

Wisdom and Good Judgment in Politics

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The job of the political leader requires, in the view of classical writers, unique sensibilities to assure good political judgment and wisdom. Two characteristics that may define a sui generis nature of political decision-making include tasks of: 1) Responding to emotional demands of mass publics; 2) Dealing with amoral and unusually ambitious people. In addition, the study of political judgment involves two further issues unique to politics: 3) Working with people who think in ideological schema; and 4) Institutional settings designed to shape outcomes of decisions. Classic political theorists have often recommended antithetical decision algorithms as a basis for good political judgment. Two major disagreements concern the alleged Darwinian advantage of amoral Machiavellian decision algorithms and structural realist perceptions of international politics. Current research suggests Machiavellian and structural realist theories are misleading and rationalize behavior that is both more dangerous and irrational, and more hopeful, than they portray.

KEY WORDS: wisdom; good judgment; decision-making; Machiavelli; legislature.

It almost looks as if analysis were the third of those impossible professions in which one can be quite sure of unsatisfying results. The other two, much older-established, are the bringing-up of children and the government of nations . . . —Sigmund Freud (1937)

A problem that strikes one in the study of history, regardless of period, is why man makes a poorer performance of governments than of almost any other human activity. In this sphere, wisdom—meaning judgment acting on experience, common sense, available knowledge, and a decent appreciation of probability—is less operative and more frustrated than it should be.—Barbara W. Tuchman (1980)

INTRODUCTION

Wisdom is good judgment about important matters. Its fullest political expression is statesmanship: enduring decisions that restructure systems so that, for the long term, the world begins to work better for everyone.

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There are no well-established databases of wise political leaders (Simonton, 1984, 1987; Cronbach, 1955, 1958 for methodological discussions.) However, the list of historian Barbara Tuchman is suggestive: it includes Pericles "who ruled with authority, moderation, sound judgment, and a certain nobility that imposes natural dominion over others" in the Golden Age of Athens; Julius Caesar, Marcus Aurelius, and the other Antonines in the best days of the Roman Empire; Charlemagne, who "was able to impose order upon a mass of contending elements, to foster the arts of civilization no less than those of war and to earn a prestige supreme in the Middle Ages"; the American Founding Fathers ("fearless, high-principled, deeply versed in ancient and modern political thought, astute and pragmatic, unafraid of experiment, and . . . convinced of man's power to improve his condition through the use of intelligence" and who, "to a degree unique in the history of revolutions, applied careful and reasonable thinking.") (Tuchman, 1980)²

Tuchman's list is brief, and its brevity makes explicit the puzzle both Tuchman (and Freud) suggest in the passages cited at the beginning of this article. Why are good judgment and wisdom—and learning that ought, in the long term, to lead to these characteristics—so rare (Etheredge, 1981; Etheredge & Short, 1983, Breslauer & Tetlock, 1991; Deutsch, 1963)?

I will discuss good political judgment as an art as well as a science. A leader is able to do more than select from pre-existing choices: vision, and newly created agreements (in the forms of laws, coalitions, norms, and policies) may shape an attractive future from a broadly formless array of half-developed (even contradictory) possibilities and the multivariate statistical indeterminacy that social science methods and forecasts, alone, portray. And whatever analytic and scientific understanding is desirable, a politician's capacities for an intuitive and emotionally sensitive understanding of people—like an artist's understanding of materials—may be critical to success (Labouvie-Vief, 1990; Baltes & Smith, 1990; Orwoll & Perlmutter, 1990; Kramer, 1990).

This review, of good *political* judgment, concentrates upon one variable (and explanation) in the broader study of judgment, the idea that requirements for

²Articulate presentations may be critical to influence in future generations: Pericles' Funeral Oration, the writings of the Founding Fathers, Julius Caesar's accounts of his wars in Gaul are examples. The absence of Asian rulers (cultures whose wisdom may be spiritual rather than political) in Tuchman's list suggests the need for rigorous analysis of ethnocentric or other selection biases.

