

In this chapter I will consider the second problem the State Department study was designed to address—the effect of personality traits on the subject's perceptions of other countries. I will then integrate these findings with results from chapter 4 and discuss emotion-based syndromes, specifically their generation of pseudorationality in decision making and the likely importance of a male narcissism syndrome. Next, I will discuss the "best fit" summary equations combining all the data from the State Department study. Finally, I will address several issues raised by FSOs in earlier reactions to these results.

Personality Effects on Perceptions

Chapter 2 established the agenda of testing five traditional theories of how personal characteristics might affect perceptions. For simplicity I will group here as one theory, "self-based inference," the idea (b1) that images of other nations are a straightforward attribution of manifest aspects of personality and the idea (b2) of projection of one's own aspiration to become his ideal self.¹ A second theory (b3), drawn from psychoanalytic observations of ethnocentrism, postulates projection of *repressed* and *submerged* personality characteristics—an inverse self-based inference process. A third theory (b4) is that defects in mental health are the source of misperceptions. A fourth theory (b5) states that men in different groups will, by this fact alone, perceive the world differently. As before, only the statistically significant results are discussed here; details of the analyses will be found in the appendixes.

Self-Based Inference (b1, b2)

Let us consider the perception of Soviet foreign policy.² A comparison of scores shows:

1. The more active and powerful a man feels himself to be, the more active and powerful he experiences Soviet foreign policy to be.
2. The more a man desires greater activity and power, the more activity and power he attributes to Soviet foreign policy.

3. The more dominant a man in interpersonal relations, the more activity and power he attributes to Soviet foreign policy.

These results hold in all groups; they show direct self-based inference. In a straightforward way, each man uses himself as an implicit model in constructing a perception of Soviet foreign policy.³

It is important to emphasize that, here again, the explanatory power of any one trait in context is quite low; self-based attribution is only part of the story.⁴ Nonetheless, these men apparently respond to objective cues that the Soviet Union is active and powerful by drawing on themselves to flesh out a specific image of the degree to which activity and power are dominant.

This interpretation appears especially appropriate when one considers evidence that the same projective effects do *not* appear at all in the case of perceptions of British foreign policy. Britain is not considered aggressive and powerful, and there is much more openness and information about British foreign policy. A man does not *need* to draw upon these aspects of himself to understand the British.⁵

There were also personality effects on the degree of menace experienced from the Soviet Union as recorded on the "friendly-menacing" adjective scale.⁶ These results show:

1. The greater a man's tendencies to assert interpersonal dominance the more menace he experiences from the Soviet Union.
2. The more ambitious a man is to feel active and powerful, the more menace he experiences from the Soviet Union.
3. Men who like to compete experience the Soviet Union as more menacing.

Again, these tendencies hold equally across all groups. And, again, there were no comparable effects on the subjects' images of British foreign policy.

If the emphasis on the enhancement of objective cues by self-based inference is correct, then the possibility arises that it may be partly the *secrecy* of Communist foreign policy making that forces these Americans to rely on their imaginations. (If so, then national security secrecy in the

United States would be suspect, because it forces these elites' counterparts in the Soviet Union to rely on *their* imaginations too.)

I will now set forth the evidence from the questionnaire that personal traits significantly affect images of the Soviet Union with regard to a specific situation.

With respect to motives behind Soviet involvement in the Middle East, the following personality traits increase by self-based attribution the probability that a man will see long range, menacing ambition at work, specifically a Soviet desire to sweep across North Africa, take over the Mediterranean, and undermine NATO:⁷

1. How active and powerful a man is at present.⁸
2. How active and powerful a man wishes to feel.⁹
3. The tendency to make long-range plans in one's own life.¹⁰

Finally, among diplomats, the tendency to make long range plans in the subject's own life increases his belief that the Soviet Union had long range expansionist plans which lay behind its actions in the early cold war years.¹¹

Ethnocentrism and Inverse Self-Based Inference (b3)

The theory of projection of repressed aspects of personality (i.e., the attribution to Soviet leaders of the opposite of one's own traits) is not supported by these findings. One final test can be made of the ethnocentrism idea: Does greater idealization of one's group (e.g., of American foreign policy) lead to a more negative image of other nations? The results showed that, on the contrary, there is a positive relation, just a tendency to have either a rosy or pessimistic view of the world.^{12,13} Thus we conclude again that these men are not ethnocentric in a way that can be linked to differences in individual psychodynamics.

