

Revisiting the Madman Theory:

Evaluating the Impact of Different Forms of Perceived Madness in Coercive Bargaining

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Abstract: *This article reconsiders the theoretical logic behind the “Madman Theory” – the argument that it can be beneficial in coercive bargaining to be viewed as mad, or insane. I theorize about how we can best define perceived madness in a way that is relevant for analyzing coercive bargaining. I identify four types of perceived madness, broken down along two dimensions. The first dimension is whether a leader is perceived to (a) make rational calculations, but based on extreme preferences or (b) actually deviate from rational consequence-based decision-making. The second dimension is whether a leader’s madness is perceived to be (a) situational or (b) dispositional. I argue that situational extreme preferences constitute the type of perceived madness that is most helpful in coercive bargaining. I illustrate my argument using case studies of Adolf Hitler, Nikita Khrushchev, Saddam Hussein, and Muammar al-Qaddafi.*

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Both scholars and policy practitioners have long been concerned with the question of how leaders can make their threats credible in coercive bargaining against foreign adversaries. This question has become particularly pressing in the nuclear era, in which following through on a threat can lead to extreme destruction or even total annihilation. Threats may be perceived as hollow because it seems unlikely that any sane person would risk such devastation by carrying them out. Some early nuclear strategists, such as Daniel Ellsberg² and Thomas Schelling,³ argued that a potential solution to this problem is for leaders to convince their adversaries that they are *not*, in fact, sane. Possibly drawing upon this logic,⁴ Richard Nixon coined the term “Madman Theory” to describe his belief that creating the perception of mental instability could contribute to victory in Vietnam. Nixon reportedly said:

I call it the Madman Theory, Bob. I want the North Vietnamese to believe that I've reached the point that I might do anything to stop the war. We'll just slip the word to them that...“Nixon is obsessed about Communism. We can't restrain him when he is angry—and he has his hand on the nuclear button”—and Ho Chi Minh himself will be in Paris in two days begging for peace.⁵

The Madman Theory has received increased attention recently due to the bellicose rhetoric and seemingly volatile behavior of leaders such as Donald Trump and Kim Jong-un. While it is unclear to what extent President Trump's behavior is strategic or spontaneous, it seems that Trump has embraced his reputation for volatility. Trump has touted the virtues of unpredictability in foreign policy, saying, “[W]e need unpredictability...I don't want them to

² Daniel Ellsberg, “The Political Uses of Madness,” Lecture given at the Lowell Institute of the Boston Public Library, <https://ia800102.us.archive.org/20/items/ThePoliticalUsesOfMadness/ELS005-001.pdf>. (March 26, 1959).

³ Thomas C. Schelling, *The Strategy of Conflict* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, [1960] 1980).

⁴ According to his memoirs, Ellsberg does not believe that Nixon was influenced by his arguments. See Daniel Ellsberg, *The Doomsday Machine: Confessions of a Nuclear War Planner* (New York: Bloomsbury Publishing, 2017), 311.

⁵ H.R. Haldeman with Joseph DiMona, *The Ends of Power* (New York: Times Books, 1978), 83.

know what I'm thinking."⁶ In public remarks on March 3, 2018, Trump said, "I won't rule out direct talks with Kim Jong Un...As far as the risk of dealing with a madman is concerned, that's his problem, not mine."⁷ In more recent remarks on February 15, 2019, Trump noted that his prior aggressive approach toward North Korea had been called "crazy" and claimed credit for using this approach to bring North Korea to the bargaining table in a way that no one else could have done.⁸ Therefore, Trump seems to be following in the footsteps of Nixon by embracing the Madman Theory, and it is important to consider what impact this will have on US foreign policy goals. Some commentators have argued that the perception of President Trump's madness will be an asset to US foreign policy.⁹ On the other hand, Walt points out that it is hard to find examples of leaders viewed as mad who have actually experienced foreign policy success.¹⁰

However, attempting to categorize the Madman Theory as either true or false may be too simplistic. Madness is a broad concept, under which a variety of different dispositions and behavior patterns could fall. Thus, some types of perceived madness may be helpful in coercive bargaining and other types may not. Unfortunately, previous work has given little attention to this possibility. Among the small number of research efforts that have engaged with the Madman Theory, most either leave the concept of madness vaguely defined or adopt a narrow definition without considering whether the results would be the same under a different definition.

Ellsberg's original formulation of the Madman Theory deserves credit for proposing two distinct aspects of madness that can be helpful in coercive bargaining – unpredictability and deviation

⁶Donald Trump, Interview with Maggie Haberman and David E. Sanger, *New York Times* (March 26, 2016).

⁷Makini Brice, "At Joke-Filled Dinner, Trump Suggests U.S. Will Meet with North Korea," *Reuters* (March 4, 2018). This remark, made at the annual Gridiron Club dinner, was intended to be humorous, but it probably provides some genuine insight into Trump's thinking.

⁸Donald Trump, "Remarks by President Trump on the National Security and Humanitarian Crisis on our Southern Border," Washington, D.C., www.whitehouse.gov (February 15, 2019).

⁹ Charles Krauthammer, "Trump and the 'Madman Theory,'" *Washington Post* (February 23, 2017).

¹⁰ Stephen Walt, "Things Don't End Well for Madmen," *Foreign Policy.com* (August 16, 2017).

from normal payoffs – and I build upon his logic.¹¹ However, Ellsberg does not consider all of the implications of these two aspects of madness, nor does he consider additional ways in which the concept of madness can be broken down.

This article proposes a new typology for categorizing the ways in which a leader can be perceived as mad. Specifically, I identify four relevant types of perceived madness, broken down along two dimensions. The first dimension is whether a leader is (a) perceived to make rational calculations, but based on extreme preferences or (b) is perceived to actually deviate from rational consequence-based decision-making. The second dimension is whether a leader's madness is perceived to be (a) situational, i.e., limited to particular circumstances or issue areas, or (b) dispositional, i.e., applying to all circumstances and issues. I argue that leaders who are perceived to have extreme preferences over only certain issues are likely to do the best in coercive bargaining, when bargaining over those particular issues. Other types of perceived madness are less likely to be helpful and may even be harmful in coercive bargaining.

I probe the plausibility of my theory using four case studies of leaders who were perceived by their adversaries to suffer from each of the various forms of madness. The first case study presents Adolf Hitler during the Sudetenland Crisis as a leader who was initially perceived to have situational extreme preferences over the issue of unifying German nationals. The second presents Nikita Khrushchev during the Berlin Crisis as a leader who was perceived to deviate from consequence-based decision-making in a situational manner. The third discusses Saddam Hussein as a leader believed to have dispositional extreme preferences. The final case study analyzes Muammar al-Qaddafi as a leader perceived to deviate dispositionally from consequence-based decision-making. In the case studies, I draw upon primary and secondary

¹¹ Ellsberg, "The Political Uses of Madness."

sources to illustrate how perceptions of the way in which a leader was mad influenced adversaries' reactions to the leader in coercive bargaining. Because other factors also affected the outcomes, we cannot infer from these cases that each type of perceived madness automatically leads to a particular outcome. Still, the evidence presented lends plausibility to my theoretical argument.

This article proceeds as follows: I begin by reviewing the existing literature on the Madman Theory. Second, I introduce my typology of perceived madness and theorize about the impact of the various types of perceived madness on coercive success. Third, I discuss the case selection and research design. Finally, I present the evidence from each case.

The Development of the Madman Theory

Machiavelli famously stated that “at times it is a very wise thing to simulate madness.”¹² More systematic exploration of this idea began after the dawn of the nuclear era, as the problem of how to make threats of force credible intensified. Daniel Ellsberg provided the first and most complete articulation of the Madman Theory.¹³ Ellsberg considers a scenario in which one state's leader, a “blackmailer,” issues a demand of another state, accompanied by a threat of war. Ellsberg argues that if war is very costly, then the blackmailer is more likely to succeed if he is “convincingly mad.”¹⁴

¹² Niccolo Machiavelli, *Discourses on Livy*, in *Discourses of Niccolo Machiavelli on the First Ten (Books) of Titus Livius to Zanobi Buondelmonti and Cosimo Rucellai*, Constitution Society, <http://www.constitution.org/mac/disclivy3.htm> (1517), book 3, chapter 2.

¹³ Ellsberg, “The Political Uses of Madness.” Ellsberg's memoirs (Ellsberg, *The Doomsday Machine*, 311) add the caveat that he “never thought of it [the madman strategy] as an approach that would appeal to an American leader, nor be remotely advisable under any circumstances.” In an email to the author, Ellsberg further stated that his theory was intended as a warning about how US adversaries might behave, not as a recommendation for US policymakers.

¹⁴ Ellsberg, “The Political Uses of Madness,” 2.

Ellsberg identifies two forms of perceived madness that can heighten the credibility of a blackmailer's threat. The first is perceived unpredictability, which makes adversaries believe that "this blackmailer is at least 1% likely to do *anything*."¹⁵ The second is the perception of "deviation from 'normal' payoffs," i.e., the belief that the blackmailer "is perfectly predictable, consistent, rational on the basis of certain payoffs and expectations: but that these payoffs and expectations don't happen to be the ones that the opponent would tend to expect."¹⁶ In particular, it is helpful for the blackmailer to create the perception of being entirely indifferent to the costs of war and/or unwilling to accept anything less than total victory.¹⁷ The perception of either of these forms of madness can make the blackmailer's threat of war credible even when war is very costly for both sides. If the state targeted by the blackmailer views the threat as credible and views war as even worse than acquiescence, then it will have no choice but to concede to the blackmailer's demand. Thus, a convincingly mad blackmailer obtains an advantage over a rational opponent.

Thomas Schelling also argued that perceived madness can increase credibility in coercive bargaining. Schelling states, "Many of the attributes of rationality... are strategic disabilities in certain conflict situations."¹⁸ In later work, Schelling similarly notes that a "paradox of deterrence is that it does not always help to be, or to be believed to be, fully rational, cool-headed, and in control of oneself."¹⁹ Schelling offers examples of credible threats by an anarchist fanatic and by mental patients as analogies for international coercive bargaining.²⁰ Similarly to Ellsberg, he argues that because these individuals' threats of suicide are credible, they can make

¹⁵ Ellsberg, "The Political Uses of Madness," 5.

¹⁶ Ellsberg, "The Political Uses of Madness," 9-10.

¹⁷ Ellsberg, "The Political Uses of Madness," 10-14.

¹⁸ Schelling, *The Strategy of Conflict*, 18.

¹⁹ Thomas C. Schelling, *Arms and Influence* (Hartford: Yale University Press, [1966] 2008), 37.

