

If you ask a man why he believes what he does, why he is a liberal or conservative or isolationist or whatever, and if he does not think you impertinent, he is likely to tell you about the world and not about himself. . . . In the space of a minute or two he will have given you a brief model of the world as he understands it, something of the way he sees, feels, and thinks; but you will go away, perhaps rather sooner than you had planned, with information relevant to only one interpretation of the question.

Suppose you had said, "Yes, but why are *you* a conservative?" tilting the question around so that it faces him rather than the world . . .

Robert E. Lane

*Political Thinking and Consciousness*

Wars, like chemical explosions, may result from varied combinations of many different elements. There have been aggressive wars for territorial expansion or material advantage. There have been wars of liberation. There have been preventive or defensive wars. There have been civil wars. There have been religious crusades. There have been tribes or societies that seem to have gone to war simply for glory or because they liked to fight.<sup>1</sup>

The concern in this book is not to develop a general theory of all these wars or even of one war. Rather it is the limited problem of tracing the effect of certain aspects of the personality of the decision maker upon the decision to go to war. One war might be explained by the factors  $A + B + C + D + X$ , another by the factors  $C + D + K + Q + X$ . It is how an  $X$ -factor, the personality of the decision maker, operates within different situations that will be the focus here.

The major part of this chapter is devoted to examining different theories of how elements of a decision maker's personality might influence his judgments and images of reality.

Theorists have engaged in continuing debate over the problems of whether, and if so, how, the personal qualities of a top level decision maker affect his perceptions and decisions.<sup>2</sup> A traditional view skeptical of the influence of personal traits grows from the assumption that both international politics and government decision making are so highly organized that, for every major decision, any decision maker will face a set of objective forces which impel his decision and that by selection, professional training, and organizational norms, elite decision makers are "standard-

ized" to respond to these objective forces in predictable ways regardless of personal preference.

This skeptical position has much to recommend it. In fact there *are* many views held in common among the men I studied; as chapter 3 will show, a substantial majority agree that the Soviet Union is slightly or moderately menacing to American interests but England is seen as friendly. A substantial majority would use American force to prevent a Soviet naval buildup in the Caribbean, while a substantial majority stated that they would have opposed American military intervention in Indonesia in the 1960s. There are, as the skeptical position suggests, external factors which produce very substantial shifts to different perceptions and to different policy recommendations even when the distribution of personality traits is held constant.

Still, it is too much to say that factors external to the decision maker solely determine his images of reality and whether he decides to use force. Reading the daily newspaper reveals significant elite disagreements over foreign policy. And as will be shown in chapters 4 and 5, there are consequential personality-based disagreements among these men in their tendencies to feel either threatened or relaxed about the Soviet Union's intentions and in their tendencies to use or oppose force. The historical study of presidents and secretaries of state between 1898 and 1968 in chapter 6 will present evidence that the personality of the president has in a substantial number of cases since 1898 tipped the balance decisively for or against the use of force, especially in situations involving American military intervention in small countries. While the  $X$ -factors of personal predisposition can be overridden by powerful external forces, often there is sufficient ambiguity so that the contribution of these  $X$ -factors of personality is consequential for crystallizing a specific image of reality and a specific course of action.

### The Decision Maker and His Decision

Psychologists and political scientists have devoted considerable effort to the problem of clarifying personal sources of foreign policy deci-

sions.<sup>3</sup> One useful set of categories is a schema which thinks of judgments as formed in relation to four different aspects of the individual: (1) his *values*, (2) his *cognitive capabilities and processes*, (3) his *emotional dynamics and predispositions*, and (4) the *interaction of himself with his surroundings*—i.e., with the social consensus and structure of the group to which he belongs and others whose opinions are important to him.<sup>4</sup>

Some work, although far too little, has been devoted to the problem of values, especially to *unrealizable values* as a source of policies which are unproductive or disastrous. Fitzgerald, for example, maintains that America's recent efforts to nurture Vietnam's emergence as a Western-style democracy could never have succeeded.<sup>5</sup>

