Psychological Advice on Foreign Policy

What Do We Have to Contribute?

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ABSTRACT: *This article explores the diverse ways in which psychologists can contribute to debates on foreign policy issues. I distinguish three forms that such contributions can take: (a) Psychologists as experts on social judgment and decision-making processes can help to identify and perhaps reduce sources of error and bias in the policy-making process; (b) psychologists as experts on bargaining and negotiation processes can assist in developing policy-relevant theory that can inform the selection of influence strategies in dealings with other states; (c) psychologists as experts on problems of predicting behavior in complex natural settings can assist policymakers in forecasting trends in international relations and in anticipating likely reactions of other states to policy initiatives. I examine current gaps in our understanding and potential limits on the usefulness of psychological advice in each of these areas.*

The future of civilization, perhaps even that of the human race, hinges on our ability to avoid nuclear war. This point has been made so repeatedly and, on occasion, so eloquently that it needs no amplification here (cf. Dyson, 1984; Katz, 1982; Sagan, 1983; Schell, 1980). The consensus, however, begins and ends on that point. Wide disagreement exists on the best means for avoiding nuclear war. In the United States, for example, there exists a broad range of opinion. At one end of the continuum, there are the nuclear use theorists, who believe that the only truly secure forms of deterrence are those that convince one's adversaries that one possesses the capability and resolve to "prevail" at any level of nuclear conflict (Gray, 1982). At the other end of the continuum, there are the proponents of partial or even total unilateral disarmament, for whom the use of nuclear weapons as instruments of foreign policy is morally abhorrent. Toward the middle of the continuum, one finds proponents of the mutual-assured-destruction school of thought: The key to preserving peace lies in ensuring that neither side ever acquires the power to launch a first strike that would eliminate the ability of the other to retaliate (Bundy, Kennan, McNamara, & Smith, 1982; McNamara, 1983).

It is misleading to represent these different policy positions on a single continuum—as if preference for more or less nuclear weaponry were the only issue at stake. Advocates of the competing positions differ on a complicated, and difficult to disentangle, mixture of factual and moral issues: What types of risks is the Soviet Union prepared to take to achieve its geopolitical objectives?

What are these objectives? What types of risks should the United States be prepared to take to achieve its geopolitical objectives? What should these objectives be? What are the likely short- and long-term consequences of pursuing new policy initiatives—be they nuclear weapons systems, arms control agreements, or military, political, or economic interventions in zones of contested influence? Not surprisingly, given the variety of important issues at stake and the lack of precision in definitions of key terms on both sides (What, for example, does prevailing in a nuclear war really mean? What exactly is "minimal deterrence" or a "vital interest"?), debates between schools of thought tend to be acrimonious, with each side simply reiterating its own position and disparaging the arguments of the other side either as being naive (a label applied to advocates of more "liberal" conflict spiral positions) or as representing a Neanderthal mentality (a label applied to advocates of more "conservative" deterrence positions). As I have noted elsewhere (Tetlock, 1983a), such debates are doomed to be unproductive: The loose intellectual ground rules under which the debates are conducted guarantee a conceptual impasse. Advocates of each side possess a seemingly unlimited capacity to interpret evidence in terms that are at least consistent with their own initial assumptions concerning the nature of the international predicament confronting humanity.

In this article, I explore contributions that psychologists can make toward improving the quality of foreign policy debates in general and debates on problems of American-Soviet relations in particular. It is useful to begin by explicitly stating the conception of foreign policy that guides my analysis. The fundamental goal of any foreign policy is to develop and maintain relationships with other states that promote the security and welfare of one's own state. If policymakers are to be successful in achieving this goal, they must perform a variety of cognitively and emotionally demanding tasks. They must clearly define their own state's interests and values, make difficult judgments concerning the relative importance of these interests and values, and carefully weigh the costs and benefits of alternative strategies of pursuing them. Knowing one's own objectives, moreover, is not enough; one must also understand the perceptions and concerns of the other side and how the other side is likely to react to policy initiatives of one's own state. Policymakers need to be aware of situations in which conflicts of interest are likely to emerge and of the best ways to achieve mutually acceptable accommodations of such conflicts without

abandoning what policymakers deem to be vital national interests.

I distinguish three interrelated ways in which psychologists (qua psychologists) can become involved in foreign policy debates. First, psychologists can become involved in their capacities as experts on social judgment and decision-making processes. Here the focus is on how psychological variables—be they rooted in personality, cognitive, or small-group processes—can bias or distort the processing of policy-relevant information. The goal is to identify and minimize these potential sources of error and bias. Second, psychologists can contribute as experts on negotiation and social-influence processes. Here the focus shifts from the decision-making process to the actual dynamics of interstate bargaining and negotiation. The goal is to explore the psychological assumptions that policymakers rely on in choosing influence strategies and to assess the degree to which these assumptions are in accord with existing research evidence. Third, psychologists can contribute as experts on “assessment-at-a-distance” methodologies that permit the operationalization of psychological constructs from archival or historical records. Here the focus shifts from bargaining and negotiation processes in general to a concern with determining the power of psychological variables to predict the behavior of particular individuals (or collectivities) under specified circumstances. Such data can presumably then be fed directly into policy calculations.

I will examine examples of each of these forms of involvement in foreign policy. My purpose in doing so is neither to defend nor to condemn past efforts, although my remarks may on some occasions sound supportive and on others more critical. My objective is to acquaint a broad readership with the diverse ways in which psychological research findings may be helpful to policymakers who are charged with the extraordinarily complex task of managing relations with other states.