²⁰ Schelling, *Arms and Influence*, 37.

others do their will. In contrast to Ellsberg, Schelling does not differentiate between different types of perceived madness or offer a definition of madness.

Over the subsequent decades, the Madman Theory has remained well-known, but has been the subject of little academic research. A few rationalist scholars have incorporated the idea that certain actors might be irrational into game theoretic models. Little and Zeitzoff develop a bargaining model in which preferences evolve over generations. Their model suggests that evolution may favor “irrationally tough” types, who are willing to reject low offers even when fighting is a worse alternative, because they are able to obtain better bargaining outcomes.²¹ Acharya and Grillo also present a bargaining model which incorporates the possibility that one player is crazy. Crazyness is defined as issuing unreasonable offers in bargaining and always selecting the most aggressive option when presented with a choice. They find that pretending to be crazy can sometimes improve a rational leader’s expected bargaining outcome.²² These modeling efforts are supportive of the Madman Theory, but their conclusions are based on narrow definitions of madness and particular assumptions about the structure of coercive bargaining. Therefore, they may have limited applicability.

Empirical testing of the Madman Theory has also been limited. Some work has raised doubts about the empirical validity of the theory. In particular, Sechser and Fuhrmann find that Richard Nixon, Nikita Khrushchev, and the North Korean leadership were unable to persuade opponents that they were actually mad enough to follow through on nuclear threats.²³

Additionally, McManus presents quantitative evidence that a reputation for madness increases

²¹ Andrew T. Little and Thomas Zeitzoff, “A Bargaining Theory of Conflict with Evolutionary Preferences,” *International Organization* 71, no. 3 (2017): 523-557.

²² Avidit Acharya and Edoardo Grillo, “War with Crazy Types,” *Political Science Research and Methods* 3, no. 2 (2015): 281-307.

²³ Todd S. Sechser and Matthew Fuhrmann, *Nuclear Weapons and Coercive Diplomacy* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2017).

the risk of general deterrence failure and is rarely helpful in crisis bargaining.²⁴ On the other hand, psychological studies have shown that demonstrating anger and emotional volatility can help to achieve concessions in negotiations.²⁵ In addition, Wong presents evidence from the Berlin Crisis that expressions of anger by leaders who are usually stoic can influence coercive bargaining outcomes.²⁶ Rathbun also argues that some leaders with famously successful foreign policy, particularly Winston Churchill and Ronald Reagan, have been non-rational thinkers – although he characterizes these leaders as “romantics” rather than madmen.²⁷

However, drawing conclusions about the validity of the Madman Theory from any of these studies may be premature. We cannot identify what constitutes a valid test of the Madman Theory without first defining what it means to be perceived as mad in a way that is relevant for coercive bargaining. With the exception of Ellsberg,²⁸ the work cited above has either defined the concept of perceived madness narrowly or left it undefined. Both approaches may be legitimate for certain purposes, but neither is adequate for gaining a comprehensive understanding of how perceived madness affects coercive bargaining. This is because there are multiple patterns of expected behavior that might fall under the broad concept of perceived madness, and different expected behavior patterns are likely to have different impacts on coercive bargaining.

²⁴ Roseanne W. McManus, “Crazy like a Fox? Are Leaders with Reputations for Madness More Successful at International Coercion?” Working Paper (2019).

²⁵ Marwan Sinaceur, Hajo Adam, Gerben A. Van Kleef, and Adam D. Galinsky, “The Advantages of Being Unpredictable: How Emotional Inconsistency Extracts Concessions in Negotiation,” *Journal of Experimental Social Psychology* 49, no. 3 (2013): 498-508; Marwan Sinaceur and Larissa Z. Tiedens, “Get Mad and Get More than Even: When and Why Anger Expression Is Effective in Negotiation,” *Journal of Experimental Social Psychology* 42, no. 3 (2006): 314-322; Gerben A. Van Kleef and Stéphane Côté, “Expressing Anger in Conflict: When It Helps and When It Hurts,” *Journal of Applied Psychology* 92, no. 6 (2007): 1557-1569.

²⁶ Seanon S. Wong, “Stoics and Hotheads: Leaders’ Temperament, Anger, and the Expression of Resolve in Face-to-Face Diplomacy,” *Journal of Global Security Studies* 4, no. 2 (2019): 190-208.

²⁷ Brian C. Rathbun, *Reasoning of State: Rationality, Realists and Romantics in International Relations* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2018).

²⁸ Ellsberg, “The Political Uses of Madness.”

A Typology of Perceived Madness

This article proposes a new typology for categorizing the ways in which a leader can be perceived as mad. Meriam Webster defines madness as “a state of severe mental illness” or “behavior or thinking that is very foolish or dangerous.”²⁹ This definition is too broad to be useful for analysis, so further refinement is necessary. However, I want to avoid the pitfall of assigning an overly narrow definition because this could lead to inferences that have very limited applicability. Therefore, my goal is to identify the various behavior patterns that might be associated with the broad dictionary definition of madness and categorize them in a way that is useful for analyzing coercive bargaining. I do not aim to consider every possible difference in behavior, but rather group behavior patterns into categories that have meaningful differences in terms of their expected impact on coercive bargaining.

My typology of perceived madness is not based on the underlying psychological conditions that a leader is believed to suffer from, but rather on the way in which the leader is expected to *behave* in his or her decision-making. One reason for this is that underlying psychological conditions are difficult to diagnose. It is not uncommon for two psychologists who analyze the same person to reach different conclusions, and diagnosing psychological conditions from afar is even more difficult. A second and more important reason is that the specific psychological diagnosis of a leader’s mental disorder is likely to have less impact on how opponents respond to the leader in coercive bargaining than expectations about how the leader will behave. For example, if a leader is expected to make decisions without rationally weighing the consequences, then opponents are likely to respond to this decision-making style similarly

²⁹ Meriam-Webster, “Definition of Madness,” <https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/madness> (May 21, 2018).

regardless of whether they believe it is caused by impulse control disorder, bipolar disorder, or any other type of disorder. Any differences in reaction based on beliefs about the underlying disorder are likely to be minor, and I abstract away from these in order to develop a tractable typology.

Relatedly, it should be emphasized that my typology focuses on *perceived* madness. Therefore, it emphasizes how a leader is *expected* to behave by international opponents. Regardless of whether a leader truly suffers from any of the forms of madness included in my typology, international opponents will react to the leader based on what they believe to be true. Not all leaders who are perceived to be mad are truly mad. Some leaders who are sane may seek to deliberately cultivate a reputation for madness, as Richard Nixon did. The question of exactly how leaders develop their reputations for madness and whether deliberate efforts to cultivate a reputation for madness are likely to be successful is a topic for future research. However, if an effort to cultivate a reputation for madness is successful, then international opponents should react the same way as if the leader's madness were genuine. Therefore, it is the perception, rather than the reality, of madness that is relevant for this analysis.

My typology breaks down perceived madness along two dimensions. The first dimension is whether a leader is (a) perceived to make rational calculations, but based on extreme preferences or (b) is perceived to actually deviate from rational consequence-based decision-making. This dimension of my typology builds upon Ellsberg's identification of unpredictability and deviation from normal payoffs as two distinct types of madness.³⁰

The first possibility along this dimension is that the leader's behavior is expected to follow a rational, consequence-based logic, but based on *extreme preferences*. Such preferences

³⁰ Ellsberg, "The Political Uses of Madness."

would include an unusually low cost of war, an unusually high valuation of the issue at stake in a dispute, or an unusually high tolerance for risk. Each of these preferences, either alone or in combination, would make a leader abnormally willing to fight. Under the typical definition of rationality used in game theory, having such preferences would not qualify as irrational.

However, when taken to an extreme, these preferences can be far enough from the norm to be considered “mad” under the more common dictionary definition of the word. Exactly where the line between “normal” and “extreme” preferences is located can be debated, but there are some preferences that are clearly outliers. For example, believing that a war that would kill hundreds of thousands is not very costly or believing that achieving victory on a minor issue is worth any cost is far enough outside the normal range of preferences to be considered extreme or, in common parlance, mad. However, such “mad” preferences can coexist with rational, consequence-based behavior.

At the other end of this dimension are leaders who are expected to *deviate from consequence-based decision-making*; that is, make decisions based on something other than rational cost-benefit analysis of the expected outcomes. A leader need not be expected to *always* deviate from consequence-based decision-making in order to be included in this category, as the expectation of even occasional deviation can have an important impact on coercive bargaining. In its most extreme form, deviation from consequence-based decision-making might mean that a leader makes purely random decisions. However, this is likely to be rare. A more common way in which leaders are likely to deviate from consequence-based decision-making is by making decisions emotionally. In conflict bargaining, anger is likely to be a particularly relevant emotion. If a leader makes a decision to launch an attack impulsively in a moment of anger, rather than by weighing the consequences of attacking versus not attacking, this would qualify as

deviation from consequence-based decision-making. Because their emotions or mental health issues can overrule any fear of the consequences, leaders who deviate from consequence-based decision-making can sometimes be expected to use force in situations where a rational leader with normal preferences would not.³¹ However, while the use of force by leaders with extreme preferences is predictable, the use of force by leaders who deviate from consequence-based decision-making has an unpredictable element, driven by emotions and mental state.

Whether a leader is viewed as deviating from consequence-based decision-making or as merely having extreme preferences is a crucial distinction between different types of perceived madness. However, it is not the only important distinction. The second dimension that I consider is whether a leader's madness is perceived to be situational or dispositional.

Situational madness is a type of madness that applies only to particular issues or circumstances. Thus, madness in the sense of having *situational extreme preferences* would mean that the leader's extreme preferences apply to some issues, but not others. For example, a leader might be willing to bear any cost to have control over a region with historical importance to his or her country, but might have more moderate preferences over other issues. Madness in the sense of *situational deviation from consequence-based decision-making* means that a leader's deviations from consequence-based decision-making are infrequent and triggered by particular circumstances. Often, the trigger might be a provocation from an international adversary. Thus, a leader who is perceived to deviate from consequence-based decision-making in a situational manner can actually be expected to behave rationally most of the time. However, if an international adversary challenges or defies the leader, there is a risk that the leader will respond emotionally and impulsively rather than based on rational calculations.

³¹ In theory, there could also be "irrationally peaceful" leaders who decide *not* to attack based on emotions. However, these leaders would typically not be called madmen.

