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PRUDENCE OR PERIL:

PRESIDENTIAL RISK BEHAVIOR IN FOREIGN POLICY

DISSERTATION

Presented in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for
the Degree Doctor of Philosophy in the Graduate
School of The Ohio State University

By

William A. Boettcher III, M.A.

*****

The Ohio State University
1997

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ABSTRACT

Why do certain foreign policy decision makers take risks while others avoid them? Why does the same foreign policy decision maker take risks in one situation while avoiding them in another? In this dissertation, I focus on the theoretical and methodological problems associated with the recent introduction of prospect theory to the study of foreign policy decision making. I concentrate on issues of definition, measurement, validity, and evaluation. Two observations serve as foundations for my research: 1.) prospect theory, with its limited focus on situational factors, is neither the sole nor the dominant theory capable of explaining risk behavior; and 2.) theories borrowed from psychology require significant adaptation because the gambling analog is not a sufficient representation of the foreign policy decision making milieu. Building on the various literatures on risk behavior in political science, psychology, economics, business, and sociology, I develop a synthesized model of risk behavior that is sensitive to the empirical domain of presidential foreign policy decision making. I then conduct a series of case studies across two presidential administrations (Truman and Kennedy) that explore the plausibility of hypotheses derived from the synthesized framework. I find empirical support for a number of these hypotheses and propose a revised model that may someday serve as the foundation for a process-oriented theory of foreign policy risk
behavior. I also suggest a future research agenda for exploring the utility of the revised model.
Dedicated to Becky
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I. Overview

Why do certain foreign policy decision makers take risks when others avoid them? Why does the same foreign policy decision maker take risks in one situation while avoiding them in another? The recent introduction of prospect theory (a psychological theory of risk behavior developed by Daniel Kahneman and Amos Tversky [1979]) to the study of foreign policy decision making has led to a surge in research regarding risk behavior. Numerous empirical studies have offered prospect theory-based explanations for risk-taking and risk-aversion¹, while other analyses have discussed the implications of prospect theory (and other decision theories that deal with risk) at the theoretical level². Unfortunately, this marked growth in empirical research has proceeded ahead of careful reflection on the theoretical side.

Theories generated in other disciplines (economics and psychology) have been transported across disciplinary boundaries without ample attention to the data


requirements of the theories or differences between the foreign policy decision making milieu and the domains in which the theories were generated. In particular, issues of definition (what is meant by terms such as risk, uncertainty, and risk propensity?), measurement (can we measure utilities and probabilities, and distinguish frames/reference points in "real world" cases?), validity (can we generalize from laboratory studies involving medical or gambling decisions?), and evaluation (what are the various alternative explanations for the choices under examination?) are often discussed, but seldom resolved.

This dissertation deals with a number of these issues in an attempt to develop a synthesized model of risk behavior that is sensitive to the empirical domain of presidential foreign policy decision making. Building on research on risk behavior in political science, psychology, economics, business, and sociology, my "Risk Explanation Framework" (REF) integrates three veins of research (on reference dependence, personal predispositions, and uncertainty and information accuracy) in a new conceptual framework for the study of presidential risk behavior in foreign policy. The plausibility of the hypotheses that compose the REF is then evaluated through six case studies from the Truman (Iran 1946; Greece 1947-1948; and Korea 1950) and Kennedy (Laos 1961; Vietnam 1961; and Congo 1962) administrations.

The central objective of this project is to identify factors that lead to risk-taking or risk-avoidance in cases of foreign policy decision making by U.S. presidents. Two observations serve as foundations for this research: 1.) studies of risk behavior have generally focused on either individual or situational factors-- eschewing a more
integrative approach, and 2.) experimental research on risk behavior has largely focused
on laboratory studies of gambling preferences—resulting in theories that are not easily
generalizable to other domains of human behavior. A significant portion of the literature
on risk behavior relies on the analysis of subjects’ responses to gambling problems. A
key concern is whether the knowledge gained through this type of experiment is
generalizable to human behavior when confronted with different types of problems. Paul
Slovic reflects that, when asked to provide insight regarding the domain of human
response to natural hazards, “we realized that our laboratory studies had been too
narrowly focused on choices among simple gambles to tell us much about risk-taking
behavior outside the laboratory” (Slovic 1992:117). The extent to which the foreign
policy domain is different from the domain of gambling argues against our automatic
acceptance of results obtained from experiments in the gambling milieu. Only by
identifying these differences, considering whether these differences might alter the
observed behavioral regularities, and developing domain-sensitive means for evaluating
the validity of the relevant findings in the area of foreign policy decision making, can we
begin to produce research that provides insight into risk behavior in foreign policy
decision making.

II. Risk Behavior in International Relations

The study of state behavior in the face of risk and uncertainty has been an integral
part of International Relations research for at least the last quarter century (see Singer,
Bremer, and Stuckey 1972; Alpert 1976). Researchers focusing on the systemic, state, or
individual levels of analysis have consistently recognized that states (or individual
decision makers within states) operate in a complex and uncertain world where they are
forced to anticipate and respond to the actions of enemies and allies. While different
research traditions approach the study of risk behavior in markedly different ways, almost
every scholar of International Relations recognizes that the fundamental foreign policy
task facing states/decision makers is to discern order in a disorderly world. In short,
states/decision makers worry about the future; and in planning for the future they must
deal with risk and uncertainty.\(^3\)

Two basic approaches have dominated the study of risk behavior in the field of
International Relations. The first approach recognizes the importance of unit or actor risk
propensity, but assumes that risk propensity is consistent across all units or actors within
a system. This approach is evident in much of the structural realist literature (see Waltz
1979; Keohane 1986). In structural realism it is assumed that the most basic value
possessed by every unit within the system is survival. States are forced to be concerned
(or even obsessed) with survival because of the anarchic nature of the international
system. This concern leads to risk aversive behavior by states. Because survival is valued
so highly, states require significantly lower risks (or higher stakes) before they will
pursue policies that could potentially endanger their existence. Conflict between states is
usually the result of the security dilemma and not the result of risk-taking by significant

\(^3\)The study of risk behavior should not be confused with the process of risk analysis or
assessment. In this dissertation, I focus on the decision making process through which presidents deal with
risk and uncertainty. I do not examine how estimates of risk are formulated in the intelligence community,
nor do I advocate a particular procedure for developing risk estimates. Readers interested in risk analysis or
assessment can refer to the work of Coplin and O'Leary (1983), Haendel (1979), or Nagy (1979).
actors. In the event that a risk-taking state does emerge, it is expected that systemic constraints will force that state to recognize the folly of its ways- or perish. All states act as risk-averse security-maximizers, going to war only when provoked or when the mix of risks and potential gains outweighs the fear of extinction.

Waltzian neo-realism is designed to be a theory capable of describing systemic trends, it is not designed to make point predictions regarding the behavior of individual states (see Waltz 1979:72). This lack of predictive power is one weakness that has led other researchers to develop theories capable of explaining foreign policy behavior. Since these theories seek to explain why states behave differently (rather than reveal behavioral regularities), scholars have focused on the extent to which risk propensities vary across units or actors. This second approach to the study of risk behavior can be further broken down into theories operating at the national level that treat states as unified rational actors, and theories that operate within the "black box" of state decision making by focusing on individual decision makers or groups of decision makers.

Theories that treat states as unified rational actors generally develop mathematical models based on the expected-utility tradition (see Bueno de Mesquita 1981, 1985, 1992; Morrow 1987; Alpert 1976). The expected-utility tradition (see Savage 1954; Von Neumann and Morgenstern 1947) suggests that actors are either risk-acceptant, risk-neutral, or risk-averse. The difficulty for scholars of International Relations lies in determining a state's risk-propensity. The main indicator that has been used to infer a state's risk propensity is its willingness to trade security for autonomy as indicated by its
alliance commitments (Morrow 1987:435-436). Risk propensity thus modifies the utility curves of states (regarding war initiation decisions), introducing concavity or convexity. Unfortunately, this method of inferring a state's risk propensity suffers from a fundamental flaw: inferring risk propensity at time $t$ from state behavior at time $t-1$ borders on tautology. States are assumed to be risk-takers if they behave like risk-takers, there is no attempt to identify the factors contributing to a state's risk propensity. As Bueno de Mesquita notes, his "indicator of risk taking will therefore be several stages removed from a direct measure and so will be crude and error prone" (1981:123).

Theories that operate within the "black box" of state decision making seek to identify the origins of individual or group risk propensities. Pioneering work in this area was undertaken by Hannes Adomeit (1982), Robert Jervis (1976), Alexander George (1980), and Alan Lamborn (1985). This vein of research has been furthered by recent advances in psychology and economics. Kahneman and Tversky's (1979) prospect theory has provided a new and intuitively compelling explanation of how situational factors affect individual risk propensity. Widespread interest in prospect theory has led to the recent expansion of the International Relations literature on risk behavior (see Levy 1987, 1992a&b, 1995; Jervis 1988, 1992; Maoz 1990; Huth, Bennett, and Gelpi 1992; Stein and Pauly 1992; Farnham 1992; McDermott 1992, 1995; McInerney 1992; Taliaferro 1994, 1995; Boettcher 1995; Kowert and Hermann 1995; and Vertzberger 1995a&b). These authors recognize that the study of risk behavior is essential to the

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¹Bueno de Mesquita's indicator of a nation's risk propensity (developed in Bueno de Mesquita 1981, 1985) focuses on security/vulnerability, but does not include an autonomy term.
development of descriptively accurate (and predictive) theories of foreign policy decision making. The risk propensity of the decision maker is an important part of the decision process— as, or more important than decision maker estimates of probability and utility.

Regardless of the theoretical position adopted by the scholars listed above, each recognizes that the risk propensity of the decision maker plays an important role in almost any foreign policy decision made by an individual or group. Any issue requiring a decision maker to arrive at a conscious choice between policy options will be affected by that decision maker’s risk propensity. Of course, we should not overstate the importance of decision maker risk propensity. Knowing a policy maker’s risk propensity will not tell us what options will be considered, or how estimates of risk and uncertainty are made. Knowing a decision maker’s risk propensity will, however, contribute to our understanding of why a given option will be chosen over another. The study of risk behavior supplements work on the inputs to the decision making process by focusing on the decisional procedure by which inputs are translated into foreign policy choices.

The study of risk behavior has important implications for the study of war, deterrence, international military and economic cooperation, bargaining, and military intervention. (This is by no means an exhaustive list, see Jervis 1992:192-199; Stein and Pauly 1993; Levy 1992b.) The risk propensities of key decision makers will affect decisions to go to war and their commitment to achieving certain goals (reference points) will affect the degree to which they persevere in the face of losses. Deterrence will more often fail against risk-acceptant adversaries or decision makers that are committed to the belief that the status quo is unacceptable. International military and economic cooperation
will be more likely when each side fears the losses (outcomes below the reference points) that will result if agreements are not reached. In bargaining, the advantage will be held by states attempting to reach or remain at certain goal levels. Finally, risk-acceptant decision makers may be more willing to intervene militarily, particularly when they fear the potential losses they might face if they do not decide to intervene. In each of these substantive issue areas, our knowledge about the relevant actors' risk propensities will affect our predictions regarding the outcomes of international interaction.

This dissertation adopts the “inside the black box” perspective on the study of risk behavior. By focusing solely on presidential decisions, it avoids the difficulties experienced when attempting to aggregate individual risk propensities into group orientations toward risk. It builds on previous work in this research tradition, developing a new conceptual framework for the study of risk behavior that includes personality factors (which are often ignored in the International Relations literature). It breaks new ground by examining more recent advances in behavioral decision theory, and further, by examining the significant literatures on risk behavior in business, economics, and sociology. Finally, it raises and deals with a number of conceptual and methodological issues that have not been resolved by the extant literature.

III. Theoretical Foundations

My “Risk Explanation Framework” (REF) is based on three broad theoretical traditions. From behavioral decision theory it adopts the notion of reference dependence, from personality theory it adopts the view that personal predispositions affect individual
risk propensity, and from the foreign policy decision making tradition it adopts a concern regarding uncertainty and information accuracy.

Reference Dependence

Prospect theory (developed by Daniel Kahneman and Amos Tversky 1979; see also Tversky and Kahneman 1992) and SP/A theory (developed by Lola Lopes 1987, 1990, 1995) are two psychological theories of individual decision making under risk that develop the notion of reference dependence to explain preference reversals exhibited by subjects in laboratory experiments. Their subjects demonstrated that they were not concerned so much with final asset positions (as would be suggested by expected-utility theory), but rather with departures from an initial position or “reference point”. In the language of Kahneman and Tversky, subjects think in terms of “gains” and “losses” and their risk propensities vary from one “frame” to the next. Thus, individual risk propensity is dependent on the reference point that the subject adopts at the beginning of the choice problem.5

The “reference point” adopted by a decision maker may be conceived of in a number of ways. In the Kahneman and Tversky experiments, the reference point is provided for the subjects by the experimenters. Kahneman and Tversky suggest, however,

5The notion of framing or reference dependence is also important to researchers concerned with “problem representation” (see particularly Beasley 1996; and also Sylvan and Voss forthcoming; and Sylvan and Thorson 1992). These scholars view the foreign policy decision making process in terms of developing solutions to ill-structured problems. Research on problem representation explores the origins of perceived problem frames (or states), operators, and constraints (Voss forthcoming;3). A more complete discussion of the relevance of this research tradition is found in Chapter 2.
that in "real world" decision making the reference point adopted may represent the status quo or some "aspiration level" sought by the decision maker (1979:286). Lopes (1987:277) uses the term aspiration level to represent the decision maker's situational judgements regarding what can (or must) be obtained in a particular choice problem. March and Shapira (1992:172) discuss situations where the aspiration level becomes a "survival level" that identifies the absolute minimum that must be obtained in a choice problem. The usages of these various terms suggests that the notion of a reference point is closely related to the view that decision making is goal-directed behavior (see Anderson 1984). A foreign policy decision maker may hope to simply maintain the status quo, may wish to achieve some aspiration level, or may feel compelled to at least reach a survival level. In each of these cases, the decision maker identifies a landmark value that affects perceptions of utility, which in turn may alter that individual's risk propensity. Outcomes above the reference point are perceived as possessing added value, while outcomes below the reference point are viewed more negatively. Generally, it is helpful to think of a reference point as a threshold that affects the interpretation of outcomes.

In the REF the term "aspiration level" denotes the president's minimum level goal (or goals) during the decision process. The president's aspiration level acts as a situational constraint that precludes the consideration of options that are viewed as incapable of achieving the minimum goals in a particular case. The aspiration level serves a further role by providing the yardstick by which the outcomes associated with the remaining options are evaluated.
Personal Predispositions

The link between personality traits and risk behavior has been investigated extensively since the 1950s. In attempting to explain risky choice, theorists from this tradition have examined such diverse independent variables as subjects' need for achievement (Atkinson 1957; McClelland 1961, Bueno de Mesquita 1975); self-efficacy, self-worth, perceived parental expectations, and sex (Wyatt 1989); emotional arousability, conformity, moral reasoning, empathy, psychopathy, and sensation seeking (Levenson 1990); and neuroticism, extraversion, openness, agreeableness, and conscientiousness (Kowert and Hermann 1995). Other studies (see Slovic 1972) have simply attempted to establish cross-situational consistency in observed risk-taking behavior. Personality theorists directly address the person-situation debate in psychology and political science.6

The vast literature that focuses on personality predispositions and risk behavior may be divided into two separate research traditions. The first vein of research focuses on risk as a physical sensation. The term “sensation seeking” is generally used to describe physical risk taking—skydiving, bungee jumping, cigarette smoking, binge drinking (Bromiley and Curley 1992:94). A more relevant (for political scientists) segment of research focuses on risk-taking in games of skill/chance, everyday life decisions, and business decisions (see Atkinson 1957; McClelland 1961; Kogan and Wallach 1964; and March and Shapira 1987). This dichotomy suggests that different personality traits

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6 For discussions of this debate see Houts, Cook, and Shadish 1986; and Backteman and Magnusson 1981.
contribute to different types of risk-taking behavior. The personality characteristics that contribute to my presidential risk-predisposition index (discussed below) are carefully selected to measure the latter form of risk behavior.

While a number of researchers have studied the link between personality traits and risk behavior, Lopes (1987, 1990, 1995) is one of the few that has attempted to describe the process through which personal predispositions are translated into risk-acceptant/avoidant choices (see also Koweït and Hermann 1995). She suggests the "security" or "potential-motivation" of a decision maker affects the processing of relevant information. Security-motivated individuals tend to engage in "bottom-up" processing—a focus on worst-case outcomes and maximum losses. Potential-motivated individuals tend to follow the "top-down" method by focusing on best-case outcomes and maximum gains (see Lopes 1995:202). This marked difference in attentiveness to certain aspects of the decision problem results in different rank-orderings of alternatives and thus differences in risk behavior.

In the REF, I propose that security/potential-motivated presidents (operationally defined below) will follow this general pattern in making a foreign policy decision. A special exception to this general rule applies in cases where there is a dearth of options. If

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7It is, perhaps, unfortunate that Lopes has chosen to use the expressions "bottom-up" and "top-down" to describe the alternate ways in which information is processed by security/potential-motivated individuals. Social psychologists use these phrases to describe data-driven versus conceptually/theory-driven information processing (see Fiske and Taylor 1991:98). It is important to note that Lopes' use of these terms is not intended to be directly related to their traditional usage by social psychologists. For Lopes (1995:202), "bottom-up" and "top-down" simply refer to the different aspects of the decision problem that are most salient to decision makers.
there is only one alternative capable of achieving the aspiration level, that alternative may be selected regardless of its level of risk.

**Uncertainty and Information Accuracy**

The study of “cognitive biases” that influence decision making in the face of uncertainty is well established.® George (1980:35-47) describes the myriad ways in which American presidents deal with perceived information inadequacy or inaccuracy. More recently, Vertzberger (1995b) has recognized the extent to which issues of uncertainty and information accuracy can influence perceptions of risk. He identifies four ideal typical criteria for information validation: epistemic-based, person-based, belief-based, and situation-based (1995b:352-353). Vertzberger proposes that increased uncertainty and the perceived lack of valid information causes heightened vigilance regarding feedback after a decision has been made. Conversely, He argues that increased certainty and confidence in the validity of information “reduces alertness to warning cues and may generate premature cognitive closure and conservatism regarding risk estimates” (1995b:354). Similarly, George (1980:37) suggests that presidents faced with high uncertainty, inaccurate information, and time pressure may become “hypervigilant”. George also considers other psychological and cognitive aids that a president can use to deal with these problems.

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®One of the seminal works on this subject is Janis and Mann’s *Decision Making: A Psychological Analysis of Conflict, Choice and Commitment* (1977). Their “conflict model” of decision making is one of the best explications of the manner in which stress affects decision makers. Their work introduced many of the concepts discussed here (and in George 1980). (See also Mann 1992; Holsti 1979; and Hermann 1979.) For a more complete review of these works refer to section III, Chapter 2.
"Bolstering" and "incrementalism" are two types of defensive avoidance strategies that presidents have used to deal with uncertainty, inaccurate information, and time pressure. Bolstering is defined as the "psychological tendency under certain conditions of decisional stress to increase the attractiveness of a preferred (or chosen) option and doing the opposite for options which one is inclined to reject (or has rejected)" (George 1980:38). Incrementalism is simply the strategy of selecting "policy alternatives that differ only slightly from existing policies and aim at securing marginal rather than dramatic improvements" (George 1980:40). Incrementalism is viewed as a conservative strategy that allows for risk-avoidance (although over-cautious strategies can involve their own risks). Of course, when presidents do not perceive acute time pressures they may simply delay the decision in order to reduce uncertainty and collect more valid information (see George 1980:35-36).

In the **REF**, I follow George (1980) and propose that presidential perceptions of high uncertainty and the lack of valid information will interact with presidential risk predispositions and affect the output of the decision process. If time pressures are not acute, both risk-averse and risk-acceptant presidents are likely to delay the moment of decision in order to reduce uncertainty and collect more valid information. If time pressures are acute, risk-averse presidents are likely to engage in incrementalism, while risk-acceptant presidents are likely to engage in bolstering.
IV. Hypotheses

The three theoretical traditions briefly discussed above suggest the following testable hypotheses regarding presidential risk behavior. Hypotheses 1 and 1a are drawn from the literature on reference dependence. Hypotheses 2, 3, 4, 5, and 6 are derived from the "personal predisposition" research tradition. Finally, hypotheses 7, 7a, 7b, and 7c are gleaned from the work of researchers focusing on uncertainty and information accuracy.9 Together these hypotheses sketch the outline of my REF.

**H1:** Presidents tend to evaluate outcomes relative to an aspiration level rather than an overall value level.

**H1a:** The president's aspiration level (acting as a situational constraint) is likely to preclude the consideration of options that are viewed as incapable of achieving (or surpassing) the aspiration level in a particular case.

**H2:** Security-motivated presidents tend to engage in "bottom-up" processing—(i.e. focusing on worst-case outcomes and maximum losses).

**H3:** Potential-motivated presidents tend to engage in "top-down" processing—(i.e. focusing on best-case outcomes and maximum gains).

**H4:** Security-motivated presidents are likely to behave in a risk-averse manner.

**H5:** Potential-motivated presidents are likely to behave in a risk-acceptant manner.

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9A more detailed description of the theoretical origins of each hypothesis may be found in Chapter 2 (section V).
**H6**: If there is only one alternative capable of achieving the aspiration level, that alternative is likely to be selected regardless of its level of risk.

**H7**: Presidential perceptions of high uncertainty and a lack of valid information will interact with presidential risk predispositions and affect the output of the decision process.

**H7a**: If time pressures are not acute, both risk-averse and risk-acceptant presidents are likely to delay the moment of decision. (The rationale is that the presidents will use this added time to reduce uncertainty and collect more valid information.)

**H7b**: If time pressures are acute, risk-averse presidents are likely to engage in incrementalism.

**H7c**: If time pressures are acute, risk-acceptant presidents are likely to engage in bolstering.

V. Methods

This research project employs the personality assessment-at-a-distance technique (as developed by M. Hermann 1980a&b) and the structured, focused, comparative case study method (as described by George 1979, 1982; see also Snyder 1984/85, 1988; and King, Keohane, and Verba 1994). The personality assessment-at-a-distance technique assists in the coding of the dispositional variable capturing security/potential-motivation. The evaluation of the hypotheses put forth above is facilitated through six case studies from the Truman and Kennedy administrations.
Personality Assessment-at-a-Distance

Hermann's (1980a&b) personality assessment-at-a-distance technique uses content analysis of spontaneous interviews to assess a leader's beliefs, motives, decision style, and interpersonal style. Through this technique, a researcher may obtain measures of a leader's: nationalism, belief in ability to control events, need for power, need for affiliation, conceptual complexity, distrust of others, self-confidence, and task emphasis. The New York Times and the Public Papers of the Presidents are basic sources for interview responses. These may be supplemented by transcripts from television interview shows, such as “Meet the Press”, “Face the Nation”, or “This Week with David Brinkley”. A minimum number of interview responses is required before an individual can be coded for the various personality traits (Hermann suggests fifteen or more, 1980a:15). In the case of U.S. presidents, the amount of material may be excessive and a sampling procedure may be used (Hermann suggests coding every fifth interview response, 1980a:15). The coding of interview responses is facilitated through the use of the Personality Assessment-at-a-Distance Concordance computer program and a high resolution document scanner.10

The contemporary literature on personality and risk behavior usually relies on various personality inventories to measure subjects’ personality characteristics. Researchers interested in studying presidential foreign policy decision making can seldom hope to administer such tests to the subjects of their inquiry. I have, therefore, 

10Complete coding rules are available from the author upon request.
adapted Hermann’s personality assessment-at-a-distance technique to the study of risk behavior.

Employing Hermann’s personality assessment-at-a-distance technique, M. Hermann and T. Preston have developed a data set that includes scores for eight key personality characteristics for a number of U.S. presidents (see Hermann 1983, 1984, 1989; Preston 1996). I have obtained the codings for six presidents: Truman, Eisenhower, Kennedy, Bush, and Reagan. A number of the personality characteristics identifiable through this technique may be associated with security/potential motivation, particularly: belief in ability to control events, need for power, need for affiliation, task emphasis, and conceptual complexity. Plax and Rosenfeld suggest that the “personality pattern of the high risk-taker characterizes a dynamic task oriented leader: aggressive and manipulative, independent and radical - an individual who moves others about as if they were objects placed before him to satisfy his own personal needs” (1976:417). This description suggests an individual with a strong belief in ability to control events, need for power, and task emphasis; and a low need for affiliation. I further assume that conceptually complex individuals are less ideological and more sensitive to environmental cues. Individuals low in conceptual complexity are more likely to exhibit cross-situational consistency in risk behavior. A president is coded as potential-motivated if he scores high on an index of belief can control events, need for power, and task emphasis, and low on an index of need for affiliation and conceptual complexity. Security-motivation is associated with the opposite pattern. Of course, high and low are relative terms- the overall index score for a president is compared to the index scores of the other five.
Kennedy and Bush lie on the security-motivated end of the index while Truman lies at the potential-motivated end. The Kennedy administration was selected over the Bush administration due to the similarity between their index scores and concerns regarding document availability.

**Structured, Focused, Comparative Case Study**

The second major method employed in this project is the structured, focused, comparative case study method (as described by George 1979, 1982; also see Snyder 1984/85, 1988; and King, Keohane, and Verba 1994). George's formulation of the structured, focused, comparative case study is viewed as one of the most rigorous elaborations of the case study method. He discusses the numerous ways in which case studies may be used to uncover causal relationships. I plan to follow his "process-tracing" procedure of within-case explanation. George suggests that, in many cases, the less demanding congruence procedure (which simply attempts to establish covariation between the independent variables and dependent variable in a theoretically predicted direction) reveals relationships that are spurious in nature. Process-tracing goes beyond the identification of covariation and "attempts to identify the intervening steps or cause-and-effect links between an independent variable and the outcome of the dependent variable" (George 1982:19). Despite its extensive use of historical data to reconstruct a particular case, "process-tracing" is not a theory-free method. As George notes,

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11 A more complete discussion of this method and a table including the actual risk index scores for each of the presidents is found in Chapter 2.

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“Historical explanation and process-tracing are not purely descriptive. they make use. often only implicitly, of generalizations of one kind or another to support each step in the causal sequence” (1982:19). Since the case studies presented below are viewed as “plausibility probes” (see Eckstein 1975), between-case explanation is limited to an approximation of Mill’s method of agreement (described in Etzioni and Dubow 1970:207-208). The method of agreement “attempts to identify similarities in independent variables associated with a common outcome in two or more cases” (George 1982:7; emphasis in original).

In “Case Studies and Theory Development: The Method of Structured, Focused Comparison”, George (1979:54-55) proposes five tasks for designing heuristic and plausibility probe case studies: 1.) the specification of the research problem and the research objectives of the study, 2.) the specification of the variables that will enter into the controlled comparison, 3.) the selection of “appropriate” cases, 4.) the consideration of how the variables can best be described to further theory development, and 5.) the formulation of the general questions to be asked of each case study. I have briefly touched on several of the tasks in this chapter and will more fully address each task in Chapter 2.

VI. Case Selection

The potential pool of cases for this study was limited to considerations of military intervention by U.S. presidents. I only considered cases where the president contemplated (but did not necessarily approve) one or more proposals to deploy/employ U.S. military
forces to deal with the situation at hand. The demanding nature of the process-tracing case study limits my ability to extend this study to a large number of cases. Limiting the scope of the study to cases of potential military intervention clearly limits the generalizability of its results, but it also enhances the plausibility of the results for this specific type of decision problem. Further, the study of presidential considerations of military intervention, from Johnson’s Vietnam decisions to Reagan’s Lebanon policies, is an established research focus of scholars interested in theories of foreign policy decision making. Finally, the significant stakes and risks involved in this type of decision make this an almost ideal issue context in which to study presidential risk behavior.\(^2\)

I chose to study U.S. presidents because they act as the final authority in determining U.S. foreign policy and their decisions are often of high substantive importance. As the sign on Harry Truman’s desk read: “The Buck stops here”.

I initially considered a pool of ten cases for this study.\(^3\) The final six cases, across two presidential administrations, were selected through five basic criteria (see Figure 1.1): the high level of presidential involvement in decisions, the fact that the adversary was perceived to be controlled by the Soviet Union and China, multiple options were

\(^2\)Clearly, other scholars interested in risk behavior agree with this assertion- see Farnham 1992; McDermott 1992; Vertzberger 1995b; Taliaferro 1994, 1995.

\(^3\)I do not claim to have identified the universe of potential cases across the Truman and Kennedy administrations. I have instead attempted to identify the most significant cases (i.e. high profile, significant stakes, crisis atmosphere) from each administration, and then further limited the pool of cases to enhance their comparability. I am confident that these cases were selected in a systematic manner, despite the fact that they may not be a strictly representative sample of the entire pool of potential cases. In this regard I am willing to sacrifice some methodological rigor in exchange for the ability to focus on more interesting and relevant cases.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Country</th>
<th>Level of presidential involvement</th>
<th>Adversary perceived to be controlled by Soviet Union and/or China</th>
<th>Multiple options considered by president</th>
<th>Stakes for U.S. as perceived by president</th>
<th>Level of prior U.S. commitment</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Iran</td>
<td>High</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Moderate</td>
<td>Moderate</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Greece</td>
<td>High</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Moderate</td>
<td>Moderate</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>China</td>
<td>High</td>
<td>Adversary was Chinese communists</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>High</td>
<td>High</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Berlin 1948</td>
<td>High</td>
<td>Adversary was Soviet Union</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>High</td>
<td>Moderate</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Korea</td>
<td>High</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Moderate</td>
<td>Moderate</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bay of Pigs</td>
<td>High</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Moderate</td>
<td>High</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Laos</td>
<td>High</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Moderate</td>
<td>Moderate</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Berlin Crisis</td>
<td>High</td>
<td>Adversary was Soviet Union</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>High</td>
<td>High</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vietnam 1961</td>
<td>High</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Moderate</td>
<td>Moderate</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Congo</td>
<td>High</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Moderate</td>
<td>Moderate</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: The judgments presented above are based on a brief survey of the secondary literature on each case. Since an analysis of the primary sources for every case was not conducted, these judgments should be viewed with caution. I feel confident in using them for case selection, but willingly admit that they are rough estimates.

Figure 1.1 Potential Cases x Case Selection Criteria
considered by the president, the perceived stakes for the U.S. were moderate, and the level of prior U.S. commitment was moderate.

The criterion regarding the role of the Soviet Union and China is used to enhance the comparability of the cases selected. The criteria regarding level of presidential involvement, the number of options considered by the president, the perceived stakes for the U.S., and the level of prior U.S. commitment contribute to the comparability of cases, but were also selected because of theoretical concerns. A high level of presidential involvement is required in each case in order to justify the application of an individual-level theory of risk behavior. Presidential consideration of multiple options is required so that hypotheses 1-5 can be tested. Finally, the perception of moderate stakes for the U.S. and moderate prior commitment are required because it has been suggested that extreme stakes or commitment may affect the applicability of the theories from which hypotheses 1 and 1a are drawn (see Levy 1992a&b). A consequence of this selection process was the selection of cases that all fit within an even more restrictive issue area: potential Cold War regional military interventions in opposition to revolutionary Communist movements. While this happily increases the comparability of the cases, it should not necessarily limit the applicability of the results of this study to potential military interventions of this type alone. These further restrictions are not expected to bias the results of this study in any way.

In selecting the Truman and Kennedy administrations I have attempted to vary presidential risk propensity in a manageable fashion through the use of the personality assessment-at-a-distance technique and my presidential risk predisposition index. For the
Truman period, I examine the decision to back the Iranian Post-War regime in 1946, the decisions resulting in the Truman Doctrine regarding Greece in 1947-48, and the decision to intervene in Korea in June of 1950. For the Kennedy administration, I examine the decision-making regarding the Laos Crisis in the Spring of 1961, the decisions regarding Vietnam in response to the Taylor mission report in November of 1961, and the decisions regarding the Congo in 1962.

VII. Plan of Dissertation

Chapter 1 has provided a brief introduction and theoretical and methodological overview of the dissertation. Chapter 2 includes a much more in-depth discussion of various concepts, such as risk and uncertainty, and presents and defends the definitions that I will follow throughout this study. It also contains an extensive review of the various literatures on risk behavior in political science, psychology, economics, business, and sociology; as well as a critique of these literatures organized around issues of measurement, validity, and evaluation. Finally, it provides a more complete (and critical) discussion of the REF and the methods employed in this dissertation. Chapter 3 reports the results for the three Truman case studies, while Chapter 4 reports the results for the three Kennedy case studies. Finally, Chapter 5 discusses the theoretical implications of the case studies, suggests potential revisions of the REF, and proposes a research agenda for the future study of presidential risk behavior.
CHAPTER 2

CLARIFICATION, CRITIQUE, FRAMEWORK CONSTRUCTION, AND RESEARCH CONCERNS

I. Introduction and Overview

The study of how human beings make decisions has evolved in the last century as the classical expected-utility model (EU) (developed by D. Bernoulli 1967[1738]) was refined by von Neumann and Morgenstern (1947) and then modified by Savage (1954). Savage’s model of subjective expected-utility (SEU) has served since as the primary theory guiding research on decision making in the social sciences. While the normative strength of EU and SEU is often accepted, the descriptive accuracy of the Bernoullian family of theories has been seriously questioned. The failure of SEU to explain the behavior of significant numbers of experimental subjects and real world decision makers has led to further revisions and the development of generalized expected utility theories that have the ability to explain some (if not all) of these anomalies. All of these theories attempt to explain, at least in part, decisions under risk—where outcomes are not certain, but the chances of the outcomes occurring follow a known probability distribution. Recently, skepticism regarding the descriptive accuracy of EU and SEU has crossed disciplinary boundaries from psychology and economics to political science, sociology.
and business. In particular, researchers in political science studying foreign policy
decision making have begun to examine alternatives to the Bernoullian models.

In this chapter I first consider the myriad ways in which the concepts of risk,
uncertainty, and risk propensity have been interpreted by social scientists and the
implications of adopting one set of definitions rather than another. I then put forth and
defend the definitions that I will follow throughout this study. My third section focuses
on the various literatures from political science, psychology, economics, business, and
sociology that inform this study. In the fourth section, I raise issues of measurement,
validity, and evaluation, constructing a critique that provides the foundation for the
theory and research design explicated in sections five and six. In section five, I propose a
"Risk Explanation Framework" (REF), discussing the theoretical and empirical roots of
each hypothesis. Finally, section six focuses on the research methods used in this study,
providing a more complete and critical examination of the methods introduced in Chapter
1 (sections V & VI).

II. Conceptual Clarification

The concept of risk is commonly used in discussions of private and public
decisions. Individuals may decline to engage in a particular activity (e.g. skydiving)
because they are unwilling to “take the risk”. The president may describe a particular
policy as entailing “risks that we are willing to bear”. The commonality of the notion of
risk is exemplified by the diversity of fields in which literatures on risk and risk-taking
have proliferated: political science, psychology, economics, sociology, business, health
sciences, systems engineering (and others). Unfortunately, the extensive study of risk across numerous disciplines has also resulted in a proliferation of perspectives regarding the concepts under study. Aside from cross-disciplinary confusion, a further problem emerges when research based on one set of perspectives (and resultant definitions) is used to support elements of research based on other perspectives (and definitions).

The classical definition of risk emerges from decision research in psychology and economics. In this tradition, *risk* describes choice problems where the various outcomes associated with potential actions are probabilistic, and the probabilities and utilities associated with the outcomes are known by the decision maker. Risk is thus differentiated from *uncertainty* which is used to describe similar choice problems where the probabilities and/or utilities associated with outcomes are not known by the decision maker (and the potential set of outcomes may be unknown as well). Betting on whether a fair coin will land on its “head” or “tail” involves risk (the probability of each outcome is known to be .50). Betting in April that the Boston Red Sox will win the World Series in October involves uncertainty (the probability of this outcome is not known— it may be .8, .5, or more likely 0). “Uncertainty” suggests a broad range of probabilities that may be associated with any outcome, although the range may be limited through the acquisition of knowledge it can seldom be reduced to a single numerical probability. Much of behavioral decision theory rests on experimental results produced through confronting subjects with decisions that involve risk (see Kahneman and Tversky 1979; and Lopes 1987, 1990), while some recent advances have incorporated uncertainty into the standard research design (see particularly Tversky and Kahneman 1992).
While the classical definition was developed in the clarity of the experimental laboratory, the use of risk in business, sociology, and political science is more empirically oriented. In these disciplines, definitions of risk are often adapted to reflect the reality of the domain under study. Thus, in business, risk has been associated with “exposure to a chance of loss” (MacCrimmon and Wehrung 1986:9). Losses may either be defined as movement from a pre-existing asset level (i.e. the status quo) or as “opportunity losses” which are obtained through the selection of sub-optimal decisions. In sociology, risk often “denotes the possibility that an undesirable state of reality (adverse effects) may occur as a result of natural events or human activities” (Renn 1992:56). A burgeoning literature therefore focuses on environmental and technical risks for society and how risks should be distributed across different groups/regions (see Renn 1992; Vlek and Stallen 1980; Sjöberg 1980; and Teuber 1990). In political science, risk has been described as “the likelihood of the materialization of validly predictable direct and indirect consequences with potentially adverse values, arising from events, self-behavior, environmental constraints, or the reaction of an opponent or third party” (Vertzberger 1995b). As Adomeit notes in his discussion of the study of risk in international relations: “Risks, in the mind of the political scientist, refer to conditions which are more or less likely to result in war” (1982:17). The common thread that runs through each of these definitions is a focus on adversity or loss (i.e. negative outcomes) and uncertainty.

The study of risk (at least in business, sociology, and political science) is evolving away from the traditional focus on probability and utility, and moving towards a focus on loss and uncertainty (see Yates and Stone 1992). Risk “has entered politics and in doing
so has weakened its old connection with technical calculations of probability... The idea
of risk in itself was neutral; it took account of the probability of losses and gains... now
risk refers only to negative outcomes... The language of risk is reserved as a specialized
lexical register for political talk about the undesirable outcomes" (Douglas 1990:3, italics
in original). Uncertainty is included as an “integral element” of risk in order to account
“for the predecisional state of knowledge and its impact on the incentive to take or avoid
risk” (Vertzberger 1995b:350). This redefinition of risk results from a frustration with the
traditional use of the term and its inability to reflect the reality of the domain under
examination. “Risk must be approached in a nontechnical manner, and hence the common
distinction between risk and uncertainty is neither realistic nor practical when applied to
the analysis of nonquantifiable and ill-defined problems, such as those posed by
important politico-military issues” (Vertzberger 1995b:349).

A key concern at this stage in the study of risk and decision making has to be the
implications of this redefinition of the concept under examination. It is important to note
that while Vertzberger advocates a new approach (Sociocognitive) to the study of risk
that is based on his rethinking and reconceptualization of the concept, his discussion of
problem-framing and risk estimation relies on a number of psychological studies that
subscribe to the traditional definition of risk (1995b:361-369). Simply put, the results
obtained by these researchers may not apply to decisions under risk as defined by
Vertzberger. In fact, the terms risk-seeking and risk-aversion have vastly different
meanings depending on your definition of risk. In terms of Vertzberger’s definition, risk-
seeking and risk-aversion are functions of the relationship between “real risk”, “perceived
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risk”, and “acceptable risk” (1995b:357). This view of risk propensity is quite different from the traditional view that risk propensity is related to the expected-utility of the outcomes under examination. Obviously, empirical studies based on the traditional view of risk and risk propensity uncover behavioral regularities that may not occur in situations fitting the new definitions. The fundamental logical assumptions underlying the classical and adaptive definitions are so different that it is questionable whether the same phenomenon is being examined.

A further implication of the redefinition of risk is a focus on threats to the neglect of opportunity. The focus on “adverse values” and “negative consequences” in political science has resulted in a number of studies of decision making in the domain of losses (see Levy 1987; Jervis 1988; Stein and Pauly 1992; Farnham 1992; McDermott 1992; and McInerney 1992), but few in the domain of gains (to follow the language of Kahneman and Tversky 1979). Foreign policy decisions that involve risks of the type that may result in “opportunity loss” (MacCrimmon and Wehrung 1986:10) are seldom examined. This redefinition of risk reduces the scope of the study of risk in foreign policy

1Vertzberger puts forth a distinction between “real risk... the actual risk resulting from a situation or behavior, whether decision-makers are aware or unaware of it”, “perceived risk... the level of risk attributed to a situation or behavior by the decision-makers”, and “acceptable risk... the level of risk representing the net costs that decision-makers perceive as sustainable, and are willing to bear, in pursuit of their goals” (1995b:355-356, see also 355 FN6). Risk-seeking is suggested to occur when perceived risks > acceptable risk, while risk-aversion occurs when perceived risk < acceptable risk. Vertzberger uses the relationship between real risk and perceived risk to indicate when misperceptions may have their greatest impact. In the more traditional conception, risk-seeking occurs when an option is chosen with a.) a higher probability of a negative outcome, and b.) equal or lower expected-utility; while risk-aversion occurs when an option is chosen with a.) a lower probability of a negative outcome, and b.) equal or lower expected-utility (see Kahneman and Tversky 1979).
decision making and may contribute to the status quo bias found in so much of the current international relations literature.⁴

For the purposes of this project I shall speak of the domain of foreign policy decision making as being characterized by *subjective risk under uncertainty*. It is important to recognize the differences between the foreign policy and gambling domains, but we should not attempt to reconcile these differences by simply redefining our concepts. Viewing foreign policy decision making as *subjective risk under uncertainty* allows us to retain the content of the classical concepts while adapting them for use in the foreign policy domain. *Subjective risk under uncertainty describes occasions for decision where the complete set of potential outcomes (gains and/or losses) and outcome probabilities are not fully known, forcing decision makers to develop subjective estimates of potential outcomes, the values of those outcomes, and the probabilities associated with the occurrence of those outcomes.* By adopting this viewpoint, we may continue to speak of *risk* in a consistent and meaningful manner, and we may also consider how subjective estimates of the elements of risk are formed, as well as how uncertainty regarding these estimates affects the decision process. In effect, we can recognize the special character of the foreign policy decision making domain without rejecting the concepts developed to explain decisions under risk elsewhere. By maintaining a connection with the classical definition of risk we may avoid the equation of risk with solely negative outcomes. By

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⁴Schweller (1996) provides an interesting discussion of the status quo bias in the neorealist literature. Jervis strongly cautions prospect theorists: "it should be stressed that prospect theory does not deny that actors may want to change the status quo... Actors will take some risks to improve their situations even if they are risk-averse for gains" (1992:195).
characterizing the foreign policy decision making domain as subjective risk under uncertainty, we may define a new area of study for which the classical literature on risk is not well-suited.

This project chooses to reject the definitions of risk-aversion and risk-seeking developed in Vertzberger (1995b:355-57). The notion of acceptable risk is certainly plausible, but the distinction between real risk and perceived risk is difficult to discern outside of the laboratory setting. Vertzberger’s (1995b:356) notion of real risk runs counter to his depiction of the foreign policy decision making domain under conditions of uncertainty. If the dominating characteristic of the domain under study is uncertainty, how can the researcher expect to identify real risk any better than the subjects under study? This is not so much a phenomenological as a practical view. In the expected-utility tradition, risk-seeking occurs when an option is chosen with a) a higher probability of a negative outcome, and b) equal or lower expected-utility: while risk-

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3 The analytical value of introducing real risk seems to lie in the ability to attach a normative judgment to the decision maker’s choice (Vertzberger 1995b:357 Table I). Since normative evaluation of decision maker choice is not a goal of this project, I am comfortable with rejecting Vertzberger’s distinction between real and perceived risk. I also reject this distinction on the grounds of practicality, and the fact that we may debate whether real risk actually exists apart from perceived risk. Vertzberger suggests that two “realities” exist-- one subjective and perceived by the decision maker, the other objective and observable by the researcher (1990:37). In defending this epistemological orientation, he argues that: “Indeed, reality as defined by the researcher cannot represent perfect objectivity. Yet since we are dealing with a soft science, we must rest content with qualified objectivity, that is, the researcher’s perception of reality, and not allow this to deter us from dealing with the subject and making the best of it.” (1990:37) While I do not characterize myself as a “post-positivist” (see Smith, Booth, and Zalewski 1996), I find that I disagree with Vertzberger’s epistemological perspective. Given that the researcher can only approach “qualified” objectivity, does it make sense to suggest that the researcher’s estimate of risk is more truthful or accurate than the subjects? In terms of probability theory, can we actually discriminate between veridical and inaccurate perceptions of risk (even if we are allowed to benefit from hindsight)? When the weather forecaster predicts a 40% chance of snow for Tuesday, March 8 and it rains instead was his estimate of the risk of snow wrong? These practical and epistemological problems lead me to focus on “perceived risk” and avoid notions of “real risk” altogether. (See Sylvan and Thorson 1992 for a similar discussion regarding the “accuracy” of problem representations and decision frames.)
aversion occurs when an option is chosen with a.) a lower probability of a negative outcome, and b.) equal or lower expected-utility. An alternative formulation focuses on variation in the potential range of outcomes, probabilities associated with negative outcomes, and the validity of subjective estimates (see March and Shapira 1987). For the purposes of this project, *Comparatively riskier options are characterized by: a.) more numerous and extremely divergent outcomes, b.) the perception that extreme negative outcomes are at least possible.*, and c.) recognition that estimates of potential outcomes and the probabilities associated with the occurrence of those outcomes are potentially flawed and may, in fact, be totally incorrect. This formulation of riskiness retains the comparative nature of the classical view, and yet also reflects the difficulties in measuring utilities and probabilities discussed below. It reflects the character of the domain as discussed by Vertzberger (1995b), but it also indicates a descriptive rather than normative perspective.\(^5\)

\(^4\)The term “negative outcome” describes the outcomes that are least preferred by the decision maker. This category should therefore include perceived opportunity losses as well as perceived losses. By possible, I mean that the decision maker’s subjective estimate of the probabilities associated with extreme negative outcomes exceed .05 (if represented numerically).

\(^5\)Vertzberger (1995a&b) avoids developing a general operational definition of risk-acceptant/averse behavior. He focuses on a particular policy instrument—military intervention—and associates risk-taking behavior with the use of this instrument and risk-averse behavior with a decision not to use this instrument. This perspective is far removed from the explicitly comparative view of risk-acceptant/averse behavior preferred by most decision theorists. I feel that it is a mistake to measure the “riskiness” of options in an objective, isolated manner. One may easily construct hypothetical cases where military intervention may be the least risky option under consideration.
III. Extant Theory and Empirical Research

As mentioned at the outset of this chapter, the classical study of risk behavior is usually traced to Daniel Bernoulli’s introduction of expected utility theory in 1738. Scholars of this era had been wrestling with Nicholas Bernoulli’s “St. Petersburg Paradox” since 1713. The “paradox” challenged the intuitive plausibility of the then-dominant expected-value theory (EV). N. Bernoulli posed a simple question: “Suppose that a fair coin is tossed until tails first appears, at which point the player is paid a sum equal to $2^n$, where $n$ is the number of the toss on which tails appears. How much should a person be willing to pay for a single play of the game?” (quoted in Lopes 1995:179).

According to EV theory,

$$
EV = \sum_{i=1}^{n} p_i(v_i)
$$

$$
EV = \frac{1}{2}($2) + \frac{1}{4}($4) + \frac{1}{8}($8) + ... + \frac{1}{n}($2^n)...
$$

$$
EV = 1 + 1 + 1 + ... + 1...
$$

where $p_i$ is the probability of tails appearing on the $i$th toss, and $v_i$ is the value of tails appearing on the $i$th toss, so the value of the game is infinite. As Lopes notes: “Though intuition whispers that the game is worth no more than a few dollars, expected value demands that one give all one has or hopes to have in exchange for a single play” (1995:179). D. Bernoulli solved the problem by developing the notion of “moral value” (utility) (1967[1738]).
The Bernoullian Tradition

D. Bernoulli’s expected-utility (EU) theory is based on the notion that “rich men value given increments of wealth less than poor men” (Lopes 1995:180). Rather than view increases in wealth as a monotonic function, Bernoulli posited that individual perceptions of utility might be represented by negatively accelerated utility curves. Lopes solves the St. Petersburg paradox by positing a utility curve that decreases logarithmically and finds that the game is worth approximately $4 (1995:180). Bernoulli’s negatively accelerated utility function introduced the concept of risk aversion: ceteris paribus, most individuals prefer certain outcomes to gambles. This simple theoretical advance provided the foundation for the next two centuries of research on human risk behavior.

Expected-utility theory was modernized in the 1940s and 50s. von Neumann and Morgenstern (1947) provided an axiomatic procedure for measuring cardinal utility (similar to Bernoulli’s subjective value), altered the interpretation of the utility function so that it summarized rather than caused preferences, and suggested that utility maximization applied to single choices as well as to iterated decisions (see Lopes 1995:181). In 1948, Friedman and Savage suggested that: if utility functions summarize preferences, it is possible that they may have both concave and convex regions (allowing for risk-aversion and risk-seeking). Finally, Savage (1954) introduced “subjective expected-utility theory” (SEU). SEU “challenged the idea of probability objectivity by replacing measured or stated probabilities by their subjective counterparts” (Lopes 1995:181). In SEU, the perceptions of the individual decision maker were finally taken
into account, but the challenge of estimating subjective probability opened a "pandora's box".

Much of the work on risk behavior in political science is based on the Bernoullian tradition. The revised specification of expected-utility theory proposed by von Neumann and Morgenstern (1947) provides the foundation for researchers that use game theory to explore strategic decision making.° Morrow (1994:16-50) details the manner in which expected-utility theory has been (and can be) applied to political decision making. Bueno de Mesquita has based an entire research program on expected-utility theory (see 1975, 1981, 1985; Bueno de Mesquita and Lalman 1992). These authors have proposed alternative measures of national risk attitudes that can be entered into the expected-utility calculus (Bueno de Mesquita 1985; Morrow 1987). They clearly recognize the challenges to expected-utility theory discussed below, but they argue that "their proponents have not yet demonstrated their general importance to the construction of social theory based on individual choice" (Morrow 1995:49).

Preference Reversals

The axiomatic specificity of the newly modified expected-utility theory had the unintended consequence of highlighting its weaknesses. In the late 1950s and 60s, scholars (in such fields as experimental psychology and economics) began to conduct strict empirical tests of these axiomatic relations. One vein of research introduced the

°Savage's (1954) subjective expected-utility theory is used somewhat less extensively. (A notable use of SEU in research on risk behavior in international relations may be found in Alpert 1976).
notion of *preference reversals* (for a review of this research see Slovic and Lichtenstein 1983; Tversky, Slovic, and Kahneman 1990). These studies focused on the fact that “models of rational choice assume a principle of procedure invariance, which requires strategically equivalent methods of elicitation to yield the same preference order” (Tversky, Slovic, and Kahneman 1990:204). Thus, asking for a preference between gambles while also asking for a buying or selling price for the gambles should yield similar preference relations. If one prefers bet A to bet B they should also value bet A more than bet B. These studies found just the opposite, hence the term *preference reversal*. In one of the pathbreaking studies, Slovic and Lichtenstein (1968) found that “both buying and selling prices of gambles were primarily determined by the payoffs, whereas choices between gambles (and ratings of their attractiveness) were primarily influenced by the probability of winning and losing” (Tversky, Slovic and Kahneman 1990:204). The empirical results of the early studies were supported by a rigorous (and skeptical) series of replications reported in Grether and Plott (1979). These economists proposed no less than twelve alternative explanations for the preference reversal phenomenon (including “experimenters were psychologists”) and yet found that “the preference reversal phenomenon which is inconsistent with the traditional statement of preference theory remains” (1979:634). Buoyed by this persuasive evidence of the empirical weakness of expected-utility theory (and combined with the paradoxes discovered by Allais (1979[1952]) and Ellsberg (1961)), many psychologists and economists began to develop new theories of choice that sacrificed theoretical simplicity in exchange for descriptive accuracy.
A number of significant modifications of the basic expected-utility model have been proposed in the last twenty-five years. Kahneman and Tversky's prospect theory (1979, Tversky and Kahneman 1992) has received the most attention from political scientists and will be the focus of our concern, but others have also had some influence. Machina's (1987) "fanning out" hypothesis, Neilson's (1992) "mixed fanning" hypothesis, Yaari's (1987) "dual theory" of choice, and Loomes and Sugden's (1982) "regret theory" are all promising revisions that have been empirically tested against expected-utility theory (see Harless and Camerer 1994). Despite the modest success of several of these theories, they are seldom employed by political scientists because their mathematical innovations are difficult to translate into "real world" behavioral observations. I feel that the interest of political scientists in prospect theory is the result of its intuitively plausible hypotheses, supportive experimental results, and apparent simplicity and relevance. In particular, I feel that International Relations theorists are also attracted by its focus on risk-taking in the face of "losses" or threats.

Prospect Theory

Prospect theory, as developed by the aforementioned Kahneman and Tversky, was formally introduced in a 1979 *Econometrica* article and popularized through a number of more descriptive pieces in other publications (see Tversky and Kahneman 1981; Kahneman and Tversky 1982, 1983). Prospect theory is viewed by many as the dominant weighted-utility theory in psychology and economics. Kahneman and Tversky hoped to modify the standard subjective expected-utility (SEU) model in order to account for the
preference reversal phenomenon as well as the Ellsberg paradox (which introduced the
notion of nonlinear subjective probability). While SEU has been described as a normative
theory of choice, prospect theory is a descriptive theory based on extensive laboratory
testing (Quattrone and Tversky 1988:720). The most compelling (and oft cited) finding of
Kahneman and Tversky’s experiments is their explanation for the preference reversal
phenomenon. Kahneman and Tversky’s subjects were not concerned so much with final
asset positions (as would be suggested by expected-utility theory), but rather with
departures from an initial position or “reference point”. Thus, subjects think in terms of
"gains" and "losses" (decision frames) and their preferences are actually variable (as
opposed to the invariance predicted by standard SEU models; see Quattrone and Tversky.
1988:727) as they shift from one frame to the other. This observed shift in preferences
also involves a shift in risk propensity.

Tversky and Kahneman “use the term ‘decision frame’ to refer to the decision-
maker’s conception of the acts, outcomes, and contingencies associated with a particular
choice”(1981:453). The framing of any decision is not simply the result of “objective”
elements of the problem, it is also shaped by the “norms, habits, and personal
characteristics of the decision-maker”(1981:453). This goes beyond the simple notion of
subjectively defined probabilities and utilities and suggests that people experience similar
combinations of probability and utility is markedly different ways. Tversky and
Kahneman posit that due to “imperfections of human perception and decision... changes
of perspective often reverse the relative size of objects and the relative desirability of

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options" (1981:453). Thus, weighted-utility theories (like prospect theory) must be developed to account for these perceptual distortions.

The above observations led to the following hypothesis regarding human decision making behavior: "risk aversion in the positive domain is accompanied by risk seeking in the negative domain" (Kahneman and Tversky 1979:268). Subjects tended to prefer the less risky option when the problem was framed as a gain, and the more risky option when the problem was framed as a loss. This "reflection effect" and the correspondent sensitivity to the way a problem is framed are the main findings that have been utilized by political scientists.

Prospect theory "distinguishes two phases in the choice process: an early phase of editing and a subsequent phase of evaluation" (Kahneman and Tversky 1979:274). The editing phase is discussed, but not formally modeled. The most significant element of the editing phase is "coding" - subjects "perceive outcomes as gains and losses... Gains and losses, of course, are defined relative to some neutral reference point" (1979:274). The subject's current reference point is usually assumed to be the status quo, although it may also be associated with some previous or anticipated reference point. The evaluation phase is explicitly modeled. Kahneman and Tversky note that "Following the editing phase, the decision maker is assumed to evaluate each of the edited prospects, and to

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I have distinct reservations regarding the methods employed in these experiments. One of the strongest findings reported by Kahneman and Tversky (1979) is the "certainty effect". When one of the prospects presented to subjects included a certainty term, the preference reversal phenomenon was more extensive. Unfortunately these prospects did not measure decisions under risk, but rather subjects' decisions between certainty and risk. Thus, risk-aversion under these circumstances may be more accurately characterized as risk-avoidance.
choose the prospect of highest value” (1979:275). The value of the prospects- \( V \) is expressed through a modified expected-utility equation. This modified utility equation includes a decision weight- \( \pi \) and a value function- \( v \). The decision weight measures “the impact of events on the desirability of prospects” (1979:280), it essentially introduces a measure of the subjectivity involved in interpreting probabilistic information. The value function introduces a measure of the subjectivity involved in interpreting values as deviations from the reference point. It captures loss aversion as well as the diminishing marginal utility of gains.