Procedural Advocacy

Procedural advocacy refers to efforts that aim at improving the quality of the foreign policy-making process (advising policymakers on *how* they should think) but that stop short of recommending that policymakers adopt particular arguments or proposals (advising policymakers on *what* they should think). Procedural advocacy can take a variety of forms (Axelrod, 1976; Fischhoff, Lichtenstein, Slovic, Derby, & Keeny, 1981; George, 1980; Janis, 1982; Janis & Mann, 1977; Jervis, 1976; Tetlock, 1983a). It is possible, however, to identify three guiding assumptions underlying all forms of procedural advocacy: (a) an im-

plicit or explicit normative model that specifies what high-quality or rational decision making looks like; (b) an empirically grounded analysis that specifies how psychological variables can lead to serious deviations from these normative models; and (c) the view that it is possible, through individual or organizational interventions, to reduce these psychological sources of error and bias.

Normative Models of High-Quality Decision Making

Substantial consensus exists on what constitutes high-quality or rational decision-making procedures (cf. Fischhoff et al., 1981; George, 1980; Janis & Mann, 1977). Decision makers need to consider a broad range of policy options, carefully appraise the potential consequences of these options, assess the relevance of these consequences to their basic values, squarely recognize conflicts that emerge among basic values, and display a willingness to revise their opinions in response to new evidence. Although no one claims that adherence to these rules guarantees a satisfactory outcome in any given situation, or that deviation from these rules automatically results in failure, most analysts of decision making agree that adherence to these rules does at least increase the probability of satisfactory outcomes, especially in complex, ambiguous, and changing environments.

Deviations From Normative Models

Substantial consensus also exists that actual decision making often falls far short of the demanding requirements of normative models. This evidence—which comes from such diverse methodological sources as laboratory experiments and simulations, personality assessment, content analyses of archival documents, and historical case studies—points to a number of ways in which psychological variables can produce sharp departures from rational-actor standards (for reviews, see George, 1980; Janis, 1982; Jervis, 1976; Tetlock, 1983b; Tetlock & McGuire, 1986). Evidence has accumulated that supports the following conclusions.

1. Personality needs and themes that bear no logical connection to foreign policy issues are systematically related to foreign policy preferences (Etheredge, 1978; Hermann, 1976; McClosky, 1967; Tetlock, 1981; Walker, 1983; Winter & Stewart, 1976). For instance, persons who score high on measures of dominance and power motivation are more likely to endorse hard-line postures toward other nations that are low scorers on these measures. Foreign policy attitudes often seem to be extensions of broader psychological or interpersonal dispositions.

2. Cognitive biases and errors that have been documented in laboratory work also emerge in foreign policy settings (Axelrod, 1976; George, 1980; Jervis, 1976; Lebow, 1981; Tetlock & McGuire, 1986). Although it is hard to estimate the pervasiveness of these biases and errors with precision, a growing body of work in political science provides numerous—and rather compelling—examples of the intrusion of cognitive shortcomings into high-level national security deliberations. Policymakers have been found to rely heavily on theory-driven as op-

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posed to data-driven processing of incoming evidence, to employ superficial and simplistic forms of analogical reasoning in drawing lessons from history, to be slow in recognizing political or situational constraints on the behavior of adversaries, to deny or avoid value tradeoffs inherent in many international relations problems, and to be excessively confident in the correctness of their judgments and predictions. To compound the problem, many of these errors or biases appear to be exacerbated in high-stress crisis situations, which frequently promote rigid, conceptually simple functioning (Hermann, 1972; Janis & Mann, 1977; Staw, Sandilands, & Dutton, 1981; Suedfeld & Tetlock, 1977).

3. Small-group dynamics—pressures toward conformity and ingroup cohesiveness—can restrict the range of policy options that decision-making groups consider, inhibit the expression of deviant viewpoints, and discourage thoughtful, self-critical analysis of popular viewpoints (George, 1980; Janis, 1982; Tetlock, 1979). In brief, interpersonal patterns of behavior that are activated in small groups often may amplify rather than correct biases that are rooted in individual cognitive and motivational processes.

This list is illustrative, certainly not exhaustive. It nonetheless captures the pessimistic tone of recent work on decision making in general and on foreign policy in particular. Decision makers are commonly depicted as cognitive misers (Fiske & Taylor, 1984) who rely on simple and fallible heuristics that permit them to make up their minds quickly and with confidence in the correctness of their decisions. Unfortunately, our understanding of judgmental shortcomings has advanced much more rapidly than our understanding of the extent to which these shortcomings can be overcome. Much of what has been written on improving the foreign-policy-making process is highly speculative.

Reduction of Psychological Sources of Error

What practical steps might be taken to minimize potential psychological impediments to high-quality decision making? Proposed solutions tend to reflect the theoretical orientation of the proposer. For example, a concern for the impact of personality variables on the decision-making process leads one to consider the feasibility of screening mechanisms designed to prevent certain types of individuals from achieving high office (Clark, 1971). A concern for cognitive limits on rationality leads one to consider decision aids that sensitize individual policymakers to the fallibility of their own judgment and that increase their awareness of and control over their own cognitive processes (Fischhoff et al., 1981). A concern for interpersonal and small-group constraints on rationality leads one to consider broader organizational reforms designed to increase incentives for complex and open-minded policy analysis (George, 1980; Janis, 1982).

When applied to foreign policy contexts, some proposed remedies are impractical. The idea of personality screening of high-level policymakers quickly comes into conflict with important political values and norms (e.g.,

in democracies, the right of elected officials to assume office and appoint the individuals who will control key governmental bureaucracies). Screening systems are also unlikely to be able to maintain even the pretense of ideological neutrality.