It should be clear, however, that self-based inference is not always the main story of international politics. For example, the image of the Germans in official propaganda and news coverage during World War II—the image of powerful and lurid evil—was never considered by Americans to be part of their own makeup. The image projected onto the internal view-

ing screen of the mind's eye in America was probably the "not-self." Thus, while inverse self-based inference probably is true in some situations, it is replaced here by straightforward attribution.

To step back from the data briefly, I would suggest that the partially self-based imaginative processes seen here (compared to inverse self-based imaginative processes at other times) represent an advance toward the achievement of empathy. These men are willing, in some degree, to consider Russian leaders as somewhat like themselves rather than as mysterious, uncivilized monsters. There is a partial effort to "put one's self in the other fellow's shoes" and to try to understand the world as it appears to him, although of course the resulting beliefs may still tell us more about the American than about the Russians.

Mental Health and Perception (b4)

In chapter 4 evidence emerged of the influence of internal psychological conflict on policy. The issue is worth exploring further; the hypothesis that the actions and perceptions a high official adopts are chosen because of clinically ascertainable psychic states, rather than the objective features and constraints of the situations he must deal with, is the basis of a growing number of theories of official behavior. While it is not possible within the limitations of the present study to reach broad conclusions on this issue, we can examine the evidence to see what the influence of ordinary neurotic symptoms might be.

There seems to be little influence on policy attitudes (action) among these men. The only significant findings have been (1) the greater tendency of neurotic military officers to advocate force, and (2) a slight but significant tendency across all groups for higher degrees of neurosis to shift a man more strongly toward the advocacy of force *or* away from it. There has been no discernible effect of neurosis on other foreign policy preferences.

Turning, however, to the effect of neurotic conflicts on perception, it turns out that men who score higher on this scale experience Soviet foreign policy as *less* menacing. And at State and OMB, those with greater intrapsychic conflict tend to be *revisionists*.¹⁴ These results are difficult to understand because of the general nature of the neurotic-symptom scale

(e.g., low energy, difficulties in concentration). It may be that such men are engaged in wishful thinking or desire to see a world which does not add to their own existing burdens.¹⁵ But, in truth, the results are a mystery and a subject for future research.

Relative Impacts and (b5) the Organizational Setting

Table 5.1 summarizes the patterns of personality impact across groups. With only one minor difference (which suggests a slightly diminished emotional engagement at OMB), these results show consistent effects across all groups. Organizational setting seems to affect perception less than it affects action.

Again, as in the case of policy advocacy, the evidence is clear that any single personality trait is only one piece of the puzzle. However, each personality trait by itself has a powerful impact if all other influences are held constant.¹⁶ Shifts of up to 42% (4.2 units on a 10-point scale) of how menacing the Soviet Union is experienced to be can be generated by differences in a single personality trait, as can shifts of over 20% in the number of men who believe the Soviet Union has long range expansionist dreams behind its actions in the Middle East.

These results suggest strongly that a combined perception of power and of intention, i.e., of how *menacing* the Soviet Union is, varies more strongly in response to the different personality dynamics of an observer than does the perception of Soviet activity and power alone. They also show that the maximum personality impact is substantially smaller than the range of the scales—a result which tends to support the earlier finding of the cueing of personal emotional engagement in the experience of international reality (i.e., there are broad "ballpark" cues, with personality differences substantially affecting locations within this range).¹⁷

Elite Modal Personality and Perception

Consistently, across all groups, American elite modal personality (as assessed by typical personality traits of these men) will tend to shape perceptions toward an image of a more powerful, menacing, and expansionist Soviet foreign policy. As we saw in chapter 3, these men experience themselves as

Table 5.1

Impacts, Everything Else Held Constant, of Selected Personality Traits on Perceptions