The greatest density of research has centered upon analyzing and improving cognitive processes. One approach has been to consider the problems of thinking and learning of foreign policy decision makers as an extension of those cognitive processes found to be generally true of the mind.<sup>6</sup> Another approach, being actively pursued by Alexander George and Ole Holsti, is to study individual differences in thinking about the world—a man's assumptions, his categories, his "operational code," the lessons he has learned from his past experiences.<sup>7</sup>

The third aspect of the individual, his emotional dynamics and predispositions, has also been investigated through two approaches, the first dealing with emotional dynamics common across individuals (stress responses, especially during crisis; and aggression, especially that resulting from frustration).<sup>8</sup> The second approach, represented specifically in the studies undertaken here, looks at individual differences in personality traits and the impact of these differences in producing different policies and perceptions.<sup>9</sup>

The fourth aspect that can be made the subject of research is how attitudes and policies are shaped by contexts of interpersonal and organizational relationships. Janis's concept of the "groupthink" syndrome has been a major contribution to an understanding of these processes;<sup>10</sup> Argyris's study of the ways interpersonal and organizational norms in the State Department inhibit performance of its responsibilities is another.<sup>11</sup> The literature on "bureaucratic politics," dealing in part with how a person's

job affects his viewpoint, also bears on this aspect of an attitude formation.<sup>12</sup>

This brief sketch locates the present work within the context of work by others. This book is primarily an investigation of the effect of individual differences in the third (emotional dynamics) of the four categories upon foreign policy decisions.

### Theories of The Influence of Personality on Policy and on Perception

The State Department study to be discussed in chapters 3-5 is based upon five traditional theories about personality effects on policy ((a1) interpersonal generalization, (a2) displacement of subjective fantasy goals, (a3) inverse interpersonal generalization, (a4) defects in mental health that would produce deviations from cooperative internationalism, and (a5) the interaction of personality with organizational setting) and upon five theories about the effects of personality on perception ((b1) self-based inference, (b2) attribution (i.e., projection) of subjective fantasy goals, (b3) inverse self-based inference, (b4) defects in mental health that would produce systematic effects on reality-testing, and (b5) the interaction of personality with organizational setting). The reason for testing these theories was not to determine whether they were true or false in a total sense—there is already evidence that each explains something about some members of the general public. Rather the purpose of testing was to determine their *applicability* to these specific men in the area of their foreign policy thinking.<sup>13</sup>

Let me briefly review each of the approaches incorporated into the study.

#### Personality Effects on Policy Interpersonal Generalization (a1)

Interpersonal generalization theory proposes that decision makers relate to other nations in ways that are straightforward extensions of their manner of relating to people in their daily lives. A classic study in this tradition was conducted by Bjorn Christiansen with 167 cadets and applicants at the

Military and Naval Academies in Oslo.<sup>14</sup> Each man was presented with written descriptions of 40 potential everyday conflicts and asked how he would likely react and with written descriptions of 40 potential international conflicts and asked how he wished Norway to react. Christiansen found, for example, that in an everyday situation where a friend absent-mindedly burned a large hole on the subject's table with a lighted cigarette, those who would angrily reproach him and tell him to watch what he is doing were more likely, if a Russian radio station jammed Norwegian foreign broadcasts, to be blaming and punitive in this international situation as well, to want Norway to protest and retaliate by jamming Russian foreign broadcasts. Correlations between six everyday and six international response tendencies were statistically significant at the  $< .01$  level, averaged about  $r = .40$ , and provided striking evidence that men who blame and threaten others in everyday conflicts also favored blaming and threatening other nations in international conflicts.<sup>15</sup> Christiansen's study did not show, however, whether or not such generalization extended to the predisposition to advocate a war (war was not a plausible option for Norway at the time). However, more recent research in this tradition with Americans shows that such a generalization does occur (at least in samples of the general public) to produce magnification of interpersonal responses. For example, Americans who believe children need strict discipline from their parents are more inclined to advocate use of nuclear weapons in international conflicts. In the terms of William Eckhardt's review and factor analysis, a general predisposition to use self-assertive "compulsion" of others is generalized and magnified into advocacy of punitive responses in American foreign policy.<sup>16</sup>

