Personality and Foreign Policy: Tony Blair's Iraq Decisions

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The British choice in Iraq has been characterized as "Tony Blair's War," with many believing that the personality and leadership style of the prime minister played a crucial part in determining British participation. Is this the case? To investigate, I employ at-a-distance measures to recover Blair's personality from his responses to foreign policy questions in the House of Commons. I find that he has a high belief in his ability to control events, a low conceptual complexity, and a high need for power. Using newly available evidence on British decision making, I show how Blair's personality and leadership style did indeed shape both the process and outcome of British foreign policy toward Iraq. The research reemphasizes the importance of individual level factors in theories of foreign policy, as well as offering a comprehensive explanation of a critical episode.

Reflecting upon the decision to attack Iraq, a senior British cabinet minister commented that "had anyone else been leader, we would not have fought alongside Bush" (Stephens 2004:234). Is this a valid claim? To put it differently, would another occupant of the post of British prime minister, presented with the same set of circumstances, have acted as Tony Blair did? While it has been suggested that whoever is prime minister, the "special relationship" determines that Britain will follow the U.S. lead in all circumstances, there is a good deal of prima facie evidence suggesting that Blair's distinctive individual characteristics are a crucial factor in explaining the Iraq choices. Blair was not overly pressured by the Bush administration into joining the Iraq coalition, and the president directly offered him a way to step back from participation after Blair encountered difficulties generating domestic support for the war (Naughtie 2004:144). Secretary of Defense Donald Rumsfeld declared a general indifference to the question of ultimate British participation, stating on the eve of war, when it appeared as if Blair might not be able to get authorization from parliament to commit British troops, that the forces were not essential in any case (Naughtie 2004:145). A close adviser, convinced of the importance of Blair's personality to the outcome, comments that "there were six or seven moments in the Iraq story when he could have drawn back. He could have, and he didn't" (Naughtie 2004:79).

Further, Blair had been a proponent of action against former Iraq President Saddam Hussein long before the Bush administration began the buildup to war. In

both public and private, Blair had settled upon the basic parameters of his policy toward Iraq as early as 1998. During the UN weapon inspectors crisis of that year, Blair stated that: "The Saddam Hussein we face today is the same Saddam Hussein we faced yesterday. He has not changed. He remains an evil, brutal dictator . . . It is now clearer than ever that his games have to stop once and for all. If they do not, the consequences should be clear to all" (Butler Report 2004:54, paragraph 212). In a private conversation with the leader of the Liberal Democratic Party Paddy Ashdown, during mid-November 1997, Blair said "I have now seen some of the stuff (intelligence) on this. It really is pretty scary. He (Saddam) is very close to some appalling weapons of mass destruction (WMD). I don't understand why the French and others don't understand this. We cannot let him get away with it. The world thinks this is just gamesmanship. But it's deadly serious" (Ashdown 2001:127). Either of those statements would accurately describe Blair's position 5 years later. This does suggest that we should take Blair seriously when he insists that he was not merely "Bush's poodle," as he did to the Parliamentary Labour Party in February 2003: "People say you are doing this because the Americans are telling you to do it. I keep telling them that it's worse than that. I believe in it" (Riddell 2003:1).

Within the field of foreign policy analysis, it has often been suggested that foreign policy crises and wars involve conditions which favor the influence of personality, and that individuals' distinctive policy preferences, decision-making styles, and relationships to advisers are crucial elements in accounting for outcomes (Greenstein 1967; Holsti 1976:30; Suedfeld and Tetlock 1977; Hermann 1980a, 1980b, 1983, 1984; Winter 1987, 1993; Hermann and Preston 1994; Preston 1997; Preston and t'Hart 1999; Winter 2003:112). Working from this basis, this article seeks to investigate the impact of Blair's personality upon Britain's Iraq policy. Specifically, I utilize the Leadership Trait Analysis technique to recover the personality traits of Tony Blair through content analysis of his responses to foreign policy questions in the British House of Commons. I find that Blair measures as having a high belief in his ability to control events, a low conceptual complexity, and a high need for power. Drawing upon newly available evidence concerning Britain's Iraq decision making, I demonstrate the role these personality traits played in shaping the policy process and outcome in Britain. This research reemphasizes the importance of actor specific factors in theories of foreign policy, as well as offering a comprehensive explanation of a critical foreign policy decision. The first step is to introduce and apply procedures for measuring Tony Blair's personality.