	OMB	FSO	NWC
I. Soviet Foreign Policy Image			
A. Activity-Power			
Self: Activity-Power	+ 1.6 ^a	+ 1.6	+ 1.6
Ideal Self: Activity-Power	+ 2.7	+ 2.7	+ 2.7
Interpersonal Dominance	+ 2.7	+ 2.7	+ 2.7
B. Menace			
Ideal Self: Activity-Power	+ 4.0	+ 4.0	+ 4.0
Interpersonal Dominance	+ 4.2	+ 4.2	+ 4.2
Likes to Compete	+ .8	+ .8	+ .8
Internal Conflict (Neuroticism)	- 2.1	- 2.1	- 2.1
II. Soviet Expansionist Ambitions in Middle East			
Self: Activity-Power	+19.3 ^b	+19.3	+19.3
Ideal Self: Activity-Power	+21.5	+21.5	+21.5
Life Planning: Long Range Goal Orientation	+13.9	+13.9	+13.9
III. Soviet Ambitious Goals Responsible for Cold War (Orthodox view)			
Life Planning: Long Range Goal Orientation	0	+11.7	na
Internal Conflict (Neuroticism)	-14.1	-14.1	na

na = not available.

^aEntries for part I of table are given as positions on 10-point scale.^bEntries for parts II, III are given as percent shifts.

active and powerful, and wish to feel still more active and powerful, they are slightly more dominant than submissive, many like to compete, substantial numbers make long range career plans, and they are relatively free of neurotic symptoms.¹⁸ (On most of these traits military officers score so as to find intuitively more plausible, thus to experience with more confidence, a more menacing image of the Soviet Union.) It seems possible that some of these same modal traits could characterize Soviet foreign policy elites and shape similar Soviet beliefs about American policy and intentions.

Summary of Personality Effects on Perception

There is a certain dreamlike quality involved in the behavioral and perceptual dynamics sketched in the foregoing sections. A man experiences other nations *internally*, in his own mind; they are creations which partly embody his own emotions. In part, the men studied here frighten or reassure themselves by working their own oppressive or domineering or menacing or intrusive predispositions into their experiences of the Soviet Union. Like the god Vishnu, these men partly dream the world in which they act and in which, as a consequence of foreign policy decisions, we all live.

It is true, of course, that diplomats think, analyze, and test out their thinking against what facts they have. I think they *try* to be rational. But in making choices based upon incomplete knowledge, and having of necessity to deal with ambiguous situations, and to use crude, inadequately validated theories of political behavior, they resort to projective intuition. And that resort systematically shapes the mental simulation these men construct of the world without complete grounding in objective evidence. The use of these processes tends to trap a man by his own character structure and emotional dynamics.

Emotion-Based Syndromes of Action and Cognition

The Psychology of Self-Deception

The most striking perspective on the findings in chapter 4 and in this chapter is that personality traits shape both (1) policy preferences and (2) perceptions of the intentions of other nations simultaneously *and in*

directions which tend to yield internal coherence between action and cognition. The result is what *looks* like a rational decision, and *feels* like a rational decision, but which is in reality only a plausible, consistent decision.¹⁹ For example an ambitious, competitive man is inclined to use force *and* he is also inclined by the same personality traits to imagine opponents with expansionist ambitions against whom hard-line policies are called for (see, e.g., President Kennedy's decision at the Bay of Pigs discussed in chapter 1).²⁰ Similarly, unambitious, cooperative men tend to oppose the use of force and are also predisposed by the same personality traits to see relatively unambitious, quiescent, friendly nations against whom hard-line policies are not appropriate.

Foreign policy decision makers regularly say they have made the most rational choices possible. The evidence clarifies how they come genuinely to feel this way—and how they are led to deceive themselves. Internally consistent and plausible decisions do not necessarily have a rational base, and journalists and scholars will mislead people if they mistake rationalizations for true explanations.

