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OF CONVENTIONAL AND NUCLEAR WAR

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This thesis attempts to contribute to the debate of why states go to war and what calculations dominate a state’s decision making process as it relates to war. This paper attempts to explain this by an examination of the relationship between the weapon environment of a prospective war and the decision calculus of states. To do this, this thesis draws on literature concerning deterrence and prospect theory as well as the broader international relations theoretical debate over state preferences. The thesis offers two heuristic case studies of the Cuban missile crisis and the Persian Gulf war to explore the potential conditional relationship that exists between the broad category of weapon types (conventional or nuclear) and state preferences (relative versus absolute gains calculations). Through these case studies this thesis suggests that the weapon system that defines the strategic environment is the main factor impacting whether a state will base its calculations to go to war in terms of relative or absolute calculations.
For my Mom
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INTRODUCTION

There has long been a debate about why states go to war. This thesis attempts to contribute to that debate with a narrow examination of the relationship between the weapon environment of a prospective war and the decision calculus of states. To do this, the thesis draws on literature concerning deterrence and prospect theory as well as the broader international relations theoretical debate over state preferences. The thesis offers two heuristic case studies that explore the potential conditional relationship that exists between the broad category of weapon types (conventional or nuclear) and state preferences (relative versus absolute gains calculations). Specifically, the thesis attempts to show that relative calculations tend to dominate state decision-making as it relates to war, except at the point of making the final decision to go to war in a nuclear strategic environment. Here, absolute calculations dominate.

If this hypothesis holds, it offers a foundation for further analysis that is both theoretically-oriented and policy relevant. In the confines of this MA thesis, however, I do not offer such an extrapolation. The first section of the thesis provides a brief introduction to the relative gains debate in international relations theory. I then turn to discussions on prospect theory and deterrence theory in order to produce some generalized hypotheses to guide two small case studies. The Cuban missile crisis and the Persian Gulf War provide a basis to examine how different weapon types alter states preferences in the decision making process of whether a state will escalate a crisis to war or will choose options to divert a war. Through these case
studies this thesis suggests that the weapon system that defines the strategic environment is the main factor impacting whether a state will base its calculations to go to war in terms of relative or absolute calculations. Bringing together a diverse set of arguments from prospect theory and deterrence theory the case studies indicate that states focus primarily on relative calculations in their decision making process leading to war. In a potential conventional war crisis, these relative calculations dominate decision makers through the full spectrum of the decision making process. From the initial crisis to the decision to go to war, relative gains are at the forefront of the decision making process due to the contestability of conventional weapons. On the other hand, while relative gains may be the focus of states operating in the nuclear realm as well, the focus does not continue through the entire spectrum of the decision making process to include the final decision to go to war. At that particular decision point, relative gains become secondary as absolute calculations dominate a state’s decision making process.

INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS THEORY

Within the general debate between structural realists and neo-liberal institutionalists in international relations theory, the issue of what dominates states’ preferences in decision making processes became a major issue during the 1990s. The discussion revolves around states preferences towards gains and how these preferences in gains impact the decision making process. Neoliberal institutionalists assume states focus primarily on their individual absolute gains and are indifferent to the gains of others. Structural realism assumes states are largely concerned with relative rather than absolute gains and thus posit that decisions to cooperate are more difficult. Although neorealists and neoliberals agree relative gains play a role in states’ foreign policy decisions, they disagree, however, over what dominates states’ preferences in the decision making process. Neoliberals assume states focus primarily on their individual absolute gains. They have argued similarly that while relative gains can be important, they are important insofar as they can

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1 For relative/absolute gain debate see Powell, Grieco, Snidal, Werner, Mathews, Keohane, Jervis, and Waltz.
aid a state to obtain a greater absolute payoff. It is when a state places absolute gains as a more important concern, relative gains issue becomes secondary in that they alter absolute payoffs. Whether cooperation between states results in a relative gain or loss is not as important to a state as long as it brings about an absolute gain. Neoliberals see a state’s utility function as being directly measured by its accumulation of its absolute gains.

When one introduces the specific issue of war into the debate over gains calculations, Neorealists draw from their base assumption that due to the anarchical nature of the international environment security concerns are primary among states operating in the international system. The constant threat of force and lack of central authority in the international system compels states to focus on their own survival and in turn increase their awareness of their own relative capabilities. Because of this, the primary goal of states is not to acquire the highest individual payoff, but to increase their own relative capabilities and to prevent other states from increasing theirs. The importance states place on gauging relative gains becomes even greater when there are small differences in relative power between the two states. When states totally focus on relative gains, they attain a zero sum mindset where a gain made by one state is seen as a loss by the other.

If over time these small relative gains by an opponent state are exploited and bring about future relative gains over the first state, the focus becomes even greater on relative gains. Initial advantages a state is able to make that increase its ability to perform in future interactions, is what Mathews calls the “cumulative effect”. The cumulative effect is important because it shows that if relative gains made presently have

3 Mathews 116.
9 Werner 290.
11 Matthews 125.
the effect of benefiting a state in future interactions with another state, the importance that state places on relative gains will increase. Disproportional gains made by a rival could be turned into an increased military or political capability for the rival to exert its will over the first state, thus impacting its overall security. Relative gains are at the forefront for states measuring their relative position against their rivals due to the fact these gains can greatly impact a state’s security. Therefore, focus is paramount on relative gains due to the fact a miscalculation can adversely affect a state’s own security. On the contrary, when relative gains fail to enhance one state’s capability over the other, or they have little influence over states’ interactions, relative gains will be less significant and a state will focus on absolute gains.

To avoid war over competing interests states must essentially cooperate minimally on a mutual decision to handle their dispute short of the battlespace. Whether states make the calculation to avoid war on the basis of absolute versus relative gains may have a direct effect on the prospect for war avoidance, if we extend the logic of the gains debate to this crucial moment in state relations.

However, making a basic assumption about state preferences without reference to the context of how the problem they face is framed and what capabilities they may utilize and face in deciding how to deal with the problem is an abstraction that removes from analysis two important conditional variables. Prospect theorists suggest that the framing of loss versus gains is critically important to decision-making. Additionally, some deterrence theorists argue that the strategic environment matters; that is, whether one is attempting to retain a status quo with reliance on conventional weapons will play out differently than attempts that rely on nuclear forces. Before drawing hypotheses out of the gains debate directly for examining the choice to go to war, the context of frames and weapons types need to be explored. The remaining part of this thesis centers on questions such as: Do absolute or relative calculations play more of an impact in the decision to go to war? Do the proposed weapons used affect states’ preferences toward absolute or relative calculations? Does the prospect of gain versus loss alter states preferences differently in a nuclear or

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14 Mathews 146.
conventional crisis?

The notion that particular contextual or conditional variables affect the flow of crisis and decisions over war is prevalent in the literature on causes of war. John Vasquez has made a particularly strong effort in developing classifications for crises and war. Vasquez argues it is important to look at political foreign policy practices, interstate interactions, and the domestic politics of the states in question. It is also beneficial to look at the global institution as a whole and how it relates to the particular states in question. Therefore to understand war one must also try to comprehend the politics and issues behind the actions that lead to war. The causes stem from political, cultural, economic, and security issues. Not all wars are alike and not all have the same causes, therefore, their paths and classifications are somewhat different. Vasquez, for example, distinguishes wars of rivalry as a particular classification that focuses on the basic equality of power between states and has characteristics such as mutual fear, arms races, suspicion, and years of political and ideological rivalry. Vasquez, however, does not explore in depth the two contextual variables of this thesis. Although rivals, for example, may become fixated on their relative position compared to their opponents and are sensitive to any gains their opponent makes that may impact their relative position does that fixation alone explain behavior or will the assessment of loss versus gain make a difference?

PROSPECT THEORY

To simplify predictability about probable state actions and reaction in international relations, states have been assumed to act as rational actors. Rational action is modeled on the premise of expected utility theory that an actor using an expected utility function will try to maximize outcomes by weighing each possible outcome by the probability of its occurrence. Once a state has analyzed all possible outcomes for

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16 Vasquez 45.
17 Vasquez 64-65.
each strategy, it selects the strategy with the highest expected utility. At the core of this rational action are a state’s goals and objectives. A state has to make decisions and create alternatives to achieve them. Each decision or alternative also includes consequences that may be either beneficial or possibly harmful for the state. Through a systematic process, a state makes a choice from the alternatives present in order to select the one that gives it the highest payoff towards achieving its goals and objectives. Predictions can be made, by assuming the decision maker will calculate the most reasonable way to achieve its goals by making rational decisions through weighing the expected utility of the outcome by its probability of occurrence.

While expected utility theory is and has been beneficial in attempting to predict states’ future actions based on an expected utility, proponents of the alternative prospect theory assert that expected utility theory concerns itself with the final state of the actor rather than the values attached with each decision an actor makes. Critics contend expected utility theory cite the absence in the model of gains and losses measured from a reference point and the departure of actors away from their original position.

The premise of prospect theory lies on the assessment of various outcomes with respect to a reference point, rather in terms of net asset levels. Proponents of prospect theory claim it shows greater accuracy than the expected utility function for predicting the choices decision makers will actually make based on the premise that gains and losses are treated differently. More specifically, it emphasizes actors care more about avoiding losses than making gains. The strength of the theory lies in the emphasis it places on the actor’s predisposition toward risk. More importantly, prospect theory finds individuals to be risk averse

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23 Levy 89.
25 Milburn & Isaac 340.
when confronted with choices involving gains and risk acceptant when confronted with choices involving losses.  

Decisions when using prospect theory are based upon a cost benefit relationship where each action creates an associated cost. A good illustration of this is the gain-loss value function (fig-1). The graph is a model on how individuals treat gains and losses differently. This reaction towards gains and losses is the cornerstone of prospect theory. The focus here is on how gains and losses are viewed and are interpreted by the individual. As Quatrone and Tversky suggest: “According to prospect theory, an individual’s attitude toward risk depends upon whether the outcomes are perceived as gains or losses, relative to the reference point.” The S-shaped value function (fig-2) is a representation of an individual’s choice with two distinctive observations. First, there is a diminishing value for gains made. Second, losses hurt significantly more than gains feel good.

The gain-loss value function (fig-2) shows as the amount of gain increases, so does the risk associated with the gain. The graph also shows as the amount of risk increases, the relative payoff becomes smaller. The gains frame gives an example of two options. The first option has a sure gain of $80. The second option is riskier, giving only an 85% chance of winning a $100 and a 15% of winning nothing. The payoff is slightly more, but with the increased payoff comes the increased risk of winning nothing. The losses frame is slightly different. Option one gives a sure loss of losing $80. Option two gives an 85% chance of losing a $100 and a 15% chance of losing nothing. Similarly but conversely to the gains frame, there is the chance of losing slightly more, but there is also the slight chance of losing nothing at all.

When presented with the options in the gains frame, most individuals would choose the sure gain over the riskier option. The risk of losing $80 simply isn’t offset by the possibility of gaining $20. The sure gain of the $80 status quo margin and avoiding some gamble is appealing. Therefore, individuals in the gains

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26 Levy 92.
28 Berejekian 789.
29 Berejekian 790.
30 Berejekian 791.
frame are risk averse because of the possibility of moving back from the status quo. Basically individuals would ask themselves, “Why mess up a good thing?” On the contrary, when presented with the options in the losses frame, most would likely risk an extra $20 in the hopes of losing nothing. The individual is already guaranteed a substantial loss, therefore, the gamble to improve the status quo from a sure loss to losing nothing is appealing. Individuals operating in the losses frame are risk takers when the status quo is viewed as a loss.31

If one assumes states to be acting on the premise of prospect theory, the gains-loss value function is useful at giving insights on states’ preferences. More specifically, to those choices a state makes with regard to other states. Referring back to the gains frame, if a state is presented with the option of making a sure gain with no risk, a state will be inclined to choose that option. If the gain to be made is increased slightly and the chance of gaining nothing is also increased, states will tend to shy away from this risky option from fear of not getting anything. States that operate in the gains quadrant are risk averse.32 They are content with operating past the reference point in the gains frame and will take little or no risks, especially if those risks have the possibility of putting them back toward the reference point.

On the contrary, states operating in the losses quadrant are more prone to take risks. If presented with the option of losing slightly more or losing nothing, states will likely take the risk for the prize of losing nothing. Thus, decisions made by states in the loss quadrant are made in order to get them back to the reference point where they do not have a perceived loss. For states that view status quo as a gain and are confronted with the choice of continuing the status quo or pursuing some gamble with a slightly higher payoff, but with some risk of loss, they will choose the status quo. For those states who view the status quo as a loss, when confronted with a gamble that has an expected outcome of further loss, but a slight probability for improving their status quo, they will choose the gamble.33

To clarify this point, take for example two states of relative equal power. Both states view the status quo as a gain, therefore, both are operating in the gains frame. If the first state wishes to better its relative

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31 Berejekian 791.
32 Berejekian 791.
33 Berejekian 793.
position with regards to the second by course of military buildups and advances, treaty deviation, economic or political power plays for example, the status quo could be shifted. As shown by the graph, the payoff may be slightly higher than before for the first state, but there would also be a risk of losing everything in terms of gains previously made if the second state responds adversely. (Previous gains could have been economic, diplomatic, political, and security gains the two states enjoyed prior to the first state taking action to better its position.) The second state could either perceive the action of the first as a loss or no significant loss. If it perceives the move by the first state as a loss, it can either accept it or reject it by some countermove of its own. Its countermoves runs the risk of worsening its situation, but it also has the chance of limiting its losses. This is similar to the individual operating in the losses frame in the above example. If the gamble pays off, the second state may be able to nullify any gains the first state hoped to make by its initial action. This could result in a new status quo for both states where the new status quos would be less in value than before the initial action. The new status quos would be one where there are increased tensions and mistrust among the states.

Considering this in their decision making process, states who view the status quo as a gain are more risk averse. They will more than likely choose to remain at the status quo rather than take a gamble which may lead them to a loss in the hopes to increase their status quo by some smaller possible gain. Possible actions and reactions shift the status quo which could prove more harmful than helpful to a state’s relative position. On the other hand, states that view their new status quo as a loss are more prone to make a gamble to get back to their previous position. Therefore, keeping the opponent state content with its status quo and restraining their opponent from attempting to move its status quo in order to better its relative position is a goal for most states. This is done by a willingness of one state to show the opponent state they have the will and means to counteract any movements from the status quo. This is done through a state possessing a good deterrence strategy, which impedes the potential movement of a rival state trying to improve its relative status quo.