The general design of the Kahneman and Tversky (1979) experiments involved presenting subjects with gambling prospects. Subjects were presented with two prospects, framed as either gains or losses. The prospects include an outcome (a monetary gain or loss) and an associated numerical probability. The values of outcomes and the probabilities associated with the occurrence of outcomes are varied so that one prospect can be viewed as more “risky” than the other while the expected-utility of each prospect is roughly equivalent (allowing the elimination of SEU as an alternative explanation for subject choice).\(^8\)

International relations theorists have interpreted the Kahneman and Tversky findings in such a way as to increase the applicability of prospect theory to the study of foreign policy decision making. In the original experiments (1979), framing was more a characteristic of the prospects rather than the situations. In the more recent international

\(^8\)For a more extensive discussion of prospect theory see Levy 1992a, 1995.
relations applications, the decision maker is viewed as being in a certain domain (gains or losses) and the focus is often on the decision maker's frame of the situation rather than the manner in which options are framed (see Huth, Bennett, and Gelpi 1992; Farnham 1992. McDermott, 1992). This is an important difference, and yet this new interpretation has not been subject to extensive empirical testing.

Process Models

A promising alternative to the Bernoullian family of decision making theories is the process approach described by Lopes (1995). This research tradition has rejected the normative character of expected-utility theory, instead focusing on “the question which logically ought to come first—how do people actually go about making decisions in gambling situations?” (Edwards 1953:351). These studies have examined risk dimensions and duplex bets (Slovic and Lichtenstein 1968), intransitivity and lexicographic semiorders (Tversky 1969), responses to histograms and multioutcome distributions (Coombs 1975; Lopes 1987), choice boards and eye movement (Payne, Bettman, and Johnson 1990; Rosen and Rosenkoetter 1976), and verbal protocols (Payne, Laughhunn, and Crum 1980). The process approach hopes to achieve descriptive accuracy and appears to be more easily adaptable for use in the study of presidential foreign policy decision making.

Despite the sharp conceptual contrasts between the Bernoullian and process traditions, the fundamental intuitions that underlie the models are often similar. As Lopes notes, the Bernoullian (algebraic) and process models “can be easily reconciled by
recognizing that algebraic models describe patterns of preferences across option sets, whereas process models describe the sequence and content of comparison processes that underlie individual acts of choosing" (1995:213). Lopes (1987, 1990, 1995) has attempted to develop a model of risky choice that builds on both traditions.

*SP/A Theory*

Numerous decision theorists have attempted to explain the observed behavioral departures from SEU theory. One such research tradition is known as “rank dependent value modeling”. These theorists hypothesize that “decumulative probability values are shrunk systematically as a function of the rank position of the outcome value... Decumulative probabilities attached to the worst outcomes in the distribution are shrunk proportionally little or not at all while probabilities attached to the best outcomes are shrunk proportionally much more” (Lopes 1990:276). The manner in which decumulative probabilities are transformed yields functions whose shapes depict risk-avoidance and risk-seeking (or a combination of each, see Lopes 1990:278). This notion of transforming decumulative probabilities is the rank dependent value modeling parallel to prospect theory’s weighting function.

A promising variation on the rank dependent value modeling tradition is SP/A theory as developed by Lola Lopes (1981, 1987, 1990). Lopes (1987) attempts to construct a theory of risk behavior that captures individual dispositions toward risk, in accord with the motivational literature on risk behavior (see Atkinson 1957 and McClelland 1961), and the impact of situational factors on risk-taking/risk-aversion. The
dispositional factors are described as “security motivation” and “potential motivation” while the situational factor is termed “aspiration level” (Lopes 1987:276-277). Simply put, “security motivation corresponds to weighting the worst outcomes in a lottery more heavily than the best outcomes, and potential motivation corresponds to the opposite” (Lopes 1987:276). “Aspiration level” is intended to capture the opportunities and constraints facing the decision maker. The crucial differences between the weighting functions of SP/A theory and prospect theory are 1.) factors posited to affect the weighting functions: security/potential motivation and aspiration level in SP/A theory, coding in terms of gains and losses in prospect theory; 2.) in SP/A theory the weights are joint functions of the magnitudes of probabilities and the magnitudes of outcomes, in prospect theory the weighting of probability and value is independent; and 3.) in SP/A theory, weights do not reflect perceptions of probabilities or values- “the fact that a person chooses... to minimize the likelihood of a bad outcome does not imply either that (subjectively) he underestimates the value of good outcomes or that he overestimates the probability of bad outcomes” (Lopes 1987:276).

Like prospect theory, SP/A theory is a descriptive theory of choice based on experimental observations. Lopes’ (1987) method is slightly different than Kahneman

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9 Lopes notes that this notion of security/potential-motivation “is also related to the maximin gain and minimax loss rules that have figured in theories of decision under uncertainty, but it does not share their propensity to be foolishly affected by very small differences” (1990:280).

10 It is suggested that the aspiration level interacts with security/potential motivation so that security-motivated individuals “set more modest aspiration levels than potential-motivated people” (Lopes 1987:279).

11 Lopes’ findings are supported by research in the area of managerial response to risk (see March and Shapira 1987, 1992).
and Tversky's (1979) however, as she presents subjects with choices between lotteries with similar expected utilities but differing levels of risk. While the domain of choice continues to be gambling problems, presenting subjects with multi-outcome prospects is viewed as a closer approximation of "real world" decisions (Lopes 1987:264-265). Lopes' results are particularly interesting because of her use of protocol analysis. This method allows subjects to directly report their rationales for choosing one lottery over another. The researcher is provided with direct insight as to which aspects of the decision problem receive the most weight.  

While Lopes (1987, 1990, 1995) describes the process through which personal predispositions are translated into risk-acceptant/avoidant choices, she provides little guidance regarding the personal characteristics that contribute to security/potential-motivation. Lopes' experimental method allows her to observe behavioral evidence of security/potential motivation, but she does not correlate this evidence with the personality traits of her subjects. Her reluctance to proceed to this obvious next step may stem from her recognition of the complex and indeterminate results obtained by researchers attempting to associate personality characteristics with risk taking propensity.

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12 SP/A theory appears, at least intuitively, to have great potential relevance for the study of foreign policy decision making. Lopes' focus on process--how decision makers go about making choices--fits well with a research tradition that has long noted the empirical failure of more normative models of choice. The focus on process presents hypotheses that are actually testable in the "real world" of presidential foreign policy decision making (see section IV below). Also, the emphasis on individual personality should strike a chord with researchers that have stressed the importance of leadership and presidential character. Unfortunately, few international relations theorists interested in risk behavior (notable exceptions include Vertzberger, Levy, and Taliaferro) have exhibited even a basic familiarity with this research tradition.
The term "personality theory" is used here to describe the conglomeration of theories that focus on the personality traits of individual decision makers. In attempting to explain risky choice, theorists from this tradition have examined such diverse independent variables as subjects' need for achievement (Atkinson 1957; McClelland 1961; Bueno de Mesquita 1975); self-efficacy, self-worth, perceived parental expectations, and sex (Wyatt 1989); emotional arousability, conformity, moral reasoning, empathy, psychopathy, and sensation seeking (Levenson 1990); and neuroticism, extraversion, openness, agreeableness, and conscientiousness (Koweit and Hermann 1994). Other studies (see Slovic 1972) have simply attempted to establish cross-situational consistency in observed risk-taking behavior. Research in this tradition has focused on the intuitively attractive assumption that some people are risk-takers while others are not.

Personality theorists directly address the person-situation debate in psychology and political science. For years theorists have questioned the relevance of the personality traits of the decision maker. In decision theory (especially in economics) individual differences have often been ignored. Koweit and Hermann (1994:3-4) note: "That these subjects have been ignored is unproblematic in a field such as economics which ordinarily concerns itself with the modal behavior of utility maximizers in markets. But for students of international politics, no such oversight is permissible when the

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For discussions of this debate see Houts, Cook, and Shadish 1986; and Backteman and Magnusson 1981.
behavior of a single leader, shaping military or economic policy, often has dramatic consequences. "Personality theorists have begun to concentrate on developing a critique of prospect theory, which focuses on the exigencies of the situation or makes generalizations about decision maker risk propensity rather than addressing the personality characteristics of the decision maker.

A significant portion of this research focused on the question of whether a general trait of risk-taking propensity exists. The negative results obtained by Slovic (1962, 1972) provided empirical support for a more situational perspective, but a broader study by Kogan and Wallach (1964) produced somewhat more optimistic results. Kogan and Wallach included two moderator variables—defensiveness and test anxiety, and found that subjects high on both of these variables "tended to show greater regularity of risk taking across situations" (Bromiley and Curley 1992:118-119). Despite this weak support for an overall trait relating to risk propensity, more recent studies have supported a more individual-by-situation perspective (see Keyes 1985; MacCrimmon and Wehrung 1986). These studies suggest that individuals are at times consistent in their risk propensities, but usually only within a limited range of situations. This has led researchers to develop situational typologies and consider the personality traits that might contribute to a decision maker's risk propensity with regard to a particular type of decision.

Bromiley and Curley (1992:94) identify "four broad situations involving risk: activities involving physical sensation, games and lotteries, everyday life choices, and business settings". The experience of risk as a physical sensation has led to the study of "sensation seeking". Sensation seeking behaviors include skydiving, bungee jumping,
cigarette smoking, or binge drinking. This vein of research is probably the least relevant in terms of applicability to presidential foreign policy risk behavior. Games and lotteries, everyday life settings, and business decisions have all provided fertile experimental contexts for the study of risk behavior, but the results of this research are only suggestive of what we might expect in studying the context of foreign policy decision making. We must consider (see section IV below) the extent to which these situations are similar to the domain of foreign policy decision making before we readily accept the personality traits identified in these various studies.

Despite the often confusing and contradictory results produced by the experiments discussed above, researchers have begun to trace the outline of the risk-taking personality. A number of scholars have focused on “belief in ability to control events” as a significant personality trait associated with risk propensity (Vertzberger 1995:4-5; March and Shapira 1987; Slovic 1964; Plax and Rosenfeld 1976). Individuals with an internal locus of control belief tend to view situations involving risk and uncertainty as games of skill, while subjects with an external locus of control belief tend to view the same situations as games of chance. March and Shapira (1987:1413) note that business managers distinguish between taking risks and “gambling”, at least in part “because their experience teaches them that they can control fate”. Plax and Rosenfeld (1976:416-17) describe the attributes that their experiments led them to associate with a “dynamic task oriented leader” (a high risk-taker): “aggressive and manipulative, independent and radical- an individual who moves others about as if they were objects placed before him
to satisfy his own personal needs”. We may consider how these findings may be adapted to describe the prototypical risk-taking president (see section VI below).

**Uncertainty and Information Accuracy**

The study of decision maker responses to the stress inherent in making important decisions is grounded in the seminal work of Irving Janis and Leon Mann (see Janis and Mann 1977; Mann 1992; and for a review of their pathbreaking book, Kinder and Weiss 1978). Their “conflict model” of decision making served as the foundation for later studies of foreign policy decision maker behavior in the face of uncertainty, time pressure, and information of questionable accuracy (see George 1980; Vertzberger 1995b). The coping patterns and mechanisms for dealing with conflict that they identify in their research, suggest that we may expect to observe marked deviations in the foreign policy decision making process of presidents dealing with uncertainty and decisional stress.

Janis and Mann (1977) identify five main coping patterns that decision makers use to deal with difficult choices. The first two, *unconflicted inertia* and *unconflicted change*, involve little conflict and stress. The former involving the belief that risks from “staying the course” are slight, the latter involving the belief that a new policy entails little risk. *Defensive avoidance, hypervigilance, and vigilance*, are associated with situations where the decision maker perceives serious risks no matter what course of action is selected (Mann 1992:208). In these situations the decision maker is expected to experience conflict and stress.
Hypervigilance and vigilance describe extremely different coping patterns by decision makers. Hypervigilant decision makers approach a level of panic in the decision making process. Symptoms associated with this coping pattern include an acute awareness of time pressure, a focus on threats, impulsivity, vacillation, emotionality, reduction in memory span, and simplistic and repetitive thinking (Mann 1992:210). Vigilance, conversely, is associated with only moderate levels of stress, optimism, painstaking information search and assimilation, and careful evaluation of alternatives (Mann 1992:210). Clearly, vigilance may be associated with traditional notions of “rational” decision making, while hypervigilance is expected to produce highly “irrational” behavior.

Each of these coping patterns is observable in the laboratory setting, but George notes that “while hypervigilance is relatively rare, defensive avoidance is a highly pervasive tendency that is encountered in many different types of decisions whether in business, family affairs, or in politics” (1980:37). Of course, much of the research presented above would also seem to indicate that vigilance (i.e. perfectly rational decision making) is also a relatively rare response to uncertainty and the perceived lack of accurate information. Thus, our focus here will be on defensive avoidance strategies as developed by Janis and Mann (1977) and then modified by George (1980) and Vertzberger (1995b).

Janis and Mann (1977) proposed three basic defensive avoidance strategies: procrastination, buck-passing, and rationalization. Procrastination (or George’s “rational” procrastination 1980:36-37) is most likely to occur when the decision maker does not perceive that time pressure is acute. It involves delaying the decision until further
information can be collected and analyzed. This strategy involves the implicit belief that a better decision can be reached at some point in the future. Rationalization, or the more familiar “bolstering”, is the “psychological tendency under certain conditions of decisional stress to increase the attractiveness of a preferred (or chosen) option and doing the opposite for options which one is inclined to reject (or has rejected)” (George 1980:38). Bolstering allows a decision maker to reach closure by reducing (or eliminating altogether) the perception of uncertainty.

Building on these psychological strategies of coping with decisional stress, George lists a number of “cognitive aids” that may assist the decision maker (1980:39-47). Of these, incrementalism appears to be the most relevant—particularly when defensive avoidance strategies are linked to decision maker risk predispositions (see section V below). Incrementalism is simply the strategy of selecting “policy alternatives that differ only slightly from existing policies and aim at securing marginal rather than dramatic improvements” (George 1980:40). Incrementalism is viewed as a conservative strategy that allows for risk-avoidance (although over-cautious strategies can involve their own risks). In section V, I discuss how these different strategies of defensive avoidance are integrated into my “Risk Explanation Framework”.

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14This may be contrasted with George’s “defensive” procrastinator, which is closer to Janis and Mann’s notion of buck-passing.

15I have intentionally avoided a consideration of Janis and Mann’s buck-passing since the cases I have chosen all involve presidential decisions.
IV. Methodological Issues

As noted above, the study of risk behavior in political science has generally focused on algebraic models of decision making—particularly the Bernoullian family of expected-utility theories. These models, from Bernoulli (1967[1738]) to von Neumann and Morgenstern (1947) to Savage (1954) to Kahneman and Tversky (1979), share a number of flaws that limit their applicability within the study of foreign policy decision making. When taken together, the following issues suggest the need for significant theoretical adaptation and innovation.

*Measurement*

The Bernoullian theories, being models of mathematical expectation, require the exact measurement of estimates of utility and probability. While the models vary in terms of the objectivity vs. subjectivity of judgment, they all need inputs that are expressed numerically in order to accurately test their propositions. This presents problems for researchers attempting to evaluate these theories in the domain of foreign policy decision making. Levy (1995, 1992b), Jervis (1992), Vertzberger (1995b), and others (Boettcher 1995; Sjöberg 1980; Freudenburg 1992) have written extensively on the difficulties inherent in attempting to measure utilities and probabilities outside the laboratory setting. In foreign policy decision making values are attached to soldier’s lives, “national interests”, prestige, reputations, domestic political welfare, and a host of other tangible and intangible factors that resist exact measurement. The researcher is often forced to roughly aggregate different factors into a single estimate of positive or negative utility.
associated with the success or failure of particular options. This rough aggregation makes comparisons between the values of the options difficult. These problems have led to a distinct lack of rigorous, replicable, and valid utility measurement strategies in the foreign policy decision making literature.\textsuperscript{16}

Vertzberger (1995b) and Boettcher (1995, 1996) address the difficulties that researchers face when trying to determine the probabilities that are attached to outcomes by decision makers. Vertzberger notes that “in using subjective probabilities, decision-makers use symbolic descriptions of numbers (“highly likely, probably”) that express categorical and ordinal relations with certain focal or bounding landmark values”\textsuperscript{(1995b:366)}. Simply put, decision makers seldom communicate in explicit numerical probabilities, but instead rely on verbal expressions of probability. Budescu, Weinberg, and Wallsten comment on the irony of the fact that “the numerous decision models that assume numerical representation of uncertainty are in sharp contrast with the fact that people generally prefer to express their beliefs by means of natural language”\textsuperscript{(1988:281)}.\textsuperscript{17} Experiments have even shown that while consumers of probabilistic information prefer to receive numerical estimates, providers of information prefer to communicate probabilistic estimates in verbal terms.\textsuperscript{18}

\textsuperscript{16}Of course, there are exceptions. Huth, Bennett, and Gelpi (1992) follow Bueno de Mesquita (1981) and use military alliances as an indicator of utility. While this allows for rigorous and replicable measures, the validity of the utility estimates produced is questionable (see Majeski and Sylvan 1984).

\textsuperscript{17}This issue has also presented problems for survey researchers trying to understand their respondents estimates of probability. Recent research in this field has focused on developing scales of verbal probabilities that have consistent meanings for most respondents (see Krosnick forthcoming).

\textsuperscript{18}Budescu et al. suggest that “people understand words better than numbers” and that “numbers are perceived as conveying a level of precision and authority that people do not associate with their
The extent to which foreign policy decision makers communicate probabilistic information in words rather than numbers will hamper researchers’ attempts to accurately measure perceived risk. Verbal expressions of probability mean different things to different people, certain terms may cover probability ranges of 20% or more (see Clark 1990). A further problem is the fact that individuals often rely on nonprobabilistic expressions such as “good chance” or “never” or “usually” (Clark 1990:231). The indeterminate nature of these expressions results in probability estimates that cannot easily be entered into the standard expected-utility equation. Vertzberger adds that “even when likelihoods are described in numerical terms, they are actually treated as names of landmarks... The use of subjective probabilities in this form does not allow for multiplication and addition operations or for measuring errors and biases as distances from the correct values” (1995b:367). Thus, even numerical expressions of probability may not be easily manipulated as they are in the laboratory.

A third measurement problem is encountered when researchers using Kahneman and Tversky’s (1979) prospect theory attempt to identify the frame or reference point adopted by a decision maker. The notion of framing is undoubtedly the single most

opinions” (1988:281). Erev and Cohen test the hypothesis that the fear of accountability and punishment for being wrong influences the use of verbal versus numerical expressions of probability, but their results are not supportive of this explanation (1990).

There is a large amount of evidence that indicates that this has indeed been a significant problem. In 1964, Sherman Kent (the head of the CIA’s Board of National Estimates [BNE] from 1952-1967) wrote an essay titled “Words of Estimative Probability” in a vain attempt to rationalize and quantify the use of verbal expressions of probability in National Intelligence Estimates (NIEs) (Steury 1994, see also Boettcher 1996). The documentary record for both the Vietnam and Laos cases indicates that the use of these expressions was quite common in memoranda and analytical papers (Foreign Relations of the United States [FRUS]: 1961-1963, Volume I, Vietnam 1961; 1961-1963, Volume XXIV, Laos Crisis).
important contribution of Kahneman and Tversky's (1979) prospect theory, however, the editing phase is neither explicitly tested nor modeled numerically. As Levy (1995, 1992b), Jervis (1992) and others have suggested, the foundation of a prospect theory-based explanation of a foreign policy decision lies in determining the manner in which the decision maker is framing the problem, and yet Kahneman and Tversky's (1979) seminal article offers no theoretical guidance as to why a particular frame is selected. Levy notes that "the difficulty of determining empirically how an actor defines her reference point is particularly troubling... If we cannot establish the reference point, and do so independently of the behavior we are trying to explain, then prospect theory and its key hypotheses... cannot be tested and have no explanatory power" (1995:17). A number of works have attempted to empirically identify the framing of a problem confronting a decision maker (see Farnham 1992; McInerney 1992; McDermott 1992, 1995; Huth, Bennett, and Gelpi 1992; and Stein and Pauly 1992), but only Farnham (1992), Taliaferro (1994), and McDermott (1992) have developed theoretical explanations as to why one frame was chosen over another (in the first case- affect, in the latter- analogical reasoning). Of course, it is no small task to empirically identify the framing of a particular decision in a post-hoc analysis, simply because the manner in which a decision is framed may often be open to issues of interpretation. Without a great deal of empirical

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20Taliaferro's more recent work (1995) examines how frames are manipulated by advisers. He now views analogical reasoning as "one rhetorical tactic that a manipulator may employ" (personal correspondence with author).
evidence we cannot be confident about the plausibility of a researcher’s subjective interpretation.\textsuperscript{21}

The issue of measuring utilities and probabilities is less difficult than it may initially appear. If we accept the notion (discussed below) that it may be impossible to show that prospect theory (or some other behavioral decision theory) is demonstrably superior to expected-utility theory, then we may reject the view that promotes competitive testing against expected-utility theory. Thus, I advocate less concern about exact measurement of probabilities and utilities and a greater focus on examining the process of decision making. We can then focus on how estimates of utility and probability enter into the decision process (if at all) and how they are discussed by the decision makers.\textsuperscript{22} This type of design shifts the focus from simply predicting different outcomes to suggesting different underlying processes that are associated with observed outcomes.\textsuperscript{23}

\textsuperscript{21}The studies by Farnham (1992), McDermott (1992), and McInerney (1992) reveal the extensive amount of data that must be marshaled to convincingly identify the frame adopted by decision makers.

\textsuperscript{22}Most behavioral decision theories assume that some cost-benefit analysis is being conducted, their differences are more stark when they discuss the process by which estimates of utility and probability are constructed and how those estimates are entered into the cost-benefit calculations that result in a decision. Recall that expected-utility theory suggests a process of utility-maximization, where utility is evaluated relative to a decision maker’s overall asset level. Prospect theory posits that utility is evaluated relative to a reference point and that perceptions of probability are altered by decision weights. SP/A theory argues that utility is evaluated relative to an aspiration level and that security/potential-motivated decision makers engage in “bottom-up” or “top-down” processing of information.

\textsuperscript{23}I am well aware of the “as if” assumption and the “predictive accuracy” defense of rational choice models (see Friedman 1953). I contend that the development of “descriptively accurate” models of choice are essential for accurate prediction (see Kahneman and Tversky 1979 and Quattrone and Tversky 1988 for a discussion of “normative” versus “descriptive” models of choice). I firmly believe that understanding the process by which a decision is made can lead to enhanced predictive power.
Validity

Concerns regarding the internal validity of the Bernoullian family of theories have been discussed extensively in the psychological literature on decision theory (see Lopes 1990, 1995; Hershey and Schoemaker 1980; Budescu et al. 1988; Budescu and Wallsten 1990). Political scientists critical of the application of prospect theory to international relations have focused more on issues of external validity (see Levy 1995, 1992b; Jervis 1992; Shafir 1992; Kowert and Hermann 1995). A number of issues arise including: the artificiality of the experimental designs, the data requirements of the theories that make empirical testing outside the laboratory difficult (as discussed above), and the applicability and generalizability of certain behavioral observations.

The experiments performed by researchers from the Bernoullian tradition are usually rather simple, and yet ingenious. Of course, in the laboratory, the researcher has almost total control over the content of the information included in various choice problems. The stakes in the problems are usually money, lives, unemployment or inflation rates: carriers of value measurable on an interval scale and easily converted into measures of utility. Probabilities are expressed numerically to ensure that the expected-utility of each prospect can be compared. When prospect theory is tested, the framing of the reference point is inherent in the language of the choice problems: money is won or lost, people die or are saved. There is little ambiguity and subjects are assumed to adopt the frame given. The frames are also always pure- prospects are never mixed between losses and gains.
As Figure 2.1 shows, few of the conditions mentioned above are met in the
domain of foreign policy decisions where: frames are often mixed and difficult to discern;
the stakes of the decision may be prestige, domestic political welfare, reputation or some
other value that is not easily quantifiable; and decision makers often communicate in
verbal probability expressions. In the laboratory, potential outcomes associated with the
prospects under consideration are not dependent on the behavior of an adversary or ally.
The multilateral and interactive nature of the foreign policy arena might elicit different
behavioral regularities. Finally, experimental subjects are often forced to make a single
choice without the benefit of feedback. In the “real world” decision makers may make a
series of iterated decisions that allow for feedback, learning, and adaptation.

The applicability and generalizability of the results produced in these experiments
is hampered by the fact that the observed behavioral regularities are never exhibited by an
entire subject pool. In the Kahneman and Tversky experiments approximately 20-40% of
the subjects fall in the “off” cells (Levy 1992:305). For the economist studying mass
behavior across a number of decisions this is not so much of a problem, but for the
analyst examining a limited number of choices by individuals or small groups this is a
point of great concern. Who falls in those “off” cells and why they fall there becomes an
important question. This point is taken up by Kowert and Hermann (1995) in an
experiment that attempts to associate personality traits with risk propensity (see also
Bueno de Mesquita 1975; Levenson 1990; Lopes 1987; Plax and Rosenfeld 1976;
Wildavsky and Dake 1990; and Wyatt 1989).
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Characteristics</th>
<th>Gambling Domain</th>
<th>Foreign Policy Domain</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Types of Frames</td>
<td>Pure, Discernable</td>
<td>Mixed, Ill-structured</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Stakes of Decisions</td>
<td>Lack of Value Complexity- no comparison between different types of stakes</td>
<td>Value Complexity- different types of stakes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Money, Lives, Unemployment or Inflation Rates- easily converted into measures of utility</td>
<td>Prestige, Political Welfare, Reputation- resistant to exact measurement</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Estimates of Probability</td>
<td>Expressed numerically- easily entered into expected utility calculus</td>
<td>Expressed verbally or treated as numerical landmarks- difficult to translate into point numerical estimates</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Strategic Context</td>
<td>Unilateral- outcomes independent of other actors behavior</td>
<td>Multilateral- outcomes depend on behavior of allies and adversaries</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Single Shot</td>
<td>Iterated- usually part of an interactive series of decisions</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Figure 2.1: Differences Between Gambling (in experimental setting) and Foreign Policy Domains
A final concern relating to generalizability is the issue of group versus individual choice. Shafir notes: “Prospect theory is a theory of individual decision-making... It is based on specific assumptions regarding people’s anticipated pleasure over gains as compared to their pain over losses... All this may be significantly different for groups of individuals” (1992:313, italics in original). The extensive literature on small group behavior (see especially Kameda and Davis 1990; Clark 1971; Maoz 1990; and Vertzberger 1995a) suggests that group risk propensity cannot simply be determined by aggregating individual attitudes towards risk. As McDermott (1992) shows, the framing of a problem may involve competition between advisers with different policy preferences. This dynamism is seldom achieved in the laboratory setting. When foreign policy decisions are made by groups the researcher must be sensitive to the special character of the group context and take care in applying theories developed to explain individual behavior.

Plausibility probing is the fundamental motivation behind this dissertation. By focusing on process rather than solely focusing on outcome, I hope to discern the extent to which the Risk Explanation Framework's (REF) hypotheses are applicable to the domain of presidential foreign policy decision making. Concerns regarding the “off cells” of the behavioral decision theories have been addressed through the construction of my presidential risk predisposition index. The issue of group versus individual choice is addressed through careful case selection and limitations in the scope of this research design and the potential applicability of some of its findings.
I have attempted to select cases where historical interpretations and "conventional wisdom" indicate that the president was actively involved in the decision process. As Vertzberger (1995a:297) notes "in a presidential system the constitutional lines of accountability eventually lead directly to the president, no matter how many others participate in the decision making or are consulted". As the sign on Truman’s desk read "The Buck Stops Here" (McCullough 1992:481). I have carefully selected cases where the president made the final decision. I recognize that a number of the inputs to the decision process and the reference point for the problem itself may have been provided by presidential advisers, but I am less concerned with how options and reference points are developed than I am concerned with how options are compared and a choice among options is made by the president. Despite my restricted focus in this project, I recognize the importance of group inputs and plan to pursue research into group processes in the future.

Evaluation

The central purpose of many research endeavors is the elimination of alternative explanations for the results obtained through experimentation, large-N statistical studies.

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24In his dissertation, J. W. Taliaferro (1996) treats the framing of a problem as endogenous and examines how advisers may manipulate the framing of problems.

25I should clearly point out that the considerations discussed above mitigate, but do not eliminate, the concerns regarding group versus individual decision making. In order to test the hypotheses regarding the impact of personality on risk behavior I was forced to restrict my focus to individual presidents. In Chapter 5 I consider the results of my cases studies and suggest that further research into group risk behavior is required.
or case studies. Careful research designs are constructed in order to pit hypotheses against one another. When testing a theory of decision, a standard cost-benefit expected-utility model usually serves as the null hypothesis. It is also commonly accepted that the theory being tested should provide "a better explanation of that behavior than does expected-utility theory" (Levy 1992b:297, italics in original). Others argue that the new theory should be capable of explaining the cases previously explained by expected-utility theory and should also be able to explain cases that are not predicted by simple cost-benefit calculations (see Lakatos 1968). Thus, Levy (1992b, 1995) maintains that the burden of proof lies on prospect theory to perform in cases where expected-utility theory fails. In the laboratory, the Kahneman and Tversky (1979) design is "set up in such a way that expected-utility theory and prospect theory predict different choices, so that it is relatively straightforward to interpret the results of most of these experiments" (Levy 1995:17). Unfortunately, it is often difficult to replicate this degree of control in the foreign policy domain.

Levy (1992b) and Boettcher (1995) highlight the problems that McDermott (1992) experiences in attempting to eliminate alternative explanations. Her own data may be used to construct an explanation of President Carter's behavior (in the case of the Iranian hostage rescue mission) that is perfectly consistent with expected-utility theory. She avoids this conclusion by challenging Carter's revealed estimates of utility and probability. She writes: "even if he didn't think of the rescue mission as risky, he knew that objectively it was more risky than other options that were available to him"; and "while Carter may not have believed that the costs associated with the mission were high,
he was wrong objectively" (1992:260-261, italics in original). McDermott’s concern with what Carter “knew” instead of what he “thought” raises the issue of whether prospect theory is an objective or subjective theory of choice. If it is truly a subjective theory, then researchers should not rely on distinctions between perceptions and reality.

McDermott’s findings may simply be the product of the measurement problems discussed above, or they may also result from the special character of the foreign policy domain. I have argued elsewhere (Boettcher 1995) that it may be impossible to demonstrate that prospect theory can succeed where expected-utility theory fails in the “real world”. It is important to recall that prospect theory relies on a value and a probability weighting function to reflect risk-seeking in the domain of losses and risk-aversion in the domain of gains (see Kahneman and Tversky 1979; Levy 1992a). Subjects are not making “irrational” decisions in Kahneman and Tversky’s (1979) experiments, they are simply modifying the probabilities and utilities that are “given” in the choice problems. In the laboratory, “objective” probabilities and utilities are easily identifiable and potentially distinguishable from the subjects' frame-weighted perceptions. In the foreign policy setting the researcher is unable to demonstrate whether the decision maker has adopted some frame-weighted perception or has remained true to “objective” probability and utility estimates. Thus, decisions like Carter’s choice to attempt the hostage rescue mission may appear “rational” in the expected-utility sense only because
the researcher measured frame-weighted estimates of probability and utility. In short, the pre-intervention (i.e. pre-framing) estimates may be inaccessible.

In light of the methodological issues discussed above, I have argued (Boettcher 1995) for a revision of the “standard” evaluation criterion. I propose that we turn to a focus on process rather than outcome. We should not assume that, since a theory accurately predicted an outcome, that theory’s hypotheses regarding the process leading to the outcome are accurate. This is not to say that we should ignore outcomes altogether, but only that we should evaluate theories based on their ability to plausibly characterize the process of decision making (as well as accurately predict outcomes). As noted above, we should not allow theories to avoid careful scrutiny by simply resorting to the “as if assumption” defense (see Friedman 1953).

The strategy of qualitative “process” validation has frequently been utilized by political scientists concerned with the study of foreign policy decision making. Two particular research traditions immediately come to mind- simulation research and computational modeling. Simulation researchers like Harold Guetzkow and Charles F. Hermann attempted to evaluate the plausibility of their person-machine models both through “outcome” and “process” validation, suggesting that multiple validation strategies provided a more comprehensive understanding of the strengths and weaknesses of various simulation designs (see Guetzkow and Valadez 1981; Hermann 1967).

36A recent empirical attempt to differentiate between “objective” and frame-weighted estimates of verbal probability expressions weakly supports this suggestion (see Boettcher 1995).
have also emphasized the multi-criterion approach, arguing that their complex and well-specified models are often best evaluated by qualitative rather than quantitative techniques (1990:96-98). These researchers performed literature reviews, expert interviews, and counterfactual analysis to check the “process” validity of their model of Japanese energy decision making. In short, the notion of “process” validation has a significant history in the study of foreign policy decision making and clearly provides an appropriate alternative (or supplemental) criterion for evaluating the plausibility of models of presidential risk behavior.

V. A Risk Explanation Framework

Having explored much of the extant theoretical and empirical literature dealing with risk behavior (and having examined the methodological limitations of these approaches), we may now consider how the various veins of research discussed above may be combined into a synthesized model of presidential risk behavior in foreign policy. My “Risk Explanation Framework” attempts to draw on the most current and compelling research with little regard for disciplinary boundaries. In essence, I have tried to “mine the gems” of each research tradition—separating the truly original and innovative hypotheses from the sometimes cumbersome intellectual frameworks that have limited their applicability to the domain of foreign policy decision making. In this manner, I hope

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27 Despite their focus on qualitative process validation in Sylvan, Goel, and Chandrasekaran (1990), these authors view both types of validation (quantitative and qualitative) on an equal footing. They simply argue that the choice of validation strategy should reflect theoretical and empirical concerns.
to develop a framework for the explanation of presidential risk behavior that is truly sensitive to the domain of foreign policy decision making.

Figure 2.2 depicts the model of presidential risk behavior in foreign policy suggested by the REF. Following much of the literature on decision making, both within political science (e.g. Voss forthcoming) and in other disciplines as well (e.g. Kahneman and Tversky 1979), I divide the framework into a representation or framing stage and an option selection or evaluation stage. In the first stage, an aspiration level is constructed and options are generated. Also in this stage, the president first forms perceptions regarding relevant situational constraints: particularly, the level of uncertainty, the degree to which time pressures are acute, and the extent to which incoming information is accurate.  

In the second stage, options are evaluated relative to the aspiration level and options are eliminated that are incapable of achieving (or surpassing) the aspiration level. Also in this stage, I expect to observe the impact of personality predispositions upon information processing. Finally, a presidential decision is reached that reflects the interaction of presidential risk propensity and situational constraints. At this point we may observe the selection of one option out of several (influenced by presidential risk predisposition), the ratification of the only option capable of achieving the aspiration level, or an attempt to delay the decision altogether. If the president perceives high

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28 Of course the president's perceptions of the situational constraints are subject to updating throughout the decision making process.
Kennedy - Security-Motivated - Scores high on need for affiliation and conceptual complexity
Truman - Potential-Motivated - Scores high on belief in ability to control events, need for power, and task emphasis

Stage 1: Representation

Presidents and their advisers construct aspiration levels and begin to generate options.

Stage 2: Option Selection

Presidents evaluate options relative to their aspiration levels and reject those options that are perceived to be incapable of achieving (or surpassing) their aspiration levels.

If only one option remains, the president selects that option.

If two or more options remain, President Kennedy is expected to focus on worst-case outcomes and maximum losses, while President Truman is expected to focus on best-case outcomes and maximum gains.

Presidents perceive high uncertainty

Presidents perceive little time pressure

Presidents delay decisions

President Kennedy is expected to select a risk-averse option (through a decision process characterized by incrementalism)
President Truman is expected to select a risk-taking option (through a decision process characterized by bolstering)

Figure 2.2: Ideal Decision Making Process Suggested By REF
uncertainty, inaccurate information, and acute time pressures, the option selected may represent *incrementalism* (by risk-averse presidents) or *bolstering* (by risk-acceptant presidents). If the president perceives high uncertainty, inaccurate information, but little time pressure we may expect him to *delay* the decision altogether.

*Stage 1: Representation*

The representation stage of the REF is grounded in the reference dependence literature in psychology (Kahneman and Tversky 1979; Tversky and Kahneman 1992; Lopes 1987, 1990, 1995) and business (March and Shapira 1992), and the problem representation literature in political science (Sylvan and Thorson 1992; Beasley 1996; Sylvan forthcoming; Voss forthcoming). Each of these research traditions suggests that the manner in which a decision maker “represents” or “frames” a problem has a significant impact on the eventual solution he or she selects. In foreign policy decision making, presidents must develop these representations because, in general, the problems they face are “ill-structured”. That is, they do not have “well-defined initial states, goals, constraints, and/or means to reach the goal” (Voss forthcoming:5). While a president’s representation of a foreign policy problem may be quite rich, my focus here will be on the minimum level goals identified by the decision maker.

The work of Kahneman and Tversky (1979), Lopes (1995), and March and Shapira (1992) suggests decision makers are not so much concerned with overall asset levels as they are with departures from crucial “reference points”. These reference points may be interpreted as the decision maker’s minimum level goals (see Lopes 1995). While
much of the experimental literature focuses on a decision maker with a single goal (i.e.
achieving a particular monetary payout in a gambling problem), it should now be obvious
that presidents, making foreign policy decisions, often have multiple goals in mind. Thus,
in the REF, the president’s aspiration level is expected to comprise a set (or portfolio) of
minimum level goals that the president hopes to achieve or surpass. The aspiration level
may include an immediate goal, imperatives that constrain the means available for
achieving the immediate goal, and other interests that reinforce the president’s
commitment to achieving or surpassing his immediate goal.

Stage 2: Option Selection

It is in stage 2 where I first expect to observe the main effects of the president’s
aspiration level. The following hypotheses emerge from the research traditions concerned
with reference dependence and problem representation:

H1: Presidents tend to evaluate outcomes relative to an aspiration level rather than an
overall value level.

H1a: The president’s aspiration level (acting as a situational constraint) is likely to
preclude the consideration of options that are viewed as incapable of achieving (or
surpassing) the aspiration level in a particular case.

Also at this stage I expect to observe the impact of presidential predispositions on
predispositions on information processing. Her security/potential-motivated decision
makers are expected to process information in observably different ways, yielding the following hypotheses:

**H2:** Security-motivated presidents tend to engage in "bottom-up" processing—(i.e. focusing on worst-case outcomes and maximum losses).

**H3:** Potential-motivated presidents tend to engage in "top-down" processing—(i.e. focusing on best-case outcomes and maximum gains).

Further, these differences in information processing are expected to affect option selection. The following hypotheses establish the link between risk predispositions and risk behavior (i.e. option selection):

**H4:** Security-motivated presidents are likely to behave in a risk-averse manner.

**H5:** Potential-motivated presidents are likely to behave in a risk-acceptant manner.

Of course, there are certain circumstances where these hypotheses might not apply (see Lopes 1987:281-282). A dearth of alternatives may mitigate the role of presidential risk predispositions, resulting in a choice affected by the aspiration level alone. Thus, the following hypothesis:

**H6:** If there is only one alternative capable of achieving the aspiration level, that alternative is likely to be selected regardless of its level of risk.

At the conclusion of the option selection stage I leave open the possibility of observing the effects of perceptions of uncertainty, information inaccuracy, and time pressure. Following, Janis and Mann (1977) and George (1980) I offer the following hypothesis:
H7: Presidential perceptions of high uncertainty and a lack of valid information will interact with presidential risk predispositions and affect the output of the decision process.

In particular, I expect presidents to follow the defensive avoidance strategies discussed above (see section III). I propose the following hypothesis for situations where a president perceives high uncertainty and inaccurate information, but does not perceive acute time pressure:

H7a: If time pressures are not acute, both risk-averse and risk-acceptant presidents are likely to delay the moment of decision. (The rationale is that the presidents will use this added time to reduce uncertainty and collect more valid information.)

In situations where presidents perceive high uncertainty, inaccurate information, and acute time pressure, I expect the defensive avoidance strategy followed by the president to fit with his personal risk predisposition. Thus, the following hypotheses:

H7b: If time pressures are acute, risk-averse presidents are likely to engage in incrementalism.

H7c: If time pressures are acute, risk-acceptant presidents are likely to engage in bolstering.
VI. Operationalization and Measurement Strategies

*Personality Assessment-at-a-Distance*

As noted in Chapter 1 (section V), the initial method employed in this project is the personality assessment-at-a-distance technique as developed by M. Hermann (1980a&b; see Rasler and Thompson 1980 for a critique of Hermann's seminal article). This technique is used to aid in the coding of the dispositional variable capturing security/potential-motivation. Unfortunately, Lopes (1987, 1990, 1995) provides little guidance regarding the personality characteristics that might be associated with this motivational variable. I have, therefore, attempted to adapt Hermann's personality measurement technique to the study of risk behavior.

A number of the personality characteristics measured by Hermann may be associated (either positively or negatively) with decision maker risk propensity (and thus, security/potential-motivation). In particular, "belief in ability to control events", "need for power", and "task emphasis" may all be positively associated with risk-taking (potential-motivation); while need for affiliation and conceptual complexity may be positively associated with risk-aversion (security-motivation). Recall the discussion of the "personality" literature in section III. Vertzberger (1995:4-5), March and Shapira (1987), Slovic (1964), and Plax and Rosenfeld (1976) all highlight "belief in ability to control events" as an important characteristic associated with risk-taking. Plax and Rosenfeld (1976:416-417) further suggest that their "dynamic task oriented leader" exhibits a number of other characteristics: "aggressive and manipulative, independent and radical-
an individual who moves others about as if they were objects placed before him to satisfy his own personal needs”. This description appears to describe an individual with a strong need for power and task emphasis, and a weak need for affiliation and conceptual complexity.

Employing Hermann’s personality assessment-at-a-distance technique, M. Hermann and T. Preston have developed a data set that includes scores for eight personality characteristics for a number of U.S. presidents (see Hermann 1983, 1984, 1989; Preston 1996). This data set allows me to construct an index of presidential risk predispositions. Figure 2.3 presents the scores on the five key personality characteristics across six presidents: Reagan, Bush, Johnson, Kennedy, Eisenhower, and Truman. High positive scores on the index indicate potential-motivation, while low (or negative) scores indicate security-motivation. Both standardized scores and comparative ranks were summed to yield a cumulative ranking. President Truman lies at the extreme potential-motivated end of the index, while presidents Bush and Kennedy lie on the security-motivated end of the index (regardless of the method of measurement—rank vs. standardized scores). The Kennedy administration was selected over the Bush administration due to the similarity in their index scores and concerns regarding document availability.

The validity of the risk predisposition index is supported by biographical data suggestive of Truman and Kennedy’s personal orientations to risk. President Truman is described (by Paige) as possessing a “confident willingness to accept responsibility for decision” (1968:22). Indeed, the “President’s advisers greatly admired his ability to make
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>BACE</th>
<th>Power</th>
<th>Task Emph.</th>
<th>Aff.</th>
<th>Con. Comp.</th>
<th>Total (Raw)</th>
<th>Total (Rank)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Reagan M.H. 1981</td>
<td>.390$^*$ (3)</td>
<td>.400 (1)</td>
<td>.760 (6)</td>
<td>-.110 (5)</td>
<td>-.350 (6)</td>
<td>1.09 (21)</td>
<td>2 (2T)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bush M.H. 1991</td>
<td>.330 (1)</td>
<td>.440 (2)</td>
<td>.470 (1)</td>
<td>-.180 (3)</td>
<td>-.540 (3)</td>
<td>.52 (10)</td>
<td>6 (6)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Johnson T.P. 1994</td>
<td>.394 (4)</td>
<td>.731 (6)</td>
<td>.621 (5)</td>
<td>-.216 (2)</td>
<td>-.452 (4)</td>
<td>1.078 (21)</td>
<td>3 (2T)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kennedy T.P. 1994</td>
<td>.339 (2)</td>
<td>.635 (3)</td>
<td>.563 (2)</td>
<td>-.175 (4)</td>
<td>-.639 (1)</td>
<td>.723 (12)</td>
<td>5 (5)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Eisenhower T.P. 1994</td>
<td>.494 (6)</td>
<td>.639 (4)</td>
<td>.602 (3)</td>
<td>-.314 (1)</td>
<td>-.634 (2)</td>
<td>.787 (16)</td>
<td>4 (4)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Truman T.P. 1994</td>
<td>.433 (5)</td>
<td>.663 (5)</td>
<td>.618 (4)</td>
<td>-.062 (6)</td>
<td>-.420 (5)</td>
<td>1.232 (25)</td>
<td>1 (1)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

$^*$Standardized Score
$^*$Rank of Standardized Score (6=highest, 1=lowest)

Note: M.H.19-- indicates coding performed in that year by M. Hermann, T.P. 19-- indicates coding performed in that year by T. Preston.

Figure 2.3: Presidential Risk Predisposition Index Scores
crucial decisions without tormenting afterthoughts" (Paige 1968:24). Truman once noted that “I have to take things as they come and make every decision on the basis of the facts as I have them and then go on from there; then forget that one and take the next” (quoted in Paige 1968:24). According to a close adviser, there “was no wavering, doubt, or timidity on the part of President Truman” (quoted in Paige 1968:335). Truman’s willingness to make tough choices was combined with an idealism that promoted “courage in the face of politics and other risks when he knew or thought he knew he was right” (Jones 1955:113). Dean Acheson, one of Truman’s closest advisers and confidants, suggests that the President “was unmoved by, indeed unmindful of, the effect upon his party’s political fortunes of action that he thought was right and in the best interest of the country, broadly conceived. A doctrine that later became fashionable with presidents, called ‘keeping all options open’ (apparently by avoiding decision), did not appeal to Harry S. Truman” (1969:411). Truman’s detractors also focus on his personal predispositions, noting that Acheson’s “president was impatient with ambiguity, and possessed, as Robert Donovan delicately put it, ‘an appetite, too much of a one, really, for unhesitating decision.’ His penchant for historical analogy usually left him wide of the mark, but it seemed to gird his loins and underpin his confidence, almost as if Walter Mitty sat in the oval office, plumbing ‘history’ for guidance.” (Cumings 1990:630) In fact, Stephen Pelz suggests that Truman “indulged in bravado” in order to “compensate for his own weakness” (1983:101). Clearly these characterizations suggest that Truman’s placement at the potential-motivated end of the index is appropriate.
Unlike Truman, President Kennedy is described by admirers as “cautious”, “self-disciplined”, and “highly-controlled” (see Rostow 1964:139-141). In making foreign policy decisions, Kennedy encouraged dissent and “wanted all the pros and cons laid out” (Taylor 1964:30). Walt Rostow observed a “counterpoint” in Kennedy’s character, “between a voracious enjoyment of life and people set off against this sense of the possibility of failure and tragedy” (1964:140). The President tended to “set his goals as high as he could. But he was also awfully conscious of the other side of it; which was the long, difficult, grubby, painstaking, frustrating business it would be to bring the grand objectives to life” (Rostow 1964:141). Kennedy’s detractors fault his pragmatism and note that his tendency “to ‘preserve his options’ provided too facile a rationalization for postponing unpleasant decisions on major issues where results would not be immediately apparent” (Ball 1982:168). For his critics, Kennedy’s foreign policy lacked direction and the “extremism” of his caution “was responsible for some of the tottering, the ambiguity, and the blind alleys of American diplomacy” during his administration (Weissman 1974:192). Indeed, Kennedy often attempted “to compromise internal differences even when these differences were uncompromisable on the level of external reality” (Weissman 1974:192). Bruce Mazlish views Kennedy as a “Hamlet-like figure” that “continually reversed himself”, “vacillated”, “evaded responsibility”, “permitted events to overtake him”, and “could not stay the course” (1988:30). Clearly the characterizations presented above suggest that Kennedy’s placement at the security-motivated end of the index is appropriate.
Structured, Focused, Comparative Case Study

Of the five tasks for designing heuristic and plausibility probe case studies proposed by George (1979: 54-55), the most significant (and daunting) may be the formulation of the general questions to be asked of each case study (see also King, Keohane, and Verba 1994). The researcher must take care to develop reliable measurement strategies in advance of undertaking the proposed research. Of course, as data collection proceeds the researcher may see fit to refine the questions that are posed in each case study, but he or she should be careful to retain the overall structure and integrity of the original research design. Prior to the initiation of my field research I developed the questions that are presented in Figure 2.4.

The questions to be posed in each case study may be divided between the representation and option selection stages. In the representation stage the questions focus on the identification of the president’s aspiration level. In the option selection stage, the questions focus on the manner in which options are evaluated; the degree to which the president perceives uncertainty, inaccurate information, and acute time pressure; and the characteristics of the “choice” that is reached. The answers to these questions guide the evaluation of the plausibility of the hypotheses that compose the REF.

Archival Research

In attempting to reconstruct the process that led to the presidential decisions in these cases (and answer the questions posed in Figure 2.4) I undertook both primary and secondary case research. Prior to embarking on my archival research, I attempted to
Stage One: Representation

- What is the president's aspiration level that describes acceptable/desirable outcomes in a case?

  - the aspiration level is not an initial point but rather an end state that the president wishes to reach

  - look for discussions of goals, desires, hopes, needs, requirements in this case

- Is the aspiration level viewed as maintenance of the status quo or does it encompass a positive change from the present state of affairs? How firmly is the aspiration level held: are outcomes below the reference point viewed as undesirable or unacceptable?

  - look for description of commitment to goals, discussion of failure as unacceptable, evidence of “win at any cost” mentality

Stage Two: Option Selection

- What are the options under consideration? How are costs/benefits and estimates of success/failure discussed? How are options discussed, compared, evaluated?

  - identify options being examined by president by examining memoranda, position papers, minutes of meetings, secondary sources, memoirs

  - are numerical estimates of probability discussed? if yes, how are they used by the president? does the consideration of options approximate procedural rationality? are trade-offs between values recognized and resolved? are notions of expected value considered?

  - are options evaluated relative to the president’s aspiration level?

  - are options rejected out of hand because the president perceives that they are incapable of achieving or surpassing the aspiration level?

  - is there a recognizable pattern in the manner the president processes information regarding the options? Does this pattern approximate Lopes’ top-down or bottom-up processing?

Figure 2.4: Questions to be Posed in Each Case Study

(continued)
- How is the final option selected? What does this process look like? Do explicit considerations of riskiness enter into process?

- What are the president's perceptions relating to uncertainty, information accuracy, and time pressure?
  - Does the president express reticence because of a concern over inadequate information, flawed estimates, or incomplete analysis?
  - Does the president refer to time as an issue affecting the consideration of options?

- What are the characteristics of the option selected relative to the other options under consideration? Are outcomes more numerous and extremely divergent? Does the president perceive that extreme negative outcomes are at least possible? Does the president recognize that estimates are flawed and may in fact be incorrect?
  - Is the option selected viewed as "risky" or "cautious" or some similar language?
  - Is concern expressed over the extensive range of potential outcomes associated with certain options?
  - Is the option selected one out of many, or simply the ratification of the only option under consideration?
  - Does the option selected represent incrementalism or bolstering?
  - Does the president avoid making a decision? Does he encourage his staff to develop more options, provide better information, reevaluate the aspiration level?
survey the best secondary sources on each case. (These sources include, but are not limited to, *Foreign Relations of the United States* [FRUS], various volumes; Paterson 1989; George, Hall, and Simons 1971; Hilsman 1967; Schlesinger 1965; Sorensen 1965; Lefever 1967; Weissman 1974; Paige 1968; Cumings 1990; Foot 1985; Kuniholm 1980; Acheson 1969; Byrnes 1947; Jones 1955.) Having developed a more sophisticated understanding of my cases, I then visited the John F. Kennedy Library, the Harry S. Truman Library, the National Archives, and the National Security Archive. At these various archives I examined presidential papers, personal papers, institutional record groups, and oral histories. I took notes from or photocopied minutes of meetings, departmental memoranda, personal notes, personal correspondence, and other forms of primary documents.

Despite the breadth of my research, I was unable to analyze every document dealing with the cases under examination. Instead I followed a directed search strategy based on the questions to be asked of the cases and the overall objectives of the research project. In this manner, I hope to have examined or obtained the key documents that are the most relevant given the questions at hand.

**Scope Conditions**

Before delving into the more empirical chapters of this dissertation, it is important to consider the potential scope of the results it will produce. This study is intended, first and foremost, to be a probe of the plausibility of the hypotheses that compose the Risk Explanation Framework (REF). In this regard, any results should be viewed as suggestive.
rather than generalizable. I simply hope to demonstrate that it is possible to at least partially explain presidential risk behavior through the use of the REF. The study of presidential risk behavior is clearly a complex subject, and the REF will undoubtedly require further refinement.

The research design has also been limited in order to allow for a modicum of control over several exogenous variables, thus reducing the suggestiveness of its results to the realm of considerations of potential military intervention within a particular context. I would also be reluctant to extend its results much beyond the two administrations studied here. And yet, despite the modesty of its empirical claims, I feel that the conceptual and theoretical advances embodied in the REF more than make up for any flaws or limitations in this research design.

VII. Conclusion

In this chapter I first considered the diverse ways in which the concepts of risk, uncertainty, and risk propensity have been interpreted by social scientists and the implications of adopting one set of definitions rather than another. I then put forth and defended the definitions that I follow throughout this study. My third section focused on the various literatures from political science, psychology, economics, business, and sociology that inform this study. In the fourth section, I raised issues of measurement, validity, and evaluation, constructing a critique that provided the foundation for the theory and research design explicated in sections five and six. In section five, I provided a detailed description of my “Risk Explanation Framework” (REF), discussing the
theoretical and empirical roots of each hypothesis. Finally, section six focused on the research methods used in this study, providing a more complete and critical examination of the methods introduced in Chapter 1 (sections V & VI). The next two chapters are more empirically oriented: evaluating the REF through case studies from the Truman and Kennedy administrations.
CHAPTER 3
TRUMAN CASE STUDIES

I. Chapter Introduction and Overview

The Cold War between the United States and the Soviet Union began during the Truman administration. The World War II alliance, cobbled together by the personal diplomacy of Franklin Roosevelt, fell apart as the victors squabbled over the post-War settlement. The tensions that emerged between Truman and Stalin during the Potsdam conference would result in disagreements over the composition of governments in almost every liberated area. The threat that held the allies together during the war was replaced by the perceived opportunity to reshape the world in one’s own image and secure access to economic resources and global markets. The decisions made by the Truman administration between 1945 and 1951 would shape U.S. foreign policy for the next forty-five years.

The three cases examined below trace the origins of the Cold War. First in Iran and Greece and later in Korea, the Truman administration would contain and then attempt to roll back the communist “menace”. In each of these cases, Truman and his advisers were confronted with deteriorating situations under seemingly novel circumstances. Truman was forced to balance alliance and treaty commitments with U.S. interests and
declining military power. His choice to move from cooperation to confrontation involved
decisions with significant elements of risk. During each case, President Truman
considered various levels of U.S. military intervention. Truman’s decision making during
these cases is fairly well documented, providing an excellent opportunity for evaluating
the plausibility of the hypotheses that compose the Risk Explanation Framework
(REF).