Dispositional madness means that madness is part of a leader’s inherent disposition and therefore applies across all circumstances and issues. Madness in the sense of having *dispositional extreme preferences* would mean that the leader has extreme preferences over everything. That is, the leader believes that war is never costly, always enjoys running extreme risks, and/or always desires more than the status quo. Leaders with such dispositional extreme preferences are classic megalomaniacs, always eager to fight and never satisfied with what they have. *Dispositional deviation from consequence-based decision-making* means that a leader deviates from consequence-based decision-making frequently and often even in the absence of any provocation. Thus, while a leader who deviates from consequence-based decision-making situationally might be expected to impulsively launch an aggressive response to being challenged or defied, a leader who deviates from consequence-based decision-making dispositionally can be expected to launch aggressive actions based on spontaneous mood swings or delusions, without any obvious external cause.

Putting together the two dimensions gives us four basic types of perceived madness, as shown in Table 1. I now turn to considering how each type of perceived madness is likely to affect coercive bargaining outcomes.

Table 1: Predicted Effect on Coercive Success

	Extreme Preferences	Deviation from Consequence-Based Decision-Making
Situational	Helpful	Potentially helpful
Dispositional	Harmful	Harmful

Impact of Perceived Madness in Coercive Bargaining

This article seeks to explore the impact of the various types of perceived madness on coercive bargaining, defined as bargaining between adversaries in which there is a threat of resorting to military force. There are different varieties of coercive bargaining, including both deterrence and compellence scenarios, but I keep my discussion general enough to be applicable to any type.³² In this respect, I continue to follow in the tradition of Ellsberg, who argued that perceived madness could benefit leaders “on either side of the bargaining table,”³³ and Schelling, who illustrated the benefits of perceived madness with both deterrence and compellence examples.³⁴ It should also be noted that in reality, the different types of madness may exist on a continuum, but I discuss them as distinct types for theoretical clarity. In order to focus on the impact of the different types, I also abstract away from the possibility of uncertainty about a leader’s type. My analysis generally assumes that decision-makers respond rationally to beliefs about their opponents’ madness.

I will first discuss the impact of extreme preferences and compare the difference between situational and dispositional extreme preferences. There is reason to believe that extreme preferences can be beneficial to a leader’s coercive bargaining success. Any rationalist model would predict that a leader with extreme preferences – such as a very low cost of war, a very high valuation of the issue at stake, or a strong preference for risk – should be more likely to follow through on threats than a leader with more moderate preferences. This is because the extreme leader is more likely to consider the benefits of following through on a threat to be higher than the costs. The difference between moderate and extreme leaders is likely to be

³² I will touch on the issue of deterrence versus compellence again when analyzing alternative explanations for the outcomes in the case studies.

³³ Ellsberg, “The Political Uses of Madness,” 4.

³⁴ Schelling, *Arms and Influence*, 37.

particularly important when fighting would lead to very high casualties. Whereas moderate leaders might balk at high casualties, a leader with extreme preferences is more likely to view the possibility of high casualties as unbothersome or as an acceptable price to pay. Because of their higher expected likelihood of following through, leaders perceived to have extreme preferences should be able to make more credible threats than moderate leaders. Indeed, when preferences are perceived to reach the maximum possible extreme (such as viewing war as entirely costless or deriving no utility from any outcome other than victory), a leader should be able to make threats that are always fully credible, leaving no room for doubt about the leader's intentions. More credible threats should, all else equal, lead to a greater probability of acquiescence by the adversary, giving leaders with extreme preferences an advantage in coercive bargaining. This logic has been at the root of previous arguments in favor of the Madman Theory.

If a leader's extreme preferences are situational, then there are unlikely to be any further complications to this story. In a situation in which a leader's preferences are believed to be particularly extreme, an adversary will view the leader's threats as credible and thus be likely to give in, unless the adversary also has strong enough preferences to be willing to fight. Since the leader's preferences are believed to be extreme only in the context of the current situation, and not in other issue areas, the adversary can back down with little fear that it will be setting a bad precedent or setting itself up for future conflict with the same adversary. Therefore, the perception that a leader has situational extreme preferences is likely to be an asset in coercive bargaining.

The same cannot necessarily be said for dispositional extreme preferences. While dispositional extreme preferences have the same effect of strengthening a leader's threat credibility in the current dispute, the fact that the leader is perceived to have extreme preferences

across all situations pushes the leader's opponent to think ahead to the possibility of future conflict. If we assume that it is possible for additional disputes to arise sequentially,³⁵ then the same dispositional extreme preferences that lend credibility to threats in the present are also likely to detract from the credibility of assurances that compliance will be rewarded with future peace. This is problematic because successful coercive bargaining requires not only a credible threat to attack in the case of noncompliance with a demand, but also a credible (though often implicit) promise not to attack in the case of compliance. Schelling stated, "To say, 'One more step and I shoot,' can be a deterrent threat only if accompanied by the implicit assurance, 'And if you stop I won't.'"³⁶ Refining this logic, Kydd and McManus develop a formal model which shows that when a state has the option to attack even after its demand is met, a lower cost of war can make peaceful coercion more difficult because the target of a demand fears future conflict and hesitates to make concessions that will weaken its security.³⁷ Essentially, a lower cost of war enhances a state's commitment problem in this model. Similarly, Weisiger argues that when a leader is believed to have an unusually aggressive disposition, adversaries are unlikely to negotiate compromise solutions with the leader because they believe that true peace and security cannot be achieved until the leader is removed.³⁸

This is not to say that a leader who is perceived to have dispositional extreme preferences can never achieve success in coercive bargaining. Sometimes an adversary may comply with a demand from such a leader in order to delay military conflict. However, when dealing with a

³⁵ An alternative to assuming a series of sequential disputes would be to assume that countries are able to reach a single grand bargain over all issues in the world simultaneously, but this is probably less realistic.

³⁶ Schelling, *Arms and Influence*, 74.

³⁷ Andrew H. Kydd and Roseanne W. McManus, "Threats and Assurances in Crisis Bargaining," *Journal of Conflict Resolution* 61, no. 2 (2017): 325-348. This model features a continuous bargaining space, so the result does not depend on issue indivisibility.

³⁸ Alex Weisiger, *Logics of War: Explanations for Limited and Unlimited Conflicts* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2013).

leader whose preferences are perceived to be extreme across every situation and issue, adversaries can expect that they will be forced to either make an endless series of concessions or eventually take a stand and fight back, with the aim of either removing the leader or crippling the leader's military power. If adversaries view eventual conflict as inevitable, then they might prefer to get it over with before the leader gets even stronger, making them less likely to back down in the present round of coercive bargaining. Therefore, whereas the perception of situational extreme preferences is likely to be an asset in coercive bargaining, the perception of dispositional extreme preferences is more likely to be a handicap.

I now turn to considering the impact of a perceived tendency to deviate from consequence-based decision-making. There is reason to believe that this perception about a leader can also be helpful in coercive bargaining. In a situation in which it is obvious to all parties that the costs of using force are higher than the benefits, a rational leader cannot make credible threats. Therefore, if there is some chance that the leader will depart from rational weighing of the consequences and make an emotional decision to use force, this will increase threat credibility. Ellsberg argues that this type of unpredictability in the use of force is particularly useful in coercive bargaining when the target of a threat is only willing to tolerate a very small risk of war.³⁹ However, the ultimate impact of perceived deviation from consequence-based decision-making in coercive bargaining is likely to depend upon whether this deviation is viewed as situational or dispositional.

If the leader's deviation from consequence-based decision-making is perceived to be situational, then opponents will fear the possibility of an irrationally aggressive response if they provoke the leader, either by challenging the leader's interests or failing to comply with the

³⁹ Ellsberg, "The Political Uses of Madness," 8.

leader's demand. However, they will have little reason to fear that the leader will attack them unprovoked. If going along with the leader's wishes is expected to result in peace, and provoking the leader raises the possibility of war, then opponents have some incentive to comply with the leader's wishes. Therefore, the perception of situational deviation from consequence-based decision-making is potentially helpful in coercive bargaining.

On the other hand, in keeping with Ellsberg's argument about the effect of unpredictability,⁴⁰ the perception of situational deviation from consequence-based decision-making is unlikely to be equally beneficial in coercive bargaining as the perception of situational extreme preferences. If a leader's preferences are believed to be extreme enough and the leader is expected to act rationally based on those preferences, this can create near or even complete certainty that the leader will follow through on threats, providing opponents with a clear choice between going along with the leader's wishes or fighting.⁴¹ In contrast, situational deviation from consequence-based decision-making means that the probability of a leader attacking if provoked depends upon the leader's emotions and is somewhat unpredictable. Therefore, opponents lack certainty about the consequences of defying the leader. Some opponents who would back down in coercive bargaining when faced with the certainty of war are likely to behave more defiantly when the probability of war is uncertain. Thus, while the most resolute opponents might defy either type of leader and the least resolute opponents might defy neither type, there is likely to be some subset of opponents who are resolved enough to defy a leader who deviates situationally from consequence-based decision-making, but not a leader with

⁴⁰ Ellsberg, "The Political Uses of Madness," 24.

⁴¹ Uncertainty about a leader's level of resolve is a common feature of coercive bargaining, but if a leader successfully creates the impression of having extreme preferences on a particular issue, this uncertainty can be mostly or even entirely eliminated. In contrast, even if a leader successfully creates the impression of deviation from consequence-based decision-making, there will still be uncertainty about the leader's behavior. Here I only seek to compare the effects of the perceptions, not the challenges in creating them.

situational extreme preferences. This suggests that the perception of situational deviation from consequence-based decision-making is somewhat less beneficial.

What about dispositional deviation from consequence-based decision-making? This is much less likely to be beneficial in coercive bargaining than situational deviation. If a leader's deviation from consequence-based decision-making is perceived to be dispositional, then opponents will expect the leader not only to have an irrationally high probability of attacking when provoked, but to have some probability of attacking at any time, based on mood swings rather than external triggers. This means that the probability that an opponent is attacked becomes at least partially divorced from the opponent's own behavior. Regardless of whether the opponent stands firm against the leader or accommodates the leader, the opponent faces some non-zero probability of being attacked by the leader at any moment. The looser the link between the opponent's compliance and the probability of being attacked, the less incentive an opponent will have to comply with the leader's coercive bargaining demands. Looking farther into the future, the perception of dispositional deviation from consequence-based decision-making increases expectations of repeated acts of aggression, triggered by the leader's own mental instability. This further increases an adversary's incentive to fight in the present, in order to remove or greatly weaken the leader before he or she becomes more powerful.

In sum, the theoretical arguments developed above indicate that both forms of perceived *situational* madness can be helpful in coercive bargaining, although the perception of situational extreme preferences is likely to be more helpful than the perception of situational deviation from consequence-based decision-making. In contrast, both forms of perceived dispositional madness are expected to be handicaps in coercive bargaining. These predictions are summarized in Table 1 above.