Male Narcissism Syndromes

I want to draw to the reader's attention corroborating evidence from other disciplines that some males do evidence emotion-based, self-deceptive syndromes such as those detailed here. The results of anthropological studies have now become readily available in standard computer format, and this has allowed anthropologists to analyze the relation between characteristics of tribes and their war propensity. Recently published analyses of these data from over 100 primitive societies show that one predictor of war, among others, is the tendency of males in a society to be ambitious and competitive—the same correlation between personality traits and war found in the State Department study.²¹

Several of these investigators have explored the subject further and have concluded that male sexual dynamics are implicated in this connection, and specifically that there is indeed an emotion-based "machismo" or male narcissism syndrome in some tribes which includes not only personality and action linkages but also personality and perception linkages of a paranoid nature (e.g., feelings of insecurity, suspiciousness, the tendency to be easily enraged by imagined threats). It is interesting to note that the

political scientist Nathan Leites published a psychoanalytic study of Russian leaders 25 years ago and concluded that they exhibited a similar syndrome.²²

As of this writing the problem of narcissism syndromes is also an area of rapid theoretical growth in American psychoanalysis, and there are continuing debates about internal mechanisms and conceptual vocabulary. It is not clear whether male narcissism syndromes are directly an expression of sexual dynamics or whether these are peripheral to "structural" problems (e.g., a split of a man's sense of himself so he feels both grandiose *and* inferior.) It would be digressive to review all of these technical issues here. I want simply to note that there is growing attention and agreement about such syndromes from widely diverse sources—including the broad-based investigations of anthropologists. And most of these writers agree that there is an emotion-based syndrome, similar to that in the State Department study, linking ambition, aggressiveness, and paranoid tendencies. However, such a machismo syndrome is attenuated in the State Department in comparison with the overt arrogance, grandiosity, sadism, and terror which characterize males in some primitive tribes which social scientists have studied. And while several women in the State Department felt that a strong male chauvinist attitude (another correlate of the syndrome) was present there, this too is probably attenuated in comparison to that of some primitive tribes.

It is important to emphasize, at the same time, that machismo has many facets. To be strong, proud, powerful, hard, tough, particularly sensitive and alert to possible threats or domination by others, to be boldly assertive, are some of these. But male chauvinism also has connotations of paternalism, of providing security and valued gratifications, of being a protector, a leader, guardian, benefactor, a provider. Machismo in the State Department could include the virtues of paternalism (at least as these are seen by the paternalist). To put it candidly, I suspect at least some of these men wish to be high status managers, leaders, and benefactors to the world—and they are willing to fight stubbornly rather than surrender America's chance to play this powerful role of active virility, guidance of others, self-worth, and generativity.

That international politics is a "world of men" is a central and probably

consequential fact; one that may illuminate underlying sexual dynamics, and one that is important to the extent that males are more inclined than women to seek strength, power, activity, dominance, competitive achievement (and there is a large body of literature that this is the case in America):²³ such qualities make them more fearful of others and more predisposed to unleash violence (perhaps especially against ungrateful small countries).²⁴

I do not intend to single out the State Department as unique in having ambitious males with the desire to be high status benefactors of others. The available evidence suggests such dreams may be widespread among males in American society.²⁵ And perhaps becoming a member of a political elite is attractive to ambitious men in many countries.

Best Prediction Equations

As we saw in chapter 3, many of the variables pertinent to this study overlap (i.e., correlate with) each other. Since some readers will be interested in the most parsimonious mathematical statement of my findings, I present in tables 5.2–5.5 the results of the cumulative explanatory power of the perceptual and personality variables in the study when overlaps are controlled.

The first characteristic of the equations is the independent impact of a man's beliefs about "who started the cold war?" For both the tendency to use force (table 5.2) and desired war capability levels (table 5.3) this fundamental belief is of marked importance, more important than the (non-significant) effects of images of *current* Soviet foreign policy.

We can make sense of this, I think, by linking this finding with the analysis of international-relations games in the laboratory. Terhune found that *first round* experiences tend to be of critical importance.²⁶ For example, perceived treachery in a first round tended to form a basic interpretive framework or gestalt which shaped later mistrustful behavior. Men lived in history and did not continually recompute their fundamental assumptions about the true nature of the world. It seems, then, that the continuing argument about the origins of the cold war is more than an arcane academic debate. If the revisionists win, then interpretations and responses to Soviet foreign policy now, thirty years later, will also shift significantly.