Several components, including the successful use of violence to acquire or maintain influence, are present in the list: Tuchman is speaking of a compound of wisdom and worldly success in persuading (sometimes, with the sword) the unwise. Political wisdom (it is said) is also found in the sayings of fools and jesters (Kaiser, 1973), solitary prophets such as Nietzsche's Zarathustra (Nietzsche, 1986), and independent critics such as Socrates (proclaimed by the Delphic oracle the wisest of men—and executed by his polity) (Robinson, 1990). Political wisdom may be partly independent from spiritual wisdom—sound and serene judgment about life—and partly independent, too, from wisdom in marriage, raising children, or different professions. See Edwards, 1967; Encyclopedia Britannica, 1952, Sternberg, 1990, Blanshard, 1967; Holliday, 1986.

good judgment and wisdom are a function of the type of problem (Etheredge, 1981; Rose, 1976; Emery & Trist, 1975; March, 1978; Haas, 1990). Specifically, I will review classic analyses that the work of a political leader is *sui generis*. That work is to govern—mass publics, and (perhaps more difficult) other ambitious men—and requires special perceptions of human nature and decision algorithms. It may also require special safeguards as well because political work is open to unusual temptations (such as of secrecy, the corrosive and self-deceiving vanity Lord Acton warned against in his famous dictum, or the use of violence to remove unsatisfactory constraints.³ I will then discuss evidence assessing whether traditional recommendations, especially of Machiavellians and structural realists, are reliable guides.

IS POLITICAL JUDGMENT *SUI GENERIS*?

I will organize an analysis of the unique character of political decisions around four themes: the emotional needs of mass publics; the requirements for dealing with ambitious and unprincipled men; the puzzle of ideological reasoning; the role of institutional design to improve political outcomes.

Emotional Needs of Mass Publics

In his classic study of political anthropology, Sir James Frazer argued the superiority of political leaders who were brilliant, and masterful, con artists. This was a requirement, he felt, because the political leader's job embodied unique and strong public expectations far greater than ordinary human knowledge, or government itself, could fulfill (Frazer, 1922; Hare, 1985; Edelman, 1964, 1977; DeGrazia, 1948; Bennett, 1988). For example, Frazer argues political leaders have always been obligated to assure economic prosperity and respond to the intense demand of the populace that its leaders influence supernatural forces and assure the economic well-being of the tribe:

[I]n Africa the king has often been developed out of the public magician, and especially out of the rain-maker . . . But if the career of a magician and especially of a rain-maker offers great rewards to the successful practitioner of the art, it is beset with many pitfalls . . . for where the people firmly believe that he has it in his power to make the rain to fall, the sun to shine, and the fruits of the earth to grow, they naturally impute drought and dearth to his culpable negligence or willful obstinacy, and they punish him accordingly. Hence in Africa the chief who fails to procure rain is often exiled or killed. (Frazer, 1922, pp. 99–100)⁴

³A classic component of wisdom may be especially desirable in politics: the ability to know the boundaries of what conditions cannot be changed.

⁴Evidence from Edward Tufte, and other political scientists, show healthy performance of the economy remains a primary obligation of American presidents, with a critical effect upon whether an incumbent retains office or is defeated.

Frazer's analysis is especially suggestive because we now know (as did Jung, when he analyzed the practice of alchemy) there are no scientific justifications for centuries of rain-dance ceremonies. Yet the core of good judgment and wisdom in practical politics was to be smart enough, and honest enough (with *oneself*) to know that one's job included conning and manipulating the public to respond to these needs and demands. Therein (Frazer thought) was hope for progress, for both the people and their leaders alike, for self-aware deceivers would learn (and change eagerly): "Certainly no men ever had stronger incentives in the pursuit of truth than these savage sorcerers," wrote Frazer:

To maintain at least a show of knowledge was absolutely necessary; a single mistake detected might cost them their life. This no doubt led them to practice imposture for the purpose of concealing their ignorance; but it also supplied them with the most powerful motive for substituting a real for a sham knowledge, since, if you would appear to know anything, by far the best way is actually to know it . . . However justly we may . . . condemn the deceptions which they have practiced on mankind, the original institution of this class of men has, take it all in all, been productive of incalculable good to humanity. . . . (1922, pp. 71-72).

Frazer's theory that the effective manipulation of public drama is a critical component of political success received its most eloquent humanistic expression by Dostoyevsky's Grand Inquisitor, who argued that mass publics demand of their leaders magic, mystery, and an assured group unity of common worship. The Grand Inquisitor—speaking to a returned Christ witnessing the Inquisition—also argued that spiritual wisdom was antithetical to success in the world of politics, as the two paths follow from opposite answers to the three temptations Satan offered to Christ. True spiritual leaders reject, but political leaders embrace the promise of dominion over all the nations and peoples of the Earth, rule by magical power or the pretense of magical power, a relationship based upon providing economic benefit (bread alone). (Dostoyevsky, 1976; Edelman, 1964, 1974; Etheredge, 1990).