The Iran, Greece, and Korea case studies all follow the same structure. First, an
overview narrative of the case provides important contextual information. Then, the
plausibility of the various elements of the REF are evaluated through discussions relating
to the president’s aspiration level, perceptions of uncertainty and time pressure,
consideration of alternatives, and final decision. A concluding section of this chapter
considers the implications for theory of the results obtained. Throughout each case study
an attempt is made to remind the reader of the relevant elements of the REF that are
being evaluated in each section. I strive to marshal a “critical mass” of data supporting
my observations and conclusions, but I recognize and point out areas where the
documentary evidence is thin and certain hypotheses cannot be evaluated in a rigorous
manner.

II. Iran 1946

Overview

One popular interpretation of the events in northern Iran during 1946 argues that
U.S. resolve in the face of Soviet intransigence produced the first American victory of the
Cold War (Sheehan 1968:27-34). A second interpretation, based on extensive archival research, suggests that public confrontation combined with back room negotiation and appeasement resulted in a brief respite for Iran in its efforts to retain its sovereignty in the midst of a great power competition over its strategic resources (Kuniholm 1980; Herrmann and Fischerkeller 1996). As a participant in this case, President Truman clearly favored the first interpretation (Truman 1956:93-96), while more recently the scholarly community has come to accept the latter. As the following discussion suggests, I trust the historical accuracy of the recent studies, but am more interested in the processes that produced the “lessons” that President Truman and his advisers gleaned from these events. For the major lesson of Iran— that U.S. resolve could contain and even rollback Soviet aggression— shaped the future of the Cold War and presaged interventions in Greece, Korea, Laos, and Vietnam. Iran in 1946 marked the end of cooperation between the World War II allies and opened the era of confrontation between the United States and Soviet Union.

For some time prior to World War II, Iran was the arena where British and Russian imperial ambitions clashed (see Van Wagenen 1952:6-16). But as World War II began, the Iranian government proclaimed its neutrality in the hopes of maintaining a mutually beneficial trading relationship with Germany (Lenczowski 1968:167). This arrangement was successful until June of 1941— when Germany attacked the Soviet Union. As Britain allied itself with the Soviet Union against the Nazis, the significance of Iran as a path for British aid to the Soviets rose rapidly. Thus, Iran’s close relationship with Germany was highlighted as evidence of partiality. In August, British and Soviet
diplomatic notes demanded “the expulsion of a large number of Germans” (Lenczowski 1968:168). When the Iranians rejected the Allies’ notes and defended their neutrality they were invaded by Soviet troops from the north and British troops from the south. On August 28 the Shah appointed a new Iranian Premier who immediately ordered the Iranian army to “cease resistance” (which had been quite weak, Lenczowski 1968:169). In September the Allies coerced Shah Reza into abdicating, he was replaced by his son-Mohammed Reza Pahlavi (Lenczowski 1968:174). By the late fall of 1941, the Iranian government was in control of only two cities- Teheran and Meshed.

On January 29, 1942, Britain, the Soviet Union, and Iran signed a “Tripartite Treaty of Alliance” to provide a legal basis for the Allied occupation. This treaty allowed the Allies to maintain troops on Iranian soil to “defend Iran from aggression on the part of Germany or any other power” (Lenczowski 1968:175), but the troops were not to be viewed as an “occupation” force. The Allies were also given unlimited access to transport and communication facilities in Iran to facilitate the flow of material aid to the Soviets (Van Wagenen 1952:17). Despite the fairly one-sided character of this agreement, the Allies did agree to “respect the territorial integrity, sovereignty and political independence of Iran” (quoted in Lenczowski 1968:175). They also specified that “the forces of the Allied Powers shall be withdrawn from Iranian territory not later than six months after all hostilities between the Allied Powers and Germany and her associates have been suspended by the conclusion of an armistice or armistices, or on the conclusion of peace between them, whichever date is the earlier” (quoted in Van Wagenen 1952:17).
It was the withdrawal clause of this treaty that would later cause interpretive disagreements.

The United States role in Iran began to increase after the Allied occupation. In 1942 Dr. Arthur C. Millspaugh was asked by the Iranian government for assistance in managing its public finances. Though Millspaugh was not an employee of the U.S. government, he actively conferred with State Department officials. By 1943 Millspaugh was able to “fill responsible positions in the Iranian government” with over a dozen Americans (see Lenczowski 1968:264). Also in 1943, Colonel H. Norman Schwarzkopf was sent to Iran to aid in the reorganization of the gendarmerie (provincial police). Schwarzkopf's five years of service in Iran were termed an “outstanding success”, he was probably the most influential of American advisers in Iran during this period (Lenczowski 1968:272). Again during 1942-1943, some 30,000 U.S. troops were deployed to Iran to “speed up supplies to Russia” (Lenczowski 1968:273). These troops provided technical assistance in the British zone: maintaining and constructing harbors, highways, railways, and airports. While British troops provided security, the U.S. Persian Gulf Command (P.G.C.) constructed the infrastructure that allowed massive quantities of material to reach the Soviet Union (Lenczowski 1968:273). Clearly, by 1943 the U.S. had become the third major power in Iran.¹

¹Clearly, the signs of growing U.S. interests in Iran were not ignored by the Soviets or the British. The British viewed the U.S. as a potential protector of British oil interests in southern Iran, while the Soviets saw the U.S. as one more competitor for Iranian oil concessions and a threat to their position of influence in Teheran (see Kuniholm 1980:214-216,270-298).
The increasing American role in Iran was publicly affirmed in the "Declaration on Iran" signed in Teheran by Roosevelt, Churchill, and Stalin in November of 1943. The U.S. was not a signatory to the original Tripartite treaty (discussed above), so the declaration on Iran was the first public statement of U.S. support for the 1942 agreement (Van Wagenen 1952:19). By signing this declaration the U.S. "reaffirmed Iran's independence, sovereignty, and territorial integrity" (Lenczowski 1968:176). This statement was undoubtedly a partial reward for Iran's recent (September) declaration of war against Germany, but it also acted as a "moral obligation" guiding U.S. policy in 1946 (Van Wagenen 1952:19). The "Declaration on Iran" later provided the foundation for American support of Iran in the United Nations.

A preview of the events of 1946 took place in the fall of 1944. As World War II began only two foreign oil concessions were in effect: the Anglo-Iranian Oil Company (AIOC, a joint Iranian-British group) operated a concession in southwestern Iran, while the Kavir-i-Khurian Company (a joint Iranian-Soviet group) operated a concession in northern Iran (Lenczowski 1968:216). In the spring of 1944, Standard Vacuum Oil and Sinclair Oil (both U.S. companies) began to negotiate with the Iranian government for an oil concession in Baluchistan (southern Iran). The Iranians hired two U.S. petroleum geologists to "survey the oil reserves in various parts of the country" (Lenczowski 1968:216). Fearful of being excluded from these negotiations, the Soviets sent the People's Commissar for Foreign Affairs (Sergei I. Kavtaradze) to Teheran to negotiate a new concession for northern Iran. In order to avoid a political dispute over the concessions, the Iranian government announced in October that it would "terminate all
negotiations until after the war” (Van Wagenen 1952:20). The Kavtaradze mission was not satisfied with this outcome and sought to discredit the Iranian government, suggesting that “British and American influence stood behind Iran’s refusal” (Lenczowski 1968:221). In the face of this pressure, the Sa’ed government fell on November 8 and a new government led by Morteza Quli Bayat was expected to give in to the Soviet demands. In order to prevent this concession, *Majlis* (Iranian Parliament) member Dr. Mohammed Mossadegh introduced a law prohibiting cabinet members from negotiating foreign oil concessions without previous Majlis approval (Lenczowski 1968:222). On December 2 Mossadegh’s law was adopted by the Majlis, and on December 9 Kavtaradze left Teheran in protest. On his departure, Kavtaradze “told the press that Iran would some day repent of this decision not to negotiate” (Van Wagenen 1952:20). Despite Mossadegh’s clever maneuvering, the oil concession issue would achieve great significance in the events of 1946.

As the tension over the oil “crisis” of 1944 died down, the Iranian government began to draw attention to incidents of Soviet interference in internal Iranian affairs (see FRUS 1969a:359-361). At the same time, the importance of Iran as a supply path to the Soviet Union was declining (starting in November of 1944 the Black Sea was open to Allied shipping, Lenczowski 1968:284). Thus, at the Yalta conference in February of 1945, the issues of troop withdrawals and oil concessions were raised by the U.S. and Britain during the “Foreign Secretaries” meetings (FRUS 1969a:362). Given the diminishing importance of Iran for the European war effort, Anthony Eden proposed that “Allied troops begin withdrawal from Iran *pari passu* (at an equal rate) before hostilities
ended” (Kuniholm 1980:215). Despite U.S. support for the Eden proposal, V. M. Molotov (People’s Commissar for Foreign Affairs of the Soviet Union) refused to discuss these issues and kept Iran off of the agenda of the “Big Three” (FRUS 1969a:362-363).

While the German army was desperately defending Berlin and the European war was coming to an end, the Iranian government continued to protest Soviet restrictions on Iranian troop movements (see FRUS 1969a:367-368). On May 19, eleven days after V-E day, the Iranian government sent notes to the American, British, and Soviet ambassadors requesting the withdrawal of Allied troops based on the “spirit” of the Tripartite Treaty of 1942 (FRUS 1969a:370-372; Kuniholm 1980:271). In reply to the Iranian note, the British again put forth the proposal for a pari passu withdrawal (FRUS 1969a:377). The Soviets ignored the British plan, and so at Potsdam Eden suggested a three-stage withdrawal: first from Teheran, then from all of Iran except for a British enclave around Abadan and a Soviet zone in northern Iran, and finally from all of Iran (Kuniholm 1980:272). Stalin rejected the full withdrawal of Soviet troops before the deadline set by the 1942 treaty2, but accepted a limited withdrawal from Teheran and agreed to the consideration of the troop withdrawal issue at the London Council of Foreign Ministers meeting set for September (Kuniholm 1980:273; FRUS 1969a:388). At the close of the discussion on Iran at Potsdam, Stalin is reported to have told Truman: “So as to rid the United States of any worries we promise you that no action will be taken by us against

2Stalin’s “technically accurate” reading of the 1942 agreement allowed Allied troops to remain in Iran until six months after the end of the war with Japan (Kuniholm 1980:272).

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Iran.” (quoted in Kuniholm 1980:273) Obviously, the Iranians were less than satisfied with the outcome of the Potsdam meetings (see FRUS 1969a:389).

In late August of 1945, the Iranian government was given another cause for concern. An armed uprising in Azerbaijan, although of limited duration, was supported by Soviet propaganda and protected by Soviet troops (see FRUS 1969a:400; Kuniholm 1980:274-275; Lenczowski 1968:286-287). This period also witnessed the creation of the “Democratic Party of Azerbaijan” led by Ja’afar Pishevari. Pishevari had played a role in various communist enterprises in the Middle East during the 1920s, returning to Iran in 1936 (Lenczowski 1968:224). This “Democratic Party” absorbed the Tudeh party in northern Iran, forming a left-leaning Azeri-nationalist party with pro-communist sympathies (Kuniholm 1980:274; FRUS 1969a:407). Frustrated by Soviet interference, the Iranian government again requested the withdrawal of Allied troops. On September 9, seven days after the end of the war with Japan, the Iranian Minister for Foreign Affairs stressed that all Allied troops must be withdrawn from Iran by March 2, 1946 (FRUS 1969a:408-409). At the London Council of Foreign Ministers meeting, Molotov rejected a British proposal for an early withdrawal, but agreed that March 2, 1946 was the date set by the provisions of the 1942 treaty (FRUS 1969a:413-415). The Iranian government now looked forward to the return of its sovereignty (FRUS 1969a:408-409).

The situation in Iran erupted on November 19 when the “Democratic Party of Azerbaijan” took control of the province (see FRUS 1969a:430-431; Kuniholm 1980:278-280; Lenczowski 1968: 288-289). When Soviet authorities refused to allow the movement of an Iranian force to put down the uprising, the issue of Allied troop
withdrawals gained even greater importance (Kuniholm 1980:279). After numerous Iranian appeals for assistance, a U.S. note was delivered to Molotov detailing the U.S. government’s understanding of the situation and suggesting that “it would be in the common interest for all Soviet, British, and American troops to be withdrawn immediately from Iran” (FRUS 1969a:449). The Soviets replied that the U.S. interpretation of the situation did not “correspond to reality”, and that the Soviets had restricted the movement of Iranian troops to preserve order and assure the “security of Soviet garrison” (FRUS 1969a:468). The Soviets refused to reconsider the deadline for troop withdrawals and the stage was set for a contentious ministerial conference in Moscow (Kuniholm 1980:282). By the time U.S. Secretary of State Byrnes left for Moscow a “National Assembly” dominated by the “Democratic Party of Azerbaijan” had named Pishevari as the new premier of the autonomous “Republic of Azerbaijan” (Kuniholm 1980:282).

From December of 1945 to December of 1946, President Truman and his advisers faced two major decision periods affecting U.S. policy towards Iran. During the initial period of December 1945 through May 1946, the President and his advisers decided to support Iran’s efforts to secure the withdrawal of Allied troops in accordance with the Tripartite Treaty of 1942. During the period from the departure of the last Soviet troops from northern Iran in late May to December of 1946, the President and his advisers decided to support Iran’s efforts to eliminate the Pishevari-led resistance movement in Azerbaijan. During the first decision period, U.S. efforts were limited to diplomatic bluster and small-scale gunboat diplomacy. During the latter decision period, U.S. efforts
were extended to confidential assurances of U.S. support should the Soviets intervene and a decision to sell a limited amount of military material to the Iranian army. The discussion that follows highlights the attributes of the situation that constrained the U.S. response in the first decision period, and reinforced the U.S. commitment in the latter period.

**Aspiration Level**

As noted in Chapter 2, the president’s “aspiration level” is expected to comprise a set of minimum level goals that the president hopes to achieve or surpass. In order to evaluate hypothesis 1 (presidents tend to evaluate outcomes relative to an aspiration level rather than an overall value level), we must infer the elements of President Truman’s aspiration level (regarding Iran) from the documentary record. We need to find descriptions of acceptable/desirable outcomes/objectives in this case. Thus, we need to find relevant documents that address Truman’s goals, desires, hopes, needs, and/or requirements in this case.

Based on the evidence presented below, I believe that President Truman’s immediate goal in Iran was to secure the withdrawal of the Allied (particularly Soviet)
troops and end the autonomy movement in Azerbaijan, thus reestablishing Iran's sovereignty in accordance with the Tripartite Treaty of 1942 and the Declaration on Iran of 1943. The means available for achieving this goal were constrained by the fear of potential Soviet reactions to U.S. initiatives and a concern regarding the resolve of the Iranian government. The President's commitment to achieving or surpassing his immediate goal was reinforced by his desire to demonstrate that the World War II Allies would not trespass on the rights of smaller states; by his fear that communist success in Iran would lead to the fall of Turkey or Greece; and by his desire to prevent the Soviets from dominating Iran's strategic resources (particularly oil). This complex combination of goals and constraints formed the aspiration level that guided Truman's decision making in this case.

President Truman's immediate goal in Iran was based, in part, on his desire to eliminate the spheres of influence that had dominated the Middle East prior to World War II. At the end of 1944, the State Department advocated a number of "political objectives of the United States in the Middle East" including the preservation "of the right of peoples to choose and maintain for themselves the types of political, social and economic systems they desire" (FRUS 1969a:34). By the end of 1945, Loy Henderson (Director of the Office of Near Eastern and African Affairs) provided a background memorandum for the President detailing a "more active" U.S. policy emphasizing the promotion of Western democratic traditions (FRUS 1969a:11). And yet ironically, just prior to the uprising in Azerbaijan, President Truman "agreed that there was no reason for a conflict between Russia and the United States" in the Middle East (FRUS 1969a:16). As long as
the Soviets lived up to their treaty commitments, the President was willing to accept a Soviet role in the region.

Clearly, the President's immediate goal was also derived from the "moral obligation" of the 1943 Declaration on Iran (Van Wagenen 1952:19). In that agreement Roosevelt, Churchill, and Stalin voiced their "desire for the maintenance of the independence, sovereignty and territorial integrity of Iran" (quoted in Lenczowski 1968:323). The President was reminded of Roosevelt's commitment by the Shah in a letter presented to Truman on November 29, 1945 (see FRUS 1969a:405-406). One week later, Secretary Byrnes "reiterated America's pledge to observe the Declaration Regarding Iran" (Kuniholm 1980:281). This public support for the Declaration on Iran was mirrored in the diplomatic correspondence between Ambassador Harriman and Molotov. The U.S. note of November 23, 1945 stated: "This Government has entire confidence that the Governments of the Soviet Union and Great Britain are just as zealous as the Government of the United States meticulously to abide by the assurances contained in this declaration" (FRUS 1969a:449). The United States government would not accept the division of Iran. Having succumbed to Soviet pressure regarding Eastern Europe and the Balkans, President Truman and his advisers concluded by the end of 1945 that they could "compromise no more" (Kuniholm 1980:298).4

4As noted above, I expect President Truman to evaluate outcomes relative to an aspiration level rather than an overall value level. In this case, President Truman's desire to eliminate spheres of influence and respect treaty commitments represent "overall value levels". These desires become policy-relevant only through their contribution to Truman's aspiration level. Thus, the aspiration level, rather than the overall value level, provides the metric for evaluating alternatives.
While the documentary record suggests that President Truman's immediate goal was to preserve the territorial integrity and sovereignty of Iran, it also reveals that the means available for achieving this goal were constrained by the fear of potential Soviet reactions to U.S. initiatives and a concern regarding the resolve of the Iranian government. Despite President Truman's desire to secure the withdrawal of the Soviet troops in northern Iran, his in-theater military capabilities to deal with the situation were almost non-existent. By December of 1945, the American Ambassador notified the Secretary of State that some 75,000 Soviet combat troops were in northern Iran, compared to 5,000 British "and less than 6,000 non-combat Americans in southwestern Iran" (FRUS 1969a:482). These Soviet troops had spent five years fortifying their positions and developing defense plans. Indeed, during the height of the "crisis" in Iran (roughly March 2-April 4, 1946), somewhere between 200-500 Soviet tanks along with cannons, anti-aircraft guns, and hundreds of trucks entered northern Iran (see Rossow 1956:20-21; Kuniholm 1980:319). While Secretary Byrnes' initial reaction to the Soviet troop movements was "now we'll give it to them with both barrels" (FRUS 1969b:347), Charles Bohlen advised against a forceful confrontation. Bohlen argued that "the United States was in no position to confront the Soviet Union in Iran" and that "the Soviet Union would consider any strong action a bluff" (Kuniholm 1980:322). It was during this latter time period that Stalin and Molotov reportedly told the Iranian Premier (Qavam), "We don't care what US and Britain think and we are not afraid of them." (FRUS 1969b:352). Even after the withdrawal of Soviet troops in late May, a State Department policy paper stated that U.S. "military policy does not at this time contemplate the use of force to
achieve our objectives in Iran” (FRUS 1969b:508). In the spring of 1946 the United States was not in a position to physically compel the Soviets to withdraw from northern Iran.

A second constraint on the means available for achieving the President’s immediate goal was a concern regarding the resolve of the Iranian government. Throughout the period under examination a delicate diplomatic game was played between the United States and Iran. On their part, the Iranian government expressed a determination to stand firm “so long as it can count on American and British support” (FRUS 1969a:491). Particularly as they prepared their case for the U.N. Security Council meeting in London, the Iranian government sought concrete assurances of U.S. support (1969b:292-293). The U.S., on the other hand, expressed a concern that the Iranians would not persevere in their efforts in the face of Soviet pressure. This concern increased when Qavam Saltaneh became the new Iranian Premier on January 27, 1946 (see Lenczowski 1968:295). Qavam hoped to settle the situation through direct negotiation. Against the advice of the U.S. ambassador, Qavam personally led the Iranian delegation to Moscow (FRUS 1969b:331). Upon his return to Teheran without an agreement, Qavam alternately conferred with the Soviet and American ambassadors. It was during this period of intense pressure that “the prime minister’s determination to press his case wavered, first in one direction and then another” (Kuniholm 1980:327). The inconsistency of Iranian resolve was also highlighted by a split between the Iranian ambassador (Ala) and Qavam. Ala, directly influenced by the American delegation to the
U.N., continued to press the Iranian case in late March while Qavam used an apparent
split with his interpreter (Muzaffar Firuz) to confuse his position in Teheran (Kuniholm
1980:327). Finally, in a complex analysis of the situation in Iran, U.S. Ambassador
Murray argued that Qavam's proposed concessions to the Soviets were acceptable
because neither government (Iranian or American) possessed the resolve to push the
Soviets further (FRUS 1969b:373-375). In essence, the U.S. was not willing to be "more
Iranian than the Iranians". Since the battle over Soviet troop withdrawal was largely
fought through public diplomacy and public opinion, President Truman and his advisers
could not take the matter further without Iranian support.

In considering the factors reinforcing Truman's commitment to achieving or
surpassing his immediate goal, we must first examine the President's desire to
demonstrate that the World War II Allies would not trespass on the rights of smaller
states. In discussing the events regarding Iran in his memoirs, President Truman wrote:
"What perturbed me most, however, was Russia's callous disregard of the rights of a
small nation and of her own solemn promises. International co-operation was impossible
if national obligations could be ignored and the U.N. bypassed as if it did not exist."
(1956:95) Indeed, in requesting U.S. assistance after the uprising in Azerbaijan, the
Iranian Charge d'Affaires noted that:

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2Throughout this time period, Ambassador Ala provided assurances of Iran's resolve in order to
garner U.S. support. Isolated in the U.S., Ala was less affected by Soviet pressure and Iranian politics. He
was also more convinced of U.S. resolve because of personal assurances from Secretary Byrnes. Qavam, in
Teheran, was subject to the harassment of the Soviet ambassador and the pressure of Tudeh activists. He
was less convinced of the U.S. commitment to Iran.
“If the United States Government remains quiescent while the Soviet Union carries out what seems to be a carefully laid plan to deprive Iran of its independence or to infringe upon its integrity, no small country in the world can in the future have any confidence in promises made by the Great Powers. There is no small country which has been given more assurances with regard to its independence by responsible Great Powers than Iran. If these promises are not lived up to, there can be little hope for world stability.” (FRUS 1969a:435, emphasis added)

This sentiment was also expressed in the U.S. notes to the Soviets on November 23, 1945 and March 6, 1946 (see above discussion, FRUS 1969a:449-450; FRUS 1969b:340-342). By early 1946 the President had come to the conclusion that the Soviets could not be trusted to live up to their treaty commitments. In a letter to Secretary Byrnes on January 5, the President detailed recent “outrages” in Eastern Europe and indicated that he was “tired of babying the Soviets” (quoted in Kuniholm 1980:297). Iran would become a test of the durability of the World War II alliance and of U.N. mechanisms for protecting the rights of smaller nations (Hess 1974:129).

A second factor reinforcing Truman’s commitment to achieving or surpassing his immediate goal was his fear that communist success in Iran would lead to the fall of Turkey or Greece. Of the three American interests in Iran that President Truman discussed in his memoirs, “one was the security of Turkey” (1956:95). The President

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*For a discussion of the history of this note see Kuniholm 1980:298 FN243 and Byrnes 1958:401-402.*
wrote that: “Russia had been pressing Turkey for special privileges and for territorial concessions for several months. The Turks had resisted all these demands, but their position would be infinitely more difficult if Russia, or a Russian puppet state, were able to outflank her in the east.” (1956:95) In Truman’s January 1946 letter to Secretary Byrnes, the President stated: “There isn’t a doubt in my mind that Russia intends an invasion of Turkey and the seizure of the Black Sea Straits to the Mediterranean. Unless Russia is faced with an iron fist and strong language another war is in the making. Only one language do they understand- ‘how many divisions have you?’.” (quoted in Kuniholm 1980:297) While the President was not yet fully seized by the “domino thinking” that would affect American policy toward Greece (see section III below), he was surrounded by advisers who were slowly developing that perspective. George Kennan’s famous “long telegram” was received on February 22, 1946, immediately prior to the “crisis” period in Iran. Kennan stressed that “wherever it is considered timely and promising, efforts will be made to advance official limits of Soviet power” (FRUS 1969c:701). He argued further that the “Soviets are still by far the weaker force” and that they “can easily withdraw... when strong resistance is encountered at any point” (FRUS 1969c:707).

Ambassador Ala in December of 1945 had suggested to Dean Acheson that “Azerbaijan was only the first move in a series which would include Turkey and other countries in Near East” and might prove to be the “first shot fired in third world war” (FRUS 1969a:508). As Soviet troops poured into Azerbaijan in early March of 1946, it appeared as if Ala’s prediction might prove to be accurate. The American Vice Consul at
Tabriz (Rossow) barraged the State Department with reports of Soviet activities, suggesting that the “Soviets are preparing for major military operations” (FRUS 1969b:343). A map prepared by the State Department’s Office of Near Eastern and African Affairs revealed that the Soviet troops were not only heading for Teheran, but also towards Turkey and Iraq (see Kuniholm 1980:322). After delivering a strong U.S. protest to the Soviets on March 9, Kennan tried to calm some of the fears that he had inspired with his “long telegram”. He argued that “there is not sufficient evidence here for concluding that present Sov military preparations in northern Iranian sector envisage an immediate attack on Turkey” (FRUS 1969b:363). He offered a complex analysis of Soviet strategic and tactical thinking, suggesting that they would not “blunder casually into situations” which were “not thought through” (FRUS 1969b:364). The day following the receipt of Kennan’s cable, Ambassador Ala brought Iran’s case before the United Nations while Premier Qavam was negotiating with the Soviet Ambassador in Teheran. While Kennan appeared to be correct in his interpretation of immediate Soviet intentions, Stalin’s long-term ambitions regarding Turkey and Greece remained a great concern for President Truman (see Truman 1956:96; Kuniholm 1980:334).

The final factor reinforcing Truman’s commitment to achieving or surpassing his immediate goal was his desire to prevent the Soviets from dominating Iran’s strategic resources (particularly oil). In writing his memoirs, President Truman was quite frank in assessing the importance of oil to his administration’s policies toward Iran:

“The second problem was the control of Iran’s oil reserves. That Russia had an eye on these vast deposits seemed beyond question. If the Russians
were to control Iran's oil, either directly or indirectly, the raw-material balance of the world would undergo a serious change, and it would be a serious loss for the economy of the Western world.” (1956:95)

Loy Henderson was particularly concerned with emphasizing the strategic and economic significance of Iran. Henderson stated in his oral history interview that Iran's "independence and territorial integrity were... of vital importance, not only to the Western world but to all the peoples who looked to Middle Eastern oil as the source of their energy" (1976:54). Henderson also noted that both Secretary of War Patterson and Secretary of the Navy Forrestal agreed that the U.S. should safeguard its oil supplies (1976:56). Indeed, it appears that Qavam felt that U.S. acceptance of his deal with the Soviets could be bought by oil concessions. On March 23 (1946) he assured the American Ambassador that the remainder of the unallocated oil reserves of Baluchistan would go to American companies (FRUS 1969b:373). Secretary Byrnes forwarded an indignant reply stating bluntly that the U.S. would not accept *a quid pro quo* agreement of this type.

In the fall of 1946, a Joint Chiefs of Staff study reiterated the strategic importance of Iran. Commissioned by the State department in a “high priority” request (see FRUS 1969b:515), the report was based on the “assumption that a war with Soviet Russia is a possibility” (FRUS 1969b:529-530). It concluded that Iran was “an area of major strategic interest to the United States” because of its strategic position with respect to the Middle East (allowing for defense in depth) and its oil resources (FRUS 1969b:530). Regarding American policy, the report suggested that the U.S. should “keep Soviet
influence and Soviet armed forces removed as far as possible from oil resources in Iran. Iraq, and the Near and Middle East” (FRUS 1969b:530). The JCS advocated the provision of limited military aid to Iran to contribute to its internal stability and to strengthen the central government in its attempt to regain control over Azerbaijan. Less than a week after this report was received by the State Department, Secretary Byrnes approved a more pro-active policy in support of the Iranian government (see further discussion below, FRUS 1969b:533-536).

To summarize, President Truman’s immediate goal in Iran was to secure the withdrawal of the Allied (particularly Soviet) troops and end the autonomy movement in Azerbaijan, thus reestablishing Iran’s sovereignty in accordance with the Tripartite Treaty of 1942 and the Declaration on Iran of 1943. The means available for achieving this goal were constrained by the fear of potential Soviet reactions to U.S. initiatives and a concern regarding the resolve of the Iranian government. The President’s commitment to achieving or surpassing his immediate goal was reinforced by his desire to demonstrate that the World War II Allies would not trespass on the rights of smaller states; by his fear that communist success in Iran would lead to the fall of Turkey or Greece; and by his desire to prevent the Soviets from dominating Iran’s strategic resources (particularly oil). President Truman’s aspiration level was well articulated and the documentary evidence supports REF hypothesis 1.
Uncertainty and Time Pressure

As noted in Chapter 2, I expect that *presidential perceptions of high uncertainty and a lack of valid information will interact with presidential risk predispositions and affect the output of the decision process* (REF hypothesis 7). In the Truman cases, if the President perceives high uncertainty and inaccurate information but does not perceive acute time pressure I expect to observe decisional delay and an expanded search for information (REF hypothesis 7a). If the President perceives high uncertainty and inaccurate information and also perceives acute time pressure I expect to observe bolstering (REF hypothesis 7c).

As the evidence presented below suggests, President Truman perceived high uncertainty and acute time pressure during the initial decision period (from December of 1945 through May of 1946) and moderate uncertainty and acute time pressure during the latter decision period (from June to December of 1946). During both decision periods, the President faced two major sources of uncertainty: 1.) what were Soviet intentions? and 2.) what were Iranian intentions? Truman’s perception of time pressure during both decision periods was largely determined by reports of events on the ground in Iran. Unfortunately, President Truman’s actions during the first decision period do not support the plausibility of REF hypothesis 7c. Despite perceptions of high uncertainty and acute time pressure, I observed little evidence of bolstering. Finally, during the latter decision period, Truman’s approval of an incremental escalation runs counter to the REF hypotheses.

The analysis of Soviet motivations and intentions became a major preoccupation for President Truman and his advisers in 1946. Prior to the Azeri uprising in November
of 1945, President Truman’s advisers suggested that Soviet aims were “limited to maintenance of buffer zone in Iran as protection against attack from south” (FRUS 1969a:418). The Soviets were expected to follow the pattern established in Eastern Europe: promote a friendly “popular” government in Teheran through intimidation, propaganda, and covert activity (FRUS 1969a:418-419). George Kennan offered the analogy of Manchuria, the Soviets might attempt to dominate Azerbaijan and secure its autonomy “through orderly processes of friendly negotiation” (FRUS 1969a:424). Thus, the only U.S. initiative might be to withdraw American troops from Iran as quickly as possible and hope that the Soviets would follow (see FRUS 1969a:425-427). These estimates of Soviet intentions required immediate revision when the Azeri uprising on November 19 was protected by Soviet troops.

The initial interpretation of the events in Azerbaijan suggested that the autonomy movement had “unquestioned Soviet support” (FRUS 1969a:430). Ambassador Murray reported that the Soviets were “directly responsible for actions of Democratic Party Azerbaijan” and that Russian forces had stopped a column of Iranian troops headed for Tabriz (FRUS 1969a:436-437). The Secretary of State was reluctant to accept the reports based on Iranian information, so he instructed Murray to obtain a “first-hand report” by an “American official” (FRUS 1969a:444). This confirmation (by the Assistant U.S. Military Attache) was received on November 23. Just four hours later, a strong American protest was sent to Ambassador Harriman for delivery to the Soviet government (FRUS 1969a:448-450). By November 27, Murray was able to communicate the Soviet’s immediate demands: new oil concessions, air transport rights, special rights to the
Caspian port of Pahlavi, and the maintenance of the “Astara-Resht-Qazvin” highway (FRUS 1969a:456). He later reported the Iranian Premier’s impression that the “only thing which would satisfy Soviets would be grant of oil concession northern Iran and that any Govt which refused such grant would be branded as hostile to USSR” (FRUS 1969b:300). The issue of oil concessions was brought back to center stage and the U.S. position in the U.N. Security Council focused on the Soviet’s attempt to coerce the Iranian government.

Despite the new evidence that led others to develop conclusions about Soviet motivations regarding Iran, President Truman was slowly developing his view of the Soviet Union as an unrepentant expansionist power. In early January (1946) the State Department had prepared a report, based on interrogations and captured German documents, that detailed Soviet aims in the Near East during the time of the Nazi-Soviet pact (see Kuniholm 1980:293-294). This report suggested that strong Soviet claims on Iranian and Turkish territory contributed “to the break between the two countries” (Kuniholm 1980:294). It was also during January that Truman wrote the letter to Secretary Byrnes (discussed above) detailing his impressions of Soviet intentions regarding Turkey and Iran and indicating that he was “tired of babying the Soviets” (quoted in Kuniholm 1980:297). Truman’s growing distrust of the Soviets was aggravated by Stalin’s speech of February 9. Stalin discussed the “capitalist encirclement” of the Soviet Union and announced a new five-year plan emphasizing “rearmament and munitions production” (Kuniholm 1980:309-310). When asked to analyze Stalin’s speech, Kennan responded with his long telegram describing Soviet
motivations and intentions (see discussion above. FRUS 1969c:696-709). Finally. on February 28, Secretary Byrnes spoke before the Overseas Press Club in New York. In this speech (described as “virtually an ultimatum”, Jones 1955:53), Byrnes indicated the U.S. government’s intention to abide by the U.N. charter and ensure that other great powers live up to their treaty commitments. On March 16, during another speech in New York, Byrnes suggested that “should the occasion arise, our military strength will be used to support the purposes and principles of the Charter” (Jones 1955:55). It was within this context of growing distrust that President Truman and his advisers interpreted Soviet troop movements into Azerbaijan in early March.

As briefly noted above, the initial reports from the American Vice Consul at Tabriz (Rossow) argued that the Soviets were “preparing for major military operations” (FRUS 1969b:343). Great importance was attached to the fact that Soviet Army Commander General Bagramian (a specialist in tank warfare) had “taken command of Soviet troops in Azerbaijan” (FRUS 1969b:342). The President’s State Department advisers concluded that “the USSR was adding military invasion to political subversion in Iran” (FRUS 1969b:347), and also that “the United States was in no position to confront the Soviet Union in Iran” (Kuniholm 1980:322). As Secretary Byrnes prepared for his battles with Ambassador Gromyko in the U.N. Security Council, Kennan attempted to calm some of the administration’s fears: arguing that the Soviets were not about to invade Turkey and that they had not yet decided to “forego all advantages of further cooperation with western world and to enter on path of complete defiance and armed isolation” (FRUS 1969b:363-364). When Qavam approached Ambassador Murray
to solicit U.S. approval of Iranian oil concessions to the Soviets. Byrnes indicated that
"we are not in a position, in view of uncertainty of course of events in Iran, to give you
definite instructions" (FRUS 1969b:375). Clearly during this period, President Truman
and his advisers were highly uncertain of Soviet motivations and intentions regarding
Iran. Were they dealing with an aggressive adversary bent on military expansion or a
defensive (but coercive) government desiring equal rights to Iranian oil? These
competing analyses of Soviet motivations were both partially supported by the available
evidence.

In the latter decision period (June-December 1946), President Truman and his
advisers were more certain of Soviet motivations and intentions. Once the Soviets
withdrew their troops from Iran in late May, President Truman became convinced that the
Soviets would follow the strategy ascribed to them in September/October of 1945. The
Soviets would use intimidation, propaganda, and covert action in Azerbaijan to achieve
their objectives. This perception of Soviet intentions was supported by Ambassador
Allen's description of Soviet pressure on Qavam during his negotiations with Pishevari.
In mid-May the Soviet Ambassador told Qavam that "he was afraid Qavam's continued
failure to reach agreement with Azerbaijan would result in 'iron and blood'" (FRUS
1969b:460). Throughout the summer, Qavam appeared to bend to Soviet pressure-
concluding a deal with Pishevari and then including Tudeh members in his cabinet (see
Lenczowski 1968:301-303). The Shah became dissatisfied with Qavam's "passive
policy" and asked for U.S. support to "counteract Soviet penetration" (FRUS 1969b:486).
In early October the Shah forced Qavam to remove the Tudeh members from his cabinet
and by late November the U.S. was pledging moral, economic, and military support to Iran (see FRUS 1969b:546-547). By November the President and his advisers had concluded that the Soviets would not support the Azeri separatists and so encouraged Qavam to send troops into northern Iran. If the Soviets did react to the Iranian troop movements, the U.S. would “give its unqualified support to Iran” (FRUS 1969b:552). When the Azeris were routed and the Soviets did not interfere, Ambassador Allen argued that the “Soviets were finally convinced that US was not bluffing and would support any United Nations member threatened by aggression” (FRUS 1969b:563). Truman felt vindicated, when the Soviets encountered strength they backed down (see Truman 1956:95-96).

The second major source of uncertainty for President Truman and his advisers was the question of Iranian intentions. Throughout the first decision period the administration feared Iranian capitulation to Soviet demands. In early January of 1946, not only were the Soviets pressuring Premier Hakimi, but it also appeared that the British were “preparing make tacit deal leaving Soviets free hand in north while they consolidate British position in south” (FRUS 1969b:300). When Qavam became the Iranian premier in late January, the administration became concerned that he would make a deal with the Soviets (see Lenczowski 1968:295-296). Qavam told the American ambassador that “he believed... Iranian difficulties with Soviets all date from oil crisis of late 1944” (FRUS 1969b:315) and indicated that he was willing to send a special mission to Moscow. Ignoring Ambassador Murray’s advice, Qavam led the delegation and was personally pressured by Stalin and Molotov (Kuniholm 1980:314). George Kennan was uncertain of
Qavam's ability to withstand the pressure and so was happily surprised when Qavam indicated that he had rejected the Soviet proposals and was leaving Moscow (FRUS 1969b:338). Upon returning to Teheran, Qavam was pressured by Ambassador Murray-to press Iran's case before the U.N., and by Soviet Ambassador Sadchikov- to continue bilateral negotiations (FRUS 1969b:361). At this point Qavam wavered, sending contradictory instructions to Ambassador Ala and damaging Iran's case before the Security Council (see Kuniholm 1980:327). Caught between the U.S. and the Soviet Union, Qavam's intentions shifted based on the last Ambassador he had met. In early April, Qavam signed an agreement with Sadchikov that appeased the Soviets while Secretary Byrnes declared victory in the U.N. (based on the Soviet contention that their upcoming troop withdrawal would be unconditional) (see Kuniholm 1980:332). During this period Iran was clearly an unreliable partner, but then again, so was the United States.

Qavam's shifting loyalties also raised questions during the second decision period. When the new American ambassador (Allen) arrived in Iran on May 8 it became clear that Qavam and the Shah did not see eye to eye. Qavam wished to win back Azerbaijan through "pacific penetration" while the Shah insisted on sending Iranian troops to the region (FRUS 1969b:454). In the short-term, Qavam won the policy dispute: he negotiated an agreement with the Azeri separatists, founded his own political party.

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7Qavam's wavering combined with the competing interpretations of Soviet intentions and contributed to President Truman's perception of high uncertainty during this period.

8Qavam's party was called the "Democratic Party of Iran" in order to steal adherents from the Democrats of Azerbaijan (see FRUS 1969b:505).
and made concessions to the Tudeh party (see Kuniholm 1980:348-349). While
Ambassador Allen defended Qavam’s policies, Rossow argued that Qavam had lost
control of the situation (see FRUS 1969b:510-511). In early October, as Qavam
contemplated a more aggressive policy towards Azerbaijan, Loy Henderson argued that
the Iranian premier was “following a pro-Soviet course of action” because of the lack of
U.S. assurances of support (FRUS 1969b:524). As President Truman and his advisers
considered the extension of moral, military, and economic support for Qavam’s
government, they were not totally certain of Qavam’s intentions. Was he a patriot
cleverly acting in Iran’s best interest or was he a naive optimist giving in to Soviet
demands?

Largely due to inflammatory reports from State Department officials in Iran, the
President and his advisers perceived acute time pressure during the two decision periods.
During the first decision period, urgent cables from Rossow and Murray and reports from
Henderson and his NEA staff encouraged their superiors to act. In January Rossow wrote
that “unless some sort of energetic action is soon taken Azerbaijan must be written off”
(FRUS 1969b:299). In early February he reported an intensification in the rhetoric of the
Pishevari regime in Azerbaijan as it called for a “Jihad” (FRUS 1969b:332). In March
Rossow called attention to the Soviet troop movements and, in a flourish meant to convey
the seriousness of the situation, suggested that communications with him might be “cut at
any moment” (FRUS 1969b:345). The Iranians were also contributing to the sense of
growing time pressure. On March 5 Ambassador Ala reported that Qavam had officially
protested the presence of Soviet troops and “would welcome and appreciate American
intervention at this critical juncture” (FRUS 1969b:339). These reports certainly had an impact—triggering meetings in the State Department and the transmission of two protest notes to the Soviet Union (although they did not alter the administration’s strategy of dealing with the situation through the U.N. Security Council, see FRUS 1969b:346-347; Hess 1974:135). For the participants, the period of early March to early April represented the pinnacle (in terms of uncertainty and time pressure) of the Iran “crisis” (see Truman 1956:94-96). President Truman became personally involved in the decisions regarding Iran and Secretary Byrnes led the American delegation to the U.N. himself. A “war scare” flared in the press and a New York Times editorial asked, “Where does the search for security end and where does expansion begin?” (quoted in Kuniholm 1980:325)

During the second decision period, reports from Ambassador Allen in Iran and Loy Henderson in Washington contributed to President Truman’s perception of acute time pressure. In August Allen reported that the situation was “gloomy but by no means desperate” (FRUS 1969b:511), Qavam’s deal with Pishevari had fallen through and the Iranians were once again turning to the U.S. for assurances of support (FRUS 1969b:511-512). In late September the Ambassador had a new cause for concern—the British were inciting a revolt in southern Iran and appeared to be leaning toward a “spheres of influence” settlement (FRUS 1969b:516). When Qavam requested direct U.S. military and economic aid, Allen passed on the Iranian Premier’s proposal (FRUS 1969b:519-

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9Six years later (April 24, 1952), President Truman suggested that he sent an “ultimatum” to Stalin during this period. This document has never been found and many doubt the truth of the President’s assertion (see Thorpe 1978; Rosenberg 1979; Samii 1987; Rountree 1991; Henderson 1976; Curry to Bennorth 2 February 1969; George to Lagerquist 20 June 1969; Allen “Mission to Iran” N.D.).
520), but Secretary Byrnes was not yet convinced of the severity of the situation and deferred the decision regarding military aid (FRUS 1969b:521). On October 8 Loy Henderson conveyed his support for Qavam’s request indicating that, “we feel that the situation is critical and that we should do everything within our power to prevent Iran from slipping into the Soviet orbit” (FRUS 1969b:524). On October 18 Henderson attempted to force a decision, arguing that: “we are faced at the present time... with an extremely critical situation in Iran which may require quick action on our part” and that “Iran is daily losing what remains of its independence” (FRUS 1969b:534).

Ambassador Allen was notified on November 14 that Secretary Byrnes had tentatively approved Henderson’s proposals for aiding Iran (FRUS 1969b:546). Allen and Henderson had convincingly communicated the importance of American aid to the policy debate between Qavam and the Shah. They had also stressed the need for a quick decision due to the upcoming Iranian elections and plans to send troops into Azerbaijan. Though the aid plan took some time to develop and implement, the announcement of concrete U.S. support buoyed the spirits of Qavam in his confrontation with the Soviets and Azeri separatists. By December 12, Allen could report that the “war is over” in Azerbaijan (FRUS 1969b:560).

As noted above, the evidence suggests that President Truman perceived high uncertainty and acute time pressure during the initial decision period (from December of 1945 through May of 1946) and moderate uncertainty and acute time pressure during the latter decision period (from June to December of 1946). During both decision periods, the President faced two major sources of uncertainty: 1.) what were Soviet intentions? and 2.)
what were Iranian intentions? Truman’s perception of time pressure during both decision periods was largely determined by reports of events on the ground in Iran. Unfortunately, President Truman’s actions during the first decision period do not support the plausibility of REF hypothesis 7c. Despite perceptions of high uncertainty and acute time pressure, I observed little evidence of bolstering. Finally, during the latter decision period, Truman’s approval of an incremental escalation runs counter to the REF hypotheses.

Consideration of Alternatives and Final Decision

As noted in Chapter 2, I expect that President Truman (identified as a potential-motivated president) will tend to focus on best-case outcomes and maximum gains when considering alternatives (REF hypothesis 3). I also anticipate that President Truman is likely to behave in a risk-acceptant manner in making final decisions (REF hypothesis 5). In order to evaluate the plausibility of these hypotheses, we must examine the manner in which alternatives were considered, and the decisions that were reached during crucial periods in the cases. For the Iranian case, two periods are worthy of careful scrutiny- December 1945-May 1946 and June-December 1946.

Regrettably, I am unable to test REF hypothesis 3 with direct evidence in this case. As one author has noted: “It is difficult to determine the exact role that Truman played in the Iranian crisis” (Gosnell 1980:302). President Truman is known to have met several times with Secretary Byrnes during the initial decision period, but there is no

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10 Recall the exception to this hypothesis: if there is only one alternative capable of achieving the aspiration level, that alternative is likely to be selected regardless of its level of risk (REF hypothesis 6).
documentary record of the President’s comments during these meetings (Truman 1956:94-95). While Secretary Byrnes and then Under Secretary of State Acheson both note that President Truman was an informed and active participant in the policy deliberations, there is only indirect evidence of the manner in which the President considered alternatives (see Byrnes 1947, 1958; Acheson 1969). Unfortunately, this indirect evidence does not appear to support REF hypothesis 3 during the first decision period.

In early March (1946), Charles Bohlen opposed an aggressive U.S. protest of Soviet troop movements in Azerbaijan. His argument focused on the potential costs associated with this alternative and introduced the possibility that “the United States might wind up in a worse position than before” (Kuniholm 1980:322). Later in March, Ambassador Murray provided his analysis of a potential U.S. decision to accept Qavam’s concessions to the Soviets. Murray also considered the negative consequences associated with confrontational actions: “I can see little utility in winning a resounding victory over USSR in SC meeting if it either (a) fails to result in evacuation of Iran or (b) leaves Russians smarting under humiliating defeat and determined to revenge themselves on Iran.” (FRUS 1969b:374) Certainly in the following analysis, Murray was not engaging in “best-case” thinking: “In summary much as I regret possibility that Iran will be forced to pay bribe to secure what should be accorded her automatically as of right, I do not feel that proposed solution is too bad.” (FRUS 1969b:375) This “best of the worst” strategy of selecting alternatives, fits more with the pattern that I observe in the Kennedy administration cases (see Chapter 4).
There is, however, some indirect evidence supporting REF hypothesis 3 in the latter decision period. Loy Henderson's memoranda of October 8 and 18 discussed only the positive implications of providing moral, economic, and military aid to Iran (see FRUS 1969b:523-525, 533-536). While he elaborated extensively on the negative consequences of the current U.S. policy, he did not attempt to discuss the potential Soviet response to his aid proposal. Henderson argued that the aid plan "might strengthen the hands of this government in its efforts to preserve the independence of Iran and to prevent that country from succumbing to Soviet pressure and thus passing completely into the Soviet orbit of satellite states" (FRUS 1969b:534). There was no discussion of the negative things that "might" happen if Henderson's aid plan was approved.

In evaluating REF hypothesis 5, we must first consider whether President Truman reached a "final decision" (regarding U.S. intervention) in each decision period. Based on the evidence discussed above, I feel that the President did not reach a "final decision" during the initial period. Qavam's concessions to the Soviets allowed the U.S. to claim victory in the U.N. without having to follow through on hollow threats. The President never was forced to make the hard choices that might lead to the loss of Iran or a confrontation with the Soviets. Truman could later claim that American firmness led to the Soviet withdrawal, but undoubtedly Stalin (and certainly Qavam) knew better (Truman 1956:96). Thus, REF hypothesis 5 cannot be evaluated during this period.

In the latter decision period a "final decision" was reached. The President approved Secretary Byrnes' endorsement of Henderson's proposal and the U.S. supplied combat arms to Iran. In my view, however, this decision is more accurately explained by
REF hypothesis 6- *if there is only one alternative capable of achieving the aspiration level, that alternative is likely to be selected regardless of its level of risk.* By the fall of 1946, Henderson and Allen had become the main administration experts on Iran. They cooperated in developing and justifying Henderson’s aid proposal and they did not offer any alternative policies. They suggested that U.S. inaction would lead to Soviet control of Iran and offered the only way to achieve the President’s aspiration level. Their policy appeared to be successful when Qavam expressed his thanks by putting down the Azeri rebellion and later leading the political fight to repudiate the April (1946) oil agreement with the Soviets. Of course, the lack of direct evidence of President Truman’s role in this period limits the strength of these findings.

**Epilogue**

Clearly President Truman and his closest advisers viewed the settlement of the Iranian “crisis” as a victory for the United States (see Truman 1956:95-96; Acheson 1969:198; Byrnes 1947:303-304; Herrmann and Fischerkeller 1996:156 FN5). The Soviets pressed where “weakness showed” and American strength pushed them back (Truman 1956:96). In December of 1946 Ambassador Allen wrote that the collapse of the Azeri separatist regime “was a major victory for UN- and for a firm policy toward USSR” (FRUS 1969b:566). The lack of Soviet intervention indicated that they were not ready for a “showdown” with the United States (FRUS 1969b:566). While the facts of the case suggest a second interpretation (focusing on Iranian appeasement), the President’s interpretation is important because it influenced his behavior in Greece and Korea. The
events in Iran supported Truman's developing image of the Soviet Union and further suggested that the "minds in the Kremlin worked very much as Kennan had predicted they would" (Kuniholm 1980:398). The "Cold Warriors" in Truman's administration (Acheson, Henderson, and Kennan) "cut their teeth" on Iran and secured their status as experts on Soviet motivations. The World War II alliance had come to its effective end. In the words of Walter Lippmann, the United States and the Soviet Union "had indeed reached the point where it was easier to fail than succeed" (quoted in Hess 1974:146).

III. Greece 1947-1948

Overview

The American intervention in the Greek Civil War that began with the announcement of the "Truman Doctrine" on March 12, 1947 was (as Iran) a direct result of the disagreements between the U.S. and U.S.S.R. over the settlement of World War II. Unlike Iran, however, the American intervention in Greece was precipitated by the collapse of the British imperial system and the Truman administration's desire to ensure global peace and prosperity (and possibly establish American hegemony). While Congressional and public opinion expressed fears of a willingness to pull "British chestnuts out of the fire" (Jones 1955:139), the Truman administration was developing an aggressive foreign policy of international engagement that provided for American involvement in European economic and political affairs and set the foundation for the Marshall Plan and the NATO alliance.
The origins of the Greek Civil War extend (at the least) to the period before World War II when “rightist” and “leftist” groups coalesced during the Metaxas dictatorship (Jones 1989:17). The devastation wrought by the Nazi occupation of Greece during the War further set the stage for conflict (Kuniholm 1980:221). Indeed, the Nazis attempted to benefit from the “personal and political rivalries” that divided the partisan groups in Greece (Jones 1955:69). As the end of the War drew near, the Greek partisans were generally divided between the left-leaning EAM (National Liberation Front, and its People’s Army known as ELAS) and the rightist EDES (National Republican League). Between August of 1943 and February of 1944, the “First Round” of conflict between these groups resulted in the partisans fighting one another more often than they engaged the Germans (Kuniholm 1980:223 FN26).

Throughout World War II Britain had held a special interest in Greece. The Greek King (George) spent the War in London and a number of “royalist politicians” (led by Papandreou) had established the Greek government in exile in Cairo and had assembled a “Greek Brigade” that fought in Italy (Jones 1955:69-70). By August of 1944 the British coerced the EAM into joining the government in exile, thus ensuring the continuation of the Greek monarchy. Fearful of defection by the EAM or EDES, the British occupied Athens and Piraeus in order to provide security for the Greek government and to supervise the demobilization and disarmament of the partisan groups once the Nazi troops had withdrawn. The friction between the EAM and the royalist government erupted into civil war on December 3, 1944 when Greek police fired on leftist demonstrators (Jones 1955:71). From December 3 to February 12 the “Second Round” of the Civil War was
marked by brutal and bloody fighting in the streets of Athens until British reinforcements finally forced ELAS troops to flee to the countryside. In late December, Churchill had pushed the Greek King to accept a “regency solution”; and so by February the more liberal-minded government of Nikolaos Plastiras was able to end the “Second Round” by signing the “Varkiza Agreement” with the EAM (Kuniholm 1980:225). British intervention (amounting to 75,000 troops) contributed to the defeat of the EAM and the momentary stabilization of life, at least in the major Greek cities. And yet through 1945 and 1946 the EAM remained active politically, ELAS once again became a guerrilla force, and the devastation of Greece caused by World War II and the two “rounds” of the Civil War left Greece almost entirely dependent on British economic and military aid.

Article IX of the Varkiza agreement called for a plebiscite to determine whether the public advocated a royalist or republican constitution. It also allowed for a general election of members to the constituent assembly that would draft the new constitution (Kuniholm 1980:250). Throughout 1945 rightist and leftist political parties debated both the timing and order of the plebiscite and election. Since many of the atrocities committed during the “Second Round” were publicly attributed to ELAS and the EAM, the rightists hoped for early elections to cash-in on favorable public opinion (Kuniholm 1980:250; Jones 1955:72). As one Greek government after another considered the election issue, the British enlisted the aid of the United States and France to push the Soviets to accept an early popular election. On March 31, 1946 the general election was held “under the watchful eyes of fifteen hundred American, British, French, and South African official observers” (Jones 1955:72). Buoyed by the EAM’s decision to encourage
left-leaning voters to abstain from the election, the Populist Party of Constantine Tsaldaris received a plurality of the votes cast and with its allies controlled 251 seats in the 354 member “revisionary parliament” (Kuniholm 1980:353, Jones 1989:17). Despite pressure from the British to form a broad coalition government, Tsaldaris could not reach an agreement with the heads of the more centrist republican parties and instead formed a Populist government and announced that the plebiscite would be held on September 1 (see Alexander 1982:190-194). The majority of Greeks (officially 68 per cent\(^\text{11}\)) voting in the plebiscite favored the return of the King, and on September 28 King George returned to Athens (Alexander 1982:216).\(^\text{12}\)

The “Third Round” of the Greek Civil War began (according to popular consensus, see Jones 1989:18) on March 30, the eve of the general election. In reality, the attack on the village of Litokhoron simply signaled an increase in the guerrilla campaign being mounted by the Greek Communist Party (KKE). As guerrilla attacks continued to increase in the summer of 1946, the Greek government under Tsaldaris was forced to increase expenditures aimed at containing the guerrilla threat. Despite vast aid from the United Nations Relief and Rehabilitation Administration (UNRRA) and the reassuring presence of British troops, the security situation continued to deteriorate and the Greek government faced financial collapse (Kuniholm 1980:354; Jones 1955:73-74). As the

\(^{11}\text{The American observers of the plebiscite were not convinced of the accuracy of the government’s figures, but their report was not released publicly (see Alexander 1982:209-210).}\)

\(^{12}\text{For a more complete and nuanced discussion of Greek politics during this period see Xydis 1963.}\)
situation approached its lowest point, events in Britain caused the Atlee government to reevaluate its role as the Greek patron.

In June of 1946 the British Cabinet had decided that economic and military aid to the Greek government must cease by March 31, 1947 (Alexander 1982:197). In September the number of British troops in Greece was reduced to 31,000, "leaving a single division in Macedonia and a brigade in the vicinity of Athens" (Alexander 1982:214). By October, the British Foreign Office was actively attempting to persuade the U.S. State Department that American economic aid was necessary to salvage the situation.\(^{13}\) As the winter of 1946-47 progressed, the British domestic economy was approaching a crisis of its own. Plagued by huge budget deficits and a "calamitous" coal shortage caused by a brutal winter, Atlee’s government embarked on a program to further reduce foreign financial and troop commitments (Jones 1955:78-85; see also Jones 1989:23-26). This British withdrawal from global commitments was hammered home to the U.S. on February 21, 1947 when the State Department received an Aide-Memoire indicating that the British would be unable to provide aid to Greece beyond March 31, 1947 and that "His Majesty's Government trust that the United States Government may find it possible to afford financial assistance to Greece on a scale sufficient to meet her minimum needs, both civil and military" (FRUS 1971:34-35).\(^{14}\)

\(^{13}\) The British Foreign Office regretted the cabinet's decision to withdraw aid to Greece. Foreign Minister Bevin could not convince the economy-minded Ministers of the importance of the Greek situation.