Research Design

I use four case studies to probe the plausibility of my predictions regarding the impact of each type of perceived madness on coercive bargaining and analyze the causal mechanisms. In selecting cases, I focused on prominent crises involving major powers in order to ensure the availability of adequate historical records. I drew on my historical knowledge to identify leaders who were likely to be perceived to suffer from each type of madness. I then verified that these perceptions existed among the leaders' opponents based on primary and secondary source accounts of government deliberations and officials' private impressions. As in the theory section, I focus on *perceptions* of madness, without attempting to independently establish whether the leader in question was truly mad in the way that opponents believed him to be.

The leaders and coercive bargaining situations that I have selected as case studies are shown in Table 2. Given the small number of leaders with clear reputations for madness and the relatively small number of international crises that are documented extensively enough to provide a basis for analyzing causal mechanisms, I had limited choice regarding which cases to select. Nonetheless, I was able to identify four coercive bargaining situations involving four different leaders who were perceived to be mad in quite different ways. This enables me to perform an initial plausibility probe of the predictions in Table 1 regarding the relative helpfulness or harmfulness of different types of perceived madness. The case study method enables me to analyze causal mechanisms and explore how perceptions of various types of madness influenced the calculations of adversaries in coercive bargaining. Although other factors, such as the adversaries' level of resolve, also affected the coercive bargaining outcome in each case, I focus on tracing the role that perceived madness played.

Table 2: Case Studies

	Extreme Preferences	Deviation from Consequence-Based Decision-Making
Situational	Adolf Hitler in the Sudetenland Crisis	Nikita Khrushchev in the Berlin Crisis
Dispositional	Saddam Hussein in confrontation with the George W. Bush Administration	Muammar al-Qaddafi in confrontation with the Reagan Administration

In the subsequent sections of this article, I discuss each leader’s case in turn. In each case, I first present evidence that the leader was perceived as mad in the way that I claim. In keeping with my theoretical argument that it is perceptions of madness that matter for conflict bargaining, I focus on evaluating adversary perceptions of the leader, rather than directly analyzing the leader’s own behavior. Next, I document how the leader’s perceived madness influenced opponents’ calculations in coercive bargaining. After discussing all of the cases, I analyze possible alternative explanations.

Hitler in the Sudetenland Crisis

Adolf Hitler is a leader who is particularly known for successful coercion of his opponents. In the run-up to World War II, Hitler persuaded Britain and France to stand by while he remilitarized the Rhineland and annexed Austria. Shortly thereafter, Hitler also demanded control over the Sudetenland, a part of Czechoslovakia inhabited by ethnic Germans. After a period of tense bargaining, Britain and France acquiesced to this as well in September 1938. Ellsberg uses the example of Hitler to illustrate the advantages of perceived madness in coercive bargaining, arguing that Hitler relied on the perception of unpredictability in the Rhineland Crisis and on the perception of deviation from normal preferences in the Sudetenland Crisis.⁴² Here I

⁴² Ellsberg, “The Political Uses of Madness.”

will explore the Sudetenland Crisis in more detail, using the greater variety of sources that are now available. I will focus on British perceptions, due to space limitations and the key role of British Prime Minister Neville Chamberlain in negotiations. Similar to Ellsberg, I will argue that key British officials perceived Hitler to be mad in the sense of having *extreme preferences*. However, I will also make the case that crucial to their decision to acquiesce was the belief – or at least the hope – that Hitler’s extreme preferences were *situational*.

There is ample evidence that many British officials had begun to view Hitler as a madman in the years leading up to the Sudetenland Crisis. Chamberlain referred to Hitler as a “mad dictator” in 1936⁴³ and on September 3, 1938, he bemoaned that “the fate of hundreds of millions depends on one man and he is half mad.”⁴⁴ Similarly, British Foreign Secretary Lord Halifax told a US interlocutor in August 1938 that “for all practical purposes [Hitler] is a madman,”⁴⁵ and British Ambassador Nevile Henderson wrote in September 1938 that “driven by megalomania...[Hitler] may have crossed the border-line of insanity.”⁴⁶ These quotes illustrate the tendency of officials to refer to madness in a non-specific way.

But in which particular way did these officials view Hitler to be mad? The evidence indicates that they did not actually expect him to deviate from consequence-based decision-making. Despite Chamberlain’s earlier comments about Hitler’s madness, after meeting with Hitler, he reported to his cabinet that Hitler showed “no signs of insanity.”⁴⁷ Rather, British officials viewed Hitler as having extreme preferences. British Ambassador Henderson wrote in

⁴³ Keith Feiling, *The Life of Neville Chamberlain* (London, UK: Macmillan & Co, 1946), 279.

⁴⁴David Faber, *Munich, 1938: Appeasement and World War II* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 2008), 251.

⁴⁵ *Foreign Relations of the United States, 1938, Volume I, General*, Eds. Matilda F. Axton, Rogers P. Churchill, N. O. Sappington, John G. Reid, Francis C. Prescott, Louis E. Gates, Shirley L. Phillips (Washington: Government Printing Office, 1955), doc. 537.

⁴⁶ Abraham Ascher, *Was Hitler a Riddle? Western Democracies and National Socialism* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2012), 73.

⁴⁷ Telford Taylor, *Munich: The Price of Peace* (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1979), 749.

1938 that “Hitler’s sense of values is so abnormal that argument seems powerless...His capacity for self-deception and his incapacity to see any point which does not meet his own case are fantastic.”⁴⁸ The British understood that Hitler’s obsession with the Sudetenland and inability to see different points of view made him highly resolved and indifferent to the costs of war. Thus, rather than viewing Hitler’s behavior as unpredictable due to deviation from consequence-based decision-making, Chamberlain expressed complete certainty that failing to give Hitler control over the Sudetenland would mean war.⁴⁹

The perception that Hitler had extreme preferences persuaded the British that they faced a choice between acquiescing to Hitler’s demand for control of the Sudetenland or a German invasion of Czechoslovakia. The clarity of this choice goes a long way toward explaining British acquiescence because, unlike Hitler, the British viewed war as very costly. However, if British officials had been certain that Hitler’s extreme preferences were dispositional and extended beyond the Sudetenland, they would have had some incentive to confront him in the present rather than allow him to gather more power.

Realizing that the perception that he had dispositional extreme preferences would make the British and French more likely to defy him, Hitler attempted to give the impression of having situational extreme preferences. He assured Chamberlain that the Sudetenland “was the last of his territorial ambitions in Europe and that he had no wish to include in the Reich people of other races than Germans.”⁵⁰ Hitler’s assurances were successful at causing British officials to believe – or at least entertain hope – that Hitler’s extreme preferences were situational. In discussions with other British officials, Chamberlain repeatedly portrayed Hitler as having no further

⁴⁸ Abraham Ascher, *Was Hitler a Riddle? Western Democracies and National Socialism* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2012), 73.

⁴⁹ Faber, *Munich, 1938*, 299

⁵⁰ Winston S. Churchill, *The Gathering Storm* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1948), 307-308.

ambitions beyond unifying the German people. In March 1938, Chamberlain told his Cabinet, “the seizure of the whole of Czechoslovakia would not be in accordance with Herr Hitler’s policy, which was to include all Germans in the Reich but not include other nationalities.”⁵¹ In late September 1938, Chamberlain told his inner circle that he was “satisfied that Herr Hitler was speaking the truth when he said that he regarded this question as a racial question.”⁵² Other British officials also expressed the belief that Hitler’s extreme preferences were situational. Foreign Secretary Halifax wrote in March 1938 that he did not think it “necessary to assume that Hitler’s racial ambitions are necessarily likely to expand into international power lust.”⁵³ Alexander Cadogan of the British Foreign Office also advocated against war based on the premise that Hitler would pose no further military threat after annexing the Sudetenland.⁵⁴

Of course, it is not necessarily the case that the British were fully persuaded by Hitler’s claims that his ambitions were limited. There were differences of opinion among British officials,⁵⁵ and Chamberlain quite likely exaggerated his trust in Hitler to other officials in order to gain their approval for the Munich Agreement.⁵⁶ Nonetheless, the evidence suggests that Chamberlain and other key British officials at least maintained *hope* that Hitler’s extreme preferences were limited to the issue of German unification. Even if Chamberlain exaggerated his confidence that Hitler’s ambitions were limited, the fact that this topic came up so often in British discussions and the fact that Chamberlain felt he needed to exaggerate on this point to

⁵¹ Gerhard L. Weinberg, *Hitler’s Foreign Policy 1933-1939: The Road to World War II* (New York: Enigma Books, [2005] 2010), 549

⁵² Faber, *Munich, 1938*, 345.

⁵³ Weinberg, *Hitler’s Foreign Policy*, 549.

⁵⁴ Taylor, *Munich*, 625.

⁵⁵ Keren Yarhi-Milo, *Knowing the Adversary: Leaders, Intelligence, and Assessment of Intentions in International Relations* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2014).

⁵⁶ Taylor, *Munich*, 821.

gain approval suggests that beliefs about the limitations of Hitler's ambitions were important in British calculations.

This famous case therefore illustrates the advantages that a leader who is perceived to have situational extreme preferences has in coercive bargaining. British officials perceived Hitler as having extreme preferences on the issue of the Sudetenland, which made them believe that standing firm on this issue would certainly lead to war. Moreover, their belief that Hitler's extreme preferences were limited only to the current situation made acquiescence more attractive because they hoped it would lead to permanent peace. Therefore, while many other factors also contributed to British reluctance to fight Hitler, the fact that Hitler was perceived to have situational extreme preferences influenced British calculations as predicted by my theory and seems to have been beneficial to Hitler.

Khrushchev in the Berlin Crisis, 1958-1959

During the early Cold War, Soviet Premier Nikita Khrushchev was highly dissatisfied with the status of West Berlin as an island of capitalism and democracy in the middle of communist East Germany. Tensions over Berlin peaked in 1958-1959 and again in 1961. I will focus on the first peak, which began in November 1958 when Khrushchev threatened to sign a treaty with East Germany that would end US, British, and French military access rights to West Berlin within six months – essentially pressuring the Western powers to withdraw or face the possibility of war – and ended with Khrushchev's disavowal of the ultimatum in September 1959. I focus on this first period of tension because Western officials had the greatest concerns about Khrushchev's mental instability during their early interactions with him.⁵⁷ I will show that although Western officials

⁵⁷ As Western officials interacted more with Khrushchev, they increasingly suspected that his apparent emotionality was an act. See Wong, "Stoics and Hotheads," 190-208.

generally assessed that Khrushchev was unlikely to launch a war over Berlin because of the high costs, they did consider the possibility that Khrushchev might *deviate situationally from consequence-based decision-making* and launch a war emotionally. However, given their level of resolve, they were willing to run this risk.