Most power plays and confrontations such as these are avoided if states have effective deterrence.
strategies. States are too apprehensive of making such strong moves from fear of provoking their rival, which would worsen their current situation instead of helping it gain an advantage. Therefore, deterrence impedes another states’ movement because it prevents them from accomplishing their foreign policy objectives. As Paul Huth suggests “[deterrence] prevents an adversary from using military force to achieve its foreign policy objectives.”\textsuperscript{35}

**DETERRENCE**

Strategic theorists have identified three deterrence strategies to explain why states avoid war. The first is deterrence by denial. A state is more prone to avoid war if it believes its’ war objectives cannot be met. Therefore, there would be no need or benefit to initiate a conflict. Here, deterrence focuses on denial of military objectives and it does not promise to punish the aggressor for initiating hostilities. The second strategy of deterrence is deterrence by punishment. This strategy deters an attack based on the assumption the state attacked will respond equally or with greater force than the state which attacked first. The damage inflicted by the response is higher than the aggressor is willing to accept. The third type of strategy is deterrence by defeat. This means a potential aggressor is deterred by the certainty it will be defeated if it initiated war. All of these strategies are dependent upon the enemy’s perception of a rival’s will and capability to use its weapons. The perceived image of a state by another is a critical component to the overall strategy of deterrence. The image of a state’s fortitude and resolve, whether it be truly authentic or not, must be exhibited to and believed by its rivals. It is not so much the reality of a nation’s leadership, power structure, or overall strength, but the image of reality shown to other states.\textsuperscript{36}


CONVENTIONAL DETERRENCE

One can further break down these three deterrence strategies in two different categories--conventional and nuclear deterrence. The difference between the two strategies is obviously the weapon choice used to ward off a potential adversary. Conventional deterrence historically has been predicated on defeating an enemy on the battlefield or denying a state’s ability to achieve its objectives by the use of force. But with the evolution of conventional weaponry, the aspect of punishment in conventional deterrence has come more prominent. In conventional deterrence, a defender has to display the ability and willingness to deny the aggressor of its objectives, to defeat the aggressor if it attacks, or to punish the aggressor for attacking. A defender state has to convince the aggressor it will not achieve its objectives by going to war for the denial strategy to work. Moreover, the defender has to show the ability to deny the aggressor of a quick victory and political fait accompli. Much like denial, deterrence by defeat focuses on the defender convincing the aggressor it will not be victorious on the battlefield. Defender states must be able to relay a sense of overwhelming conventional capability comparable to the aggressor, thus dissuading an aggressor to attack. Different from denial or defeat, conventional deterrence based on punishment is focused on the defender’s threat to inflict unacceptable damage on the aggressor’s society or government if it attacks. The focus of punishment is not whether forces are victorious on the battlefield, but how much damage can they inflict on an enemy’s society or regime. Punishment largely was confined to the nuclear realm, but as mentioned before, the evolution of technology and advances in conventional weaponry have added the dimension of punishment to conventional deterrence.

The problem of these conventional deterrent strategies lies in the complexities involved with conventional warfare and the contestability of conventional weapons themselves. It is the contestable

38 Allan 203-204.
41 Rhodes 224.
42 Allan 208.
44 Allan 203-204.
nature of conventional forces that burdens deterring states. The capability of a defender to inflict losses on an aggressor will come into question by the aggressor. As Richard Harknett summarizes,

“the fundamental problem is not easily solved by strategy or reputation because it lies within the inherent dynamic process produced by reliance on non-nuclear forces. Conventional deterrence is hampered by the nature of the weapons upon which it is based. The ability of conventional forces to inflict pain on an opponent is highly dependent on the skill shown in their application, on the capabilities possessed, and on the counter-capabilities employed by an opponent. The destructiveness of conventional weapons, and thus the cost that can be threatened, will only be felt over time after achieving military victory or dominance over some sector of the battlefield. In the mind of a potential challenger, therefore, conventional weapons and their attendant costs hold out the prospect of technical, tactical, or operational solution, and it is this prospect that makes them less effective deterrents to war.”

Along with contestability, conventional deterrence needs a great deal of information to be processed in order to be effective. Planning of an adversary’s military capability is extremely important in order to estimate the likelihood of success in a conflict. This planning aids states to maximize their overall military effectiveness and to degrade the effectiveness of an adversary. It has to account for a vast amount of variables that come into play (i.e. weapon types, logistics, morale, the movement of forces, etc.). Because the estimation of these variables may be unreliable, the overall estimated capability of an opponent’s military potential could also be unreliable. This could obviously lead to a gross miscalculation on the credibility of the defender’s capabilities by an aggressor. A state may overestimate its own capabilities and underestimate an opponent or vice versa. The aggressor may erroneously believe it has the capability to circumnavigate or overtake the defender to either achieve its objectives or defeat the defender on the

In addition, the aggressor may not account for conventional weapons that may be able to inflict excessive damage on its society or leadership.\textsuperscript{49}

Furthermore, estimations about conventional capability are further threatened because the dynamics of conventional warfare are always changing. The ability alone to conduct large scale military operations effectively is difficult and requires a tremendous amount of skill and coordination. As soon as a state thinks it has mastered the execution of its defense strategy, the strategy then becomes antiquated with the changing times. New weapon systems, technology, communication, new government regimes are a few examples that will alter a state’s estimated strength by an aggressor. More than likely, there will be a higher probability for error in these estimates.\textsuperscript{51} To have an effective conventional deterrence strategy, defender states must not only be able to adapt to these changing times, they must consistently give the impression they are evolving with the times.\textsuperscript{52}

Along with the degradations mentioned above in conventional deterrence strategy, Charles Allan identifies four important factors which play into and somewhat degrade the effectiveness of conventional deterrence strategy. First, there is the quality and quantity of information available by the defender and the aggressor. As mentioned, conventional deterrence relies heavily on the gauging of other states’ capabilities. Having accurate and current information about an opponent’s capabilities leads to a better overall assessment of a rival. Inaccurate information about the defender’s capabilities or intent could lead to disaster in a war situation for the aggressor where it can be defeated, denied of its objectives, or punished for attacking.\textsuperscript{53}

Allan’s second factor he claims degrades the effectiveness of conventional deterrence is the cultural influences affecting the paradigm each state is operating in. An important factor in determining the credibility of threats from opponent states comes from understanding the culture of the opponent state. The

\textsuperscript{49} Rhodes 224.
\textsuperscript{51} Shimshoni 227.
\textsuperscript{52} Harknett, “Logic of Conventional” 92.
understanding of the culture and mindset of a state will lead to better analysis of reactions and threats by the opponent state.\textsuperscript{54} This would greatly aid decision makers in separating authentic and inauthentic threats and capabilities by determining how cultural influences affect the decision making process for their opponent. If these cultural influences are incorrectly analyzed by the aggressor state, it could pay a tremendous price by initiating war by taking on more than it could handle.\textsuperscript{55}

The third degradation Allan mentions is the states’ assessment of its status quo. If states perceive their status quo as intolerable, the deterrent threat may not succeed in averting a possible attack by an aggressor even though the outcome of the war may mean certain defeat.\textsuperscript{56} The cost of inaction and accepting the status quo may be more burdening than certain defeat on the battlefield and the attainment of some other political, security, or economic goal. States must correctly interpret how their adversary interprets the status quo to effectively impede any movement an opponent attempts to make. By failing to do so, an aggressor may opt to challenge the defender even though it is assured of being defeated.\textsuperscript{57}

The fourth degradation Allan discusses is the psychological status of a state’s leadership. The psychological status of a state gives a certain aspect of unpredictability from which to draw sound conclusions by the defending state. State leaders do not always adhere to a simple rational actor model. A leader of an aggressor state may be a psychopath or may place extreme emphasis on nationalism, a particular ideology, or religion where they are willing to accept massive retaliation in order to remain in power or loyal to their convictions.\textsuperscript{58} The wildcard of unpredictability can be a difficult variable to account for when trying to draw logical conclusions about how states will react to particular policies or actions. It is even a more difficult variable to account for when attempting to draw sound predictions in a potential war or crisis situation.\textsuperscript{59}

\textsuperscript{55} Barry Wolf, \textit{When the Weak Attack the Strong: Failures of Deterrence} (Santa Monica: Rand, 1991) 5.
\textsuperscript{56} Frank C. Zagare, \textit{The Dynamics of Deterrence} (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1987)
\textsuperscript{57}
\textsuperscript{58} Rhodes 222.
\textsuperscript{59} Wolf 5.
\textsuperscript{59} Allan 218-219.
Conventional deterrence historically has focused on denying a state’s ability to achieve its objectives by the use of force or by defeating an enemy on the battlefield. The evolution of conventional weaponry has added the component of punishing an enemy as well. In the realm of conventional war, the destructiveness of the weapon systems is limited in scale. War is a more viable option where decision makers believe they can win.\textsuperscript{60} The costs associated are also more tolerable because of the limited destructiveness and contestability of these weapons.\textsuperscript{61} Decision makers appear to focus more on motivation to go to war rather than its consequences.\textsuperscript{62} Conventional deterrence is further hampered by informational, cultural, psychological, interpretations of the status quo by opposing states which may lead to inaccurate assessments of an opponent.

NUCLEAR DETERRENCE

The difference between conventional and nuclear deterrence centers around the nature of the weapon system. The obvious destructiveness, almost indiscriminate and disproportional nature of the weapon, and consequences of possible escalation between nuclear states raises the cost of going to war to enormous levels.\textsuperscript{63} As with conventional deterrence, these costs are felt throughout the entire spectrum of denial, defeat, and punishment deterrent strategies. One might speculate weapon systems are the deciding factor in terms of effective deterrence, but this is not necessarily the case. A state simply possessing nuclear weapons by itself does not guarantee an effective nuclear deterrent strategy, rather the perceived resolve and credibility by the state to use the weapons is necessary for effective deterrence.\textsuperscript{64}

Similarly to conventional deterrence, effective nuclear deterrence is accomplished by convincing an opponent state its objectives will be denied, its forces will be defeated on the battlefield, or its society or

\textsuperscript{61} Allan 214; Harknett, “Logic of Conventional” 89.
\textsuperscript{64} Joseph M. Siracusa and David G. Coleman, “Scaling the Nuclear Ladder: Deterrence from Truman to Clinton,” Australian Journal of International Affairs 54.3 (2000): 280
government will be punished. Through denial, a defending state must convince the aggressor its objectives will not be accomplished. Nuclear weapons affect this strategy more specifically through the potential use of tactical or theater nuclear weapons to defeat or impede an advance by an opposing force. The defender must convince the aggressor an attack would leave its forces open to destruction or defeat. The suggested use of theater or tactical nuclear weapons can be an equilizer among opposing states with unequal conventional military strength. These weapons tend to offset the conventional force ratio between two opposing states of different conventional sizes. The defender must convince the aggressor that if it attacks, theater or tactical nuclear weapons will be used to deny it of its objectives or lead its forces to defeat on the battlefield. The defender may also threaten the use of these weapons to avoid the certainty of defeat or out of desperate self-preservation. The possible use of smaller tactical or theater nuclear weapons can also be seen as establishing a link between a defender’s tactical and strategic nuclear forces (if available) by the escalation of armed hostilities to total war.

The use of tactical or theater nuclear weapons by a defender does have a weakened deterrent value in some aspects both due to credibility of use and the capability of delivering the weapon by the defender. Tactical or theater nuclear weapons add a relatively high degree of uncertainty and unpredictability when assessing an opponent. The difficulty is not so much assessing the destructive capability of the weapon as in the predictability of actually using the weapon. One argument that degrades the overall deterrent value of theater or tactical nuclear weapons stems from the disproportional use of the weapon system combined with the fear of escalation.

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It has been argued weapon systems that realistically cannot be used, cannot realistically deter. The more difficult they are to use in any rational way the less credible they are for deterrence. Furthermore, there are the effects of using tactical or theater nuclear weapons. Can the deterrer convince the aggressor it will use nuclear weapons on his own territory or the territory of an ally if it is attacked? And can the deterrer or aggressor risk the ultimate high political fallout from using any nuclear weapon on the battlefield no matter how small? And although the deterring state may possess nuclear weapons, it does not mean it can effectively deliver the weapon in a manner to effectively deter an aggressor. It is not just the capability of having nuclear weapons, but the twofold capability of having and delivering them. Perception of having the weapon is not enough, but a tangible capability to deliver the weapon increases deterrence strategy. Furthermore, a deterring state has to convince an opponent that it will use its weapons despite the possibility that escalation and total war can occur. The burden is placed on the deterrer to convince the aggressor that hostile acts could lead to an all out escalation to nuclear war.

The problem with deterrence by denial or defeat on the tactical or theater nuclear level is it seeks to add nuclear weapons as a discriminatory and viable weapon which in turn allows nuclear war to become more probable. Thus, the unwarranted effect of the nuclear counterforce strategy is not only the destructiveness of a limited nuclear exchange, but the transformation from denial or defeat on the battlefield to punishment of an opponent state’s society.

States operating in the punishment realm of nuclear deterrence tend to be risk averse. In the nuclear realm the focus is shifted from winning wars to avoiding them. The damage inflicted by two states both

72 Siracusa and Coleman 285.
73 Siracusa and Coleman 280.
possessing a capable nuclear force would be catastrophic. The effects of a nuclear exchange based on small numbers of nuclear weapons using even low yield nuclear weapons would be significant. Nuclear deterrence by punishment seeks to dissuade an adversary through the threat of retaliation against an opposing state’s society or regime. The hoped for effect is to deter an adversary not to initiate military force because of the potential destructive consequences of a battlefield within the heart of a state.

The deterrer must convince its opponent it has not only the capability to deliver its strategic nuclear weapons, but that it will take the decision to retaliate with overwhelming nuclear force inflicting enough damage to make any expected gains made by the challenger outweighed by severe incontestable costs.

The deterring effect of strategic nuclear weapons is also argued to be a drawback to the strategy. The burden of a strategy based on strategic nuclear weapons is the potential destructiveness of a society may not be an acceptable act and thus not a credible threat. As mentioned earlier, because the destructiveness is so high, the rationality of using the weapons is degraded. If the strategy is degraded, a potential aggressor may opt to gamble with a military or political power play based on the fact it is gambling on the defender’s failure to act because the potential costs are too great for the deterrer to act. The deterrer may decide to forgo any hostilities on a smaller power play to avoid an escalation to total war.

The danger for the aggressor is the power play gamble itself. Military or political power plays may pay off, but there is a degree of uncertainty with regards to a deterrer’s response when dealing with a nuclear response. The unpredictable nature of state responses could lead to possible escalation. A miscalculation of capability and will could possibly lead to escalation from a smaller conflict to a larger one of disproportionate consequences.

77 See the National Resources Defense Council’s nuclear war simulation between India and Pakistan, Jan 2002. www.nrdc.org/nuclear/southasia.asp
80 Quinlan 57.
Two base assumptions can guide analysis about the probability of war: a war will not be initiated if a state cannot expect to achieve some minimal objective that outweighs the status quo and the smaller a state’s military forces are to its rival the less likely it will be able to win the conflict. If the outcome of a conflict is judged in terms of either a win or loss, the relative size and quality of a state’s military compared with its adversary can serve as a starting point for analysis. Robert Powell has created a model showing the probability of victory for a state is a function of the size of a state’s military allocations when a war breaks out. Also, the probability of a state succeeding in a conflict is higher when it allocates more resources to the military sector relative to its adversary. But these are based on the outcome of war being a zero sum game measured in terms of battlefield victory or defeat. But what about stalemates where neither side can claim victory? According to Wagner, the probability of a war ending in a stalemate is highest when both forces are equal not only in size, but more specifically in relative capability.