The perception of an inherent conflict between the decision rules that lead to political success and the nobler and higher values statesmen might ideally pursue has been long-standing. Most classical political theorists were deeply skeptical of mass publics and democracies (Pool, 1967). The "higher" sensibility required of the wise leader—freer from the socialized embeddedness, false values, and preoccupations of uneducated (albeit democratic) mass publics—is a recurring image in political thought. In different forms, the common solution—from Plato and Machiavelli, to Confucius, to the Public Policy movement in American higher education—is that the recruitment and training of future rulers should be conceived as a profession, requiring knowledge and unique perspectives above those of ordinary men. Superior people should be induced to enter public life, educated by leading institutions for this role, and should be guided by such professional sensibilities and not by popular beliefs, rewards, or the slings and

arrows of the political marketplace, although such leaders should give the appearance of honoring these popular values (e.g., Tuchman, 1980; Moore, 1970; Huang, 1981).⁵

Ambitious, Ruthless, Unprincipled Opponents

The second distinction of political judgment is that it involves ambitious men and what they value most—power, money, and status. A political leader deals with atypical, and sometimes dangerous, people whose true motives and character may not be openly displayed to him. Uneasy lies the head that wears a crown: many wish to wear it or conspire to manipulate a ruler for their own ends (Meltsner, 1990).

Frazer's (1922, p. 1) opening scene, in the sacred grove of Diana, provides his own vivid reminder that political office-holders' decisions are typically made in intensely competitive (and often unforgiving) arenas and require expertise in such environments:

In this sacred grove there grew a certain tree round which at any time of the day, and probably far into the night, a grim figure might be seen to prowl. In his hand he carried a drawn sword, and he kept peering warily about him as if at any instant he expected to be set upon by an enemy. He was a priest and a murderer; and the man for whom he looked was sooner or later to murder him and hold the priesthood in his stead. Such was the rule of the sanctuary. A candidate for the priesthood could only succeed to office by slaying the priest, and having slain him, he retained office till he was himself slain by a stronger or a craftier.

Stark warnings in this tradition also give similar counsel for the conduct of international politics. For example, Table I is an outline of a simple structural realist story of international politics, a baseline of perceived repetition beginning in the year 1495 and extending throughout most of the 20th century (Goldstein, 1988).⁶

The decision-making of nation states, in this tradition, is imagined to be very different from people who might be drawn from a representative sample of the population. By comparison, nation-states are at the extreme of high and single-minded motivation for power, money, and status. They have no moral principles and are completely Machiavellian and opportunistic. They have no affiliation motivation or love or genuine idealism. Each lives in a fearful world, surrounded by potential predators like itself.

⁵A new theory of effective political manipulation of mass publics can be developed from Kahneman et al., 1982 and Kull, 1988. Concerning evidence of cognitive processing in mass (democratic) publics, see Sniderman et al., 1991.

⁶For simplicity I use "structural realist" as a common term, grouping realists, Neo-Realists, Machiavellians, *Realpolitik*, and other tough-minded analyses.

Table I. Cycles of Hegemonic War: 1495-1991

	War		
	Thirty Years	Napoleonic	WW I & II
Loser	Hapsburgs	France	Germany
New Leader (economically strongest, winning coalition)	Netherlands	Britain	U. S.
Eventual challenger (winning coalition, but economically devastated by last war)	France	Germany	U.S.S.R.

The drama these insecure maximizers have created during the past 500 years can be summarized in three and a half acts:

Act 1

In the first act, 1495 to 1648, the Hapsburg family, linking Vienna and Madrid, seeks to dominate the rest of Europe—and everyone else maneuvers to prevent them from doing so. The conflict becomes especially fierce because of the Hapsburgs' Catholicism and the Protestantism of the European states opposed to them.

The final showdown with the Hapsburgs—and their defeat—is the exhausting series of wars, grouped as the Thirty Years War, ended by the Treaty of Westphalia in 1648.

Act 2

In a repeated pattern, the exhaustion and devastation of the Great Power hegemonic wars now creates the opportunity for the least exhausted member of the winning coalition (here, the Netherlands) to expand its influence. But it lacks the natural endowments to become the new long-term hegemon. As they rebuild, France and England increasingly compete with one another for this position. The second act reaches its climax in Napoleon's bold effort to break out of a normal framework of interstate relations and secure hegemony by conquering the rest of Europe. It ends with his defeat at Waterloo in 1815 and the Congress of Vienna.