Other proposed remedies are more practical and deserve careful scrutiny. For instance, Axelrod (1976) has proposed using the cognitive mapping technique to assist policymakers in “externalizing” their implicit and explicit beliefs about causal relationships (what leads to what?) in foreign policy problems. Axelrod’s procedure may have a variety of beneficial consequences. It may facilitate detection of dubious hidden premises in arguments, serious gaps in knowledge, and errors of fact or logic embedded in key arguments. Systematically comparing the cognitive maps of different policymakers may also facilitate detection of exact points of disagreement and possible methods for resolving them.

A related technique, formal decision analysis, could play a similar role. Decision analysts would encourage those who make foreign policy (as they have encouraged many other types of policymakers) to decompose complex problems into constituent parts. Many psychological shortcuts in decision making would be blocked off as policymakers systematically tried to list (a) the variety of possible courses of action open to them; (b) the variety of possible consequences of each option and the likelihood of each consequence occurring; and (c) their evaluations of each consequence on a common utility metric (Raiffa, 1968). Decision analysis might be particularly useful in clarifying sources of disagreement among policymakers (e.g., factual versus value disagreements) as well as in assessing “bottom-line” differences in the expected utility that different policymakers attach to options (Hammond & Adelman, 1976).

Both cognitive mapping and formal decision analysis focus on fine-tuning the judgmental processes of individual decision makers. Alexander George (1980) and Irving Janis (1982) have offered procedural prescriptions that nicely complement these individual-level interventions. They have been concerned with fostering small-group and organizational norms that guarantee the representation of diverse points of view and evidence in the foreign-policy-making system. For instance, George’s multiple advocacy approach “accepts the fact that conflicts over policy and advocacy in one form or another are inevitable in a complex organization” (George, 1980, p. 193). The challenge is to make good use of such conflicts by creating and maintaining an institutional framework for structured, balanced debate among policy advocates drawn from different parts of the organization. Practically, multiple advocacy could go hand in hand with cognitive mapping and decision analysis. Multiple advocacy greatly expands the range of informational inputs into the cognitive systems of individual policymakers; cognitive mapping and decision analysis provide powerful tools for systematically representing and communicating in succinct form different perspectives on key issues. The two approaches jointly may well lead to a higher quality and

more complex decision-making process than is commonly observed—one in which a broad range of options are considered, the pros and cons of competing proposals are thoroughly aired, and difficult tradeoffs and ambiguities are candidly acknowledged rather than suppressed (cf. Tetlock, 1983c).

Reactions to proposals for procedural reform. To many psychologists, these procedural reforms may seem uncontroversial, even obvious. Many policymakers may, however, have the opposite reaction. The problems for which solutions are being proposed are not widely recognized or understood to be problems. The language of psychological analysis has yet to be absorbed into the language of the foreign-policy-making community in the same way that concepts of economic theory or deterrence theory have been absorbed. As a result, implementation of even modest procedural reform is likely to run into considerable, even steely, resistance. Psychologists bearing such advice should be prepared for often unenthusiastic receptions from the policy-making community. During the Kennedy administration, Dean Acheson bluntly told Richard Neustadt (a political scientist who suggested that the president should typically be exposed to many viewpoints prior to making decisions): “I know your theory. You think the President should be warned. You’re wrong. The President should be given confidence” (in Steinbruner, 1974, p. 332).

Advocates of procedural reform need to be sensitive to the hidden costs of adopting their recommendations (see George, 1980). Policymakers are extremely busy people who cannot afford to spend much time or energy on most decisions. Advice that requires time- and energy-consuming analysis and debate is practical for only the most important issues. Policymakers also want to keep bureaucratic and political infighting within their administrations to a tolerable minimum. Advice that requires highlighting serious disagreements (thereby magnifying their symbolic importance) may exacerbate intragovernmental conflict. For political and personal reasons, policymakers may often be reluctant to acknowledge the painful value tradeoffs that are implicit in many decisions. Advice that requires confronting these tradeoffs is therefore not likely to be popular. Finally, procedural advice may sometimes be too effective in sensitizing decision makers to the complexity of policy problems. It may lead decision makers to vacillate, to appear inconsistent to friends and foes alike, and to fail to act quickly in situations that call for prompt action. In many cases, it may indeed be better to rely on simple, easy-to-execute choice heuristics with clear-cut policy implications than to temporize in the hope of identifying a best or utility-maximizing solution (Jervis, 1982; Kleinmuntz & Kleinmuntz, 1981).

In brief, there are no magical procedural solutions that guarantee a wise and judicious foreign policy. In any given case, one must balance the benefits that are likely to accrue from vigilant, complex analysis against the personal and political costs of undertaking such analysis. Policymakers must decide how to decide (Einhorn & Ho-

garth, 1981; Payne, 1982). Psychologists who advocate procedural reform in foreign-policy-making systems need to make a strong case that (a) the problems that the reforms are designed to cure do actually exist; and (b) the “costs” of implementing the reforms are substantially outweighed by the effectiveness of the reforms in reducing serious blunders and miscalculations.

Generating Policy-Relevant Knowledge

Procedural advocates draw on psychological research on social judgment and decision making in designing proposals for improving the policy-making process. Procedural advocates generally stay neutral, however, on such politically sensitive questions as, What types of evidence and values should policymakers take into account in arriving at specific decisions? and How exactly should policymakers weight these considerations in arriving at final judgments? Procedural advocates can maintain neutrality on these issues because they focus on abstract threats to the rationality of the policy-making process—threats that, in principle, could affect the rationality of decision making in any domain of life. The question inevitably arises: In what ways can psychological knowledge be utilized to inform the *content* of foreign policy decisions?

