

When a hungry cat concentrates his attention on a mousehole, there usually is a mouse in it; but when the government of some great country has concentrated its attention and efforts on some particular foreign-policy objective, the outcome remarkably often has been unrewarding. . . . During the half century from 1914 to 1964, the decisions of major powers to go to war or to expand a war, and their judgments of the relevant intentions and capabilities of other nations, seem to have involved major errors of fact, perhaps in more than 50% of all cases.

Karl W. Deutsch

The Analysis of International Relations

Soon after he was elected president, John F. Kennedy was briefed about a proposed American-supported invasion of Cuba. In the months that followed the president and his advisers considered the recommendation, altered details, and, finally, the president ordered the invasion by a force of Cuban refugee guerillas at the Bay of Pigs.

Compared with the crisis conditions under which world leaders often must decide whether or not to use force, Kennedy and his advisers enjoyed both exceptional freedom from pressure and a great deal of time for careful thought and analysis. There was no surprise, no crisis atmosphere, no imminent threat of nuclear war, no necessity for rapid judgment.¹ Moreover the president's advisers were, in David Halberstam's phrase, among "the best and the brightest" in America's foreign policy establishment.² If one were to choose circumstances in which the decision to use force in world politics would be the result of and reflect analytic brilliance and realism of the highest order, it would have been this group and this situation that would have been chosen.

But the consequence of President Kennedy's decision was dramatic and total failure. The dream of success that was so attractive to the president and his advisers shattered before reality, and victory that seemed so plausible was a decisive defeat.³

What produced such a wrong decision in this case? An answer to this question is probably important to a broader understanding of international politics: as Karl Deutsch notes in the quotation at the beginning of this chapter, serious mistakes by top decision makers are actually common in international politics. In fact, between 1914 and 1968 the initiators of violence lost 60% of their wars, evidence of pervasive miscalculation and

overconfidence if we assume a country should only begin a military action when it will win.⁴ To take several major examples: the instigators of World War I lost. There is no evidence that either Hitler or Japanese leaders consciously wanted a self-defeating nightmare from World War II. Kennedy did not want to lose at the Bay of Pigs. Soviet Premier Khrushchev did not want nuclear confrontation and a humiliating face-down in the Cuban missile crisis. President Johnson did not want ultimate defeat when he escalated the Vietnam War. The track record of world leaders has been remarkably poor. It will be a safer world if we can diagnose the sources of these errors and prevent them in the future.

Many reasons have been advanced to explain the faulty Bay of Pigs decision. The most thoughtful of these analyses argue there were defects in the decision-making processes employed in the Kennedy administration.⁵ But, without ruling out the importance of good decision-making processes, my attention has been drawn to another area, the personality of the key decision makers. Social scientists interested in political psychology have begun to identify systematic linkages between the personality characteristics and the official actions of presidents, premiers, judges, lawmakers, and other political notables.⁶ Of course, decision makers believe they are rational, realistic men, and decisions are justified by reference to facts, to broad principles and ideals, to the public interest. But the observation that most major foreign policy decisions provoke disagreement suggests that such decisions may have personal and private origins which are masked by the rationales ultimately offered for public consumption.

One could hold that imperfect decision-making processes were central to President Kennedy's unrealistic Bay of Pigs decision if Kennedy had been the captive of a group of unanimous advisers. But President Kennedy did not simply rubber-stamp the unanimous recommendations of others: a well-informed journalist, recently returned from Cuba, told the president privately that the hoped-for mass uprising was doubtful; adviser Arthur Schlesinger, Jr., opposed the plan in a long memorandum to the president; Senator J. William Fulbright, then chairman of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee, spoke strongly in opposition.⁷ Kennedy made his decision in the face of disagreement and ambiguity. Kennedy

did hear doubts; he chose to discount them. What led Kennedy to override such ultimately realistic doubts and order this plan?

Certain aspects of President Kennedy's personality might explain his decision to launch a guerilla invasion. Throughout his life he evidenced a pattern of being attracted to stories of men who, starting from subordinate positions and with odds and powerful forces arrayed against them, finally emerged heroically triumphant. He had written *Profiles in Courage*, a study of such men. He particularly enjoyed Ian Fleming's novels about a secret agent, James Bond, who triumphed miraculously against the awesome forces of SMERSH. He was fascinated by guerilla warfare, he devoted personal attention to the Army's training program for its Special Forces, and he insisted—against Army resistance—that the Special Forces have a distinctive uniform and be an elite corps.⁸ Such themes resonated with similar patterns of heroic striving in Kennedy's own life: his courageous survival when his boat, PT-109, was destroyed during World War II; his survival after a near-fatal back operation; his long-standing competition with—and eventual replacement of—his older brother Joseph, whom Kennedy's father had wished to be president; his remarkable grass-roots political organization and success in winning the presidential nomination from the established regulars of the Democratic party; his winning of the presidency at a comparatively young age.