Act 3

The third act is the rise of Britain—the least exhausted member of the winning coalition against Napoleon—to world leadership. The eventual chal-

lenger for hegemony is a unified, industrializing Germany. World Wars I and II are two phases of the same war—a prolonged contest between Germany's hegemonic ambitions and the efforts of other nations to contain Germany.

Act 4

Act 4 opens with America (the least exhausted member of the winning alliance and producing 40% of the world's GNP) emerging as the new world leader.

In its new role America—like Britain in the 19th century—has engaged almost continually in conflicts on the periphery of its spheres of influence. These brushfire and proxy wars, and covert operations, have been directed primarily against its emerging rival, the U.S.S.R. and its allies. Like Britain (or, earlier, the Romans) America has also located many of its own troops in forward deployment along the frontiers.

Such, at least, is one deeply mistrustful perception of world politics. If the historical pattern held, the U.S. and U.S.S.R. should be heading toward a showdown with each other, with nuclear weapons (a failure of prediction to which I return below).

Two additional features of political judgment also deserve brief mention: the puzzling recycling of ideological themes and research to improve the institutional settings and formal procedures of collective judgment.

Ideological Arguments

The third unique attribute of political decisions is the recurring ideological organization of many arguments in political arenas. The numerous theories of ideology are still unsatisfactory to explain the persistence and intractability of such impassioned, ritualized, mutually antithetical, and overly simple schema, and why these are so prominent in politics but not in other realms.⁷

Traditionally, this mystery has seemed difficult to explore fruitfully, especially given theories that conservatives and liberals disagree (for example) because of different values—personal preferences that afforded little opportunity for useful scientific discussion—and other theories that suggest inherent bad faith (for example, disguised class or economic interest) (Rokeach, 1973; Thompson et al., 1990).

But, a new line of investigation has suggested a Frazer-like analysis of the

⁷A project supported by the National Science Foundation in the late 1970s argued that better public policy results—good judgment and wisdom—could be achieved if these recycling ideological schema could be engaged by social scientific methods (Etheredge, 1981; also Rose, 1976).

problem—that is, that ideologies are unique in their invocation of counseling sensibilities to design remedial agendas that alter the mass psychology of authority relationships (Etheredge, 1984, 1990, in press). Thus (for example) President Reagan's policies for economic growth were designed to alter modal American personality that (in the view of Republicans) had become too passive and dependent upon government and a growing welfare state.⁸ Changing the national political drama of individuals' relations to government, and the restoration of self-confidence, were injunctions with a moral imperative—pursued for more than a decade—and thought essential to restore energy and entrepreneurial spirit for economic growth.

This new model of ideology recognizes that conservatives advance testable hypotheses about *other* people's behavior (e.g., strong imagery of government, and associated emotional ties, should be present if the extraordinary backward linkages, hypothesized by Republicans and affecting personality structure, have been produced and sustained by the growth of the welfare state.) Thus the validity of conservative economic policies can now be tested through national probability samples and either validated scientifically or dismissed. Whatever the cause, it is striking that such a decade-long project to alter and manipulate the modal personality of citizens and voters has occurred without a single government (or National Academy of Science, or National Science Foundation) study that would be acceptable to the scientific community. The persistence of (untested) ideological models in the design of policy for a multitrillion dollar economy is perhaps the most prominent recent example of the phenomenon of puzzling unwisdom discussed by Tuchman at the beginning of this essay: about such issues it would be good judgment, eventually, to test reality.

Institutional Improvements and Safeguards

A fourth characteristic of political decisions—their institutional setting—deserves brief mention. Throughout a long history government institutions have gradually been designed to minimize certain types of administrative, regulatory, and judicial risks: safeguards include due process of law; separation of powers; electoral accountability; a free press, the expansion of legal rights to participate, appeal, and benefit. These and other similar changes in formal decision processes are part of the story of Western political theory since Magna Carta in 1215. Today, except for major foreign policy choices (images of heroic presidents notwithstanding), most government decisions are collective and adopted through formal procedures that honor at least the appearance of fairness and

⁸The syndrome cited by conservatives also includes dependent complaining, the weakening of strong and healthy individuals in a modern "liberal way of life" of rising divorce, stagnation in worker productivity, an erosion of work ethic in schools, rising drug use, and related symptoms.

legitimacy (Thibault and Walker, 1975).⁹ Many of these institutional designs involve theories of common baseline errors and debiasing procedures that remain only partly tested by scientists (e.g., Hastie et al., 1983; Dahl & Lindblom, 1973; George, 1972, 1980; Destler, 1972; Quandt & Triska, 1990; Calabresi & Bobbitt, 1978).