Table 5.2

Best Prediction Equation, Tendency to Advocate Use of Force (Percent)

a_0	b		$p(t)$
22.35	3.526 (1.527)	Interaction of ideal self: Activity-power and self-esteem	.03
	1.416 (.664)	NWC—Interaction of ideal self: Activity-power and self-esteem	.04
	2.900 (.772)	Domestic conservatism	3×10^{-4}
	1.724 (.799)	Relative Soviet responsibility for origins of cold war	.04
	-.995 (.492)	Interpersonal trust	.05
	-3.493 (2.259)	Political transcendence	.13

$$R^2 = .31 \quad F(6,196) = 14.66$$

$$SE = 22.97 \quad p(F) < 1 \times 10^{-13}$$

The number in parenthesis beneath each b coefficient is the standard error of that coefficient. Dividing a b coefficient by its standard error gives the value of a t statistic, which in turn yields the probability $p(t)$, listed in the right-hand column, that the value of b might have resulted from random processes.

Table 5.3

Best Prediction Equation, Desired General Military Capability (Number of Wars)

a_0	b		$p(t)$
0.84	.061 (.014)	Relative degree of Soviet responsibility for cold war	3×10^{-5}
	.032 (.012)	Domestic conservatism	.009
$R^2 = .16$ $F(2,187) = 17.75$			
SE = .414 $p(F) < 9 \times 10^{-8}$			

Table 5.4

Best Prediction Equation, Soviet Foreign Policy: Activity-Power

a_0	b		$p(t)$
5.28	.236 (.077)	Interaction of ideal self: Activity-power and self-esteem	.003
	.072 (.034)	Domestic conservatism	.05
$R^2 = .11$ $F(2,220) = 7.6$			
SE = .96 $p(F) < 7 \times 10^{-4}$			

Table 5.5

Best Prediction Equation, Soviet Foreign Policy Attributed Menace

a_0	b		$p(t)$
4.43	-.21 (.07)	Neuroticism	.004
	.402 (.190)	Ideal self: Activity-power	.04
$R^2 = .10$ $F(2,218) = 6.94$			
SE = 2.13 $p(F) < .002$			

The evidence is that the revisionists have been gaining ground: although few diplomats have shifted across the dividing line to the revisionist side, the younger a diplomat, the less completely traditional are his views.²⁷ This is the primary route through which age has a systematic influence on foreign policy.

The second characteristic of the tables is that an interaction term, the tendency to wish to feel active and powerful and *simultaneously* to be of high self-esteem, is central in increasing the use of force and the belief that Soviet foreign policy is active and powerful.

Finally, the tables show that domestic conservatism or liberalism is a strong predictor when used in equations with other relevant personality variables and perceptions.²⁸

The independent impacts of these variables, when all are considered together and their overlaps controlled, can be assessed easily by multiplying the b coefficients by 10 (since all variables have been rescaled from 0 to 10). The R^2 statistics are respectable in showing personality-based themes underlying and shaping complex thought processes, and R^2 is .31 in the case of the use of force.

These results also help to clarify whether the organizational setting exercises an independent effect on either policy or perception. The evidence from chapter 3 showed such information was a useful *descriptive* rule-of-thumb for identifying differences. But the organizational setting itself is not usually a significant predictor of the perceptions and policy decisions studied here which adds causal information once the personality traits are known.

Reactions and Criticisms

Each participant who requested it (almost all did so) received a detailed summary of the data and the conclusions drawn from them. About 5% of FSOs communicated reactions, and comments were also solicited from several psychiatrists and social scientists familiar with the State Department. All those who offered reactions agreed that the results plausibly agreed with their own observations of foreign policy thinking. But several comments raised important and useful clarifications of what the State

Department study accomplished and what it implies and does not imply. These clarifications are discussed in the remainder of this chapter.

In a sense the findings are reassuring.

This observation was advanced on the basis of the statistics which show that any single personality trait plays only a small part within the overall context and that, taken together, the personality traits studied explain only about 31% of the variance in the advocacy of force—and this in scenarios which are in fact unrepresentative of situations usually encountered. Hence, one writer concluded, irrationality plays a minor role in American foreign policy.