Like Hitler, Khrushchev was a leader who some Western officials viewed as mad. Indeed, British Foreign Secretary Selwyn Lloyd called him “a madman like Hitler capable of anything.”⁵⁸ Yet despite this comparison, Western officials generally perceived Khrushchev to be mad in a different way than Hitler. Whereas descriptions of Hitler emphasized his extreme preferences regarding the Sudetenland, Western officials did not assess Khrushchev to have such extreme preferences over Berlin. Both CIA Director Allen Dulles⁵⁹ and US Ambassador to the Soviet Union Llewellyn Thompson⁶⁰ opined that Khrushchev was unlikely to stand firm on his Berlin ultimatum because of the high costs. Thus, they believed that Khrushchev’s preferences were “normal” in the sense that he viewed war as costly and would not pay any cost to prevail. In August 1958, when British Prime Minister Macmillan asked his ambassador in Moscow, Patrick Reilly, if Khrushchev was a megalomaniac like Hitler, Reilly replied, “I do not think Khrushchev’s incipient megalomania is as yet nearly as dangerous as Hitler’s, and I think the odds are against it becoming so. First, Khrushchev is a normal human being, with a normal family life.” Reilly also noted that Khrushchev had lost a son in World War II, implying that he had an acute personal understanding of the costliness of war.⁶¹ Again in March 1959, Reilly assessed Khrushchev to be less obsessive than Hitler, saying that there was nothing “mystical”

⁵⁸ *Foreign Relations of the United States, 1958–1960, Berlin Crisis, 1958–1959, Volume VIII*, doc. 374.

⁵⁹ Aleksandr Fursenko and Timothy Naftali, *Khrushchev's Cold War: The Inside Story of an American Adversary* (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 2006, paperback edition), 203.

⁶⁰ *Foreign Relations of the United States, 1958–1960, Berlin Crisis, 1958–1959, Volume VIII*, doc. 92

⁶¹ William Taubman, *Khrushchev: The Man and His Era* (New York: W.W. Norton and Company, 2003), 749.

about his foreign policy approach.⁶² Thus, although Western leaders understood that Khrushchev's goal was to spread communism, they did not believe his preferences were extreme enough that rational cost-benefit analysis would lead him to choose war over Berlin or any issue.

Nonetheless, particularly in their early interactions with Khrushchev, many Western officials feared that he was mad in the sense of occasionally deviating from consequence-based decision-making. Khrushchev's behavior gave the impression of emotional volatility,⁶³ which created fear that he might react to situations impetuously and emotionally. In initial encounters with him, Western diplomats observed that he spoke loudly and drank a great deal.⁶⁴ At a National Security Council meeting on June 28, 1956, Secretary of State John Foster Dulles said of Khrushchev: "He was not a coldly calculating person, but rather one who reacted emotionally. He was obviously intoxicated much of the time, and could be expected to commit irrational acts. The previous Soviet leaders had been for the most part the chess-playing type. Khrushchev was the first top authority in the USSR who was essentially emotional and perfectly capable of acting without a calculation of the consequences of his action."⁶⁵ Secretary Dulles and other State Department officials continued to reiterate similar impressions in the subsequent year, referring to Khrushchev as "unpredictable and reckless,"⁶⁶ "impetuous and unstable,"⁶⁷ "emotional and

⁶² John P.S. Gearson, *Harold Macmillan and the Berlin Wall Crisis, 1958-62: The Limits of Interests and Force* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 1998), 76.

⁶³ Wong, "Stoics and Hotheads."

⁶⁴ Fursenko and Naftali, *Khrushchev's Cold War*, 25.

⁶⁵ *Foreign Relations of the United States, 1955-1957, Soviet Union, Eastern Mediterranean, Volume XXIV*, Eds. Ronald D. Landa, Aaron D. Miller, and Charles S. Sampson (Washington: Government Printing Office, 1989), doc. 55.

⁶⁶ *Foreign Relations of the United States, 1955-1957, Arab-Israeli Dispute, 1957, Volume XVII*, Ed. Nina J. Noring (Washington: Government Printing Office, 1990), doc. 371.

⁶⁷ *Foreign Relations of the United States, 1955-1957, Near East: Jordan-Yemen, Volume XIII*, Eds. Will Klingman, Aaron D. Miller, and Nina J. Noring (Washington: Government Printing Office, 1988), doc. 400.

impetuous,”⁶⁸ and “volatile and unpredictable.”⁶⁹ These descriptions do not indicate that US officials believed Khrushchev would never act rationally, but they suggest that US officials feared the possibility of sporadic deviations from consequence-based decision-making, particularly in times of heightened emotion.

During the Berlin Crisis, Western, and especially British, officials continued to express similar fears. The British officials who met with Khrushchev during Prime Minister Macmillan’s March 1959 visit to the Soviet Union came away with the impression that Khrushchev was “remarkably emotional” and “[e]xtremely sensitive to any imagined slight.”⁷⁰ MacMillan himself wrote in his diary that Khrushchev was “[i]mpulsive; sensitive of his own dignity and insensitive of anyone else’s feelings.”⁷¹ Based on the meeting, British Ambassador Reilly stated that it would be challenging to show “firmness” on Berlin without provoking a “wild emotional reaction” from Khrushchev.⁷² British officials were sufficiently worried that Khrushchev would follow through on his threat that the British government wanted to accommodate Khrushchev by recognizing East Germany and negotiating a new access agreement for Berlin.⁷³

Compared to the British, US officials generally assessed the risk of war to be lower. Despite the US expressions of concern about Khrushchev’s emotional volatility in 1956 and 1957 cited above, some doubts about the genuineness of his emotional outbursts had arisen by 1959. A March 1959 State Department report argued that Khrushchev’s “mood swings” were strategic, and based on his July 1959 visit to Moscow, Vice President Nixon also assessed that

⁶⁸ *Foreign Relations of the United States, 1955–1957, Western European Security and Integration, Volume IV*, Ed. William Z. Slany (Washington: Government Printing Office, 1988), doc. 252.

⁶⁹ *Foreign Relations of the United States, 1955–1957, Western European Security and Integration, Volume IV*, doc. 69.

⁷⁰ Taubman, *Khrushchev*, 411.

⁷¹ Harold Macmillan, *The Macmillan Diaries Vol. II: The Premiership 1957-1966* (London: Macmillan, 2011), 199.

⁷² Gearson, *Harold Macmillan and the Berlin Wall Crisis*, 76.

⁷³ Taubman, *Khrushchev*, 403-404.

Khrushchev's volatility was feigned.⁷⁴ This probably at least partly explains why officials such as CIA Director Allen Dulles⁷⁵ and US Ambassador to the Soviet Union Llewellyn Thompson⁷⁶ expressed the belief that Khrushchev would back down.

On the other hand, US officials certainly did not rule out the possibility that Khrushchev would follow through on his ultimatum. In addition to the warnings that the US government was receiving from the British, some US diplomats also warned of danger. After meeting with Khrushchev in July 1959, former US Ambassador to Moscow Averell Harriman said that although "he felt that Khrushchev's performance had been all bluff...[Khrushchev] was a man of many misapprehensions who might over-play his hand." He further warned that "Khrushchev was an impetuous man whose reaction to ultimatums might be unpredictable."⁷⁷ The even more alarmist US Ambassador to Bonn, David Bruce, warned, "undoubted peril exists that rejection of Soviet proposals might create conditions susceptible [*sic*] engendering global war."⁷⁸

Higher-level US officials also thought the danger was real. As of November 1958, Pentagon officials thought Soviet military action was likely, and the Joint Chiefs of Staff wanted to "do something fast and quick" and "fight our way through."⁷⁹ The public and private statements of Secretary of State Dulles also indicate that he initially believed Khrushchev would follow through on his threat,⁸⁰ although by February 1959 he expressed the opinion that Khrushchev would back down at the last minute.⁸¹ Even President Eisenhower, despite reacting

⁷⁴ Wong, "Stoics and Hotheads."

⁷⁵ Fursenko and Naftali, *Khrushchev's Cold War*, 203.

⁷⁶ *Foreign Relations of the United States, 1958–1960, Berlin Crisis, 1958–1959, Volume VIII*, doc. 92

⁷⁷ *Foreign Relations of the United States, 1958–1960, Eastern Europe Region; Soviet Union; Cyprus, Volume X, Part 1*, Eds. Ronald D. Landa, James E. Miller, David S. Patterson, Charles S. Sampson (Washington: Government Printing Office, 1993), doc. 77.

⁷⁸ *Foreign Relations of the United States, 1958–1960, Berlin Crisis, 1958–1959, Volume VIII*, doc. 193.

⁷⁹ Fursenko and Naftali, *Khrushchev's Cold War*, 210.

⁸⁰ Daryl G. Press, *Calculating Credibility: How Leaders Assess Military Threats* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2005), 96.

⁸¹ Sechser and Fuhrmann, *Nuclear Weapons and Coercive Diplomacy*, 135.

“calmly” to the ultimatum,⁸² expressed regret that the US had made such a strong commitment to West Berlin.⁸³ Additional evidence that top US officials thought there was a real possibility of war comes from the frequent discussion of military contingency plans throughout the duration of the crisis, in which even Eisenhower himself participated.⁸⁴

This evidence suggests that while Western officials, as a group, were not certain that Khrushchev would carry out his threat, they saw a real possibility that he could launch a war if they defied him. Given the high costs of war for both sides, the perception that Khrushchev might be emotional enough to deviate from consequence-based decision-making probably influenced the risk perceptions of many, if not all, Western officials. Importantly though, no one suggested that Khrushchev was likely to launch a war merely on a whim, without provocation,⁸⁵ indicating that his perceived tendency to deviate from consequence-based decision-making was viewed as situational rather than dispositional. Given that there was perceived to be a real danger of war if the West stood firm and but not if the West backed down, Western leaders arguably had some incentive to make concessions. However, while the British were ready to do so, Eisenhower did not feel he could back down without grave damage to the US reputation and international position.⁸⁶ If the United States had been less resolved, then it might not have been necessary for US officials to have *certainty* that Khrushchev would go to war in order to be persuaded to back down. The mere possibility could have been enough. However, given the high importance placed on Berlin, the Eisenhower Administration was willing to tolerate some non-

⁸² Fursenko and Naftali, *Khrushchev's Cold War*, 210.

⁸³ *Foreign Relations of the United States, 1958–1960, Berlin Crisis, 1958–1959, Volume VIII*, doc. 47.

⁸⁴ *Foreign Relations of the United States, 1958–1960, Berlin Crisis, 1958–1959, Volume VIII*.