Of recent research, a detailed study by Muir (1982) is a pioneering application of social and cognitive psychology to improve institutional designs of democratic legislatures. Muir's dependent variables are criteria for good decision-making in democratic politics drawn from James Madison in *The Federalist*: (1) Patriotism (a wide identification with the entire populace, not merely one's own district); (2) A love of justice (politics involves deal-making and practical compromises among competing principles—thus, Madison and Muir are concerned with making fair compromises and deals, and the skills to manage conflict and negotiate fairly in an open, conflict-ridden process); (3) Wisdom (conceived to be "a sense of statecraft . . . knowing how to build a consensus around a good idea" and patience with the time, application, and skill necessary to fashion a changed consensus in a democratic process). The caution of classic writers—that formally democratic institutions may not naturally make very wise choices—is still timely and well-made—and the new ground opened for the study of democratic legislatures is a hopeful beginning.

Muir's initial study outlined a wide range of structural and social-psychological variables. Unfortunately, for scientific purposes, the California Legislature was (in Muir's account) the "best democratic legislature in the country" and thus there was too little variation to test the model fully. Especially intriguing (for further research) is Muir's observation (p. 11), as the book went to press, that the "golden age" of the California Legislature had encountered a reversal of fortune—a shift that does not seem to have been predicted by the model and that suggests other variables affecting decision outcomes can be discovered in time series and comparative analyses.

I now turn to two continuing, and unresolved, arguments: the desirable (or undesirable) role for morality and the alleged wisdom of structural realist tough-mindedness in international politics. I discuss both issues in turn.

CLASSIC ALGORITHMS, MODERN EVIDENCE

Morality: Machiavelli, Weber, Muir

Among political theorists, Machiavelli was forthright in his perception that people drawn into a political arena often showed no ethical restraint and his

⁹Studies of major business decisions suggest a modal decision process of about one year and, except for foreign policy questions, the American government seldom moves more quickly—Hickson, 1987.

advice that none should be shown in return: "Any man who tried to be good all the time is bound to come to ruin among the great number who are not good. Hence a prince who wants to keep his post must learn how not to be good, and use that knowledge, or refrain from using it, as necessity requires" (Machiavelli, 1977, p. 44).

Machiavelli's urgings of objectivity and realism about political motivation are perennial counsels to those who would be wise. But his cynical analysis of political relationships, ruthless spirit, and amoral calculus are less universal in the classic discussions of wisdom. And they have been directly opposed to theorists who argue the reverse, that it is *good* moral character, personal integrity (in the tradition of Pericles of Athens), and an appreciation of man's highest potential that are the basis for good political judgment (Kagan, 1990; Burns, 1978; Beiner, 1983).

In recent decades, the ability, developed by Christie and others, to measure a Machiavellian constellation of attitudes offers the possibility of shedding light on the political superiority of Machiavellians (e.g., Geis, 1974). And recent theorists have developed a specific alternate theory, in the classic "good character" tradition, that empathy, a tragic sense of life, and an integrated morality of civic coercion—not cold cynicism, ruthlessness, and amorality—provide a better guide to decisions.

The leading modern psychological critic of Machiavelli was Max Weber, although his analysis, "Politics as a Vocation," conceded Machiavelli's warning that sincere adherence to normal ethical reasoning led to dangerous and self-defeating decisions (and indecision) in political life:

He who lets himself in for politics, that is, for power and force as means, contracts with diabolical powers and for his action it is not true that good can follow only from good and evil only from evil, but that often the opposite is true. Anyone who fails to see this, is, indeed, a political infant. (Weber, 1918)

Weber drew a sharp distinction between an ordinary morality of judging means (e.g., "truth-telling is praiseworthy") and a unique political ethic of responsibility. In private life one could choose the virtues of a saint, be morally praiseworthy, and then be crucified by opponents willing to use violence to get their end—and still be praiseworthy. A political leader acts, however, for others (including future generations), and the judgment appropriately applied to him is an ethic of responsibility for his actions.

Weber's theory of good professional judgment also addressed Dostoyevsky's problem of the psychological temptations and costs of political success. Weber warned that a political leader must recognize (at peril to himself)—and come deeply to terms with—his true pact with evil and diabolical forces. Without this self-knowledge, compassion, and maturity, he argued, a political leader would destroy his own soul and spirit in his route to political success—and reap bitterness and self-contempt, banal self-acceptance, or flight from reality. •

A study by Muir (1977) presents impressive evidence that Weber was right and that compassionate warmth and fellow-feeling, rather than ruthlessness and cold cynicism, are a better guide for decisions to use coercion.

