systematic confirmation bias in explaining the behaviour of opponents. In particular, FAE implies a tendency to attribute observed actions that are consistent with expectations to the personal disposition of the opponent, whilst attributing actions that are inconsistent with expectations to the influence of situational pressure. This perpetuates suspicion and leads to overly aggressive decision-making. FAE also catalyses a secondary heuristic, termed 'Reactive Devaluation by Kahneman and Renshon, in which the "bad behaviour" of adversaries is generally attributed to their natural hostile intentions, whereas

[23] H. A. Simon, "Rational Choice and the Structure of the Environment", *Psychological Review*, vol.63 no.2 (1956), p129

anything contrary to expectations is seen as contingent upon external pressures or situational factors. This means that any concessions or ideas proposed by adversaries are automatically regarded with suspicion, and assigned a lower value than is objectively justified. The unconscious devaluation of offers, concessions or plans suggested by rivals or adversaries makes it difficult to reach agreements.

d) Risk Seeking in Losses[24]

This theorises that people afford different values to gains and losses; rather than maintaining a linear, internally consistent marginal utility, they overvalue definite gains yet have a risk-seeking preference when faced with losses. Therefore, contrary to the principles of rational choice theory, the value-function that individuals ascribe to gains and losses is distorted. In practice, this means leaders are instinctively reluctant to settle a crisis if a high-risk strategy might help them cut their eventual losses. In crisis mode this inclines them against mediation and towards escalation. It also induces an aversion to making concessions, and a reluctance to accept objectively fair exchanges. As seen in prospect theory, it corresponds to the assertion that losses loom larger than gains, implying "an abrupt change in the slope of the value function at the point separating gains from losses."[25] Leaders will be reluctant to trade like-for-like because they instinctively focus on what is lost rather than what is gained.

3.3. Developing the Model

The set of biases and heuristics borrowed from Kahneman and Renshon provide a coherent array of gauges for establishing unreflective and pre-cognizant decision-making. By

[24] This behaviourist heuristic is better known as prospect theory. It won Kahneman and Tversky the 2002 Nobel Prize in Economics.
[25] Kahneman and Renshon, *op.cit*., p89

developing these into measurable indicators, we can operationalise the logic of practicality at an individual level of analysis, and begin to delve into the inclinations and assumptions that leaders instinctively revert to and operate from in a crisis situation. This leaves us with an appropriate analytical framework – the next stage is to make these biases perceptible to research and quantification.

This means working out standards for identifying how far individual decision-making is being informed by ontologically-prior cognitive preference rather than objective and ontologically-informed analysis. The existence of apparent cognitive bias allows us to classify when leaders revert to instinct and intuition in the first moments of the crisis response. The implication is that frequent evidence of acute bias in the decision-making process will indicate when leaders are thinking 'from' the logic of practicality rather than 'towards' logics of consequences or appropriateness. The opinions they express and the decisions they make in these circumstances are likely to suggest the way they instinctively see and understand the world.

For source material, this approach relies upon records of decision-making, private speeches and public announcements (textual, visual and audio) made by leaders in the minutes and hours after the crisis occurs. This can be supplemented with first-hand accounts from observers and bystanders, although it is critically important that leaders are scrutinised in their own words rather than through the descriptive narratives of *post hoc* memoirs.

These sources are scrutinised using basic content analysis techniques to identify words, decisions, or images which seem to be a symptom of specific cognitive biases. In particular, we are looking to identify expressions and emotions which seem incongruous, or decisions which do not correspond to the crisis situation as it might have been perceived by an objective observer. It is important to account for hindsight bias by pitching the analysis against the specific context of the crisis. This means delineating what a leader knew, what

they did not, and the extent to which statements and decisions articulated in this milieu seem either justifiable or appropriate.

3.4. Challenges

However, before testing the model on actual case studies, it is important to acknowledge a number of important caveats and challenges. There are real risks and issues which even challenge the basic validity of this approach. Some of these are simply unavoidable, so it is important that they are on the table. Readers can then decide for themselves how much credence to place in this approach and its conclusions.

Firstly, there is a fundamental problem for any psychological approach to international politics, which is that any conclusions are inherently speculative. There is no way to prove when cognitive biases are at play, nor that they have decisively shaped or influenced a decision to any conclusive extent. At best, this model can ascertain when an identifiable 'bias' corresponds with a given decision and has some credible capacity to explain it. This means that the thesis is dependent on some extrapolation and supposition. Consequently, all speculative assertions must be acknowledged and rigorously justified if the eventual conclusions are to have any academic merit.

This rebounds at a more practical level in terms of access to source material. The nature of this study means that the really critical units of analysis – the leaders themselves – are impossible to obtain for either interview or personal correspondence. Presidents and Prime Ministers are rather too preoccupied to provide source material for experimental Masters level research, and their public accounts of crisis situations are normally partial, redacted, or deliberately withhold sensitive pieces of information. Most damagingly for this study, many of the decisions and logics at play have gone through a natural process of *post hoc* rationalisation and compartmentalisation, which makes their crisis leadership seem far

more rational and structured than it really was. Nobody likes acknowledging their own weaknesses and misjudgements, even to themselves, and therefore leaders tend to remember and recount their critical decisions as though they were far more considered and painstaking than they actually were at the time.[26]

Therefore, to 'reconstruct' the crisis mindset I am relying on the public announcements (textual, visual and audio) made by leaders in the minutes and hours after the crisis occurs, as well as memoirs and accounts from observers and bystanders such as government officials. These sources are limited in scope and access, particularly when the relevant files remain classified. Working with a limited and potentially unbalanced set of source material can lead to distorted conclusions which misrepresent the reality of the situation. It is important to remember that this model is applied to the locus of power in extremely chaotic and confused situations, and so much of primary evidence is either lost or restricted. This evidencing issue limits confidence in the wider applicability of the model.