⁸⁵ The only indication of a belief that Khrushchev's deviation from consequence-based decision-making might extend beyond angry responses to provocations comes from Secretary of State Dulles, who argued that Khrushchev's positive emotional response to prevailing on Berlin could cause him to impulsively raise challenges elsewhere. See *Foreign Relations of the United States, 1958–1960, Berlin Crisis, 1958–1959, Volume VIII*, doc. 112.

⁸⁶ *Foreign Relations of the United States, 1958–1960, Berlin Crisis, 1958–1959, Volume VIII*, doc. 47.

zero probability of an emotional deviation from consequence-based decision-making by Khrushchev.

The Berlin Crisis illustrates both the potential and the limitations of situational deviation from consequence-based decision-making as a factor influencing coercive bargaining. Although Khrushchev was believed to have “normal” preferences in the sense that he viewed major war as unacceptably costly, the perception that he might respond emotionally to Western defiance gave his threats greater credibility. The British willingness to make concessions gives a hint of how the perception of situational deviation from consequence-based decision-making can provide a bargaining advantage against a less resolved opponent. However, the unyielding US response shows how this is less of an advantage against a more resolved opponent that is willing to tolerate some risk of war.

Saddam in Confrontation with the George W. Bush Administration

Another crisis that involved bargaining against an ostensibly mad leader was the confrontation between the United States and Saddam Hussein over Iraq’s alleged weapons of mass destruction (WMD) program, which came to a head under the George W. Bush Administration. After the 1991 Gulf War, the United States forced Iraq to accept dismantlement of its existing chemical, biological, and nuclear weapons programs by United Nations inspectors. However, Iraq was reticent with inspectors from the beginning and forced them out completely in 1998. The United States initially launched airstrikes in response, but then largely accepted the lack of inspections as the new status quo until 2001, when the Bush Administration launched an effort to remove Saddam from power. On the surface, the most obvious cause of this confrontation was the Bush Administration’s inaccurate belief that Iraq’s WMD program was still active. However, I will

argue that a deeper reason for the Bush Administration's desire to remove Saddam from power was the perception that Saddam had *dispositional extreme preferences*. This perception underlay both the belief that Saddam was pursuing WMD and the belief that he could not be deterred from using WMD. I make no claim that the perception of dispositional extreme preferences was the sole cause of the Iraq War, but the following paragraphs seek to highlight the important role that the perception of dispositional extreme preferences played.

Saddam's psychology was studied by intelligence analysts in both the United States and United Kingdom. It appears that Saddam was judged to engage in rational cost-benefit analysis. A British Defense Intelligence Staff (DIS) psychological evaluation assessed, "Saddam is a judicious political calculator, who is by no means irrational... Although his actions may at times appear obtuse and reckless to the West, Saddam is a rational actor, who chooses his course of action for what he considers to be good reasons."⁸⁷ Despite his consequence-based decision-making, intelligence analysts believed that Saddam was aggressive and had an insatiable appetite for power. The same DIS assessment said of Saddam, "He is driven by desire to control the state and expand his power. He will challenge constraints and convey himself through rhetoric as champion of the Arab world."⁸⁸ Suggesting that Saddam's preferences fall outside the normal range, the DIS noted that he had a "risk-taking nature" and a "distorted cost-benefit perspective."⁸⁹ Giving insight into the full perceived scope of Saddam's ambitions, the DIS stated, "Saddam is said to emulate many significant historical figures, most notably Nebuchadnezzar, the King of Babylon who conquered Jerusalem (586 BCE), and Saladin who

⁸⁷ Defense Intelligence Staff, "Iraq: Psychological Profile of Saddam," UK National Archives, <http://webarchive.nationalarchives.gov.uk/20171123122654/http://www.iraqinquiry.org.uk/media/242596/2002-11-14-letter-ps-c-to-scarlett-iraq-psychological-profile-of-saddam.pdf> (November 14, 2002): 6-8.

⁸⁸ Defense Intelligence Staff, "Iraq," 2.

⁸⁹ Defense Intelligence Staff, "Iraq," 9.

recovered Jerusalem in 1187 by defeating the Crusaders. He has adopted these significant characters as pillars in the creation of his own personality cult, with the determination that he too will be remembered in such a way.”⁹⁰

Less declassified information is available on US intelligence assessments of Saddam’s psychology,⁹¹ but it appears that US intelligence analysts held similar opinions. A 2002 report by the State Department’s Bureau of Intelligence and Research (INR) noted that “Saddam has long likened himself to the great Arab warriors and continues to paint himself as the one Arab leader willing to risk all on behalf of the greatness of Arabs and Muslims” and warned that, if threatened, he might prefer to go down fighting rather than concede in order “to carve a place in history for himself along the lines of Nebuchadnezzar or Saladdin.”⁹² Another INR report described Saddam as “buoyed” by recent successes and argued that he would resist any attempts to reign him in.⁹³ According to former CIA leadership analyst John Nixon, many CIA analysts accepted “the crude caricature of Saddam as an evil butcher who must be stopped at all costs”⁹⁴ and believed that Saddam was an admirer of Stalin and Hitler.⁹⁵ The CIA also believed, apparently inaccurately, that Saddam had been abused as a child, which led to his current aggressiveness and desire for WMD.⁹⁶ On the whole, these intelligence assessments paint a

⁹⁰ Defense Intelligence Staff, “Iraq,” 4.

⁹¹ Although some Intelligence Community (IC) assessments about Iraq were declassified in congressional investigations of the war, the IC never actually produced a community-wide assessment of the overall threat posed by Saddam in the years immediately preceding the war. See US Senate, *Report of the Select Committee on Intelligence on the U.S. Intelligence Community's Prewar Intelligence Assessments on Iraq*, National Security Archive, George Washington University, <https://nsarchive2.gwu.edu/NSAEBB/NSAEBB254/doc12.pdf> (2004), 392.

⁹² Bureau of Intelligence and Research, “Iraq—Ever So Many Options,” Information Memorandum, <https://blogs.baruch.cuny.edu/davidlindsey/files/2018/08/IraqOptions.pdf> (August 12, 2002).

⁹³ Bureau of Intelligence and Research, “Iraq—Saddam Riding Higher Than Ever,” Information Memorandum, <https://blogs.baruch.cuny.edu/davidlindsey/files/2018/08/HigherThanEver.pdf> (September 7, 2001).

⁹⁴ John Nixon, *Debriefing the President: The Interrogation of Saddam Hussein* (New York: Blue Rider Press, 2016), 45.

⁹⁵ Nixon, *Debriefing the President*, 143-144.

⁹⁶ Nixon, *Debriefing the President*, 46, 91.

portrait of a leader with a strong desire for conquest, little concern for human life, and an enjoyment of risk-taking – the very definition of extreme preferences. Furthermore, these assessments suggest a belief that Saddam’s extreme preferences were dispositional in the sense that he would always seek to expand his power and never be content with the status quo.

Key Bush Administration officials expressed similar beliefs. Bush himself called Saddam a “madman” and expressed doubt that it was possible to keep him “in a box.”⁹⁷ In their memoirs, top Bush Administration officials justify their distrust of Saddam based on his continued acts of aggression and violations of constraints imposed by the international community.⁹⁸ Under Secretary of Defense Douglas Feith, a lead player in justifying the US invasion of Iraq, believed that Saddam had “megalomaniacal passions”⁹⁹ and argued, “No other contemporary leader – and few in history – had a record of aggression to match Saddam’s.”¹⁰⁰ National Security Advisor Condoleezza Rice agreed that Saddam’s behavior revealed him to be “either stubborn or delusional.”¹⁰¹ Similarly, Secretary of Defense Donald Rumsfeld wrote, “Saddam’s long record of aggression and regional ambition were not in doubt, and there were no indications that he had changed.”¹⁰²

The perception among policymakers and intelligence analysts that Saddam had dispositional extreme preferences influenced US calculations in at least three important ways. First, it subtly contributed to the belief that Saddam was pursuing WMD because it seemed

⁹⁷ Bob Woodward, *Plan of Attack: The Definitive Account of the Decision to Invade Iraq* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 2004, paperback edition).

⁹⁸ George W. Bush, *Decision Points* (New York: Crown Publishers, 2010); Richard B. Cheney, *In My Time: A Personal and Political Memoir* (New York: Threshold Editions, 2011); Douglas J. Feith, *War and Decisions: Inside the Pentagon at the Dawn of the War on Terrorism* (New York: Harper, 2008); Condoleezza Rice, *No Higher Honor: A Memoir of my Years in Washington* (New York: Crown Publishers, 2011); Donald Rumsfeld, *Known and Unknown: A Memoir* (New York: Sentinel, 2011).

⁹⁹ Feith, *War and Decisions*, 183.

¹⁰⁰ Feith, *War and Decisions*, 181.

¹⁰¹ Rice, *No Higher Honor*, 186

¹⁰² Rumsfeld, *Known and Unknown*, 422-423.

logical that a leader with unbridled ambitions would desire such weapons. Second, the perception that Saddam had dispositional extreme preferences made US policymakers believe that Saddam could not be deterred from using WMD if he obtained them.¹⁰³ Third, the perception of Saddam's dispositional extreme preferences created a justification for war that was broader than WMD. Feith says that the rationale for the Iraq War was based on what he called, "WMD and the Three Ts," which included "Iraq's WMD capability and infrastructure, its support for terrorism, its threats to neighbors, and its tyrannical nature."¹⁰⁴ The "Three Ts," particularly the first two, relied on the belief that Saddam would generally seek to expand his power, putting him on a collision course with the United States. Believing that future conflict with Iraq was likely, Feith says, "President Bush ultimately decided that the risks of getting drawn into a renewed war on Saddam's terms were unacceptable" and decided to take the initiative to remove Saddam.¹⁰⁵ Thus, the perception that Saddam suffered from dispositional extreme preferences led Bush Administration officials to believe that the only sure way to achieve long-term peace and avert an eventual disaster was to remove Saddam from power.

Comparing the differing views of Saddam between the Bush Administration and the Clinton Administration reveals how the perception of dispositional extreme preferences affected US calculations differently from the perception of situational extreme preferences.¹⁰⁶ While the Clinton Administration viewed Saddam as a threat, it believed that he could be contained and undermined with actions short of an invasion.¹⁰⁷ Intelligence Community assessments produced

¹⁰³ Richard N. Haass, *War of Necessity, War of Choice: A Memoir of Two Iraq Wars* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 2009), 234; Rice, *No Higher Honor*, 170.