Muir studied policemen as they worked their beats ("streetcorner politicians," he called them)—their personality traits, their development from the time they were rookies, their objective performance on the job. He found impressive support for a theory derived from Weber's essay, a theory that he used to explain the effective exercise of power in four types of situations at the core of police work.

Muir's independent variables—a 2 × 2 personality typology—classified officers by their perspective on life (tragic or cynical) and whether they had integrated the use of coercion into a professional ethic of civic responsibility (or remained conflicted about their own morality in using coercion).

The tragic perspective on life came from a deep empathy, a belief that much of what people suffer from circumstances in life is unfair and undeserved: "The knowledge of tragedy with which all action, but especially political action, is truly interwoven," as Weber (Muir, 1977, p. 51) called it. Its opposite—found in the cynical (Machiavellian) officers—disparaged motives of others and created a strongly hierarchical social distance between the officer and those with whom he typically dealt.

The officer with integrated morality harmonized his standards of personal innocence with a willingness to stand firm (gun at his side), to use the authority of his position to coerce with a good conscience. He was willing to create and maintain norms, issue threats, and to use violence and force against other human beings in the conduct of his job (because of the values he served) without disabling pangs of guilt.

Muir's resulting ideal ("professional") police officer combined the tragic perspective and an integrated morality, a "warm passion and a cool sense of proportion . . . in one and the same soul." Each type of officer (including the Machiavellians) responded to different situations in ways that were sometimes effective, but only the professional was superior in each of four major types of cases: dealing with the dispossessed (skid row), family and marriage quarrels, public confrontations involving crowds, and constructively engaging deficiencies of rationality in challenges to authority from adolescent males.

Structural Realists and Hardball Politics

A second classic algorithm has been more difficult to evaluate. Many writers, with hopes for peace, have been critical of the structural realist school of political analysis and have attempted various strategies to show that such analyses and guidelines for foreign policy can be improved upon. Much of the structural realist tradition presents itself as shrewd and tough-minded, and the contrast

between the self-advertised sophistication of these *Realpolitik* perceptions and decision algorithms, and the results they produce, continues to define a vital area of critical inquiry (Keohane, 1986; Etheredge, 1985, 1991; Cohn, 1987a, b, for feminist deconstruction).

Any challenge to structural realism is, however, difficult. As portrayed above, 500 years of data—and many wars—seem to give prima facie support. And, like iron filings on a sheet of paper that reveal the shape and power of a magnet beneath, the historical record suggests decision-makers may resolve many ambiguities of perception and forecasting by invoking these alleged insights into political motivation that may seem more politically sophisticated even when (as in the Bay of Pigs invasion) they result in long term failure:

[Advocates] could strike virile poses and talk on tangible things—fire power, air strikes, landing craft, and so on. To oppose the plan [which no one did successfully], one had to invoke intangibles—the moral position of the United States, the reputation of the President, the response of the United Nations, 'world public opinion' and other such odious (sic) concepts. (Schlesinger, 1965, p. 256).¹⁰

Failures of policies based on such perceptions do not (in themselves) negate the structural realist model. It is *not* clear, after a failure, that a president should have listened to specific doubters, skeptics, and naysayers. There are *always* doubters, skeptics, and naysayers. If a rational president faces three futures, with probabilities of success of $a = .3$, $b = .3$, and $c = .4$, he will select the third option (c) as his best guess and also predict he will be wrong (the probability is .6 that reality will be either *a* or *b*) (Pool, 1978). (The superficiality of learning a "listen to critics" rule generalizes: given any set of 3 or more alternatives, when the probability of the most likely alternative is $<.5$, the most likely outcome will usually be wrong.)

I will discuss two successful critiques, two apparent failures, and two recent developments that suggest a more comprehensive and integrated model is possible and needed. The emerging argument is that academic structural realists have rationalized a political phenomenon that is both more dangerous, and more hopeful, than their models imply. (e.g. Axelrod, 1984; Keohane, 1986; Vasquez, 1983).