Finally is important to remember that this is an essentially experimental and untested model. I am essentially trying to borrow, adapt and operationalise unconventional IR theory by drawing on concepts from political psychology, and using this as an entry route into the international system. I believe that this approach holds promise, but when retracing the construction process it is clearly couched in a number of major assumptions and logical conjecture. Any step could be flawed, and immediately emerge as an insurmountable problem which undermine the explanatory power or even basic utility of the model. Any major obstacles will be flagged up in the conclusion, and may be tackled with further research.

[26] The 'illusion of control' heuristic touches on the issue of ego and *post hoc* rationalisation.

4. CASE I: THE THATCHER CABINET ON 2 APRIL 1982

4.1. Context

On the morning of 2 April 1982 approximately six hundred Argentine troops mounted an audacious amphibious landing on the Falkland Islands, a small archipelago in the South Atlantic. The Falklands had been governed as a British overseas territory since 1833, but the legitimacy of this arrangement was disputed by Buenos Aires, which had maintained a formal claim to sovereignty ever since. However, Argentina had never before attempted a military invasion to assert its claim.

At 3.30pm on 1 April 1982, the British governor, Rex Hunt, received an indistinct warning of an impending attack. A top secret telegram from the Foreign and Commonwealth Office (FCO) in London simply stated:

> *"We have apparently reliable evidence that an Argentine task force could be assembling off* [the capital] *Port Stanley at dawn tomorrow. You will wish to make your dispositions accordingly."*[27]

At this stage, there was relatively little panic in London. The British Prime Minister at the time, Margaret Thatcher, relays in her autobiography that "The advice we received from intelligence was that the Argentinian Government were exploring our reactions… any escalation they might make would stop short of full-scale invasion… I do not think that any of us expected an immediate invasion of the Falklands themselves."[28]

Yet, overnight, Argentine Special Forces proceeded to overwhelm the small British garrison, forced a mass surrender from the Governor, and secured control of the islands. Bad

[27] Foreign and Commonwealth Office. "Telegram to Governor Rex Hunt." London to Port Stanley, 1 April 1982.
[28] Margaret Thatcher, *The Downing Street Years*, London (1993), pp.178-179

weather meant that the communications between Port Stanley and London were delayed, meaning the British Government was unaware of the invasion until the afternoon of 2 April. As such, the emergency Cabinet Meeting on 2 April 1982 was presented with a quite unexpected scenario, in which:

> *"The Prime Minister said that, although no direct information had been received from the Falkland Islands, it appeared that Argentine had invaded them. It was not known what resistance there had been, nor the extent of any damage or casualties."*[29]

The invasion of the Falkland Islands constituted the most surprising and challenging British foreign policy crisis since the Suez debacle of 1956. The crisis was compounded by the confused and imperfect data flowing into London. Against their own expectations, the Thatcher Cabinet was faced with a genuine conundrum; a strategically important overseas territory had apparently been illegally seized by a well-resourced and conveniently situated enemy. Amidst the uncertainty and weight of public pressure, they had to work fast to construct a response. In this context, political psychology and the logic of practicality implies key protagonists would be forced to draw on their background assumptions as a mental shortcut towards 'self-evident' or 'best-fit' decisions. As the model shows, the unreflective decision-making that we can parse from their response offers an entry route to understand the instinctive assumptions they hold about the international system.

[29] Cabinet Office, "Conclusions of a Meeting of the Cabinet held at 10 Downing Street on Friday 2 April 1982." London, 1982.

4.2. Sources

Serendipitous timing makes this a convenient period to research the Thatcher Cabinet's reaction to the invasion of the Falkland Islands. Under the British Government's thirty year rule, a collection of Cabinet Office documents were declassified in 2012, and are now available for public research. The archive provides an extremely valuable resource of the first discussions made in Cabinet and formal communications sent across Whitehall. Of particular interest are the minutes of the private Cabinet meetings on the morning (09:45) and evening (19:30) of 2 April 1982, when details of the invasion were beginning to emerge, and first responses were being formulated.

Speeches made to the House of Commons, captured in the parliamentary record, also provide important access to Thatcher's unreflective thinking and decision-making. Of similar value are responses to follow-up questions by backbench MPs, as the Westminster model requires spontaneous and instinctive thinking. Leaders who are forced to think on their feet over an emerging issue are more inclined to draw on background knowledge and assumptions. The same applies to early media interviews given by public officials in the immediate aftermath of the invasion.

Another valuable resource are the set of memoirs released by members of the Thatcher Cabinet in later years. These include autobiographies of Foreign Secretary Peter Carrington, the Defence Secretary Sir John Nott, and Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher herself. In addition, many staffers and senior civil servants operating in Whitehall at the time have since retired and committed their own accounts to public record.

4.3. Analysis

a) Illusion of Capacity and Control

The first substantive item on the emergency Cabinet meeting agenda (called on the evening of 2 April 1982) was submitted by Foreign Secretary Lord Carrington. He informed

colleagues that the United Nations Security Council was in session and considering a British resolution "demanding the immediate cessation of hostilities and the withdrawal of Argentine forces from the Falkland Islands."[30] The Security Council referral, citing a breach of Article 51, was one of the most immediate steps the United Kingdom had taken in response to the Falklands invasion.