History has shown a number of cases where there was a clear winner and loser. It has also shown examples where war has resulted in a stalemate. But what about war in the nuclear realm? Are nuclear wars winnable? And what defines the winner in a nuclear war? How do we define an aftermath of a nuclear war in which both rivals have destroyed each other’s cities, but one side still has residual nuclear forces at sea. Has a side with more remaining forces won? Relative counterforce measures can be irrelevant at some minimal level of nuclear possession in which a state’s society is held at risk. In this sense, nuclear possession can promise equal consequences even if the force structures of two rivals are unequal. By nuclear weapons leveling the playing field and the difficulty in differentiating from the so-called winners and losers, classifying the war as a stalemate becomes more realistic.

War is costly and the outcome is uncertain. Survival and keeping the status quo by averting war may be the ultimate goal in deterrence. Survival may mean protecting the regime itself, society, territorial

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84 Wagner 594.
sovereignty, culture, and values of that state. Applying the logic of prospect theory to state interaction in a nuclear crisis there is pressure to be risk averse. They prefer to receive a lower payoff with a higher level of certainty. They are more prone to make a safe bet rather than make some gamble with a slightly higher payoff. Being risk averse makes decision makers less likely to escalate a conflict provided capabilities are more evenly distributed among rivals. This is due to decision makers being less certain about the outcome of war with an equal. This makes alternatives about not going to war and settling on a negotiated peace of some kind more probable.

This is not to say power plays will not be made by rival nuclear states. These power plays, however, will be overshadowed by the destructiveness of a nuclear exchange. Power plays are made by states to better themselves or better themselves in relation to their rival. Sometimes it is done to tip the balance of power in their favor. If these power plays give the first state a more optimistic view towards victory in a conflict and the second state a more pessimistic view of victory, the first may be in a position to seek more favorable demands at the bargaining table in a peace settlement or treaty. The second state in turn may be willing to accept a less favorable settlement. This change in the balance of power affects the settlements states are willing to make as an alternative to war, but does not necessarily change the probability of going to war. In the conventional realm, a more optimistic view by one state may increase the probability of war. In the nuclear realm, however, it probably will not increase the likelihood of a conflict. This is due partly on the assumption a state makes about the outcome of a war. In this case, both sides would view war as catastrophic.

It is this balance of military strength that composes one of five common variables Paul Huth has identified as the core of deterrence theory. The other four variables are as follows: the defender’s possession of nuclear weapons, the challenger’s and defender’s interests at stake in the dispute, the

85 Krauthammer 17.
87 Huth 612.
88 Wagner 594.
89 Wagner 594.
challenger’s and defender’s involvement in other disputes, the challenger’s and defender’s involvement in other disputes, and the past behavior of the challenger and defender.\textsuperscript{90}

Each variable set generates an hypothesis. The defender’s possession of nuclear weapons is actually a two-fold variable. First, possession of nuclear weapons decreases an attacker’s probability of success on the battlefield. A key condition is whether the deterrer has a second-strike capability, which, when present, decreases the odds for the aggressor to knock its enemy out completely without suffering comparable damage itself.\textsuperscript{91} Along with capability, Huth argues the relative balance of interests is important, particularly in the context of territoriality. It is not only territory within their own borders, but those territories of adjacent states as well. A dispute among states is less likely to escalate provided the defending state considers adjacent states crucial to their national interest and security. The logic stems from the presumption that the aggressor state will more than likely back down in a dispute because of the defender’s willingness and determination to preserve its security. While an aggressor may make a small gamble to better itself relative to its rival, it will not escalate the dispute provided the small gain to be made is outweighed so much by the potential cost of war.\textsuperscript{92} Finally, there are the explanations of the variables consisting of states interactions with others and interactions amongst themselves. Here the basic premise is a state’s reputation toward crisis management based on past actions or inactions by the state. In situations such as these, the resolve of a state not to back down from a crisis is paramount. If a state has backed down in the past or has had disputes where it has backed down in times of crisis, a challenger will count on the state to back down when a dispute arises with it in the future.

Huth, Gelpi, and Bennett in the article, “The Escalation of Great Power Militarized Disputes: Testing Rational Deterrence Theory and Structural Realism,” have come up with five different models analyzing Huth’s five deterrence hypotheses in order to show which set of variables had the greatest impact on deterrence as a whole. In all five of the models the hypothesis that was the most statistically significant was the defender’s possession of a second-strike capability. According to the results of the models, this

\textsuperscript{90} Huth 612.\textsuperscript{91} Huth 612.\textsuperscript{92} Huth 612.
means the likelihood of an escalated dispute resulting in a conflict would be reduced if the defender not only possessed nuclear weapons, but possessed a second-strike capability where if it were attacked it had the ability to counterattack with its own weapons. The authors do state nuclear capability is again significant, but the capability alone does not ensure a successful deterrence strategy, it just comprises the largest contribution of an entire deterrent foundation.\textsuperscript{93} The second most statistically significant correlation was based on the interests at stake for both the aggressor and defender. Interpretation of data shows escalation by the aggressor is reduced if the territory in the dispute is bordering or close to the defender’s state. Conversely, the data also shows a defending state will escalate a crisis if the territory or state is close to its own borders. The next most significant relationship for deterrence is the balance of conventional forces. This probability of escalation fluctuates when the aggressor-to-defender force ratios are changed. As the conventional force ratio becomes more equitable between opponents, the data shows there is an increased deterrent effect.\textsuperscript{94} The fourth most significant hypothesis contributing to an effective deterrence strategy according to the data is a state’s behavior in past disputes with the rival state. The data shows, backing down from a conflict definitely gives an overall impression of weakness. The results show if the defender has backed down in a previous dispute with the aggressor, the probability the aggressor will escalate a conflict increases. Likewise, if the aggressor were forced by the defender to submit in a previous crisis, the defender’s decision to escalate a current crisis would be decreased.\textsuperscript{95} The least significant, according to the results of the model, is a state’s involvement in another dispute or conflict at the time an aggressor initiates a dispute. The data shows an aggressor is more likely to escalate a conflict if the targeted state is already involved in another dispute. This is due to the aggressor’s confidence about achieving its goals if its enemy is preoccupied with another state.\textsuperscript{96}

Using the results of the models and interpretation of the data of the deterrence hypotheses brings insight into how decision processes are made when states confront one another. Huth has illustrated in his

\textsuperscript{93} Huth 618.  
\textsuperscript{94} Huth 618.  
\textsuperscript{95} Huth 618.  
\textsuperscript{96} Huth 619.
study of militarized disputes since 1816 to the present that there are elements of differential impact on
deterrence with the most significant being the introduction of nuclear weapons. The introduction of these
weapons along with increased assurance by states to deliver these weapons provides the greatest statistical
impact in states willingness to escalate a dispute. The study shows how there is a different dynamic in
deterrence between states possessing purely conventional forces and states possessing both conventional
and nuclear capability.

Many times it is assumed that when states enter a conflict the outcome can be predicted using a simple
zero-sum game; either one side will win and the other will lose or vice versa. (Winning is classified as a
state or regime obtaining a desirable outcome to a military, political, economic, or security objective it
sought to achieve by instigating the conflict.) But, as stated earlier, there can be a third outcome to a
conflict. This is a stalemate, where neither side wins or a non-zero sum game where both sides lose. This
is probable in a conventional conflict but even a higher possibility in a nuclear confrontation. Looking at
the classic prisoner’s dilemma matrix (see fig-3) one can see there are four outcomes depending upon a
state’s action to attack or wait to attack. There is the reward for waiting (R), punishment for attacking and
being attacked in turn (P) (punishment in this scenario can be defined as either denying a state’s coveted
objectives, defeating a state militarily, or punishing the regime or society of an adversary), the temptation
to attack if the opponent does not or cannot attack (T), and the sucker’s payoff for waiting when the
opponent attacks (S). The relative payoffs for these variables can be expressed as follows: T>R>P>S.

Basically, preempting an attack to one’s opponent while he is waiting is the best payoff, while waiting and
being attacked is the worst payoff. In a conventional confrontation the prisoner’s dilemma model shows
the payoffs in a simplistic form. Thus, attacking an opponent while he is waiting with a quick and decisive
victory is the best payoff. In a nuclear war, these payoffs are quite different. Given the fact the use of
nuclear weapons bring into a variable of unpredictability and destruction at disproportionate levels, the
expression should be altered. It is arguable that P would be any better than S. Also, given the possibility

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of a second-strike capability and post-war consequences of nuclear radiation, it could be argued T may be no better than P or S. Thus, both sides waiting and not attacking with nuclear weapons has the highest payoff. Quadrant I (R,R) is the highest payoff, a win-win for both. The new expression for payoffs should be represented as $R > T > P = S$.

The goal of deterrence with regards to the prisoner’s dilemma is to prevent states from attacking by making them focus on the reward for not attacking or to show the undesirable consequences if it chooses to attack. The difference emerges with regards to weapon type being used to deter. The difficulty in conventional deterrence lies, as Richard Harknett has pointed out, on the contestable nature of conventional weapons. An aggressor may focus more on the temptation to attack or the prize of going to war rather than the consequences of attacking or waiting. This weakens the deterrer’s objective of preventing an attack. On the contrary, nuclear deterrence has the benefit of the predictable and overwhelming nature of the weapon. As Brodie has mentioned earlier, the focus of war with nuclear weapons will be on avoiding them rather than winning them. Because all other quadrants result in some losses for both, nuclear deterrence seeks to keep both states in Quadrant I. It rewards them for waiting and not attacking and helps them avoid punishment. This matrix is a simplified model of outcomes based upon a state’s choice of whether or not to go to war. The purpose is to show in simplistic terms the efforts of action and inaction of states when confronted with the decision to go to war or not. The goal in crises on both the conventional and nuclear levels is to keep each state focused on the reward for waiting and the potential consequences of war. The difference is conventional deterrence has to convince its adversary to focus on the last three outcomes rather than the first. This is more difficult because of the nature of the weapon system.

In addition to the prisoner’s dilemma model, writers on deterrence theory have also included a matrix based on the game of “chicken”. (fig-4) The game differs from the prisoner’s dilemma model due to the difference in payoffs. It also differs with the model because of its purpose. Unlike the prisoner’s dilemma model where states are brought to the brink of conflict and the decision to go to war is imminent, the

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98 Barash 124.
99 Barash 125.
“chicken” model focuses on how states react in a crisis situation—will the state swerve or not? For example, in Quadrant IV if no state swerves, the payoff is extremely low for both. This is symbolic to neither side backing down in a crisis. If no state backs down or swerves and the crisis escalates, the effects for both sides could be staggering, especially in a nuclear crisis. Yet, if both sides swerve, as in Quadrant I, no one wins, but no one loses either. This quadrant represents both sides “blinking” in a crisis. Neither side is able to claim any foreign relations victory, but still the benefits are definitely higher than those of the fourth quadrant. Quadrants I and III represent the highest payoff for the state which doesn’t swerve in its diplomacy. To the state that swerves though, there comes some foreign policy loss. But still this loss is far less than in Quadrant IV. As stated earlier, states wish to maximize their gains for the least amount of cost. The hope is for a state to achieve its gain by having its opponent swerve, while keeping itself on a straight path. But there is the necessity not to move into Quadrant IV where the losses are enormously larger than if a state were to swerve. This is the great challenge for each state confronted in a crisis. At what point should they decide to swerve, if at all? At what point should they decide not to deviate from their present course of action and what are the consequences of those actions?

HYPOTHESES

The background information discussed so far from the relative gains debate, prospect theory, deterrence, and the game models have to do with providing information about states’ preferences and how they impact a state’s decision-making process. The hope is that by understanding these processes a better overall assessment about the predictability of state action and reaction in certain crises can better be discerned. When dealing with matters of security, states focus primarily on relative gains due to the impact even small differences in capability can affect their relative power compared to rival states. Since states focus primarily on relative gains, they are continually attempting to improve their relative position among

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100 Barash 125.  
101 Barash 125.
other states. Prospect theory illustrates how states continually are trying to improve their position with regards to a reference point. It also provides insight in how perception of the relative status quo can greatly impact a state’s decision to attempt to improve their relative status quo. States treat gains and losses differently. States make decisions to either avoid some loss or attain a particular gain. Their goal is to either keep the relative status quo the same when they are operating in the gains frame or to make a gamble to improve their overall status quo when they are operating in the losses frame. Because prospect theory shows gains and losses are treated differently and losses “hurt more than gains feel good,” states satisfied with the status quo and operating in the gains frame are risk averse. On the other hand, states that are unhappy with the relative status quo and perceive the status quo as operating in the losses frame are more risk acceptant to change the status quo.

The link between deterrence and prospect theory is that deterrence affects the potential movement of a challenger or deterrer to respectively improve or maintain its relative status quo. A deterring state may threaten to use its capabilities to impede the movement of a challenger by threatening force. The hope by the deterrer is to convince the challenger to be more content with its status quo, rather than to take a costly gamble to try and improve it. The deterring state must convince the challenger the cost of aggressive action will far outweigh any potential gain the challenger hoped to make. The deterring state accomplishes this by displaying a credible will and capability to use enough force, if necessary, to deny, defeat, or punish the challenger for attacking or attempting a risky power play. The challenger and defender must weigh the potential risks, costs, and gains resulting in its possible actions and reactions. These risks, costs, and gains are also calculated differently due to the weapon type an opponent possesses. Because of this, there is a distinctive difference in the decision making processes for states in conventional crises and those in nuclear crises. These differences were effectively illustrated in the prisoner’s dilemma example and game of chicken example.

With regards to conventional conflicts, relative gains dominate the decision making process throughout the entire spectrum of the events leading to war. From the initial power play a state makes to improve its

\[102\] Berejekian 790.
relative status quo, to the decision to go to war, relative gains are at the forefront of the decision making process. Similarly to the conventional context, a crisis between nuclear powers has decision makers focus primarily on relative gains, but this is true only to a point. The difference in the decision-making process comes when a crisis escalates to the point of imminent armed hostilities. It is at this point in the nuclear realm where relative calculations become secondary and absolute calculations are brought to the forefront of the decision-making process. This is due primarily to the potential destructiveness of nuclear weapons.

The case studies of the Cuban missile crisis and the Persian Gulf War are examples of how different weapon types alter states preferences in the decision making process of whether a state will escalate a crisis to war or will choose options to divert a war. These cases will show that when considering gains, states such as the Soviet Union, United States, and Iraq focus on relative calculations. This focus on relative calculations spans the entire spectrum of the decision-making process when states are operating in the conventional realm, but does not dominate the entire process in the nuclear realm. These cases will show states operating in the conventional realm base their calculations primarily on relative calculations and are risk acceptant and thus less likely to be deterred by the threat of conventional war. The contestable nature of conventional weapons provides multiple options for states that even include going to war. The deterrent value of conventional weapons is undermined due to this contestability. A state, such as Iraq, that views its status quo in the losses frame will naturally be risk acceptant, basing its decisions primarily on relative calculations throughout the entire spectrum leading to war.