#### **Displacement of Subjective Fantasy Goals (a2)**

My guess, which I tested as a theory, was that men differ in how they would like ideally to feel about themselves, and that differences in such fantasies for desired feeling-states were displaced in the selection of policies with the desired connotation. Specifically, I suspected a man sought (possibly to gain vicarious satisfaction) for his nation to adopt those policies which symbolized his ideal self. An ambitious man who wished to feel active, powerful, and influential would advocate more militaristic, activist policies for his nation; a man whose wishes were for a relatively pastoral

and tranquil state of mind would advocate nonmilitary, low key policies.<sup>17</sup>

#### **Inverse Interpersonal Generalization (a3)**

A third theoretical tradition derives from early work in anthropology: Sumner's *Folkways*, published in 1906, proposed a causal relationship between ingroup solidarity and hostility toward outgroups.<sup>18</sup> Such "ethnocentrism" predicts, at least in one formulation, the exact opposite of interpersonal generalization. Interpersonal generalization theory predicts that high levels of interpersonal affection should generalize to produce decreased tendencies to use force in international relations. But ethnocentrism theory holds that high levels of ingroup affection will correspond with *increased* aggressive tendencies to use force toward outgroups in international relations.

A classic formulation of the inverse interpersonal generalization theory was Freud's:

It is always possible to bind together a considerable number of people in love, so long as there are other people left over to receive the manifestations of their aggressiveness. . . . When the Apostle Paul had postulated universal love between men as the foundation of his Christian community, extreme intolerance on the part of Christendom toward those who remained outside it became the inevitable consequence.<sup>19</sup>

Ethnocentrism theories are usually applied to groups as a whole. There are theorists in this tradition who would object to testing the validity of their ideas by looking only at differences between individuals within the professional elites of American government. These objections would be well taken: Theories of ethnocentrism come in rich and complex variety, and (as discussed below) there are at least some formulations which probably do apply collectively to the State Department.<sup>20</sup> Still, an inverse interpersonal generalization hypothesis does represent a reasonable formulation of the Freudian branch of ethnocentrism theory.

One element of ethnocentrism which probably holds more or less in general is national identification, the egocentric tendency to look out at the world from the perspective of (in this case) the United States. It is the subject's self-identification with his nation's overall foreign policy which allows the prediction of the specific policy differences that follow from personality differences. To give an obvious example: One statement of

interpersonal generalization theory is that hostile Americans are more likely to advocate the use of force against the Soviet Union. A Soviet with the same trait would undoubtedly not favor such policies against his own country. Chapter 4 reports data that the men studied do identify with American foreign policy. Individual differences in this identification appear to be small—a result which is not surprising since the diplomats and the military officers have selected the implementation of such policy as their career.

A second statement of an ethnocentrism theory is that a man seeks to promote the values of his culture in his foreign policy recommendations. Democratic electoral processes, intellectual freedom, economic growth, and mass education are examples of values which American elites would be expected to wish to export. Although the State Department study did not explore this avenue, such ethnocentrism (“culturally-based idealism” is a less pejorative term) might well produce errors in judgment and not be obvious to the individuals making decisions.<sup>21</sup>

#### **Deviations from Mental Health (a4)**

A fourth theoretical tradition proposes that deviations from cooperative internationalism arise from traits many psychologists believe reflect poor mental health. Typical traits which have been studied and found to be associated in this way among the general public include: authoritarianism, dogmatism, neurotic conflict, low self-esteem, mistrust, low cognitive complexity, and intolerance of ambiguity.<sup>22</sup>

Many researchers in this tradition seem satisfied simply to demonstrate that bad goes with bad; empathetic explanations are few and far between. But, reading between the lines, the research suggests that men who are suspicious of others, men who feel harassed or anxious or unsure of themselves, or who have difficulty coping flexibly with complex situations are more likely to prefer policies whose meanings to them are strong, simple, and definitive. The majority of studies show deviations from mental health ideals leading to belligerent nationalism, but studies that have looked more carefully have also found that the same deviations may increase the likelihood that an individual will advocate a pacific isolationist withdrawal from international relations.