¹⁰⁴ Feith, *War and Decisions*, 304

¹⁰⁵ Feith, *War and Decisions*, 223-224

¹⁰⁶ The differing views of these two administrations also show that how a leader is perceived does not depend entirely upon the leader's own behavior and can vary with the characteristics of the observer.

¹⁰⁷ Joshua Rovner, "Delusion of Defeat: The United States and Iraq, 1990-1998," *Journal of Strategic Studies* 37, no. 4 (2014): 482-507; Nancy Soderberg, *The Superpower Myth: The Use and Misuse of American Might* (New York: Wiley, 2005), 210-211.

under Clinton did not rule out the possibility of renewed Iraqi aggression, but judged that regime survival was Saddam's top priority and noted that Saddam had been deterred in the past.¹⁰⁸ Clinton himself viewed Saddam as someone who responded to international pressure.¹⁰⁹ In sum, the Clinton Administration did not view Saddam's ambitions as unlimited enough that he would directly threaten US security. Therefore, Clinton viewed Saddam's extreme preferences as more situational than dispositional. This contributed to Clinton's calculation that the costs of an invasion would exceed the benefits.

In contrast, since the Bush Administration viewed Saddam's extreme preferences as dispositional, it saw the benefits of an invasion as higher. Indeed, it viewed removing Saddam as the only way to prevent serious challenges to US security by him in the future. Therefore, while the perception that Saddam had dispositional extreme preferences enabled him to make very credible threats, it simultaneously impeded his ability to offer any credible reassurances to the Bush Administration. This – together with other factors, including the generally interventionist ideology of the Bush Administration and the post-9/11 environment in the US – helps to explain why Saddam's eventual readmission of WMD inspectors in late 2002 was not enough to avert a US invasion.

Qaddafi in Confrontation with the Reagan Administration

Libyan leader Muammar al-Qaddafi is an example of a leader who was perceived to dispositionally deviate from consequence-based decision-making. Beginning in the late 1970's, Qaddafi sought to challenge US hegemony and establish himself as a leader in the Muslim world by sponsoring terrorism and declaring the Gulf of Sidra to be Libyan territorial waters. Tensions

¹⁰⁸ US Senate, *Report of the Select Committee on Intelligence*, 386-388.

¹⁰⁹ Bill Clinton, *My Life* (New York: Random House, 2005), 778.

with Qaddafi came to a head under the Reagan Administration, which will be the focus of this case. Rather than tolerate Qaddafi's behavior or negotiate with him, the Reagan Administration deliberately conducted freedom of navigation operations in the Gulf of Sidra and tried to overthrow or kill Qaddafi himself. This case study will show how US officials' perception that Qaddafi deviated from consequence-based decision-making frequently and without provocation caused them to believe that lasting peace could only be achieved with his removal.

Reagan clearly believed that Qaddafi was a madman. He publicly referred to Qaddafi as the "mad dog of the Middle East,"¹¹⁰ and in his memoirs, Reagan repeatedly called Qaddafi a "madman" and a "mad clown."¹¹¹ Similarly, Secretary of Defense Caspar Weinberger said, "Qaddafi is a theatrically posturing, fake mystic, with a considerable dollop of madness thrown in."¹¹² The perception of Qaddafi's madness even predated the Reagan Administration. As of 1977, State Department officials were already considering the possibility that Qaddafi "may have finally gone totally insane."¹¹³ Foreign governments also apparently shared this view, as a top Soviet official called Qaddafi a "madman,"¹¹⁴ and the son of Tunisia's president called Qaddafi a "crackpot" who "should be in a nut house."¹¹⁵

But in what way exactly did the Reagan Administration consider Qaddafi to be mad? To some extent, US officials considered Qaddafi to have extreme preferences. For example, the CIA briefed Reagan that Qaddafi was an Islamic extremist who sought to establish "a unified, Pan-

¹¹⁰ April 9, 1986, in Gerhard Peters and John Woolley, *American Presidency Project*, University of California, Santa Barbara, <http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu>.

¹¹¹ Ronald Reagan, *An American Life* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1990), 280, 511, 514.

¹¹² Caspar Weinberger, *Fighting for Peace: Seven Critical Years in the Pentagon* (New York: Warner Books, 1990), 175.

¹¹³ *Foreign Relations of the United States, 1977-1980, Volume XVII, Part 3, North Africa*, Ed. Myra F. Burton (Washington: Government Printing Office, 2017), doc. 136.

¹¹⁴ Alexander M. Haig Jr., *Caveat: Realism, Reagan and Foreign Policy* (New York: Scribner, 1984), 109.

¹¹⁵ Douglas Little, "To the Shores of Tripoli: America, Qaddafi, and Libyan Revolution 1969-89," *International History Review* 35, no. 1 (2013): 82.

Arab state which will become the nucleus of a larger grouping encompassing the entire Islamic world.”¹¹⁶ Reagan himself wrote that Qaddafi “believed any action, no matter how vicious or cold-blooded, was justified to further his goals,”¹¹⁷ suggesting Reagan believed that to some extent Qaddafi’s actions were goal-oriented. Therefore, Qaddafi cannot be considered a pure case of deviation from consequence-based decision-making.

However, the evidence indicates that US policymakers perceived Qaddafi to frequently depart from goal-oriented behavior. To a greater extent than Hitler or Saddam, he was perceived to lack the ability to make decisions based on cost-benefit analysis of the consequences. As of the 1970’s, US intelligence analysts had assessed Qaddafi to be “impetuous and emotional,”¹¹⁸ and US diplomats thought he was “increasingly losing his grip on reality.”¹¹⁹ The Saudi King told US officials that he thought Qaddafi was “disoriented, incomprehensible.”¹²⁰ Reagan said that Qaddafi had proven himself to be irrational and added, “I find he’s not only a barbarian, but he’s flaky.”¹²¹ In his memoirs, he also called Qaddafi an “unpredictable fanatic.”¹²² Reagan Administration officials apparently thought there were medical reasons why Qaddafi could be expected to act without rational analysis of the consequences. According to Weinberger, “Rumors have long circulated in intelligence circles that he suffers from an incurable venereal disease, and that the disease accounts for occasional bouts of madness exhibiting hysteria, braggadocio and extreme theatricalism.”¹²³ According to a press leak, the CIA also believed that

¹¹⁶ Little, “To the Shores of Tripoli,” 84.

¹¹⁷ Reagan, *An American Life*, 281.

¹¹⁸ Little, “To the Shores of Tripoli,” 79.

¹¹⁹ Little, “To the Shores of Tripoli,” 80.

¹²⁰ George P. Schultz, *Turmoil and Triumph: My Years as Secretary of State* (New York: Charles Scribner’s Sons, 1993), 682.

¹²¹ January 7, 1986, in Peters and Woolley, *American Presidency Project*.

¹²² Reagan, *An American Life*, 281.

¹²³ Weinberger, *Fighting for Peace*, 175.

Qaddafi used hallucinogenic drugs.¹²⁴ All of this likely fed into the CIA's assessment that "Qadhafi is not controllable."¹²⁵

This evidence suggests that US officials perceived Qaddafi to be likely to deviate from consequence-based decision-making in a more dispositional way than Khrushchev. There was not just fear that he might respond angrily to a provocation, but concern that he suffered from deeper mental health problems which could cause him to deviate from rational analysis of the consequences of his actions without any external cause. Unlike Khrushchev, who was considered primarily a "normal human being,"¹²⁶ Qaddafi was considered to be decidedly abnormal. US officials seemed to fear that Qaddafi could lash out irrationally not only in response to being challenged, but at any time and with little warning.

The Reagan Administration reacted to Qaddafi with military confrontation. It conducted freedom of navigation patrols in the Gulf of Sidra, which led to armed clashes. In response to the 1986 La Belle disco bombing, the US launched operation El Dorado Canyon, airstrikes against military and terrorism-related facilities in Libya. Among the targets was Aziziyah Barracks, where both a terrorism command center and Qaddafi's personal residence were located.¹²⁷ Engaging in military conflict, rather than making concessions or bargaining, is the expected response when dealing with a leader perceived to dispositionally deviate from consequence-based decision-making because no amount of bargaining or concessions can be expected to reliably prevent attacks from such a leader. However, since the use of force can also be a tool to

¹²⁴ Russel Watson, "Kaddafi's Crusade," *Newsweek* (April 7, 1986): 20.

¹²⁵ Little, "To the Shores of Tripoli," 88.

¹²⁶ Taubman, *Khrushchev*, 749.

¹²⁷ Joseph T. Stanik, *El Dorado Canyon: Reagan's Undeclared War with Qaddafi* (Annapolis, MD: Naval Institute Press, 2002).

coerce rational leaders, it is helpful to more deeply investigate the goals of the US military action.

Reagan portrayed operation El Dorado Canyon as being partly intended to give Qaddafi “incentives and reasons to alter his criminal behavior.”¹²⁸ This motivation would seem to be in conflict with the perception that Qaddafi dispositionally deviated from consequence-based decision-making because only leaders who utilize cost-benefit analysis would be motivated by incentives. However, it is not clear that influencing Qaddafi’s behavior was truly a serious reason behind the attack. In the same speech, Reagan said, “I have no illusion that tonight's action will ring [*sic*] down the curtain on Qadhafi's reign of terror.”¹²⁹ Furthermore, memoirs from senior officials show no evidence of serious discussion of how Qaddafi would react to the attack.¹³⁰ Rather, Reagan Administration officials retrospectively justified operation El Dorado Canyon, as well as previous freedom of navigation patrols, primarily based on the need to protect the US reputation.¹³¹ Thus, they did not necessarily think that Qaddafi was rational enough to be deterred from further attacks, but they worried that the absence of a response would make the US look weak in the eyes of other adversaries.

Although it is not officially acknowledged, it also appears that the Reagan Administration hoped that operation El Dorado Canyon would kill Qaddafi. This would be in keeping with the perception that Qaddafi was a leader who deviated dispositionally from consequence-based decision-making because the only way to permanently eliminate the threat from such leaders is to kill or remove them. Reagan had already approved covert operations seeking to remove

¹²⁸ April 14, 1986, in Peters and Woolley, *American Presidency Project*.

¹²⁹ In Peters and Woolley, *American Presidency Project*.

¹³⁰ Edward Meese III., *With Reagan: The Inside Story* (Washington: Regnery Gateway, 1992); Schultz, *Turmoil and Triumph*; Reagan, *An American Life*; Weinberger, *Fighting for Peace*.

¹³¹ Schultz, *Turmoil and Triumph*, 677; Weinberger, *Fighting for Peace*, 182.