Similarly to Iraq, states such as the United States and the Soviet Union have focused primarily on relative calculations throughout their decision-making processes leading up to the Cuban missile crisis. The difference is the shift from relative to absolute calculations at the decision point to initiate war. This shift in calculations was the result of a possible nuclear exchange in the crisis. The Cuban missile crisis will show how states such as the Soviet Union and the United States made power plays in order to make relative gains, but shifted their primary focus to absolute calculations during the possible escalation to war. The case will show how the Soviet Union’s perception of an unsatisfactory status quo goaded it to gamble by
placing missiles in Cuba. The case will show how the destructiveness of nuclear weapons altered the focus of both the United States and Soviet Union from relative to absolute calculations. The case will show how states operating in the nuclear realm will shift from risk acceptant at improving their status quo, to risk acceptant in the avoidance of war. It will show that even though a state may have to endure an undesirable status quo, it is still preferable to the losses entailed due to the destructiveness of a nuclear war. The case will also show the deterrent value of nuclear weapons in impeding potential movement by an adversary attempting to improve its relative status quo. This is due to the predictable and destructive nature of nuclear weapons.

CASE I: THE CUBAN MISSILE CRISIS

By the summer of 1962 it was known that the Soviet Union had been transporting large amounts of weapons to Cuba. The Castro regime feared a possible U.S. attack to follow up the failed Bay of Pigs invasion attempt of 1961. American authorities had suspected nuclear weapons were being placed in Cuba, even though the Soviet Union had never placed them outside their own borders before. When the Soviet government was questioned about the matter, they responded by stating only defensive weapons were being supplied to Cuba and also reiterated their policy of not transferring nuclear weapons to other countries. Furthermore, they boasted their intercontinental ballistic missile (ICBM) force was capable enough to handle the delivery of its nuclear arsenal and therefore they did not need Cuba as a launch base. Moscow also made clear its commitment to Cuba and warned the United States not to attack either the island of Cuba or Soviet supply ships in the area.\(^\text{103}\)

From the beginning, the Soviets were on a collision course with the United States over missiles in Cuba. Although the deployment may have been an attempt to defend and deter, the United States had made clear publicly and privately they would not tolerate “offensive” weapons (clearly understood to mean nuclear weapons) in Cuba. President Kennedy gave assurances to the Soviets that he would not invade

\(^{103}\) Allison 79.
Cuba unless it threatened other Latin American countries or if the Soviets placed an offensive base in Cuba. But if one of these conditions were met, the United States would be compelled to act to protect its security. The United States clearly laid out its policy and intentions towards Cuba to the Soviets; if A happens, B would be the response. Despite this, the Soviets continued secretly to place offensive missiles in Cuba disregarding the warning made by the Kennedy administration.\textsuperscript{104}

Why did the Soviets continue to make such a risky action when they were told in clear terms what would happen if they did? What objective did they have which would justify increasing the probability of a nuclear showdown with the United States? Allison answers these questions by generating four hypotheses as to why the Soviets placed missiles in Cuba. The first hypothesis as to why the Soviets placed missiles in Cuba centers around the protection of Cuba from a U.S. invasion. Cuba was very important both symbolically and strategically to the Soviets due to its location. Khrushchev’s own memoirs emphasize the importance the Soviets had placed on keeping Cuba communist and an ally. In keeping with this philosophy, Khrushchev even went so far as to threaten a nuclear attack on the United States if they had attempted an invasion of the island. This rhetoric was generated in part by the failed Bay of Pigs invasion by Cuban exiles in 1961. The Soviets did believe the United States would attempt another invasion, but this time it would be with U.S. military forces and not Cuban exiles. Thus, arms from the Soviets flowed into Cuba for the purpose of its defense. After the revelation of ballistic missile placement in Cuba was made known to the world, the Soviets maintained the nuclear missiles, like other weapons exported to Cuba, were there for the defense of Cuba.\textsuperscript{105} If the Soviets main purpose for placing missiles in Cuba was to avert an American invasion, it succeeded. As the crisis came to a close, President Kennedy promised the Soviets no invasion of Cuba would be undertaken, as long as Cuba did not threaten the United States and other countries in the region. Convinced by Kennedy’s promise, the missiles were subsequently removed by the Soviets.\textsuperscript{106}

Though this hypothesis is strong, Allison points out it has some flaws. First, if the main reason to
deploy missiles to Cuba was to deter an American invasion, it would not have been necessary to install ballistic missiles to do so. Instead, Soviet troops deployed to the island would have been a sufficient, and perhaps less provocative, deterrent. The effect would have been similar to that of American troops stationed in Berlin. Secondly, the Soviets could have also signed a defense pact with Cuba. (A pact was actually drafted, but never signed by Khrushchev.) The third and fourth reasons against the Cuban defense hypothesis were the deployment of the type of nuclear weapons to Cuba. The Soviets could have easily deployed tactical nuclear weapons to Cuba, as Khrushchev did later in September of 1962 when he perceived a threat of an invasion. These were easy to put in place, smaller, cheaper, and almost undetectable. Deploying intermediate-range ballistic missiles (IRBM) was not necessary. There was no reason to deploy the larger, more expensive, more detectable, long range missiles when they could have deployed medium range ballistic missiles (MRBM). Finally, the chronology of events surrounding the deployment of the missiles for a Cuban defense did not add up. The missiles were deployed after the U.S. made it clear it would take action if offensive missiles were placed in Cuba. The Soviets had carefully examined the threats made by the United States and still chose to place the missiles in Cuba. Castro himself saw the missiles as a good justification for the United States to invade, thus hurting his position instead of helping it. Castro and the Soviet military delegation to Cuba were reluctant to support the particular missile deployment because they felt the type of missiles was not needed.  

The second hypothesis as to why missiles were placed in Cuba centers on simple Cold War politics between the Soviet Union and the United States. The situation in Cuba was as much a political crisis as a military one. Basically, the competition between the two states was calculated in terms of zero sums; “I win, you lose.” Cuba was seen in this perspective. A Soviet-backed state so close to the enemy’s shore was already a political victory in the global competition between the superpowers. A military buildup with ballistic missiles so close to America’s shore provided the prospect of an enormous shift in the balance of forces favoring the Soviet Union. The missiles would also probe the political resolve of the United States by trying to show a lack of will and overall weakness by its handling of the situation. If the United States

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107 Allison 87-88.
made empty threats and weak diplomatic protests followed by inaction, U.S. credibility throughout the world might have come into question. Countries allied with the United States would have lost confidence and questioned whether the United States was really serious about their security. The probe, if successful, would have strengthened the Soviet Union’s political muscle throughout the communist world. It would have redefined the Berlin problem while at the same time deal a hard political blow to the United States.\footnote{Allison 89-90.}

Although the Cold War politics hypothesis is strong, Allison contends it ignores a few key factors. First, why would the Soviets make a probe in an area where they were clearly at a military and geographical disadvantage? If a conflict erupted, they were taking a gamble with enormous odds stacked against them that they would lose both militarily and politically. If the goal of the probe had been to test American resolve, the answer should have came from the U.S. reaction to the 1961 blockade of Berlin where the Soviets were at an enormous advantage. Second, the size and scope of the nuclear deployment went beyond what was necessary for a probe. Instead of deploying a few MRBMs cheaply and easily, the Soviets deployed IRBMs, which were costlier and more intensive to set up. Furthermore, IRBMs gave an impression of an offensive nature, rather than a defensive nature. Therefore, a probe of American resolve would have been better accomplished if the Soviets reduced in scale the number and type of missiles deployed to Cuba.\footnote{Allison 90-91.}

The third hypothesis for the Soviet missile placement in Cuba deals with missile power. Early in the Cold War military might and strength of a state’s nuclear arsenal were essential tools in terms of displaying power by a state. Khrushchev held the belief that military might was gauged on missile strength—more was better. At the time of the Cuban missile crisis, the Soviets perceived their nuclear arsenal inadequate in relative terms to the United States. The overall threat to the continental United States was low, while the threat towards Western Europe remained high. IRBMs and MRBMs, which numbered in the hundreds, were able to reach U.S. allies in Western Europe from within Soviet borders, but the Soviets lacked a real
and credible ICBM threat. Soviet nuclear missile development was plagued with a series of set backs and problems. All this came at a time when U.S.-Soviet talks on nuclear testing had broken down and the United States ran a series of nuclear tests in the Pacific Ocean. Furthermore, the Soviet strategic nuclear forces in 1962 consisted of roughly 20 ICBMs, whose reliability was seriously question. The Soviet navy also lacked a serious nuclear threat. The Soviets had only six submarines able to deliver nuclear weapons. The long sea routes from Soviet naval bases to U.S. shores made them highly susceptible to detection and destruction by highly skilled U.S. anti-submarine forces. The greatest threat to the United States came from a force of 200 Soviet bombers, but even this force lacked a forward operating base. Couple this factor with long flying routes and a lack of air refueling capability, the force’s survivability and effectiveness was low. The Soviets, on the other hand, faced a highly reliable U.S. nuclear force of 180 ICBMs, 630 strategic bombers, and 12 ballistic missile submarines. The U.S. ICBM force was considered reliable, and both bomber and submarine forces were highly trained.  

With this knowledge President Kennedy concluded the Soviets might be making a missile play in Cuba to even out the strategic balance of power, especially to even out the imbalance between the ICBM forces. To compensate for this gap, it was easy to conclude the Soviets were hard pressed to make their nuclear arsenal more imposing. Thus, the placement of missiles in Cuba would have been a logical move. U.S. analysts and Kennedy’s staff understood the strategic balance logic. They predicted a missile force in Cuba would increase Soviet striking capability by 50%. To have attained this increase in power projection from within Soviet borders would have taken the Soviets several years to accomplish during which time the American arsenal would have continued to grow. MRBMs and IRBMs in Cuba gave the Soviets a more equitable playing field by bringing the strategic environment practically in balance overnight.

Although this is another strong theory, Allison has two real objections. First, the urgency to address the strategic balance by Khrushchev seemed impulsive and rash. The Soviets, although behind in ICBM

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110 Allison 94-95.
111 Allison 94-95.
strength, still would have been able to mount a formidable ICBM force within two to three years, even with the delays they had experienced. Secondly, to correct the missile problem, the risk Khrushchev was willing to take was too extraordinary and out of character. Therefore, analysts in the Kennedy administration felt the missiles in Cuba were part of a bigger scheme to win a political victory somewhere else in the world. Their analysis pointed towards Berlin.\(^{112}\)

The final hypothesis was that the move in Cuba was part of a broad attempt to change the bargaining conditions over Berlin. Throughout the late 1940s and 1950s the United States had established a reputation of resolute commitment to Berlin. However, its geographical position well inside the German Democratic Republic (GDR) made holding Berlin precarious. The balance of forces favored the Soviets. Thus from a bargaining perspective, the question for the Soviets was how to shift the balance of interests. Leverage over Cuba was the most obvious point. Critical to this hypothesis is the assumption that the Soviets viewed the status quo over Berlin, not only as unacceptable, but problematic over the long-term. This is what would explain the willingness to take risky behavior in the early 1960s. Allison, ultimately finds this hypothesis most persuasive, although the assessment of a worsening status quo may have been poorly determined by the Soviets.

Kennedy himself, while placing weight on the missile gap and Cold War politics theses, understood the connection over Berlin. He and others in his administration realized the tension surrounding Berlin in the early 1960s was a serious problem over which the Soviets might use Cuba as leverage.\(^{113}\) Berlin was a splinter in the eye for the Soviets. Berlin was not only a pivot in Cold War politics but also represented a personal obsession of Khrushchev. Twice before he had demanded the withdrawal of American troops from both Eisenhower and Kennedy and both times they scoffed at his demands. Kennedy’s response to these demands went even so far as to increase conventional forces in Berlin and threatened the use of nuclear weapons if it were attacked. With all these tensions, the idea of Cuba as a tradeoff for Berlin in a diplomatic swap was an intriguing solution. Since Berlin was more important politically at the time than

\(^{112}\) Allison 99.

\(^{113}\) Allison 100.
Cuba, however, the swap would have appeared unequal -- a political victory for the Soviets. The United States believed if action in Cuba had to be taken, it needed to be well calculated to prevent the loss of Berlin. If they acted hastily by using force, Berlin might feel the pinch from the Soviets. If Berlin were lost, the integrity of the alliance would be weakened, and Western Europe would surely blame the United States for the loss and further question its commitment to the defense of Europe against Soviet aggression.\textsuperscript{114}

From this perspective, the Kennedy administration calculated that it had two choices: either to do something quickly to remedy the problem in Cuba or wait to have a probable nuclear crisis over Berlin. The problem with waiting on Cuba with a possible subsequent showdown in Berlin, meant the Soviets would have a massive boost in missile strength. The almost equalization of missile power would mean the Soviets ability to dictate policy towards Berlin would be increased.\textsuperscript{115} The difference in the two scenarios would be who would initiate hostilities first. With regards to Cuba, Khrushchev would have to be the one to initiate hostilities first. But if Kennedy waited, hostilities in Berlin would probably have to be initiated by the United States. Because of this, Kennedy chose to react towards Cuba.\textsuperscript{116}

The Kennedy administration wanted to avoid conflict with the Soviets. Kennedy feared that the wrong actions compounded with Soviet reactions would lead to an escalation of events which might lead to war. Calculations had to be made to accomplish the goal of getting the missiles out of Cuba while not provoking a conflict. This meant being able to give the Soviets a possible out to respond to the situation which would allow them to save face. The actions also had to be well calculated enough where as not to instigate a Soviet action against Berlin. The administration spent several days reviewing possible alternatives and weighing them against possible Soviet reactions. Finally, the administration generated six main courses of action the United States could take towards the Soviets along with possible Soviet reactions.