Herbert McClosky's work is illustrative of the best of this latter re-

search. He studied a representative national sample of American citizens and a large number of delegates and alternates to the 1956 conventions of the Democratic and Republican parties. For both his mass and his political elite samples he concludes:

While (isolationism) is obviously a political attitude influenced by political circumstances, reference groups, demographic factors, and other such determinants, it is also shaped to a considerable extent by a complex set of personality variables, primarily of an aversive nature. Such personality states as misanthropy, psychological inflexibility, manifest anxiety, and low self-esteem have a powerful influence. . . . Although isolationism manifestly appears as a peaceful withdrawal from international entanglements and frequently has been interpreted as a simple desire to keep one's country from becoming militarily embroiled, it is characteristically xenophobic and belligerent in its posture toward foreign affairs. It represents, for the most part, a rejection of other men rather than a concern for them, a disavowal of responsibility and a strong urge to disengage oneself from obligations toward others.<sup>23</sup>

Two studies, one by Bernard Mennis and one by David Garnham, recently tested hypotheses from this tradition with foreign service officers.<sup>24</sup> Mennis interviewed 37 country desk officers and political assistants at the State Department and 58 military officers at the Defense Department who had responsibility for international political affairs. He found a significant (but low) relation between a composite measure of cognitive style (rigidity and dogmatism) and a composite measure of hard line anticommunism, nonsupport of arms control and disarmament, and verbal derogation of nonaligned nations. David Garnham conducted a similar study using a worldwide sample of 274 foreign service officers and found a significant (but low) relation between psychological flexibility and “world mindedness.” However, both researchers also report that foreign service officers score very low on dogmatism and very high on psychological flexibility; thus it is unlikely that cases involving substantial consensus favorable to the use of force would be explained by dogmatism and personal rigidity. While these personality factors could (according to studies of the general public) produce hard-line policies in abundance if present, it appears to be a dynamic that is not engaged centrally in the decision of these elite groups to use force.

There is, however, a related theory I was interested in exploring. I had come increasingly to suspect that, as part of the normal process of socialization, many people experience themselves as *beneath* their government. Among the contents of the mind is the sense of one's self, one's subjective locus within the world imagined by the mind. Also within the mind is a vast collection of ideas and reified images, some of which are located for most people *above* their sense of themselves. Images located above the sense of self seem to include ideals and the *superego*; and, of particular relevance here, the image of one's government and its foreign policy.

I suspected that this *political subordination*, the integration of the sense of self within a subjective hierarchical system, might produce systematic effects—among which are increased personal fear if American interests are threatened, an increased tendency toward self-assertive dominance of other nations to retain the status quo and American hegemony, and reduction in altruism and generosity.<sup>25</sup> I also suspected that there are men who, through *growing* up politically (i.e., dissolving the hierarchical structure between their sense of themselves and their image of government) would come to stand subjectively, in Goethe's phrase, "*above* the nations and to feel the good fortune or distress of his neighbor people as if it had happened to his own."<sup>26</sup> As a result of these conjectures, one deviation which the State Department study explores is the sense of political subordination of the self to government.

One additional factor studied in the "deviations from mental health" tradition has been mistrust. For example, Henry Kissinger, theorizing about the relation between domestic politics and foreign policy, argued that a low level of interpersonal trust was characteristic of Soviet leaders who lived through the Stalin period.<sup>27</sup> Consequently he proposed that Soviet leaders were unlikely to place more faith in the professed goodwill of the United States than the low trust they placed in their own colleagues.

The problem is of particular theoretical interest; if its effects can be captured by assessing individual differences within American foreign policy elites, it might identify one important and general influence of elite political culture on foreign policy. In addition the trait is an interesting object of study because Argyris's extensive social-psychological study of

the State Department several years ago concluded that there were very *low* levels of interpersonal trust,<sup>28</sup> while Kissinger, in his article, implied that the opposite was true in the United States.

#### The Self in Organizational Context (a5)

Out of a desire for simplicity, much basic research on the linkage between personality and political attitudes has simply compared scores of personality scales with scores on political attitude scales. Such a straightforward effect may be the major story, but it does ignore the fact that individuals are seldom free-floating and responding only to a policy situation. Rather, they are embedded in a social context. And this social context includes, in this case, organizations with distinctive norms, operating styles, missions, self-images, philosophy, and viewpoint, and rewards for being successfully in the mainstream or appropriately creative in the service of the organization's mission, or sanctions for being too deviant, disruptive, or "far out."