I propose here that psychological theory and research can be harnessed not only to improve the policy-making process but also to improve the quality and soundness of the assumptions that policymakers rely on in deciding how to deal with specific states in the international system. Foreign-policy-makers can be thought of as intuitive influence theorists who spend much of their working lives attempting to influence, and being influenced by, the policy initiatives of other states. The influence tactics that policymakers adopt are profoundly colored by psychological and political assumptions they hold concerning (a) the most effective strategies for eliciting desired responses from other states and (b) the nature of other states and the probable responses of these states under various hypothetical contingencies. Errors or gaps in these guiding assumptions can lead to the adoption of influence tactics that prompt unexpected (and frequently very unwelcome) international responses (cf. George, 1980; George & Smoke, 1974; Jervis, 1976, 1982; Lebow, 1981).

In the next section, I consider some examples of ways in which behavioral science research can enrich the assumptions that have been used to guide and justify American policy toward the Soviet Union. I argue that the dominant matrix of guiding assumptions—loosely known as deterrence theory—represents a very limited and constrained way of thinking about the superpower relationship. A more comprehensive theory of international influence processes is needed—a differentiated theory (George, 1980; Pruitt, 1981) that takes into account the full range of influence tactics that are open to policymakers (competitive and coordinative) and that offers at least general guidelines concerning the conditions under which different tactics (or mixtures of tactics) are likely to be effective in protecting or advancing important

objectives.¹ In the succeeding section, I take up the problems that arise in applying general theories of influence processes to particular problems. Policymakers are typically not interested in the "truth content" of general psychological propositions; they want to know what policy will achieve desired results in a specific situation. The question here becomes, Can psychological concepts and research methods be used to bridge the inevitably large gap between the abstractions of theory and the concrete demands of praxis?

Toward a Comprehensive Theory of International Influence

Foreign policy is in its most fundamental sense the exercise of social influence. But that statement by itself is not very informative. Foreign-policy-makers face an enormous variety of influence tasks. To take a specific example, American policymakers in the post-World War II era have had a number of stated influence objectives in their dealings with the Soviet Union. Among other goals, they have sought to prevent the Soviet Union from launching a thermonuclear attack on the United States and its allies, to prevent the Soviet Union and its allies from using conventional forces to invade American allies, to prevent the Soviet Union from using low-level violence and political or economic instrumentalities to encroach on Western spheres of influence, and—as a long-term goal—to encourage gradual change in the nature of the Soviet Union itself.

Deterrence theory. One or another variant of deterrence theory has provided the conceptual underpinnings of American policy toward the Soviet Union (Brodie, 1946, 1959; Brown, 1979; Kaufman, 1954; Weinberger, 1981; Woolsey, 1984). Although major doctrinal and policy disagreements exist, deterrence theorists tend to share the following assumptions: (a) The Soviet Union is an expansionist power willing to incur moderate—perhaps even substantial—risks to challenge American national security interests, (b) the Soviet Union can be deterred from "aggressive" action by threats of punishment (or threats of denial of gain) that lead the Soviet leadership to conclude that the expected utility of aggression is substantially lower than that of accepting the status quo, (c) generating this conclusion in the Soviet leadership requires a threat that, if enacted, is sufficiently large to make the consequences of aggression truly less attractive than those of accepting the status quo, and (d) generating this conclusion also requires that the Soviet leadership believe that the American leadership possesses both the resolve and capability to enact the threat—factors that jointly influence the *credibility* of the threat.

Deterrence theory has been tremendously influential in the policy-making community. It provides policymakers with a coherent, reasonably simple, and readily com-

municated rationale for making key national security decisions. From a social-psychological point of view, however, deterrence theory possesses serious limitations that circumscribe its usefulness as a general framework for foreign policy analysis (cf. George, 1980; George & Smoke, 1974; Lebow, 1981, 1983).

First, the theory presumes a definition of the problem that is at least debatable. Soviet foreign policy conduct is posited to spring from expansionist motives activated by vulnerable commitments, not from defensive or security concerns, as conflict spiral theorists maintain (Deutsch, 1983; Etzioni, 1962; Osgood, 1962; White, 1984). The theory also presumes an unchanging, unitary rational-actor model of the leadership of the adversary (cf. Allison, 1971)—what may well be the international analogue of the fundamental attribution error in person perception (Ross, 1977). Many historical observers have suggested that national governments typically consist of shifting political and bureaucratic coalitions that seek or oppose confrontation with other states for their own independent reasons (e.g., Jervis, Lebow, & Stein, 1985). An adequate theory of international influence would take into account the diverse ways in which the internal political dynamics of states can prompt them to challenge the status quo (Lebow, 1981) and the steps that defender states might take to minimize the "perceived need" to challenge the status quo.

A second, serious limitation is the theory's one-sided focus on threats as instruments of social influence. Policymakers have traditionally employed a much broader range of tactics in their efforts to shape the conduct of other states, including not only competitive tactics (such as threats, faits accomplis, and ultimatums) but also coordinative tactics (such as proposing compromises, symbolic tension-reducing initiatives, and cooperation with third-party mediators) and mixed competitive-coordinative tactics (cf. Craig & George, 1983; Pruitt, 1981).