Although not given serious consideration, the first course of action was to do nothing. The logic of inaction meant the United States might be able to diffuse the situation by not giving political clout and attention to the Soviets. Granted, the placement of missiles in Cuba represented a serious jump in Soviet

\textsuperscript{114} Allison 104.
\textsuperscript{115} Allison. 108.
\textsuperscript{116} Allison 108.
missile capability, but it was assumed those gains would have been made by the Soviets in a few years anyway with further ICBM development. Also, by not initiating any sort of hostile action, any threat to Berlin in the near future would be postponed. And most importantly, if the missiles in Cuba were operational at the time of a U.S. strike, the United States would be clearly vulnerable to nuclear attack by the Soviets. Therefore, initiating any hostilities in Cuba would have come with an increased risk.¹¹⁷

Most in the administration held the belief inaction would worsen the situation in the long run, particularly regarding in Berlin. It would probably have been safe in the near future, but with a substantial missile force in Cuba, the Soviets would have increased their bargaining leverage. If the Soviets moved against Berlin, such a crisis would have been more complex than the United States had seen before. Furthermore, by U.S. inaction, American allies would have questioned America’s willingness to thwart Soviet expansionism, especially since the activity was in the Western Hemisphere. Compounding possible international fallout, the Kennedy administration would have suffered severe political damage on the home front from congressional Republicans, who had already criticized the administration’s handling of the Cuban situation. Therefore, there was no a serious consideration of implementing the option of doing nothing.¹¹⁸

Kennedy was also presented with an option of trying to use diplomatic pressure to handle the crisis. Aides wanted him to use two avenues of approach to Khrushchev. The first would be the discrete approach to Moscow by negotiating a deal for the removal of the missiles. This already had some drawbacks to it. First, the Soviets would have the upper hand in the negotiations; they would be in the position of strength. Therefore, their demands in any deal would probably be lopsided. Also, if the secrecy of the negotiations were compromised, American commitment to the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) would come under question. European allies would wonder what secret deals existed at the expense of European security. The second diplomatic approach to Moscow could be negotiations brought through UN channels, but this had drawbacks as well. Again, the problem would come from Western

¹¹⁷ Allison 112-113.
¹¹⁸ Allison 112-113.
Europe’s suspicion of a hollow U.S. commitment towards the defense of Europe. In such United Nations (UN) negotiations it would be highly probable that the United States would have to withdraw nuclear missiles based in Turkey for any kind of a deal. Although these missiles were planned to be withdrawn anyway, withdrawal at the time of the crisis would reaffirm some of NATO’s suspicions about the American allegiance to the alliance.\footnote{Allison 115.}

Another alternative presented to Kennedy was a secret approach to Castro. Although the probability of success would almost be zero, it still was brought up for consideration. The ultimatum given to Castro would be one in which he could either split ties with the Soviets or be removed from power. The consensus among most of Kennedy’s staff was Castro would not accept the proposal. The proposal would send a signal of probable U.S. action against communist Cuba, thus making Castro strengthen his ties with Moscow for security instead of breaking them. Finally, the missiles were Soviet, not Cuban. It was questionable as to the influence Castro really had on the placement of Soviet missiles.\footnote{Allison 115.}

Kennedy was also presented with options for using military force: the first being an all out invasion of the island; the second option an air strike to remove the missiles; and the third, a naval blockade of the island. An all out invasion of the island would not only remove the missiles for good but would also get rid of the Castro regime. The greatest fear from this option was the possible and almost inevitable confrontation with Soviet troops. The clashing of Soviet and American troops could escalate into a possible nuclear exchange and lead to Soviet reciprocity against Berlin.\footnote{Allison 115.}

The second military option called for an air strike to remove the missiles. A surprise air attack done immediately and effectively would remove the threat from the missiles, but might not stop the entire nuclear threat. If the air strike was too small, Soviet fighters or bombers armed with tactical nuclear weapons could still be able to strike at the southern United States. Furthermore, a small air attack would take care of the immediate missile threats but would not guarantee against future Soviet buildups in Cuba. The small air strike could lead to war with Cuba and inevitably prompt an American invasion of the island, which was
what the administration wanted to avoid. Therefore, a plan was presented for a massive strike against all missile sites and air bases in Cuba, which would obviously lead to direct combat between Soviet and U.S. forces. The air strike could easily escalate into an all out nuclear war. This option also led to the realization if total war did not break out, the Soviets would more than likely respond against Berlin or Turkey. Kennedy was not satisfied and wanted an option that would make the chance of nuclear war the least, but at the same time would maintain the resolve, integrity, and commitment of the United States to its allies.\textsuperscript{122}

The final option became the most attractive to Kennedy-- a naval blockade on all missile and military equipment going to the island. To Kennedy, this was a balanced approach to the crisis. It was firm enough to clarify U.S. intentions and resolve, but not as hostile as an all out attack. The blockade would be coupled with a demand for the removal of all nuclear missiles in Cuba and would be followed up by the use of force if the ultimatum were not met. Kennedy believed this balanced approach would shift the crisis more into the conventional realm and would give the United States an advantage because of its conventional military superiority in the region. Furthermore, the blockade would make Khrushchev the instigator of a hostile clash if he challenged the blockade, pushing the burden of decision making onto Soviet shoulders.\textsuperscript{123}

The blockade option did have dangerous risks associated with it. First, if the United States blockaded Cuba there could be a similar response against Berlin. Second, if Soviet and U.S. vessels clashed, escalation from that clash could lead to all-out war. Finally, if the Soviets refused to remove the missiles already in place, U.S. military force used to remove those missiles could also escalate into war.\textsuperscript{124}

Military confrontation and escalation into an all-out war did not occur. In the eyes of the United States, the blockade was a success. Soviet missile sites in place or being built were dismantled, and the missiles were returned to the Soviet Union. The Cuban missile crisis was over. The blockade seemed to have been effective at diffusing the crisis. U.S. analysts at the time speculated the Soviets retracted from

\textsuperscript{122} Allison 116-118.
\textsuperscript{123} Allison 118-120.
\textsuperscript{124} Allison 119.
their position due to U.S. conventional superiority in the region, coupled with a formidable strategic nuclear force. In addition clear demands by the United States to have the missiles removed was backed by a show of strong military force and the determination to use that force if necessary.\footnote{Allison. 121.}

According to Allison, the Soviets placed missiles in Cuba on the hope it would eventually lead to the West’s relinquishment of West Berlin. At the time of the crisis, reasoning focused on missile power and Cold War politics. The view from the Soviets was one where the status quo was in the losses’ frame. The Soviets wished to improve their relative position with regards to the United States. The lag in strategic nuclear strength coupled with their perceived embarrassment of Berlin prompted them to take action. Since the Soviet perception was in the losses frame, they were more likely to take some gamble in order to better their status quo. The gamble was placing missiles in Cuba.

As the Soviets tried to shift the status quo, the United States responded because the shift would have worsened their relative position. Therefore, the act of doing nothing was not an option. The United States needed to respond in a way to get back to the old status quo point. The challenge came in choosing the response. The response needed to achieve the old status quo, but not worsen the situation any further than it had already gone. This is where absolute calculations took on the primary influence in the decision making process. At the point of whether or not to attack Cuba with a pre-emptive strike or set up a blockade, the blockade was chosen due to the possibility that a direct attack could lead to nuclear war. There was no guarantee U.S. forces could hit all the nuclear missiles in Cuba, and there was no guarantee the strikes would not hit Soviet troops. Furthermore, there was not a guarantee that if the United States attacked Cuba, the Soviets would not attack Berlin.

As Huth, Gelpi, and Bennett have pointed out, the most significant deterrent is not just the possession of nuclear weapons, it is a second strike capability. And since the United States with an all-out attack against Cuba and the possibility of escalation into total war with the Soviets, could not guarantee results of hitting every nuclear weapon, there was an overwhelming risk of losing some U.S. cities in a nuclear exchange. Due to this fear of a nuclear exchange, a possible response was calculated in terms of absolutes.
It was not the blockade alone that ended the crisis, it was the fear of escalation.

The fear of escalation into a nuclear conflict was real. Through their personal statements and public actions, it is clear both Kennedy and Khrushchev feared a small clash could escalate into total war. According to Albert and Roberta Wohlstetter, the blockade was only the first step in a series of steps that could have ended the crisis peacefully or disastrously depending upon each side’s decisions. A decision matrix began to form at the beginning of the crisis and reached its peak at the introduction of the blockade. The blockade gave each side the opportunity to either diffuse the situation or escalate it. Kennedy chose to use the blockade to put the burden of decision on the Soviets. It showed U.S. resolution, and was not an all or nothing option. The blockade gave the Soviets an “out” to the crisis that was not immensely humiliating and was far better than the outcome of war. It did not back them into a corner where escalation to war would be the only option. The blockade in effect was a balanced approach that left room for both sides in the crisis to further expand their options for the next course of action.

As shown earlier in their model, Huth, Gelpi, and Bennett have presented supporting data as to explain why the Soviets reacted the way they did in the crisis. First, the fear of escalation into a nuclear exchange and more importantly the ability and perception of a second strike capability was at the forefront as to why the Soviets removed the missiles. Secondly, the region where the conflict was taking place coupled with U.S. conventional numerical superiority in the region obviously played a factor. And finally, the United States had not backed down to the Soviets in previous crises with regards to Berlin. Because of this, U.S. resolve gave the impression of being definite and concrete.

The United States also feared the possibility of a nuclear exchange. As mentioned earlier, this coupled with a possible second-strike capability proved to be the most significant. On the other hand, the United States enjoyed a stronger military presence in the region and the benefit of “home field advantage.” Furthermore, the United States had a reputation of resolute action in the handling of Berlin, which gave the United States a psychological advantage, especially where this crisis was being played out so close to its

126 Allison 126-129.
127 Allison 122.
As stated earlier with regards to nuclear war, the prisoner’s dilemma can be understood as \( R > T > P = S \), where Quadrant I of the prisoner’s dilemma model has the highest payoff. The highest reward was averting a conflict and waiting not to attack. Because of escalation and a second strike capability, there was a reward for waiting. For both the Soviet Union and the United States, choices were made to keep themselves in Quadrant I. For the United States choosing the blockade and waiting for it to work and not attacking Cuba helped keep them in Quadrant I. For the Soviet Union, not running the blockade or preempting an attack kept them in Quadrant I.

In terms of comparing the decisions in the game of chicken, it could be said both sides swerved, but at different times in the crisis. As Albert and Roberta Wohlstetter pointed out, a decision matrix began at the beginning of the crisis and reached its peak at the introduction of the blockade. Looking at the crisis as a whole an observation and conclusion could be made by the following: the Soviets placed missiles in Cuba, the United States responded, the Soviets took missiles out of Cuba, the Soviets blinked. As a whole it would appear the Soviets swerved in the game of chicken, but in reality both sides swerved, but at different times and at different degrees. The Soviets did not swerve in the beginning of the crisis and left the missiles in Cuba. But when they were presented with the possibility of escalating the crisis into a nuclear war, they swerved by taking the missiles out of Cuba. The United States on the other hand swerved in their decision by not taking military action against Cuba. For the United States, swerving came by implementing a blockade and not undertaking a strike against Cuba. But the United States did not swerve in its enforcement of the blockade.

The core of why each side swerved at different times came from the fear of escalation and calculations made in terms of absolutes based on the use of nuclear weapons. Images of each state’s capability and the impression of the other’s willingness to use nuclear weapons if a conflict erupted shifted both sides into avoiding a conflict.

The focus of the states shifted away from the relative status quo between the two states, to the absolute status quo of the individual state. This shift in frames comes through clearly in the language,
dialogue, and analysis of key decision makers. For example, even before the crisis unfolded, Kennedy had a deep fear of a potential nuclear war. After meetings with Khrushchev, the Berlin crisis of 1961, and during the Cuban missile crisis, Kennedy confided in his colleagues about his personal fear of nuclear war and was quoted as saying, “I keep thinking of the children, not my kids or yours, but the children of the world.”\textsuperscript{128} At the beginning of the crisis, Kennedy was quoted as saying, “[nuclear war was] the final failure.”\textsuperscript{129} As days passed, Kennedy had expressed one of his greatest personal fears as president was he might be the one to start a nuclear war. He was insistent to his colleagues he would take no action (or fail to act) in any way where it would push the world over the “brink”\textsuperscript{130} In talking with his brother, Robert Kennedy, the president was quoted as saying, “The great danger and risk in all this, is a miscalculation—a mistake in judgement.” The president went on to further comment on Barbara Tuchman’s book, \textit{The Guns of August} and related the crisis in Europe before World War I to the present crisis. He expressed concern over how leaders are sometimes goaded to go to war because of “pride” or to save “face”\textsuperscript{131} In a meeting with his staff, shortly after an American U-2 was shot down over Cuba, he was quoted as saying, “It isn’t the first step that concerns me, but both sides escalating to the fourth and fifth step, and we don’t go to the sixth because there is no one around to do so. We must remind ourselves we are embarking on a very hazardous course.”\textsuperscript{132} Robert Kennedy echoed the mood of the staff surrounding the crisis when he wrote, “there was a feeling that the noose was tightening on all of us, on Americans, on mankind, and that the bridges to escape were crumbling.”\textsuperscript{133} President Kennedy further echoed this by stating he could not be hasty or reckless, for the odds he figured the Soviets would go to war were “somewhere between one out of three and even.” And reiterated about the fact that innocent people around the world,

\begin{thebibliography}{9}
\bibitem{128} David F. Powers, et al., \textit{Johnny, we hardly knew ye} (Boston: Little Brown and Company, 1972) 285.
\bibitem{129} Sheldon Stern, “The 1997 Published Transcripts of the JFK Cuban Missile Crisis Tapes: Too Good to be True?” \textit{Presidential Studies Quarterly} 30.3 (2000): 587.
\end{thebibliography}
many them children would be killed. He was quoted as saying to an aide, “If it weren’t for these people that haven’t lived yet, it would be easy to make decisions of this sort.” These examples showed Kennedy’s concern over the potential destruction of nuclear war and clearly his focus was in terms of absolute losses rather than relative gains.

Furthermore, this shift in calculations was also shown through Kennedy’s aversion to take out the missile emplacements in Cuba, his reluctance to carry out a retaliatory strike in response to the shoot down of a U-2 reconnaissance aircraft, the entertainment of a potential Cuba-Turkey missile swap, and his pledge not to invade Cuba. When General Walter Sweeney, head of the U.S. Air Force Tactical Air Command, briefed Kennedy that he could not guarantee all the Soviet missiles would be destroyed and there was a possibility one or two missiles might be able to be launched after an air strike, Kennedy’s reported reaction was an immediate shift away from the air strike option. Clearly the risk of escalation and the possibility of just one nuclear weapon detonating over a U.S. city bore potential uncontestable costs that would outweigh any possible gain for Kennedy had he chosen the air strike. President Kennedy was clearly thinking in terms of potential absolute losses when he fended off pressure from many on his staff to use military force against SAM sites after the shoot down of the U-2 aircraft on October 27. Again, his restraint was predicated on the notion of possible escalation from a U.S. air strike and a clash between Soviet and American forces. His restraint was criticized by some on his military staff as being “weak”, while others on his staff warned the president the United States could not politically afford to do nothing if another shoot down occurred. The president also in his effort to avoid a nuclear conflict was more susceptible at trading the missiles in Cuba for U.S. missiles in Turkey. Even though Kennedy was warned by his staff and the State Department that a trade of missiles would “weaken” the alliance and by his brother that “[the trade of missiles] would tear apart NATO” if it became public, the deal appealed to the president. When referencing the possible Turkey-Cuba missile swap, he was quoted as saying, “to any

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138 Pious 85.
other rational man, it will look like a fair trade.” Kennedy went on further to justify his logic of a trade by stating, “What we’re going to be faced with is because we wouldn’t take the missiles out of Turkey, then maybe we’ll have to invade or make a massive strike on Cuba which we may lose Berlin. That’s what concerns me.” Again, his reluctance to use military force against Cuba and the idea of a missile swap stemmed from his own personal convictions to avert a possible escalation to total nuclear war. Clearly absolute calculations were at the forefront of his decision making process when the threat of nuclear war became more of a possibility. It is at this point where these potentially severe absolute losses outweighed any relative gains, and thus became dominant in the decision making process.