\(^{14}\) A second Aide-Memoire indicated that British aid to Turkey was also about to be discontinued (FRUS 1971:35-37).
Neither the deteriorating situation in Greece nor the British government’s desire to extricate itself from its commitments to the Greek government were a surprise to Truman administration officials. The February 21 Aide-Memoire was a “shocker” primarily because it allowed the President and his advisers only six weeks to develop a program of American assistance (Acheson 1969:217). In fact, the U.S. had become increasingly involved in Greek affairs: approving an Export-Import Bank loan to Greece in January of 1946, observing the elections in March of that year, sending an economic mission to Athens in January of 1947, and providing the head of the UN Security Council Commission investigating border incidents in Northern Greece (see Jones 1989:26-35). As cables from the American Ambassador to Greece (Lincoln MacVeagh) indicate, the State Department and the President were well aware of the current situation in Greece in February of 1947 (see FRUS 1971).

In a matter of days after the receipt of the British Aide-Memoire President Truman met with his principal advisors and approved a massive plan to aid Greece and Turkey, both economically and militarily (see Acheson 1969). After meeting with Congressional leaders the President and his advisers concluded that the only way to secure quick passage of the enabling legislation was to appear before a joint session of Congress and launch a massive public information campaign (see Jones 1955). The “Truman Doctrine” speech boldly set forth the administration’s foreign policy vision, frankly stating the dire global situation and the need for American action. On May 22 President Truman signed Public Law 75, which approved approximately $400 million in aid to Greece and Turkey (Kuniholm 1980:414). And yet the massive “Truman Doctrine”
aid package did not immediately change the fortunes of the Greek government. Between May of 1947 and June of 1948 President Truman would twice consider the dispatch of U.S. troops. In the late summer/early fall of 1947, as the British contemplated the withdrawal of their remaining forces in Greece, President Truman considered the deployment of American ground troops. Under strong pressure from his military advisers to avoid the commitment of significant American forces, Truman approved the expansion of the U.S. military advisory group in Greece and broadened their role to include operational advice to the Greek military (see Jones 1989:79-106). Later in December-June of 1948, as the KKE proclaimed a "Free Government" in northern Greece, the President and the National Security Council would once again consider the dispatch of American troops. But continued military opposition to further escalation and the first Greek government victories supported by the effective use of U.S. operational advice and weapons (including napalm) encouraged the President to reject escalation for the moment (see Jones 1989:137-139). Eventually the massive U.S. aid was too much for the Greek rebels (and their Balkan allies) to counter and President Truman was able to declare victory in a report to Congress in November of 1949.

Aspiration Level

As noted above, the president's "aspiration level" is expected to comprise a set of minimum level goals that the president hopes to achieve or surpass. In order to evaluate hypothesis 1 (presidents tend to evaluate outcomes relative to an aspiration level rather than an overall value level), we must infer the elements of President Truman's aspiration
level (regarding Greece) from the documentary record. We need to find descriptions of acceptable/desirable outcomes/objectives in this case. Thus, we need to find relevant documents that address Truman’s goals, desires, hopes, needs, and/or requirements in this case.

Based on the evidence presented below, I find that President Truman’s immediate goal in Greece was to eliminate the threat posed by the communist guerrillas and secure a non-communist, democratic, and economically stable ally. The means available for achieving this goal were constrained by the fear of potential Soviet reactions to U.S. initiatives, a concern regarding the overcommitment of U.S. economic and military capabilities, and apprehension about a potential isolationist reaction in Congressional and public opinion. The President’s commitment to achieving or surpassing his immediate goal was reinforced by his fear that communist success in Greece would lead to the fall of France, Italy, Iran, and Turkey; a desire to establish U.S. leadership of the “free world” in the wake of British retreat; and later, by a need to demonstrate the resolve of his administration and the credibility of previous U.S. commitments. This complex combination of goals and constraints formed the aspiration level that guided Truman’s decision making in this case.

There was almost no disagreement within the Truman administration regarding the immediate goal that should be sought in Greece. In a memorandum to President Truman that accompanied him to the White House on February 26, 1947, Secretary of State George C. Marshall stated that “the collapse of Greece would create a situation threatening to the security of the United States” (FRUS 1971:58). As early as September 125
of 1946, the previous Secretary of State (James F. Byrnes) had communicated to his British counterpart (Ernest Bevin) that “it was essential that the Communists should not get into power in Greece. This must be avoided at all costs. He did not mind how it was done. We must keep our eye very closely on Greece.” (quoted in Alexander 1982:193)

One must recall the context in which Greek events took place: the contest over political influence in Eastern Europe had been won by the Soviets, and yet Truman’s “get-tough” battleship diplomacy in Turkey and Iran (see section II above) had halted communist expansion (see Barnet 1968:103-104). By 1947 President Truman had adopted the view that communist expansion must be stopped in Europe14, and, importantly, that it could be stopped by an aggressive U.S. foreign policy.

The immediate administration goal in Greece was stated directly in Truman’s speech to Congress on March 12. The President boldly argued: “I believe that it must be the policy of the United States to support free peoples who are resisting attempted subjugation by armed minorities or by outside pressures” (quoted in Jones 1955:272). He further stated that “Greece must have assistance if it is to become a self-supporting and self-respecting democracy” (quoted in Jones 1955:270). The economic devastation Greece suffered during World War II was cited as a justification for U.S. economic support, the oppressive pressure of “armed minorities” and outside “totalitarian regimes”

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14In his oral history, George Elsey states: “the President was very well informed of what the Soviets were up to in the Eastern Europe. He had no illusions whatsoever about their interests, their activities, and what they were up to in Poland, Hungary, Romania, their zone of Austria, Bulgaria. He knew, our whole government knew that they were trying to subvert the governments of Greece and Turkey and I think he accepted without question the assessment of the British and our State Department and military departments of what would happen if he didn’t act” (1974:354).
was cited to justify military aid (see Jones 269-274). This immediate goal was repeated by the President throughout 1947 and 1948 in comments at press conferences and in public speeches (see Truman 1963, 1964). Over time, as the Greek government’s success against the guerrillas wax and waned, Truman would occasionally shift emphasis from the economic to the military aspects of the aid program (see Truman 1964:28-29). But throughout the period under examination, the President consistently emphasized his wish to secure a non-communist, democratic, and economically stable ally.

The documentary record suggests that the goal of securing a non-communist, democratic, and economically stable Greece was indeed President Truman’s immediate goal in this case. But clearly other imperatives constrained the means available for achieving this immediate goal as well as Truman’s commitment to achieving or surpassing his immediate goal. In terms of constraints on means, Truman was initially only somewhat fearful of potential Soviet reactions to U.S. initiatives. During the development of Truman’s speech before Congress, George Kennan (recently chosen to be the head of the State Department’s Policy Planning Staff) actively opposed any aid to Turkey and fought to limit military aid to Greece (Henderson 1976:87). Kennan argued that the belligerent tone of the President’s speech “might provoke the Soviet Union to aggressive action” (Acheson 1969:221). He was particularly concerned with the portrayal of “two opposing ways of life” (Jones 1955:155). Despite Kennan’s concerns, the President approved the official State Department version of the speech. But he was very careful to refrain from directly mentioning or challenging the Soviet Union (see Jones 1955:269-274). Truman did not want to turn the Greek Civil War into a direct conflict
between the Soviet Union and the U.S., but he also knew that some inflammatory rhetoric was required to force the Republican Congress to act (Kuniholm 1980:413-414).

During the later stages of American intervention, when the President considered the deployment of American ground troops to Greece, Truman expressed a greater concern for the potential Soviet reaction to U.S. initiatives. In the fall of 1947, the decision to provide operational advisers rather than ground troops was partially based on the belief that the limited U.S. forces available for action in Greece could not counter the adjacent communist forces that might be provoked into action (Jones 1989:99). In the Spring of 1948, when Truman again considered the dispatch of U.S. ground troops, a CIA study examined the “Consequences of Certain Courses of Action with Respect to Greece” (5 April 1948). This paper examined the potential Soviet response to the intervention alternatives under consideration by the NSC. It concluded that the deployment of U.S. troops “might alarm the USSR initially”, but that “the USSR would not accept the risk of war for the sake of Greece” (“Consequences of Certain Courses of Action” 5 April 1948:1). And yet, the report also suggested that partial mobilization in the United States might result in a Kremlin decision to launch a preventive war (“Consequences of Certain Courses of Action” 5 April 1948:2). Since Truman’s military advisers argued that partial mobilization must accompany troop deployments to Greece, the possibility of a major war with the Soviets had to be considered (see Jones 1989:155).

A second constraint on the means available for achieving Truman’s immediate goal was a concern regarding the overcommitment of U.S. economic and military capabilities. The recently elected eightieth Congress was dominated by economy-minded
Republicans (Barnet 1968:113). These Republicans were engaged in an effort to reduce the government budget, particularly in foreign affairs and defense spending (Truman 1956:102). Just one week before the President’s speech, the Senate voted to cut the President’s budget by four and a half billion dollars (Acheson 1969:222). It was in this context that Truman proposed a $400 million dollar aid bill. In order to ensure Congressional support for the aid bill, President Truman invited Congressional leaders (with a few notable exceptions) to the White House on February 27 and again on March 10 (see Acheson 1969:219-221). President Truman and his State Department advisers (Marshall and Acheson) were careful to court the favor of Senator Arthur Vandenberg—the powerful Republican Chairman of the Foreign Relations Committee. With Vandenberg as an ally the administration was able to emphasize the bi-partisan character of support for the aid proposal, even allowing a “Vandenberg amendment” to stamp the bill with the Senator’s imprimatur (see Acheson 1969:223-225).

Having successfully avoided a clash with Congress over the aid program, the administration later faced a confrontation with Truman’s military advisers regarding the possibility of overcommitting U.S. military resources in Greece. During both of the periods in which the President considered the deployment of U.S. ground troops, his military advisers stubbornly argued that partial mobilization must accompany troop movements to Greece. In October of 1947, the JCS reported that America lacked the military capability to defeat the “adjacent Soviet satellite states” should they become openly involved in the Greek Civil War (Jones 1989:99). In the Spring of 1948, when the NSC formally asked the Secretary of Defense and the JCS to reconsider troop
deployments, they replied that partial mobilization was a "necessity" (FRUS 1974:94). The intransigence of the JCS frustrated the State Department (see particularly FRUS 1974:98-99), but the fear of overcommitment expressed by his military advisers convinced President Truman to put off the troop deployment decision.

The final constraint on the means available for achieving Truman's immediate goal was his apprehension regarding the potential for an isolationist reaction in Congressional and public opinion. This constraint had an impact primarily during the weeks leading up to the President's speech. In his memoirs, President Truman notes that he "could never quite forget the strong hold which isolationism had gained over our country after World War I" (1956:101). Having received numerous intelligence reports suggesting the belligerent character of Soviet motivations (see "The Greek Situation" 7 February 1947:1) and the deterioration in British capabilities, Truman was convinced that "without American participation there was no power capable of meeting Russia as an equal" (1956:102). The President also firmly believed that "Fortress America" notions could only result in handing to the Russians vast areas of the globe now denied to them" (1956:102). Thus, in developing the "Truman Doctrine" speech, great attention was paid to ideological and moral issues. President Truman and his advisers were careful to avoid discussions of Greece and Turkey's "strategic value" or of America's interest in Near East oil resources (see Jones 1955:162; Kuniholm 1980:413; Barnet 1968:118-119).

Indeed, the initial meeting between the President (and his advisers) and Congressional leaders on February 27 set the tone for the administration's presentation of its aid request. At the meeting, General Marshall "flubbed his opening statement"
Acheson (1969:219) by following a “dry” and “cryptic” presentation that resulted in questions like “Isn’t this pulling British chestnuts out of the fire?” and “How much is this going to cost?” (Jones 1955:139). In contrast, Acheson’s presentation in support of his boss (full of clever metaphor and ideological rhetoric) persuaded Senator Vandenberg to tell Truman: “if you will say that to the Congress and the country, I will support you and I believe that most of its members will do the same” (quoted in Acheson 1969:219). Ironically, in order to overwhelm the isolationist stream in American politics, President Truman invoked grand ideological rhetoric that extended far beyond the immediate situation. For some Congressmen “the President’s message sounded like a virtual declaration of war on Russia” (Shelton 13 March 1947).

In considering the factors reinforcing Truman’s commitment to achieving or surpassing his immediate goal, we must first examine the President’s concern that communist success in Greece would lead to the fall of France, Italy, Iran, and Turkey. This “domino thinking” was prevalent throughout the administration during this time period. A CIA report in early February of 1947 indicated that Soviet success in Greece would help them “achieve a strategic position in the Eastern Mediterranean, thereby outflanking Turkey, threatening the Suez Canal, and endangering the polities of the Near East” (“The Greek Situation” 7 February 1947:1). A cable from Ambassador MacVeagh on February 11 stated that if “Greece falls to communism the whole Near East and part of North Africa as well are certain to pass under Soviet influence” (FRUS 1971:17). A report from Mark Ethridge (the U.S. Representative on the U.N. Commission of Investigation in Greece) dated February 17 noted that the “feeling of commissioners with
whom I have close contact particularly British, French, Chinese and Colombian is that if Greece goes not only Near East goes with it but also Italy and France” (FRUS 1971:24). Finally, a February 21 memo from Acheson to Marshall entitled “Crisis and Imminent Possibility of Collapse” argued that:

“The capitulation of Greece to Soviet domination through lack of adequate support from the U.S. and Great Britain might eventually result in the loss of the whole Near and Middle East and northern Africa. It would consolidate the position of Communist minorities in many other countries where their aggressive tactics are seriously hampering the development of middle-of-the-road governments.” (FRUS 1971:30)

This “domino thinking” appears to have convinced President Truman of the seriousness of the Greek situation. In his memoirs Truman writes “America could not, and should not, let these free countries stand unaided. To do so would carry the clearest implications in the Middle East and in Italy, Germany, and France” (1956:101).

Acheson’s colorful metaphor in his February 27 presentation to the Congressional leadership predates the “domino” analogy but is no less explicit: “Like apples in a barrel infected by one rotten one, the corruption of Greece would infect Iran and all to the east. It would also carry infection to Africa through Asia Minor and Egypt, and to Europe through Italy and France, already threatened by the strongest Communist parties in Western Europe.” (1969:219; see also Marshall’s comments in FRUS 1971:61) It is no wonder then, that President Truman’s speech before Congress would use similar (but less explicit) language (see Jones 1955:272-273). The President and his advisers had
concluded that they were engaged in a bi-polar power struggle of historic proportions\(^\text{16}\). between camps “divided by an unbridgeable ideological chasm” (Jones 1955:141).

Closely tied to this “domino thinking” was the second major factor reinforcing Truman’s commitment to achieving or surpassing his immediate goal— a desire to establish U.S. leadership of the “free world” in the wake of British retreat. The Greek “crisis” was as much a watershed in U.S.-British relations as it was in U.S.-Soviet relations. As the British Empire receded from India, Burma, Egypt, and Palestine, “‘Dunkirk’ was on the lips of all” (Jones 1955:80). The British retreat was about to create a vacuum that only two states were capable of filling. In a conversation with Louis Fisher on Monday, February 24, Acheson stated bluntly that the “British are pulling out everywhere and if we don’t go in the Russians will” (quoted in Isaacson and Thomas 1986:393). The “domino thinking” that was prevalent within the administration led the President and his advisers to view Greece in global as well as local terms.

A major initial concern of administration officials was whether or not the British request for U.S. aid to Greece was sincere. The State Department analysis of the British notes on Greece and Turkey considered whether the British had decided “to come to terms with the Soviet Union on a basis involving respective spheres of influence” (FRUS 1971:50). Were the British simply throwing in the towel without expecting the U.S. to react? A second concern was whether the U.S. was being asked to assume the burden of Empire on Britain’s behalf (see FRUS 1971:50-51). The Truman administration did not

\(^{16}\)Acheson likened the struggle to that between Rome and Carthage (Jones 1955:141).
wish to assume the responsibilities and liabilities of global involvement without receiving the benefits of such involvement. The answer to each of these questions was negative, the State Department concluded that the British request was sincere and that the U.S. should offer aid to Greece and Turkey (see FRUS 1971:51-53).

Based on his own beliefs and the suggestions of his State Department advisers, President Truman concluded that it was “time to align the United States of America clearly on the side, and the head, of the free world” (Truman 1956:102). The President “took the Greek crisis as an opportunity to announce the willingness of the United States to assume the global responsibilities of power” (Jones 1989:43). This decision was reflected in the language of the President’s speech to Congress. Truman referred to the British retreat, noting that “Great Britain finds itself under the necessity of reducing or liquidating its commitments in several parts of the world, including Greece” (quoted in Jones 1955:270). He also discussed the responsibility that fell to the U.S.:

“The Free peoples of the world look to us for support in maintaining their freedoms. If we falter in our leadership, we may endanger the peace of the world— and we shall surely endanger the welfare of our own nation. Great responsibilities have been placed upon us by the swift movement of events. I am confident that the Congress will face these responsibilities squarely.” (quoted in Jones 1955:274)

Both the public and the Congress grasped the significance of the President’s remarks, the era of American isolationism was over (see Shelton 1947; Barnet 1968:122).
The final factor reinforcing Truman’s commitment to achieving or surpassing his immediate goal was a need to demonstrate the resolve of his administration and the credibility of previous U.S. commitments. Obviously, this factor was only relevant during the later stages of the American intervention. After the President received word on August 1, 1947, that the British had decided to pull out their remaining troops (see FRUS 1971:268), he was forced to consider the dispatch of U.S. ground troops. The task facing the President was to convince “the enemy (as well as other nations) that America possessed the will to resist communist aggression without resorting to all-out war” (Jones 1989:80). He was in many ways constrained by the boldness of his March 12 speech to Congress. In making Greece a public demonstration of American leadership and responsibility, the President had committed his administration to securing a favorable outcome. The world was watching and a “failure in Greece would lead to a dangerous weakening of resistance to communism” (quoted in Jones 1989:83). In the spring of 1948, when the deployment of U.S. troops was again being examined, the JCS argued that “withdrawal from Greece would lead to a ‘substantial loss of prestige’” (quoted in Jones 1989:130). Loy Henderson (the Director of the Office of Near Eastern and African Affairs) stated, at the same time, that “Greece is the test tube which the peoples of the world are watching in order to ascertain whether the determination of the Western powers to resist aggression equals that of international Communism to acquire new territory and new bases for further aggression” (FRUS 1974:12). This depth of commitment did not privilege any of the escalatory options under consideration by the President, but it did remove U.S. withdrawal from serious consideration.
To summarize, President Truman’s immediate goal in Greece was to eliminate the threat posed by the communist guerrillas and secure a non-communist, democratic, and economically stable ally. The means available for achieving this goal were constrained by the fear of potential Soviet reactions to U.S. initiatives, a concern regarding the overcommitment of U.S. economic and military capabilities, and apprehension about a potential isolationist reaction in Congressional and public opinion. The President’s commitment to achieving or surpassing his immediate goal was reinforced by his fear that communist success in Greece would lead to the fall of France, Italy, Iran, and Turkey; a desire to establish U.S. leadership of the “free world” in the wake of British retreat; and later by a need to demonstrate the resolve of his administration and the credibility of previous U.S. commitments. President Truman’s aspiration level was well articulated and the documentary evidence supports REF hypothesis 1.

Uncertainty and Time Pressure

As noted above, I expect that presidential perceptions of high uncertainty and a lack of valid information will interact with presidential risk predispositions and affect the output of the decision process (REF hypothesis 7). In the Truman cases, if the President perceives high uncertainty and inaccurate information but does not perceive acute time pressure I expect to observe decisional delay and an expanded search for information (REF hypothesis 7a). If the President perceives high uncertainty and inaccurate information and also perceives acute time pressure I expect to observe bolstering (REF hypothesis 7c).
As the evidence presented below suggests, President Truman perceived only moderate uncertainty during the three decision periods under examination in this case study. He did, however, perceive acute time pressure during the initial decision period of February 21- March 12 of 1947. During the second decision period in August-November of 1947 and the final decision period of December-June 1948 initial perceptions of acute time pressure gave way to perceptions of moderate time pressure. Throughout the decision periods, Truman faced two major sources of uncertainty: 1.) how would the Soviets respond to U.S. initiatives? and 2.) how much aid and of what type (military or economic) was required to achieve a successful outcome in Greece? The perception of acute time pressure in February/March 1947 was fueled by cables from MacVeagh, Porter, and Ethridge, and the British Aide-Memoire. The perception of initially acute, but later moderate time pressure in August-November was caused by reports from the field and by the British decision to withdraw their remaining forces from Greece. During the final decision period, Truman’s perception of initially acute, but later moderate time pressure was caused by communist successes in Greece (particularly the creation of a “Free” rebel government). President Truman’s decisions regarding Greece are only partially explained by the REF hypotheses. In March of 1947 when he perceived acute time pressure and moderate uncertainty, President Truman decided to intervene economically and militarily in Greece (as suggested by REF hypothesis 6, see discussion below). In November of 1947 when he perceived moderate time pressure and moderate uncertainty, President Truman approved an increase in U.S. military advisers in Greece and an expansion of their role to include operational advice (which appears to be an
incremental strategy that runs against the predictions of either REF hypothesis 5 or 7c).

Finally, in the Spring of 1948 when he perceived moderate uncertainty and moderate time pressure, events on the ground in Greece began to turn around and the President was spared from making a final decision on troop deployments (preventing the evaluation of the REF hypotheses).

As discussed above, one of the first questions facing President Truman and his advisers was how the Soviets would respond to U.S. initiatives. The task of anticipating potential Soviet responses also required some motivational analysis by intelligence staffers. The sources of information on Soviet motivations and future actions were generally the CIA, the State Department, and military intelligence. Despite the usual qualifications describing the inherent difficulties of motivational analysis and prediction, the majority of intelligence reports received by the President confidently concurred that the Soviet objective was to achieve a communist Greece, but that they would not risk war with the U.S. to achieve their objective (see “The Greek Situation” 7 February 1947; “Consequences of Certain Courses of Action” 5 April 1948; and FRUS 1971). In his memoirs, President Truman wrote: “Intelligence reports which I received stated that many of the insurgents had been trained, indoctrinated, armed, and equipped at various camps beyond the Greek borders. Under Soviet direction, the reports said, Greece’s northern neighbors-- Yugoslavia, Bulgaria, and Albania-- were conducting a drive to establish a Communist Greece” (1956:98). While the various intelligence services kept a close watch for changes in Soviet policy, President Truman became increasingly convinced that the U.S. could intervene in Greece without provoking an open Soviet
reaction. Of course, during the two later decision periods the question of whether the Soviets would respond to U.S. troop deployments was a major constraint. In fact, concerns regarding the military's ability to deal with a counter-intervention by Soviet or Balkan communist forces played a major role in Truman's decision to avoid the commitment of U.S. troops (see Jones 1989:99; "Consequences of Certain Courses of Action" 5 April 1948).

The second major issue facing President Truman and his advisers was how much aid and of what type (military or economic) was required to achieve a successful outcome in Greece. Because of their limited experience in Greece, the Truman administration was initially unsure of the potential scope of the intervention enterprise. In the early weeks of 1947, cables from Ambassador MacVeagh, Paul Porter (Chief of the American Economic Mission to Greece), and Mark Ethridge had begun to shed light on the situation in Greece (see FRUS 1971:12-29). But no one in the administration had contemplated the British withdrawal of aid on such short notice (Acheson 1969:217). On February 27, a cable was sent to Ambassador MacVeagh requesting "urgently your and Porter's comments on note concerning Greece particularly re sums mentioned and your opinion magnitude US financial aid required for all-out assistance to Greece as well as suggestions on implementation" (FRUS 1971:65). On March 3 Porter responded that "assuming US government intends to bear full burden military relief and reconstruction expenses, figures used in summary British note re Greece check approximately with our data" (FRUS 1971:65 FN1). Given the large sums under consideration, the $400 million dollars
initially appropriated by Congress was a ballpark figure which allowed for aid to be shifted from economic to military areas as needed (see "Public Law 75" 22 May 1947).

Throughout 1947 Ambassador MacVeagh and Governor Dwight P. Griswold (the Chief of the American Mission for Aid to Greece, AMAG) attempted to determine the best manner in which to distribute U.S. aid. But by early August, State Department officials were already preparing to explain AMAG's failure to achieve results before the end of the year (FRUS 1971:292-293). By September, the British decision to withdraw its troops led to the consideration of the escalation of U.S. involvement. Unsure of the situation in Greece, Major General Stephen J. Chamberlin was sent to survey the "broad strategic and operational factors of present military situation" (FRUS 1971:345 FN3). Chamberlin's report of October 20 advocated the deployment of additional U.S. advisers and the expansion of their role to include operational advice, but he stopped short of endorsing the deployment of U.S. ground troops (FRUS 1971:375-377). Put forward as the product of an objective outside analysis, Chamberlin's recommendations were accepted by the President and the NSC (Jones 1989:102-103).

When the issue of American escalation was again raised in the Spring of 1948 the National Security Council embarked on a study of "The Position of the United States With Respect to Greece", considering the various economic and military aspects of the aid mission (see FRUS 1974:2-95). The NSC 5 series (1-4) involved all of the government agencies connected to the aid program and took approximately five months to complete (January to June 1948), whereupon the situation had significantly changed in
Greece and the issue of further military escalation was no longer relevant (FRUS 1974:93).

President Truman's perception of time pressure was growing even before the receipt of the British Aide-Memoire. On February 7, Ambassador MacVeagh had reported a recent trend toward “specially lively guerrilla activity” (FRUS 1971:15). On February 17, Mark Ethridge reported that the “Soviets feel like Greece is ripe plum ready to fall into their hands in a few weeks” and that he felt that the “Soviets have every good reason to feel that Greece may be about to fall” (FRUS 1971:24). Finally, Paul Porter cabled that he could not “emphasize too strongly gravity of situation... developments here next few months could determine the future” (FRUS 1971:26). The urgency of the situation in Greece prompted Acheson to send Marshall the memorandum (originally drafted by Loy Henderson) entitled “Crisis and Imminent Possibility of Collapse in Greece”. This report stated that “unless urgent and immediate support is given to Greece, it seems probable that the Greek government will be overthrown and a totalitarian regime of the extreme left will come to power” (1971:30). Thus, the British decision to withdraw their aid to Greece and request that the U.S. replace them simply served to add emphasis to an already urgent situation.

In his memoirs, President Truman commented on his awareness of the urgency of the situation in Greece:

“The urgency of the situation was emphasized by dispatches from our representatives in Athens and Moscow. General Smith recorded his belief that only the presence of British troops had so far saved Greece from being
swallowed into the Soviet orbit. From Athens. Ambassador MacVeagh
sent a picture of deep depression and even resignation among Greek
leaders; their feeling seemed to be that only aid given at once would be of
use. Time, MacVeagh urged, was of the essence.” (1956:100)

George Elsey later noted that, for Truman, “Time was of the essence... if you were going
to act, you had to act fast because the time was then. It was not something you could sit
around and debate for weeks or months.” (1974:354) Indeed, the President acted fast,
giving tentative approval to the aid program on February 26 and discussing his decision
with Congressional leaders on February 27. The “Truman Doctrine” speech to Congress
came only three weeks after the receipt of the British notes. The March 12 speech also
commented on the urgency of the situation in Greece. Truman noted that “assistance is
imperative if Greece is to survive as a free nation” and later that “the situation is an
urgent one requiring immediate action” (Jones 1955:269,270-271).

President Truman also appears to have initially perceived acute time pressure
during the second decision period of August-November, 1947.17 The President and his
advisers were taken by surprise once again by their allies when they were told on July 30
that the British intended to “withdraw British troops from Greece” (FRUS 1971:268).
Despite the largely “symbolic” character of the British force in Greece (see Jones
1989:81), their withdrawal prompted the Truman administration to consider the dispatch
of U.S. ground troops. While the State Department attempted to persuade the British to

17Unfortunately, there is a lack of direct evidence for President Truman’s perceptions during the
August-November 1947 and December-June 1948 decision periods. We may, however, cautiously infer the
President’s perceptions from the evidence at hand.
delay the withdrawal (see FRUS 1971:274-275). reports from U.S. personnel in Greece again suggested a need for urgent action.

On August 2, Ambassador MacVeagh cabled that he considered “this astonishingly ill-timed decision as little short of catastrophic and hope implementation may be postponed pending determination of other possible security measures equally valid with presence British troops” (FRUS 1971:276). The ambassador also reported the thoughts of a U.S. military officer in Greece, “if British troops withdrawn and not replaced with at least equal numbers of US, ‘we might as well pack up and go home’” (FRUS 1971:277). By August 22, MacVeagh reported an increase in guerrilla activity and a military adviser’s conclusion that “house is on fire, but few in Athens or Washington seem to realize how fast flames are spreading” (FRUS 1971:307). While in Washington, Secretary Marshall was becoming frustrated by the British government’s refusal to reconsider their decision: “They are far too casual or freehanded in passing the buck of the international dilemma to US with little or no consideration for the harmful results.” (FRUS 1971:313)

By September 12 (when the embassy first suggested the possibility of sending additional U.S. military advisers to Greece, see FRUS 1971:336) the diplomatic pressure on the British resulted in an offer to withdraw only 800 men with the remainder of the troops remaining in Greece until at least December 15 (FRUS 1971:337). On September 15 Governor Griswold cabled Marshall with a description of “increasing deterioration conditions” in Greece and a plan to increase the strength of the Greek army (GNA), provide operational advice to the GNA from “125 to 200” U.S. army officers, and replace
the British troops in Greece with U.S. forces (FRUS 1971:337-340). Since the British
decision to leave the majority of their troops in Greece had already been made, the debate
within the administration now focused on the issue of operational advice rather than the
replacement of British troops. The British decision to postpone the withdrawal of their
remaining troops also reduced the President’s perception of time pressure. The President
did not approve the dispatch of U.S. operational advisers until November 3, fully two
weeks after the receipt of Major Chamberlin’s report and seven weeks after Griswold’s
initial proposal (see FRUS 1971:393 FN1).

The third decision period (December-June 1948) also began with the President
initially perceiving acute time pressure that became more moderate over time. On
December 6 the State Department received a study by the Political Section of the U.S.
embassy in Athens entitled “Suggestions for United States Policy in Greece”. This report
indicated that the “Greek situation has now reached an exceedingly delicate balance
point” and that “high policy decisions should be taken in the United States with the least
possible delay” (FRUS 1971:440). The report also explored an event “which would
completely upset the delicate balance in Greece: to wit, the formation of a so-called ‘Free
Democratic Government’ in rebel-held territory or even in exile” (FRUS 1971:443). On
Christmas eve that event occurred, the KKE announced the creation of the “first
provisional democratic government of free Greece” (quoted in FRUS 1971:462). The
President again appeared to be faced with a “crisis”.

The announcement of a “Free Greek” government forced the consideration of two
further events: recognition of that government by Soviet satellite governments or by the
Soviets themselves, and the possibility of open external aid to the “Free” government. With these concerns in mind, Loy Henderson sent a memorandum to the Acting Secretary of State (Lovett) asking that the NSC complete “urgent studies” reevaluating U.S. policy regarding Greece (FRUS 1971:473). Released to NSC members on January 6, NSC 5 (entitled “The Position of the United States With Respect to Greece”) expressed the Truman administration’s worst fears: “Almost certainly one or more of the satellites, and possibly the USSR, will recognize this ‘free’ government. The objective of such recognition will probably be to facilitate open military assistance” (FRUS 1974:3). The report went on to advocate the use of U.S. troops as a final resort to save Greece, but did not explicitly state the circumstances under which U.S. troops would be deployed (FRUS 1974:5). Unsatisfied with NSC 5, President Truman’s State Department and military advisers pushed for multiple revisions, eventually producing NSC 5/2 which directed the various government agencies involved in the aid program to comment on four specific military alternatives (FRUS 1974:46-51). But by this point President Truman’s perception of time pressure had waned, it had been seven weeks since the declaration of the “Free” Greek government and as yet it had not been recognized by the Soviet Union’s Balkan allies. When NSC 5/4 was finally approved by the President on June 21 the situation on the ground in Greece had turned around and the decision to escalate militarily was tabled (see FRUS 1974:93-95).

As previously noted, President Truman perceived only moderate uncertainty during the three decision periods under examination in this case study. He did, however, perceive acute time pressure during the initial decision period of February 21- March 12
of 1947. During the second decision period in August-November of 1947 and the final decision period of December-June 1948 initial perceptions of acute time pressure gave way to perceptions of moderate time pressure. Throughout the decision periods, Truman faced two major sources of uncertainty: 1.) how would the Soviets respond to U.S. initiatives? and 2.) how much aid and of what type (military or economic) was required to achieve a successful outcome in Greece? The perception of acute time pressure in February/March 1947 was fueled by cables from MacVeagh, Porter, and Ethridge, and the British Aide-Memoire. The perception of initially acute, but later moderate time pressure in August-November was caused by reports from the field and by the British decision to withdraw their remaining forces from Greece. During the final decision period, Truman’s perception of initially acute, but later moderate time pressure was caused by communist successes in Greece (particularly the creation of a “Free” rebel government). President Truman’s decisions regarding Greece are only partially explained by the REF hypotheses. In March of 1947 when he perceived acute time pressure and moderate uncertainty, President Truman decided to intervene economically and militarily in Greece (as suggested by REF hypothesis 6, see discussion below). In November of 1947 when he perceived moderate time pressure and moderate uncertainty, President Truman approved an increase in U.S. military advisers in Greece and an expansion of their role to include operational advice (which appears to be an incremental strategy that runs against the predictions of either REF hypothesis 5 or 7c). Finally, in the Spring of 1948 when he perceived moderate uncertainty and moderate time pressure, events on the
ground in Greece began to turn around and the President was spared from making a final
decision on troop deployments (preventing the evaluation of the REF hypotheses).

Consideration of Alternatives and Final Decision

As noted above, I expect that President Truman (identified as a potential-
motivated president) will tend to focus on best-case outcomes and maximum gains when
considering alternatives (REF hypothesis 3). I also anticipate that President Truman is
likely to behave in a risk-acceptant manner in making final decisions (REF hypothesis
5). In order to evaluate the plausibility of these hypotheses, we must examine the
manner in which alternatives were considered, and the decisions that were reached during
crucial periods in the cases. For the Greek case, three periods are worthy of careful

Loy Henderson received the British Aide-Memoire regarding Greece on Friday.
February 21 (FRUS 1971:32 FN1). Since Secretary Marshall had left Washington for a
speaking arrangement, Under Secretary of State Acheson took the lead role in
orchestrating the initial State Department reaction. He advised Henderson and Jack
Hickerson (the Director of the Office of European Affairs) to get their people together
over the weekend to develop reports on the current situation in Greece, the availability of
U.S. “funds and personnel”, and the “significance of an independent Greece and Turkey
to Western Europe” (Acheson 1969:218). That evening Acheson telephoned the President

18Recall the exception to this hypothesis: if there is only one alternative capable of achieving the
aspiration level, that alternative is likely to be selected regardless of its level of risk (REF hypothesis 6).
and Secretary Marshall, detailing the contents of the British notes and the initiatives Acheson had taken (Jones 1955:132). After toiling through the weekend, Henderson delivered the various policy papers to Acheson's home on Sunday evening (see FRUS 1971:41). While meeting with Henderson, Acheson commented that "under the circumstances there could be only one decision" and so the State Department officials "drank a martini or two toward the confusion of our enemies" (Acheson 1969:218).

On Monday the official versions of the British notes were presented to Secretary Marshall by Lord Inverchapel, the British Ambassador. Marshall showed the notes to President Truman during lunch and suggested that the situation "puts up the most major decision which we have been faced since the war" (FRUS 1971:45). Marshall proposed that "War, Navy, Treasury and State should give this immediate study, make recommendations to you, and that a decision in which the leaders in Congress should participate must be made within the week" (FRUS 1971:45). The President agreed and awaited the various reports that were completed on Tuesday and Wednesday (Truman 1956:100).

On Wednesday at three o'clock President Truman met with Secretary Marshall and Under Secretary Acheson (Truman 1956:100). Acheson presented the "Report of the Committee Appointed to Study Immediate Aid to Greece and Turkey". This report included two key studies entitled "Analysis of the Proposals Contained in British Notes of February 24 Relating to Greece and Turkey (For Discussion Purposes Only)" and "Position and Recommendations of the Department of State Regarding Immediate and Substantial Aid to Greece and Turkey" (FRUS 1971:28-55). The first report summarized
the British notes and evaluated the accuracy and sincerity of the British proposals. It also detailed the consequences if the U.S. should "refuse to assume the type of responsibility for Greece and Turkey which the British are asking us to undertake" (FRUS 1971:51). The two major consequences of U.S. inaction were: 1.) Greece and Turkey might become "Soviet puppets" allowing for "further Soviet territorial and other gains in Europe and in the Near and Middle East" (FRUS 1971:51, see discussion of "domino thinking" above); and 2.) the British Government might decide to throw in the towel, joining a military alliance with the Soviet Union and setting up spheres of influence to preserve the British Empire (FRUS 1971:51). In order to avoid these disastrous consequences, the report concluded that "it would be in the interest of the United States for this Government to relieve the British Government of the major share of the financial burden which it has been bearing on behalf of Greece and Turkey" (FRUS 1971:52).

The second report detailed the State Department’s specific recommendations for aid to Greece and Turkey. Regarding Greece, the recommendations were split between military and economic assistance. On the military side it suggested that, after careful consideration, the U.S. should provide military supplies to Greece, if required to "maintain its independence and restore domestic tranquility" (FRUS 1971:54). In terms of economic aid, the report focused on the need for an "American Administrative Organization to undertake Greek rehabilitation" (FRUS 1971:54). The report included an estimate that "if put into effect promptly and in its entirety", the proposed aid program
offered “a reasonable chance of success” (FRUS 1971:54). The report then detailed the diplomatic, intra-governmental, legislative, and public opinion management strategies that should be followed to secure the success of the aid program (FRUS 1971:55).

The President also had before him memoranda from Secretary Marshall and by the Secretaries of State, War, and the Navy. Marshall’s memorandum argued that “the situation, particularly in Greece, is desperate”; that “the collapse of Greece would create a situation threatening to the security of the United States”; and that “we should take immediate steps to extend all possible aid to Greece” (FRUS 1971:58). The accompanying memorandum by the Secretaries of State, War, and the Navy simply rephrased the specific recommendations found in the second State Department report (FRUS 1971:59; see above).

President Truman discussed the details of this meeting at length in his memoirs. He wrote: “Under Secretary Acheson made the presentation of the study, and I listened to it with great care. The diplomatic and military experts had drawn the picture in greater detail, but essentially their conclusions were the same as those to which I had come in the weeks just passed as the messages and reports went across my desk.” (1956:100) Indeed, Jones writes that Truman “required no convincing” (1955:138).20 The President approved the State-War-Navy proposals and immediately set a meeting with Congressional leaders

19 The report also argued that “half-way measures will not suffice and should not be attempted” (FRUS 1971:54), but this language was not approved by the State-War-Navy Coordinating Committee (see FRUS 1971:57).

20 In his oral history, Clark Clifford notes: “I don’t recall President Truman agonizing through the decision as far as the Truman Doctrine was concerned. I think he had begun to feel that we had to face up to Soviet expansionism.” (1977:153)
for the next day (Acheson 1969:219). The issue now was "not what should be done, but how to get authorizing legislation through Congress" (Jones 1955:138). In reflecting on his decision the President wrote:

"The risks which such a course might entail were risks which a great nation had to take if it cherished freedom at all. The studies which Marshall and Acheson brought to me and which we examined together made it plain that serious risks would be involved. But the alternative would be disastrous to our security and to the security of free nations everywhere." (1956:101)

Once President Truman approved the basic State Department proposals, his energies turned to convincing Congressional leaders and Cabinet officials that the correct decision had been made. At the February 27 meeting with Congressional leaders, Acheson's compelling presentation served to temper the doubts of those assembled, but they still wanted "to know what definite program we had for meeting the situation and what it would cost" ("J.M. Jones' Notes..." 28 February 1947:2). The March 10 meeting with a larger group of Congressional leaders was somewhat less successful as no agreements regarding legislative support were made and Vandenberg "reiterated his insistence that the President put the crisis before Congress in its broadest setting" (Acheson 1969:222). The meeting of the Cabinet on March 7 allowed the President to speak before a much friendlier audience. He stated: "The decision is to ask Congress for 250 million and say this is only the beginning. It means U.S. going into European politics. It means greatest selling job ever facing a President. Wants opinions of Cabinet."
(“Notes on Cabinet Meeting” 7 March 1947:3) The Cabinet officials immediately grasped the significance of the President’s decision and agreed that the time had come to “stop spread of Russian influence” (“Notes on Cabinet Meeting” 7 March 1947:3). With this support from within the administration, the President decided to go ahead with his presentation to Congress and the American people.

The above discussion of President Truman’s decision making during this first decision period regarding Greece provides significant indirect evidence in support of the plausibility of REF hypothesis 3 (potential-motivated presidents tend to focus on best-case outcomes and maximum gains). If we examine the various policy papers presented to the President on February 26, we can find almost no critical evaluation of the intervention alternative. While there was an extensive discussion of the dire consequences associated with refusing to accept the transfer of responsibility for Greece, there was almost no discussion of the potential negative consequences associated with taking over the military and economic needs of Greece. Indeed, the direct evidence we have of Truman’s perceptions suggests that he was not bothered much by his February 26 decision. Once he decided that aid to Greece and Turkey was the only decision that could be reached, the President turned his efforts toward justifying his decision to Congress and his Cabinet.

In considering Truman’s final decision to move forward with the aid program, we must first determine whether REF hypothesis 5 or 6 is more appropriate. Based on the evidence presented above, I feel that hypothesis 6 (if there is only one alternative capable of achieving the aspiration level, that alternative is likely to be selected regardless of its level of risk) more accurately characterizes this decision. President Truman initially only
considered the two alternatives presented to him in the State Department reports— intervention or the refusal of aid. Since the dire consequences associated with refusing to step-in for the British in Greece did not allow for the achievement of the President’s aspiration level, the intervention option became the only alternative under serious consideration. Faced with only one way to prevent the communist domination of Greece (and beyond), the President decided to take over as Greece’s patron both militarily and economically.

The second major decision period—August-November 1947—began much like the first, but concluded quite differently. On August 1, President Truman was notified of the receipt of the British government’s note detailing their intention to “withdraw British troops from Greece” (FRUS 1971:268). This provoked a series of alarmist reports from Ambassador MacVeagh and Governor Griswold as they pressed for further U.S. intervention (see FRUS 1971:276-277,307,336,337-340). Griswold’s September 15 report (labeled AMAG 222) proposed an aggressive new program for eliminating the guerrilla threat—increasing the strength of the GNA, providing operational advice to the GNA from U.S. army officers, and replacing the British troops in Greece with U.S. forces (FRUS 1971:337-340). But during this decision period, two major factors privileged the limited-intervention alternative. First, on September 12 the British government offered to limit their troop withdrawals, breaking the “crisis” atmosphere (FRUS 1971:337). Second, the U.S. military actively opposed the deployment of U.S. ground troops to Greece (Jones 1989:92).
Without the time pressure of the impending British withdrawal, the administration was able to send Major General Chamberlin to Greece. His late-September mission allowed the President and his advisers to receive the input of an ostensibly objective "outside" observer. While Chamberlin did endorse Griswold's proposal to extend operational advice to the GNA, he did not see an immediate need for further U.S. escalation (FRUS 1971:375-377). The reduction in time pressure also gave the President's military advisers the opportunity to produce critical studies of the potential impact of the dispatch of U.S. troops. These studies emphasized the porous nature of the Greek border and the apparent indefensibility of its frontiers (see Jones 1989:92). They carefully weighed the advantages and disadvantages of the troop deployment alternative and determined that "the sending of American troops was not advisable" (Jones 1989:93). On November 3, President Truman agreed to send an "Advisory and Planning Group" composed of less than 180 U.S. officers and enlisted men to provide operational advice to the GNA (FRUS 1971:399). The alternative of deploying U.S. troops was "temporarily shelved" (Jones 1989:94).

Despite the lack of direct evidence bearing on President Truman's perceptions during this decision period, we may rely on the indirect evidence found in the reports of his State Department and military advisers. This indirect evidence does not support REF hypothesis 3 (potential-motivated presidents tend to focus on best-case outcomes and maximum gains). The careful, critical evaluation of the alternatives under consideration provides a balanced presentation of the costs and benefits associated with the various options. Of course the lack of time pressure after September 12 was significant, in that it
allowed President Truman's military advisers to develop their own studies of the troop deployment option. During this decision period, the State Department would not be the only agency producing reports for the President.

I must also report that the REF hypotheses fail to explain President Truman's decision to extend operational advice to the GNA. This decision seems to be an "incremental" escalation which I would expect a security-motivated president to select. A potential-motivated president is expected to either delay the decision or engage in bolstering (REF hypotheses 7a and 7c). I observed neither type of behavior during this decision period.

The final decision period- December-June 1948- also began somewhat like the first two, but concluded rather differently. This time it was not a British decision that triggered administration activity, but rather the announcement of the creation of "the first provisional democratic government of Free Greece" on December 24 (FRUS 1971:462). Once again, State Department advocates of U.S. escalation pointed to the urgency of the situation (see FRUS 1971:473). The speedy completion of NSC 5 ("The Position of the United States With Respect to Greece") seemed to indicate that the administration was prepared to act, but the endless revision of this NSC document simply resulted in the troop deployment decision being delayed indefinitely (see FRUS 1974:3-95).

As in the second decision period, the President and his advisers identified the triggers that would force them to act. In this case, NSC 5 pointed to a communist-satellite or Soviet decision to recognize the "Free Greek" government and the extension of open communist military assistance as actions that would provoke a U.S. response (FRUS
1974:3). But as the NSC contemplated the revisions of NSC 5, the anticipated triggering events did not occur. This allowed the military opponents of intervention to once again voice their opinions (see Jones 1989:155-156). By the time President Truman considered NSC 5/4 on June 21 the situation on the ground in Greece had completely turned around and the troop deployment proposal was tabled indefinitely (see FRUS 1974:93-95).

Once again, despite the lack of direct evidence bearing on President Truman's perceptions during this decision period, we may rely on the indirect evidence found in the reports of his State Department and military advisers. This indirect evidence does not support REF hypothesis 3 (potential-motivated presidents tend to focus on best-case outcomes and maximum gains). As in the second decision period, the careful and balanced evaluation of the troop deployment alternative runs against the expectations of this hypothesis. Indeed, the extended deliberations involved in the drafting of NSC 5 and its revisions (1-4) explicitly attempted to include the evaluations of all of the relevant government agencies (FRUS 1974:46-51).

The decision to table indefinitely the troop deployment alternative may be viewed as somewhat supportive of REF hypothesis 7a. As President Truman's perception of uncertainty and time pressure waned across this decision period, he became less and less inclined to select one of the troop deployment alternatives. Unfortunately, the lack of a final decision during this period, precludes the evaluation of either hypothesis 5 or 6.
President Truman's speech on March 12, 1947 included chilling rhetoric that was meant to mobilize the budget-minded Eightieth Congress. The President noted that the time had come when "nearly every nation must choose between alternative ways of life" (Jones 1955:272). He then carefully stated the Truman Doctrine- "I believe it must be the policy of the United States to support free peoples who are resisting attempted subjugation by armed minorities or outside pressure" (Jones 1955:272). The significance of the President's speech was clearly understood by those involved in its drafting. Joseph Jones giddily writes of this period:

"It was a time when men thought not in terms of what could be done but of what should be done, when only the timid idea was banished and all others welcomed, a time of courage, of bold decision, of generous response. It was a time when American democracy worked with unexampled efficiency and inspiration to produce national agreement. It was a great time to be alive." (Jones 1985:259)

Despite the global rhetoric of the President's speech, Howard Jones argues that the Truman Doctrine "was part of a global strategy capable of handling most foreign policy problems by carefully controlled response" (1989:235, emphasis added). Thus, Greece was eventually used to justify Vietnam because its "lessons" were "grossly distorted" by later administrations (Jones 1989:235). On the other side, Isaacson and Thomas (1986) and Kuniholm (1980) hold President Truman and his advisers responsible for contributing to the climate of confrontation that marked the early Cold War. For much
of the American public and many Congressmen, the Truman Doctrine speech was taken as fact and served as a guide to future policy. Indeed, despite that claims that U.S. intervention in Greece was "carefully controlled", Isaacson and Thomas point out that American actions "eerily foreshadowed Vietnam" (1986:401). And of course, the perception that emerged from Iran (that the Soviets would back down when faced with U.S. resolve, see above) received further confirmation and undoubtedly contributed to Truman's decision to intervene in Korea.

IV. Korea 1950

Overview

The murky origins of the U.S. commitment to Korea may be traced to 1943 and Roosevelt's meetings with Chiang Kaishek and Winston Churchill at the "Cairo conference". During this conference Chiang encouraged Roosevelt to consider the settlement of the war in Asia, particularly the disposition of Manchuria and Formosa. Roosevelt and Chiang agreed that these two islands should be returned to China, and also promised in the "Cairo Declaration" that "in due course Korea shall become free and independent" (quoted in Pelz 1983:98). This policy for the disposition of Korea was privately endorsed by Stalin in Teheran in 1943 and again at Yalta in 1945 (Truman

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21 Isaacson and Thomas ponder the effect of Truman's speech on a young Congressman named Lyndon Baines Johnson (1986:398).

22 These authors note that the use of American operational advisers and advanced weapons (including napalm) to support a shaky right-wing regime against communist rebels is common to both Greece and Vietnam (1986:461).
The allies would oversee a trusteeship for Korea, a peripheral area in the War that was still under Japanese occupation. In fact, Korea was so peripheral in Roosevelt's mind that he developed this policy with little consultation and almost no consideration of its practicality or chances for success (Pelz 1983:99).

After Roosevelt died in April of 1945, President Truman attempted to continue his policy of "trusteeship" for Korea. But, when the Japanese suddenly surrendered on August 9, there was no preexisting agreement between the Americans and the Soviets regarding zones of occupation in Korea. State Department planners suggested to Truman that U.S. troops should at least share in the occupation of Korea (Pelz 1983:104-105). And so, the 38th parallel was selected as a convenient line of demarcation between the American and Soviet occupation zones (Truman 1956:317). As 1945 wore on, the United States and the Soviet Union entered into negotiations over Korea and in January of 1946 a "Joint Commission" of Soviet and American military commanders was established to negotiate the implementation of the "trusteeship" plan (Truman 1956:319-320; Pelz 1983:107-109). As negotiations continued through 1946 and 1947, the "trusteeship" policy was revealed to be a complete failure. The Soviet and American negotiators could not agree on which Korean political parties were worthy of recognition and almost every Korean political party opposed "trusteeship", preferring immediate independence.

In 1947 the Truman administration moved from the "trusteeship" policy for all of Korea to a policy of military and economic support for South Korea (Pelz 1983:110). As U.S. interests in Western Europe and the Mediterranean were threatened and as the U.S. Congress pushed for demobilization and budget cuts, Truman and his advisers decided to
put Korea on the U.N. agenda and begin to plan for the withdrawal of U.S. troops from
the region. A “United Nations Temporary Commission on Korea” convened in January of
1948 and was denied access to the Soviet zone of occupation (Truman 1956:327). In
May, the U.N. Commission supervised elections in the South for representatives to a
National Assembly (Pelz 1983:111). On July 20 Syngman Rhee became the first
president of the “Republic of Korea” (ROK) and on August 15 the American military
occupation of Korea was ended as control was transferred to Rhee’s government (Truman
1956:327-328). This new “Republic” was countered on September 9- when the
“Democratic People’s Republic of Korea” (DPRK) was created in the North.

After the withdrawal of Soviet troops from the DPRK in December of 1948, the
Truman administration began to seriously consider the withdrawal of American troops
from the ROK. In the minds of Truman’s military advisers (who were “preoccupied” with
preparations for a general war), Korea held little strategic value (Stueck 1981:155;
George and Smoke 1974:145-146). It was believed that this small contingent of U.S.
troops might be better employed in Japan in the event of a global war. Truman’s decision
to withdraw U.S. troops by June of 1949 was taken despite State Department intelligence
estimates that suggested that “US troop withdrawal would probably result in a collapse of
the US-supported Republic of Korea, an event which would seriously diminish US
prestige and adversely affect US security interests in the Far East” (“Consequences of US
Troop Withdrawal” 28 February 1949:1). By 1950 only 500 U.S. troops were in the ROK
as part of a “Korean Military Advisory Group” (KMAG, George and Smoke 1974:145).
In his famous National Press Club speech on January 12, 1950 Secretary of State
Acheson excluded the ROK from the U.S. “defense perimeter” in Asia (Paige 1968:67). And on May 5, 1950 Senator Tom Connaly indicated that Korea might be abandoned to the communists (Paige 1968:68). Thus, by June of 1950 it appeared that the Truman administration was moving from a policy of reduced support for the ROK to tacit withdrawal.

At approximately 4:00 a.m. (local time) on Sunday June 25 the first battles in what would become the “Korean War” began on the Ongjin peninsula. As North Korean troops pressed the attack along the 38th parallel, officials in Washington were taken completely by surprise. President Truman was on his way to Independence to spend a weekend with his wife and daughter. Secretary of Defense Johnson and Chairman of the JCS Bradley were just returning from a trip to the “Far East”, and Secretary of State Acheson was at his farm in Sandy Spring, Maryland (see Cumings 1990, Paige 1968).

The first news of the fighting to reach a government official in Washington came from the United Press when a “Mr. David Gonzales” requested “confirmation of a dispatch that had just been filed by Seoul correspondent Jack James” (Paige 1968:88). The official contacted, W. Bradley Connors (PAO of the State Department’s Bureau of Far Eastern Affairs), in turn called Dean Rusk (then serving as Assistant Secretary of State for Far Eastern Affairs). Rusk asked Connors to contact the American Ambassador in Seoul, John J. Muccio, and then departed for the State Department (accompanied by

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23 I shall leave to others the difficult question of deciding who was “responsible” for the outbreak of hostilities. Bruce Cumings (1990:568-621) has discussed three “mosaics” pieced together from the existing evidence. Clearly, however, the Truman administration believed that the North Koreans had embarked on an unprovoked “act of aggression” (see FRUS 1976: 144).
Secretary of the Army Pace who was, coincidentally, attending the same dinner party.
FRUS 1976:126-127). By the time Rusk and Pace reached the State Department a
telegram had been received from Ambassador Muccio relating that the North Korean
attack appeared to constitute an “all out offensive against [the] ROK” (FRUS 1976: 126).
As numerous State Department officials joined Rusk and Pace, Secretary Acheson was
notified and Ambassador Muccio’s telegram was forwarded to President Truman, the
Army Department, and American embassies around the world. At 11:20 p.m., Secretary
Acheson reached President Truman by phone and received approval to request a meeting
of the U.N. Security Council for Sunday June 25 (Washington was thirteen hours behind
Korean time). State Department officials worked throughout the night preparing the
formal request for the Security Council meeting; “a resolution to be introduced by the
United States Acting Representative, Ernest Gross; and... a statement to be made by Mr.
Gross” (FRUS 1976:127).