On the surface, this suggests that the Thatcher government was conditioned into a relatively 'internationalist' mindset, in which it was a natural, unreflective logic to seek redress for grievances through the institutionalized mechanisms of the international society. It implies that a prominent world power was willing, and indeed presumed, to operate within an international legal framework to secure the safe return of its sovereign territory. This would challenge the realist contention that powerful states place no faith in the capacities of multinational organizations.

However, it is quickly apparent that British leaders were actually quite dismissive of the role of the United Nations. Private discussions show the referral was seen as a means to an end, and a route which the Cabinet intended to use and manipulate, in order to defeat Argentina in the court of public opinion and embed the British national interest within the scaffolding of international law. In other words, the UN was seen as a useful forum for securing patronage which would underpin subsequent military action. This is evidenced in the UK Mission's confidential telegram to the Foreign Secretary as the crisis was emerging: "We got as much in one day as we could have done… the sympathy of the majority of the Council is undoubtedly with us and the Argentines are on the wrong foot."[31] It similarly sought to follow through on Governmental instructions to "get as much as the traffic would

[30] Cabinet Office, "Conclusions of a Meeting "
[31] UK Mission to the United Nations, "Telegram 366", New York, 02 April 1982, NA/020510Z.

bear in terms of deploring, condemning, and so on."[32] The implicit undertone is spelled out in Thatcher's autobiography:

> *"In the short term we needed to win our case against Argentina in the UN Security Council and to secure a resolution denouncing their aggression and demanding withdrawal. On the basis of such a resolution we would find it far easier to win the support of other nations for practical measures to pressurise Argentina. But in the longer term we knew that we had to try to keep our affairs out of the UN as much as possible."*[33]

The implicit logic of this thinking is that the United Nations could be used and manipulated according to the British national interest. Initially, it suited Thatcher to operate within the framework of global institutions, in pursuit of a UN resolution which would marginalize Argentina internationally and secure legal endorsement of the British military response. However, if the case progressed too far at a multinational level, it would place undesirable operational constraints on the United Kingdom, and move eventual outcomes outside of their control. Thatcher was concerned that a UN-brokered reconciliation would incorporate acknowledgement and accommodation of Argentine grievances, which her Government was unwilling to accept. As such, she wanted to withdraw from the UN route as soon as the United Kingdom secured the prize of a Security Council resolution condemning Argentine aggression. This is supported by Lawrence Freedman, who suggests that in resorting to military action leaders wanted "to be able to demonstrate Britain as the aggrieved

[32] *Ibid.*
[33] Thatcher, *op.cit.*,

party had been reasonable in any negotiations and was therefore justified now in taking drastic steps."[34]

It fits within the positive illusion bias because the Cabinet was instinctively (and unjustifiably) overconfident in their capacity to outfox the United Nations. They seemed assured that the Council could be controlled, manipulated and primed to a point where it would uphold British interests, but equally confident that they could simply step outside of the forum whilst simultaneously using Resolution 502 as a launch pad for unilateral action.

This indicates an audaciously pragmatic and cunning approach to the United Nations, which British leaders perceived as an instrument for the national interest when necessary, but otherwise an inconsequential irrelevance. More fundamentally, it indicates that the Thatcher Government held an extremely low opinion of this global body, and felt entirely confident in their own ability to outmaneuver global society in pursuit of the national interest.

b) Illusion of Transparency

Whereas the British Government seemed instinctively dismissive of the United Nations as a body for resolving the Falklands, it is notable that they anxiously looked towards the United States as the actor which would settle the crisis in their favor. Much has been written on the UK's declining power and submissive deferral to the United States during the first decades of the twenty-first century, but in the buildup and immediate aftermath of the 1982 Falklands crisis, Thatcher and Foreign Secretary Peter Carrington effectively outsourced diplomatic efforts to President Reagan and Secretary of State Al Haig. Indeed, at times Thatcher was almost channeling orders from across the Atlantic, such as exhorting the Cabinet to comply with Reagan's instructions and avoid escalating the situation.

[34] Lawrence Freedman, *Britain & the Falklands War*, Oxford (1988), p40

Yet it is evident that the Government was disconcerted by American reluctance to publicly endorse more aggressive strategies against Argentina. As the diplomatic route proved entirely unproductive, the Thatcher Cabinet clearly assumed the implicit next step was towards military action, which they wanted the Americans to condone and support.[35] In fact, the American 'satisficing' threshold was much lower.[36] They had no territorial integrity at stake, and were unwilling to alienate strategic allies in South America. As such, President Reagan was willing to mediate in pursuit of a peaceful resolution, but the path towards war, which the UK had assumed was a legitimate step that was 'transparently' incorporated into diplomatic overtures, was less evident in American planning. In other words, whilst the logic of military action may have been self-evident to British leaders, they mistakenly assumed that American objectives were similarly aligned.

The implication of all this is that British leaders were thinking from an unrealistic level of faith in the United States, ascribing too much importance to the idea of the 'Special Relationship', and not enough to American national interest. By assuming their intentions for recovering the Falklands were transparent, and shared by the Americans simply because they 'bought into' the implicit enactment of the plan, the British leadership demonstrate their failure to understand the United States as a hegemon with its own fundamental interests at heart.

c) Fundamental Attribution Error

One of the most interesting elements of the British Government's response to the Falkland invasion lies in its early attempts to decipher the Argentine rationale. The dispute over ownership of the islands had been a source of bilateral tension for over a century, yet never before had it crystallized in military action. The British Government thus hastened to

[35] Lawrence Freedman, *Britain & the Falklands*, Oxford (1988), p43
[36] William Whitelaw, *The Whitelaw Memoirs*, London (1989), pp205-6

figure out why the issue had unexpectedly blown up at this particular moment in time. This process of deconstruction and attribution reveals much of the way they understood the nature of political autocracy and dictatorial power projection on the international scene.