At-A-Distance Personality Assessment

Under certain circumstances, individual characteristics of major international figures can have important impacts on policy outcomes (Greenstein 1967; Winter 2003:112). High-level, nonroutine policy making tasks, often involving crises and war, are perhaps the most prominent of these circumstances. In this context, much attention has been given to issues of conceptualization and measurement of individual psychological factors.

The so-called "at-a-distance" measures of the individual characteristics of political leaders have become increasingly prominent in recent years (Winter and Stewart 1977; Winter et al. 1991; Schafer 2000). At-a-distance methods are designed to provide valid, reliable data on leaders, and to mitigate the problem of the lack of direct access to political leaders and to private material which might reveal their individual characteristics (Taber 2000:6; Winter 2003:113). Indeed, the core assumption of the at-a-distance approach is that the public verbal output of political leaders, when processed by content analysis schemes linked to psychological concepts, can reveal important information about their world views and decision styles (Schafer 2000:512; Winter 2003:114).

Among the most prominent of the at-a-distance techniques is Margaret Hermann's Leadership Trait Analysis framework, an approach which focuses upon politically relevant personality traits. Leadership Trait Analysis conceptualizes personality as a combination of seven traits: belief in ability to control events, conceptual complexity, need for power, distrust of others, in-group bias, self-confidence, and task orientation. An individual's score on these variables is measured through a content analysis of their verbal output. More specifically, "an assumption is made that the more frequently leaders use certain words and phrases in their interview responses (and other verbal behavior) the more salient such content is to them . . . At issue is what percentage of the time when leaders could exhibit particular words and phrases they are, indeed, used" (Hermann 2003:186). The coding procedures are relatively straightforward. Extensive dictionaries were developed to correspond with each of the seven traits of interest. Words are categorized as being indicative of either a low or a high score on each trait. The leader's verbal output is then scanned for these words, with the score on each trait being the ratio of words tagged as "low" versus "high," for a final score between 0 and 1. The conceptualization and coding rules for the seven traits are summarized in Table 1.

Initial studies using the Leadership Trait Analysis framework used hand coding of texts. These procedures were labor intensive and time consuming, and raised concerns over the necessarily small samples of text used and the potential for scorer bias (Rasler, Thompson, and Chester 1980). However, developments in computer processing capabilities and software design have allowed for the automation of the technique (Young 2000; Mahdasian 2002). This eliminates intercoder reliability concerns as the computer perfectly replicates the coding results for a given piece of text each time. Additionally, vastly greater volumes of text can be coded given the improvements in the speed of processing in moving from hand to automated coding (Walker 2000).

Using this technique, Hermann and others have studied the personality and leadership style of a wide range of individuals: modern American presidents, Sub-Saharan African leaders, Soviet Politburo members, Iranian revolutionary leaders, and heads of intergovernmental organizations such as the United Nations and the European Union (Hermann 1984, 1987a, 1987b; Mastors 2000; Preston 2001; Taysi and Preston 2001; Kille and Scully 2003). Individual characteristics have been linked to factors such as the degree to which a leader challenges or respects constraints in the international environment, their openness to information, their motivation for leading, and their preferences over the structure and operation of advisory systems and decision processes (Hermann 2003; Schafer 2000; Preston 2001). Reviewing progress made within this research program, Kille and Scully (2003:175) note "strong support now exists for the argument that leaders have particular and identifiable traits that predispose them to behave in certain ways."