¹⁰E.g., Etheredge, 1985, p. 160: "At each point where the policy process stopped at what was, in retrospect, a misjudgment or misperception, it did so because the stopping point was a node of the hardball dramatic sensibility." Similarly, Bloomfield, summarizes more than 40 years of experience as a scholar and participant in American national security decision-making since World War II with the observation that "humanitarian and fairness" arguments lose most of the time. Although considerations based upon economic interdependence and human rights are of growing (but still modest) weight, both classes of considerations traditionally lose to the invocation of "national security," however narrow, short term, or vague, and despite the private misgivings of some, including presidents themselves." The empirical question is whether these decision rules are as wise as they are sophisticated. (Bloomfield, 1991, 8–9).

Successful Critiques

Among the successful critiques of Structural Realism are the following:

- Studies of the outbreak of World War I that have provided strong, contradictory evidence that the conflict was based upon mutual misperceptions and stress effects (Holsti, 1989; Lebow, 1987).
- A set of arguments (de facto confessions, from unexpected sources) that American decision-makers do not behave as leading hardheaded realists believe they should.¹¹ Morgenthau (1967), for example, became a forceful critic of the Vietnam War, offended both that American leaders sent hundreds of thousands of troops to Vietnam, yet permitted a Communist government to come to power in Cuba and establish a Communist enclave in the Western hemisphere. Schelling (1985), writing in the mid-1980s, noted that major progress in Soviet and American arms control—rational for both sides, given the conceptions of rationality at Harvard—had not occurred, and he conceded that 18 years of data since the late 1960s could not be explained by the assumptions of rational choice upon which the Cambridge policy recommendations were based. More recently, Mearshimer (1990) has broadened the critique beyond the United States, conceding, in effect, that neither the United States nor the Soviet Union is acting upon a structural realist logic.¹²

Two Still Unproven Criticisms

Two still-unproven critiques by Janis and Jervis may yet become consequential challenges to structural realist prescriptions.

Janis proposed a general theory that error in foreign policy decision-making results from faulty (and insular) small group decision processes that deviate from scientific ideals for vigilant decision-making. His original argument was later

¹¹Other evidence also suggests that academic structural realists rationalize a more complex psychological phenomenon that is both more dangerous and unrealistic, and (in several respects) more hopeful. For example, in a study of personality effects on American foreign policy, Etheredge (1976) confirmed a system-level logic of international power calculation in which a decision to intervene, or not to intervene, was determined primarily by situations instead of personality traits. But variations in personality traits (e.g., personal ambition and power motivation) could play a decisive role in a broad midrange of scenarios. In the modal personality of foreign service officers, there was also more ambivalence concerning the use of force, especially among men with liberal political views and whose motivations for impact were linked to high self-esteem and use of diplomatic skill. A related study of the personality of presidents and secretaries of state (since partially replicated by Shepard, 1988) observed that, holding domestic and international situations constant, more dominating extroverts were more likely to deviate from structural realist baselines and initiate and pursue bridge-building (Gorbachev), and extroverts (Reagan) were more likely to accept genuine reductions of tension and bridge-building.

¹²Poor predictive ability did not cause these theorists to change their original models: puzzling, as they claimed their models were intended to be scientific.

bolstered by analyzing 19 major cases of American decision-making after World War II and finding a positive correlation between the quality of the decision processes employed and the favorableness of the outcome judged (in the later 1980s) by diplomatic historians and other specialists. The finding that the quality of rational analysis varies significantly, even for major cases is suggestive as a cautionary critique of structural reality assumptions.

However, the evidence remains very slight that technical errors in rational decision engineering (e.g., information known but not made available; arguments unheard or poorly made) were responsible for the key errors Janis discussed (e.g., the Bay of Pigs and escalation of the Vietnam War) or other decisions which critics find most profoundly objectionable. This judgment applies especially to the escalation of the Vietnam War, one of Janis's major cases: Extraordinary nonsense has been written about the alleged insularity of the process (Janis, 1989; Burke et al., 1991). Lyndon Johnson engaged his work with uncommon energy, including viewing three large television sets in the Oval Office on which he watched all three evening news shows, switching back and forth. To imagine that Johnson's decision process concerning the Vietnam War was insular, and closely tied to the paper flow from his assistants and subordinates, disregards the impassioned public drama that swirled about him and in which Johnson, as a political animal, was fully engaged. It is doubtful there was a single argument, or doubt, against his decision, by any expert, that he didn't hear numerous times, in both quiet counsel and at loud volume. It is equally doubtful Lyndon Johnson's aides shielded him from anything. And we now know that Johnson also relied upon counsels of "wise men" of the American foreign policy Establishment and assured himself of the opportunity to hear contrary views forcefully presented (in a private meeting at Camp David) by one of Washington's best advocates (Clifford, 1991) in debate with Robert McNamara.