There is no doubt that a major catalyst for the Falklands invasion was the emergence of General Leopoldo Galtieri as President of Argentina in December 1981. Galtieri was the leader of a hardline fringe within the fascist military junta that had ruled the country since 1976, and his coup d'état against predecessor Roberto Viola occurred amidst a backdrop of dissent and spiraling inflation. Early intelligence into London indicated that Galtieri's rhetoric and jingoism around the Falkland issue was a ploy to sidetrack the Argentine population from domestic problems, and channel their discontent into a popular nationalist cause that united support from across the country. As such, there was slight complacency that the Falklands was merely a nodal point that Galtieri commandeered in order to distract dissenters and consolidate his own position. British leaders did not truly believe that this would coalesce into a military attack.

It becomes evident that this opinion was the consequence of 'mirror-imaging' the Argentine state. Leaders were operating under "a tendency to assume that factors which weighed heavily in the formation of British policy, such as public opinion, a reluctance to use force, and military balances of power, would be equally compelling constraints on countries ruled by one party or heavily under the influence of a single leader."[37] This tendency to understand the unfamiliar according to one's own established schema is an innate human instinct, but in this case reveals a remarkably lax awareness of fascism and dictatorial power in practice. The Thatcher Cabinet was essentially caught out over the Falklands as they understood warnings according to their own standards; intuitively perceiving the Argentine state as though it were the British state transplanted in a different location. The response was

[37] Lawrence Freedman, *The Official History of the Falklands War, vol.I: The Origins of the Falklands War*, Abingdon (2007), p219

developed accordingly. As such, the attack was not initially understood in relation to the fascistic nature of the regime, although as the Government began to think more 'reflectively' this reality was incorporated into their thinking.[38] There are implications here for their dealings with other fascistic South American regimes, and especially Augusto Pinochet's Chile.

d) Risk Seeking in Losses

As news of the crisis started to filter into the decision-making centers of British government, Thatcher and other senior leaders began to plot the response. It became evident that sending a task force to attempt a recapture of the Falklands would be an inherently risky venture, and stretch British military capabilities to the limit. A naval convoy would take three weeks to sail approximately 8000 miles, where it would have to deal with an encroaching South Atlantic winter season, and a total lack of fallback posts or backup. Meanwhile, British air forces were faced with the fact that all nominal allies possessing landing strips within range of the Falklands (such as Chile) were also bordered by Argentina, and unwilling to incur the wrath of this more powerful neighbor. Yet despite the difficulties, Thatcher was determined that the British response should be swift and decisive. In consultation with First Sea Lord Henry Leach, and Chief of Defence Staff Terence Lewin, the War Cabinet opted to dispatch a fleet as soon as it was practicable. The leaders were keen to demonstrate their intent and prevent Argentina from consolidating its grip over the islands.[39] Perhaps most significantly, it was noted that a swift and emphatic response would signal British resolve to the rest of the world.

This is an extremely interesting and notable subtext emerging from the Falklands crisis. In the pre-cognizant phase of decision-making, the British leadership seemed to

[38] Hugo Young, *One of Us*, London (1989), p279
[39] Thatcher, *op.cit*., p184

instinctively 'frame' the invasion against the broader context of the Cold War, even though the event was quite far removed from the geographical and ideological struggle transfixing the Northern Hemisphere. Indeed, the military junta in Argentina had closely aligned itself with the Western world (and secured American financial support) for suppressing South American communist movements such as the Contra rebel groups in Nicaragua. Therefore, aside from the Falklands issue, the United Kingdom and Argentine junta were essentially nominal allies.

It is apparent that the British response was informed by three priorities: to liberate the Falkland islanders, to retrieve British sovereign territory, and to remind the rest of the world that the United Kingdom would not sit idly by whilst its sovereign territories were annexed.[40] This third objective compelled quicker action than was strictly necessary to regain the islands; a fleet could have sailed after weeks of preparation and planning, but instead it was sent within days. Whilst defense chiefs pressed for time to stock and sustain a sufficiently powerful fleet, political leaders were eager for a swift dispatch that would signal high military readiness and demonstrate the extent of British resolve to protect their overseas territories. The key audience here was not just Argentina, but the Soviet Union, and other states with designs on British possessions – notably China over Hong Kong.[41]

Therefore, appended to military action against Argentina was more symbolic intent. The British Government felt that a swift military response was the natural choice, not necessarily because it was the best fit for the retrieval operation itself, but because it was the necessitated by Britain's need to project a certain image of itself against the context of the Cold War:

[40] Thatcher, *op.cit*., p173
[41] House of Commons Debate, *Hansard*, vol.21, 03 April 1982

"If we do not [take immediate action], or if we pussyfoot in our actions and do not achieve complete success, in another few months we shall be living in a different country whose word counts for little."[42]

This framing is supported by Thatcher's statement to the Scottish Conservative Party conference in May 1982, before the islands had actually been retaken: "The struggle was between good and evil. It went far wider than the Falklands and their one thousand, eight hundred British people. It was a challenge to the West. 'It must be ended. It will be ended.'"[43] This all gives credence to the idea that leaders were subconsciously attuned to react to events in broad strategic terms, and not just focus on single issues in isolation from the background context.