A third flaw, which flows directly from the previous two, is the insensitivity of many deterrence theorists to the potential negative side effects of a pure-threat policy (cf. Brehm, 1966; Deutsch, 1973; Kelman & Bloom, 1973; Lebow, 1981; White, 1984). Threats may activate interrelated psychological and political processes that actually increase the likelihood of aggression and war. Threats may do so by inducing psychological reactance (motivating the threatened party to assert its freedom to perform the forbidden act), by increasing the threatened party's concern for saving face in the eyes of domestic political and international audiences (it does not want to acquire a reputation for weakness), and by leading the threatened party to conclude that it is impossible to arrive at a stable *modus vivendi* with the source of the threat. Threats may also exacerbate the insecurity of the other side, thus triggering a conflict spiral of mutually escalating hostility and an arms race that culminates in a war that no one wants (Holsti, 1972; Kelman & Bloom, 1973; Lebow, 1981). Deterrence theory, however, largely ignores these issues; like many other theories, it is insensitive to its own boundary conditions.

¹ Although I focus on psychological assumptions of deterrence theory in general, detailed investigation is needed of the social influence assumptions underlying other policy formulations, including the Nixon-Kissinger détente strategy (George, 1980) and countervailing doctrines of nuclear deterrence (Jervis, 1984).

Fourth, and most crucial from a policy-making perspective, deterrence theory offers surprisingly little guidance in solving the multitude of specific problems that arise in devising actual threats to influence other states. With a few noteworthy exceptions (e.g., Schelling, 1960, 1966), the theory fails to address key questions such as the following:

1. How should one calibrate threats to specific situations? What are the costs—beyond possible losses in credibility—of relying on severe threats? How should one design threats to avoid provoking undesired responses from adversaries? On this latter point, for example, the research literature suggests that presenting threats as warnings (Snyder & Diesing, 1977) or as promises (Rubin & Lewicki, 1973) enhances their effectiveness. The literature also suggests that threats that appear “legitimate” in the eyes of an adversary (cf. Kelley, 1965) are more likely to induce compliance. Why do these relationships exist? Such findings certainly cannot be deduced from, and are difficult to assimilate into, a traditional deterrence framework.

2. In what ways should threats be combined and synchronized with coordinative policy initiatives such as concessions or other tension-reducing moves? Both laboratory research and archival research indicate that under a rather broad range of circumstances, a fair-but-firm reciprocity strategy works better than either a pure-threat or pure-appeasement posture—“works better” in the sense of triggering more mutually advantageous patterns of interaction (Axelrod, 1984; Druckman, 1983; Esser & Komorita, 1975; George, Hall, & Simon, 1971; George & Smoke, 1974; Leng & Wheeler, 1979; Lindsfold, 1978; Oskamp, 1971; Pruitt, 1981; Snyder & Diesing, 1977). Concessions in conjunction with firmness on the key issues (what Pruitt has called flexible-rigidity) frequently facilitate solutions to conflicts of interest that both parties prefer to continued or escalated competition. What explains the superiority of mixed influence strategies of this sort? Do properly timed concessions serve important face-saving functions that make it psychologically and politically easier for the other side to back down (George & Smoke, 1974; Kelman, 1982; Pruitt, 1981; Schlenker, 1980; Snyder & Diesing, 1977)? And what qualifications need to be attached to the above claims? Again, deterrence theory offers little help in answering these questions.

3. Finally, if deterrent threats are most effective when carefully calibrated and phrased and when integrated into an overall reciprocity strategy, how does one ensure that potential adversaries correctly interpret these threats? Too-subtle signals can be easily lost in the noise of surrounding dramatic events (Jervis et al., 1985). How does one ensure that potential adversaries heed all the facets of one’s multifaceted influence strategy? And how does one ensure that, if heeded, the different components of one’s strategy do not cancel each other out—that one’s concessions do not negate the impression of firmness and that one’s threats do not negate the impression of fairness? In brief, how does the beleaguered decision maker come

up with a mixed strategy that achieves the desired effects of deterrence but moderates the ill effects?²

Is there a viable alternative? Granting that deterrence theory possesses fundamental shortcomings, what can be offered in its place? Unfortunately, no full-grown alternative exists. The foregoing remarks do, however, illustrate that the general shape of an alternative has begun to emerge from the work of social psychologists and political scientists on bargaining and negotiation processes. The research literature points to the need for a much more complex theory of influence processes than traditional deterrence analyses provide—a theory that points to the need for different mixes of influence tactics in different historical-political situations. But, that said, it must be conceded that the research literature, too, has serious limitations. Available evidence is far from totally consistent (Druckman, 1983; Pruitt, 1981). Moreover, even if it were totally consistent, translating theoretical abstractions and empirical trends into specific policy proposals is no easy task. It is one thing to claim that a reciprocity strategy usually “works better” than rival strategies; it is another thing to claim that a reciprocity strategy is most appropriate in a particular political context. In Verba’s (1967) words, “generalizations fade when we look at particular cases” (p. 116). It is necessary to take into account the many circumstances unique to the case at hand, each circumstance a potential boundary condition for the “law” one wishes to apply. Caution is obviously in order, for the history of psychology abounds with examples of the main effects of today becoming the first- and second-order interaction effects of tomorrow (cf. Cronbach, 1975; Gergen, 1978).