Method and Data

To measure Blair's personality, I collected and analyzed the universe of his responses to parliamentary questions focused upon foreign policy from May 5, 1997 (his first day in office) to March 19, 2003 (the beginning of the Iraq War), available through the *Hansard's Parliamentary Debates* series: a verbatim record of every word spoken in the British House of Commons. Responses to parliamentary questions meet many of the desired criteria as source materials for Leadership Trait Analysis. They are from a single source, eliminating the possibility of differential audience and venue effects. In relation to many types of material, such as set-piece speeches, they are quite spontaneous, reducing the risk that they are thoroughly prepared (and thus impression managed) answers, composed by an aide or speechwriter.[1]

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[1] The prime minister is not given copies of questions in advance. There are two ways in which a member of the House can ask the prime minister a question. Firstly, a member can schedule in advance a proforma question asking

TABLE 1. Trait Conceptualization and Coding Scheme

Trait	Description	Coding
Belief in ability to control events	Perception of the world as an environment leader can influence. Leader's own state is perceived as an influential actor in the international system	Percentage of verbs used that reflect action or planning for action of the leader or relevant group
Conceptual complexity	Capability of discerning different dimensions of the environment when describing actors, places, ideas, and situations	Percentage of words related to high complexity (i.e., "approximately," "possibility," "trend") vs. low complexity (i.e., "absolutely," "certainly," "irreversible")
Distrust of others	Doubt about and wariness of others.	Percentage of nouns that indicate misgivings or suspicions that others intend harm toward speaker or speaker's group
In-group bias	Perception of one's group as holding a central role, accompanied with strong feelings of national identity and honor	Percentage of references to the group that are favorable (i.e., "successful," "prosperous," "great"), show strength (i.e., "powerful," "capable") or a need to maintain group identity (i.e., "decide our own policies," "defend our borders").
Need for power	A concern with gaining, keeping and restoring power over others	Percentage of verbs that reflect actions of attack, advise, influence the behavior of others, concern with reputation
Self confidence	Personal image of self-importance in terms of the ability to deal with the environment	Percentage of personal pronouns used such as "my," "myself," "I," "me," and "mine," which show speaker perceives self as the instigator of an activity, an authority figure, or a recipient of a positive reward
Task orientation	Relative focus on problem solving versus maintenance of relationship to others. Higher score indicates greater problem focus	Percentage of words related to instrumental activities (i.e., "accomplishment," "plan," "proposal") versus concern for other's feelings and desires (i.e., "collaboration," "amnesty," "appreciation")

Note: Coding rules from Hermann (1987a, 2003).

TABLE 2. Tony Blair's Personality and Two Comparison Groups

Individual Characteristic	51 Political Leaders	Standard Deviation	12 British Prime Ministers	Standard Deviation	Tony Blair
Belief in ability to control events	0.35	0.04	0.33	0.05	0.45 (high)
Conceptual complexity	0.57	0.04	0.55	0.04	0.50 (low)
Distrust of others	0.12	0.04	0.08	0.02	0.10 (average)
In-group bias	0.09	0.02	0.07	0.01	0.08 (average)
Need for power	0.24	0.03	0.22	0.03	0.30 (high)
Self-confidence	0.41	0.08	0.40	0.05	0.39 (average)
Task orientation	0.63	0.06	0.69	0.05	0.66 (average)

Data on 51 world political leaders provided by Michael Young, Social Science Automation Inc., personal communication.

The use of responses to parliamentary questions is advantageous in one other respect—it provides a great deal of material for analysis. While the prime minister may answer questions posed by the press rarely if they so desire, they are mandated to appear before parliament at least once per week at prime minister's questions and whenever there is a major debate on government policy. The result of this prolific prime ministerial output is that the profile of Blair's personality which forms the basis for this study rests upon 140,000 + words spoken by the prime minister—vastly more that the 5,000 word suggested minimum. The actual analysis was performed using the automated content analysis software engine "Profiler Plus." As noted above, the use of computer coding eliminates reliability concerns and allows for a great deal of material to be processed.

Hermann's Leadership Trait Analysis technique has been used to generate personality profiles of many political leaders. The value in the wide application of this technique is that it is possible to compare each new leader analyzed against a previously established reference group, giving some substantive meaning to the data that is generated. However, while it is valuable to compare a particular leader to peers from around the world, the existing reference groups are heterogeneous samples of political leaders from many different countries and political systems. In recognition of the importance of comparing Blair to other possible individuals who could have occupied the post, I repeated the procedures for isolating his trait scores for all 11 other post-1945 British prime ministers. Therefore, Blair's personality can be compared with both a heterogeneous sample of 51 other political leaders, and a homogenous sample of 12 modern British prime ministers generated by content analysis of the universe of their responses to foreign policy questions in the House of Commons.