[42] Lawrence Freedman, *The Original History,* p209
[43] Hugo Young, *op.cit*., 279

5. CASE II: THE BUSH ADMINISTRATION ON 11 SEPTEMBER 2001

5.1. Context

The 9/11 terrorist attacks on New York and Washington DC set the direction of American foreign policy in the twenty first century and remain the defining flashpoint of the Bush presidency. Images of the burning World Trade Centre towers continue to reverberate around the world, and are firmly established as a 'flashbulb moment' in American political memory, equivalent to the assassination of President Kennedy or the attack on Pearl Harbor.[44] These few hours are certainly seared into the mindset of contemporary political leaders. President George W. Bush calls it a "shocking and devastating" period which "changed American life."[45] Vice President Dick Cheney's memoir opens with an account of this single day, whereas the rest of his long career in Washington is covered in purely chronological order.[46] National Security Advisor Condoleezza Rice acknowledges 9/11 to be a kairotic moment: "every day since has been September 12th… no security issue ever looked the same again."[47] Altogether, it would be difficult to find any event which is as clearly and firmly established as a moment of exception in American political life. Given the numerous interconnections and links to international issues, this makes 9/11 an appropriate test case for the model.

The events of September 11 created a major crisis at the heart of American government. Such traumatizing attacks paralyzed the day-to-day apparatus of decision-making, with executive power required to break the gridlock. Only the president and his senior officials had the authority to shut down US airspace, mandate a DEFCON increase, and issue intercept orders on other hijacked civilian aircraft. Of more consequence for an IR

[44] Tali Sharot, Elizabeth A. Martorella, Mauricio R. Delgado, and Elizabeth A. Phelps. "How personal experience modulates the neural circuitry of memories of September 11", *Proceedings of the National Academy of Science of the United States*, 2 January 2007, pp.389-394.
[45] George W. Bush, *Decision Points*, New York (2010), p445
[46] Dick Cheney, *In My Time: a personal and political memoir.* New York (2011)
[47] Condoleezza Rice. *No Higher Honor: a memoir of my years in Washington*. New York (2011), p79

study, they had to situate the attacks within the contemporary global context, and consider how to construct an international response. Yet such decisions had to be made with extreme urgency, on the basis of unverified and incomplete information, and against the backdrop of unparalleled and ongoing events. In this context, psychological theory suggests that Bush, Cheney and other key leaders could not have fully rationalized the incoming information. Instead, they would have drawn on their background assumptions as a mental shortcut towards the 'self-evident' or 'best-fit' decision. Indeed, Condoleezza Rice makes numerous references to the "fog of war" that descended and impaired decision-making.[48] The unreflective decision-making that we can parse from the American leadership on 9/11 thus offers an entry route to understand the assumptions they hold about the international system.

5.2. Sources

Uncovering appropriate source material represents the biggest challenge to any analysis of presidential leadership during 9/11. The event is so recent that official records remain classified. Many senior staffers who worked with key individuals are still in service, often in confidential national security roles that mean their very identities are protected. This limits the number of witnesses that might be approached for interview, and means very few impartial accounts of the decision-making process are in the public domain. One notable exception is the memoir of Richard E. Clarke, the National Coordinator for Security and Counter-Terrorism, who oversaw the Situation Room on 9/11. Clarke himself notes the paucity of material: "there is no good source, no retelling of the day which history will long mark as a pivot point… no single inside account of the flow."[49] (Clarke 2004, ix). His memoir fills some of the gap, although this version of events has been vigorously disputed by Bush administration officials.

[48] Ibid., p74
[49] Richard A. Clarke, *Against All Enemies: Inside America's War on Terror*, New York (2004), p.*ix*

We can also refer to the memoirs of administration insiders, such as Rice, Cheney, and Bush himself, although it must be noted that these memoirs 'recreate' the day in a confused and inconsistent manner. Accounts frequently conflict with one another, and there is a clear sense of selective memory at play: the emotional outbursts and flawed decisions attributed to the author by other sources are usually omitted. Instead, we see swathes of *post hoc* rationalization and justification. This places added emphasis on the few public speeches and press statements that the administration released on the day, especially as events were unfolding on the morning of 9/11. President Bush made three televised speeches that day: one short address from Emma E. Booker Elementary School in Florida, another from Barksdale Air Force Base in Louisiana, and an evening address to the nation from the White House. These provide a critical source for any analysis of his 'intuitive' response to the crisis.[50]

5.3. Analysis

a) Illusion of Capacity and Control

This indicator, which highlights the tendency for individuals to assume greater ability to influence events than they actually hold, is rendered somewhat hollow when applied to paramount leaders in the United States at the turn of the millennium. Certainly, the idea of 'reference group neglect' is redundant. In 2001, American economic, political and military capacity was so extensive that any objective assessment of presidential power would confirm a unique capacity to project power and dictate events across the world. American GDP at this time was nearly $13 trillion, and the base rate defense budget was $287 billion per annum. This is a fraction of its post-9/11 total, and yet even then was larger than the combined total of the next eight highest military powers, accounting for about 35% of global defense

[50] Jay Maggio, "The Presidential Rhetoric of Terror: The Recreation of Reality Immediately After 9/11", *Politics and Policy* vol.35 no. 4 (2007), pp.810-835.

spending. The capacity of this global hegemon to project power around the world was undeniable.

Yet in the hours after 9/11, the Bush team seemed to intuitively interpret their extraordinary military capacity as a license for complete unilateralism. The initial presidential decisions of 9/11 signaled estrangement from the rest of the world, suggesting nobody outside of the United States was to be brought in to help manage and respond to the ongoing crisis scenario. Even though attribution for the attacks was framed in broad normative terms that co-opted a global liberal democratic paradigm (see Fundamental Error Attribution below), the response itself was deeply exclusionary. The implication here is that neither Bush nor his team had sufficient underlying trust in international allies to factor them into their thinking. When it came to monitoring and containing the events of 9/11, America was inclined towards total self-reliance.