In retrospect, the critics weren't *persuasive*, but this problem requires a political analysis of greater depth than puzzling arguments about alleged technical or procedural flaws in the presentations of opposing views. Many presidents knew success was unlikely (e.g., the judgments of their advisers that there was no light at the end of the tunnel), but chose to persevere (and hope for a favorable turn of events) because of political logic unrelated to the details of local reality in Vietnam (Gelb & Betts, 1976).

A second, still-uncertain criticism of structural realism is Jervis's (1976) bold implication that much of international politics (including, for example, the behavior discussed by structural realists) reflected four common misperceptions, impressionistic "beginner's biases" of cognitive processing identified by Kahneman, Tversky, and others (1982) with studies of university undergraduates and other subjects without extensive scientific training in a particular line of work. These ideas held the promise of a major rewriting of structural realist accounts of the past 500 years of history—and the hope that international politics could be

rapidly improved by pointing out such simple cognitive errors to decision-makers.

However Jervis's original book was not based on systematic sampling and careful controls; these scientific deficiencies have not been overcome by later research. Studies of American foreign policy, based upon declassified transcripts and interviews, have not found American decision-makers to be as analytically simplistic or unreflective as Jervis's study implied¹³ (e.g. Breslauer and Tetlock, 1991; Bundy, 1988).

A More Dangerous (and Hopeful) World

An alternative to structural realist arguments has emerged from Lasswell's tradition of careful attention to the psychology of power motivation and (also in Frazer's spirit) to the manipulation of public drama. The models portray a world that is both more irrational and dangerous, and hopeful, than structural realists have discussed.

New Models

For example, Etheredge (1985) found repeated American interventions in Central America followed a logic of "hardball politics," that, by comparison with structural realist accounts, was more oddly wired, ahistorical, expressive of cognitive overlays with little power to clarify local realities, and more self-defeating in the long term. American interventions appeared more intimately tied to a conception of public drama and power relationships and to impression management since the 1950s (President Eisenhower being the last American president before the changed conception of American power and vulnerability). This model also observed and predicted (before the Iran-Contra scandal became public) a baseline of internal irrationalities and self-defeating behavior in this type of aggressive American decision-making.

Etheredge (1991 [1986]) proposed a model (in the spirit of Lasswell, 1965) of the Soviet-American nuclear arms race that implied a rapid and dramatic end if it were possible to use public drama mechanisms to shift an emotional consensus on both sides. The model also argued that there was a logic (albeit dangerous and possibly misguided) to the continuing nuclear arms race and outlined an explanation of the 18-year gap, and other related phenomenon, that Schelling confessed his model (discussed above) was unable to explain.

¹³Etheredge (1985), for example, found the American construction of reality in Central American policy was a power-linked overlay whose origin and maintenance were not politically innocent, or as easily changed, as the Jervis model suggested.

This alternative to structural realist models of American foreign policy suggested American political elites instinctively (and self-reflectively) used principles of associational psychology to create and manage a personified image of America in international power relationships. Thus, they gave preference in deterrence to impressive-looking and high-technology weaponry (even when such systems were not otherwise cost-effective or able to perform as well in combat); to annual percentage increases in the national defense budget as a symbolic and public statement of credibility and continued strength; and were less rationally concerned with preparedness than Cambridge-based models that assumed rational actors. Recent American leaders were also unusually reactive (compared, for example, to President Eisenhower) to domino theories linked to public drama mechanisms (i.e., an explanation of the Vietnam War that Morgenthau confessed his model unable to explain).

The End of the Cold War

The recent end of the Cold War remains (as discussed above) a miracle in world history. Now, prima facie, traditional structural realist counsels for viewing international politics appear wrong, and we may expect renewed efforts to develop new images of international political behavior that offer the promise of wise judgments, informed by both the risks and possibilities on the road ahead. Indirectly, the evidence of greater attention to public drama management and the ease with which entire constructions of reality are abandoned (like the Cold War) suggest political leaders have been engaging in learning and, to a growing degree, do act from a new, self-reflective understanding (that would be considered sophisticated by social scientists and consistent with the traditional understanding of political wisdom) that all social reality is constructed (Berger & Luckmann, 1967; Gergen, 1985; Bennett, 1988). In Frazer's sense it remains unclear whether this is new learning or a dramatic application of a continuing pragmatic wisdom that has often (except in the case of first-generation revolutionary ideologues) informed successful political leaders.

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