Even if one could be reasonably confident that the general principle applied to a specific case, one would still confront the profound problem of implementing the reciprocity strategy. What exactly does it mean to say that the United States should pursue a reciprocity strategy in its dealings with the Soviet Union? Reciprocity can be operationalized in a seemingly infinite variety of ways. Does reciprocity mean adopting some variant of Osgood’s (1962) Graduated and Reciprocal Initiatives in Tension Reduction (GRIT) proposal, in which the United States attempts to initiate a de-escalation process through a series of carefully planned unilateral concessions? And what exactly should these concessions be—halting development of the MX missile, cessation of deployment of interme-

² Achieving a well-balanced mix of influence tactics is difficult in a world of conventionally armed states. Jervis (1984) made a powerful case that, if anything, the tensions between conflict and cooperation become even more acute in a nuclear world of mutual assured destruction. He argued that the tradeoffs created by the nuclear revolution are so stressful (e.g., the perceived need to use nuclear weapons for deterrence and the prospect of total destruction) that people have sought to escape from them in a variety of ways (e.g., seeking a perfect ballistic missile defense system, advocating total nuclear disarmament, supporting general freezes on current weapons systems and technologies, and developing doctrines espousing limited nuclear war that “conventionalize” nuclear weapons). Jervis suggested, however, that all proposed escapes are illusory and that no fully satisfactory resolution of the tensions may be possible.

diate-range nuclear missiles in Western Europe, announcement of a "no first use" policy, or, perhaps, all of the above (cf. Deutsch, 1983; White, 1984)? How do we know that in operationalizing the reciprocity strategy in a particular way, we have struck the right balance between conciliatoriness and resistance to exploitation? Presumably, some kind of corrective feedback mechanism needs to be built into the policy formula. How does one decide whether a given Soviet response is sufficiently conciliatory or refractory to warrant a response in kind?

In my opinion, psychologists are wise to avoid staking their professional credibility on particular policy proposals. Taking positions on such detailed issues requires extrapolating far beyond existing psychological knowledge and taking stands on highly ambiguous political and moral issues (e.g., What are the geopolitical intentions of the Soviet leadership? How great a risk of appearing too open to exploitation or too threatening should one take?).

Crisis prevention and management. Psychological theory and research does not lead directly to policy prescriptions; policy prescriptions rest on complex amalgams of psychological, political, and moral assumptions. Psychological theory and research do, however, highlight issues that prudent policymakers should take into account if those policymakers do indeed wish to avoid war in international confrontations. Alexander George's path-breaking research on crisis prevention and management is the best illustration of work in this vein. In discussing the practice of deterrence and compellence in international politics, George (1980) did not presume to tell policymakers whether they should use threats of force in specific situations. On the basis of his own inductive-historical research, he did, however, identify several generic problems that policymakers need to solve if they are to be successful in tailoring a strategy of deterrence or compellence to specific situations. For instance, he identified six classes of considerations that need to be addressed by policymakers who contemplate the use of coercive tactics to shape the behavior of other states:

1. What are the risks of presenting an explicit or implicit ultimatum that specifies a deadline for compliance? Can the risks be controlled?
2. How does one deal with the conflict between the need to pressure the opponent into compliance (for example, cease invading a particular nation) and the requirement of effective crisis management of slowing the pace of events to give the opponent time to evaluate the situation?
3. How should one calculate the timing of the threat to make certain it will be regarded as credible?
4. How should one calculate the timing of negotiations with the opponent?
5. How does one formulate a "carrot-and-stick" policy that makes compliance the most attractive option to the adversary? How threatening should the consequences of noncompliance be? How appealing should the consequences of compliance be?
6. How can rewards and threats be designed so that they do not interfere with each other?

Influence theorists such as George make a vital contribution by highlighting the complexity of the issues that must be confronted and the variety of "things that can go wrong" in making major foreign policy decisions. The products of such analyses are similar in important respects to "fault trees" that engineers use to assess the various ways in which complex physical systems can fail (cf. Fischhoff, Slovic, & Lichtenstein, 1978). Influence fault trees may eventually come to play an important troubleshooting role in the foreign policy field by sensitizing decision makers to gaps or omissions in their cognitive representations of policy problems.

At this point, however, it is important to recall the cognitive, emotional, and small-group processes that may make it difficult to cope with complex tradeoffs in choosing influence tactics. My discussion of error and bias in the decision-making process revealed a variety of psychological pressures to simplify policy problems. The discussion of influence processes complements this earlier discussion by pointing to specific ways in which psychological pressures to simplify issues can lead to serious miscalculations. Achieving a well-balanced mix of foreign policy influence tactics requires the ability and willingness to see events from different points of view (including that of one's opponent), to recognize tensions between important objectives, and to develop guidelines for resolving tensions between these objectives (cf. Lebow, 1983).³

Situational Diagnosis

Developing a theory of interstate influence that acknowledges the limitations of pure deterrence approaches is a step in the right direction. Policymakers should be sensitized to the wide range of influence tactics open to them and to the variety of contextual factors that can shape a target's responses to these tactics. Useful as such theory may be as a framework for organizing one's thinking about problems of foreign policy in general, it does not satisfy the needs of policymakers for guidance in coping with concrete real-world problems. How does one go about bridging or at least closing the conceptual void between general theoretical analyses of influence processes and policy debates over the best strategies for dealing with specific states at specific times?

Theoretical analyses of social influence yield, at best, conditional generalizations for selecting influence strategies. Under one set of conditions, policymakers should emphasize one type of strategy; under another set of circumstances, they should emphasize another type of strategy. But such advice begs the question of how one determines whether the preconditions for adopting a given strategy are actually met in a given situation. What conceptual model, for instance, best fits current American-Soviet relations: some form of deterrence or conflict spiral

³ Even assuming that one knows what would constitute a well-balanced foreign policy, one still faces the extraordinarily difficult task of rallying and maintaining domestic political support for such a policy (George, 1980). This problem raises a whole new set of complex social-psychological issues beyond the scope of this article.

model? Is the Soviet Union an expansionist power prepared to take large risks to achieve highly ambitious goals (cf. R. Osgood, 1981; Wildavsky, 1983)? Or is the Soviet Union best thought of as a conservative status quo power preoccupied with minimizing internal or external threats to its own security (cf. White, 1984)? Or is the Soviet foreign policy guided by some complex mixture of defensive and opportunistic offensive motives? The answers one provides to these questions have important implications for the relative importance one attaches to deterrence versus reassurance in designing a foreign policy strategy toward the Soviet Union.