This is first evidenced with reference to a Spanish jetliner en route from Madrid to Lisbon, which American intelligence had temporarily identified as "non-responsive". Even though the plane was over the Iberian Peninsula, and thus nearly eight hours of flying from the American mainland, President Bush gave his authorization to shoot it down if required. There was no suggestion of consulting with the Spanish authorities on this matter, even though the plane was over their sovereign territory, and Spain was a firm bilateral partner with sufficient military capability to escort and engage a potentially hijacked jet. Such instinctive preference for control over the security operation corresponds with the biases identified by Kahneman and Renshon. It leads us on to infer a fundamental American wariness of placing too much trust in ostensibly allied states.

A second indication of the positive illusion bias at play is seen with reference to NATO. Within a few hours of 9/11, Member States indicated their willingness to invoke Article V, meaning a collective commitment to restore and maintain security in the North

Atlantic region. This was an unprecedented and extremely significant act, indicating that America's closest ideologically-aligned allies were supportive of action and willing to fund operations that would augment the size and scope of post-9/11 security operations. Whilst the administration publicly welcomed the Article V resolution, Bush and his close team did not seem disposed to factor the collective resolve of NATO into their own decision-making.

The positive illusion of capacity and control thus indicates that Bush's proclivity for unilateralism was instinctive rather than rational. Moreover, it inclined the administration towards unrealistically optimistic expectations of success. The juggernaut of American military hegemony may have had a global reach, but it was fundamentally dependent on facilitation and staging from allies around the world. Yet in the immediate aftermath of 9/11, the American leadership seemed to overlook their dependency on external support for projecting power. Consequently, when Bush announced his intention to "hunt down and find the folks that committed this act" he was talking from a bullish and impulsive state of mind that was prepared to 'take on the world', but was deeply unappreciative of how this might be achieved.[51]

In his remarks from Barksdale, the President affirmed that "the United States will hunt down and punish those responsible" and that "we have been in touch… with world leaders to assure them that we will do whatever is necessary to protect America and Americans." This speech, and corollary decision-making by Bush team in Washington, was made without reference to the coalition of world leaders which was actually coalescing in support behind the United States. Instead, the administration seemed to feel safer confronting the outside world as a singular entity. "The resolve of our great nation is being tested, but make no mistake. We will show the world that we will pass this test." This was Bush drawing an early line in the sand, and demonstrating intent to dominate the post-9/11 agenda. From

[51] The impact of this impulsive optimism (and unilateralist mindset) on later military objective-setting would warrant further study.

his early words, it is clear that Bush was focused on directing any response deemed necessary, with or without external support. This instinctive tendency to overlook allies - and preference for absolute self-reliance - became a frequent criticism of the Bush administration in later years. Yet the initial apathy towards support from the foremost security community suggests unilateralism was clearly ingrained into the mindset of the Bush administration. In the first moments of the crisis, this was the comfort zone from which they felt most secure.

By viewing words and actions through the prism of the 'positive illusions' bias, we have therefore identified some of the underlying assumptions that the United States administration held about its international allies, not least a deep-rooted reluctance to entrust any part of the security operation to other states or associations. When allied states were better placed to shoulder the burden, as with the Spanish jetliner, Bush preferred to rely on American capabilities. Even when support from NATO was forthcoming, leaders in Washington were predisposed to continue operating unilaterally, rather than capitalize on an unprecedented level of collective security. In a more reflective moment, Condoleezza Rice notes with regret that "we missed an opportunity… we left the Alliance dressed up with nowhere to go" (Rice 2011, 79). Yet it seems unlikely that this was a conscious decision, or that the leadership would have chosen a different course. Unreflective actions made in the moment of crisis itself suggest that the Bush administration was naturally inclined to disregard the possibility of outside assistance and maintain complete control over the post-9/11 agenda.

b) Illusion of Transparency

On 9/11, the Secretary of Defense Donald Rumsfeld took the decision to escalate American defense readiness condition (DEFCON) to Level III, placing American troops and military installations around the world on high alert and primed towards a state of combat

readiness. During the Cold War, the United States had been extremely cautious about increasing the DEFCON level and escalating tensions with Moscow: "There was always a concern that raising the alert level of U.S. forces would spark the Soviet Union to do the same, causing a dangerous spiral of alerts."[52] Indeed, before 9/11, DEFCON had only been elevated to Level III on two occasions: during the Cuban Missile Crisis of October 1962, and again during the Yom Kippur War of October 1973.

It follows that during the Cold War, discussions about raising the DEFCON rating would painstakingly assess possible consequences or misinterpretations. No 'transparency of intentions' was assumed.[53] In fact, Henry Kissinger notes that deliberations during October 1973 were specifically focused on using DEFCON to attain Soviet attention: "we would have to go to DEFCON III [to ensure] the Soviets would notice it… [and] affect their diplomacy."[54] As such, alert levels were carefully pitched and consciously deployed to demonstrate American resolve and put pressure on Moscow. Kissinger highlights that repercussions were carefully considered and factored in to any calculations about raising the DEFCON level. In other words, the connection between DEFCON and the Soviet reaction were hitherto inextricably linked; the United States would not even consider elevating the national security threat level without accounting for possible response and escalation in Moscow.

This computation was notably absent on 9/11. It took an inordinate amount of time before political advisors noted that the increased DEFCON level should be squared with Moscow: "we should contact the Russians… [their] military forces operate worldwide and in close proximity to our own."[55] Naturally, the Kremlin was well aware of events in New York and Washington, and as such Rice's eventual phonecall to reassure Vladimir Putin was

[52] Rice, *op.cit.*, p74
[53] Dick Cheney, *In My Time: a personal and political memoir*, New York (2011), p7
[54] Henry Kissinger, *Years of Upheaval*, Boston (1982), p588
[55] Rice, *op.cit.*, p74

somewhat redundant. Given the unprecedented nature of the 9/11 attacks, the rationale for DEFCON increase was perfectly transparent to the Kremlin, which had easily deduced that it was not intended as a threat against Russia.