Similarly to Kennedy, Khrushchev also shifted his calculations from relative to absolute during the crisis as the potential for escalation into nuclear armed conflict increased. This was also shown through his actions and statements made to his subordinates and staff. First, was Khrushchev’s emphatic orders to the lead Soviet commander in Cuba that even though the United States might invade, their orders would be to resist, but under no circumstances were they to use nuclear weapons to thwart an attack. As the crisis escalated, Khrushchev personally felt the crisis began to slip beyond the realm of control. His response to Castro’s unbelievable request to pre-empt the U.S. invasion of Cuba with a nuclear first-strike on the United States was even more revealing. Khrushchev was reported as saying, “What? Is he [Castro] proposing that we start a nuclear war? That we launch missiles from Cuba? That is insane! We deployed the missiles there to prevent an attack on the island, to save Cuba and defend socialism. But now not only is he ready to die himself, he wants to drag us with him.” Khrushchev’s doubts to remove the missiles from Cuba had ended with this incident and in the same meeting was quoted as saying, “Remove them, and as soon as possible. Before it’s too late. Before something terrible happens.” Immediately after the U-2 shoot down on 27 October, Khrushchev gave strict orders to the head of Soviet forces in

139 Pious 86.
140 Pious 86.
141 Morgenthau 37.
143 Khrushchev 74.
Cuba to, “Allow no one near the missiles. Obey no orders to launch and under no circumstances install the warheads.” Furthermore, Khrushchev was cognizant of Kennedy’s pressure by the “hawks” on his staff to react aggressively towards the shoot down of the U-2. In a meeting with the members of the Central Committee’s Presidium, Khrushchev warned the committee of the potential impeding escalation by saying, “we have no right to take risks. If the President [Kennedy] announces there will be an invasion, he won’t be able to reverse himself. We have to let Kennedy know we want to help him...yes help. We now have a common cause, to save the world from those pushing us toward war.” Khrushchev’s message to Kennedy on 26 October also demonstrated the Soviet leader’s sense of urgency to de-escalate the crisis. The message urged the president not “to give way to pressures” and explained “If people do not show wisdom, then in the final analysis they will come to a clash, like blind moles, and then reciprocal extermination will begin.” Months later Khrushchev commented on the magnitude of the crisis and expressed his personal experience during the crisis and the possibility of an imminent nuclear war by saying he had, “a smell of burning in the air.”

Khrushchev, like Kennedy, when presented with options of continuing to pursue original relative gains or to avoid potential absolute losses, shifted his decision making process due to the threat of nuclear war. As nuclear war became more probable with each passing day, the relative gains hoped to be made were then put secondary in the decision making process and absolute calculations came to the forefront. Khrushchev’s desired relative gains of a possible missile leverage, a Soviet defense of Cuba, a political power play, or a Cuba-Berlin swap were clearly put aside when the threat of total nuclear war could emanate from increased escalation in the crisis. This was amplified by his personal and professional conversations with his staff, his correspondence with President Kennedy, and his urgency to remove the missiles from Cuba.

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144 Khrushchev 74.
145 Khrushchev 75.
147 Hilsman 131.
Over what dominated both states’ preferences in the crisis it is clear to see both states were in pursuit of relative gains at the beginning of the crisis, but the shift came with the introduction of possible escalation to nuclear war. As neorealists and neoliberals disagree over what dominates states preferences in international relations, both are correct with regards to certain aspects of this crisis. Neorealists were correct in the fact states pursue relative gains, especially in matters of security, however, it did not dominate throughout the entire spectrum of the decision making process when the potential use of nuclear weapons were involved, as this case shows. As Mathews has highlighted, while neoliberals do acknowledge relative calculations are important, they are important insofar as they can aid a state in a greater absolute payoff, such as in this case.\textsuperscript{149} The United States and Soviet Union kept relative gains at the forefront of the decision making process, but abandoned pursuit of these payoffs as nuclear war was becoming increasingly probable (pursuit of relative gains would not have led to a greater absolute payoff, rather the increased potential of an extreme absolute loss). As the quotes by Kennedy and Khrushchev have shown absolute calculations, in the avoidance of nuclear war, were put at the forefront of the decision making process.

Furthermore, the properties of the S-shaped value function, as discussed earlier, also explain why decision makers likeliness to gamble was decreased. This is due to prospect theory’s observation of losses hurt significantly more than gains feel good.\textsuperscript{150} As both leaders feared escalation and the uncontestable costs associated with nuclear weapons, their likeliness to gamble diminished, as supported by the dialogues. The deterrent effect of nuclear weapons impeded shifts of the relative status quo by bringing absolute losses to the forefront of the decision making process. Both sides were convinced of each other’s will and capability. Though “will” was more defined as both sides fear of being succumbed to uncontrollable events at the tactical level leading to an escalation of total nuclear war. This also was evident in the both leader’s dialogues.

The United States chose a blockade not only to keep the relative status quo between itself and the Soviet Union the same, more importantly it chose a blockade out of fear of drastically changing its own

\textsuperscript{149} Mathews 116.
\textsuperscript{150} Berejekian 790.
absolute status quo by the reality of nuclear war. Similarly, the Soviet Union chose a gamble and placed missiles in Cuba based upon relative calculations to better their relative status quo. But when faced with a possible nuclear escalation, the Soviets’ calculations shifted to terms of absolutes. Again, the fear of a horrific and drastic shift in their state’s absolute status quo by a possible nuclear war changed their focus from relative to absolute calculations. Thus, the removal of missiles from Cuba.

CASE II: THE PERSIAN GULF WAR

The Iraqi invasion of Kuwait in 1990 should be understood in the context of the eight-year Iran-Iraq war. In 1980, the Hussein regime attacked Iran because of the potential security and economic impact the fundamentalist Islamic state would have on Iraq. Iran’s Khomeini regime called for the exportation of the Islamic revolution around the world. Hussein feared the Islamic revolution in Iran would lead to internal instability with regards to the Kurdish and Shia Muslim populations in Iraq. Economically, by invading Iran, Iraq had hoped to increase its potential oil profits by increasing its oil reserves and lengthening its narrow coastline. Iraq had hoped to eventually harvest the billions of dollars of potential profits by invading the oil rich Kurzisten region in Iran. Furthermore, the virtually landlocked Iraq hoped to seize territory along the Persian Gulf shores from Iran to increase its mere fifteen miles of coastline. The increased coastline would equate to greater exports of oil and a greater economic independence. The timing of Iraq’s invasion of Iran was critical. With Iran in virtual disarray from the revolution in 1979, Iraq’s Saddam Hussein calculated he would have an expedient and decisive victory. Iraq gained only subtle support from Saudi Arabia and Kuwait before the Iraqi attack on Iran. Kuwait found itself in a predicament before the war. Twenty-five percent of its nationals were Shia, and of those ninety percent were Iranian. The Kuwaiti government feared an Islamic uprising in their own state, but also feared an attack by Iran if they overtly supported Iraq in a war. The borders of Iran and Iraq were dangerously close to Kuwait’s oil facilities and desalination plants, thus making them easily susceptible to air raids. An attack would wreak havoc on the

152 Hiro, The Longest War 38.
emirate. Kuwait eventually chose to subtly support Iraq in the war. It was not because of outright support for Hussein, but rather represented a choice between the lesser of two evils.  

The Iran-Iraq war began in September of 1980. Saddam Hussein’s hopes of an expedient conflict were soon dampened by the grueling reality of war which would last eight years. By the fall of 1980, a major Iranian counter attack recoiled the late summer push by Iraqi forces into Iran, all hopes for a quick and decisive victory by the Iraqis were dashed. As the Iranians began to acquire previously lost territory in the counter-attack and the tide began to turn in favor of the Iranians, Kuwait found itself covertly aiding Iraq in a war for Kuwaiti survival as an independent state. Along with a $2 billion interest free loan, 500-1,000 heavy trucks filled with supplies crossed the border from Kuwait to Iraq daily.

Kuwaiti financial and logistical aid did not go unnoticed by the Iranians. In November of 1980, Iranian air raids attacked Kuwaiti border posts to serve as retribution for the aid. Kuwait then sponsored two more loan packages to Iraq in 1981 totaling $2 billion. The Iranians responded with force by hitting a Kuwaiti oil refinery at Umm Aagosh. Kuwait responded by providing an additional $2 billion in aid to Iraq. The game of “Tit for Tat” between Iran and Kuwait went on for years. By 1984, Saudi and Kuwaiti annual aid to Iraq had reached $4 billion. Additionally, Kuwait and Saudi Arabia provided 300,000 barrels of oil per day (b/d) to Iraqi customers to prevent Iraq from defaulting on its oil contracts.

The Iranian raids was counterproductive as they actually spurred increased Kuwaiti support for Iraq and fueled further suspicions and harsher treatment of Kuwait’s Shia population internally which in turn angered Iran. Iran, on the other hand, did not renounce its claims of trying to expand the Islamic revolution because this would be considered a renege on the promise to expand the revolution throughout the Middle East. Therefore, by default, Kuwait became further entrenched in the war. Iran wanted the Gulf States be neutral in the conflict, which would in turn help Iran win the war. Neutrality was not possible given Iran’s ideological goal since, Iranian victory would have shifted the regional balance and become a threat.

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153 Hiro, The Longest War 38.
154 Hiro, The Longest War 77.
155 Hiro, The Longest War 155.
to the leadership and stability of the Gulf states, including Saudi Arabia.\textsuperscript{156}

Prior to the war, Iraq weighed its possible economic, security, political, and military gains before striking Iran. It is obvious the losses Iraq sustained from the war far outweighed the possible gains. It is estimated the total cost of the Iran-Iraq War, to include direct and indirect damage, lost revenues, and war debt, was roughly $1.2 trillion.\textsuperscript{157} The cost to Iraq in terms of lost oil revenues is estimated at $90 billion.\textsuperscript{158} To fund the war Iraq borrowed $70 billion. Roughly $15 billion came from Kuwait in the form of low or no interest loans, while another $20-25 billion of loans came from Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates (UAE).\textsuperscript{159} $10 billion came from the Soviet Union and other Eastern Bloc countries, while Western banks pitched in another $25 billion.\textsuperscript{160}

After the war Iraq looked to its oil industry and newly discovered oil reserves to alleviate the burden of its internal economic crisis. With its current reserves and those just discovered, Iraq’s total reserves skyrocketed close to 100 billion barrels of oil. The amount of oil reserves was second only to Saudi Arabia. The hurdle for Iraq would be to tap this extra oil supply for export with its dilapidated oil industry’s infrastructure. Because of their extreme indebtedness, it was going to be difficult for Iraq to secure more loans to rebuild its oil infrastructure. Early in the war, Iran devastated Iraq’s ability to export oil through the Persian Gulf by destroying its two offshore export terminals. This cut a nearly two million b/d export operation. Iraq examined alternate means of export by building three land pipelines, one through Turkey and two through Saudi Arabia to try and raise exports to 3 million b/d. The Iraqi economy in the late 1980s was stagnant even with these new initiatives. An increase in total OPEC output resulted in oil prices falling throughout the world. As a result, Iraq’s overall oil revenues dropped from $21 billion in 1980 to $10 billion in 1988 even with oil production nearly doubling and the discovery of new oil reserves.\textsuperscript{161}

Economically, Iraq fought the Iran-Iraq war on the backbone of foreign workers. At the height of the

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\textsuperscript{156} Hiro, \textit{The Longest War} 161.
\textsuperscript{157} Hiro, \textit{The Longest War} 1.
\textsuperscript{161} Joyner 9.
\end{flushleft}
war Iraq spent 57% of its gross domestic product (GDP) to fund the conflict. The domestic economy was dependent upon 40% of its workforce from 2 million foreign workers. The foreign workforce drained Iraqi domestic economic growth by having these foreign workers send large portions of their personal earnings back to their respective countries. For example, some 800,000 Egyptian workers were sending $2.2 billion in income back to Egypt each year. The redistribution of Iraqi money throughout the Middle East was basically an overall loss for Iraq’s domestic economy. This exacerbated the problem for any Iraqi economic stimulus. Iraqi economic woes led to an overall feeling of bitterness among the Iraqi population against other Arab nations due to the wide gap between Iraq’s per capita gross national product (GNP) and other Gulf states’ per capita GNP. Iraq ranked last among all Arab states in the Persian Gulf region with a per capita GNP of only $1,950. The next closest per capita GNP for the region was Oman with $5,070.

A positive gain for Iraq after its eight-year long war with Iran was its end military strength. The total armed forces of Iraq were 242,000 personnel at the beginning of the war in 1980. By 1988 that number had increased fourfold to over 1 million men. The war more than doubled the size of the armor inventory of Iraq to almost 5,000 tanks and tripled the artillery inventory to almost 4,000. This made Iraq’s army the most heavily armed country in the Middle East. The Iraqi air force improved through the development of an experienced cadre of pilots by Middle Eastern standards, and their procurement of Soviet third and sometimes fourth generation fighters. Iraq’s air force increased its total number of combat aircraft from 375 in 1980 to 716 in 1988, making it the second largest in the Middle East.