During the six-day period from Sunday, June 25 through Friday, June 30
President Truman would approve: an initial limited military intervention to protect the
evacuation of American dependants (see “Teleconference” 25 June 1950), a further
intervention allowing the use of American naval and air forces below the Thirty-eighth
Parallel (see “Teleconference with MacArthur” 26 June 1950), a subsequent escalation
allowing Air Force operations north of the Thirty-eighth Parallel (see JCS to CINCFE
MacArthur 29 June 1950), and finally full-scale involvement of American ground troops
to prevent the fall of South Korea (see JCS to CINCFE MacArthur 30 June 1950). During
this busy week, Truman consulted with his primary advisers in five major meetings. He

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also met twice with Congressional leaders to encourage their support for his policies and held one press conference on June 29 to defend his decisions publicly (see Paige 1968). After making the final decision to commit American ground troops to the battle, President Truman left Washington for a “weekend cruise in Chesapeake Bay with his daughter Margaret”, ending his “most strenuous week in office thus far” (Paige 1968:269).

Aspiration Level

As noted above, the president’s “aspiration level” is expected to comprise a set of minimum level goals that the president hopes to achieve or surpass. In order to evaluate hypothesis 1 (presidents tend to evaluate outcomes relative to an aspiration level rather than an overall value level), we must infer the elements of President Truman’s aspiration level (regarding Korea) from the documentary record. We need to find descriptions of acceptable/desirable outcomes/objectives in this case. Thus, we need to find relevant documents that address Truman’s goals, desires, hopes, needs, and/or requirements in this case.

Based on the evidence presented below, I believe that President Truman’s immediate goal in Korea was to thwart the North Korean invasion and return to the status quo ante at the 38th parallel. The means available for achieving this goal were constrained by the fear of potential Soviet reactions to U.S. initiatives and a concern regarding the overcommitment of U.S. military capabilities. The President’s commitment to achieving or surpassing his immediate goal was reinforced by his desire to demonstrate
resolve and the credibility of U.S. commitments both to the Soviets and to American allies; by his fear that communist success in South Korea would lead to the fall of Indochina, Formosa, and possibly Japan; by his fear of negative reactions from Republicans in Congress who were already criticizing the administration for "losing" China; and by his desire to show that the United Nations could be an effective instrument for combating territorial aggression. This complex combination of goals and constraints formed the aspiration level that guided Truman's decision making in this case.

In elaborating on the conclusions presented above, it may be useful to first consider how the apparent abandonment of South Korea in 1949 and early 1950 can be reconciled with Truman's decisions during the final week of June. President Truman's decision to commit American ground troops to the defense of South Korea should not simply be viewed as a complete reversal of the foreign policy of his administration, but rather as a significant alteration in the context in which Korea policy was made. Despite Acheson's speech excluding South Korea from the U.S. "defense perimeter" (Paige 1968:67), President Truman and his advisers had not "written-off" their South Korean allies. As George and Smoke have noted, "the 'strategic' significance of South Korea was assessed exclusively with reference to the contingency of another general war" (1974:146, emphasis in original). In much of the military planning prior to June of 1950, the general assumption was that the invasion of South Korea would come as the result of a Soviet decision to initiate World War III. In this context, South Korea would have little strategic value and would not be a core theater of concern for U.S. military planners. Indeed, during the Blair House meetings between President Truman and his advisers (on
Sunday June 25 and Monday June 26), the President considered the possibility that the North Korean attack was a “strategic feint” meant to draw U.S. forces away from other areas (see “Memorandum of Conversation” 25 June 1950, “Memorandum of Conversation” 26 June 1950). Also, in a conversation with George Elsey (26 June 1950), the President pointed to Iran on a globe and indicated that, “Here is where they [the Soviets] will start trouble if we aren’t careful”. The full American commitment to the defense of South Korea (represented by Truman’s decisions on June 30) was not approved until the administration was relatively confident that the North Korean invasion was not the first move of World War III. As George and Smoke (1974; see also Stueck 1981:155) note, dealing with Korea as a localized conflict forced the administration to consider the “value” of Korea in a different context. This new context required new thinking regarding American goals in the region. Thus Korea, viewed as a “limited” conflict perceived to be a “test” of U.S. resolve, was a much better candidate for U.S. military intervention.

In a teleconference between Army Chief of Staff General J. Lawton Collins and MacArthur’s Chief of Intelligence Major General C. A. Willoughby on the morning of June 25, Major General Willoughby concluded that North Korean troops were “engaged in an all-out offensive to subjugate South Korea” (FRUS 1976:136). From Sunday June 25 to Friday June 30 President Truman would consider the depth of the United States’ commitment to its South Korean allies. During the Blair house conferences on Sunday and Monday, President Truman and his advisers settled on his administration’s immediate goal- stopping the North Korean invasion and returning to the status quo ante
at the 38th parallel. This goal was publicly stated in the United Nations Security Council
Resolution drafted in the State Department during the early morning hours of June 25 and
approved by the Security Council that evening (with the Soviet ambassador absent). The
resolution called for “the immediate cessation of hostilities” and called upon “the
authorities of North Korea to withdraw forthwith their armed forces to the thirty-eighth
parallel” (FRUS 1976:155).

At the initial Blair House meeting on Sunday June 25, General Omar Bradley
(Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff) suggested that “we must draw the line
somewhere” and President Truman “stated he agreed on that” (“Memorandum of
Conversation” 25 June 1950:2). But at this first meeting, uncertainty regarding Soviet
intentions inclined the President to favor a measured response to the situation. While he
was at least minimally committed to the goal stated in the United Nations resolution.
Truman had not yet decided on the means that would be employed to achieve this goal.
At this meeting he approved the provision of ammunition and equipment to ROK forces
and U.S. air and naval cover for the safe evacuation of U.S. dependents (“Memorandum
of Conversation” 25 June 1950:4-5; “Teleconference” 25 June 1950). The minutes of the
second Blair House meeting (on June 26 1950) also show Truman’s commitment to his
immediate goal. Despite the fact that he authorized U.S. air and naval forces to come to
the aid of ROK troops, the President was careful to make sure “that no action should be
taken north of the 38th parallel” (“Memoranda of Conversation” 26 June 1950:2). At this
stage in the conflict, Truman and his advisers were clearly focusing on saving South
Korea, while avoiding provocative actions against the DPRK.
At a meeting with Congressional leaders on Tuesday, June 27 Truman was asked if "the United States was now committed to defend South Korea from invasion" and the President responded in the affirmative ("Notes on Meeting in Cabinet Room" 27 June 1950:3). Finally, the President issued a press statement on June 27 to reiterate his administration's immediate goal. In this statement he cited the June 25 U.N. Security Council resolution and indicated his administration's intention to "render every assistance to the United Nations in the execution of this resolution" (FRUS 1976:202). The key debates that would continue during the National Security Council Meetings on June 28 and 29 would focus on how far the administration was willing to go to prevent the fall of the ROK.

There were two major constraints on the means available for achieving Truman's immediate goal: the fear of potential Soviet reactions to U.S. initiatives and a concern regarding the overcommitment of U.S. military capabilities. The North Korean invasion was immediately interpreted as a Soviet initiative (see Kirk to Acheson 25 June 1950). The key question for President Truman and his advisers was whether this was a strategic "feint" (as discussed above) or a limited probe of U.S. resolve. If the North Korean invasion was the prologue to World War III, American intervention could prove disastrous. Conversely, if the North Korean invasion was a Soviet test of U.S. resolve, American intervention would not bring massive Soviet or Chinese retaliation. So long as Soviet motivations were unknown, President Truman was reluctant to make decisions that were not immediately necessary (see "Memorandum of Conversation" 25 June 1950:4). At each of the key meetings during the week of June 25-30, the escalation of
U.S. intervention was carefully measured to avoid triggering an aggressive Soviet response.

At the first Blair House meeting, the prevailing view of Truman’s advisers was that the Soviets were not yet ready for war. The Air Force Chief of Staff, General Hoyt Vandenberg, was the lone dissenter. He cautioned that “he would not base our action on the assumption that the Russians would not fight” (“Memorandum of Conversation” 25 June 1950:3). This comment led to an exchange with President Truman regarding Russian air strength in the Far East. Vandenberg was supported by Secretary of the Air Force Finletter, who argued that U.S. forces “in the Far East were sufficient if the Russians do not come in” (“Memorandum of Conversation” 25 June 1950:4, emphasis added). Based on Vandenberg’s concerns, Truman directed the Air Force to “prepare plans to wipe out all Soviet air bases in the Far East” (“Memorandum of Conversation” 25 June 1950:5).

At the second Blair House meeting, President Truman and his advisers remained unsure of Soviet motivations. While the situation on the ground in Korea was deteriorating, the President was still concerned with limiting U.S. involvement. Although he approved U.S. air and naval attacks on North Korean troops, he was careful to emphasize that “no action should be taken north of the 38th parallel” (“Memorandum of Conversation” 26 June 1950:2). During this meeting, Truman also attempted to neutralize the issue of Formosa by approving the deployment of the U.S. seventh fleet between the island and communist China, and by instructing Chiang Kaishek to end attacks against the mainland (“Memorandum of Conversation” 26 June 1950:2; FRUS 1976:198). The
President did not want the Generalissimo to use this opportunity to drag the U.S. into a confrontation with China.

As estimates of Soviet intentions filtered into the White House on Tuesday and Wednesday and after the fall of Seoul to North Korean troops, President Truman began to consider further U.S. military intervention. On June 27, Ambassador Kirk (in Moscow) cabled the State Department that “we believe US, on basis calculated risk, may with some degree assurance estimate that Soviets will not engage in war with US if we take firm stand and effective action to assist ROK immediately to halt and throw back North Korean aggression” (FRUS 1976:199). On June 28, the Central Intelligence Agency estimated that the Soviets were not yet ready for war and “that the USSR will seek to localize the Korean conflict” (CIA 28 June 1950:1). At the National Security Council Meeting that afternoon, General Vandenberg pushed the President to allow air and naval operations north of the 38th parallel, but the President hesitated. Instead Truman directed the NSC to “resurvey all policies affecting the entire perimeter of the USSR”, to prepare plans for “the courses of action to be followed in the event that Soviet forces enter Korean hostilities”, and to give “special attention... to obtaining intelligence concerning clear evidence of Soviet participation in Korean hostilities” (“Memorandum for the President” 29 June 1950:3-4).

At the second NSC meeting on June 29, Defense Secretary Johnson read a proposed directive for General MacArthur. This directive would allow U.S. air and naval operations north of the 38th parallel and the deployment of U.S. Army service units to “insure the retention of a port and air base in the general area [of] Pusan-Chinhae” (FRUS
The directive also informed MacArthur that if Soviet forces entered the Korean hostilities U.S. troops were to "defend themselves", "take no action on the spot to aggravate the situation", and "should report the situation to Washington" (FRUS 1976:217). Once again President Truman expressed his concern regarding the potential escalation of the conflict. He stated: "I do not want any implication in the letter that we are going to war with Russia at this time. We must be damn careful. We must not say that we are anticipating a war with the Soviet Union. We want to take any steps we have to push the North Koreans behind the line but I don't want to get us over-committed to a whole lot of other things that could mean war" ("Draft" N.D.:1-2; "Memorandum for the President" 30 June 1950:1). Clearly the evidence presented above suggests that President Truman was concerned with potential Soviet reactions to American initiatives.

The other major constraint on the means available for achieving Truman's immediate goal was a concern regarding the overcommitment of U.S. military capabilities. As early as the second Blair House meeting on Monday June 26, President Truman and his advisers had begun to address the issue of troop mobilization. General Bradley argued that "if we commit our ground forces in Korea we cannot at the same time carry out our other commitments without mobilization" ("Memorandum of Conversation" 26 June 1950:7), but suggested that the President did not need to make that decision immediately. At the first NSC meeting on Wednesday, the President announced that "he didn't intend to back out unless there should develop a military situation which we had to meet elsewhere" ("Memorandum of Conversation" 28 June 1950:2), and authorized "a review of our military capabilities in order to indicate the extent of our
freedom of choice” ("Memorandum for the President" 29 June 1950:4). Finally, at the second NSC meeting on Thursday, Truman expressed his desire to avoid becoming "so deeply committed in Korea that we could not take care of other situations which might develop" ("Memorandum for the President" 30 June 1950:1).

This fear of overcommitment was due to the rapid demobilization of the U.S. military that Truman had overseen from 1946-1949. As David McLellan notes, “any relationship between America’s foreign policy goals and its military strategy was purely coincidental” during this period (quoted in Pelz 1983:113). Indeed, as U.S. foreign policy commitments grew from 1945-1947, U.S. military forces shrunk from 12 million to 1.6 million men and the defense budget went from 81.6 billion to 13.1 billion dollars (Foot 1985:41). On the eve of the war, the “Army had only ten trained divisions, each of which was under strength by a third” and MacArthur’s Far East Command was “well below half of its authorized strength” (Pelz 1983:118). Despite the fact that Truman could blame some of this budget cutting on Republicans in Congress and on public opposition to tax increases, he could not ignore the fact that the United States was ill-prepared for global war and certainly lacked the in-theater capabilities to manage a full-scale intervention in Korea. If U.S. troops became bogged down in Korea, increased defense budgets and troop mobilizations would be required to substantiate America’s global commitments.

In considering the factors reinforcing Truman’s commitment to achieving or surpassing his immediate goal, we must first examine the President’s desire to demonstrate resolve and the credibility of U.S. commitments both to the Soviets and to American allies. As noted above, the North Korean invasion was immediately perceived
to be a Soviet initiative. Early reports also suggested that it was a probe of American resolve. The initial cables from the U.S. embassy in Moscow estimated that the North Korean attack was a “clear-cut challenge which in our considered opinion US should answer firmly and swiftly as it constitutes direct threat our leadership of free world against Soviet Communist imperialism” (Kirk to Acheson 25 June 1950:1). The embassy still believed that the Soviets were not prepared to launch a full-scale war and suggested that “determined countermeasures will deter the Soviets” (FRUS 1976:169). Further correspondence between the State Department and Ambassador Kirk indicate the desire to avoid engaging Soviet prestige, thus allowing Moscow to stay out of the conflict without losing face (see FRUS 1976: 169-70, 176-177, 199, 204, 212, 229-230, 253-254). This perception of the North Korean attack as a Soviet probe was also suggested by an intelligence estimate dated June 25. This report argued that Korea “offers a test on ground militarily most favorable to the Soviet Union of the resolution of the US in its announced policy of ‘total diplomacy’” and that the loss of South Korea would deal a “severe blow” to U.S. prestige and encourage other Southeast Asian peoples to “get on the bandwagon” (FRUS 1976:150). Finally, the CIA on June 28 estimated that by “choosing Korea as the area of attack, the USSR was able to challenge the US specifically and test the firmness of US resistance to Communist expansion” (CIA 28 June 1950:1). There is clear evidence that these beliefs were eventually accepted by President Truman and his advisers.

On Monday June 26, President Truman told George Elsey that, “Korea is the Greece of the Far East. If we are tough enough now, if we stand up to them like we did in Greece three years ago, they won’t take any next steps. But if we just stand by, they’ll
move into Iran and they’ll take over the whole Middle East. There’s no telling what they’ll do, if we don’t put up a fight now” (“President Truman’s Conversations” 26 June 1950). This “domino” thinking was also evident in Truman’s comments to the Congressional leaders on Tuesday: “If we let Korea go down, the Soviet will keep right on going and swallow up one piece of Asia after another. We had to take a stand some time or else let all Asia go by the board” (“Persons Present” 27 June 1950:4). While some uncertainty remained regarding whether the Chinese might intervene in Korea (see “Persons Present” 30 June 1950:6), by Friday the President had accepted the view that the North Korean attack was a test of American resolve and that Soviet troops would probably not become involved in the conflict.

President Truman’s decision to intervene in Korea was also intended to demonstrate resolve to American allies. The June 25 State Department intelligence estimate (discussed above) noted that the “capacity of a small Soviet satellite to engage in a military adventure challenging, as many Europeans will see it, the might and will of the US, can only lead to serious questioning of that might and will” (FRUS 1976:154). In his memoirs, Truman wrote “in Europe, the Middle East, and elsewhere the confidence of peoples in countries adjacent to [the] Soviet Union would be very adversely affected, in our judgment, if we failed to take action” (1956:339). As cables flowed into the State Department from U.S. embassies in Europe it became clear that allied governments were “watching to see what the United States will do” (FRUS 1976:174-175). It also became

24 The analogy with Greece reinforced Truman’s commitment to his immediate goal in two ways: 1.) it contributed to the interpretation of the North Korean invasion as a Soviet test of U.S. resolve. and 2.) it suggested that strong U.S. action would force the communists to back down.
clear that several European governments were encouraging the U.S. to act (see FRUS 1976:174-175, 185, 193-195). After the President’s statement on Tuesday June 27, allied response was immediate and supportive. At the first NSC meeting on Wednesday, Truman was relieved to hear Averell Harriman report that “prior to the President’s announcement, the Europeans were gravely concerned that the United States would not meet the challenge in Korea. After the announcement, however. ...they felt great relief since they believed disaster would be certain otherwise” (“Memorandum for the President” 29 June 1950:2).

The second major factor reinforcing Truman’s commitment to achieve or surpass his immediate goal was his fear that communist success in South Korea would lead to the fall of Indochina, Formosa, and possibly Japan. Beyond the ideological elements of the "domino theory" discussed above, President Truman and his advisers (particularly the JCS) were also concerned that Korea might be used as a military base to subvert U.S. and allied positions in other parts of Asia. At the first Blair House meeting, Chief of Naval Operations (CNO) Admiral Forrest P. Sherman argued that “Korea is a strategic threat to Japan”, in favoring U.S. intervention (“Memorandum of Conversation” 25 June 1950:3). Beyond Japan, if the North Korean attack indicated a new communist campaign in Asia, the obvious next targets might be Formosa or Indochina. At the second Blair House meeting on Monday, Formosa and Indochina were major topics of discussion and President Truman approved the deployment of the Seventh fleet between China and Formosa and increased U.S. aid and involvement in Indochina (“Memorandum of Conversation” 26 June 1950:3). He also approved “an increase in the United States
military forces in the Philippines and an acceleration of aid to the Philippines”
(“Memorandum of Conversation” 26 June 1950:2-3).

The third major factor reinforcing Truman’s commitment to achieve or surpass his immediate goal was his fear of negative reactions from Republicans in Congress who were already criticizing the administration for “losing” China. Truman was careful to avoid discussing domestic political considerations during the Blair House and National Security Council meetings, but as a wily politician he could not have been unaware of the domestic political ramifications that would follow from the loss of Korea to the communists. Recall that 1950 was the year of the Klaus Fuchs confession, the arrest of Julius Rosenberg, the perjury verdict for Alger Hiss, and the rise of Senator Joseph R. McCarthy (see Foot 1985; Pelz 1983). Prior to the President’s statement on June 27, debate in the House and Senate was quite rancorous over Korea. One Senator noted that, “It is fairly clear that what happened in China and what is now happening in Korea were brought about deliberately by the advisers of the President at Yalta and by the advisers of the State Department since then” (quoted in Pelz 1983:129). Even after the President’s statement had received bi-partisan support, Robert Taft (a leading Republican presidential hopeful) blamed the Korea “crisis” on the “bungling and inconsistent foreign policy of the administration” (quoted in Pelz 1983:129). Unfortunately for Truman, his refusal to ask Congress to approve his Korean intervention would later haunt him when the tide turned after the Chinese invasion in the fall.

The final major factor reinforcing Truman’s commitment to achieve or surpass his immediate goal was his desire to show that the United Nations could be an effective
instrument for combating territorial aggression. The initial decision to bring the North Korean invasion to the attention of the United Nations may have been influenced by the composition of the State Department group that dealt with the problem on the night of June 24 (see Paige 1968:284); but regardless of its origins, this decision was clearly seized upon by the President in justifying U.S. intervention. At the first Blair House meeting, General Bradley cynically noted that the U.S. should "act under the guise of aid to the United Nations" ("Memorandum of Conversation" 25 June 1950:2). But President Truman was somewhat more idealistic, stressing that "we are working entirely for the United Nations" ("Memorandum of Conversation" 25 June 1950:5) and later that "we must do everything we can for the Korean situation - for the United Nations" ("Memorandum of Conversation" 26 June 1950:7). Indeed, at the Tuesday meeting with Congressional leaders, Truman chided Acheson for briefing the Congressmen without discussing the role of the United Nations Security Council ("Persons Present" 27 June 1950:3-4). Truman agreed with Senator Connally that "if the United Nations cannot bring the crisis in Korea to an end, then we might just as well wash up the United Nations and forget it"; and assured the Congressmen that "he was going to make absolutely certain that everything we did in Korea would be in support of, and in conformity with, the decision by the Security Council of the United Nations" ("Persons Present" 27 June 1950:7). Later in the week, the President would make his famous off the cuff remark, agreeing with a reporter that the American intervention was a "police action under the United Nations" (Truman 29 June 1950:2). Whether the U.S. was acting for the U.N. or simply manipulating the institution as a tool of American foreign policy, the prestige of
the U.N. was now tied to the success of the U.S. effort to thwart the North Korean invasion.

To summarize, President Truman’s immediate goal in Korea was to thwart the North Korean invasion and return to the status quo ante at the 38th parallel. The means available for achieving this goal were constrained by the fear of potential Soviet reactions to U.S. initiatives and a concern regarding the overcommitment of U.S. military capabilities. The President’s commitment to achieving or surpassing his immediate goal was reinforced by his desire to demonstrate resolve and the credibility of U.S. commitments both to the Soviets and to American allies; by his fear that communist success in South Korea would lead to the fall of Indochina, Formosa, and possibly Japan; by his fear of negative reactions from Republicans in Congress who were already criticizing the administration for “losing” China; and by his desire to show that the United Nations could be an effective instrument for combating territorial aggression. President Truman’s aspiration level was well articulated and the documentary evidence supports REF hypothesis 1.

Uncertainty and Time Pressure

As noted above, I expect that presidential perceptions of high uncertainty and a lack of valid information will interact with presidential risk predispositions and affect the output of the decision process (REF hypothesis 7). In the Truman cases, if the President perceives high uncertainty and inaccurate information but does not perceive acute time pressure I expect to observe decisional delay and an expanded search for information.
(REF hypothesis 7a). If the President perceives high uncertainty and inaccurate information and also perceives acute time pressure I expect to observe bolstering (REF hypothesis 7c).

As the evidence presented below suggests, President Truman perceived high uncertainty early in the week of June 25-30 and moderate uncertainty at the end of the week. Conversely, the President perceived moderate time pressure early in the week and acute time pressure by Friday morning. During this week, Truman faced two major sources of uncertainty: 1.) what were Soviet intentions? and 2.) how much American assistance was needed by the South Koreans? The perception of time pressure was determined by events on the ground in Korea. Once Seoul fell and MacArthur concluded that the situation was desperate President Truman and his advisers had reached the acute stage of the "crisis". As suggested by REF hypothesis 7a, when President Truman perceived high uncertainty but moderate time pressure he delayed making a final decision regarding U.S. intervention in order to gather more accurate information (while also approving some increases in U.S. military assistance). But by the end of the week, when Truman perceived acute time pressure combined with a reduction in uncertainty, he decided on full-scale U.S. intervention (as suggested by REF hypothesis 6, see discussion below).

As noted above, the North Korean invasion appears to have caught the Truman administration completely off-guard. The surprise and swiftness of the North Korean assault created a "crisis" atmosphere in Washington that was punctuated by high initial uncertainty. The obvious first question for the President and his advisers was how to
interpret these events. Was this an act of aggression by the DPRK against the ROK? Or was this the first salvo of World War III? An inaccurate interpretation of events could result in the loss of South Korea or an American defeat in a Soviet trap. Thus, estimating Soviet intentions became the crucial task for State, Defense, and CIA analysts.

The initial reports that reached the White House suggested that earlier intelligence estimates were accurate— the Soviets were not ready to risk full-scale war with the West (see Kirk to Acheson 25 June 1950). With this assumption in mind, the July 25 State Department estimate suggested that the North Korean invasion was a Soviet probe of U.S. resolve (FRUS 1976:150). At the first Blair House meeting, President Truman expressed uncertainty regarding the accuracy of these estimates. He appeared to be particularly concerned with General Vandenberg’s caution that Soviet intentions should not be assumed (“Memorandum of Conversation” 25 June 1950:3). The decisions reached at this meeting reflect the high level of perceived uncertainty. Truman ordered General MacArthur to send “a survey group to Korea”, instructed the Air Force to “prepare plans to wipe out all Soviet air bases in the Far East”, and directed the State and Defense departments to make a “careful calculation... of the next probable place in which Soviet action might take place” (“Memorandum of Conversation” 25 June 1950:4-5). At the close of this meeting, Truman “again emphasized the importance of making the survey of next possible moves by the Soviet Union” (“Memorandum of Conversation” 25 June 1950:5). The President had made only the “necessary decisions” in the face of high uncertainty.
On Monday the President was coming to accept the notion that the North Korean attack was a Soviet challenge, but remained worried about potential communist moves against Formosa and Iran (see “President Truman’s Conversations” 26 June 1950). In the early morning hours, Acheson had sent a circular telegram to U.S. embassies and consulates asking them to “maintain utmost vigilance” for evidence of further Soviet moves (FRUS 1976:166). At the Blair House meeting that night, part of the conversation focused on the State and Defense department estimates of where the next Soviet move might come: State favored Formosa while MacArthur had suggested Iran (“Memorandum of Conversation” 26 June 1950:5).

At the meeting with Congressional leaders on Tuesday, President Truman noted that he “still hoped there would be no Soviet involvement in the attack but their possible next moves were being studied” (‘Notes on meeting in Cabinet Room” 27 June 1950:1). That afternoon, another cable from Ambassador Kirk asserted that “we estimate Soviets not yet ready to embark on World War III” and that the U.S. “may with some degree assurance estimate that Soviets will not engage in war with US if we take firm stand and effective action to assist ROK immediately to halt and throw back North Korean aggression” (FRUS 1976:199). On Wednesday, the CIA estimate of Soviet intentions supported this view- arguing that “the USSR will seek to localize the Korean conflict” (CIA 28 June 1950:1). But at the NSC meeting that night Truman again expressed uncertainty, directing the NSC to “resurvey all policies affecting the entire perimeter of the USSR”, prepare “recommendations as to the courses of action to be followed in the event that Soviet forces enter Korean hostilities”, and pay special attention to intelligence.
“concerning Soviet activities in the vicinity of Yugoslavia and Northern Iran”
(“Memorandum for the President” 29 June 1950:3-4). The President was not yet convinced.

One of the main reasons for Truman’s concern was the fact that the Soviets had not responded to U.S. diplomatic approaches. As the NSC meeting opened on Thursday, Truman was very reluctant to approve instructions to MacArthur that allowed the possibility of combat between U.S. and Soviet troops (“Draft” N.D.:1-4). In the middle of this discussion, Acheson reminded Truman about the telegram received that afternoon from Ambassador Kirk. Kirk had finally met with Gromyko and the Soviet response was “interpreted as a clear statement that the Russians were not going to put their armed forces in as their own forces” (“Draft” N.D.:4, emphasis in original). Acheson was now “convinced” that the “Russians do not intend to enter directly into the Korean dispute” (“Draft” N.D.:5). This piece of evidence impressed Truman to the extent that he authorized U.S. air and naval action north of the 38th parallel (“Memorandum for the President” 30 June 1950:2-3). The President was now convinced that the initial intelligence estimates were accurate (although some uncertainty remained as to Chinese intentions, but this possibility was remarkably viewed as less of a concern, see “Draft” N.D.:5). The high level of uncertainty regarding Soviet intentions that Truman perceived at the beginning of the week had been replaced by a strongly held belief that the Soviets would not intervene in response to U.S. military actions.

The second major source of uncertainty for President Truman was the extent of intervention that would be required to save the ROK. Given his fear of Soviet escalation
and concern regarding overcommitment, Truman did not want to use more resources than necessary to achieve his immediate goal. But in the early stages of the conflict, there was a high level of uncertainty as to what level of commitment would be needed. The initial hope was that the South Koreans could repulse the attack with only material assistance from the U.S. military. Unfortunately, the lackluster American aid program for the ROK had left it ill-prepared for the North Korean assault (Pelz 1983:118). The State Department’s own intelligence estimates detailed the extent of the DPRK’s superiority (see “Current Capabilities” 19 June 1950:1; Consequences of US Troop Withdrawal” 28 February 1949:1). Indeed, Truman had not sent planes and tanks to the ROK because his administration feared that Rhee would use offensive weapons for an invasion of the North (see Cumings 1990: 598-599).

At the Blair House meeting on Sunday, the JCS favored the use of U.S. air and naval assets in the region. Secretary of the Army Pace later suggested that “the original decision to go in was made on the basis of the belief that this could be handled by air and naval forces” (Pace 1972:71). While Secretary of the Air Force Finletter disputed Pace’s assertion (see Finletter 1972:33-34), the minutes of the meeting certainly reveal guarded optimism in that direction on the part of General Vandenberg and Admiral Sherman. In fact, General Bradley, Secretary Pace, and Defense Secretary Johnson all indicated their opposition to putting ground troops in Korea, preferring to rely on air and naval operations (“Memorandum of Conversation” 25 June 1950:2,4).

At the Blair House meeting on Monday, President Truman discovered that U.S. pilots had taken their orders too literally and were “avoiding combat where the direct
carrying-out of their mission was not involved” (“Memorandum of Conversation” 26 June 1950:1). Thus, the President ordered US air and naval forces to give the ROK troops support south of the 38th parallel (“Memorandum of Conversation” 26 June 1950:2).

Later in the evening, Army Chief of Staff General J. Lawton Collins commented on the seriousness of the military situation and noted that it “was impossible to say how much our air can do” (“Memorandum of Conversation” 26 June 1950:6). This comment led to the first real consideration of supplying U.S. ground troops, but the discussion was limited to the affect of this action on other U.S. commitments (“Memorandum of Conversation” 26 June 1950:7).

On Wednesday the CIA reported that Seoul had fallen but that the morale of ROK troops had been buoyed by the news of U.S. support (CIA “Korean Situation” 28 June 1950:1). This report encouraged renewed hope that further intervention would not be needed. Despite this glimmer of hope, General Vandenberg told the NSC that evening that “we could not get the full value of our air support unless we could attack especially the north Korean bases and fuel supplies” (“Memorandum of Conversation” 28 June 1950:3). Truman put off the decision to authorize operations north of the parallel until Thursday.

On Thursday morning the CIA report was much more bleak. The U.S. military aid that had reached ROK forces did not stabilize the situation and U.S. air and naval operations had not produced significant results (CIA “Korean Situation” 29 June 1950:1). At the NSC meeting Thursday night, Truman authorized air and naval operations north of the 38th parallel and the deployment of limited ground forces (“Memorandum for the
President” 30 June 1950:2-3). Before this latest escalation could have an effect, the Pentagon received MacArthur’s report on his reconnaissance mission to Korea. In his report, MacArthur confidently stated that the “only assurance for the holding of the present line, and the ability to regain later the lost ground, is through the introduction of US ground combat forces into the Korean battle area” (FRUS 1976:249). The President accepted MacArthur’s estimate and approved the dispatch of U.S. troops on Friday morning (Truman 1956:343-344).

The above discussion also sheds light on the build-up of time pressure from June 25-30. From Saturday to Friday the progress of events in Korea dictated the pace of decision making in the White House. As the North Korean troops advanced deeper into the ROK, President Truman was forced to make new decisions before the effects of his previous decisions could be determined. Early in the week, the President and his advisers frequently commented on time as a factor in decision making. When the President was notified of the invasion on Saturday night, Acheson encouraged him to remain in Independence while the State and Defense Departments gathered information and developed alternatives (Acheson 1969:404). On Sunday, Acheson cabled Ambassador Muccio that his “greatest concern” was “whether Korean army can pull things together for brief period required for US decision and action or help” (FRUS 1976:162). Muccio replied that after their initially heavy losses the ROK army had regrouped and the situation seemed to have “stabilized” (FRUS 1976:166). Thus, at the first Blair House meeting, Secretary Finletter cautioned the President “that only the necessary decisions be
made that night” and Truman noted that he “would wait for further action until the UN order is flouted” (“Memorandum of Conversation” 25 June 1950:4,5).

On Monday night, the CIA produced a gloomy memorandum detailing the situation in Korea. The collapse of Seoul was “imminent” and it was “problematical whether cohesive southern Korean resistance will continue beyond next 24 hours” (CIA “Korean Situation” 26 June 1950:1-2). But since the increased air and naval operations approved at the second Blair House meeting had not yet been launched, the President refrained from making any new decisions on Tuesday. By Wednesday, the situation in Korea had become more clear. The CIA reported that both Kimpo airfield and Seoul had fallen but that Korean morale had improved after the announcement of U.S. support. This report suggested that once U.S. air operations were executed with “maximum effort” the tide might turn (CIA “Korean Situation” 28 June 1950:1). It was at the NSC meeting on Wednesday that General Vandenberg suggested attacking North Korean bases, whereupon the President stated that “we may have to do it but he didn’t want to decide that now” (“Memorandum of Conversation” 28 June 1950:3).

As noted above, President Truman’s perception of acute time pressure and reduced uncertainty crystallized on Thursday. The CIA report on the military situation gave ROK forces “a slightly less than 50-50 chance of holding the present defense line” (CIA “Korean Situation” 29 June 1950). On Friday, MacArthur’s report on the situation called for an immediate decision. It stated, “Unless provision is made for the full utilization of the Army-Navy-Air team in this shattered area our mission will at best be needlessly costly in life, money and prestige. At worse, it might even be doomed to
failure" (FRUS 1976:250). The urgency of MacArthur's request was amplified during a teleconference between Washington and Tokyo. MacArthur told his military superiors that "time is of the essence and a clear cut decision without delay is imperative" (FRUS 1976:251). Secretary Pace left the teleconference to telephone the President at 5:00 in the morning. The President approved the dispatch of one regimental combat team and immediately assembled his advisers to discuss further troop commitments (Acheson 1969:412). For Truman the time of decision was at hand and could not be avoided.

As noted above, the evidence presented suggests that President Truman perceived high uncertainty early in the week of June 25-30 and moderate uncertainty at the end of the week. Conversely, the President perceived moderate time pressure early in the week and acute time pressure by Friday morning. During this week, Truman faced two major sources of uncertainty: 1.) what were Soviet intentions? and 2.) how much American assistance was needed by the South Koreans? The perception of time pressure was determined by events on the ground in Korea. Once Seoul fell and MacArthur concluded that the situation was desperate President Truman and his advisers had reached the acute stage of the "crisis". As suggested by REF hypothesis 7a, when President Truman perceived high uncertainty but moderate time pressure he delayed making a final decision regarding U.S. intervention in order to gather more accurate information (while also approving some increases in U.S. military assistance). But by the end of the week, when Truman perceived acute time pressure combined with a reduction in uncertainty, he decided on full-scale U.S. intervention (as suggested by REF hypothesis 6, see discussion below).
Consideration of Alternatives and Final Decision

As noted previously, I expect that President Truman (identified as a potential-motivated president) will tend to focus on best-case outcomes and maximum gains when considering alternatives (REF hypothesis 3). I also anticipate that President Truman is likely to behave in a risk-acceptant manner in making final decisions (REF hypothesis 5). In order to evaluate the plausibility of these hypotheses, we must examine the manner in which alternatives were considered, and the decisions that were reached during crucial periods in the cases. For the Korean case, only one period is worthy of careful scrutiny- June 24-30.

Upon his arrival at Washington’s National Airport on the night of June 25, President Truman expressed his initial response to the North Korean attack- “By God, I’m going to let them have it” (Webb to Snyder 29 April 1975:2). While Defense Secretary Johnson immediately offered his support for the President’s comment, Under Secretary of State Webb cautioned Truman to refrain from reaching any conclusions before hearing the recommendations discussed at the State-Defense conference that morning (Webb to Snyder 29 April 1975:2). Later that evening at the first Blair House meeting, President Truman had “before him” a packet of papers that included: “White 3” Ambassador Muccio’s initial cable describing the North Korean attack, the “text of the resolution adopted by the United Nations Security Council Sunday afternoon”, telegram “1726” detailing the views of the US. Embassy in Moscow, and a memorandum drafted

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35Recall the exception to this hypothesis: if there is only one alternative capable of achieving the aspiration level, that alternative is likely to be selected regardless of its level of risk (REF hypothesis 6).
by the State Department (possibly by Acheson alone, see Paige 1968:127) entitled
“Points Requiring Presidential Decision” (“Blair House Meeting” 25 June 1950). The State Department cables from Korea and Moscow helped frame the situation for the President in the manner suggested above. The State Department memorandum was the sole policy paper under consideration at this meeting.

The State Department memorandum served as Acheson’s notes for his presentation opening the Blair House discussions. This paper included five specific recommendations for U.S. action with accompanying discussion sections (“Points Requiring Presidential Decision” N.D.). The five recommendations included: instructing MacArthur to supply needed arms and equipment to the ROK forces, giving MacArthur wide discretion in using air and naval assets to support the evacuation of U.S. personnel, initiating consideration of what U.S. military action under U.N. auspices would be appropriate, interposing the U.S. 7th fleet between Formosa and Communist China, and executing military aid programs to Indochina, Burma, and Thailand (“Points Requiring Presidential Decision” N.D.:1-6). It is interesting to note that the State Department paper generally focused on the benefits that would result from prompt U.S. action, but neglected to consider the chances for failure or potential negative consequences that might result from these initiatives.

The initial response to Acheson’s presentation was General Bradley’s assertion that “we must draw the line somewhere”, which was immediately endorsed by the President (“Memorandum of Conversation” 25 June 1950:2). Bradley noted the positive impact that U.S. air action would have on ROK morale even if “they were unable to spot
the North Korean Tanks” (“Memorandum of Conversation” 25 June 1950:2). In reference to U.S. naval action, Bradley noted “it would probably not be necessary for them to shoot but that they might frighten off the North Korean amphibious forces” (“Memorandum of Conversation” 25 June 1950:2). The only negative comment offered by Bradley was his concern regarding the deployment of U.S. ground units (“Memorandum of Conversation” 25 June 1950:2). Admiral Sherman seconded Bradley’s views, and further suggested that the “present situation in Korea offers a valuable opportunity for us to act” (“Memorandum of Conversation” 25 June 1950:3). General Vandenberg offered the only voice of caution regarding air action, indicating that the U.S. could handle the North Korean air force but might face trouble if the Russian air force intervened (“Memorandum of Conversation” 25 June 1950:3). This uncertainty regarding Russian intentions (discussed above) was also highlighted by Secretary Finletter when he advised that “only the necessary decisions be made that night” and that the U.S. should only take “calculated risks” in attempting to “keep the peace” (“Memorandum of Conversation” 25 June 1950:4). Given the uncertainty regarding Soviet intentions, Truman agreed to only the first three of Acheson’s five recommendations. The President expressed a willingness to go further in supporting the ROK, but the lack of time pressure allowed him to delay the other decisions and gather more information about the situation (“Memorandum of Conversation” 25 June 1950:5).

As events deteriorated on Monday June 26, Secretary Acheson reformulated his five recommendations into a draft statement for the President (Paige 1968:161; Acheson 1969:407). General Vandenberg opened the Blair House meeting that night with a report
that the first North Korean fighter had been shot down by U.S. pilots, to which the
President responded that “he hoped it was not the last” ("Memorandum of Conversation"
26 June 1950:1). Acheson then presented four recommendations (two of which had been
presented at the Sunday meeting): instructing U.S. air and naval forces to “offer the
fullest possible support” to the ROK south of the 38th parallel, interposing the U.S. 7th
fleet between Formosa and Communist China, providing military aid and sending a
military mission to Indochina, and strengthening U.S. forces and increasing military aid
to the Philippines (Acheson 1969:407-408). The President approved each of Acheson’s
suggestions with little debate. His main concern was that U.S. planes should not cross the
38th parallel, at one point adding “not yet” ("Memorandum of Conversation" 26 June
1950:2). Secretary Johnson also liked Acheson’s proposals, stating that “if we hold the
line as indicated that that was alright” ("Memorandum of Conversation" 26 June 1950:3).
There is very little evidence of any consideration of the chances for failure or the
potential costs of the actions proposed by Acheson.

After discussing Acheson’s draft statement and plans for submitting the second
Security Council resolution to the U.N., the President and his advisers returned to a
discussion of what might happen next in Korea. When General Collins cautioned the
group that the military situation in Korea “was bad” and that it “was impossible to say
how much our air can do”, Acheson replied that “it was important for us to do something
even if the effort were not successful” ("Memorandum of Conversation" 26 June 1950:6).
Secretary Johnson seconded Acheson’s views and asked the Joint Chiefs if they had any
objections to “the course of action which had been outlined”, there “was no objection”
The President then briefly raised the possibility of troop mobilization, but was advised that “it would be preferable to wait a few days” (“Memorandum of Conversation” 26 June 1950:7). Secretary Johnson seems to have spoken for the President and his advisers when he said that “he hoped these steps already authorized will settle the Korean question” (“Memorandum of Conversation” 26 June 1950:7). At approximately 10:17 p.m. (EDT) Truman’s instructions were sent to MacArthur (Paige 1968:180-181).

The National Security Council meeting on Wednesday was scheduled for its regular weekly time and produced little in the way of new initiatives (see Paige 1968:221). There were no policy papers under consideration and so the discussion mainly focused on bringing those assembled up to date on events in Korea and on potential future U.S. moves. The major product of this meeting was a recognition that the U.S. was now firmly committed to aid the ROK and that this commitment might require deeper U.S. involvement. Acheson stated “we may find ourselves in trouble in Korea” and thus, “what has been done may make it imperative to accept full-out war” (“Memorandum for the President” 29 June 1950:1). Truman agreed with Acheson, indicating that “we should not back out of Korea unless a military situation elsewhere demanded such action” (“Memorandum for the President” 29 June 1950:1). As a result of this discussion, the Defense Department was directed to review U.S. military capabilities to indicate Truman’s “freedom of choice” (“Memorandum for the President” 29 June 1950:4).

Towards the end of the NSC meeting, Secretary Finletter and General Vandenberg introduced the issue of U.S. air attacks north of the 38th parallel. The meeting minutes...
indicate that the President did not want to consider this action without “further consideration” (“Memorandum of Conversation” 28 June 1950:3). This discussion marked the first real debate between the President and his military advisers regarding the effectiveness of current U.S. actions. It was only after General Vandenberg expressed his concerns that Acheson asked, for the first time, for an estimate of “the possibilities of our air against North Korean armor” (“Memorandum of Conversation” 28 June 1950:3). Vandenberg replied that both weather and terrain were limiting the effectiveness of U.S. air attacks and that even when a North Korean tank or airplane was destroyed, “another would come in from the Northern bases” (“Memorandum for the President” 29 June 1950:3). As disturbing as this information was, it did not move Truman to action. The President was not yet ready to deal with problems of implementation.

As events deteriorated further in Korea and as MacArthur returned to Tokyo from his survey mission, Secretary Johnson asked the President to call another meeting of the National Security Council (Paige 1968:240). The basic document under consideration at this meeting was a draft directive from the JCS to MacArthur. Secretary Johnson presented the draft directive at the outset of the meeting and the discussion focused on its details. The directive sought to eliminate the “principal impediments to the effective implementation of the military mission in Korea” (Paige 1968:247; see also Smith 1951:86). The draft directive broadened MacArthur’s instructions to allow operations north of the 38th parallel, authorized the deployment of U.S. service units (particularly those dealing with communication and transportation), authorized the deployment of U.S. ground troops to retain a port and airbase near Pusan, and included rules of engagement.
in the event that Soviet forces intervened in the conflict (Paige 1968:247; JCS to CINCFE MacArthur 29 June 1950).

The only real debate over the proposed directive focused on the instructions for MacArthur in the event that the Soviets intervened. The President interrupted Secretary Johnson’s presentation to state: “I do not want any implication in the letter that we are going to war with Russia at this time” (“Draft” N.D.:1). The President’s fear of overcommitment subsided when he was assured that MacArthur’s instructions would not be released publicly and the “document would remain top secret” (“Draft” N.D.:4). He was also relieved to hear of the Soviet response to Ambassador Kirk and the State Department’s interpretation of this exchange (see discussion above, “Draft” N.D.:4-5).

The rest of the meeting focused on clarifying the instructions regarding operations north of the 38th parallel and discussing the merits of deploying ground troops.

There was surprisingly little discussion (and almost no disagreement) regarding the escalatory elements of the draft directive. Secretaries Johnson and Pace, the main proponents of these new military initiatives, were only weakly challenged by the President. He was mainly concerned with giving MacArthur too much authority and directed his comments toward limiting the scope of the instructions. Truman “said that he just wanted to destroy air bases, gasoline supplies, ammunition dumps and places like that north of the 38th parallel” (“Draft” N.D.:2). The President also appears to have discussed limiting MacArthur’s use of ground troops:

“He said that he only wanted to restore order to the 38th parallel; he did not want to do anything north of it except to ‘keep the North Koreans from
killing the people we are trying to save. You can give the Commander-in-Chief (MacArthur) all the authority he needs to do that but he is not to go north of the 38th degree parallel.” (“Draft” N.D.:2)

Secretary Acheson amplified the President’s concerns, indicating that U.S. planes should be ordered to stay well clear of Manchuria and Russia (Paige 1968:247). Acheson also supported the deployment of U.S. ground troops, but cautioned that “the present proposal... is quite different from an unlimited commitment to supply all of the ground forces required in South Korea” (“Memorandum for the President” 30 June 1950:1). Once again, there is very little evidence of any consideration of the chances for failure or the potential costs of the proposed military actions.

In contrast to the well-documented discussions from June 24-29, the events of Friday June 30 are somewhat murky. First, MacArthur’s telegram regarding the dire situation in Korea was not received by the Pentagon until 1:31 a.m., fully sixteen hours after MacArthur was reported to have drafted it (Paige 1968:239-240). Second, the Friday morning meeting between President Truman and his advisers- where he agreed to commit two U.S. divisions to Korea- is the only meeting for which there are no declassified minutes (and possibly no minutes at all). And yet despite these problems, we may construct a somewhat detailed account of the events leading up to Truman’s final decision.

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26In his oral history, Secretary Pace suggests that MacArthur’s report and discussion with Washington took place on Thursday night, and the decision to intervene was postponed by the President until Friday morning (1972:73-74). Unfortunately, I have been unable to locate independent corroboration of this account.
During the early morning teleconference, Secretary Pace called the President to relay MacArthur's request for an immediate decision regarding the deployment of one regimental combat team to Korea (Smith 1951:88; Paige 1968:256). The President immediately approved MacArthur's request, but delayed a final decision on the two division commitment until he could meet again with his advisers (Paige 1968:256). At 7:00 a.m. Truman was briefed on the military situation in the ROK and then called Secretaries Pace, Johnson, and Acheson to discuss MacArthur's request (Smith 1951:88). Truman's Defense Department advisers drafted a simple directive to MacArthur and then met with Truman, Acheson, and Harriman to make a final decision (Paige 1968:257; Smith 1951:88).

At this thirty minute meeting, there was complete unanimity regarding MacArthur's recommendation. Acheson later stated that "this was a necessary step to be taken, and it was one that you had to do" ("Princeton Seminars" 13-14 February 1954:Track 2, Page 8). Secretary Pace would later note that this decision "was a much more fundamental decision than the original one although it was largely overlooked at the time" (1972:74). For Pace, "at that point you can't really call it a decision" (1972:75). For Truman, the meeting was largely about whether or not to accept two divisions of Chinese Nationalist troops that had been offered by Chiang Kaishek (1956:343). Fortunately for the President, all of his advisers opposed this move and he decided to decline this offer (Paige 1968:258-259). At 1:22 p.m., the word was sent out to General MacArthur and the U.S. was "then fully committed in Korea" (Acheson 1969:413).
The above discussion of President Truman's decision making during the Korea "crisis" provides a great deal of evidence in support of the plausibility of REF hypothesis 3 (potential-motivated presidents tend to focus on best-case outcomes and maximum gains). The extensive quantity of direct Truman statements from the meetings on June 25-30 allows for the rigorous evaluation of this hypothesis. Clearly, President Truman and his advisers continually ignored the relative costs of the recommendations that were being considered. The President appears to have had great faith in his advisers, and so he refrained from asking pointed questions and challenging their assumptions and estimates. The President appears to have been particularly confident in the advice of his military commanders- recall that questions regarding the potential effectiveness of U.S. air operations did not emerge until the Wednesday NSC meeting. Indeed, when Truman agreed to MacArthur's recommendations on Friday, there appears to have been no discussion of whether two divisions was the extent or just the beginning of American intervention. There is also some non-direct evidence bearing on the evaluation of hypothesis 3. The few policy papers delivered to the President during this crucial week generally ignored considerations of costs and benefits and chances of success or failure. In fact, I am struck by the lack of well staffed-out policy analysis in the White House, particularly in contrast to the Kennedy administration (see Chapter 4).

In considering Truman’s final decision to commit U.S. ground troops, we must first determine whether REF hypothesis 5 or 6 is more appropriate. Based on the evidence presented above, I feel that hypothesis 6 (if there is only one alternative capable of achieving the aspiration level, that alternative is likely to be selected regardless of its
level of risk) more accurately characterizes this decision. If we look at the Korea case as a single decision, we clearly see that the military intervention option was really the only alternative under consideration. At no time did the President or his advisers consider pulling out of Korea or accepting a diplomatic solution to the “crisis”. Indeed, even if we view this case as a sequence of decisions (see Paige 1968:278-279), there is no point where we observe the consideration of distinct alternatives. At the meetings during the week of June 24-30, not one of Truman’s advisers challenged the overall representation of the problem facing them. And although the JCS were at times concerned regarding the chances for success of the various military options, they did not offer viable alternative options. The policy proposals presented to President Truman throughout this crucial week all represented steps along the same path, with almost no suggestion of alternative goals or alternative means for achieving the President’s aspiration level. Essentially the President was presented with a series of single options (or sets of options) that were viewed as the only options capable of achieving the aspiration level. Upon his arrival at Washington’s National Airport on Sunday June 25, the President had stated “By God, I’m going to let them have it” (Webb to Snyder 29 April 1975:2), and by Friday June 30, he had.

Epilogue

For Harry Truman, Korea was a challenge that had to be met. “The Reds were probing for weaknesses in our armor; we had to meet their thrust without getting embroiled in a world-wide war.” (Truman 1956:337) For others, the decisions reached in
the final week of June 1950 were just, but Truman’s inability to deter the North Koreans is criticized (see Paige 1968:347-352). More recently, scholars have focused on the longer term implications of the Korean War. Bernstein (1977:34) argues that the conflict contributed to the militarization of the U.S. and set the precedent for other large-scale U.S. military interventions “without a Congressional declaration of war”. Finally, scholars like Bruce Cumings have examined the War from the Korean perspective, emphasizing its effects on the Korean people and questioning the accuracy of traditional interpretations of U.S. decision making (1990). Unfortunately, this would not be last U.S. experience in this type of conflict. For Kennedy’s problems in Southeast Asia lay just around the corner.

V. Conclusions

The Truman administration cases- Iran, Greece, and Korea- provide empirical support for several of the hypotheses that compose my “Risk Explanation Framework” (REF). Unfortunately, as Figure 3.1 reveals, the Iran and Greece cases also provide evidence that runs against a number of the hypotheses. Clearly hypotheses 1 and 1a (relating to the president’s aspiration level) receive the most support across the cases. In each instance, President Truman perceived and articulated a complex combination of goals and constraints. I found extensive direct and indirect evidence of the aspiration level guiding the President’s decision making. President Truman consistently evaluated options relative to his aspiration level rather than some overall value level. Based on
### Table: Degree of Support for REF Hypotheses Across Cases and Decision Periods

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Key: S=strong, M=moderate, W=weak, A=evidence runs against hypothesis, NA=hypothesis not applicable

Figure 3.1: Degree of Support for REF Hypotheses Across Cases and Decision Periods
these case studies, I feel that hypotheses 1 and 1a are indeed “plausible” and that this part of the REF is on target.

REF hypothesis 3 (relating to how potential-motivated presidents are expected to process information) is only partially supported by the results discussed above. While I found strong direct and indirect support for this hypothesis in the Korean case, three of the five decision periods for Iran and Greece produced indirect evidence that runs against the hypothesis. I am encouraged by the fact that in Korea (the case with the most direct evidence of President Truman’s decision making process), I found ample evidence of a focus on best-case analysis. I am also somewhat heartened by the weak support for this hypothesis in the first decision period regarding Iran and the moderate support for this hypothesis in the first decision period regarding Greece. But I cannot ignore the evidence for the remaining decision periods. In Chapter 5, I explore a number of potential explanations for these negative results and suggest revising the REF in this area—both to deal with evidentiary problems and to consider other ways in which individual risk predispositions might affect information processing.

REF hypothesis 5 (potential-motivated presidents are likely to behave in a risk-acceptant manner) cannot be adequately evaluated through these case studies. Results for this hypothesis were only obtained during one decision period, and the evidence from that period ran against the hypothesis. Indeed, hypothesis 6 (if there is only one alternative capable of achieving the aspiration level, that alternative is likely to be selected regardless of its level of risk) turned out to be the more relevant hypothesis for the Truman cases. This hypothesis received strong support in the Greece and Korea cases,
and was weakly supported by the Iran case. These results suggest that potential-motivated presidents may be less likely to develop a range of alternatives when time pressure is acute (see discussion in Chapter 5). This appears to be another area where the REF requires substantial revision.

The REF hypotheses that deal with uncertainty, information accuracy, and time pressure-7a&c- received mixed support. In the two instances where President Truman perceived moderate or high uncertainty and little time pressure, he delayed making a significant decision. The strongest support for hypothesis 7a is found in the Korean case where Truman delayed making a decision until he was convinced that the Soviets would not intervene in response to U.S. military actions, that U.S. troops were required to turn the tide of the battle, and that an immediate decision was required. Hypothesis 7c, on the other hand, is not well supported. In fact, the evidence from three of the six decision periods under examination runs against this hypothesis. The Iran and Greece cases provide evidence that, when faced with perceptions of high uncertainty and acute time pressure, President Truman was more likely to engage in incrementalism rather than bolstering. This result is obviously disturbing. Clearly this hypothesis needs to be reworked.

Overall, I feel that my "Risk Explanation Framework" (in its current form) only partially explains President Truman's risk behavior in these cases. While I am obviously encouraged by the results for the Korea case, I am also discouraged by the negative results obtained in the Iran and Greece cases. In Chapter 5, I consider possible explanations for the negative results obtained in the Iran and Greece cases and suggest
substantial revision of REF hypotheses 3, 5 and 7c. In the next chapter I evaluate the REF in three case studies from the Kennedy administration- Laos, Vietnam, and the Congo.
I. Introduction and Overview

In Laos, Vietnam, and the Congo, President John Fitzgerald Kennedy dealt with the legacy of President Dwight David Eisenhower and his Secretary of State John Foster Dulles. In each of these cases, previous American commitments forced the new president to consider his response to “Communist aggression” early in his term. Particularly in Laos and Vietnam, Kennedy and his advisers were confronted with deteriorating situations that required immediate attention. Over time, President Kennedy considered various levels of military intervention by U.S. forces in these regions. Kennedy’s decision making during these cases is well documented, providing an excellent opportunity for evaluating the plausibility of the hypotheses that compose the Risk Explanation Framework (REF).

The Laos, Vietnam, and Congo case studies all follow the same structure. First, an overview narrative of the case provides important contextual information. Then, the plausibility of the various elements of the REF are evaluated through discussions relating to the president’s aspiration level, perceptions of uncertainty and time pressure, consideration of alternatives, and final decision. A concluding section of this chapter
considers the implications for theory of the results obtained. Throughout each case study an attempt is made to remind the reader of the relevant elements of the REF that are being evaluated in each section. I strive to marshal a “critical mass” of data supporting my observations and conclusions, but I recognize and point out areas where the documentary evidence is thin and certain hypotheses cannot be evaluated in a rigorous manner.