A full treatment of this social context as it affects American foreign policy decision making would require an enormous amount of data and is far beyond the scope of the present investigation. But tests for some major sociological forces interacting with personality differences can be made. For example, I have tested the psychological effect of a sense of subordination of the self to American foreign policy (as described in the preceding section). It is also possible that an individual's group and organizational location may affect perspectives and mediate the effects of personality traits on policy attitudes. For this reason data from comparison groups at the Office of Management and Budget and the National War College will be used in two special tests to be described in the following chapters. First, there will be a test of whether group membership alone represents some significant difference in unmeasured forces, apart from personal predispositions, that are reflected in policy attitudes and perceptions. Second, there will be a test of whether group membership mediates the effects of personality differently within these different groups.

Numerous hypotheses could be generated about these interaction effects. But two seem especially relevant: first, that self-esteem will affect attitudes toward the use of force in interaction with an agency's specialty: high self-esteem diplomats should oppose force while high self-esteem military officers should support it more strongly, and self-esteem should have

no effect among domestic policy specialists. Second, it will be possible to study whether personality engagement, as a general rule, is greater or less among FSOs and military officers compared with domestic policy specialists. The relationship, at this point, could be plausibly argued either way: one might say there will be a greater impact of emotional dynamics among national security professionals because these men are more ego-involved—foreign policy is more salient to them. Or one could argue, as Verba has suggested, that diplomats and military officers, as professionals, will have more rationally disciplined thinking in the national security area and their thinking will be *less* likely to exhibit systematic emotional influences.<sup>29</sup>

### The Effects of Personality on Perception

Traditional theories of the effects of personality on the subject's perceptions of other nations have in general the same structure as the theories concerned with the effects of personality on policy. But there are a few differences, and a brief discussion of self-based inference, attribution of one's own subjective fantasy goals, and inverse self-based inference (b1, b2, and b3) will be useful.

#### Self-Based Inference (b1)

A major tradition of theorizing about the relation of personality to political perception has been self-based inference. Barber, for example, found that personality differences within local political elites in Connecticut produced different perceptions of the operation of their local political systems. Men who preferred close and intimate relations with others tended to believe decisions in their communities were made by a small group of men who discussed and planned their actions with one another. Men who preferred greater independence and psychological distance in interpersonal relations inferred that the leaders of their communities consulted widely in making decisions. Each man, then, tended to imagine decisions being made in his local community as he would make them if he held the central post.<sup>30</sup> Lane has suggested that such a process occurs generally: "Each of us is a model of man we use in our interpretation of others."<sup>31</sup> Herman Kahn has argued that this dynamic occurs in international political perceptions:

People tend to see the Russians in terms of their personalities: a bureaucratic and rigid type would see them as bureaucratic and rigid and an ag-

gressive person would see them as aggressive. . . . You might sum it up by saying the right wing has an enemy . . . and the peace movement has a misguided friend.<sup>32</sup>

#### Attribution of Subjective Fantasy Goals (b2)

Men who are ambitious to feel active, strong, and powerful may imagine that Soviet leaders have the same ambitions, thus attributing their own strivings to others. (I list this dynamic separately here to retain the symmetry between the perception- and policy-traditions, but it seems parsimonious to simply expand the concept of "self" to include the attribution to others of one's dreams for an ideal self. In later chapters, therefore, I will use the general term "self-based inference" to include attribution to Soviet leaders of one's own dreams to become his ideal self (e.g., dreams of becoming active, strong, powerful)).

#### Inverse Self-Based Inference (b3)

There is an opposing epistemological tradition, that of inverse self-based inference. This tradition employs the Freudian concept of the projection of *repressed* impulses, proposing that the image of foreigners is constructed from an individual's impulses that are unacceptable to his conscious sense of himself. The Russians, in this formulation, would be the garbage heaps of an American's psyche, harbingers of brutal, savage, crude impulses a man would neither acknowledge in himself nor express toward his fellow Americans. Such a dynamic is part of the ethnocentrism syndrome, and as such has been proposed as the cause of perceptions that justify, and perhaps call forth, hostility against the Russians and other outgroups.

This ends our brief overview of theoretical traditions and research concerns. In the next chapter I will proceed to introduce the first of the two investigations, the State Department study.