Yet whilst it is no surprise Moscow was not contacted sooner on 9/11, there is something indicative in the fact that no American leader seems to have thought to contact them sooner. Bush, Cheney, Rumsfeld, and Rice were children of the Cold War; they forged their early political careers in a world where all American foreign policy was viewed through the bipolar paradigm, and the DEFCON level rating was carefully pitched with one eye on Moscow. Many commentators argued that the Bush administration continued to operate with this Cold War mindset.[56] Even amidst the panic and chaos of 9/11, it is notable that no leader instinctively considered whether raising the DEFCON level would be interpreted along its traditional lines – a sign of American fortitude and willingness to confront Moscow.

There are two major implications to this analysis. Firstly, it suggests that by 2000 the American leadership had internalized setting the DEFCON threat rating as a practice that was self-evidently actioned in response to certain stimuli, rather than carefully and deliberately deployed according to a certain logic of appropriateness or consequences. Secondly, and perhaps more significantly, it suggests that key figures in Bush administration were not instinctively 'programmed' to perceive the world and their own foreign policy decision-making through the sphere of the Cold War. Indeed, Rice herself claims she first realized this after speaking to President Putin, and received assurances of his consideration, condolences, and an offer of assistance. She describes a moment of lucid realization as she first processed the implications of this, recognizing: "the Cold War is definitely over."[57] The intuitive and reactive decision-making surrounding the DEFCON level suggests the Bush leadership were already operating from this background assumption. This means that 9/11 represents the first

[56] Leon T. Hader, "Are Republicans Locked in a Cold War Mindset?" *CATO Institute*, 7 August 2000.
[57] Rice, *op.cit*., p75

moment when we can illustrate that the practical implementation of DEFCON had been extricated from its traditional application with the international system.

c) Fundamental Attribution Error

The logic of the FAE heuristic implies a confirmation bias, in which the behaviour of opponents is explained according to a pre-existing understanding of their character and intentions. This bias is an extremely informative tool for the study of International Relations, because it reveals how leaders understand the nature of opponents and by extension how they project themselves on the world stage. The 9/11 case is especially interesting in this regard, as the identities and motivations of the attackers were unknown for several hours. This meant President Bush and his advisors were able to grasp and essentially construct the narrative according to their own understanding of events. This is seen with reference to the opening lines of the Barksdale speech:

> *"Freedom itself was attacked this morning by a faceless coward, and freedom will be defended."*[58]

For Jay Maggio, this response in itself was "constructing the social reality concerning the tumultuous events."[59] In the absence of any external justification, Bush had *carte blanche* to ascribe motives to the attack. It is extremely telling that he instinctively framed it in such abstract and normative terms. By highlighting 'freedom' as the target, the United States was cast as the victim of a focused attack on a universalized value, rather than the target in and of itself. This idea was repeated in the address to the nation later that evening:

[58] George W. Bush, *Remarks at Barksdale Air Force Base, 11 September 2001*
[59] Maggio, *op.cit*., p812

"America was targeted for attack because we're the brightest beacon for freedom and opportunity in the world."[60]

As Zarefsky argues, Bush was defining the situation, and "shaping the context in which events were to be viewed by the public."[61] However, this does not imply a deliberate or Machiavellian undertone. These speeches and remarks were rushed and handwritten, with an unusually small amount of consultation from the presidential speechwriting team. They represent the President's attempt to verbalize his own perception of events, and as such indicate a certain unreflective understanding of the world. The repetition of 'freedom' as the target of attack indicates some intuitive grasp of America's place within the world of values and ideologies, and the nodal points of antagonism upon which 'enemies' were focused.

Consequently, the motivation ascribed to the perpetrators of 9/11 reveals an element of the administration's self-perception on the global stage. Terrorists were not considered simply anti-American, but more fundamentally enemies of global values with which the United States was synonymous. This is especially significant when we remember that the four hijacked planes were flying on domestic routes, and whilst the terrorist identities and non-American nationalities were quickly established, their motivations were never articulated. It was left to the victims to construct the narrative. The process of attribution is therefore something of a self-fulfilling prophecy, because the lens offered to the world, through which the "evil acts" might be understood, was actually a projection of pre-existing expectations of the enemy. The rhetoric and symbolism that President Bush felt inclined to draw upon therefore indicate something about his outlook, not least suggesting that he instinctively believed in the image of America as the most prominent exponent of 'free world' values.

[60] Bush, *Remarks at Barksdale*
[61] David Zarefsky, "Presidential Rhetoric and the Power of Definition", *Presidential Studies Quarterly* vol.34 no. 3 (2004), p641

d) Risk Seeking in Losses

On the evening of 9/11 President Bush returned to Washington, and Richard Clarke noted that he seemed angry and focused on revenge.[62] In consultation with his core team, Bush began drawing up plans for a military response, even though an appropriate target was yet to be identified. Indeed, whilst the perpetrators had been identified as Al Qaeda affiliates, most sources converge on the point that very little was known about their history or contacts. Consequently, there was no immediate offensive action that could be credibly justified to prevent a second wave of imminent attacks. Presidential attention at this time would have been most productively focused on consolidation, recuperation, and defensive measures to protect the United States from further attack, rather than considering plans for offensive action against an indeterminate enemy. We can extrapolate that this retributive reaction was affected by instinctive anger and vengefulness, rather than an objective assessment of the situation. This is action that Bush thought he should be taking, or wanted to take, but not action that was justified by the information available that evening.