The Iraqi armed forces were organized as a model under Soviet military doctrine, concentrating its strength on sheer numbers and a substantial amount of rugged, simple, low budget, “heavy” equipment. This was in stark contrast to the Western model which relied on expensive, complicated, high tech equipment. Iraq benefitted from a military war machine simple to maintain that could survive the hostile and

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almost primitive battlefield conditions of desert warfare. The Soviet model helped Iraq keep its war-making industry efficient by keeping costs down and making equipment simple to produce, repair, and maintain. The simplicity of the equipment aided the large portion of the Iraqi military who were uneducated and also was of great benefit because of the large portion of foreign unskilled laborers in the Iraqi war industry. The Soviet Union and Eastern Bloc arms suppliers were generous in supporting Iraqi demand for large amounts of arms shipments. Equipment was often sold before a cash transaction took place, which often resulted in Saudi Arabia or Kuwait paying for the merchandise.165 

As mentioned earlier, Saddam Hussein was faced with an enormous economic burden after the war. Lost revenues and indebtedness were sure to plague Iraq for decades. With a battered nation, Hussein felt extreme bitterness towards those Arab states whom he felt basically were given a ‘free ride’ of security at the cost of Iraqi blood. As an appeal for economic aid Saddam Hussein asked King Hussein of Jordan and President Mubarak of Egypt to relay to other Arab states Iraq’s need for complete forgiveness of all debt and an infusion of some $30 billion. Along with this message, Saddam Hussein threatened the Gulf States that if this money were not received, he would attain it by alternate means. This verbal warning was accompanied by the Iraqi military holding maneuvers in the neutral zone outside the Kuwaiti border in February of 1990.166

Oil grievances against Kuwait and other Arab states were at the forefront of Hussein’s agenda. Iraq claimed some $2.4 billion worth of oil was extracted by Kuwait out of the Iraqi Rumaila oil field from 1980-90. Tariq Aziz, Iraq’s foreign minister, claimed the pumping from the Iraqi oil field could be viewed as an act of war because of the economic damage done to the Iraqi economy. Aziz demanded Kuwait pay $2.4 billion for damages inflicted on Iraq. Iraq also claimed there was a serious overproduction of oil quotas by the Organization of Petroleum Exporting Countries (OPEC) states. This was also viewed as an act of war by Iraq.167 They sent their oil minister to Saudi Arabia and Kuwait in February 1990 to pressure the emirates to abide by new production quotas set by OPEC earlier in the year. The Iraqi oil minister’s

165 Segal 948-950.
mission had little effect on the overall production of Kuwaiti oil. Kuwait continued to exceed OPEC quotas, thus helping to drive world oil prices down and pouring salt on an already open wound with Iraq.\textsuperscript{168} By May of 1990, Iraq’s oil minister met with OPEC ministers in Geneva. He reiterated the fact that overpumping by some Gulf states was detrimental to the Iraqi economy and urged not only strict compliance with OPEC quotas, but that the price of oil per barrel be raised. At an Arab Summit in Baghdad, Hussein made similar charges that specific Gulf states, particularly Kuwait and Saudi Arabia, were engaged in blatant overproduction and price depression. He specifically charged Kuwait and the UAE as guilty of cheating Iraq out of $4 billion by their overproduction. He argued that each dollar drop in the price of a barrel of oil was an Iraqi loss of $1 billion a year. In Hussein’s view, this was war waged on Iraq by other Arab states.\textsuperscript{169}

Kuwait and the UAE were unmoved by the charges of the May Summit. Kuwait did not reduce its current level of oil overproduction and showed no signs of forgiving the Iraqi war debt. Not until a July 1990 meeting of Gulf Oil Ministries did Kuwait yield to the pressures of Saudi Arabia, Iran, and Iraq to decrease oil production. Not believing Kuwait’s new promise to keep production within quotas and feeling impotent on the economic and political fronts, Hussein sent a division of his elite Republican Guard to the Kuwaiti border. By 19 July 1990, there were 35,000 men and 300 tanks as close as ten miles from the Kuwaiti border.\textsuperscript{170} On 16 July, Saddam had Tariq Aziz deliver a memorandum to the Arab League indicting some Gulf states, mainly Kuwait, for willful economic wrongdoings towards Iraq. The memorandum was to scold other Arab nations and seek economic restitution. In a political response to the Iraqi troop movement and memorandum, Kuwait sent a request to the President of the United Nations and called for a meeting of the Gulf Co-operation Council to get the Arab League fully involved in the crisis.\textsuperscript{171}

Hussein did not relent on his claims of blatant economic violations against Iraq or his on-going military

\textsuperscript{168} Freedman 45.
\textsuperscript{169} Freedman 48.
\textsuperscript{170} Freedman 47.
\textsuperscript{171} Freedman 50.
presence along the border. By the 27 July meeting of OPEC ministers in Geneva, Iraq was in the position to dictate its oil demands. OPEC agreed to raise the price of oil from $18 to $21 a barrel and to have strict enforcement of its overall production quota. On 31 July, Hussein had sent the vice-president of Iraq’s Revolutionary Command Council to the a Kuwaiti-Iraqi Summit in Jeddah, Saudi Arabia, to lay out a proposition for the withdrawal of Iraqi troops along the border in return for $10 billion in compensation from Kuwait for the use of the Rumaila oilfield and the surrender of disputed border territories. Iraq felt their proposition was falling on deaf ears and in response called off the summit. There was a tentative agreement to a future set of talks to take place four days later in Baghdad, but the meeting was never convened. After midnight on August 2nd, 120,000 Iraqi troops rolled across the Kuwaiti border.172

Reflecting on the events, which led to Iraq’s invasion of Kuwait, it is clear to see economics was placed as the primary contributing factor for the invasion. Viewing the economic hardships of his country, Hussein’s own decision making process to go to war was placed primarily on relative gains he hoped to make. In terms of Iraqi wealth, it lagged severely behind that of Kuwait. Saddam saw Kuwait as a freeloader for eight years during the Iran-Iraq war. Kuwait enjoyed prosperity and steady economic growth throughout the 1980s. An invasion would liquidate the billions of dollars of debt to Kuwait and would give Hussein an opportunity to redistribute Kuwaiti assets (totaling over $150 billion) back to Iraqi coffers. The invasion would double Iraqi’s oil reserves to nearly 200 billion barrels, making Iraq the controller of 7.5% of the world’s total crude oil production. Landlocked, Iraq could use the nearly 100 miles of coastline to increase exports of oil. This would generate independence from its pipelines through Turkey and Saudi Arabia.173

Iraq’s political aim for the invasion was the hope other Arab states would take Iraqi claims of perceived economic injustice seriously. In the region, Iraqi military power was second only to Israel. By using the military as an extension of Iraqi policy, Arab states might be more apt to support the absolution of Iraqi loans. Hussein’s military muscle could work to set future Arab agendas and sway opponents of

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172 Freedman 60.
Iraqi policy to a more pro-Iraqi stance. Furthermore, Hussein felt there were several Arab states, not only Kuwait, who were ungrateful toward the sacrifice Iraq had made in the eight-year war. A war, which Hussein felt, protected their sovereignty against Islamic fundamentalism. By invading Kuwait, focus in the Middle East would be on Iraq as the supreme powerhouse in the region.

Saddam Hussein viewed U.S. policy towards Iraq as conciliatory. The relationship was different at the public and private levels. Early in 1990, a U.S. Senate delegation traveled to Iraq to publically denounce Iraq’s quest for chemical and nuclear weapons. Hussein’s view privately was that the senators assured Hussein his problem was not with the American people, but with the American media. In the same month, a U.S. State Department official testified before the U.S. Congress to successfully swayed legislators to block legislation to impose economic sanctions on Iraq for its pursuit of nuclear and chemical weapons, citing it would be counterproductive to U.S. interests. Months later, the same official returned to report to congress on the status of Iraq and again advocated against economic sanctions. Although Iraq had not relented on its pursuit of nuclear and chemical weapons and still had an abysmal human rights record, the official testified Iraq had attempted to make small improvements in these areas.

The Iraqi leader also noted the U.S. State Department’s public condemnation of massing troops along the Kuwaiti border in July, and its deliberate mention in the same speech of how the United States had no defense commitments to any of the Persian Gulf states. This led Hussein to question the interpretation of U.S. credibility and intentions. During the troop buildup along the border, the United States publicly responded by stating “[It] would defend its interests and friends and the region” and “would continue to support the sovereignty of the Gulf States.” The U.S. State Department responded specifically to the massing of Iraqi troops along the Kuwaiti border by stating, “Iraq knows there is no place for coercion and intimidation in a civilized world.” Hussein perceived this statement as hostile and in response summoned

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174 Hilsman 230.
175 Freedman 62.
177 Karsh & Rautsi 214.
178 Freedman 51.
the U.S. ambassador, April Glaspie, to meet with Saddam Hussein.\textsuperscript{179} Hussein wanted more clarification on U.S. intent toward the crisis with Kuwait.\textsuperscript{180}

Critics contend the results of this meeting were a catastrophe for diverting an Iraqi invasion of Kuwait. According to U.S. reports, Ambassador Glaspie attempted to explain U.S. policy regarding the disputes between Iraq and Kuwait in the most diplomatic way possible. In doing so critics charge she failed to clearly explain the U.S. stance against possible Iraqi aggression against Kuwait. Ambassador Glaspie stated, “We can never excuse settlement of disputes by any but peaceful means.”\textsuperscript{181} In the discussions with the ambassador, Hussein was critical of the U.S. policy in the Gulf and charged the United States with supporting an economic war against Iraq. Furthermore, Hussein alluded to the possibility of terrorist attacks against the United States if the hostile policy towards Iraq was continued.\textsuperscript{182} Hussein recounted the history of strained relations between the United States and Iraq and also cited the recent progress in diplomatic relations made over the past five years. He went on to say diplomatic damage between the two countries would be certain if U.S. policy towards Iraq did not change. To prevent a possible meltdown of diplomatic relations, Ambassador Glaspie stated, “The United States had no opinion on the Arab-Arab conflicts, like Iraq’s border dispute with Kuwait.”\textsuperscript{183}

Saddam Hussein perceived the United States would not directly intervene in the Gulf crisis. Along with the meeting with Ambassador Glaspie, Iraq’s ambassador had sent a message back to Hussein assuring him of perceived American passivity towards intervention in the Persian Gulf. The Iraqi envoy went on to note that even though the present political mood in Washington was negative towards Iraq, any direct involvement by the United States was not likely. This was synonymous with Hussein’s personal analysis. The United States had no treaties or strong military and diplomatic ties with Kuwait. He felt the United States historically tended to respond based on emotions rather than any real action. He referenced the crises between Turkey and Cyprus, China and Tibet, and the Soviet Union and Afghanistan.

\textsuperscript{179} Duffy 24.
\textsuperscript{180} Karsh & Rautsi 215.
\textsuperscript{181} Triumph without Victory 125.
\textsuperscript{182} Freedman 52.
\textsuperscript{183} Duffy 24.
Furthermore, Hussein felt the U.S. populace had no stomach for severe casualties like Iraq had experienced in their eight-year war with Iran. He cited the U.S. reaction of the bombing of Marines in Lebanon and America’s ‘Vietnam Syndrome’.\footnote{Freedman 60.}

The significance of the Iraqi invasion of Kuwait to the United States was obvious when looking at the overall importance the Middle East plays to sustain the industrialized economies of the world. Forty-five percent of the world’s known oil reserves came from Iraq, Kuwait, and Saudi Arabia. If Iraq overran Kuwait quickly, it would have had an opportunity to move against Saudi Arabia. Since the Saudi military would be no match against the enormous Iraqi army, it would be difficult for Saudi Arabia to defend the majority of its oil fields, which are located within 200 miles of Kuwait. The possibility of Iraq controlling these reserves would have wreaked havoc on the world’s economies, especially that of the United States, Western Europe, and Japan. This is what U.S. policy makers feared the most. The potential to control the supply of oil output and the ability to greatly affect the prices of these reserves would result in great economic uncertainty. This would result in almost certain recession for the U.S. Japan would see their financial markets tumble and Europe would most likely see economic reform for the former Eastern Bloc countries disappear.\footnote{Freedman 185.}

For U.S. officials it was unclear about the ultimate goal for the invasion of Kuwait. It was not clear whether Iraq would continue into Saudi Arabia or if they would hold their position in Kuwait.\footnote{Hiro, Desert Shield 104.} It was clear to U. S. policy makers that action had to be taken on all fronts. The U.S. worked through the United Nations to draft and pass resolutions to executing economic sanctions against Iraq. The sanctions set up an embargo and froze Iraqi and Kuwaiti accounts.\footnote{Freedman 84.} Diplomatically, the United States convinced Saudi Arabia through sensitive intelligence briefs about the potential threat Iraqi forces posed to the security of Saudi Arabia. In response Saudi Arabia allowed the deployment of U.S. troops to enter their country as a defensive measure to deter and expel a possible Iraqi invasion.\footnote{Freedman 93.}
The Bush administration determined it was necessary to attain full Arab support for the deployment of U.S. forces to the region. To win support the administration compiled an economic plan of $25 billion to provide aid to regional states such as Turkey, Jordan, and Egypt hurt by the embargo of Iraq. The plan would compensate them billions of dollars in lost revenues due to the economic sanctions.\textsuperscript{189} To seal up support with the Soviet Union, President Bush met with President Gorbachev in September of 1990 at Helsinki. The results were favorable for the United States with the Soviet Union further demanding the withdrawal of Iraqi troops from Kuwait.\textsuperscript{190} In another measure to solidify the anti-Iraq coalition with the Soviet Union, the United States gave full briefing of American military plans in the Persian Gulf to the Soviet foreign minister in November of 1990. This would have been unheard of a few years earlier. Finally, the U.S. worked with other Security Council members to get authorization to use force, if necessary, to expel Iraqi forces from Kuwait.\textsuperscript{191} Saddam Hussein could not have anticipated much of this prior to the invasion.

The UN economic sanctions had a significant impact on Iraq. The blockade stifled the flow of spare parts and military supplies to the Iraqi armed forces. By the end of August 1990 the economic blockade was almost 100\% effective. With 95\% of its income coming from oil, the blockade cost Iraq $80 million daily.\textsuperscript{192} The loss in capital touched off a staggering inflation rate and halted all industrial and infrastructure programs.\textsuperscript{193} Lack of spare parts and supplies for their oil industrial complexes slowed down production to 20\% of its potential. This created a problem for Iraq to barely meet its domestic need for oil and petroleum products. Iraq also had trouble meeting its requirements for agricultural products for its people. The country imported 75\% of its food requirements. With the embargo, the loss of these imports further increased the hardships for its population.\textsuperscript{194}

In America, public opinion supporting the use of military action against Iraq was not strong. President Bush initiated a ‘last ditch’ effort to avoid war by holding diplomatic talks with Iraq. The U.S. position in

\textsuperscript{189} Hiro, Desert Shield 170.
\textsuperscript{190} Freedman 164.
\textsuperscript{191} Freedman 233.
\textsuperscript{192} Hiro Desert Shield 169.
\textsuperscript{193} Freedman 190.
\textsuperscript{194} Hiro, Desert Shield 173.
the talks would be uncompromising, focusing on the total withdrawal of Iraqi forces from Kuwait and the compliance of all Security Council resolutions. The U.S. decision to be uncompromising centered on the belief that even a minor compromise to any of the resolutions would undermine the stability of the Middle East in the future and would destroy U.S. credibility in the world. If the United States backed down, it would certainly be a victory for Saddam Hussein. The Arab world would look to Hussein as the one who was defiant and overcame U.S. power and influence. The United States feared displaying an impression of appeasement, a compromise would almost certainly lead to a future military showdown. The U.S. position was if Iraq went unchecked and there were no consequences for their actions, future aggressions would occur not only in the Middle East, but around the world as well. The Middle East leaders of Kuwait, Saudi Arabia, Egypt, and Israel warned the U.S. of this happening, as did many U.S. foreign policy analysts. Furthermore, with the decreased Soviet influence throughout the world and the United States emerging as the lone superpower, leadership, supported by action, was needed to prevent other world conflicts. If the United States was not going to stand firm to the resolutions, it could be concluded they would not stand firm on future crises in the world. This would result in an overall weakened American influence and a more unstable world.195

The Geneva talks on January 9, 1991 broke down after six hours with the United States and Iraq not budging from their original positions.196 The decision now was for the United States to go to war or not. The Bush administration faced a political front at home with Congress. Debates inside Washington had arisen as to whether congressional approval should be sought by the president to use military force. Adhering to political advisors and public opinion polls, the president lobbied congress for the authorization to use military force in accordance with U.N. Resolution 678. With a vote of 250-183 in the House of Representatives and 53-46 in the Senate, the U.S. Congress gave the Bush administration the green light to use military force.197

The Iraqi invasion of Kuwait was the result of the eight-year war with Iran. The economic hardships

195 Freedman 291.
196 Hiro, Desert Shield 298.
197 Freedman 294.
enured by Iraq threatened Iraq’s internal and external security and overall strength of the state and the Hussein regime. Berejekian’s writing on the gain-loss value function can be applied to the Iraqi predicament before the invasion of Kuwait. As he points out, a state such as Iraq would be more prone to take a gamble if their relative status quo was perceived as a loss. Iraq’s relative status quo compared to other Arab states in the region had shifted toward the losses frame due to the Iranian war. A war, which perceived by Iraq, was one where other Gulf states benefitted without the costs Iraq had paid. Iraq’s call for debt forgiveness, oil production regulation, and economic aid by other Gulf states appeared to be fruitless. To remedy their situation and to stabilize their overall status quo, Iraq used its strongest instrument of power, its military, to take a gamble with hopes to immediately eradicate billions of dollars of debt and improve their overall economic state. They were inclined toward risk because inaction would have cost more – inaction was a losing proposition.