II. Laos 1961

*Overview*

On July 20, 1958 the International Control Commission for Laos (which had been created as part of the 1954 Geneva agreements regarding Indochina) adjourned following the first successful election in an independent Laotian state. Prince Souvanna Phouma formed a government of “national union” which included members of the Neo Lao Hak Xat (NLHX, the political arm of the Pathet Lao). These events angered members of the Eisenhower administration, which had been providing military and economic aid to Laos to prevent a Pathet Lao victory (George, Hall, and Simons 1971:38-39; Hilsman 1967:118-119; Sorensen 1965:639-640). The Eisenhower administration decided to withhold the regular U.S. aid payment to the Laotian government, causing a parliamentary crisis which led to the removal of Souvanna Phouma and his replacement by Phoui Sananikone (George, Hall, and Simons 1971:38-39; Hilsman 1967:118). Sananikone favored neutrality in the Cold War (as had Souvanna Phouma), but he desired a “pro-Western” neutrality that allowed no NLHX participation in government and
wished to prevent the North Vietnamese from using trails in northeastern Laos (Hilsman 1967:119-120).

At the end of 1959, Sananikone made a serious mistake when he attempted to consolidate his hold on power by removing a CIA supported group of ministers. On December 31, 1959 General Phoumi Nosavan removed the Sananikone government from power in a bloodless coup and reluctantly called for new elections to be held in April of 1960 (Hilsman 1967:121-122; Schlesinger 1965:326). These elections (which were clearly rigged, see Hilsman 1967:122) allowed Phoumi to form a pro-Western, anti-communist government. This hard-line policy resulted in another coup, engineered by paratroop Captain Kong Le in August of 1960, which provided an opportunity for the return of Souvanna Phouma, negotiations with General Phoumi, and headaches in the Eisenhower administration (see Hilsman 1967:123-125; George, Hall, and Simons 1971:39-40; Schlesinger 1965:326-327). As Phoumi negotiated in bad faith and prepared to launch another coup, Souvanna Phouma accepted a Soviet offer to airlift military equipment from Hanoi to Vientiane (the Laotian capital) (Hilsman 1967:125). The Soviet airlift came too late to alter events on the ground and Phoumi took Vientiane on December 16. Kong Le’s forces fled north to join the Pathet Lao and Souvanna Phouma fled to Cambodia (George, Hall, and Simons 1971:40-41). On January 20, as John Fitzgerald Kennedy was inaugurated in Washington, Soviet aid flowed to the Pathet Lao and Kong Le troops and General Phoumi’s forces prepared for civil war.

President-elect Kennedy had met with President Eisenhower on January 19. During this meeting, Eisenhower appraised Kennedy of the situation in Laos. He noted
that “any proposal which would include communists in the government would end up with the communists in control of the government” and called Laos the “cork in the bottle” of Southeast Asia (FRUS 1994a:19). The situation was viewed very seriously by the outgoing administration, and Kennedy left the meeting with the impression that Eisenhower felt military intervention was “preferable to a communist success in Laos” (FRUS 1994a:20). Laos would become the first “crisis” faced by the new administration.

Over the next five months President Kennedy would seriously consider U.S. military intervention in Laos on two separate occasions. In late March, after a series of Pathet Lao victories, the President used a “tacit” ultimatum (see George, Hall, and Simons 1971:58) and small-scale troop movements to coerce the Soviets into agreeing with a British proposal favoring a diplomatic solution in Laos. In late April/early May, as the Pathet Lao continued to expand and consolidate their control over parts of Laos, Kennedy rejected an immediate large-scale intervention but allowed contingency planning to continue in the State and Defense Departments. When a cease-fire was declared in Laos on May 3, President Kennedy and his advisers enjoyed their first success since the disaster of the Bay of Pigs. The tumultuous events in Laos, Cuba, and the Congo during this period provided a baptism by fire for the new President and his closest advisers.1

1For a more complete discussion of the Laos crisis see Hilsman 1967; George, Hall, and Simons 1971; Schlesinger 1965; Sorensen 1965; Walton 1972; and FRUS 1994a.
As noted in Chapter 2, the president’s “aspiration level” is expected to comprise a set of minimum level goals that the president hopes to achieve or surpass. In order to evaluate hypothesis 1 (*presidents tend to evaluate outcomes relative to an aspiration level rather than an overall value level*), we must infer the elements of President Kennedy’s aspiration level (regarding Laos) from the documentary record. As noted in Table 2.3, we need to find descriptions of acceptable/desirable outcomes/objectives in this case. Thus, we need to find relevant documents that address Kennedy’s goals, desires, hopes, needs, and/or requirements in this case.

Based on the evidence presented below, I believe that President Kennedy’s immediate goal in Laos was to create a “truly” neutral state that would align itself with neither superpower. The means available for achieving this goal were constrained by the fear of potential communist reactions to U.S. initiatives, the potential for a negative domestic reaction should the U.S. send troops to Laos, and the fear of overextending the U.S. military posture globally. The President’s commitment to achieving or surpassing his immediate goal was reinforced by his fear that communist success in Laos would lead to the fall of South Vietnam and Thailand, his concern regarding the need to demonstrate resolve and the credibility of U.S. commitments to the SEATO allies, and by his fear of a negative reaction from Republicans in Congress who might castigate him in the press for negotiating with communists. This complex combination of goals and constraints formed the aspiration level that guided Kennedy’s decision making.
In order to understand President Kennedy’s aspiration level, it is useful to first consider the goals of the Eisenhower administration in Laos. Roger Hilsman groups the policy alternatives in Laos according to the personalities that represented them (1967:105-106). And so, Souvanna Phouma represented true neutrality, Phoumi Sananikone represented pro-Western neutrality, and Phoumi Nosavan represented pro-Western anti-communism. The Eisenhower administration never accepted Souvanna Phouma’s brand of neutrality. In fact, while Souvanna sought to form a government of national union, J. Graham Parsons (the American Ambassador) “struggled for sixteen months to prevent a coalition” (quoted in Hilsman 1967:111). From 1958-1961 the Eisenhower administration vacillated between supporting Sananikone’s pro-Western neutrality and Phoumi’s militant anti-communism. Within the administration, the State Department favored Sananikone while the Defense Department and CIA supported General Phoumi (see Hilsman 1967:118-121). Souvanna Phouma could not garner American support because he wanted to form a coalition with the communists, a stance that was unacceptable to Eisenhower and Dulles (see FRUS 1994a:19-25).²

Having attended the meeting with President Eisenhower on January 19, Kennedy was clearly aware of the previous administration’s views. Eisenhower had stated that SEATO (Southeast Asia Treaty Organization) intervention was preferable to accepting a coalition with the communists (see FRUS 1994a:19-20), but the Kennedy administration was not prepared to blithely accept the policies of the previous administration. Over the

²In his oral history, Dean rusk noted: “Had it been possible for the Eisenhower administration to support a neutral Laos rather than overreaching to try to convert it into a right-wing Laos, a pro-Western Laos, I think the Laotian situation might have developed on different lines” (Rusk 1969:21).
inaugural weekend, an “Inter-Agency Task Force on Laos” prepared its first report. In its report, the Task Force noted that: “There is also an advantage to the United States through the fact of the new Administration, in that there will appear to many critics of our past policies a potentiality for a new approach” (FRUS 1994a:30). From late January to early March the Kennedy administration struggled with the development of its own policies regarding Laos.

During the two-month period in which President Kennedy developed his aspiration level regarding Laos, debate within the administration was quite heated. Doves like Senator Mike Mansfield encouraged the new President to advocate strict neutrality in Laos. Mansfield wrote to the President, “There are risks in such a policy but the risks in our present policies seem even greater for they create the illusion of an indigenous Laotian barrier to a communist advance when, in fact, there is none” (Mansfield to Kennedy 21 January 1961:1). Hawks like Kenneth P. Landon supported the continuation of support for General Phoumi. He wrote to Walt Rostow, “Neutrals are like manure, useful if spread very thin but a nuisance in a heap” (Landon to Rostow 7 February 1961:7). By early March President Kennedy was ready to sit down with his advisers and commit to a new policy on Laos. Admiral Felt (CINCPAC) was recalled for consultation and a reassessment of the administration’s Laos policy was initiated. Rostow wrote to Kennedy, “In short, our initial dispositions with respect to Laos, both diplomatically and militarily, have not succeeded; and we enter a new phase” (Rostow to Kennedy 9 March 1961:2).
At a crucial White House meeting on March 9, President Kennedy and his top advisers reevaluated U.S. goals in Laos. In discussing a planned 14-nation conference, Kennedy “remarked that it looked like all were in favor of Souvanna except us, and perhaps Thailand and South Vietnam, and this did not look like a very good lineup” (FRUS 1994a:76). The point was made that “the neutral Laos that we were seeking was different than the one we are working for now. The Laos we are fighting for now should be anti-Communist, but neutral—in other words, keep the Laotian government from strong Communist influence. Before, we sought a pro-Western ‘neutral’ Laos” (FRUS 1994a:78, emphasis in original). Kennedy then observed, “Well, look at Vietnam. What kind of a government are we going to get? Couldn’t we settle now for a non-Communist Laos?” (FRUS 1994a:78). President Kennedy was slowly coming to accept the goal of a neutral Laos where Souvanna Phouma could once again play a role in the government.

On March 12 Secretary Rusk sent a “Top Secret” cable to Phnom Penh asking Souvanna to return to Laos (see FRUS 1994a:89-90). All that remained was to express the administration’s new policy publicly.

On March 10, American Ambassador to the Soviet Union Llewellyn E. Thompson sent a cable from Moscow indicating that his impression was that “for first time Khrushchev fully convinced that we are genuinely seeking neutral status and that he is much intrigued by possibly settling this problem” (Thompson to Rusk 10 March 1961:1). Unfortunately for the Kennedy administration, this newfound understanding with Khrushchev did not result in Pathet Lao restraint. As the situation continued to deteriorate on the ground in Laos and as the administration seriously considered significant military
intervention for the first time. President Kennedy held a press conference to publicly reiterate his administration’s objectives in Laos (and present a “tacit” ultimatum [George. Hall, and Simons 1971:58] to the Soviets, see discussion below). Kennedy stated “we strongly and unreservedly support the goal of a neutral and independent Laos, tied to no outside power or group of powers, threatening no one, and free from any domination... and if in the past there has been any possible ground for misunderstanding of our support for a truly neutral Laos, there should be none now” (Kennedy Press Statement 23 March 1961:1; see also Kennedy “Presidential Statements on Laos” N.D.).

The documentary record suggests that the goal of a “truly” neutral Laos was indeed President Kennedy’s immediate goal in this case. But clearly other imperatives constrained the means available for achieving or surpassing the immediate goal, as well as Kennedy’s ability to accept a settlement that fell short of his immediate goal. In terms of constraints on means, Kennedy carefully considered potential Chinese and Soviet responses to American military intervention and was particularly concerned with the assertion by the JCS that nuclear weapons might need to be employed if Chinese troops invaded Laos (see FRUS 1994a:59-61, 162-162; Kennedy “Notes” N.D.:4; Sorensen 1965:644-645). He was also concerned with potential threats to the lives of American troops and the possibility of overextending the U.S. military posture globally (see Sorensen 1965:645; Schlesinger 1965:338-339). In terms of factors reinforcing Kennedy’s commitment to achieving or surpassing his immediate goal, Kennedy and his advisers were concerned with SEATO perceptions of U.S. weakness and lack of resolve and particularly with the implications that the loss of Laos would hold for future events in
Vietnam and Thailand (see Rusk “Oral History” 1969:7; FRUS 1994a:72-79,105-107,142-144). Domestically, the President feared Congressional Republicans castigating him in the press for negotiating with communists, but also was concerned with the potential for negative public opinion should the U.S. send troops to Laos (see Hilsman 1967:134; Schlesinger 1965:338-339; Kennedy “Notes” N.D.:2,6).

To summarize, President Kennedy’s immediate goal in Laos was to create a “truly” neutral state that would align itself with neither superpower. The means available for achieving this goal were constrained by the fear of potential communist reactions to U.S. initiatives, the potential for a negative domestic reaction should the U.S. send troops to Laos, and the fear of overextending the U.S. military posture globally. The President’s commitment to achieving or surpassing his immediate goal was reinforced by his fear that communist success in Laos would lead to the fall of South Vietnam and Thailand, his concern regarding the need to demonstrate resolve and the credibility of U.S. commitments to the SEATO allies, and by his fear of a negative reaction from Republicans in Congress who might castigate him in the press for negotiating with communists. This complex combination of goals and constraints formed the aspiration level that guided Kennedy’s decision making. President Kennedy’s aspiration level was well articulated and the documentary evidence supports REF hypothesis 1.

*Uncertainty and Time Pressure*

As noted in Chapter 2, I expect that *presidential perceptions of high uncertainty and a lack of valid information* will interact with *presidential risk predispositions and*
affect the output of the decision process (REF hypothesis 7). In the Kennedy cases, if the
President perceives high uncertainty and inaccurate information but does not perceive
acute time pressure I expect to observe decisional delay and an expanded search for
information (REF hypothesis 7a). If the President perceives high uncertainty and
inaccurate information and also perceives acute time pressure I expect to observe
incrementalism (REF hypothesis 7b).

As the evidence presented below suggests, President Kennedy’s perceptions of
uncertainty and time pressure waxed and waned during the various stages of the Laos
“crisis”. During the period from April to March of 1961, President Kennedy perceived
persistent uncertainty and increasing time pressure. The decisions that emerged during
this period were marked by incrementalism as Kennedy slowly increased the pressure on
Moscow without fully committing U.S. troops. This pattern of incrementalism in the face
of uncertainty and time pressure provides support for REF hypothesis 7b. By late April,
Kennedy perceived acute time pressure combined with a reduction in uncertainty. He
then may have finally decided against U.S. intervention in Laos, following a risk-averse
course (as suggested by REF hypothesis 4, see discussion below).

Perceptions of uncertainty and time pressure had significant impacts on President
Kennedy’s decision making during the Laos “crisis”. Initially, the situation in Laos was
believed to be “deteriorating progressively” and the Inter-Agency Task Force on Laos
suggested that “time appears to be against us if we do not increase our support of RLG
[Royal Lao Government] forces” (FRUS 1994a:28). Despite these gloomy impressions,
President Kennedy put off the first serious consideration of significant U.S. intervention
until mid-March. In early February, General Phoumi had launched an offensive against Pathet Lao and Kong Le troops on the Plaines des Jarres (PDJ). It was hoped that the success of this offensive would halt the deterioration in Laos and turn the tide in favor of Phoumi's forces. Unfortunately for Kennedy, by late February General Phoumi's forces were "stuck" (FRUS 1994a:62) and by early March the Communists had launched a "probing offensive" (FRUS 1994a:71) which had routed Phoumi's troops. In a meeting on March 3, Kennedy decided to recall Admiral Felt (CINCPAC) for consultations and on March 9 Rostow wrote to Kennedy "we enter a new phase" (Rostow to Kennedy 9 March 1961:2) following the failure of the administration's military and political initiatives.

During the key White House meetings of March 9, 20, and 21, Kennedy's perception of growing time pressure forced the first serious consideration of significant U.S. military intervention. Schlesinger notes that Kennedy feared an "immediate communist takeover" and could not "accept any visible humiliation over Laos" (1965:332). But perceptions of uncertainty persisted, particularly after the March 20 meeting where the JCS shook Kennedy by advocating large-scale intervention and the possible use of nuclear weapons or no U.S. intervention at all (see FRUS 1994a:35-36; Schlesinger 1965:332-333; Hilsman 1967:127-129). Despite the deteriorating situation on the ground in Laos, Kennedy was again reminded that "the diplomatic road was not finally blocked" (Schlesinger 1965:332). Kennedy decided that the situation was serious enough to merit some form of action, but not yet critical (see Hilsman 1967:130-131). He decided on a "two stringed" (FRUS 1994a:95) approach combining negotiation and
action, this policy resulted in the March 23 news conference including the "tacit"
ultimatum to the Soviets.

The crisis character of events in Laos broke briefly in early April when the
Soviets responded favorably to diplomatic initiatives proposed by the British
government. But as the month progressed, the Soviets and British could not agree on the
terms for a cease fire and the Pathet Lao/Kong Le troops continued to expand their
position on the ground. On April 13 Rostow sent a memo to Kennedy detailing Soviet
intentions: "the Communist tactic in Laos is to delay on the cease-fire while the situation
crumbles politically and militarily" (FRUS 1994a:126). Communist troops were in a
position to threaten Paksane and Takhek and Rostow noted that the "collapse of these two
towns would cut Laos in half isolating Vientiane and Luang Prabang from the south"
(FRUS 1994a:126). The administration was distracted from events in Laos from April 17-
19 as they dealt with the Bay of Pigs debacle, but on April 26 the State Department
received an urgent telegram (from the U.S. Ambassador to Laos Winthrop Brown) that
could not be ignored. Brown noted that the town of Muong Sai had fallen and he did not
see how "we can afford to let enemy continue his forward movement toward key centers
of Laos beyond a certain point" (FRUS 1994a:139). Following the receipt of Brown's
telegram, Acting Secretary of State Chester Bowles sent a memorandum to President
Kennedy entitled "Deteriorating Situation and Need for Critical Decisions". Bowles
noted that the U.S. now had "a choice between two difficult and unpleasant alternatives":
military intervention or a government that would eventually "convert Laos into a
Communist puppet" (FRUS 1994a:140-141).
In an afternoon meeting on April 26 President Kennedy and his advisers concluded that a large-scale "conflict would be unjustified, even if the loss of Laos must be accepted" (FRUS 1994a:143). The President withheld from making a final decision because "the possibility of a strong American response" was "the only card left to be played in pressing for a cease-fire" (FRUS 1994a:143). From April 26 until May 2 President Kennedy and his advisers met five times to consider military intervention in Laos. Before a final decision could be reached a cease-fire was declared and the situation stabilized.\(^3\) There is evidence that suggests that President Kennedy’s perception of uncertainty was altered by several new pieces of information during this time period. In separate meetings on April 22, 25, and 27, Kennedy met with President Eisenhower, Governor Nelson Rockefeller, and a group of bipartisan legislative leaders. Kennedy’s handwritten notes from each of these meetings indicate that he could find no support for U.S. military intervention in Laos (Kennedy “Notes” N.D.). It was also during this period that the Joint Chiefs of Staff were asked to provide their views on where U.S. intervention in Laos would lead. The resulting mix of conflicting opinions (see FRUS 1994a:169-170) disturbed Kennedy, particularly further information regarding the defensibility of the Laotian terrain and the acknowledgment by the JCS that nuclear bombings of China, North Vietnam, and the Soviet Union were a real possibility (see Sorensen 1965:644-645).

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\(^3\)Various sources disagree on whether President Kennedy remained open to the intervention alternative on May 3. Sorensen (1965) and Hilsman (1967) suggest that Kennedy “bluffed” the Soviets. Schlesinger (1965), based on comments by Rostow (see Newhouse N.D.:28), argues that Kennedy had once again ordered troop movements to the region. I have not found conclusive evidence in either direction, but my considered opinion favors the Sorensen/Hilsman interpretation.
As noted above, the evidence presented suggests that President Kennedy's perceptions of uncertainty and time pressure waxed and waned during the various stages of the Laos "crisis". During the period from March to April of 1961, President Kennedy perceived persistent uncertainty and increasing time pressure. The decisions that emerged during this period were marked by incrementalism as Kennedy slowly increased the pressure on Moscow without fully committing U.S. troops. This pattern of incrementalism in the face of uncertainty and time pressure provides support for REF hypothesis 7b. By late April, Kennedy perceived acute time pressure combined with a reduction in uncertainty. He then may have finally decided against U.S. intervention in Laos, following a risk-averse course (as suggested by REF hypothesis 4, see discussion below).

Consideration of Alternatives and Final Decision

As noted in Chapter 2, I expect that President Kennedy (identified as a security-motivated president) will tend to focus on worst-case outcomes and maximum losses when considering alternatives (REF hypothesis 2). I also anticipate that President Kennedy is likely to behave in a risk-averse manner in making final decisions (REF hypothesis 4). In order to evaluate the plausibility of these hypotheses, we must examine the manner in which alternatives were considered, and the decisions that were reached.

\footnote{Recall the exception to this hypothesis: \textit{if there is only one alternative capable of achieving the aspiration level, that alternative is likely to be selected regardless of its level of risk.}}
during crucial periods in the cases. For the Laos "crisis", two periods are worthy of careful scrutiny- March 9-April 1 and April 26-May 3.

During the initial meeting of March 9, President Kennedy considered a plan to increase military and covert assistance to the Lao Armed Forces (FAL) so that they might recapture the Plaines des Jarres. Kennedy expressed a number of concerns regarding the opposition of France and Britain, the political goals of the U.S. in Laos, the strength of communist forces in Laos, and the weakness of the Phoumi-led FAL (see FRUS 1994a:72-79). The President tentatively approved the plan, but put its implementation on hold while diplomatic efforts continued (see FRUS 1994a:80, 86-88). As the Soviet airlift proceeded and as Phoumi’s forces were routed on the ground, the President met again with his advisers on March 20 and 21 to consider further actions. In these “off the record” meetings, Walt Rostow advocated the movement of U.S. forces into Thailand so that they might be pre-positioned to intervene in the Mekong Valley (see FRUS 1994a:94-95). The JCS opposed Rostow’s limited commitment, instead arguing for a large-scale intervention of “60,000 troops with air cover, and even the use of nuclear weapons, or else no intervention” (FRUS 1994a:94).

Given the lack of documentary evidence regarding Kennedy’s concerns during this period, it is difficult to evaluate REF hypothesis 2. By examining the accounts

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5Unfortunately, there is only one brief contemporaneous record of the March 21 meeting (see FRUS 1994a:95-96). Schlesinger (1965:332-333) provides the best account of these meetings, while Hilsman’s account (1967:127-32) combines comments made at different meetings and is thus unreliable.

6This region of Laos held great significance for Kennedy’s advisers because Pathet Lao occupation of the Mekong Valley would threaten South Vietnam and Thailand (see Rostow 1964).
provided by Schlesinger (1965) and Hilsman (1967) we may find suggestive evidence of Kennedy’s concerns, but we must be careful to not overstate our conclusions. Each of these accounts portrays a reluctant Kennedy dissatisfied with the advice of his military advisers. Schlesinger comments on the indecisive character of the two meetings and argues that the President’s “objective remained a political settlement” (1965:333). Hilsman notes that the political solution favored by Kennedy “offered a possible way around this black-and-white choice with the additional advantage that it did not close out the other alternatives” (1967:130). While Kennedy opposed the full-scale intervention suggested by the JCS, he was also reluctant to consider the “do nothing” option. As noted above, mounting time pressure suggested the need for some form of action on the part of the U.S.

During the March 21 meeting, Kennedy agreed to a combination of diplomatic and military moves (see FRUS 1994a:95-96). His March 23 press conference would clarify U.S. objectives and provide the Soviets with a “tacit” ultimatum with vague references to a potential future U.S. “response” (Kennedy Press Statement 23 March 1961). In terms of diplomatic initiatives, the British presented an “aide memoire” to the Soviets calling for a cease-fire and a new Geneva conference on Laos. Kennedy also approved the preliminary steps “necessary to the movement of American troops into the Mekong Valley of Thailand” (George, Hall, and Simons 1971:58). These steps included the movement of U.S. Marines and helicopters into Udorn, Thailand; the movement of the Seventh fleet into the South China Sea; the alerting of a combat force on Okinawa; and the departure of 2,000 Marines from a movie set in Japan (Schlesinger 1965:333-
Kennedy's "carrot and stick" tactics were acknowledged in a Pravda "Observer" (a pseudonym believed to indicate the official Soviet view) article on March 27 (Pravda Observer Article 27 March 1961), and on April 1 the Soviets responded positively to the British proposal (see FRUS 1994a:110-111).

While diplomatic wrangling continued in early April, the Kennedy administration began to develop policy options in the event that these initiatives failed to achieve a cease-fire in Laos. As noted above, Pathet Lao/Kong Le troops continued their advance-threatening Luang Prabang, Vientiane, and the Mekong Valley. When Muong Sai fell and Ambassador Brown sent his frantic cable on April 26 (FRUS 1994a:139-140), President Kennedy was once again faced with an occasion to decide whether to intervene militarily in Laos. The period from April 26-May 2 was the high point of the Laos "crisis" for President Kennedy and his advisers. The various policy papers and meeting transcripts for this period provide a rich documentary resource for the evaluation of the REF hypotheses.

The initial White House meeting on April 26 was characterized by gloomy fatalism. Chester Bowles was Acting as Secretary of State while Dean Rusk was in Ankara, Turkey at a CENTO conference. Bowles' two memoranda of April 26 set the tone for the meeting. His first memorandum described the "intolerable" military situation in Laos and noted that the upcoming Geneva conference might become "little more than a Communist victory celebration" (FRUS 1994a:141). It was this memo that presented the President with two "difficult and unpleasant alternatives": military intervention or support for a Souvanna Phouma government that would eventually "convert Laos into a
Communist puppet” (1994a:141). In a second memo, Bowles fleshed out his arguments further. He noted a recent broadcast from Peking demanding U.S. withdrawal in exchange for a cease fire and suggested that China had emerged as “the major force which we must contend in Southeast Asia” (Bowles to Kennedy 26 April 1961:1). Bowles expressed his belief that U.S. military intervention in the Mekong Valley would “face the near certainty of a massive Chinese Communist move into the area”; and that the recent broadcasts from Peking “underscore this probability” (Bowles to Kennedy 26 April 1961:2). He also criticized Pentagon plans which advocated the use of nuclear weapons in response to this contingency, and argued that “it would be a serious mistake for the United States to send troops into Laos, except in the unlikely event that some kind of UN force could be organized, as in Korea” (Bowles to Kennedy 26 April 1961:4). Bowles finished by considering the domestic response to the loss of Laos, concluding that:

“The Prudent course of action is to cut our immediate losses, proceed to secure the best possible agreement in regard to Laos..., prepare a strong military position in Thailand and Vietnam and then proceed to secure the essential moral and material support for the greater [global] contest.... This will appear, I am afraid, as a conservative proposal at a time when many people are hungry for action. Nevertheless, I deeply believe that a military move in Laos involving the major built-in risks to which I refer would be a serious mistake.” (Bowles to Kennedy 26 April 1961:8-9, emphasis in original).
McGeorge Bundy’s notes of the April 26 meeting indicate that the Peking broadcasts were “particularly in mind” for the President (FRUS 1994a:142-143). Several of Kennedy’s advisers disagreed with Bowles’ opinions regarding the probability of an aggressive Chinese response, but they agreed with the President that “on balance it seemed wise to avoid a test if possible” (FRUS 1994a:143). The President “explicitly refused to decide against intervention at this time” in order to keep his options open, but did approve further diplomatic initiatives (FRUS 1994a:143). He also encouraged McNamara to begin contingency planning should the need arise to “place substantial U.S. forces in South Vietnam and Thailand” (FRUS 1994a:144).

The fact that the President explicitly refused to decide against intervention at the April 26 meeting allowed those who favored the intervention alternative to re-group and develop a better argument in support of their views. On April 27 at a “long and confused” (Schlesinger 1965:337) National Security Council meeting, Rostow persisted in advocating the Task Force’s plan for a limited intervention while the JCS maintained that an all or nothing intervention was required. Rostow later noted that this was the “worst meeting he’s ever attended in all his government service. Everyone had a different idea and the military was completely at odds” (Newhouse N.D.:25). In the afternoon Kennedy met with Congressional leaders who opposed the intervention to varying degrees (FRUS 1994a:147). The President assured the Congressmen that no decision had been reached and left for a speech in New York. While in New York he “paid an unannounced visit to MacArthur, who advised him against intervention” (Newhouse N.D.:27).
When Rusk returned from Ankara on April 29, a major meeting of Kennedy’s advisers was held at the State Department. During this meeting, Robert Kennedy played the role of his brother—probing for clarity and attempting to discern a consensus opinion (1994a:150-154). As factions developed among the participants, three alternative positions emerged. The Laos Task force (Rostow) and the State Department (Rusk) favored limited intervention to prevent the fall of Laos and demonstrate U.S. resolve to its SEATO allies; the Defense Department (McNamara) and the JCS developed an all or nothing position favoring full-scale intervention and a commitment to “go the distance” (with some dissent from Curtis LeMay who suggested that air power alone could solve the problem); the final minority position advocated by Bowles favored the acceptance of the loss of Laos and a renewed commitment to make a stand in Vietnam and Thailand (FRUS 1994a:150-154). This contentious morning meeting at the State Department turned into another contentious meeting of the NSC. Kennedy again refused to commit to a final course of action and additional meetings were planned for May 1 and 2 (see FRUS 1994a:154-156).

In order to clarify the positions that developed over the weekend, Rusk sent Kennedy a memorandum describing two alternative policy tracks. Track 1 noted that Kong Le had recently called for a cease-fire—the success of which would lead down the “ICC-14-nation conference route” (FRUS 1994a:159). Track 2 planned for the failure of the cease-fire negotiations and continued Pathet Lao victories. This track advocated UN pressure on the Soviet Union and the implementation of SEATO Plan 5—a limited intervention of U.S. and SEATO troops (FRUS 1994a:160-162). In an interesting
“comment” Rusk discussed the potential goals of the U.S. should the cease-fire succeed. In describing U.S. objectives in a Geneva conference on Laos Rusk noted, “Our actions and the realities of Laos will all anticipate a ‘mixed-up-Laos’. The more we can fracture it the better. It will be best for the time being for Laos to become a loose federation or confederation of somewhat autonomous strong men” (FRUS 1994a:161).

The last chance for the proponents of intervention came at the May 1 NSC meeting. McNamara proposed that SEATO troops (mostly U.S.) move into the panhandle of Laos. The opposition to this proposal focused on the possible negative outcomes associated with such a move. McNamara’s notes read as follows:

2. Allen Dulles said we must anticipate a Chinese response if we move into the panhandle.
4. Chet Bowles: are likely to face full-scale war with the Chinese in 4 to 5 yrs; should have neutrals with us (India, Burma, etc.); Laos, including the panhandle, is not the place to start.
Risk in view of:
a. Potential PL [Pathet Lao] moves during our action endanger and outflank US & Thai troops
b. Chicom jet bomber moves
c. Chicom fighter attacks on B-26's
What are the chances of improving our political position by military action & what are the chances of weakening it—
a. unlikely to avoid a communist-dominated gov’t.
b. unlikely to avoid an uncontrolled Laos-SVN border.
c. May lose support of Britain, Fr. & Western world.
d. May not have support of US- note attitude of Cong. leaders
e. Run risk of
   a) temporary military reversals
   b) long debilitating war (FRUS 1994a:163)

Dissatisfied with the presentation by the JCS, Lyndon Johnson is believed to have requested that they file their views in memoranda for the President (see FRUS 1994a:164.)
166-170). Kennedy again made no final decision, but did acknowledge that he was prepared “under certain conditions to deploy U.S. forces to Thailand” (FRUS 1994a:164).

As the cease-fire negotiations were approaching success in Laos, Kennedy and his advisers met for a final time on May 2 to discuss the JCS memoranda. In a summary memorandum, McNamara and his Deputy Secretary Roswell Gilpatric described an intervention and non-intervention “course”7. In supporting the intervention course, McNamara and Gilpatric attempted to list the “Pros and Cons of the Two Courses” (FRUS 1994a:168). Their argument was, however, limited to a comparison of the “Negative Aspects of the Non-Intervention Course” and the “Risks and Disadvantages of the Intervention Course” (FRUS 1994a:168). Indeed, their advocacy of the intervention course entirely avoids a comparison of “Pros”. This document suggests a focus on choosing the “least bad” alternative, rather than the “best” alternative (providing indirect support for REF hypothesis 2, see discussion below). In light of the “rapidly developing situation” in Laos, Kennedy again avoided making a final decision, instead asking the Secretaries of State and Defense to develop a “joint recommendation on U.S. action with respect to Laos” (FRUS 1994a:171). On May 3 a cease-fire was declared in Laos and on May 16 the Geneva conference opened (Newhouse N.D.:2).

The above discussion of Kennedy’s consideration of the alternatives during the Laos “crisis” provides some evidence in support of the plausibility of REF hypothesis 2 (security-motivated presidents tend to focus on worst-case outcomes and maximum

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7The non-intervention course was somewhat mislabeled as it recommended the introduction of U.S. forces into Thailand and South Vietnam (FRUS 1994a:167).
losses). Unfortunately, the limited amount of direct Kennedy statements from the meetings on March 20, 21, April 27, 29, and May 2 constrains the rigorous evaluation of this hypothesis. Clearly, during the March 9, April 26, and May 1 meetings, Kennedy focused almost exclusively on the relative costs associated with the various alternatives. From reading the documentary record during this period, I am struck with the impression of a reluctant President making choices between “difficult and unpleasant alternatives” (FRUS 1994a:140-141). There is also some non-direct evidence that may bear on the evaluation of hypothesis 2. Many of the policy papers forwarded to the President during this period follow the pattern of focusing on costs to the exclusion of benefits. The most striking example of this is the Defense Department memorandum penned by McNamara and Gilpatric. Even when an explicit attempt was made to focus on “Pros” as well as “Cons”, McNamara and Gilpatric could only discuss “negative aspects”, “risks”, and “disadvantages” (FRUS 1994a:166-169). Of course, I would rather not characterize Kennedy’s own manner of information processing by relying on non-direct sources, so these results can only be viewed as suggestive.

In evaluating the plausibility of REF hypothesis 4 (security-motivated presidents are likely to behave in a risk-averse manner) in this case, we must determine whether Kennedy behaved in a risk-averse, risk-seeking, or risk-neutral manner. Despite the fact that Kennedy avoided making a final decision in this case, I feel that we may characterize the course that Kennedy followed- marked by decisional delay and incrementalism- as suggestive of risk-aversion. Kennedy certainly had decided that the all-out intervention advocated by the JCS was too risky. The JCS plan could result in an immediate defeat, a
long and drawn out conflict, or even nuclear war. Kennedy clearly perceived that the worst-case outcome of a U.S.-Soviet/Chinese War was possible, and recognized that his advisers were unsure of Soviet and Chinese intentions, potential domestic U.S. reaction, and potential British and French reactions (recall the discussion of "riskiness" in Chapter 2). Had the "crisis" continued, Kennedy may have put troops in Thailand and South Vietnam, but there is little documentary evidence supporting Rostow's assertion that Kennedy would have deployed troops to Laos to save the Mekong Valley (see Rostow 1964:77-78). As it was, Kennedy's tactics of delay and incrementalism allowed future options to remain open, letting events on the ground in Laos dictate when new decisions and possibly new commitments would need to be made.

Epilogue

Hilsman describes the Kennedy administration's record in Laos as a "victory of sorts" (1967:154). Despite the failure of the Geneva conference to bring peace to the region, Laos had been kept from the communists. For Schlesinger, Kennedy's "diplomacy under pressure... was marked by restraint of manner, toughness of intention and care to leave the adversary a way of escape without loss of face" (1965:340). For both former advisers, Laos was viewed as a "dress rehearsal" for Kennedy's greatest triumph- the Cuban missile crisis (Schlesinger 1965:340; Hilsman 1967:155). Of course, an alternative view argues that "Kennedy left Laos somewhat better off than he found it, not because he was unwilling to intervene but because he had concluded that intervention would demand too high a price" (Walton 1972:32). Laos also may be viewed as the dress
rehearsal for Vietnam. The Laos “crisis” sparked Kennedy’s interest in counter-insurgency tactics, and the decision to “neutralize” Laos contributed to the decision to “make a stand” in South Vietnam.

III. Vietnam 1961

Overview

The Geneva agreements of 1954 divided Vietnam at the seventeenth parallel. Shortly after the conclusion of these accords, Emperor Bao Dai appointed Ngo Dinh Diem as Premier of the “Republic of Vietnam” (South Vietnam). Roger Hilsman described Diem as “an extraordinarily devout Catholic”, a “celibate”, and a “patriot” (1967:416; neglecting to mention that Diem also served the Japanese during World War II, see Bassett and Pelz 1989:226). Through political and military maneuvering Diem consolidated his power, and in 1955 he unseated Bao Dai to become President and Chief of State (Hilsman 1967:417). In 1956, with the approval of the Eisenhower administration, Diem refused to permit the elections called for in the Geneva accords. In response to Diem’s increasingly dictatorial ways, the southern Vietminh increased its guerrilla offensive during the period from 1957-1959 (Bassett and Pelz 1989:226). Dissatisfaction with Diem was not limited to the Vietminh, as members of his own military initiated a coup in November of 1960 that almost toppled Diem’s regime (Hilsman 1967:418). By the time of Kennedy’s inauguration in January of 1961, repressive measures by Diem were eroding his regime’s bases of support and the
Vietminh were attempting to take advantage of this window of opportunity by stepping up guerrilla activity.

For Eisenhower and Dulles, Vietnam was a Cold War battleground and Diem was viewed as a bulwark against communism. U.S. military and economic assistance to South Vietnam followed immediately in the wake of the Geneva accords. Through treaties and public assurances, the Eisenhower administration “had pledged in 1954 and again in 1957 to help resist any aggression or subversion threatening the political independence of the Republic of Vietnam” (Sorensen 1965:651). As part of the United States commitment to South Vietnam, an American “Military Assistance Advisory Group” (MAAG) attempted to train and equip a 150,000-man South Vietnamese army (Hilsman 1967:417). Despite the significance of the U.S. military commitment to South Vietnam, the Eisenhower administration was careful to keep the MAAG within the size restrictions of the Geneva accords (Kattenburg 1982:108-109). Although the situation in South Vietnam was deteriorating in late 1960, Laos was in more dire straits. Thus, Laos was the focus of attention when Eisenhower briefed the new administration on January 19; Vietnam was virtually ignored during the transition (FRUS 1994a:19-20).

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*There is a significant debate over the degree to which the Eisenhower administration’s commitment to South Vietnam constrained Kennedy’s goals in this case. Kattenburg argues that Kennedy’s November 1961 decisions were “extraordinarily fateful” because they broke the MAAG ceilings set by the Geneva accords and altered the U.S.-South Vietnamese relationship from “sharing” to “limited partnership” (1982:108-109; see also Hess 1993:67-68). He suggests that prior to these decisions, the U.S. could have “disengaged with honor and a minimum of damage” (1982:108). Kennedy’s admirers argue that, despite the limited nature of the Eisenhower administration’s commitment to South Vietnam, Kennedy “could not go back on the commitments already made” (Hilsman 1967:420; see also Sorensen 1965:651; Schlesinger 1965:536). For my purposes, I am not so much interested in the “objective facts” highlighted by Kattenburg, as I am in the perceptions (in November of 1961) of the President and his advisers regarding the significance of the U.S. commitment. I shall return to this debate below.
During 1961, President Kennedy and his advisers would make major decisions regarding U.S. support for South Vietnam on at least five occasions. In late January/early February Kennedy approved a counterinsurgency plan for Vietnam (for details of the plan see FRUS 1988:1-12). This early decision was sparked by a report from General Edward Lansdale that “shocked President Kennedy when he saw it” (Hilsman 1967:419). After reading Lansdale’s report, Kennedy reportedly asked Rostow “This is the worst one we’ve got, isn’t it?” (Rostow 1964:44). On April 20 the President directed Roswell Gilpatric (Deputy Secretary of Defense) to head a “Presidential Task Force on Vietnam” that would develop a “program of action to prevent Communist domination of South Viet-Nam” (FRUS 1988:74). On May 11 the Task Force Report was approved, resulting in increased U.S. military and economic aid (see FRUS 1988:132-134).

After Vice President Johnson’s visit to Vietnam in mid-May and Dr. Eugene Staley’s “Special Financial Group” mission to Vietnam in late June, President Kennedy and his advisers faced a third major decision period. Aside from considering the recommendation’s of Dr. Staley’s team, Kennedy was faced with a request by President Diem for a 100,000-man increase in the South Vietnamese army (FRUS 1988:185). It was at this point (in late July) that Kennedy first considered sending a military mission to South Vietnam, but based on advice from Rostow and Taylor, Kennedy postponed the mission until further planning could be conducted in Washington (FRUS 1988:256-257). Kennedy also postponed a final decision on Diem’s request, but did approve a 30,000 man increase in the South Vietnamese army (see FRUS 1988:264).
The fourth major decision period occurred in September and October as Viet Cong activity increased significantly and a massive flood of the Mekong river valley provided a potential excuse for U.S. military intervention (see FRUS 1988:335-336). In an October 11 meeting, Kennedy considered a State Department paper entitled “Concept for Intervention in Vietnam” (see FRUS 1988:340-342). At this meeting Kennedy approved a small increase in U.S. military aid to South Vietnam, but withheld further consideration of the alternatives under consideration. Kennedy decided that it was now time to send a military mission to South Vietnam and asked General Taylor to be its leader (FRUS 1988:343-344).

The final major decision period covered November 1 through November 15 as Kennedy and his advisers considered the recommendations of the “Taylor Report”. It was during this period that the President seriously contemplated, for the first time, the deployment of U.S. troops to South Vietnam in numbers that exceeded the limits set by the Geneva accords. During this period, the Taylor report would be transformed into a joint State-Defense Department proposal that would be evaluated against alternatives presented by Walt Rostow and Averell Harriman. At 9:00 pm on November 15, instructions were sent to Ambassador Frederick Nolting outlining plans for a “sharply increased joint effort to avoid a further deterioration in the situation in South Viet-Nam and eventually contain and eliminate the threats to its independence” (Rusk to Nolting 15 November 1961:1). Despite this strong language, Kennedy refused to approve the deployment of substantial numbers of U.S. ground troops and refused to formally commit his administration to the defense of South Vietnam (see FRUS 1988:607-610). And yet
he did approve substantial increases in military and economic aid that increased the U.S. role in the defense of Diem’s regime.

Aspiration Level

As noted above, the president’s “aspiration level” is expected to comprise a set of minimum level goals that the president hopes to achieve or surpass. In order to evaluate hypothesis 1 (presidents tend to evaluate outcomes relative to an aspiration level rather than an overall value level), we must infer the elements of President Kennedy’s aspiration level (regarding Vietnam) from the documentary record. We need to find descriptions of acceptable/desirable outcomes/objectives in this case. Thus, we need to find relevant documents that address Kennedy’s goals, desires, hopes, needs, and/or requirements in this case.

Based on the evidence presented below, I believe that President Kennedy’s immediate goal in Vietnam was to preserve the independence of the non-communist South under Diem’s regime. The means available for achieving this goal were constrained by the fear of a negative reaction from Democrats in Congress and the fear of potential communist reactions to U.S. initiatives. The President’s commitment to achieving or surpassing his immediate goal was reinforced by his fear that communist success in South Vietnam would lead to the fall of Southeast Asia, his concern regarding the need to demonstrate resolve and the credibility of U.S. commitments to the SEATO allies, and by his fear of a negative reaction from Republicans in Congress who would
criticize the administration for "losing" Vietnam. Once again, a complex combination of goals and constraints formed the aspiration level that guided Kennedy’s decision making.

As in the Laos case, it is useful here to first consider the goals of the Eisenhower administration and the impact they had on the formation of Kennedy’s aspiration level. As noted above, the Eisenhower administration had publicly pledged to assist the South in resisting "aggression or subversion threatening the political independence of the Republic of Vietnam" (Sorensen 1965:651). From 1954 to 1960, U.S. military and economic aid supported Diem’s drive to consolidate power in the South. The American Military Assistance and Advisory Group provided military equipment and instruction to a 150,000-man army structured “to meet conventional war as the Americans had known it in Korea" (Hilsman 1967:417). As Diem’s authoritarian method of governing became more and more unpopular, U.S. aid “increased... to compensate for the political weaknesses of the Diem regime” (Sorensen 1965:651). By January of 1961, the Defense Department, State Department, and Central Intelligence Agency were all involved in the enterprise in Vietnam.

As noted previously, there is a somewhat heated debate over the extent to which Eisenhower’s policies in Vietnam constrained the Kennedy administration. Kennedy’s admirers argue that the American commitment to Vietnam had been established by Eisenhower, Kennedy simply adapted tactics to the deteriorating situation on the ground. Sorensen writes, “whether or not it would have been wiser to draw it in a more stable and defensible area in the first place, this nation’s commitment in January, 1961-- although it had assumed far larger proportions then when it was made nearly seven years earlier--
was not one that President Kennedy felt he could abandon without undesirable consequences throughout Asia and the world" (1965:651). Hilsman follows this line further, “President Kennedy grumbled occasionally about the United States being ‘overcommitted’ in Vietnam and Southeast Asia, but he could not go back on the commitments already made” (1967:420; see also Hess 1993:69). While I feel that these statements accurately characterize the perceptions of the President and his key advisers, I do not accept the logic that they imply. As shown in the Laos case, the new administration possessed the “potentiality for a new approach” (FRUS 1994a:30) to the region. I agree with Kattenburg’s contention that in 1961 “honorable disengagement had appeared possible” (1982:113), but I also acknowledge that Kennedy and his advisers perceived that they were constrained by the previous administration’s policies. I would argue that Kennedy’s rejection of Eisenhower’s policy in Laos heightened his commitment to Eisenhower’s policy in Vietnam. Rostow notes that Kennedy “did not as far as the external record shows, [at] any moment think of applying a Laos solution or the one he finally adopted to Viet Nam” (Rostow 1964:76).

President Kennedy’s views on Vietnam were initially influenced by an early trip to the region in 1951. In 1954 a young Senator Kennedy spoke in opposition to American intervention in Vietnam in the wake of the French defeat (see Walton 1972:162-163). But by 1956, Kennedy the “Cold Warrior” called Vietnam “the cornerstone of the Free world in Southeast Asia, the keystone to the arch, the finger in the dike,... a proving ground of democracy in Asia,... [and] a test of American responsibility and determination” (quoted in Bassett and Pelz 1989:226). While Kennedy seldom mentioned Vietnam in his public
statements during 1961, on two occasions he indicated the depth of his administration's
commitment. In an August 2 statement Kennedy noted "that the United State is
determined that the Republic of Viet-Nam shall not be lost to the Communists for lack of
any support which the United States Government can render" (Kennedy 1962:545). And
again on October 26 in a letter to President Diem, Kennedy declared "that the United
States is determined to help Viet-Nam preserve its independence, protect its people
against Communist assassins, and build a better life through economic growth" (Kennedy

Internally there was much less debate within the Kennedy administration over the
goals for Vietnam than there was over the goals for Laos. As early as April of 1961, the
"Presidential Task Force on Vietnam" (lead by Roswell Gilpatric) had suggested a
program goal "to counter the Communist influence and pressure upon the development
and maintenance of a strong, free South Vietnam" (FRUS 1988:74). In a May 19 NSC
meeting, Kennedy accepted the task force's recommendations. The first point in the
"National Security Action Memorandum" (NSAM) approved at this meeting noted, "The
U.S. objective and concept of operations stated in the report are approved: to prevent
Communist domination of South Vietnam; to create in that country a viable and
increasingly democratic society, and to initiate, on an accelerated basis, a series of
mutually supporting actions of a military, political, economic, psychological and covert
counter character designed to achieve this objective" (FRUS 1988:132-133). General Taylor
notes that his instructions from President Kennedy on October 13 were "drawn in strict
consistence with the statement of policy set forth in the May NSAM which it, in effect,
reaffirmed... I was not asked to review the objectives of this policy but the means being pursued for their attainment... The question was how to change a losing game and begin to win, not how to call it off” (1972:226).

Gary Hess comments on the extent to which the acceptance of this immediate goal constrained the alternatives presented to President Kennedy. Hess notes,

“Kennedy never altered his fundamental thinking... about the problems facing the United States in Vietnam. That consistency was reinforced by the way in which problems were presented to him. Assuming that U.S. interests necessitated support of the South Vietnamese government, policymakers submitted choices in terms of determining the appropriate levels of increased U.S. support. Only rarely did officials question the basic U.S.-South Vietnamese connection, and, when they did, they had to move cautiously to avoid losing influence.” (1993:69)

We should be careful, however, to avoid overstating the cohesiveness of the Kennedy administration's thinking on Vietnam. Clearly, policy advocates emerged (particularly Chester Bowles, Averell Harriman, J.K. Galbraith, and Mike Mansfield) that questioned the basic objective of U.S. policy. And indeed, much of the debate in November of 1961 focused on the extent to which Kennedy was willing to fully commit himself to the achievement of this objective.

The evidence suggests that Kennedy’s immediate goal remained consistent through the period from May to November of 1961. In his instructions to General Taylor, Kennedy wrote “I would like your views on the courses of action which our Government
might take at this juncture to avoid a further deterioration in the situation in South Vietnam and eventually to contain and eliminate the threat to its independence” (quoted in Taylor 1972:225). This language was repeated in a telegram to Ambassador Nolting on October 12 (FRUS 1988:360). In a November 14 memorandum, Rostow wrote “It is universally agreed that the objective of the proposed exercise in Viet-Nam is to induce the Communists to cease infiltration, return to the Geneva Accord, while assisting South Viet-Nam in reducing the force of some 16,000 guerrillas now operating in the country” (FRUS 1988:601). Finally, in a letter dated November 16, the day after his fateful decisions, Kennedy suggested to Khrushchev that he “as the head of a government which was a signatory to the Geneva Accords, should use all the influence that you possess and endeavor to bring the DRV to the strict observance of these accords” (FRUS 1988:638). Kennedy’s consistent immediate goal in Vietnam focused on securing an independent South under the control of a strong Diemist regime.

The documentary record suggests that the goal of preserving the independence of the non-communist South under Diem’s regime was indeed President Kennedy’s immediate goal in this case. But clearly other imperatives constrained the means available for achieving this immediate goal as well as Kennedy’s commitment to achieving or surpassing his immediate goal. In terms of constraints on means, Kennedy was wary of the potential reactions of Congressional Democrats should he agree to the deployment of U.S. ground forces to Vietnam. On November 2, Kennedy received a lengthy memorandum from Senator Mike Mansfield arguing against intervention by U.S. troops. Mansfield feared that intervention in Vietnam “could become a quicksand for us” (FRUS
During one of the crucial November meetings when Kennedy considered the Taylor recommendations the President noted that, "We have a congressional prob. Sen. Russell & others are opposed... Troops are a last resort. Should be SEATO forces. Will create a tough domestic problem" (FRUS 1988:577). Finally, during the crucial November 15 NSC meeting, Kennedy "compared the obscurity of the issues in Viet Nam to the clarity of the positions in Berlin, the contrast of which could even make leading Democrats wary of proposed activities in the Far East" (FRUS 1988:608). At the end of the meeting Kennedy "again expressed apprehension on support of the proposed action by the Congress as well as by the American people" and noted that his "impression was that even the Democratic side of Congress was not fully convinced" (FRUS 1988:610).

A second constraint on the means available to the President was his fear of potential Soviet and Chinese communist reactions to U.S. initiatives. In the White House meeting on November 11, President Kennedy asked whether the introduction of U.S. troops would "mean a war with China" (FRUS 1988:578). As in the Laos case, Kennedy was preoccupied with a concern over the potential escalation of the current conflict. Kennedy tried to impress his concerns upon Walt Rostow, asking him to re-read Special National Intelligence Estimate (SNIE) 10-4-61 entitled "Probable Communist Reactions to Certain U.S. Actions in South Viet-Nam". In a November 12 memorandum Rostow took exception to the SNIE's conclusions, arguing that the Chinese communists would not intervene in support of North Vietnam "except as a suicidal act" (FRUS 1988:579). But Kennedy remained concerned with this possibility and opened the November 15 NSC meeting with a discussion of Chinese communist assets in the region. During this
meeting, the Director of Central Intelligence (Allen Dulles) “cautioned that it should not be assumed that Chinese setbacks as well as the ideological rift were such that the Soviets and Chinese would not be able nor willing to engage jointly any nation which threatened Communist interests” (FRUS 1988:607).

In terms of factors reinforcing his commitment to achieving or surpassing his immediate goal, Kennedy was worried that communist success in South Vietnam would lead to the fall of all Southeast Asia (see Hilsman 1967:423-424; Schlesinger 1965:542). In discussing the importance of Vietnam to the Kennedy administration, Secretary Rusk noted that “the geographic position of South Vietnam and its relation to Laos, Cambodia, Thailand, and the resources, the population, all led us to take Vietnam very seriously very early in our Administration” (Rusk 1969:45). President Kennedy discussed the “domino theory” in a September 9, 1963 interview, “I believe it... China is so large, looms so high just beyond the frontiers, that if South Vietnam went, it would not only give an improved geographic position for a guerrilla assault on Malaya, but would also give the impression that the wave of the future in southeast Asia was China and the Communists” (quoted in George, Hall, and Simons 1971:47). Indeed, after the debacle in Laos, Vietnam took on even more importance.

A second, related factor reinforcing his commitment to achieving or surpassing his immediate goal was Kennedy’s desire to demonstrate the credibility of U.S. commitments, particularly to his SEATO allies. Hilsman suggested that Kennedy could not gracefully back out of the Eisenhower administration’s commitments: “he could not refuse to give more of the same kind of assistance without disrupting the whole balance
of power and fabric of the security structure of the region, where so many countries had based their policy on continued American involvement” (1967:420; see also Hess 1993:68-71). In fact, the basic State-Defense proposal presented to the President on November 11 argued that “the loss of South Viet-Nam to Communism would not only destroy SEATO but would undermine the credibility of American commitments elsewhere” (Johnson to Bundy 11 November 1961:1).

A final factor reinforcing his commitment to achieving or surpassing his immediate goal was Kennedy’s fear of anti-communist Congressional Republicans. After the failure of the Bay of Pigs and the muddle of Laos, Kennedy was beginning to face charges that he was soft on communism. In particular, the republicans had “criticized him for canceling air strikes during the Bay of Pigs operation; for talking ‘big’ and then backing ‘down when the chips were down’ in Laos; for agreeing to negotiate on Berlin; and for failing to respond to the construction of the Berlin Wall in August” (Bassett and Pelz 1989:237). Indeed, Senator Barry Goldwater could be found on the cover of Time magazine in the summer of 1961 chiding Kennedy’s softness (Bassett and Pelz 1989:237). Once again the State-Defense proposal of November 11 tapped into the President’s concerns, noting that the “loss of South Viet-Nam would stimulate bitter domestic controversies in the United States and would be seized upon by extreme elements to divide the country and harass the Administration” (Johnson to Bundy 11 November 1961:1).

To summarize, President Kennedy’s immediate goal in Vietnam was to preserve the independence of the non-communist South under Diem’s regime. The means
available for achieving this goal were constrained by the fear of a negative reaction from Democrats in Congress and the fear of potential communist reactions to U.S. initiatives. The President's commitment to achieving or surpassing his immediate goal was reinforced by his fear that communist success in South Vietnam would lead to the fall of Southeast Asia, his concern regarding the need to demonstrate resolve and the credibility of U.S. commitments to the SEATO allies, and by his fear of a negative reaction from Republicans in Congress who would criticize the administration for "losing" Vietnam. Again, President Kennedy's aspiration level was well articulated and the documentary evidence supports REF hypothesis 1.

Uncertainty and Time Pressure

As noted above, I expect that presidential perceptions of high uncertainty and a lack of valid information will interact with presidential risk predispositions and affect the output of the decision process (REF hypothesis 7). In the Kennedy cases, if the President perceives high uncertainty and inaccurate information but does not perceive acute time pressure I expect to observe decisional delay and an expanded search for information (REF hypothesis 7a). If the President perceives high uncertainty and inaccurate information and also perceives acute time pressure I expect to observe incrementalism (REF hypothesis 7b).

As the evidence presented below suggests, President Kennedy's perception of high uncertainty persisted across the five major decision periods in 1961. During this time period, Kennedy sent three major missions to the region and created two separate
task forces for dealing with the most important Vietnam policy issues. From April to November of 1961 Kennedy's perception of time pressure became increasingly acute as the rainy season ended and the Viet Cong launched their major offensive in the South. In the fall of 1961, Kennedy was faced with pressure from the South Vietnamese as well as from his key advisers. Finally, in November of 1961 Kennedy felt that he had to come to some decision. As suggested by REF hypothesis 7a, when President Kennedy perceived high uncertainty but little (or moderate) time pressure he delayed making a final decision regarding U.S. intervention in order to gather more accurate information (while also approving some increases in U.S. military and economic aid). In late October and early November when Kennedy perceived acute time pressure and persistent uncertainty he engaged in incrementalism as suggested by REF hypothesis 7b, approving the majority of the State-Defense recommendations but refusing to deploy U.S. troops and formally commit his administration to the defense of South Vietnam.