President Kennedy was a man who imagined a world full of challenges, challenges which he also imagined could be overcome by men (like himself) embodied with drive, courage, and vision. He selected many such men as his advisers. The rhetoric, dreams, and activity of the New Frontier show that these personal tendencies probably were generalized onto domestic political issues (often with beneficial results) and stated rhetorically as being in the public interest. Such generalization also occurred in nonmilitary areas of foreign policy—for example in the rhetoric and ambitions of the Peace Corps and Alliance for Progress which Kennedy initiated. In military matters the attraction of guerilla and counterguerilla activities went far beyond details of uniforms and instruction in the Army. At Kennedy's direction much attention was paid to these issues in his administration as a whole, and numerous

officials from the State and Defense departments were sent through seminars to update their thinking.⁹ And President Kennedy favored, in situations in which other men disagreed, both the guerilla invasion of Cuba and the introduction of American Special Forces advisers to bolster the South Vietnamese government.

Thus a case can be made that President Kennedy's personality was the crucial ingredient in producing the Bay of Pigs decision. We would predict, on the basis of Kennedy's personality and pattern of behavior in other areas, that he would be more predisposed than men with different traits to perceive Fidel Castro and communism in Latin America as a challenge, that he would be more predisposed to favor heroic action to meet such a challenge, that he would be more predisposed to believe the Cuban challenge would be overcome successfully by brave and committed men in a guerilla invasion force.

But this explanation, a working hypothesis, might be hasty and misleading. It is an explanation constructed after the fact. There is not yet reliable and broadly based evidence that men in responsible positions of national leadership allow their personalities to intrude in a decisive way when the well-being of their nations and the lives of many on both sides are at stake.

This book deals with such issues in a more general framework, assessing the evidence from a range of situations with multiple indicators to determine whether there exists a general pattern of personality intrusion in determining America's use of military force. Following a review of relevant theory in chapter 2, a detailed study of the psychology of a random sample of 126 career foreign service officers at the State Department (and comparison groups of military officers and domestic policy professionals) in chapters 3-5 establishes evidence for such a pattern of personality influence on both policy attitudes and images of reality among professional mid-elites, an intrusion which is a consequence of the intuitive methods these men use to understand an ambiguous, uncertain world and which operates to produce a self-deceptive confidence that choices are rational. In chapter 6 a historical comparison of presidents and secretaries of state between 1898 and 1968 finds convergent evidence, using different methods, that similar personality effects have tilted the balance of a decision for or against the use of force in actual decisions: the Bay of Pigs

decision is revealed to be a member of a class of decisions that includes (among others) Woodrow Wilson's punitive policies toward Mexico, the Dulles militarization of the containment doctrine during the 1950s, and Lyndon Johnson's escalation of the Vietnam War.

The enterprise that follows should be clear in two respects: first, the logic of the exercise is to assess the effects of personality differences *while holding situations constant*. This book is not designed to propose a total theory of international behavior, let alone argue the unwarranted conclusion that American foreign policy is solely the direct expression of the depth psychology of presidents. Kennedy may have invaded Cuba and Johnson the Dominican Republic in part because of their personal predispositions, but these decisions did not happen in the reverse order—Kennedy chose Cuba and not the Dominican Republic partly because of the *situation* in Cuba at the time. Any comprehensive theory of international relations would also have to be a theory of contexts, and not only (as in this study) a theory of decision making within these contexts.

Second, it is important to understand how the statement that personality-based decision making is risky is itself warranted by the studies reported here. This conclusion can, I think, be drawn fairly even without reaching prior agreement on the best policy or the most appropriate image of reality in each case. Take the example of a study which finds that some automobile drivers tend systematically to steer into a curve or to drive straight ahead (*and to believe their decision reflects a realistic assessment of road conditions because of something arising from within themselves rather than only from the objective shape of the road ahead*). We would, I think, agree that these are dangerous drivers, even if they are well intentioned. It is by a like recognition that I conclude that existing decision-making methods are risky. Unfortunately (as I will discuss in chapter 7), it is unlikely that completely safe alternatives are available.

It should also be clear that, although this work highlights personality intrusions that produce the use of force, the data actually shown that doves, hawks, and those in between are equally likely to base policies on self-expression, and their images of reality on intuitions shaped by personal psychodynamics. Dovish humanism does not emerge with a superior claim to be more objectively based among these men.