To what extent can behavioral science research methods help to clarify such important psychological "unknowns" in foreign policy debates? Is it possible to develop empirical techniques that permit one to assess the comparative validity of the psychological premises that underlie competing policy proposals? Cautious optimism appears to be warranted. A rich variety of assessment-at-a-distance methodologies have been developed in the last 15 years that permit investigators to operationalize psychological constructs such as images of the enemy, motivational themes, and cognitive style from archival data sources such as interviews and speeches (for reviews, see Hermann, 1976; Tetlock, 1983b). Applications of these techniques to specific foreign policy settings raise the (perhaps naive) promise of reformulating, in much more tractable, empirical terms, the often polemical exchanges between advocates of competing policy positions. For example, conflicting motivational attributions for Soviet conduct may to a considerable extent be reducible to different methods of interpreting the action-reaction dynamics of American-Soviet relations (e.g., How do the Soviets respond to seemingly conciliatory or threatening American policy initiatives?) and to different methods of reading expressed Soviet perceptions and goals in official publications (e.g., How much weight should one attach to the statements of different sources in different time periods?).⁴

American-Soviet interactions. One promising application of systematic research methods (especially content analysis) has been to the study of American-Soviet interactions. The general goal of work in this area has been to explore interdependencies between the rhetoric and policy initiatives of the two superpowers. Available evidence is encouraging to advocates of some form of reciprocity strategy in American dealings with the Soviet

Union. The evidence quite consistently indicates that conciliatory behavior tends to elicit accommodative responses and that belligerent behavior tends to elicit refractory responses. For example, this was the general finding of Gamson and Modigliani (1970) in their study of American-Soviet relations between 1945 and 1963. Compatible results emerged from Jensen's (1984) analyses of negotiating tactics in strategic arms control talks between 1969 and 1979 (concessions tend to elicit concessions), Leng's (1984) analyses of links between American threats of force in crises and Soviet reactions (threats of force trigger responses in kind; carrot-and-stick policies with less specific threats trigger more accommodative Soviet responses), and Tetlock's (1985; Tetlock & McGuire, 1985) time-series analyses of links between the foreign policy rhetoric and actions of the superpowers between 1945 and 1983 (less integratively complex rhetoric by one side elicits less integratively complex rhetoric from the other side; less complex rhetoric by a given side is also associated with an increased likelihood of that side undertaking major military-political interventions in other countries and a decreased likelihood of arriving at mutually acceptable agreements or treaties with the other superpower).

These results suggest that some form of reciprocity dynamic characterizes American-Soviet relations. But the results are far from conclusive. Skeptics can challenge, for example, the act-classification rules used by past (predominantly liberal) investigators. The skeptics might argue that tactical retreats or concessions extracted as a result of Western resolve or strength should not be classified as conciliatory. Soviet foreign policy goals, in this view, do not change; only the tactics vary. Such objections raise difficult conceptual and methodological issues that need clarification. What rules should guide act classification? In what ways do the act-classification rules of deterrence and conflict spiral observers differ? What, if anything, would hardline deterrence theorists accept as evidence of conciliatory Soviet behavior? Research on American-Soviet interaction has not yet confronted these questions, but sophisticated theoretical and methodological tools do exist for exploring possible answers (e.g., the act-frequency model of Buss & Craik, 1983). At a minimum, work on these questions would raise the quality of the debate on influence strategy in American-Soviet relations. Observers of such debates would be in a much better position to specify exact points of disagreement between models and to assess the degree to which advocates of competing models have advanced falsifiable versions of their positions.

Soviet leadership. Behavioral science research methods can also be applied to the study of trends over time and to individual differences in the Soviet leadership (cf. Bialer, 1981; Breslauer, 1984; Dallin, 1981; Hermann, 1980; R. Hermann, 1985; Hough, 1981; Stewart, Warhola, & Blough, 1983). The materials that such studies have to work with are necessarily sparse (e.g., limited biographical information, public statements); nonetheless, these studies can be suggestive of interesting trans-

⁴ Conflicting attributions of Soviet intentions are not, of course, entirely reducible to clashing interpretations of foreign policy behavior and rhetoric. Debates also focus on the proper inferences to be drawn from Soviet conventional and nuclear force configurations. These debates, although often highly technical in nature, can be usefully viewed from a psychological perspective. Major asymmetries exist in the American and Soviet arsenals—asymmetries that can be traced to the different histories, geographies, and technological capabilities of the two powers. These asymmetries, in turn, create enormous obstacles to the negotiation of mutually acceptable understandings in arms control. As Steinbruner (1985) noted, there are powerful psychological and political pressures on both sides to emphasize asymmetries that work to one's disadvantage and to downplay asymmetries that work to one's advantage.

formations and perhaps cleavages in elite Soviet opinion. Public commitments to particular perceptions or values may not represent the true perceptions and values of the speaker. But such statements do represent consequential political acts that commit the speaker to particular positions in the eyes of important domestic and international audiences (cf. Graber, 1976). As such, these statements may provide valuable clues to future directions in Soviet policy and likely Soviet reactions to various types of Western initiatives.