Qaddafi from power, dating back to at least to 1984.¹³² Reagan himself selected the Aziziyah Barracks as a target for strikes.¹³³ According to Weinberger, this was viewed as a legitimate target because of a terrorism command center located there, and the US government was unsure if Qaddafi would be in his personal residence there or not.¹³⁴ National Security Council staff member Oliver North said, “By law, we couldn’t specifically target him. But if Gaddafi happened to be in the vicinity of the Aziziyah Barracks in downtown Tripoli when the bombs started to fall, nobody would have shed any tears.”¹³⁵ The White House even prepared a statement to be released in the event of Qaddafi’s death, calling it “a fortunate by-product of our act of self-defense.”¹³⁶ Therefore, it seems more likely that the US sought to kill rather than influence Qaddafi, which is consistent with the belief that Qaddafi’s dispositional deviation from consequence-based decision-making made him impossible to influence.

Ultimately, Qaddafi survived the 1986 bombing and remained in power for another 25 years. In the absence of another provocation, the Reagan Administration could not target Qaddafi in another military operation without revealing its desire to kill him. Under the subsequent George H.W. Bush Administration, the 1991 indictment of Libyan intelligence agents for the 1988 bombing of an airliner over Lockerbie, Scotland could have provided justification for another strike, but the Bush Administration was distracted by other foreign policy issues, including the Gulf War and the collapse of the Soviet Union. Although Qaddafi’s confrontation with the Reagan Administration did not end in complete disaster for him, it does appear that the perception that he deviated dispositionally from consequence-based decision-making was a

¹³² Little, “To the Shores of Tripoli,” 87.

¹³³ Weinberger, *Fighting for Peace*, 192.

¹³⁴ Weinberger, *Fighting for Peace*, 198.

¹³⁵ Stanik, *El Dorado Canyon*, 152.

¹³⁶ Stanik, *El Dorado Canyon*, 152.

liability for him. Together with the Reagan Administration's desire to maintain a reputation for resolve, this perception made the option of targeting Qaddafi with a military strike more attractive. If Qaddafi had been less lucky, this perception might have contributed to his death in 1986.

In 2011, the United States participated in a military intervention that finally led to Qaddafi's removal and eventual killing. By this point, US-Libya relations had improved considerably due to Qaddafi's renunciation of terrorism and weapons of mass destruction in the early 2000's. Nonetheless, when a rebellion broke out in Libya in 2011 and Qaddafi appeared ready to commit mass atrocities to crush it, the Obama Administration apparently made little or no effort to negotiate a compromise solution before resorting to military force. Although little insight is yet available into the Obama Administration's private deliberations on this issue, the preference for force over negotiation might reflect a continued belief that Qaddafi could not be reasoned with.

Alternative Explanations

The evidence from the case studies conforms with the predictions in Table 1: The perception of situational extreme preferences was clearly helpful, the perception of situational deviation from consequence-based decision-making showed some potential to be helpful, and the perception of dispositional extreme preferences and dispositional deviation from consequence-based decision-making proved to be harmful. In addition to the fact that the pattern of success and failure fits with Table 1, the causal mechanisms revealed in the case studies fit with the theoretical logic outlined above. In the Sudetenland Crisis, Hitler's extreme preferences made his threats credible, while the fact that these extreme preferences were perceived as situational made acquiescence

more attractive to the British based on the hope that it would lead to permanent peace.

Khrushchev's perceived situational deviation from consequence-based decision-making made his opponents believe there was a realistic chance that he would make the emotional decision to start a war if they defied him on Berlin, but they were resolved enough to take that chance. Saddam's perceived dispositional extreme preferences made US officials think that future conflict with him was inevitable, making the option to remove him more attractive. Qaddafi's perceived dispositional deviation from consequence-based decision-making made US officials believe that they could not influence his behavior, which similarly made the option to eliminate him more desirable.

Although the evidence is supportive of my theory, it is also important to consider alternative causal arguments. Many factors can affect coercive bargaining outcomes, including reputation, domestic audience costs, domestic constraints on the ability to follow through, the balance of interests, the choice of signaling strategy, and the level of resolve of all actors involved. I do not seek to dismiss the importance of these other factors, and the presence of other causal factors does not generally undermine the validity of my argument. However, there are two alternative explanatory factors that I particularly want to address in detail because of how they vary across my cases.

One possible alternative explanation for the pattern of coercive success and failure that we observe relates to military power. Hitler and Khrushchev both possessed formidable military power. The British greatly feared German military might, and while the Soviet Union had a considerably smaller nuclear arsenal than the US during the Berlin Crisis, a nuclear war would still have been very costly for both sides. This gave Hitler and Khrushchev a plausible ability to impose devastating losses on their opponents. In contrast, both Saddam and Qaddafi had much

weaker military forces than the United States. This raises the question of whether these leaders' coercive bargaining failures might be better explained by military weakness than by perceived dispositional madness.

It is certainly plausible that the United States would have been more cautious about launching attacks against Saddam and Qaddafi if these leaders had possessed greater military power. On the other hand, the desire to prevent Saddam from acquiring more military power was a major motive for attacking preventively. Thus, even if Saddam and Qaddafi had been more powerful than they actually were, if there was any expectation of them becoming even more powerful and/or inflicting more harm on the US in the future, then the United States would still have had the incentive to fight them in the present rather than delay conflict until the future. We can also ask, given that Saddam and Qaddafi had relatively weak military power, did the perception of dispositional madness help or hinder them in coercive bargaining? It seems clear that this perception was a hindrance. While these leaders never stood much chance of achieving their full ambitions given their military weakness, the United States probably would have been more willing to tolerate a few provocations from them if the provocations were not viewed as part of a larger pattern of dispositional madness.

Another important alternative explanation to consider is whether the differing outcomes might be explained by different coercive bargaining strategies. Hitler, Khrushchev, Saddam, and Qaddafi were all leaders who sought to alter the status quo, but they went about it differently. Hitler and Khrushchev engaged in classic compellence, in which they demanded a change to the status quo and threatened to use force if their demand was not met. In contrast, Saddam and Qaddafi essentially followed a *fait accompli* strategy, as defined by Altman.¹³⁷ They took direct

¹³⁷ Dan Altman, "Advancing without Attacking: The Strategic Game around the Use of Force," *Security Studies* 27, no.1 (2018): 58-88.

action to alter the status quo – expelling inspectors in Saddam’s case, and sponsoring terrorist attacks in Qaddafi’s case – and then attempted to deter a US military response. According to Altman’s argument, using this strategy should have enhanced Saddam’s and Qaddafi’s odds of prevailing because it put the onus on the United States to initiate the use of military force. The fact that these leaders were nonetheless unsuccessful suggests that their choice of bargaining strategy mattered less than the fact that they were perceived as dispositionally mad.

Conclusion

This article argues that in order to understand how perceived madness affects coercive bargaining, it is important to ask, what type of madness? The perception of situational extreme preferences is likely to be an asset in coercive bargaining because it can make opponents believe that they face the certainty of war if they stand firm, but can obtain lasting peace if they acquiesce. The perception of situational deviation from consequence-based decision-making can also be helpful by persuading opponents that defying the leader could provoke an impulsive act of aggression, although the uncertainty associated with the leader’s response might mean that highly resolved opponents will be undeterred by this. In contrast, both the perception of dispositional extreme preferences and the perception of dispositional deviation from consequence-based decision-making are likely to hinder a leader’s coercive bargaining success. In the case of dispositional extreme preferences, opponents are less likely to back down in the present because they view future conflict as inevitable. Similarly, in the case of dispositional deviation from consequence-based decision-making, opponents are less likely to back down because they view future conflict as highly probable, and they cannot even be fully confident that backing down will secure peace in the present.

These predictions are born out in the cases of Hitler in the Sudetenland Crisis, Khrushchev in the Berlin Crisis, Saddam Hussein in confrontation with the George W. Bush Administration, and Qaddafi in confrontation with the Reagan Administration. Because other factors, including the resolve of the leaders' opponents, also affected the outcomes in these cases, we cannot conclude that each type of perceived madness leads to a particular outcome in an automatic or law-like way. Nonetheless, the evidence of how each type of perceived madness affected opponents' calculations lends plausibility to my probabilistic predictions regarding whether each type of perceived madness will help or harm a leader's prospects of coercive bargaining success.

The findings in this article highlight the value of the Madman Theory, as previously articulated by Ellsberg¹³⁸ and Schelling,¹³⁹ for understanding the outcomes of various crises. However, the findings also suggest that the Madman Theory is not universally true. Some types of perceived madness are an asset in coercive bargaining, but other types are not. This insight generally serves to emphasize the importance of definitions and avoiding over-generalization when theorizing. My findings also serve to emphasize the importance of credible reassurance in coercive bargaining and highlight the crucial role that leaders, and the reputations they develop, play in international relations.

This research also has crucial practical implications for leaders who are employing or considering employing a madman strategy. It is most desirable for leaders to try to promote the impression of having situational extreme preferences, although promoting the impression of situational deviation from consequence-based decision-making due to emotional volatility can also be useful. It seems clear that leaders should seek to avoid giving the impression of

¹³⁸ Ellsberg, "The Political Uses of Madness"

¹³⁹ Schelling, *The Strategy of Conflict*

dispositional extreme preferences or dispositional deviation from consequence-based decision-making. Therefore, President Trump's embrace of the Madman Theory does have the potential to be an asset to US foreign policy when attempting to coerce states such as Iran and North Korea to change their behavior. However, President Trump should be careful to show that his volatility has limits and that he can behave rationally and cooperatively toward countries that are willing to make concessions. Since opponents must perceive a leader's madness to be genuine in order for the predictions of my theory to apply, Trump should also cease making statements that openly embrace the Madman Theory as a foreign policy tool.

The findings presented here also suggest many directions for future research. One question of critical importance is how leaders develop reputations for madness and to what extent leaders can control this reputation. This is a vital practical question for leaders who might seek to deliberately cultivate a reputation for situational extreme preferences or another type of madness reputation. This is also related to the question of how close the relationship between perceived and actual madness is. Future research could explore how many leaders perceived as mad are deliberately cultivating the perception of madness versus simply behaving according to their nature. It would also be valuable to explore the relationship between regime time and perceptions of madness. All of the perceived madmen that I have analyzed here were dictators, raising the question of whether democratic leaders can also develop a reputation for madness. In addition, future research could investigate the extent to which perceptions of madness vary based on the characteristics of the beholder, given the evidence that the Clinton and Bush Administrations perceived Saddam Hussein quite differently.

Another topic for future research is the relationship between perceived madness and other factors. For example, future studies could analyze more deeply how the various types of

perceived madness interact with the balance of power, regime type, and alliance dynamics to influence coercive credibility. Future research could also explore how a reputation for madness affects domestic support for a leader as well as support among international allies.