Iraq calculated the invasion of Kuwait as being the option of the most amount of gain for the least amount of cost. There was, however, a flaw in this calculation. Iraq had seriously underestimated the willingness of the United States and other states around the world to become involved in the crisis. Hussein’s personal ignorance to current world affairs and his foreign policy staff’s lack of expertise led to gross miscalculations about world response. Hussein was not deterred by the possible threat of U.S. military intervention. This was due to his interpretation of a conciliatory U.S. policy towards Iraq months before the invasion of Kuwait. It was reaffirmed by his observance of the U.S. State Department and U.S. Congress’s political actions earlier in the year, his perception of U.S. passivity towards the situation, his staff’s analysis of U.S. policymakers, his meeting with Ambassador Glaspie, and his own personal convictions about the West.\(^{198}\)

Because Hussein was not deterred by any state, including the U.S., to oppose his actions against Kuwait, he calculated his gamble to improve his status quo would be relatively unimpeded. Iraq perceived its status quo as a loss at the time before the invasion. The economic woes of Iraq impacted its security. In matters of security, relative calculations are at the forefront of the decision making process. Since there

\(^{198}\) Karsh & Rautsi 214-216.
was no deterrer to prevent Iraq from taking a gamble to shift its status quo to the gains’ frame, it was easier for Iraq to concentrate on the prize of going to war and the subsequent relative payoff, rather than the possible consequences.

It is still not clear what course of action Hussein planned to take with regards to Saudi Arabia after invading Kuwait. Some analysts speculate he intended further action against Saudi Arabia, others say he sent troops close to the Saudi border to “rattle his saber.” An insight into his intentions was his order for his army in Kuwait to fall back and take up defensive positions when the initial force of U.S. troops arrived in the region. If he had any intentions of invading Saudi Arabia, actions before the United States had stabilized its deployment would have made more sense.

Hussein concluded U.S. military action against Iraq would not be attempted to remove his forces from Kuwait. Iraqi intelligence was poor, and even worse at predicting U.S. intentions. Hussein had some knowledge about American history, especially the effect the Vietnam War had on the American public. He noted the quick American withdrawal in Lebanon after losing 300 men, and if a war broke out, America could not take the losses in lives like Iraq could. Hussein’s impression of George Bush as Commander-in-Chief suggested the president would “buckle under pressure” at the first sign of a confrontation and would not follow through with military action. 199 Hussein made repeated remarks about how America ‘lacked Iraq’s readiness to lose 10,000 men in a day’s combat.’ 200 Furthermore, he also felt the American military was not used to fighting a sustained land war like Iraq had done with its eight-year war with Iran. Hussein also did not fully understand the technologically advanced weaponry of the U.S. arsenal. Precision guided weapons, extensive coordination of air power, and the rapid mobility of forces were not common in the Iraqi order of battle. The Iran-Iraq War was a series of drawn out heavyweight boxing matches with each side going head to head resulting in heavy casualties with no knock-out blows. Hussein was banking on the reality that it would take several months for the United States to mobilize and mount an attack. During this time he felt he could wait out the sanctions and let the U.S.-led coalition with the Arab states fall apart.

199 Freedman 241.
200 Freedman 52.
If he stood face to face with the West without blinking, he would shine through as a symbol of Arab independence and claimed leader of the Arab world. Lastly, Hussein was not fully aware of the world political situation. He felt the Soviet Union would not back a U.S.-led initiative for the use of force. He was unaware of how the Soviet Empire was dissolving and their interest not to disrupt the new relationship with Washington was of a primary concern.  

Although Hussein’s predictions about U.S. involvement about the invasion of Kuwait were incorrect, Huth, Gelpi, and Bennett do give some credence to Hussein’s decision making process as to why he was deterred before attacking Kuwait by U.S. policy. First, for an effective deterrent strategy to work, it has to be perceived as viable and real. The Hussein regime held the perception that the U.S. reaction to the invasion of Kuwait would lack any fortitude. Second, the conventional force ratio was in the Iraqi’s favor. Since the U.S. military presence in the region was not significant at the time of the Iraqi invasion, the conventional force ratio was clearly in Iraq’s favor. Third, the United States had no territorial claims in the Middle East and had no military pacts or treaties with Kuwait. Fourth, Iraq perceived U.S. resolve in previous disputes as being weak. Hussein felt the United States would not escalate a situation into armed conflict because of its unwillingness to accept large casualties. He felt the United States would capitulate if an armed conflict erupted. Therefore, involvement in a Middle East crisis would be slim, even though the U.S. was heavily dependent upon oil from the region.

The calculus that brought about the invasion -- a loss frame regarding the status quo and an option for achieving relative gains -- interestingly did not shift tremendously even though the strategic environment and the crisis did. Because of this, Hussein was not compelled to remove Iraqi troops from Kuwait even with the massive buildup of over 500,000 coalition troops in the region. His perception towards U.S. resilience and military capability were skewed, even with the conventional force ratio evening out. Furthermore, Hussein grossly underestimated U.S. military capability. His perception of warfare was based on the eight-year war with Iran where the battles were fought hundreds of miles away and the casualties were heavy. He did not foresee the massive air campaign that would be waged against him where targets would be

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201 Freedman 241.
destroyed in downtown Baghdad.\textsuperscript{202} He was also able to calculate on the possibility of heavy U.S. casualties early in a potential conflict and a political break down between the Arab and American coalition.\textsuperscript{203}

On the other hand, the United States had a political, economic, and military response to the invasion of Kuwait. The act of risking war and sending troops into harm’s way clearly would not have been done had the potential losses been minuscule. It was the threat of potential oil losses and subsequent economic perils which prompted swift action by the United States. The initial deployment of U.S. troops was sent to eliminate the possibility of an Iraqi attack on Saudi Arabia. It was not to expel Iraqi forces from Kuwait.\textsuperscript{204} The immediate liability for the United States was obviously the impact the invasion would have on oil supplies going to Western economies. It was feared the Iraqi invasion would almost certainly lead to economic instability in those economies dependent upon oil from the region. As Berejekian has pointed out, action is based upon the perception of whether or not the outcome is a gain or loss relative to the status quo. The United States perceived the Iraqi invasion as a loss compared to the previous status quo. Therefore, the U.S.’s initial response by deploying military forces to the region was an initial reaction to stop the potential shifting of its economic status quo into the losses frame. This holds for a balance of power perspective as well. Left unchanged, the regional balance of power shift brought about by the Iraqi invasion was a clear loss for the United States. Operating from a loss frame, the United States was, therefore, inclined to risk as well.

U.S. gains to be made by risking war with Iraq ranged in scope from economics to U.S. advantages in the post Cold War era. Economically the United States, nor the world for that fact, could stand to lose the delicate balance of power in the Middle East. The consistent flow of oil from Kuwait stimulated Japanese and Western European economies. The threat of fuel prices skyrocketing with the American economy teetering on recession, gave credence to support the war option. Politically, the crisis left open a superpower vacuum which needed to be filled. The Cold War concentrated on a bi-polar power

\textsuperscript{202} Freedman 280
\textsuperscript{203} Freedman 28.
\textsuperscript{204} Freedman 94.
structure between the United States and Soviet Union. With the Soviet Union dissolving, the United States saw the opportunity to grab the helm of leadership during the crisis. 205 Being the world’s largest economic and arguably the strongest military power in the world, the U.S., in reality, would be the only country able enough to mobilize the economic and military force needed to stop Iraq from further expansion into Saudi Arabia and to bring some stability to the region. 206

U.S. gains to be made by going to war with Iraq were a combination of economics and political power. The United States saw the opportunity to better its status quo in both arenas with the new status quo as unacceptable. While the initial response was to stop any more shifting of its economic status quo, the decision to use military force to expel Iraqi forces from Kuwait was one based on relative calculations. The United States did not want a power, such as Iraq, to dominate the region. Middle Eastern oil was crucial to the health of the U.S. economy which was so dependent upon the oil from the region. Instability in the Persian Gulf region coupled with an emerging dominant power would lead to economic uncertainty. By expelling Iraqi troops from Kuwait and restoring their government, the United States would retrieve the oil reserves that were available for Western markets. The increased supply and restoration of those reserves would continue to aid and strengthen Western economies. The decision to use military force and destroy a large portion of the Iraqi military would also help prevent the emergence of a dominant power in the region.207

Politically, U.S. action against Iraq was a way it could establish itself as the main power in the post-Cold War era. The focus had shifted from defending its Western allies from the threat of Soviet attack to defending the regional and global system. By its actions in the Persian Gulf, the United States would shift its leadership commitment from military defense of the West to Economic defense of the West.208 Furthermore, the Soviet Union’s economic internal deterioration led to its deterioration in overall military and political power. The loss of the Soviet Union’s relative position was a gain in the status quo for the

208 Yant 188.
emergence of the United States as a lone superpower. The global environment went from a stable bi-polar situation, to one where there became a vacuum of power. The United States saw the opportunity to fill the vacuum of power by its action in the Persian Gulf. The decision to expel Iraqi troops was critical in hopes to stabilize the region and the rest of the world. The United States hoped that by showing it would stop aggression in one area of the world, it would do so in other parts of the world as well. By accomplishing this, the U.S. would take on the sole leadership role to stop aggression throughout the world.\textsuperscript{209} And lastly, the U.S. had a unique opportunity to get a foothold militarily in the region with the prospect of achieving a permanent military presence in the Persian Gulf.\textsuperscript{210}

As stated earlier in the basic prisoner’s dilemma model, \( T>R>P>S \). In the Persian Gulf crisis, it is arguable Iraq and the United States had different outlooks on what payoff was more valuable in this particular model. After Iraq invaded Kuwait, the Iraqi perspective of the model might look slightly different where \( R>T>P>S \). The difference between this and the normal prisoner’s dilemma model is the value of ‘\( T \)’ and ‘\( R \)’. This is due mostly to the reward for waiting in Kuwait and not attacking the U.S. and coalition forces. For the United States, the expression would look like the basic prisoner’s dilemma model of \( T>R>P>S \). This is due mainly because of potential relative losses of inaction like those mentioned earlier. Iraq sought to keep itself in Quadrant I, to wait for the reward of not attacking and remaining in Kuwait. On the contrary, waiting was not the highest reward for the United States because of the perceived loss of doing nothing. \( T \) had the highest payoff. It was the best alternative for the United States. Thus, striking Iraq first and dismantling its military was of the highest priority. This was due to the relative gains the United States hoped to attain and potential losses it sought to avoid. In comparing the decision to go to war, as in the game of chicken, neither side swerved. Ultimately, both the United States and Iraq saw greater risk in the avoidance of war than in its fighting.

CONCLUSION

We should expect that international crises should emanate from dissatisfaction with a particular status

\textsuperscript{209} Yant 103.
\textsuperscript{210} Yant 188.
quo. It becomes a military crisis because the attempt to shift the status quo is unacceptable to at least one other state in the international system and the means through which the old status quo can be restored or a new mutually acceptable one created includes use of force. The central question of this thesis is why is the line between crisis and war crossed. This thesis suggests that two frameworks are useful for working through this difficult question. The frames through which states view their conditions are important. First, states concerned with losses, rather than gains, will be inclined to risky options such as precipitating a crisis. But war is a very risky action and states framing things through a loss context will be more likely to engage in this ultimate gamble. However, before making that final decision to use force, how states calculate what type of loss or gain is at stake intervenes. The frame of absolute versus relative calculations is critical. What determines these calculations? In large measure the escalatory scale determined by the weapon systems available to each side may be the key. Both cases revealed that the key players were working from losses frames. The Soviets and Iraqis precipitated crises because inaction to change the status quo was ultimately unacceptable. Their conditions were only getting worse. However, in response to these actions the United States also framed the crises in a losses frame as well. Not to have responded would have allowed stand new status quos that would have undermined long-term U.S. interests.

The key difference in the two cases rested on how the calculations of losses were framed. In the Cuban missile crisis the fear of escalation to a mutually unacceptable loss was palpable. The loss was framed in absolute terms. The Kennedy administration did not calculate whether it would fare better in a nuclear war than the Soviets and neither did the Khrushchev regime. War was simply a losing proposition for the United States (and the Soviet Union without reference to the other). Reliance on nuclear weapons was the key to this framing. While the crisis was conducted on the basis of relative calculations, the final decision to go to war was framed very differently.

In the Persian Gulf case, both sides never shifted from the relative calculation base that precipitated and fueled the crisis. The decision to move to war was still seated in relative calculations. In particular, both sides saw relative advantage in fighting a limited war. Hussein could lose such a war and still stand, politically tall. The United States could achieve its goals and leave Saddam still standing. Not only were
escalatory pressures not present, but there was no clear cut absolute loss or gain. Since both were calculating relative gains, cooperation on war avoidance was much more difficult and complex. In large measure, there was no shift in calculations at the moment of deciding to go to war, because the conventional environment did not provide a compelling need for such a shift. The contestability of conventional weapons allowed for greater variance in expectations about war and allowed for the prospect of fighting and advancing interest; that is, making relative gains. This difference in framing must be considered in studies of peace, crisis, and war.
Figure-1
The Gain-Loss Value Function

Subjective
Value (+)

$500 Loss

$500 Gain

Gains

Losses

Subjective
Value (-)

Berejekian, 1997, p. 791
Figure-2
A Lottery Choice Example

Value of lottery payoff: $100
Value of “sure thing”: $80
Expected value: 85% of the value of lottery payoff

Berejekian, 1997, p. 792
FIGURE-3
The Prisoner’s Dilemma

SIDE 1

WAIT

ATTACK

SIDE 2

WAIT

R,R  S,T

T,S  P,P

Barash, 1987, p.124
### FIGURE-4
The Game of Chicken

<table>
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