For example, we still know disconcertingly little about intergenerational differences in Soviet policy preferences—a topic that assumes great importance as the cohort of leaders who acquired high positions in the late Stalin era rapidly relinquishes power to the Gorbachev generation. To what extent do significant intergenerational differences in attitudes exist toward détente, economic reform, arms control, political liberalization, and a host of more specific domestic and international issues? To what extent do significant intergenerational differences exist in style or sophistication of thought (cf. Bialer, 1980; Hough, 1981)? Are the foreign policy objectives of the younger generation likely to be more or less ambitious than those of its predecessors? In a major crisis, would the new generation of leaders be more or less prone to raise the stakes and pursue a highly competitive influence strategy in dealings with the United States? Why might such intergenerational effects exist (e.g., the need of a new leadership to establish its legitimacy via external triumphs, the need to place higher priority on solving domestic economic and social problems than on foreign policy, the dimming memory of World War II, different political socialization experiences)?

If we know little about intergenerational differences in outlook, we know even less about individual differences within generations. The new political leaders of the Soviet Union—Gorbachev, Shevardnadze, Chebrikov, Ryzhkov and so forth—are the subject of much speculation, but little of it is systematic. Application of research techniques such as content analysis (qualitative or quantitative) and expert ratings of personality and political style based on biographical data would help to clarify what is and is not known of Soviet leaders (cf. Hermann, 1980; Stewart et al., 1983; Tetlock, 1986). Knowledge generated from these techniques should not, moreover, be regarded as a mere foreign policy frill. Ultimately, American leadership choices of policy tactics for influencing the Soviet Union rest on implicit or explicit psychopolitical assessments of the Soviet leadership.

Conclusions

No neat, nonarbitrary line divides psychological issues from political and moral issues. Making policy decisions requires taking stands on subtle mixtures of factual issues (some of which rest on psychological judgments, others on political ones) and moral issues (which require setting priorities among objectives and standards of acceptable risk). I have argued here that psychologists can make important contributions to foreign policy debates in their

capacities as psychologists—that existing theory and research findings can shed considerable light on the psychology of the policy-making process and on the validity of the psychological assumptions that guide policy decisions. But complete value neutrality is an illusion. Psychologists who bring existing knowledge to the attention of the policy-making community are committing a political act with potential political consequences. The general objective—improving the quality of foreign policy decisions—is uncontroversial, even platitudinous; nonetheless, much room for argument exists over what constitutes improvement and over what forms of psychological involvement are likely to promote improvement.

The proposals advanced in this article, like all efforts at social problem solving, are predicated on a complex blend of psychological, political, and moral assumptions (Lynn, 1978). I have tentatively assumed, for example, that improving the quality of the policy-making process and the soundness of the knowledge that decision makers rely on to create policy will reduce the likelihood of serious miscalculations that unnecessarily magnify or exacerbate international conflict. Skeptics might well note, however, the enormous difficulties that arise in thoroughly defending this proposition. How exactly does one determine whether the decision-making process is of “high quality”? How exactly does one go about operationalizing procedural reforms such as multiple advocacy that are designed to ensure high-quality decision making? Who decides, for example, how wide a range of viewpoints should be represented in a policy-making system? By what criteria should that decision be made? (How unreasonable must a position be to be dismissed summarily?) At what point do the costs of procedural reforms outweigh their likely benefits? How exactly does one assess the soundness of the psychological and political assumptions underlying foreign policy decisions? How does one assess the degree to which psychological advice has achieved its stated objective of reducing the likelihood of “serious miscalculations that unnecessarily magnify or exacerbate international conflict”? What constitutes an unnecessary magnification of conflict? Does not the answer depend, at least in part, on what one deems to be vital national interests? Is any national interest important enough to justify an increased likelihood of war—in particular, nuclear war? Is the problem fundamentally a moral-political one (policymakers hold the “wrong” values and are too tolerant of the risks of war), a psychopolitical one (policymakers hold faulty or simplistic assumptions about the international environment and how best to cope with it), or a systemic-technological one (given the anarchic nature of the international system and the momentum of technological development of weapons systems, policymakers are doing the best they can in an “irrational” situation). Perhaps the truth is best represented by some combination of these alternatives.

It is appropriate to close with such a list of questions, some of which just may not be answerable, others of which may possess only partial or vague answers. Our understanding of how psychological knowledge can be applied

to the solution of real-world dilemmas of foreign policy remains incomplete. It is unrealistic, moreover, to expect productive research psychologists to drop what they are doing and rush to apply their skills to these issues. Interest in foreign policy issues appears to be cyclical in the psychological research community, waxing and waning with the level of tension in the international environment. Such intermittent interest is not adequate to sustain the types of cumulative theoretical and research efforts necessary to develop and apply policy-relevant knowledge to problems of international relations.

What is needed is much more encouragement of interdisciplinary training and research projects that bring together scholars with complementary forms of expertise. The field requires the active participation of basic psychological researchers (individuals whose work currently bears on foreign policy concerns only at an abstract level, such as a concern with decision making or social influence processes), experts in political science and international relations (whose work has yielded insights into how psychological variables shape foreign policy outcomes in interaction with variables at other levels of analysis), and "area" experts (whose work focuses on the cultural, political, and economic systems of the nation states that are the objects of foreign policy). Perhaps most important, if such collaborative interdisciplinary work is to have an impact on the actual conduct of foreign policy, a new type of specialist is needed. A number of writers (Lynn, 1978; Masters, 1984) have noted the serious problems that arise in forging links between behavioral science research findings and social policy and have argued for the emergence of a new professional role: the policy liaison specialist, whose task is to assist policymakers in translating the theoretical and empirical work of academic writers into specific proposals. As I have shown, the work of such specialists will not be easy. Formidable conceptual and methodological obstacles exist simply to extrapolating solutions to particular problems from general theory or aggregate data. The more we come to understand these difficulties, the more we come to understand the limited, but nonetheless real, relevance of the psychological literature and the forms that responsible advocacy on foreign policy issues can take.

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