This, in turn, corresponds with the innate 'risk-seeking' bias that people tend towards after they experience major losses. Bush was reluctant to 'cut his losses' and settle the crisis whilst there was still a high-risk strategy which might help improve parity in outcome relative to the enemy. This offensive militarized strategy was neither mindful of the most 'appropriate' course of action, nor gave consideration to the 'consequences' of action. As such, it seems a paradigmatic example of the logic of practicality at play.

Faced with a major assault on American soil, the president's instinctive response was to escalate the situation in pursuit of a retributive counter-attack, rather than step up defensive measures, consolidate losses, and help the nation recuperate. Although targets were poorly

[62] Clarke, *op.cit.*, p24

defined, and before the value or appropriateness of a military response was substantiated, the President was focused on retaliation. The heuristic at play here is extremely significant: it indicates that Bush's instinct to chase after and avenge American losses was informed more by passion than judgment.

The risk-seeking, aggressive tendency under duress provides a useful pivot point for uncovering President Bush's instinctive understanding of his country's international legal obligations. In one exchange, Defense Secretary Donald Rumsfeld, scarcely noted for a pluralist approach to politics, advised the president that international law would only permit the use of force to prevent future attacks, and not in retribution for the attacks. The response is noteworthy:

> *Bush nearly bit his head off. "No," the president yelled at the narrow conference room. "I don't care what the lawyers say, we're going to kick some ass."*[63]

This outburst is particularly significant as it indicates a forcefully dismissive attitude to the fundamental applicability of international law. When 'push came to shove', the President was inclined to disregard any inconvenient international constraints on his power, and was instead keen to maximize his range of options by considering a course of action regardless of whether or not this coincided with legal constraints. This gives credence to the criticism routinely leveled at American governments; that international obligations are essentially considered optional, and applied when convenient but ignored when required. The instinctive reactions and decisions made on 9/11 suggest that this attitude underlay President Bush's intuitive engagement with the international system.

[63] Clarke, *op.cit.*, p24

6. CONCLUSION

This thesis demonstrates the possibilities that emerge from engagement at the intersections of IR theory, political psychology, and crisis leadership. We have seen, for example, how the actions and decisions of the Thatcher Cabinet during the Falklands Crisis implied the following inclinations in their engagement with the outside world:

a) that the United Nations was a forum that could be used and manipulated;
b) that the United States would provide unconditional support to the UK;
c) that they struggled to engage or understand the foreign policy decisions of a fascistic government on its own terms;
d) that even unrelated international issues were framed against the context of the Cold War, and as such the United Kingdom was obliged to project a certain image of itself when formulating a response.

The equivalent analysis of decision-making on September 11 implied the following things about the Bush administration's engagement with the international system:

a) that they were instinctively unilateralist;
b) that they were no longer thought about Moscow with a Cold War mindset;
c) that they genuinely esteemed the United States as the pinnacle and leader of global liberal values;
d) that international law was to be seen as a selective rather than binding commitment.

To some extent, these analyses could be considered quite facile and self-evident. Similar critiques have been written for decades, and as such the research could serve to merely support the charges routinely leveled at political elites in both the United States and United Kingdom.

Yet I believe the model developed above provides a more nuanced window into the international system. This is because traditional critiques do not sufficiently distinguish between the deeper underlying assumptions which leaders hold, and the highly politicized and calculated decisions which they make from these underlying assumptions. This is essentially the difference between what they work from and what they work towards; the former classed as the 'ontologically-prior logic of action' as expounded by Vincent Pouliot.

This is significant because background attitudes naturally limit the range of actual choices at the post-reflective stage. If leaders are instinctively inclined to defer to a particular ally, or discount a potential line of action, they are essentially 'programmed' towards long-term policy which also aligns with their background assumptions. As such, they effectively embed and perpetuate their own prejudices within the international system.

The logic of practicality helps us identify these two stages of ontology in decision-making, but it does not provide a way to challenge and reassess how background assumptions are manifest in policy-making. This is because, as a concept, it does not identify the background assumptions. This is the gap that my thesis has attempted to fill, and represents my central contribution to the International Relations corpus. I have essentially argued we can advance research into how leaders act out their own prejudices within the international system – by suggesting that heuristics present in crisis-mode decision-making provides an opportunity to operationalise the logic of practicality and actually isolate and identify background prejudices.

This was achieved through engagement with political psychology, which has established that decision-making under time and pressure constraints is instinctive and subject to cognitive biases. By staging this 'reactionary' decision-making within a moment of crisis, this model was able to hold the structural side of government in relative stasis, and as such remove outside processes to focus almost exclusively upon evidence of cognitive bias playing out from individual agency. By deploying a set of common heuristics as indicators, I established a series of lenses for observing the logic of practicality playing out in the rushed decisions of paramount figures. This allowed us to uncover a possible array of background assumptions that inform the way leaders understood the world.

There were major challenges to this approach. Procuring sufficient relevant source material was an almost insurmountable problem, and consequently all the substantive extrapolations above must be approached with extreme caution. Indeed, I would suggest that they are insufficiently supported to represent conclusions, and the paucity of evidence means that the entire approach remains inherently speculative and experimental. If the model has any future application, it may even be limited to classified reviews commissioned by governments themselves, and conducted by professional psychologists with unrestricted access to paramount leaders during crisis. Nevertheless, I hope that the thesis has at least identified a possible new avenue for exploration. The method itself, not the case study outcomes, should be held as my intended contribution to the field.

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