Perceptions of uncertainty and time pressure had significant impacts on President Kennedy's decision making regarding Vietnam in 1961. Despite the President's 1951 visit to Southeast Asia, neither he nor his top advisers possessed an intimate knowledge of the region. Robert McNamara lamented that "we faced a complex and growing crisis in Southeast Asia with sparse knowledge, scant experience, and simplistic assumptions... When it came to Vietnam, we found ourselves setting policy for a region that was terra incognita... Worse, our government lacked experts for us to consult to compensate for our ignorance" (McNamara 1995:29-32). Since the transition meeting with Eisenhower had not focused on Vietnam, Kennedy was initially surprised by the report he received from

The major Presidential initiative that resulted from this January 28 meeting was a desire to identify individuals personally responsible for the four “crisis” areas of Vietnam, Congo, Laos, and Cuba (FRUS 1988:19). Kennedy stated that “we must change our course in these areas and we must be better off in three months than we are now” (FRUS 1988:19). A number of Inter-Departmental “Task Forces” were created to take responsibility for these “crises”. The Presidential Task Force on Vietnam was created on April 20. Led by Roswell Gilpatric, the Task Force included representatives from the Defense Department, State Department, White House, U.S. Information Agency, and CIA. This group was asked to develop a plan to prevent the “Communist Domination of South Vietnam” over the course of the next week (FRUS 1988:74).

Theodore Sorensen (along with McGeorge Bundy) encouraged Kennedy to approve “only the basic concept of an all-out internal security effort to save Vietnam” (FRUS 1988:84). Highlighting the glaring questions that the Task Force report raised, Sorensen asked the President to postpone his decision until after Vice President Johnson’s mid-May trip to Southeast Asia. Sorensen argued that “we need a more realistic look” (FRUS 1988:84, emphasis in original). At the May 11 NSC meeting that
produced NSAM 52, Kennedy approved the basic concept of operations and an expansion in the size and scope of the MAAG. But the President only approved contingency planning regarding increases in the South Vietnamese army and the possible commitment of U.S. forces to Vietnam. Finally, the president approved the continuation of the Vietnam Task force under a new director, Sterling J. Cottrell (see FRUS 1988:133).

Vice President Johnson’s report on his trip to Vietnam advised caution to President Kennedy. Johnson argued that the “situation in Viet Nam is more stable than is indicated by newspaper and other reports reaching Washington in recent weeks... we must keep our perspective... we must not react in panic and in consequence, perhaps, do precisely that which will worsen the situation” (FRUS 1988:152-153). Johnson’s interpretation of the situation in South Vietnam contrasted sharply with the impressions of the Vietnam Task Force. The Task Force report had stated that “Viet-Nam is nearing the decisive phase in its battle for survival” and that “the situation is critical, but not hopeless” (FRUS 1988:94-95). President Kennedy appears to have accepted Johnson’s view. In taking a deliberate and measured approach to the problems in South Vietnam, Kennedy sent the Special Financial Group Mission to Vietnam (led by Eugene Staley) from June 17-July 15 in order to hammer out “a financial plan on which to base United States-Vietnamese joint efforts” (FRUS 1988:179). The length of this trip delayed further decisions on Vietnam policy until late July.

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9 As suggested by REF hypothesis 7a, when faced with high uncertainty and low time pressure President Kennedy searched for new information regarding the situation in Vietnam.
In late July, President Kennedy and his advisers faced another set of decisions regarding the recommendations of the Staley Group’s report and a June 9 request by President Diem for another increase in the South Vietnamese army. At this time General Taylor began promoting “the need for a rational analysis of the need for military forces in Laos and Thailand, as well as in Vietnam” (FRUS 1988:243). Taylor advocated “Southeast Asia” planning rather than simply Vietnam planning, expressing the “need” for a “tightly knit Southeast Asia Task Force” (FRUS 1988:244). In discussing this new Task Force’s interim report, Kennedy suggested that the group’s planning might benefit from a visit by Taylor to Vietnam, but refrained from approving any major new initiatives in the region (FRUS 1988:255). In a July 29 memorandum, Rostow and Taylor suggested that it was “premature to send a mission” at that time, but that “on the other hand the rainy season will soon be over; and our ducks should then be in a row” (FRUS 1988:257).

Throughout the summer of 1961 the pressure of time did not weigh heavily on President Kennedy because the rainy season in the region prevented the initiation of large-scale military operations. In mid-August the President was warned that the Viet Cong would “most likely continue concentrate efforts coming months” and that he could expect a “high number incidents most sectors with possible increase end of rainy season November” (FRUS 1988:274). Unfortunately for Kennedy, the Viet Cong did not wait until November. In a September 5 attack the Viet Cong employed modern weapons and “for first time, wore khaki uniforms into battle” (FRUS 1988:292). As September wore on the number of communist attacks in the South “was triple the average of previous months” (Rust 1985:40; Bassett and Pelz 1989:234). Based on the stepped-up communist
offensive and the outcome of the Laotian situation. President Diem requested a “bilateral
defense treaty” with the United States (FRUS 1988:316). In a memorandum on October 5
Rostow noted “We must move quite radically to avoid perhaps slow but total defeat”
(quoted in Rust 1985:40). To complicate matters further, Ambassador Nolting reported
on October 11 that a catastrophic flood was devastating the populated regions of the
Mekong river valley (FRUS 1988:335).

On October 11 the Vietnam Task Force delivered a paper to the President entitled
“Concept for Intervention in Viet-Nam”. In an afternoon meeting on that same day,
Kennedy approved only a small increase in military aid to the South Vietnamese. He
decided that the time had come for the Taylor mission (FRUS 1988:343). The day before
the Taylor mission arrived in Vietnam, the body of kidnapped Colonel Hoang Thuy Nam
was found in a river in Saigon (FRUS 1988:393). This event reinforced the perception
that the situation was deteriorating. Rostow notes that when the Taylor mission arrived in
Saigon “none of us felt that it could hold more than three months unless something
radical was done” (Rostow 1964:84). Of course, Taylor faced the delicate task of
convincing the President that the situation was serious, but not hopeless (see FRUS
1988:478). Finally, the Taylor mission had the unintended consequence of convincing the
Vietnamese that a major new U.S. initiative was on the horizon (see FRUS 1988:542).

Prior to the first key meeting on November 11, the President prepared for his
advisers a list of eight questions regarding the State-Defense proposal that had adopted
many of the recommendations of Taylor’s report. The President particularly expressed
reluctance regarding the potential deployment of U.S. forces (see FRUS 1988:576). His
memorandum to Rostow on November 12 also indicates that Kennedy was unsure of the potential reaction of communist China to the proposed U.S. military initiatives (FRUS 1988:578-579). Another memorandum on November 14 indicates that, even on the eve of his critical November 15 decisions, Kennedy had a number of significant questions for his advisers (FRUS 1988:693-604). Finally, the notes of the key November 15 NSC meeting indicate that Kennedy continued to perceive high uncertainty. He worried about Chinese communist intervention, negative Congressional and domestic opinion, and the chances for success of the proposed alternatives (see FRUS 1988:607-610).

As noted above, the evidence presented suggests that President Kennedy's perception of high uncertainty persisted across the five major decision periods in 1961. During this time period, Kennedy sent three major missions to the region and created two separate task forces for dealing with the most important Vietnam policy issues. From April to November of 1961 Kennedy's perception of time pressure became increasingly acute as the rainy season ended and the Viet Cong launched their major offensive in the South. In the fall of 1961, Kennedy was faced with pressure from the South Vietnamese as well as from his key advisers. Finally, in November of 1961 Kennedy felt that he had to come to some decision. As suggested by REF hypothesis 7a, when President Kennedy perceived high uncertainty but little (or moderate) time pressure he delayed making a final decision regarding U.S. intervention in order to gather more accurate information (while also approving some increases in U.S. military and economic aid). In late October and early November when Kennedy perceived acute time pressure and persistent uncertainty he engaged in incrementalism as suggested by REF hypothesis 7b, approving
the majority of the State-Defense recommendations but refusing to deploy U.S. troops and formally commit his administration to the defense of South Vietnam.

Consideration of Alternatives and Final Decision

As noted previously, I expect that President Kennedy (identified as a security-motivated president) will tend to focus on worst-case outcomes and maximum losses when considering alternatives (REF hypothesis 2). I also anticipate that President Kennedy is likely to behave in a risk-averse manner in making final decisions (REF hypothesis 4). In order to evaluate the plausibility of these hypotheses, we must examine the manner in which alternatives were considered, and the decisions that were reached during crucial periods in the cases. For the Vietnam case, two periods are worthy of careful scrutiny- October 5-11 and November 3-15.

In response to the events of September and early October, Kennedy’s advisers developed plans to deploy U.S. and SEATO troops to South Vietnam. During the short decision period from October 5-11, two alternative policy papers circulated within the administration. Chester Bowles was dissatisfied with the state of Washington planning regarding Vietnam, he proposed an “alternative political approach” that might save Kennedy from “having to choose between diplomatic humiliation or a major military operation” (FRUS 1988:322, emphasis in original). Bowles had previously acted as the “conservative voice of reason” in the Laos “crisis”. In his October 5 memorandum,

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Recall the exception to this hypothesis: if there is only one alternative capable of achieving the aspiration level, that alternative is likely to be selected regardless of its level of risk.

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Bowles proposed that a “Laos solution” could be applied to all of Southeast Asia. At worst, the communists would continue their operations in South Vietnam and the U.S. would have a much clearer mandate for intervening. Bowles wrote “in view of the ugly nature of the alternatives, I believe that this risk [disruption of U.S. relations with its SEATO allies] should be run, since the likely course of events under present circumstances may lead them and us into a setback with the gravest world-wide implications” (FRUS 1988:324). Once again, Bowles was offering Kennedy a political alternative that left his military options open, but in October of 1961 Bowles no longer held much influence. By October of 1961 “political alternatives” smacked of Laos and Laos smacked of failure.

The “military” alternative to the Bowles proposal suggested “an effort to arrest and hopefully to reverse the deteriorating situation” in South Vietnam (FRUS 1988:340). The “Concept for Intervention in Viet-Nam” was developed by the Vietnam Task force. This paper advocated the deployment of 22,800 SEATO forces to halt communist infiltration into South Vietnam in order to free the South Vietnamese army to fight elsewhere. These troops would also “help in logistics, communications, airlift, and combat air support” (“Concept for Intervention” N.D.:1). Under the heading of “Anticipated Later Phases” the report acknowledged that “supplemental military action must be envisaged” and that the “ultimate force requirements cannot be estimated with any precision” (apparently the JCS guessed three divisions, “Concept for Intervention” N.D.:3). The report also included a section of seven “cons” and seven “pros”. The “cons” focused on the limited aims of the intervention plan, the fact that the U.S. would have
broken the Geneva accords, the risk of anti-colonial sentiment, and the fact that a change in communist tactics might limit the utility of a stationary force. The “pros” focused on the potential boost to Vietnamese morale, the ability to extract political concessions from Diem, the fact that SEATO troops might act as a bargaining chip in negotiations with the communists, and the fact that “if we go into South Viet-Nam now with SEATO, the costs would be much less than if we wait and go in later, or lose South Viet-Nam” (“Concept for Intervention” N.D.:5-6). The paper concluded with a supplemental note indicating the “wider military implications” of the intervention plan. This note pointed out that in the later stages of the intervention the chances of massive Chinese communist or Soviet intervention “might well become substantial” (“Concept for Intervention” N.D.:Supplemental Note 2).

At the White House meeting on October 11, the “Concept for Intervention in Viet-Nam” paper was the only proposal considered by the President. There is no documentary record of the President’s comments during this meeting, but there is a record of the decisions that he reached (see FRUS 1988:343-344). Apparently Kennedy was not yet convinced of the necessity for military intervention, he instead decided to send Taylor, Rostow, and Lansdale (among others) to South Vietnam to evaluate the feasibility of three alternatives (FRUS 1988:343). The first alternative was the “Concept for Intervention” discussed that morning, the second alternative involved the deployment of fewer troops simply to establish a U.S. “presence”, while the third alternative involved simply providing more of the same type of military and economic assistance that had already been approved (FRUS 1988:344; see also Rust 1985:42). The President did
approve one element of the “Concept for Intervention” during the October 11 meeting. He allowed the deployment of a “Jungle Jim” squadron (which included 12 aircraft and 110 men) to South Vietnam. This squadron would augment the MAAG, allowing for the training of Vietnamese airmen (“Concept for Intervention” N.D.: Supplemental Note 1; see also FRUS 1988:343).

Given the lack of documentary evidence regarding Kennedy’s concerns during this period, it is difficult to evaluate REF hypothesis 2. As in the early period of the Laos case, we find only suggestive (non-direct) evidence of Kennedy’s information processing. Both the Bowles and the Task Force proposals discuss the possibility of the worst-case scenario occurring—i.e. Chinese communist or Soviet intervention—but we have no direct evidence indicating the role that this information played in Kennedy’s decision process. In fact, the balanced presentation of “pros” and “cons” in the Task Force report provides evidence that seems to contradict REF hypothesis 2, but again we have no direct evidence showing that Kennedy paid attention to both “pros” and “cons”. In evaluating REF hypothesis 4, I would simply argue that no final decision was made. The REF hypotheses that are more relevant to this decision period are clearly those relating to uncertainty and time pressure (as discussed above).

After President Kennedy received General Taylor’s report on November 3, a new round of debate engulfed his administration. Taylor’s report immediately faced a challenge in the form of a “political alternative” advocated by J.K. Galbraith (U.S. Ambassador to India). Later in the process, Taylor’s report was transformed by Rusk and McNamara into a joint State-Defense proposal. During the crucial period of November
11-15, Averell Harriman submitted a revised “political alternative” based on Bowles’ October 5 memorandum. Finally, Walt Rostow proposed a military deployment plan based on SEATO Plan 5 Plus.

The recommendations included in the Taylor Mission Report were of three types: demands for political, governmental, and administrative reforms by the Diem government; increases in material and technical aid for the development of a counterguerrilla program; and the deployment of an 8,000 man U.S. military task force to bolster Vietnamese morale, aid in flood relief, conduct combat operations for self-defense, provide an emergency reserve, and act as an advance party if SEATO or CINCPAC military plans were invoked (see FRUS 1988:477-532; Hilsman 1967:422).

Upon receiving Taylor’s report, the President indicated that he was “instinctively against [the] introduction of US forces” (FRUS 1988:532). He asked his advisors to prepare for a NSC meeting where they would consider “the quality of the proposed program” as well as the “implications and meaning of the program if implemented” (FRUS 1988:533). The policy debate that ensued focused on the potential deployment of U.S. troops and the depth of the new commitment to Diem’s regime.

Galbraith’s memorandum of November 3 was the initial “political alternative” to the Taylor proposal. Galbraith’s arguments echoed those presented by Bowles on October 5. He noted that “our long-run objective should be the creation of an independent, economically viable and politically neutral state, rather than a limping American satellite” (FRUS 1988:474). In that light, Galbraith recommended: a get tough policy with Diem; a UN resolution “confirming the independence of the Republic of Vietnam” and “calling
for the immediate dispatch of United Nations observer groups to Vietnam”: and a
“prompt agreement at Geneva on a neutral Laos” (FRUS 1988:475). Galbraith concluded
by noting that “the program recommended here avoids the high risk and limited promise
alternative of armed intervention” (FRUS 1988:476). While the President was
instinctively opposed to military intervention, he was also acutely aware of the problems
of a “Laos solution” for Vietnam. And so, the Galbraith memorandum did not convince
the President to change his approach to Vietnam policy.

The Taylor report was initially considered by Kennedy’s top advisers at a
November 4 State Department meeting. General Taylor outlined his report and responded
to direct questions. As the meeting progressed, Kennedy’s advisers focused on the issue
of U.S. troop deployments. McNamara (Rusk did not attend this meeting) argued that the
8,000-man force would not “convince anyone of our resolve” (FRUS 1988:533). He felt
that the upcoming NSC meeting should focus on three questions: “What is US objective
in South Vietnam? How far do we want to go? [and] How far do we want to state it
publicly?” (FRUS 1988:533) Under Secretary of State U. Alexis Johnson shared
McNamara’s view that the flood relief deployment was not the best use of U.S. troops,
but then asked “Can we save South Viet-Nam with steps short of putting in US forces?”
(FRUS 1988:533) At that point Rostow and (JCS Chairman) General Lemnitzer
supported McNamara. Lemnitzer stated that the U.S. “must commit the number of troops
required for success”, while Rostow noted that “Hanoi and Peking have basic weaknesses
which lessen the risk to US action” (FRUS 1988:534). Taylor protested that the President
wanted recommendations to “bolster the GVN to win their own war” (FRUS 1988:534,
emphasis added), defending the quality of his proposals. But despite Taylor’s dissent McNamara, Johnson, and Rostow agreed that a new proposal needed to be developed.

The NSC meeting to consider General Taylor’s proposals was postponed twice (on November 7 and 8) so that Secretaries Rusk and McNamara could develop a joint State-Defense alternative (see FRUS 1988:558-559). On November 8, McNamara sent a memorandum to the President laying out the views of the Defense Department. He recommended that Kennedy “commit the U.S. to the clear objective of preventing the fall of South Vietnam to Communism and that we support this commitment by the necessary military actions” (FRUS 1988:560). McNamara discussed the implications of the fall of South Vietnam and argued that “the chances are against, probably sharply against, preventing the fall by any measures short of the introduction of U.S. forces on a substantial scale” (FRUS 1988:560). He then noted that the “ultimate possible extent” of the U.S. military commitment would not exceed “205,000 men” (FRUS 1988:560). Thus, McNamara suggested accepting the Taylor proposals as a first step, fully recognizing that more U.S. troops would be needed (FRUS 1988:560-561). McNamara’s memorandum served as the basis for the initial draft (November 8) of the State-Defense proposal.

In his recent auto-biography, McNamara indicates that he immediately “worried we had been too hasty in our advice to the President” (McNamara 1995:38). He suggests that increasing awareness of the “complexity” and “uncertainties” of the situation led him to change his mind (McNamara 1995:38-39). Regardless of the veracity of McNamara’s recent claims, it is clear from the documentary record that Secretary Rusk and his State Department advisers were uncomfortable with the draft proposal. In a November 9
meeting, Rusk “insisted on discussing troop deployment rather than face real issue of troops” (FRUS 1988:572-573). Rusk refused to endorse the 8,000-man flood relief force. Thus, the final draft of the State-Defense proposal did not recommend the immediate commitment of any U.S. troops (Johnson to Bundy 11 November 1961).

As the first key White House meeting approached on November 11, Rostow wrote a memorandum to President Kennedy detailing the need for an immediate U.S. troop deployment to Vietnam. Rostow’s proposal evoked the concerns of those who favored immediate intervention. He noted that the rhetoric of the State-Defense proposal was ambiguous, the communists would “interpret our policy by deeds, not words” (FRUS 1988:574). He also commented on the fact that the South Vietnamese expected a U.S. troop deployment, noting that “Diem would be strengthened if this threshold in U.S. action were passed” (FRUS 1988:574). He suggested the placement of 5,000 U.S. troops on the 17th parallel to act as a “bargaining counter for a return to the Geneva Accords” (FRUS 1988:574). Finally, he castigated the State-Defense plan because it “would inhibit U.S. action on our side of the truce lines of the Cold War for fear of enemy escalation”, and performed some interesting motivational analysis: “if he goes to war because of what we do on our side of the line, it does not mean that he went to war because of what we did. It means that he had already determined to face war rather than forego victory in South Viet Nam, and that only our surrender of South Viet Nam could prevent war” (FRUS 1988:575).

The joint State-Defense proposal was the main document under consideration at the November 11 White House meeting. As noted above, this proposal included many of

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the recommendations of the Taylor report with the addition of the commitment to use U.S. forces in South Vietnam, if necessary, and the omission of any immediate troop deployment. President Kennedy prepared a list of eight questions that he wished to address at the meeting. The questions focused on the State-Defense proposal, raising issues of effectiveness and implementation and forcing Rusk and McNamara to flesh out ideas, make clarifications, and justify their recommendations (FRUS 1988:576). During the meeting, Kennedy discussed potential Congressional opposition, specifically noting that "We have a congressional prob. Sen. Russell & others are opposed" (FRUS 1988:577). He also noted that "Troops are a last resort. Should be SEATO forces. Will create a tough domestic problem. Would like to avoid statements like Laos & Berlin" (FRUS 1988:577). In the end, Kennedy refused to approve the full commitment advocated in the State-Defense paper asking, "Will it mean a war with China? Will not go that far as to approve" (FRUS 1988:578). He did, however, tentatively approve ten actions providing military, economic, and administrative assistance to the South Vietnamese and the publication of the "Jorden Report" (detailing communist infiltration into South Vietnam) (FRUS 1988:578). At the close of this meeting, U. Alexis Johnson commented "Line clearly drawn in VN- it was not in Laos" (FRUS 1988:578).

In the wake of the November 11 meeting Kennedy's advisers prepared for the final meeting which would take place on November 15. Rostow exchanged memoranda with the President regarding the potential threat of escalation by communist China, should the U.S. intervene militarily (FRUS 1988:578-579, 601-603; see also previous
Averell Harriman submitted a memorandum on November 11 that outlined another "diplomatic-political course of action in Vietnam" (FRUS 1988:580). Harriman's alternative did not "preclude other actions should it fail" (FRUS 1988:5801). He argued that the administration should use the publication of the Jorden Report as an opportunity for approaching the Soviets. Harriman could then persuade the Soviet Union and the United Kingdom to open negotiations as part of the Geneva conference and attempt to reach an agreement to cease hostilities and abide by the 1954 Accords. He argued that, "Major military commitment as well as possible UN initiative should be held in reserve as long as direct negotiations seemed to be making progress" (FRUS 1988:582). Finally, McGeorge Bundy sent Kennedy a memorandum on November 15 supporting the military commitment advocated by the initial State-Defense proposal. Bundy argued "I believe the odds are almost even that the commitment will not have to be carried out" (FRUS 1988:605).

On November 13 a draft National Security Action Memorandum (NSAM) was circulated within Kennedy's advisory group. The draft NSAM included the recommendations of the State-Defense proposal tentatively approved by the President at the November 11 meeting. On the evening of November 14, Kennedy put forth a number of issues that he wished addressed in the NSC meeting the next day. These included consideration of the Harriman proposal, questions regarding the implementation of the State-Defense plan, and a request to "have someone look into what we did in Greece".

11 In terms of the REF hypotheses, Chinese intervention represented the "worst-case" outcome for President Kennedy.
Kennedy stressed, “Our actions should be positive rather than negative.... concerning Laos - we took actions which made no difference at all.... Our actions should be substantial otherwise we will give the wrong impression” (FRUS 1988:603-604).

The NSC meeting that took place at 10 a.m. on November 15 was full of contentious debate. The first item on the agenda was the formal commitment and military contingency planning recommendations in the initial State-Defense proposal. Kennedy was concerned with the prospects for Soviet or Chinese intervention and “expressed the fear of becoming involved simultaneously on two fronts on opposite sides of the world” (FRUS 1988:607). The President also expressed the fear that even members of his own party were “wary of proposed activities in the Far East” (FRUS 1988:608). He then “returned the discussion to the point of what will be done next in Viet Nam rather than whether or not the U.S. would become involved” (FRUS 1988:609). At this point the discussion turned to the issue of breaking the Geneva Accords and Kennedy “delineated a clever plan to charge North Viet Nam with the onus for breaking [the] accords” (FRUS 1988:609). Kennedy then “asked how he could justify the proposed courses of action in Viet Nam while at the same time ignoring Cuba” (FRUS 1988:610). Finally, he “again expressed apprehension on support of the proposed action by Congress as well as by the American people. He felt that the next two or three weeks should be utilized in making the determination as to whether or not the proposed program for Viet Nam could be supported. His impression was that even the Democratic side of Congress was not fully convinced” (FRUS 1988:610). Kennedy then closed the meeting, indicating that he would discuss the issues with the Vice President (FRUS 1988:610). Later that day, Kennedy
approved the ten actions tentatively agreed on at the November 11 meeting, and the first cables of instruction were sent to Ambassador Nolting (Rusk to Nolting 15 November 1961 8:59, 9:00 p.m.). Kennedy did not approve the full commitment or military contingency planning proposals (see the final version of NSAM 111, FRUS 1988:656-657).

The above discussion of Kennedy's consideration of the alternatives regarding Vietnam in November of 1961 provides some evidence in support of REF hypothesis 2 (security-motivated presidents tend to focus on worst-case outcomes and maximum losses). During the November 11 and 15 meetings Kennedy focused almost exclusively on the relative costs associated with the various alternatives. He particularly expressed concerns relating to the achievement of his aspiration level: focusing on the chances of failure of the various options to prevent the communist domination of the South, on potential communist Chinese escalation, and on potential negative congressional and public opinion. Of course, we must again be concerned with the possibility of note taker bias and we must also recognize the limited scope of the documentary record regarding Kennedy's information processing. Once again there is some non-direct evidence suggesting support for this hypothesis. Both Harriman's plan and Rostow's proposal were promoted as opportunities to take actions that possessed fewer negative consequences and left the President's future options open. Indeed, even the joint State-Defense proposal was marketed in this manner.

In evaluating the plausibility of REF hypothesis 4 (security-motivated presidents are likely to behave in a risk-averse manner) in this case, we must determine whether
Kennedy behaved in a risk-averse, risk-seeking, or risk-neutral manner. Based on the evidence presented above, I feel that we may again characterize the course that Kennedy followed - marked by decisional delay and incrementalism - as suggestive of risk-aversion. Kennedy clearly opposed the immediate troop commitments recommended by the Taylor report and seconded by McNamara's November 8 memorandum. He also opposed the formal commitment to the defense of South Vietnam proposed in the joint State-Defense program. On the other extreme, Kennedy rejected the policy reorientation suggested by Bowles, Galbraith, and Senator Mansfield. In the end Kennedy steered a risk-averse course, refusing to abandon South Vietnam but also refusing to commit U.S. ground troops to its defense (see Hess 1993:73). Recalling the discussion of "riskiness" in Chapter 2, Kennedy clearly perceived that the worst-case outcome of a U.S.-Chinese war was possible, and recognized that his advisers were unsure of Chinese intentions, potential domestic reaction, and the potential reactions of America's SEATO allies. Once again, Kennedy's tactics of delay and incrementalism allowed future options to remain open, letting events on the ground in Vietnam dictate when new decisions and possibly new commitments would need to be made.

Epilogue

As briefly discussed above, Paul Kattenburg calls Kennedy's November 1961 decisions "the most fateful ever made by the United States in Vietnam" (1982:113). Despite the President's aversion to sending U.S. troops to the region, by 1963 his administration had sent 15,500 "advisers" to South Vietnam (Sorensen 1965:661). The
extent to which these advisers participated in the day to day conduct of the anti-guerrilla campaign was "a vitally important step toward 'Americanization' of the conflict" (Hess 1993:74). Another byproduct of Kennedy's November decisions was the fact that Vietnam would increasingly become a military problem, with the State Department playing a more and more limited role in the policymaking process. Kennedy's risk-averse balancing act resulted in a policy of gradualism\(^{12}\) and minimum commitment that leaves us to speculate as to what would have been the result had Kennedy served a second term. Sorensen suggests that Kennedy "was simply going to weather it out, a nasty, untidy mess to which there was no other acceptable solution" (1965:661). And so, Kennedy has been criticized from both sides: by the hawks who argued that Kennedy unreasonably restrained the military and the doves who argued that Kennedy started the U.S. on the slippery slope to war.

IV. Congo 1962

*Overview*

On June 30, 1960 the Belgian Congo became the Republic of the Congo (Hilsman 1967:235), one of the largest newly-independent states in Africa. The Belgian government agreed to the swift de-colonization of the Congo despite the fact that the Congolese political elites had little experience governing. The "Belgian gamble"

\(^{12}\) In his oral history, Dean Rusk noted "I think the historian will have a major job in making a judgment as to what might be called the policy of gradualism in our responses to Southeast Asia. In general we were on the strategic defensive in Southeast Asia. We did not want to do more than was necessary to safeguard the area." (1969:61)
(Mahoney 1983:36) focused on the hope that the Congolese would have to continue to rely on Belgian civil servants and military officers. Belgium could therefore defuse anti-colonial sentiment in the region while maintaining de facto control over the new republic. The Belgian gamble failed on July 5 when the “Force Publique” (the Congolese Army) mutinied against its white officer corps. As the revolt continued, reports of rape, pillaging, and murder by mutinous soldiers began to reach the outside world (see “Analytical Chronology” 1961:4). As Belgian reinforcements began to arrive in the Congo on July 11 (a Belgian military contingent was already in the Congo), Moise Tshombe, the Premier of Katanga (the Congo’s richest region), announced the secession of his province and asked Belgian troops to intervene to “restore order” (“Analytical Chronology” 1961:6). Congolese officials (Foreign Minister Justin Bomboko and Vice Premier Antoine Gizenga) asked for United States intervention on July 12. A second request for assistance was sent to the United Nations on July 13 when President Joseph Kasavubu and Prime Minister Patrice Lumumba returned to Leopoldville (“Analytical Chronology” 1961:7). The Eisenhower administration deferred to the United Nations and the U.S. Air Force began to transport more than 10,000 U.N. troops into the region. Over the next three years the “Congo Crisis” would become a significant part of the Cold War between the U.S. and Soviet Union.

The main objective of the Eisenhower administration was to keep the Soviets from taking advantage of the chaos in the Congo (see Mahoney 1983:37). As time passed the administration began to view Patrice Lumumba as pro-communist and actively sought to remove him from power (see Mahoney 1983:40-41). On September 5, 1960 President
Kasavubu set off a series of coups and counter-coups when he dismissed Lumumba and asked Joseph Ileo to form a new government. On September 12, Colonel Joseph Mobutu announced a temporary military takeover to calm the situation (Mahoney 1983:48). During the last four months of the Eisenhower administration the U.S. battled with the Soviet Union in the U.N. while the various factions consolidated their positions in the Congo. At the end of 1960, Mobutu and Kasavubu were in control of the central government in Leopoldville, Antoine Gizenga and his pro-Lumumbists were in control of Stanleyville and most of Orientale province, Moise Tshombe and his European mercenaries controlled Elisabethville and Katanga province, and Patrice Lumumba was imprisoned. This volatile situation was inherited by John F. Kennedy when he was inaugurated on January 20, 1961.

The first major Congo event to “rattle” the new administration occurred on February 13, when Kennedy was notified of the death of Patrice Lumumba. The news hurt the administration in the U.N. and domestically as race riots rocked U.S. cities (Mahoney 1983:72). Despite the negative implications of Lumumba’s death, it did provide an opportunity for a review of Congo policy, which resulted in an attempt to reconvene the Congolese parliament and reconcile the contending factions. In mid-July a conference was held at Louvanium University where parliamentary representatives would elect a unity government. Pro-Lumumbist parliamentarians from Orientale province attended the conference, but Tshombe refused to let his Katanganese representatives participate. The U.S. supported Cyrille Adoula, a trade leader, for prime minister. When Adoula’s hopes began to fade and Gizenga’s representatives were prevailing, the
Kennedy administration resorted to bribery to secure an Adoula government (Weissman 1974:149). "Wearied by isolation, fearful of another Mobutu coup, and finally undone by bribery, the Lumumbists struck a deal: they would support Adoula as premier in exchange for half the ministries in his new government." (Mahoney 1983:87) On August 1, 1961 Cyrille Adoula became the new prime minister. The Kennedy administration would now focus on maintaining the Adoula government and dealing with Tshombe's secession.

Domestic Congolese support for the Adoula government hinged upon its ability to end the secession of Katanga (Weissman 1974:153). This put the Kennedy administration in a difficult position because support for Adoula in ending the Katanga secession ran directly against the policies of America's NATO allies- Great Britain, France, and Belgium. The administration attempted to balance these contending interests by supporting U.N. military action against Katanga and yet preventing the U.N. from ending Tshombe's secession (see Mahoney 1983:98-123; Weissman 1974:152-183). Through two "rounds" of conflict, U.N. military success resulted in negotiations, compromise, and broken promises.

By the fall of 1962, events in the Congo were coming to a head. The Adoula government, fearing U.S. disengagement, began to consider soliciting Soviet assistance (Mahoney 1983:149). The pending withdrawal (in February 1963) of the Indian contribution to the U.N. effort contributed to the urgency of the situation (Hilsman 1967:263). Kennedy called for a reappraisal of the administration's Congo policy in October, but the Cuban Missile Crisis put off any major policy overhaul until November 264
The president and his advisers considered variations on two basic alternatives: disengagement and military intervention (Weissman 1974:183). In the key National Security Council (NSC) meetings on December 14 and 17, Kennedy decided to send a “military survey mission” to the Congo, provide requested military equipment to the U.N., and approved planning regarding the deployment of a U.S. Air Squadron to the Congo (FRUS 1994b:750-752). At this point events on the ground in Katanga overtook events in Washington. On December 24, the U.N. activated “Operation Grandslam” and, without further assistance from the U.S., ended Tshombe’s secession by mid-January (Mahoney 1983:155).

Aspiration Level

As noted above, the president’s “aspiration level” is expected to comprise a set of minimum level goals that the president hopes to achieve or surpass. In order to evaluate hypothesis 1 (presidents tend to evaluate outcomes relative to an aspiration level rather than an overall value level), we must infer the elements of President Kennedy’s aspiration level (regarding the Congo) from the documentary record. We need to find descriptions of acceptable/desirable outcomes/objectives in this case. Thus, we need to find relevant documents that address Kennedy’s goals, desires, hopes, needs, and/or requirements in this case.

Based on the evidence presented below, I believe that President Kennedy’s immediate goal in the Congo was the reintegration of Katanga into the Republic of the Congo in order to solidify the position of Cytirle Adoula’s government and forestall
communist intervention in the region. The means available for achieving this goal were constrained by the fear of a negative reaction from the United States' European allies and by the fear of a negative domestic reaction, particularly from Senators associated with the powerful Katanga lobby. The President’s commitment to achieving or surpassing his immediate goal was reinforced by his fear that communist success in the Congo would lead to communist influence in the rest of Central Africa, his concern regarding the need to demonstrate the credibility of U.S. commitments to the leaders of other African states, and by his fear that a failure in the Congo would have a negative impact on the future role of the United Nations in regional peacekeeping. And so again, a complex combination of goals and constraints formed the aspiration level that guided Kennedy’s decision making.

As in the Laos and Vietnam cases, it is useful to first consider the goals of the Eisenhower administration and the impact they had on the formation of President Kennedy’s aspiration level. Ernest Lefever argues that “there was no significant difference between Eisenhower and Kennedy in the assessment of the [Congo] crisis, or the nature of American interests in Central Africa” (1967:76). He suggests that each president “wanted to frustrate Soviet subversion, to avoid civil war, and to integrate Katanga peacefully” (1967:76; see also Mahoney 1983:35). I would add that the differences that did exist between the administrations’ policies focused more on means and levels of commitment. Eisenhower was more careful in dealing with the European allies and more likely to overstate the Soviet threat in the region. Kennedy was more careful in dealing with potential African allies and more sensitive to the affect of the “crisis” on the United Nations.
The Eisenhower administration's policy in the Congo was based on the assumption that "Moscow, not Brussels" was "the chief threat to independence" (Lefever 1967:76). Thus, the effort to reintegrate Katanga was not about anti-colonialism, but rather about anti-communism. In the debate over the initial U.N. resolutions on the Congo, the U.S. prevented the "Communist effort to brand Belgium as an aggressor" (Lefever 1967:78). In fact, although the Congolese initially requested U.S. aid, Eisenhower and Dulles decided to channel U.S. aid through the U.N. to prevent a direct Soviet role in the region (Lefever 1967:78-79; Mahoney 1983:37). The Eisenhower administration's impressions of Patrice Lumumba were formed by CIA reports that alleged he had been "bought by the Communists" (Mahoney 1983:38). Finally, in August of 1960 when Lumumba accepted Soviet military assistance, Eisenhower is believed to have approved his assassination by the CIA (see Mahoney 1983:40-41). As the end of Eisenhower's term drew near, his administration focused on supporting Mobutu within the Congo and within the United Nations. U.S. policy in the Congo was immediately put under review by the incoming administration (Mahoney 1983:62-63). Under Kennedy, the Congo was identified as one of the four "crisis" areas requiring its own task force.

Very early in his administration, Kennedy publicly discussed the overall policy concern of the U.S. in the Congo. In a news conference on February 15, 1961 the President expressed his concern "at what appears to be a threat of unilateral intervention in the internal affairs of the Republic of Congo" (Kennedy "Public Papers" 1962:91). This statement came the day after Gizenga's (ostensibly) pro-communist government in Stanleyville was recognized by the United Arab Republic (UAR) and the same day that
East Germany, Ghana, and Yugoslavia followed suit (Hilsman 1967:235). This policy concern represents a degree of continuity between the Congo policies of the Eisenhower and Kennedy administrations. The overriding American policy objective in the Congo was to keep the communists from taking advantage of the chaos in the region (see Hilsman 1967). This concern was expressed throughout the “crisis” by members of the Kennedy administration, both privately and publicly.

On the public side, in a toast to Prime Minister Adoula on February 5, 1962, Kennedy noted that the U.S. was “vitally interested in the success of the Congo because we believe the success of your country is essential to the success of a free Africa” (Kennedy “Public Papers” 1963:108). Also, in an address in Los Angeles on December 19, 1961, George Ball set forth the administration’s position—calling the Congo the “keystone” of Central Africa (1961:1). In describing the administration’s long-term objectives, Ball stated that they desired “a stable society under a stable and progressive government” which “may be ‘non-aligned’ in its international policies” (1961:2). He also noted that the administration wished “to insulate the African continent from the kind of military intervention by the Sino-Soviet bloc that has created such problems in other parts of the world” and that the U.S. “could, of course, not sit idly by in the case of such a direct intervention” (1961:3). Finally, in a rhetorical flourish undoubtedly intended for public consumption, Ball noted that, in the event of Soviet intervention, the U.S. “would be compelled to act even at the risk of a direct confrontation between the free world and the bloc—a confrontation that could lead to another Korean war, that could, in fact, blow
the flames of a brush-fire conflict into the horrible firestorm of nuclear devastation” (1961:3).

Private correspondence between the relevant administration officials also indicates that the fear of communist intervention was paramount. In an attachment to a memorandum from Secretary of State Rusk to Kennedy, U.S. objectives are clearly stated:

“Our aim in the Congo is the consolidation of the country with an essentially pro-Western orientation. Premier Adoula is the best available man to achieve this since he has the necessary intelligence, will power, nationwide stature and the appropriate political predilections. To succeed he has to overcome the secession of Katanga, the threat of ultra-nationalist anti-Western politicians whether in Stanleyville or elsewhere and the virtual breakdown of the national economy. A defeat of Adoula would make civil war inevitable and open the country to Communist penetration.” (FRUS 1994b:270)

This concern with the potential for communist penetration of the Congo is further expressed in two intelligence estimates regarding Soviet intentions. (Both of these estimates were found in the President’s National Security Files that were used during the crucial decision making period of December 1962.) These estimates (one from the CIA/Office of National Estimates, the other from the State Department/Bureau of Intelligence and Research) both note that the Soviets were unlikely to undertake a major unilateral intervention if the U.N. failed in the Congo, but they also suggest that “a more
radical regime [than Adoula's] could expect to receive significant assistance from both African and Soviet sources” (CIA/ONE 11 December 1962:2; see also Hilsman/INR 7 December 1962). Finally, it appears that the degree to which the estimates of Soviet intentions were accurate became an issue of contention in the key White House meetings on December 14 and 17. Kennedy was concerned that the “sense that the alternatives to Tshombe and Adoula were sufficiently adverse to U. S. interests to justify American military intervention did not exist” (FRUS 1994b:735). He wondered “What could we do to create it?” (FRUS 1994b:735). Clearly, keeping the Sino-Soviet bloc from intervening in the Congo was a major concern of President Kennedy. And yet despite the overall significance of this immediate goal, other U.S. interests constrained the means available for achieving this goal and reinforced the President’s commitment to this goal.

Roger Hilsman (1967; see also Schlesinger 1965) provides an excellent discussion of the contending forces that shaped Kennedy’s thinking on Congo policy. Within his own inner circle, Kennedy was faced with an emerging “New Africa” group that viewed the Congo as a test of the administration’s policy in Africa (Hilsman 1967:246). They believed that, if the U.N. failed in the Congo because of a lack of U.S. support, the U.S. “would be on the wrong side of history in African eyes; our influence throughout black Africa would be all but destroyed; and the Congo would be only the first of many defeats” (Hilsman 1967:246). On the other side of the issue, an “Old Europe” group agreed that the administration should favor an independent and unified Congo, but

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disagreed with the means and urgency advocated by the “New Africa” group. The “Old Europe” group put relations with the NATO allies first, they felt that the administration should not endanger these positive long-term relationships over internal African disputes (Hilsman 1967:247). Another constraint on Kennedy’s policy was the powerful Katanga lobby run by Michael Struebens (who was associated with Belgian Mining Interests) and supported by Senator Thomas Dodd of Connecticut. A final administration interest focused on the affect of the Congo mission on the prestige of the U.N. (see CIA/ONE 11 December 1962). Kennedy was acutely aware of the effects that failure in the Congo would have on future U.N. peacekeeping efforts and on the status of the U.N. Secretariat (Hilsman 1967:244).

To summarize, President Kennedy’s immediate goal in the Congo was the reintegration of Katanga into the Republic of the Congo in order to solidify the position of Cyrille Adoula’s government and forestall communist intervention in the region. The means available for achieving this goal were constrained by the fear of a negative reaction from the United States’ European allies and by the fear of a negative domestic reaction, particularly from Senators associated with the powerful Katanga lobby. The President’s commitment to achieving or surpassing his immediate goal was reinforced by his fear that communist success in the Congo would lead to communist influence in the rest of Central Africa, his concern regarding the need to demonstrate the credibility of U.S. commitments to the leaders of other African states, and by his fear that a failure in the Congo would have a negative impact on the future role of the United Nations in regional peacekeeping. And so again, a complex combination of goals and constraints
formed the aspiration level that guided Kennedy's decision making. Once again, President Kennedy's aspiration level was well articulated and the documentary evidence supports REF hypothesis 1.

**Uncertainty and Time Pressure**

As noted above, I expect that presidential perceptions of high uncertainty and a lack of valid information will interact with presidential risk predispositions and affect the output of the decision process (REF hypothesis 7). In the Kennedy cases, if the President perceives high uncertainty and inaccurate information but does not perceive acute time pressure I expect to observe decisional delay and an expanded search for information (REF hypothesis 7a). If the President perceives high uncertainty and inaccurate information and also perceives acute time pressure I expect to observe incrementalism (REF hypothesis 7b).

As the evidence presented below suggests, President Kennedy's perception of high uncertainty persisted across the various phases of the Congo "crisis". The President sent two major missions to the region, continually sought advice from the relevant European allies, and established a special "Task Force" to consider Congo policy. Indeed, the minutes of the crucial December meetings indicate that the President felt certain about very few of the issues relating to this case. From July to November of 1962 Kennedy's perception of time pressure became increasingly acute as the Kitona accords failed, as Adoula's regime continued to falter, and as it appeared that U.N. military strength in the region would decline following the withdrawal of Indian peacekeepers. As suggested by

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REF hypothesis 7a, when President Kennedy perceived high uncertainty but little (or moderate) time pressure he delayed the consideration of U.S. intervention in order to gather more accurate information. But by November of 1962, when Kennedy perceived acute time pressure and persistent uncertainty he engaged in incrementalism as suggested by REF hypothesis 7b, providing military material requested by the U.N. but withholding final approval of the deployment of a U.S. air squadron until another military survey mission could be completed.

Perceptions regarding uncertainty and time pressure had a significant impact on President Kennedy’s decision making during the “Congo Crisis”. In the crucial White House meetings on December 14 and 17, Kennedy raised concerns about Tshombe’s behavior in negotiations, about potential U.S. domestic criticism if he decided to intervene militarily, about the amount of U.S. military force needed to affect outcomes in the Congo, about the severity of the Soviet threat, and about the strength of Adoula’s government (FRUS 1994b:734-737, 747, 750-752). Despite the vast quantity of critical policy papers and intelligence estimates (discussed below), Kennedy remained unconvinced of the accuracy of the information presented to him (particularly since much of it was contradictory). Also, despite his desire to take action to end the Katanga secession, Kennedy withheld final approval on the deployment of a U.S. air squadron to the region pending the results of talks with Macmillan, Spaak, Secretary General U Thant, and Adoula, and the results of a “military survey mission” headed by Lieutenant General Louis W. Truman. The indeterminacy of Kennedy’s decision making during this period is best emphasized by the minutes of a White House Staff Meeting on December
20, 1962 where several top White House aides commented on the logical gaps and inconsistencies in the decisions Kennedy had reached (FRUS 1994b:768-769).

The importance of time pressures as a factor in Kennedy’s Congo decision making cannot be overstated. During the year between the signing of the Kitona Accords (which ended Round 2 of the U.N.-Katanganese conflict) and Kennedy’s December 1962 decisions, time pressures were often noted by Kennedy and his advisers. In a July 23, 1962 news conference, Kennedy stated “time is not running in favor of the Adoula Government” (Kennedy “Public Papers” 1963:572). In fact, in a letter received in the State Department on July 24, Adoula lamented “I am becoming pessimistic, if not desperate” (FRUS 1994b:517). By September, the Adoula-Tshombe negotiations over a proposed “National Reconciliation Plan” had clearly reached an impasse, and George Ball wrote to Kennedy, “All evidence indicates that -- barring some new major effort -- our plans for the Congo are slowly sinking into the African ooze” (FRUS 1994b:594). In light of this perception that his Congo policy had stalled, Kennedy called for a major reevaluation of U.S. Congo policy and sent the Under Secretary of State for Political Affairs George C. McGhee to the Congo in a final attempt to encourage Adoula and Tshombe to accept the National Reconciliation Plan (for the report of McGhee’s mission see FRUS 1994b:635-638).

By early November the President concluded that he was “near or at a decisive point in the Congo situation” (FRUS 1994b:646) and approved increased pressures on Tshombe (in the form of economic sanctions) and further contingency planning (FRUS 1994b:653-656). During the crucial decision period in early to mid-December, Kennedy
focused on Adoula’s tenuous hold on power in Leopoldville, reports that Tshombe was bolstering his forces in Katanga, and the knowledge that Indian U.N. peacekeepers would soon be returning home—thereby undermining U.N. military strength in the region (see FRUS 1994b:686-690). Convinced that he needed to make a significant decision, but fearful of the uncertainty associated with the alternatives under examination, Kennedy hedged. At the crucial late afternoon meeting on December 17, Kennedy agreed to provide the U.N. with military material that it had requested and he also expressed a willingness to deploy a U.S. air squadron given certain conditions, but he withheld final approval of the air squadron deployment pending receipt of the report of the Truman mission (FRUS 1994b:750-752). Within the next two weeks Kennedy’s cautious incrementalism paid off, the U.N. (surprising Kennedy’s advisers) successfully ended Operation Grandslam and Tshombe’s secession.

As noted above, the evidence presented suggests that President Kennedy’s perception of high uncertainty persisted across the various phases of the Congo “crisis”. The President sent two major missions to the region, continually sought advice from the relevant European allies, and established a special “Task Force” to consider Congo policy. Indeed, the minutes of the crucial December meetings indicate that the President felt certain about very few of the issues relating to this case. From July to November of 1962 Kennedy’s perception of time pressure became increasingly acute as the Kitona accords failed, as Adoula’s regime continued to falter, and as it appeared that U.N. military strength in the region would decline following the withdrawal of Indian peacekeepers. As suggested by REF hypothesis 7a, when President Kennedy perceived
high uncertainty but little (or moderate) time pressure he delayed the consideration of U.S. intervention in order to gather more accurate information. But by November of 1962, when Kennedy perceived acute time pressure and persistent uncertainty he engaged in incrementalism as suggested by REF hypothesis 7b, providing the military material requested by the U.N. but withholding final approval of the deployment of a U.S. air squadron until another military survey mission could be completed.

Consideration of Alternatives and Final Decision

As noted previously, I expect that President Kennedy (identified as a security-motivated president) will tend to focus on worst-case outcomes and maximum losses when considering alternatives (REF hypothesis 2). I also anticipate that President Kennedy is likely to behave in a risk-averse manner in making final decisions (REF hypothesis 4). In order to evaluate the plausibility of these hypotheses, we must examine the manner in which alternatives were considered, and the decisions that were reached during crucial periods in the cases. For the Congo case, one period is worthy of careful scrutiny—December of 1962.

The Kennedy administration did not seriously consider U.S. military intervention in the Congo until early December 1962. At that point it was noted that the President had the Congo “much on his mind” (FRUS 1994b:717). As time pressures mounted and Kennedy recognized the growing need for new decisions, he requested that George Ball
and other State Department officials develop policy papers considering the various
"alternative possibilities" (FRUS 1994b:717). In preparation for the first White House
meeting on December 14, Ball provided a package of papers for Kennedy and his top
advisers to use as background material. These papers included memoranda and policy
appraisals by Roger Hilsman, a memorandum by Chester Bowles, a memorandum and
policy appraisal by G. Mennen Williams, and a defense department memorandum and
report from William Bundy and the Joint Chiefs of Staff (see FRUS 1994b:727-728 FN
1-2). Ball's covering memorandum attached to the packet noted that the papers "all
move in the direction of a hard line on the Congo" (FRUS 1994b:728 FN2). The final
policy paper (developed by State Department officials- Sisco, Buffum, and Cleveland)-
"New Policy on the Congo" - was presented at the beginning of the December 14 meeting
and was the main focus of the discussion (FRUS 1994b:729-737).

Carl Kaysen forwarded the packet of papers to President Kennedy along with a
covering memorandum that focused the President's attention on Hilsman's appraisal of
the alternatives. Kaysen offered three criticisms of Hilsman's analysis: that it overstated
the Soviet threat, that it overestimated the costs of continuing the present policy, and that
it underemphasized "the importance of limiting the objectives of forcible action" (FRUS
1994b:727-728). In an interesting style of argumentation, Kaysen artfully illustrated the
costs of continuing the administration's current policies, but noted that the current policy
would not lead to the least favorable outcomes of Soviet intervention or the "spectacular

15Other documents found in the same folder with the aforementioned included a memorandum
from George McGhee and a CIA/ONE intelligence estimate (see McGhee 13 December 1962; CIA/ONE
11 December 1962).
outbreak of civil war" (FRUS 1994b:728). I note that Kaysen's argument was "interesting" because he framed the costs of staying the course as "not as bad" as Hilsman suggested, but provided no discussion of any positive benefits associated with maintaining the administration's policy. He did not suggest that maintaining the current policy was the "best" available option, only that it was not the "worst".

The analysis found in Hilsman's appraisal of the alternatives and estimate of the prospects of Soviet military intervention was very similar to the conclusions found in the official State Department proposal (drafted by Sisco, Buffum, and Cleveland) that Ball presented at the December 14 meeting (see Hilsman/INR 11 December 1962; Hilsman/INR 7 December 1962; and FRUS 1994b:729-733). Hilsman argued that the current administration policy was failing. Adoula's future was uncertain, Tshombe's strength was growing, a bloc military presence was now a "distinct possibility", and the UN could not "field an effective force in the Katanga much longer" (Hilsman/INR 11 December 1962:1). He then discussed several alternatives that had been proposed in the State Department meetings but were rejected out of hand: the matter could not be turned over to African states, Adoula and his Leopoldville government could not be bought off to accept Tshombe's secession, and Tshombe could not be backed as "the unifier of the Congo" (Hilsman/INR 11 December 1962:1). Hilsman therefore only seriously discussed two options- disengagement and forced integration.

Hilsman argued that the task of administration policy should be to make "secession less palatable for Tshombe than association with the Central Government" (Hilsman/INR 11 December 1962:2). He doubted that the current attempt to apply
economic sanctions would be effective, and argued that “Probably Tshombe will be moved only by the credible threat of military coercion” (Hilsman/INR 11 December 1962:2, emphasis in original). Hilsman then delineated five requirements for the successful implementation of the suggested policy: an immediate decision should be made, preparations must move forward quickly, consultations with the UN and the Belgians should produce a specific plan of coordinated action, if active force is required the U.S. should move swiftly, and Tshombe must be given an opportunity to give in at any stage (Hilsman/INR 11 December 1962:3-4). In analyzing the costs and risks associated with forced integration, Hilsman noted that if “our action is carefully planned the costs would be reasonably small”, but there existed the “very real risk” that U.N. military coercion would have to “run its full and destructive course” (Hilsman/INR 11 December 1962:4). Thus, U.S.-Belgian relations would be strained, the administration would face domestic criticism, and Katanga would be a mess (Hilsman/INR 11 December 1962:4). Hilsman concluded that if “these risks are thought to be unacceptable, there remains in our view only one alternative -- disengagement” (Hilsman/INR 11 December 1962:5).

In discussing the disengagement alternative, Hilsman argued that any withdrawal would have to take place on a piecemeal basis. He suggested ending military aid to the U.N. immediately and then supporting a Congolese or African solution to the problem. He stated that the administration “could only expect to postpone the time when our policy reversal became fully apparent” (Hilsman/INR 11 December 1962:5). In analyzing the costs of disengagement, Hilsman noted that they were “relatively high”: Adoula or a
successor would "almost certainly" become more radical, the Soviets would expand their position, the Bloc would have further influence in Angola, and the U.N. would either be crippled or forced to rely on Communist Bloc assistance (Hilsman/INR 11 December 1962:6-8). A final conclusion (which would later influence other members of the administration) focused on the extent to which disengagement from the Congo could be permanent. Hilsman argued that, if events deteriorated further, "a policy of disengagement would result in renewed engagement under difficult, and probably unfavorable circumstances" (Hilsman/INR 11 December 1962:9). In a parallel to Kaysen's comments (discussed above) Hilsman focused almost exclusively on comparing the relative costs of the two alternatives, neglecting to consider the potential benefits of either strategy. Once again the indirect evidence provides support for REF hypothesis 2. Hilsman's analysis suggests a focus on worst-case outcomes and maximum losses.

The other papers provided in the Ball packet supported most of Hilsman’s assumptions, but several disputed the need to move immediately to the policy of forced integration assisted by direct U.S. military aid. Chester Bowles agreed that Adoula was the administration’s only hope, and further suggested that if the U.N. failed the administration would be faced with several possible developments “all of them unfavorable to us”, but he maintained that Congolese unification could still be “achieved by a combination of economic strangulation of Katanga and of negotiation, with the risks of major military action held to a minimum” (Bowles 12 December 1962:2). G. Mennen Williams agreed with Bowles, arguing that the best alternative was to “support dramatically the existing UN efforts to achieve national reconciliation” (Williams
George McGhee saw recent developments (Tshombe had agreed to allow some Union Miniere de Haut Katanga tax payments to be made to Adoula's government) in a positive light, and advocated a renewed attempt at negotiation. He suggested that U.S. military force be used only in the "last analysis" (McGhee 13 December 1962:3). On a contrary note, a paper prepared by the Joint Chiefs of Staff advocated the deployment of a Composite Air Strike Unit if it was necessary to keep Adoula's government in power (FRUS 1994b:718-720). Generally, Kennedy's advisers agreed with the basic assumption that a new policy on the Congo was needed. They disagreed about the severity of the current situation and the necessity of direct U.S. military involvement. The crucial meetings with the President on December 14 and 17 would focus on this disagreement.