I disagree with this conclusion. It must be recognized that this was far from an exhaustive study—it consisted of assessing those personality traits which could be fitted into a 45-minute questionnaire. There are many additional facets of personality which may be relevant. Furthermore, the scales were generally short, hence the scores somewhat more randomly variable (and correlations thus probably lower) than longer scales would have produced. What can be said is that the 31% figure represents a *minimum* estimate, a floor. It may be that the true percentage of variations in the advocacy of force explained by personality factors could be higher, possibly much higher. No one will know without further research. And even the 31% figure indicates that, unless some other factors are of overwhelming importance in a particular case, the personality of the decision maker can be of crucial importance in tilting a decision one way or another.

Also, it is scarcely true that personality-based irrationality is the only source of irrationality. As reviewed briefly in chapter 2, stress and group pressures toward "groupthink" are two other sources of an emotional nature. As well, biased cognitive processes—drawing inappropriate historical analogies, for example—can also undermine foreign policy rationality; and "operational codes" or rules of thumb inappropriate to a particular situation may produce ineffective or disastrous policies. There is no warrant for concluding that irrationality has been dealt with by this study in any other than one of its aspects.

Finally, I agree that the materials presented to the subjects, centered as they were on plausible scenarios for the use of force, are unrepresentative of the everyday issues in foreign policy. Considering *all* of the situations confronting American decision makers, the question of the advocacy of military force seldom arises. And one may not need to give a significant role to personality to understand much of this routine diplomacy. But there has been no claim to construct or test a total theory of international relations or of American foreign policy. What *is* at issue are those infrequent but disproportionately consequential cases where the use of military force becomes a real possibility. And in these cases personality-based thinking can play a substantial role.

The study is biased toward casting aspersions on those who take hard-line positions.

It is not my intention to single out any one policy position as irrational. In fact, the data do not support such a conclusion: there is a lock-in effect of personality dynamics on thought across the entire spectrum, and personality-based thinking is just as characteristic of doves as of hawks and of those in between.

Nevertheless, it is true that my central concern has been that force can be used too quickly and unrealistically: the Bay of Pigs is an example of such a case; Vietnam is another. Both were events in my own lifetime that helped convince me there was a problem here to be explored. And Deutsch's review of the evidence (discussed in chapter 1) that the majority of those governments initiating official violence in the twentieth century have lost does suggest that overreliance on such policies is a typical error of nations in the twentieth century. But it would be a mistake to conclude (as my critic felt some readers might conclude) that, for example, détente is established here as a more rational policy toward the Soviet Union, and that its hard line critics are more irrational.

Don't we know this already?

The answer to the question, "Don't we know this already?" is "Yes—and no." There probably are many people who have sensed, both in themselves and from their observations of public events, that major policy decisions

are personalized, the final choice a self-expression of the decision maker himself. It is the mark of good social science research that it clarifies and explicates experience, that people will, upon reflection, say "of course."

But, if perhaps sensed, it is doubtful that the precise mechanisms of the influence of personality have heretofore been explicitly perceived. I found in talking with men at the State Department that a personality-based explanation of why men disagreed was not a *readily available* one, especially in a man's understanding of himself. This recognition may have been *latent*, but it was not easily accessible as a perspective on the process in which these men were engaged. And chapter 2 reviewed a variety of competing ideas among specialists, both about causation in international relations and about the form personality-based influence might take. Without data, no one knew what the actual story would be: some scholars have maintained personality influences to be trivial (except in cases of marked pathology, e.g., Hitler); other writers have contended that they might be significant for virtually every decision maker. But no one has previously explicitly proposed that features of American elite modal personality increase the predisposition to war, and, with evidence acquired directly and by explicit methods, that major foreign policy decision making must be conceived *generally* as in part an unreliable resort to self-expression and systematic projective intuition to deal with and make sense out of an ambiguous world. In this way the answer is "no," we did not know this already.

There is, however, an important issue left unanswered by the State Department study: FSOs or military officers do not make foreign policy. Politicians make it, and they make it through a process of consultation, analysis, and debate. Are the same dynamics found in the State Department study actually causative in real world policy making? The following chapter takes up this problem directly.