George Ball's presentation at the December 14 meeting combined several of the strategies advocated by his State Department colleagues. He argued that the most significant current policy problem was the "absence of a U.S. decision as to what we would do, in the final analysis, to prevent chaos, large-scale massacres, and/or a major Soviet presence called in by radical successors to Adoula" (FRUS 1994b:731). In an argument similar to that of Hilsman's (see Hilsman/INR 11 December 1962:9), Ball noted that "we may eventually have to use United States, and perhaps other western forces to clean up a very messy state of affairs" (FRUS 1994b:731). He further argued "we can use the possibility of our fuller intervention later to accomplish our purposes with less intervention now" (FRUS 1994b:731). Thus, Ball advocated: the build up of U.N. forces, the proroguing of the Congolese parliament by Adoula, the vigorous pursuit of acceptance by Tshombe of the National Reconciliation Plan, and the deployment of a
U.S. fighter unit. In an interesting (if not completely logical argument), Ball suggested a "build-up of U.S. military forces under a U.N. umbrella, for the purpose of avoiding the use of force to reintegrate the Katanga" (FRUS 1994b:732, emphasis in original). Thus, the deployment of U.S. forces was conceived in the State Department principally as a political and psychological instrument.

At the December 14 meeting, Kennedy expressed uncertainty over the seriousness of the current situation. He was also concerned with how American public opinion, the Congress, and the European allies would react to this increased U.S. commitment. Kennedy was especially adamant about not putting the proposed U.S. unit under direct U.N. control. He also wondered about the reaction of Secretary General U Thant. The Chief of Naval Operations, Admiral George W. Anderson, stressed that "what we had was a political rather than a military, problem in the use of force...It was the political part that required a U.S. force" (FRUS 1994b:735-736). By the end of the meeting Kennedy "decided that we should undertake to put in an air squadron" (FRUS 1994b:736), but only after consultation with U Thant and Adoula. Another meeting was planned for December 17 to reconsider the plan of action in light of these consultations.

Secretary General U Thant was initially skeptical (see FRUS 1994b:738 FN 1-2) of the U.S. plan, instead suggesting that the U.S. expand its support by providing the U.N. with an assortment of military material. But at the conclusion of a meeting with Ambassador Stevenson, U Thant "warmed" to the American proposal, suggesting that it might be better if Adoula made the request to the U.N. (FRUS 1994b:742). Throughout the meeting, U Thant downplayed the need for immediate action, asking the American
Ambassador to give U.N. plans time to work (U Thant was undoubtedly aware of the stepped-up military activity currently being planned by his U.N. commanders).

The December 17 meetings focused on an “Operating Plan for the Congo” (FRUS 1994b:743-746) that detailed the specifics of the policy changes agreed upon at the December 14 meeting. In the first December 17 meeting at 10 a.m., Kennedy questioned whether the U.S. would have increased control over U.N. military action and “whether the proposed U.S. squadron would be sufficient” (FRUS 1994b:747). Secretary of State Rusk wondered whether, if the proposed actions failed, “we would go in further with whatever force is needed? Or how do we get out?” (FRUS 1994b:747). Concerned by these questions, Kennedy “approved provision of the military equipment Secretary-General U Thant had requested and discussion of the proposed air squadron with Spaak, Adoula, and the U.N. leadership” (FRUS 1994b:747). Kaysen noted in his minutes of the meeting that Kennedy was willing to go ahead with the air squadron “if [it] adds any substantial chance of success” (FRUS 1994b:747). Once again nagged by persistent uncertainty regarding the possibility that U.S. action would result in the negative consequences discussed above, Kennedy steered a middle course of decisional delay and incrementalism.

Prior to the evening meeting, Kennedy received an analytical memorandum from Kaysen. Kaysen noted that “this morning’s discussion did not bring out clearly the alternatives to the proposed course of action. The real question is whether any of them is less likely to result in an unacceptable situation in the Congo which will call for U.S.
intervention on a larger scale at a later date” (FRUS 1994b:748). Kaysen starkly summarized the alternatives for Kennedy:

“We can take a risky step now which, by general agreement, has the best chance of moving the Congo problem from its present posture as a Congo-Katanga war to an internal political problem within a nominally unified federal Congo. However, that chance is probably not better than 50-50. The other alternative is immediate withdrawal of the UN and U.S. from the operation. This involves immediate losses of UN and U.S. prestige and may require at some future date, a year or so, from now, renewed U.S. intervention, because of the danger of Soviet involvement in a continuing Congo-Katanga struggle. It will certainly result in a change from the present moderate to a radical Leopoldville Government, and the loss of all European support for the Central Government.” (FRUS 1994b:748-749)

The structure and wording of Kaysen’s presentation suggests that he was asking Kennedy to decide on which was the “least negative” alternative, rather than which was the “best”.

At the late afternoon meeting on December 17, Kennedy expressed uncertainty regarding the necessity of deploying the U.S. air squadron. Secretary Rusk opposed the deployment and again suggested that Kennedy simply approve the provision of the military material requested by U Thant. Kennedy “declared that he did not want to get into a fight unless it could be won” (FRUS 1994b:751). He noted that providing the military material requested by the U.N. “would not make much impact but might be a useful interim step” (FRUS 1994b:751). Finally, he decided that he “wanted a military
appraisal to provide fresh input” (FRUS 1994b:751). He also decided that further consultations with Spaak, Macmillan, Adoula, and U Thant should be conducted before the deployment of the air squadron would be approved. If the consultations and military appraisal were positive Kennedy would approve the air squadron, if not, he and his advisers would start to “think how we get out” (FRUS 1994b:751). In a White House meeting on December 19, Kaysen noted that “the President’s mind is definitely made up on making some kind of a U.S. military move in the Congo for the purposes of political demonstration only; he has certainly, however, not made up his mind on the wisdom of actual involvement of U.S. forces. I am aware of the logical gaps which this leaves, but there it is.” (FRUS 1994b:769 FN1, emphasis in original) In the week after the December 17 White House meeting, Secretary General U Thant reconsidered his position and rejected the offer of the U.S. air squadron (FRUS 1994b:777-778). By December 28, General Truman returned from the Congo with a reinforcement plan that Bundy termed “feckless” (FRUS 1994b:787). Kennedy was saved from making further decisions when the “third round” of confrontation began in Katanga and the U.N. troops routed Tshombe’s forces.

This discussion of Kennedy’s decision making during the “Congo Crisis” provides some support for the plausibility of REF hypothesis 2 and a greater degree of support for the plausibility of REF hypothesis 4. The limited amount of direct Kennedy statements from the meetings on December 14 and 17 (see FRUS 734-737, 747, 750-752), constrains the rigorous evaluation of the REF hypotheses related to patterns of information processing. Generally Kennedy focused more on potential costs, neglecting
the potential benefits of the alternatives under consideration. But while this suggests that he may have been engaged in “bottom-up” processing, it may also simply be the result of Kaysen’s note-taking biases. There is some non-direct evidence that bears on these hypotheses- Hilsman and Ball’s policy papers almost exclusively focused on costs (as noted above) and neglected discussions of benefits. And yet, I would rather not characterize Kennedy’s own process of information processing by relying on non-direct sources of evidence. Interestingly, in Hilsman’s analysis of Soviet intentions he discussed the inducements and inhibitions that would affect Kremlin thinking regarding intervention in the Congo. He argued that the Soviets would not intervene in any large-scale, unilateral manner because “they are aware that the Congo is a morass and, at that, one in which they have no vital or even secondary interests” (Hilsman/INR 7 December 1962:6). Surprisingly, none of the administration officials involved in the Congo decisions advocated similar inhibitions to prevent U.S. intervention.

In evaluating the plausibility of REF hypothesis 4 in this case, we must determine whether Kennedy behaved in a risk-averse, risk-seeking, or risk-neutral manner. In my view, the course that Kennedy followed- marked by decisional delay and incrementalism- is again suggestive of risk-aversion. Hilsman notes that, while he and his colleagues associated significant risks with the forced integration policy, “disengagement contained even greater risks” (Hilsman 1967:266). Hilsman also writes that “George Ball felt much the same- the notion of getting out was tempting he said, but when you thought it all through the risk was just too great” (1967:266). Indeed, Kennedy attempted to only cautiously engage in the forced integration policy: providing the U.N. with the requested
military equipment, but delaying the decision to commit U.S. troops until he was more certain of what their impact would be. In following this policy, Kennedy avoided both the immediate costs of disengagement and the potential risks associated with the introduction of U.S. forces. Recalling the discussion of "riskiness" in Chapter 2, it appears from the documentary record that Kennedy was concerned with the worse-case outcomes associated with both the disengagement and forced integration options. He was also concerned with the high level of uncertainty that persisted throughout the December decision period. Once again Kennedy steered a middle course between risky options. He also left future options open, letting events in the Congo dictate when new decisions would need to be made.

Epilogue

While Kennedy's admirers have applauded his performance in this case (quoted in Mahoney 1983:155-156), others have criticized him for undue caution. Stephen Weissman writes:

"The extremism of Kennedy's caution was responsible for some of the tottering, the ambiguity, and the blind alleys of American diplomacy; it was one reason why events- even the most fortuitous events- had such a determinative influence on policy. I am not suggesting that compromise and moderation should be excluded from the making of American foreign policy. I am merely saying that thoughtful compromise entails a modification of ends and a consequent tailoring of means and that it is the
result of dispassionate analysis, not fear. Too often Kennedy left the ends confused or untouched and the means confused or inadequate. Too often they were the product of pure caution.” (1974:192)

V. Conclusions

The documentary evidence presented in the Laos, Vietnam, and Congo case studies provides empirical support for several of the hypotheses that compose my “Risk Explanation Framework” (REF). Figure 4.1 summarizes the findings for the three Kennedy case studies. Hypotheses 1 and 1a (relating to the president’s aspiration level) are supported by the vast amount of evidence demonstrating that, in each case, President Kennedy perceived a complex and well-articulated combination of goals and constraints. I also found ample evidence of the aspiration level guiding decision making- as outcomes were often framed as departures from particular goals. Based on these case studies, I feel that hypotheses 1 and 1a are indeed “plausible” and that this part of the REF is on the right track.

REF hypothesis 2 (relating to how risk-averse presidents process information) is only somewhat supported by the evidence presented above. I was able to find little direct evidence of “on-line” information processing by President Kennedy, although the limited evidence that was found does support this hypothesis. In different periods of each case I was also able to find substantial non-direct evidence supporting this hypothesis, but I cannot claim that this evidence is anything more than “suggestive”. Another concern is that note-taker bias might also influence the results obtained from what little direct
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Decision Period</th>
<th>Laos</th>
<th>Vietnam</th>
<th>Congo</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
<td>S</td>
<td>S</td>
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<tr>
<td>2</td>
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<td>1a</td>
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<td>2</td>
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<td>W</td>
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<td>4</td>
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<td>W</td>
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<td>6</td>
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<td>NA</td>
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<tr>
<td>7a</td>
<td></td>
<td>NA</td>
<td>NA</td>
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<tr>
<td>7b</td>
<td></td>
<td>S</td>
<td>NA</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

- March 9-April 1 1961
- April 26-May 3 1961
- October 5-11 1961
- November 3-15 1961
- July-October 1962
- December 1962

Key: S=strong, M=moderate, W=weak, A=evidence runs against hypothesis, NA=hypothesis not applicable

Figure 4.1: Degree of Support for REF Hypotheses Across Cases and Decision Periods
evidence there was. I envision revising the REF in this area, both to deal with evidentiary problems and to consider other ways in which individual risk predispositions might affect information processing (see Chapter 5).

REF hypothesis 4 (security-motivated presidents are likely to behave in a risk-averse manner) was moderately supported by the evidence found in the case studies. Although the President sometimes failed to make a final decision in these cases, the Laos and Vietnam case studies certainly suggest that President Kennedy tended to avoid options that were perceived to be "risky". The comparative definition of "riskiness" presented in Chapter 2, does well to capture the empirical fact that both intervention and disengagement alternatives were perceived as "risky" in the three cases. I also feel that the pattern of delay and incrementalism so common in these cases provides substantial evidence of risk-aversion. Finally, the careful analysis (and in some cases over-analysis) of the potential policy alternatives in each case suggests a president reluctant to take undue risks.

The REF hypotheses that receive the greatest support are 7a&b (regarding uncertainty and time pressure). When President Kennedy perceived high uncertainty and low or moderate time pressure he consistently delayed making significant decisions in each of the cases. When President Kennedy perceived high uncertainty and acute time pressure he engaged in incrementalism, basically doing more of the same in Vietnam and the Congo. The picture that emerges from these case studies reveals a cautious President that generally allows events on the ground to determine the pace of decision making, avoiding difficult value trade-offs until time pressures force a decision period upon him.
In terms of revising the REF, I will consider refining hypotheses 7a&b to capture the fact that incrementalism and delay may be a mixed response under certain conditions. In these cases there were several instances where Kennedy delayed making a major decision, but did make minor decisions that resulted in incremental policy changes.

Overall, I feel that my “Risk Explanation Framework” is quite capable of explaining President Kennedy’s risk behavior in these cases. Obviously certain elements require refinement, but the empirical accuracy of the other elements is quite encouraging. In the next chapter I first consider the Truman and Kennedy cases in a comparative manner- analyzing the strengths and weaknesses of the REF across the six cases. I then suggest a number of refinements of the REF in order to eliminate the identified flaws and increase its explanatory power. Finally, I consider the limits of this project and propose new avenues of research for expanding and refining the REF- in the hopes of developing a theory of presidential risk behavior.
CHAPTER 5
CONCLUSION

I. Overview

Why do certain foreign policy decision makers take risks while others avoid them? Why does the same foreign policy decision maker take risks in one situation while avoiding them in another? In this dissertation, I developed and empirically evaluated a synthesized model of risk behavior that is sensitive to the empirical domain of presidential foreign policy decision making. I constructed a “Risk Explanation Framework” (REF) building on the various literatures on risk behavior in political science, psychology, economics, business, and sociology. The plausibility of the hypotheses that compose this framework was then evaluated through six case studies from the Truman and Kennedy administrations.

At the end of Chapters 3 and 4 I discussed the results of the process-tracing analysis within each presidential administration. In this chapter, I first consider the significance of these empirical results in the context of the theoretical, conceptual, and methodological issues discussed in Chapters 1 and 2. In the next section, I undertake a between-administration comparison of my empirical observations. I then discuss potential explanations for the negative results obtained in particular cases and decision periods. In
section five, I propose a revised model that may someday serve as the foundation for a
process-oriented theory of presidential risk behavior and suggest a research agenda for
exploring the utility of the revised model. In section six, I discuss a number of
observations that are relevant to the study of foreign policy decision making beyond risk
behavior. Finally, in section seven, I discuss the implications of the results of this project
and certain restrictions on the scope of its findings.

II. Theoretical, Conceptual, and Methodological Significance

The empirical results presented in Chapters 3 and 4 provide support for a number
of the REF hypotheses and also suggest that the domain-sensitive orientation to the study
of risk behavior (discussed in Chapters 1 and 2) may be successfully employed by
researchers interested in studying presidential decisions regarding military intervention.
This research has demonstrated that assuming the “riskiness” of particular types of
alternatives (as is done in Vertzberger 1995a&b) ignores the subjectivity and inherently
comparative nature of the concept. It has shown that theories that neglect personality
predispositions and simply associate “risk-taking” behavior with the “domain of losses”
(such as Kahneman and Tversky 1979; McDermott 1992; Farnham 1992; or Huth,
Bennett, and Gelpi 1992) cannot explain the observed variation in risk propensity found
in these cases. It suggests that Truman and Kennedy were not concerned so much with
final asset positions (as would be suggested by expected-utility theory), but rather with
departures from an aspiration level (as suggested by the literature dealing with reference
dependence). And finally, it shows that attempts to rigorously and reliably develop
quantitative measures of subjective utility and probability estimates in the “real world” are potentially futile and are not necessary for the successful development and testing of process-oriented models of risk behavior.

As noted in Chapter 2, much of the current research on risk behavior in foreign policy either assumes the “riskiness” of a particular alternative (e.g. Vertzberger 1995a&b) or assumes that only policy change involves a high degree of risk (e.g. Huth, Bennett, and Gelpi 1992). In an attempt to retain the comparative nature of the classical notion of “riskiness” (that is based on the comparison of the utilities and probabilities associated with various outcomes), and yet also reflect the difficulties in measuring utilities and probabilities in the “real world”, I offered the following definition:

Comparatively riskier options are characterized by: a.) more numerous and extremely divergent outcomes, b.) the perception that extreme negative outcomes are at least possible, and c.) recognition that estimates of potential outcomes and the probabilities associated with the occurrence of those outcomes are potentially flawed and may, in fact, be totally incorrect. The cases presented above, particularly those from the Kennedy administration, demonstrate the usefulness of my formulation of the concept.

President Kennedy often viewed policy inertia as a risky choice and perceived variation in the riskiness of different forms of military intervention. Thus, in the Congo case, both the disengagement and full intervention alternatives were perceived to be more

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1 The term “negative outcome” describes the outcomes that are least preferred by the decision maker. This category should therefore include perceived opportunity losses as well as perceived losses. By possible, I mean that the decision maker’s subjective estimate of the probabilities associated with extreme negative outcomes exceed .05 (if represented numerically).
risky than incremental escalation. In the Vietnam case, the disengagement alternative was, quite possibly, perceived to be the most risky of the options under consideration— it could result in the loss of all Southeast Asia, the loss of U.S. prestige, and the decline of Kennedy's political fortunes at home. Likewise, in the Greece case, Truman perceived almost as much risk associated with the non-intervention alternative as the risk associated with the intervention alternative. These cases all show that "riskiness" is an inherently comparative construct. Conceivably, a decision maker could even imagine that nuclear war was less risky than another alternative if that alternative offered the serious prospect of outright annihilation. So long as we view "riskiness" as a subjective construct, we cannot ignore the variability and context-dependent nature of risk estimates.

The most significant theoretical contribution of the case study results is the ability of the REF to explain risk aversion in cases where the outcomes were framed as losses. Recall that Kahneman and Tversky's (1979) "reflection effect" (subjects tended to prefer the less risky option when the problem was framed as a gain, and the more risky option when the problem was framed as a loss) has been the main finding utilized by political scientists. A simple application of the Kahneman and Tversky theory to these cases would suggest that risk-acceptance should have been observed in every case. Only by considering the interactive effect of personality predispositions and situational constraints can we explain risk-averse/acceptant behavior in either domain. The results reported in Chapters 3 and 4 suggest that the aspiration level did have an impact on the

2Particularly if the researcher suggested that the presidents were "in" the domain of losses.
alternatives that were actively discussed, but beyond this point personality predispositions provide a more complete explanation of risk behavior.

In the Vietnam case, Kennedy did not seriously consider the non-intervention alternative because it was viewed as incapable of achieving or surpassing his aspiration level. But when he selected between the different intervention alternatives he favored incremental escalation over the more risky alternative pushed by the State-Defense Departments and the Vietnam Task Force. In Laos, Kennedy rejected the do-nothing option out of hand, but then chose to engage in diplomacy and coercion rather than assume the risks of full-scale intervention (favored by Rostow and the JCS). These cases show that the REF is capable of explaining decisions that would fall in the "off-cells" of Kahneman and Tversky's (1979) experimental research. While these results are not conclusive, they do suggest the potential usefulness of synthetic models that capture both situational and personal factors.

Another significant result of this research is the empirical support for the notion that decision makers are not concerned so much with final asset positions (as would be suggested by expected-utility theory), but rather with departures from an aspiration level (as suggested by the literature dealing with reference dependence). This result should be very troubling for scholars that focus on expected-utility models of risk behavior (see Bueno de Mesquita 1981, 1985, 1992; Morrow 1987; Alpert 1976). Much of the effort expended by the presidents in these cases was focused on the construction of an aspiration level. The aspiration level then served as the yardstick to measure the value of the outcomes associated with the alternatives under consideration. The presidents
appeared to implicitly discount the value of outcomes that fell below the aspiration level, while simultaneously privileging outcomes that fell above the aspiration level. This sensitivity to departures from the reference point also contributed to the tabling of alternatives that offered little hope of achieving or surpassing the aspiration level.

At the very least, researchers from the “expected-utility” tradition should consider the addition of “reflection points” to their utility curves. The use of “reflection points” can capture the reference dependence phenomenon (see Kahneman and Tversky 1979), showing that perceptions of utility are sensitive to departures from an aspiration level. Of course, the multi-dimensionality of my formulation of the aspiration level construct contributes a measure of complexity and would require the modeling of multiple utility curves and a persuasive theory of value trade-offs. Even then, the methodological issues discussed in Chapter 2 (and below), would limit the applicability of these models in the domain of foreign policy decision making.

A final significant contribution of this research is that it demonstrates (as does my previous work, see Boettcher 1995) that attempts to rigorously and reliably develop quantitative measures of subjective utility and probability estimates in the “real world” are potentially futile, and further, are not necessary for the successful development and testing of process-oriented models of risk behavior. The data presented in the case studies reveals that numerical representations of utility and probability seldom entered into the decision making process. At best, we can use the qualitative data available to develop

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3I am, however, convinced that rigorous non-quantitative measurement of these concepts is possible and useful in research evaluating other hypotheses.
ordinal rankings of utility and probability, but we cannot then attempt to enter those rankings into any sort of mathematical expected utility calculation.

Beyond these negative conclusions, this research suggests that "qualitative process validation" (see Guetzkow and Valadez 1981; Hermann 1967) provides an appropriate criterion for evaluating models of presidential risk behavior. Since the context of the domain prevents us from competitively testing mathematical models of decision making, we must take a closer look and tease out what these models have to say about the process of decision making. Rather than exclusively focus on the ability of different models to produce accurate outcome predictions, this project shows that we may successfully evaluate models based on their ability to explain the "nuts and bolts" of decision making: the role of personality, situation, uncertainty, and time pressure.

III. A Comparison of the Truman and Kennedy Case Studies

By evaluating the REF hypotheses through six case studies across two presidential administrations, I was able to observe commonalities and differences in the manner in which each president approached risky decisions. In particular, I noticed differences in their advisory structures, roles in the decision making process, approach to uncertainty, and faith in the efficacy of U.S. initiatives. I noticed commonalities in their sensitivity to time as an element of the decision process, in the generic structures of their aspiration levels, and in their responses to the perception of high uncertainty and low time pressure.
The observed differences in advisory structures and roles in the decision making process are clearly interrelated. President Truman's advisory structure leans toward what Richard Tanner Johnson has described as the "formalistic approach" (1974:233). In its ideal form, the formalistic structure discourages adviser conflicts by delineating jurisdictional boundaries, encourages "optimal" decision making through thorough analysis, and "conserves the decision maker's time and attention for the big decisions" (Johnson 1974:238). Thus, President Truman was reluctant to intervene in the early stages of the decision process. He was seldom involved in the development of alternatives and estimates of the success of those alternatives. And he often relied on his Secretaries of State (Byrnes, Marshall, and Acheson) to filter incoming information and develop the "best" solution to the problem at hand.

On the other hand, President Kennedy's advisory structure serves as the inspiration for Johnson's "collegial approach" (1974:236). Kennedy was often "immersed... in the information process and derived satisfaction from reaching down and shaping the options- not just selecting from among those presented" (Johnson 1974:236, emphasis in original). This approach stresses teamwork and cooperation and focuses on both "optimality and doability" (Johnson 1974:238). In the cases examined, Kennedy was particularly committed to scrutinizing every alternative. He examined raw intelligence estimates and conflicting policy papers and often questioned his advisers' assumptions and conclusions.

While each advisory structure is associated with a number of benefits, Johnson also discusses the costs that may result from following these approaches (1974:238).
Truman’s formalistic approach tended to “respond slowly or inappropriately in crisis” situations and Kennedy’s collegial approach placed “substantial demands” on his “time and attention” (Johnson 1974:238). In the Korea case, Truman placed great faith in Acheson’s advice and failed to fully explore other interpretations of the situation and develop alternatives to the military intervention option. Similarly, in the Greece case, Truman accepted the judgment of Secretary Marshall and failed to consider alternatives to the Greek aid package. The formalistic approach was more efficient in the later stages of the Greece case, when time pressures were less acute and Truman’s military advisers were given time to develop policy alternatives. For Kennedy, the collegial approach often led to confusion and inaction. In the Laos case, Kennedy received different advice from each of his military service chiefs as well as his civilian advisers. In the Congo and Vietnam cases, Kennedy became the center of conflict as teamwork broke down and policy entrepreneurs favored parochial perspectives.

The impact of advisory structures on presidential risk behavior is more evident when we consider the manner in which these structures suppressed or accentuated the presidents’ personality predispositions. Truman’s relatively formalistic approach appears to have acted as a constraint on his personal predisposition to take risks. Since the President was seldom involved in the development of options, his personal predispositions played less of a role. This point emerges when we consider the Greece case and the Korea case. In the Greece case, the State Department developed the Greek aid plan and presented it to the President for his decision. Truman had no opportunity to develop more or less risky alternatives. Conversely, in the Korea case, Truman’s advisory
structure was more *ad hoc-* more reflective of the collegial approach. Thus, Truman played a much greater personal role in the decision process and was only constrained by his State Department advisers early in the week. For Kennedy, by making him the central figure in the decision making process, the collegial advisory structure accentuated his personality predispositions. The President's pragmatism and emphasis on "doability" often led to overanalysis and indecision. Kennedy's predisposition to identify and avoid risks was facilitated by his access to information and alternative policy analyses.

I observed two other differences in the manner in which each president confronted risky decisions- their approach to uncertainty and faith in the efficacy of U.S. initiatives. Truman and Kennedy were both highly sensitive to uncertainty and inaccurate information in the decision process, but Truman was much more willing to accept the judgments of his advisers and revise his perceptions. For Truman, uncertainty about Soviet intentions was cleared up by advice from State Department officials in Moscow (in the Korea case), by direct "evidence" of Soviet behavior (in the Iran case), or by "objective" observations by outside analysts (in the Greek case). Kennedy was much more skeptical of incoming information and required more evidence before he would reach a conclusion. In the Laos and Vietnam cases, Kennedy was reluctant to accept his

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4 We may consider a number of explanations for the observed difference in advisory structure. First, personal predispositions may lead to more or less involvement in the decision process. Presidents more inclined to take risks may also be more willing to trust their subordinates. Second, we must consider the size of the White House staff. Truman's staff was relatively small, leaving the President to rely on the State Department, CIA, and military services for information and policy analysis. Kennedy's White House staff was much larger, and much more involved in the foreign policy decision making process. Finally, Truman often exhibited deference to the "strong-minded subordinates" in his administration (Johnson 1974:234) and the conduct of World War II had contributed to the political strength of the State Department and military institutions. Recall that Byrnes was a prominent member of the Democratic Party and Marshall was one of America's most visible war heroes.
advisers' judgments regarding the possibility of Chinese intervention despite supportive reports from the CIA and JCS. In the Congo and Vietnam cases, Kennedy perceived lingering uncertainty even after the Truman and Taylor military survey missions. Indeed, in the Vietnam case, three special missions and two special task forces could not reduce Kennedy's perception of high uncertainty.

In terms of the presidents' faith in the efficacy of U.S. initiatives, Truman was much more convinced of the American ability to obtain positive outcomes. Flushed with perceptions of strength in the aftermath of the victory over Germany and Japan, President Truman placed a great deal of trust in the abilities of the diplomatic and military services. Thus, he seldom questioned the chances for success of the alternatives placed before him. For a country that had saved Western Europe and the Pacific Rim from the Axis Powers, communist insurgents in Iran, Greece, and Korea appeared to be minor obstacles. While the Soviet Union was clearly perceived to be a substantial threat, President Truman appeared to be more concerned with winning Congressional and public approval of his foreign policy. President Kennedy was much less sanguine regarding the efficacy of U.S. diplomatic and military instruments of power. China (particularly after the U.S. experience in Korea) loomed as a strong and experienced adversary in Southeast Asia, and the Soviets possessed the resources to influence events in the Congo. Clearly, the Bay of Pigs fiasco also contributed to Kennedy's discounting of the assessments provided by the CIA and JCS. Finally, the disappointment with the Geneva conference regarding Laos called into question the efficacy of diplomatic initiatives.
Despite the differences between the administrations discussed above, I was able to discern a number of commonalities: their sensitivity to time as an element of the decision process, the generic structures of their aspiration levels, and their responses to the perception of high uncertainty and low time pressure. Both presidents perceived time pressure as an important factor in the decision process. Indeed, the presence of acute time pressure was almost a requirement before a final decision was made in these cases. This suggests that both presidents were generally reactive in formulating their foreign policy. In almost every case, events on the ground in the region dictated the pace of administration activity: Soviet troop movements contributed to the Iran “crisis” in March of 1946, the DPRK invasion of South Korea forced President Truman’s return to Washington on June 25, 1950, the fall of Muong Sai forced the consideration of intervention in Laos in May of 1961, and the Viet Cong offensive in the fall of 1961 led to Kennedy’s November decisions. In the Greece and Congo cases, the withdrawal of external aid contributed to the perception that time was of the essence: Truman and his advisers were forced to react to the British Aide-Memoire of February 21 and Kennedy feared the pending withdrawal of U.N. peacekeepers in early 1963. Given the multiple problems that they were dealing with at any given time, Truman and Kennedy often avoided policy decisions that were not immediately required. Their personal influence on U.S. policy was thus most apparent during “crisis” situations.

Another interesting commonality that emerged from these case studies was the shared generic structure of the presidents’ aspiration levels. In general, the presidents’ aspiration levels focused on the potential response of the adversary, the worthiness of the
ally, the potential response of other allies, the possibility of U.S. overcommitment, the
desire to demonstrate resolve and the credibility of U.S. commitments, “domino” fears,
and the desire to generate positive Congressional and public opinion. To the extent that
these commonalities exist, we may consider whether a common “Cold War in the
periphery” structure of beliefs was shared by Truman and Kennedy. We may also
consider whether a “generic intervention” aspiration level might be found in other cases
outside of the Cold War context. It may be that the imperatives discussed above are basic
interests that all U.S. presidents perceive in similar situations (see discussion below).\(^5\)

A final commonality that emerged from these case studies is the presidents’
responses to the perception of high uncertainty and low time pressure. Generally, when
faced with perceptions of high uncertainty and low time pressure, the presidents would
delay their decisions and search for new information. More interestingly, this search for
new information often took the form of a special mission to the region. Truman and
Kennedy frequently sought the advice of an “objective” outside observer to evaluate the
seriousness of the situation— as usually communicated by State Department officials. The
leaders of the missions were often military officers (although they did not always favor
the intervention alternatives). These missions included: Major General Chamberlin’s trip
to Greece, General MacArthur’s trip to Korea, General Taylor’s trip to South Vietnam,
and Lieutenant General Truman’s trip to the Congo. There were also non-military

\(^5\)In my future research, I also intend to consider alternative ways in which aspiration levels can be
organized. In my case studies I focused on immediate goals, constraints on means, and factors reinforcing
the president’s commitment to achieving or surpassing his aspiration level. We might also view the
aspiration level as a hierarchy of primary and subsidiary goals, which would begin to address the question
of the relative importance of the various elements.
missions that involved sending a trusted adviser to the region (like sending George McGhee to the Congo). In three of the four cases where a military mission was sent to the region, the reports of those advisers played a significant role in the president’s final decision. The reports of these detached “objective” observers were used to validate the information obtained from those directly involved in the situation. Unfortunately, these trips were often of short duration and did little to probe beneath the surface.

The commonalities and differences discussed above are summarized in figures 5.1 and 5.2. Together they suggest a number of avenues for future research. In particular, several of the commonalities and differences reveal important “control variables” that should be included in future research on presidential risk behavior. The common presidential response to acute time pressure implies that “crisis” decisions will be particularly fruitful areas of study for those scholars interested in examining the link between presidential personality and risk behavior. As issue salience and presidential involvement increase and the decision period constricts, we should expect to observe a greater impact of presidential personality on the decision process. And yet, the differences regarding advisory structure and role in the decision making process suggest factors that might mitigate the role of personality predispositions.

Based on the above discussion, we may posit that the formalistic structure suppresses the effect of presidential personality while the collegial approach allows the president, as an individual, to have a greater impact on policy. Going beyond these two advisory structures, Johnson’s third approach- competitive- is the advisory network where we may expect to see the greatest impact of presidential personality. The
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Response to acute time pressure</th>
<th>External events contribute to perception of acute time pressure</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Perception of acute time pressure: increases issue salience, increases presidential involvement in the decision making process, restricts length of decision period</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Generic structure of aspiration level</strong></td>
<td><strong>Aspiration level focused on: potential response of adversary, worthiness of ally, potential response of other allies, possibility of U.S. overcommitment, desire to demonstrate resolve and credibility of U.S. commitments, “domino” fears, desire to generate positive Congressional and public opinion</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Response to perception of high uncertainty and low time pressure</strong></td>
<td>Search for new information through “special missions” to region led by “objective” outside observers (military officers or trusted presidential advisers)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Figure 5.1:** Observed Commonalties in Approach to Risky Decisions by Truman and Kennedy
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Advisory structure</th>
<th>Truman</th>
<th>Kennedy</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Role in decision making</td>
<td>Deferred to advisers the responsibility of developing alternatives and estimating chances of success/failure</td>
<td>Actively involved in shaping options and estimating their chances of success/failure</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>process</td>
<td>Reserved energy for “big” decisions</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Approach to uncertainty</td>
<td>Willing to update perceptions upon receipt of new information from field or revised analyses by advisers</td>
<td>Skeptical of incoming information</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Faith in efficacy of U.S.</td>
<td>Convinced of efficacy of U.S. diplomatic and military instruments</td>
<td>Skeptical of efficacy of U.S. diplomatic and military instruments</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>initiatives</td>
<td>Success during World War II indicative of American ingenuity and will</td>
<td>Soviets and Chinese viewed as experienced and resourceful adversaries capable of thwarting U.S. initiatives</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Figure 5.2: Observed Differences in Approach to Risky Decisions by Truman and Kennedy
competitive approach allows overlapping jurisdictional boundaries. promotes competition among advisers, and places the president at the center of the decision making process (Johnson 1974:5-6). This structure places great demands on the president's time and attention and has only been followed by Roosevelt (of the modern presidents Johnson studies).

Thus, future studies might include advisory structure/role in the decision making process and perception of time pressure as important variables mitigating or accentuating the impact of presidential personality on risk behavior. Studies could take place in the laboratory in a group setting- manipulating individual status and information flows (capturing the impact of advisory structure) or limiting decision time and increasing the pace of external events (capturing the effect of time pressure)- or through case studies in the "real world"- examining "crisis" decisions by presidential administrations following each of the three advisory structures. Clearly the inclusion of these variables would "complexify" any research design, but we should not be overly concerned with parsimony when the process that we seek to model is, in itself, incredibly complex.

Of the remaining results presented in figures 5.1 and 5.2, the observations regarding the commonality in the generic structure of the presidents' aspiration levels and the differences in the presidents' faith in the efficacy of U.S. initiatives are most relevant to the study of risk behavior. As noted in Chapter 2, the notion of an "aspiration level" is probably the single most important contribution to the study of risk behavior by the literature dealing with reference dependence, but this literature provides little guidance to researchers attempting to empirically identify decision maker aspiration levels outside of
the laboratory setting (see Kahneman and Tversky 1979; Levy 1995). Beyond the question of simply identifying a president's aspiration level, we might also consider how aspiration levels are generated. The observations that suggest a commonality in the generic structure of the Truman and Kennedy aspiration levels may shed light on these questions. If this "generic intervention" aspiration level is found in other cases from other presidential administrations, we could construct a typology of basic interests that presidents consider in similar situations. This typology would guide our search for empirical evidence of a particular president's aspiration level in a particular case. It would also aid researchers interested in exploring the factors contributing to the president's aspirations regarding these various dimensions. Of course, this research must take care to insure that value dimensions that are not part of a generic aspiration level structure are not ignored.

The president's faith in the efficacy of U.S. initiatives might also have a consistent impact on risk behavior, tempering or accentuating the effect of the president's personality. A president that is less confident in the efficacy of U.S. diplomatic and military instruments might also be less likely to take the risks associated with employing those instruments. Conversely, a president convinced of the efficacy of these instruments might be more likely to take the risks associated with their use. Thus, confidence might temper a president's risk-averse predisposition or accentuate a president's risk-taking predisposition. Of course, personal predispositions might also contribute to confidence or

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6In particular, we might examine more recent administrations (Bush, Clinton) in order to include post-Cold War intervention decisions.
the lack thereof, so the researcher would have to be very cautious in specifying the
direction of the relationship. Researchers interested in this subject might engage in "real
world" case studies in order to investigate whether these relationships are consistent
across cases and personality types.

The final observation that suggests the need for further research is the
commonality in the presidents' responses to the perception of high uncertainty and low
time pressure. This result encourages research on the methods presidents use to secure
information in order to reduce uncertainty. The use of a "special mission" implies a
distrust in the information currently being provided. In the cases where military officers
led these missions, the implication is that "specialists" are more reliable than foreign
service officers or CIA field operatives. The missions that were led by trusted presidential
advisers suggest that directed information search is also effective. Presumably these
advisers were aware of the questions troubling the president, they could therefore collect
information of greater significance to the decision process.\footnote{When President Kennedy initially considered sending General Taylor to Vietnam, Taylor resisted. The General wanted to wait until he had "some idea, some agreement, as to the general direction of our policy", otherwise "it would be a mistake for any mission to go out" (Taylor 1964:20).} This "special mission"
strategy for dealing with uncertainty may be subsumed under Vertzberger's notion of
"person-based validation" (1995b:353). This type of information validation strategy
places less emphasis on "how knowledge is generated" and greater emphasis on "who is
disseminating it" (Vertzberger 1995b:353, emphasis in original).\footnote{Vertzberger also discusses epistemic-based, belief-based, and situation-based validation (1995b:353).} Future research might
investigate which information validation strategies are more likely to be used in different decision contexts.

IV. Potential Explanations for Negative Results

As noted in Chapters 3 and 4, the REF hypotheses were not supported in certain cases/decision periods. Figure 5.3 summarizes the hypotheses while figures 5.4 and 5.5 recap the results for the Truman and Kennedy case studies (with the negative results underlined and in boldface). Overall, my "Risk Explanation Framework" performs rather poorly in the Iran case and in the later decision periods of the Greek case. It is not my intention here to defend the REF against the evidence, but rather to discuss certain factors that contributed to the negative results obtained.

During the decision periods mentioned above, it was difficult to find direct evidence of President Truman's decision making. There is almost no evidence of President Truman's "on-line" processing of information. Thus, I was forced to rely on indirect evidence that may not fully reflect Truman's perceptions. The evaluation of REF hypothesis 3 - potential-motivated presidents tend to engage in "top-down" processing - (i.e. focusing on best-case outcomes and maximum gains) - is particularly hampered by this lack of data. I cannot claim that President Truman engaged in "best-case" processing because his advisers produced policy papers that included balanced analyses of potential costs as well as benefits. It is possible that Truman ignored the discussions of potential costs and "worst-cases", but there is no evidence to support or oppose this conclusion.
H1: Presidents tend to evaluate outcomes relative to an aspiration level rather than an overall value level.

H1a: The president's aspiration level (acting as a situational constraint) is likely to preclude the consideration of options that are viewed as incapable of achieving (or surpassing) the aspiration level in a particular case.

H2: Security-motivated presidents tend to engage in “bottom-up” processing—(i.e. focusing on worst-case outcomes and maximum losses).

H3: Potential-motivated presidents tend to engage in “top-down” processing—(i.e. focusing on best-case outcomes and maximum gains).

H4: Security-motivated presidents are likely to behave in a risk-averse manner.

H5: Potential-motivated presidents are likely to behave in a risk-acceptant manner.

H6: If there is only one alternative capable of achieving the aspiration level, that alternative is likely to be selected regardless of its level of risk.

H7: Presidential perceptions of high uncertainty and a lack of valid information will interact with presidential risk predispositions and affect the output of the decision process.

H7a: If time pressures are not acute, both risk-averse and risk-acceptant presidents are likely to delay the moment of decision. (The rationale is that the presidents will use this added time to reduce uncertainty and collect more valid information.)

H7b: If time pressures are acute, risk-averse presidents are likely to engage in incrementalism.

H7c: If time pressures are acute, risk-acceptant presidents are likely to engage in bolstering.

Figure 5.3: Summary of REF Hypotheses
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Decision Period</th>
<th>Iran</th>
<th>Greece</th>
<th>Korea</th>
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### Hypotheses

<table>
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<td>M</td>
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<tr>
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<td>NA</td>
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<td>A</td>
<td>NA</td>
<td>A</td>
<td>NA</td>
<td>NA</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Key: S=strong, M=moderate, W=weak. A=evidence runs against hypothesis, NA=hypothesis not applicable

Figure 5.4: Degree of Support for REF Hypotheses Across Truman Cases and Decision Periods
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Decision Period</th>
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<th>Vietnam</th>
<th>Congo</th>
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<tr>
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<tr>
<td>7b</td>
<td>S</td>
<td>NA</td>
<td>S</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

- March 9-April 1 1961
- April 26-May 3 1961
- October 5-11 1961
- November 3-15 1961
- July-October 1962
- December 1962

Key: S=strong, M=moderate, W=weak, A=evidence runs against hypothesis, NA=hypothesis not applicable

Figure 5.5: Degree of Support for REF Hypotheses Across Kennedy Cases and Decision Periods
Unfortunately, when faced with a dearth of evidence, I was often forced to judge the plausibility of the REF hypotheses in a negative manner.

These negative findings may also be the result of violations of the case selection criteria discussed in Chapter 1. In the second decision period regarding Iran and the second decision period regarding Greece, President Truman was clearly less involved in the decision making process than I would have liked. These decisions did not achieve “crisis” stature and the President did not engage in extensive policy deliberations. In these decision periods the President was less of an active player in the policy process, simply approving the alternatives recommended by his advisers. M. Hermann has noted that a leader’s personality is more likely to have an impact “when the situation the nation faces is a crisis and likely to involve high-level officials; and when the situation is ambiguous and demands definition” (1984:53). Unfortunately, neither of these criteria were met in these decision periods.

V. A Revised “Risk Explanation Framework” and a Research Agenda for the Future

Clearly, figures 5.4 and 5.5 indicate that the weakest results were obtained for the REF hypotheses dealing with the presidents’ processing of information. While I found some direct and indirect evidence of a concern with “worst-case” outcomes and maximum losses in the Kennedy administration, I found little evidence of a concern with “best-case” outcomes and maximum gains in the Truman cases (with the exception of the Korea case). As noted above, this may be partially explained by the lack of evidence for
the Iran and Greece cases. I feel, however, that this is also the result of applying Lopes' expectations regarding individual behavior to what is, in part, a group decision.

In Chapter 2 I indicated my rationale for treating these six cases as individual decisions, I am now less willing to accept the treatment of the inputs to the decision process as exogenous information. Particularly with respect to this hypothesis, the president's advisory structure clearly mitigates the impact of his personality. In the Iran and Greece cases, President Truman may have wanted to ignore the potential costs of the options under consideration, but his advisers would not allow it. In the Greece case, the President's military advisers made sure that Truman received analyses that countered those of Ambassador MacVeagh and Governor Griswold. Given these observations, I feel that I can no longer avoid the extensive effort of translating an individual model of risk behavior into a model that takes some account of group dynamics. Thus, I intend to explore the literature on group risk behavior further in order to at least identify the circumstances when an individual model of risk behavior is more or less appropriate.

One other REF hypothesis consistently performed poorly in the Truman cases. Hypothesis 7c- if time pressures are acute, risk-acceptant presidents are likely to engage in bolstering- clearly understates the effect of uncertainty on the decision maker. Contrary to this hypothesis, President Truman engaged in delay and incrementalism in the two decision periods of the Iran case and in incrementalism during the second decision period of the Greece case. I believe that these results are due to the fact that the high uncertainty perceived during these decision periods was focused on a central element of the President's aspiration level- the fear of a Soviet response to U.S.
initiatives. Uncertainty regarding an issue of such centrality could not be ignored. Thus, President Truman did not engage in bolstering.

The above discussion (and the discussion in section III) leads to three major potential revisions of the REF: the identification of more specific conditions regarding applicability, the expansion of the model to include a limited number of small-group process variables, and the development of a more nuanced understanding of the impacts of uncertainty and time pressure. I discuss these three areas of revision below, suggesting future research modes for pursuing empirical tests of the revised model.

I remain reluctant to limit my research to the study of “crisis” decision making, yet I still feel that a high level of presidential involvement is a necessary condition for the successful performance of the REF. As suggested above, if we can only assure these levels of involvement through the study of crises, then we may have to follow that path.9 We should also attempt to identify specific issue areas that are highly salient to the President under study (see Hermann 1984:77). In this project I assumed that decisions regarding potential military intervention would be highly salient to U.S. presidents, and yet that assumption appears to be questionable in at least two decision periods. Finally, we might also consider whether particular geographic regions are less important in a president’s mind. Of the cases examined, the Congo and Iran appeared to be areas that generated somewhat less presidential interest and involvement.

9It is important to note here that I have reached this conclusion through the study of both crisis and non-crisis decisions.
In my effort to include a limited number of small-group process variables in the REF, I am mainly interested in exploring processes that are treated as exogenous in the current model. As noted in section 2 (see above), the most interesting question facing researchers studying reference dependence is: how are aspiration levels constructed by the decision maker? The Kennedy and Truman case studies suggest that the president’s aspiration level is the product of the president’s own views altered (or combined) by (or with) the views of his advisers. Given the importance of the president’s aspiration level to the overall decision process, advisers may compete to influence the president’s interpretation of the situation (see McDermott 1992). I am currently developing a study of Truman’s Korea decision that focuses on the role of advisers in shaping the President’s aspiration level. I intend to concentrate exclusively on the development of the President’s aspiration level, attempting to identify the point at which each element entered the decision process. I am interested in whether the aspiration level that emerged was the product of a consensus among decision makers, of conflict among decision makers, or of some more basic process. In this dissertation I simply attempted to identify the presidents’ aspiration levels. In my future work I plan to examine the process that led to a particular aspiration level, and further, to suggest a more generic model of aspiration level formation.

I am also interested in the process by which the inputs to the decision process are formed (a second process that was treated as exogenous in the current model). In the Kennedy cases, the President played a significant role in interpreting raw intelligence, developing alternatives, and estimating potential costs and benefits. Conversely, Truman
played the role of a consumer of information developed by his advisers. Since the effects of reference dependence are often contingent on the manner in which alternatives are constructed, any revision of the REF should explore the role of the advisory group in shaping alternatives and developing estimates of success or failure. I can tentatively suggest that: given less consensus between the president and his advisers, we should expect to observe less of an impact of the president's personality on the shaping of alternatives and the developments of estimates of success or failure. Conversely, given a greater degree of consensus between the president and his advisers, we should expect to observe more of an impact of the president's personality on the shaping of alternatives and the development of estimates of success or failure. Of course, this issue extends beyond the scope of this project. I can only say that I intend to explore this subject through both case studies and laboratory experimentation.

In terms of revising REF hypothesis 7c- if time pressures are acute, risk-acceptant presidents are likely to engage in bolstering- I feel that we must consider the circumstances in which bolstering or incrementalism should be expected. Based on the Truman case studies, we should expect to observe incrementalism when the president perceives high uncertainty regarding one or more elements of the aspiration level. Since the elements of the aspiration level are accorded special status in the decision process, it is unlikely that a president would select an alternative that may seriously endanger the achievement of their objectives. Even in the Korea case, President Truman acted somewhat cautiously until the end of the week when he was more confident of Soviet intentions. I remain confident that bolstering will occur when the president perceives high
uncertainty that is not directly related to one or more elements of his aspiration level. This discussion suggests a greater sensitivity to the specific character of perceived uncertainty.

Beyond the potential revisions to the REF discussed above, I also envision future experimental research in order to provide empirical validation for my risk predisposition index. This research could investigate whether the effects attributed to presidential personality are due to an overall predisposition towards risk (as I suggest in Chapter 2) or to individual personality characteristics (like belief in ability to control events or conceptual complexity taken alone). I plan to use Kowert and Hermann’s (1995) reformulation of the Kogan and Wallach (1964) social choice dilemma questionnaire to examine this question. Subject responses to the social choice dilemma questionnaire can provide information regarding individual risk orientation which can then be correlated with measures of the individual personality characteristics and the risk predisposition index. This research could provide a much more refined understanding of the relationship between individual personality and risk behavior.

Despite the negative results and potential REF revisions discussed above, I remain optimistic about the utility of this research. The REF hypotheses performed well in the Kennedy cases, and the hypotheses regarding the presidents’ aspiration levels performed consistently well across both administrations. I am particularly encouraged by the results for REF hypotheses 1 and 1a. Overall, Truman and Kennedy did 

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*I am indebted to M. Hermann for suggesting this avenue of research.*
evaluate outcomes relative to an aspiration level rather than an overall value level” and options were tabled that were “viewed as incapable of achieving (or surpassing) the aspiration level in a particular case”. The strong empirical support for these hypotheses demonstrates the relevance of the notion of reference dependence to the study of foreign policy decision making. Hypotheses 6- if there is only one alternative capable of achieving the aspiration level, that alternative is likely to be selected regardless of its level of risk- and 7a- if time pressures are not acute, both risk-averse and risk-acceptant presidents are likely to delay the moment of decision- also received empirical support when they were applicable. Indeed, I found no evidence against these hypotheses in any case/decision period.

I should also point out that, out of fifty-three opportunities to test the plausibility of the REF hypotheses in these cases, I found strong support for the hypotheses thirty times, moderate support ten times, and weak support five times. I only found evidence against the hypotheses eight times. Given the overall success of the empirical evaluation, I feel that by pursuing the additional research discussed above I may someday develop a more comprehensive theory of presidential foreign policy risk behavior. As I pointed out in Chapter 2, this research program can only advance through rigorous empirical studies—both in the laboratory and in the “real” world.

VI. General Observations

Beyond the study of risk behavior, the six case studies from the Truman and Kennedy administrations produced a number of observations that are relevant to the study
of foreign policy decision making. I learned a great deal about the manner in which personal relationships between a president and his advisers affect the foreign policy decision making process. I observed the use of historical "lessons" in the development and analysis of alternatives. I found evidence suggesting that "where you stand" does, at times, "depend upon where you sit". And finally, I found that public opinion often acts as an anticipatory constraint during the decision process.

The president's personal relationship with an adviser often influenced his judgment of the validity of the information and advice offered by that adviser. President Truman was personally deferential to Secretaries Marshall and Acheson, trusting them to shape alternatives and often following their advice in private meetings. Conversely, Truman's relationship with Secretary Byrnes was somewhat strained after the Moscow conference at the end of 1945- he was therefore less inclined to accept Byrnes' view of Soviet intentions during January and February of 1946. Likewise, Truman's disdain for Louis Johnson in June of 1950 reduced the Defense Secretary's role in the Korea decision. During Kennedy's administration, the President's trusted advisers shifted after policy failures or successes. Thus, Harriman and particularly Bowles suffered declining influence after the failure of the Geneva Conference on Laos, while Taylor and Lansdale emerged as the President's favorite advisers regarding Southeast Asia. Rostow also lost influence over time as his hawkish (and sometimes odd) proposals no longer curried the President's favor. (Rostow may also have suffered from his eagerness and persistence which at times irritated Kennedy.) Meanwhile, Kennedy's respect for Senator Mike Mansfield insured that his "dovish" concerns would be on Kennedy's mind during the
Laos and Vietnam cases. Clearly, an adviser's access to the president and impact on the foreign policy making process was at least partially dependent on his personal relationship with the president.

Both Truman and Kennedy used "lessons" of history during crucial moments in the six cases. For Truman, the Munich analogy revealed the potential negative consequences of appeasing the Soviets (see Khong 1992). He also used Iran as a lesson during the Greece and Korea cases, suggesting that the communists would back down in the face of U.S. resolve. For Kennedy, Truman's decisions regarding Greece acted as a potential guide for policy in Vietnam. He also "learned" from the Bay of Pigs fiasco that he could not be confident of the estimates provided by the CIA or JCS. The presidents engaged in "selective learning" in these instances—drawing conclusions based on rough similarities without rigorously exploring the comparability of the cases. The use of historical analogies in these cases provides further evidence for researchers who believe "that foreign policymakers often use analogies badly" (Khong 1992:15). Further research in this area might attempt to discern why these particular analogies were chosen over others and the extent to which the construction of aspiration levels is aided by analogical reasoning (see Taliaferro 1994).

The impact of "bureaucratic politics" was most obvious in the process of generating and evaluating alternatives. The military services could be trusted to push

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11 A significant exception to this generalization is found in the Laos case. A memorandum from Mike Mansfield to President Kennedy discussed a popular historical lesson in use by the proponents of intervention (Lebanon). Mansfield engaged in a point by point comparison between the cases, arguing that they were "greatly different" (Mansfield to Kennedy 1 May 1961:2).
options that served their institutional interests (which often resulted in support for non-intervention alternatives) and State Department officials could be trusted to emphasize the importance of their regions of specialization. During the Truman cases, the military consistently pushed rearmament and partial mobilization to offset the budget cutting of 1946. In the Kennedy cases, the military tended to favor limited intervention through military advisory groups and massive weapons transfers. State Department officials in the countries under threat tended to compose telegrams stressing the seriousness and urgency of events, while desk officers in Washington (like Loy Henderson and John Foster Dulles) encouraged greater attention to particular regions. The most glaring example of the “where you stand, depends on where you sit” phenomenon comes from the Korea case. The State Department officials that were on hand when the first reports came in from Ambassador Muccio just happened to include the Director for UN Affairs, the former Director for UN Affairs, and a “world-renowned specialist in international law” (see Paige 1968:284). This bit of serendipity seems to explain why Secretary Acheson advised the President that the situation should be brought before the U.N. on Sunday, June 25.

I also observed the effect of public opinion on the presidents’ decision making in these cases. While public opinion did not appear to have a direct effect, it did seem to act as an anticipatory constraint- often forming one element of the president’s aspiration level (see Kusnitz 1984; Nincic 1992 for discussions of public opinion as an “anticipatory
constraint"). In the Iran and Greece cases, Truman feared that a growing isolationist segment of the public would oppose a more interventionist foreign policy. Indeed, the comprehensive public information campaign (detailed in Jones 1955) that was launched after the President's speech on March 12, 1947, was a direct attempt to make the aid bill more palatable to the American people. In the Korea case, Truman feared a negative public response if he did not intervene, mainly based on the public reaction to the loss of China and the growing “red scare”. Kennedy was also concerned with public opinion- on the one hand because of his fear of perceived weakness after the Bay of Pigs, on the other due to his fear of a negative reaction to U.S. troop deployments. In each of these cases, the president's anticipation of a negative public response constrained the menu of alternatives available to him.

VII. Implications

Given the scope conditions discussed in Chapter 2, the results of this research can only be viewed as suggestive rather than generalizable. I simply hoped to demonstrate that it is possible to at least partially explain presidential risk behavior through the use of the “Risk Explanation Framework”. With these caveats in mind, I feel that I can now claim to have successfully accomplished this task. While the case studies produced certain negative results discussed above, the strength of support for the REF hypotheses 12Douglas Foyle provides an excellent overview of the literature on the link between public opinion and foreign policy (1997:142-145). In these cases, Truman and Kennedy appear to have followed Foyle's “pragmatist” belief orientation: public opinion should not serve as an input to the decision process, but public support is necessary for a successful foreign policy (1997:145). Thus, public opinion constrained, but did not directly influence, the choice between alternatives.
in a number of the cases contributes to my optimism regarding the future of this research program. The attempt to meld the literatures on reference dependence, personality predispositions, and uncertainty and information accuracy is in its early stages. This research agenda can only advance through fits and starts, successes and failures. The case studies presented in this dissertation provide a firm empirical foundation on which to build revisions of the proposed model. It is hoped that future research in the laboratory and “real” world will contribute to a context-sensitive theory of presidential risk behavior based on the refined REF discussed above. This study has shown that aspiration levels matter, that personal predispositions have an impact, and that presidential perceptions of uncertainty and time pressure can moderate or accentuate risk behavior. We may now begin to investigate the specific contextual conditions that interact with these factors to produce risk-averse or risk-acceptant decisions.
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