Blair's Personality

Table 2 reports Blair's personality scores, in comparison to reference groups of 51 world political leaders and 12 British prime ministers profiled using the same methodology. These reference groups establish a baseline against which Blair's personality can be assessed. Hermann (2003:186) suggests that individuals should

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the prime minister to list his or her engagements for the day, and then asking a substantive follow-up. This "supplementary" can be "any question that relates to prime ministerial responsibilities or ... any aspect of government policy" ("Parliamentary Questions," available at http://www.parliament.U.K./factsheets). The second source of questions are members who have not scheduled in advance, but indicate that they would like to ask a question by standing up and "catching the Speaker's eye." The Speaker of the House selects the individual and the prime minister has no control over who is chosen. This means that while a prime minister can perhaps anticipate some of the topics they will be asked to address given the news of the day, they have no way of knowing the specific form or thrust of the questions in advance.

be considered high or low in the seven traits based on whether they score outside of one standard deviation from the mean of the relevant reference group.

Blair emerges as distinctive on three personality traits, and several studies have established links between high or low scores on these traits and decision-making behavior in foreign policy (Hermann 1980a,; Kaarbo and Hermann 1998; Preston 2001). Below I summarize the distinctive aspects of Blair's personality and the expectations as to his behavior.[2] The approach here is to focus upon the personality traits in which Blair is distinctive from comparable political figures—his internal locus of control, low conceptual complexity, and high need for power. Of course, it is meaningful to know those traits upon which he is similar to others, but the logic of individual level analysis is that individual *differences* are important to outcomes, making the nature of those differences the crucial explanatory factor.

High Belief in Ability to Control Events

Tony Blair scores as over two standard deviations above the mean of both the 51 leader reference group and the 12 British prime minister reference group in his belief in ability to control events. This trait indicates the individual's subjectively perceived degree of control over the political environment. Leaders higher in this trait believe themselves to be efficacious in relation to the political environment on a personal level, and perceive that their state is an influential political actor. A higher belief in ability to control events is hypothesized to lead to a more proactive policy orientation, and a perception that the barriers to successful action are surmountable. Belief in ability to control events, as a central perceptual trait, represents the subjective locus of control of the individual: internal (a higher score) or external (a lower score), and as such has also been a central concern of research into operational codes (George 1969; Walker 1977; Walker, Schafer, and Young 1998). Of course, a subjective individual belief in personal efficacy does not necessarily translate into objective reality, and individuals high in this belief can be prone to overreach. In applications of this trait to foreign policy outputs Hermann (2003) found that, when combined with need for power, belief in ability to control events predicted the extent to which a political leader would challenge constraints within the international system. Similarly, Kaarbo and Hermann (1998:252–253) found that non-U.S. leaders who measure as high in this trait, such as former British Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher and former German Chancellor Konrad Adenauer, exhibited expansionist foreign policy orientations.

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[2] What if the results obtained differ when Blair is speaking only about Iraq? If this were the case, Blair's scores would seem to be driven by situational factors rather than reflect underlying personality traits. In order to test this possibility, I extracted all of Blair's comments solely on Iraq and performed the at-a-distance trait analysis on this material, with these results (relationship to Blair's overall trait scores derived from the entirety of his verbal output in parentheses):

Belief in Ability to Control Events: 45 ($\pm$ 0)
Conceptual Complexity: 50 ($\pm$ 0)
Distrust of Others: 11(+ 1)
In-Group Bias: 6 (− 2)
Need for Power: 26 (− 4)
Self Confidence: 47 (+ 8)
Task Orientation: 67 (+ 1)

On the three key traits Blair's categorization does not change. The only substantive differences obtained are that Blair moves from being average-low to low on in-group bias (which is not a focus of my analysis), and moves marginally into the high category in relation to the 12 prime minister reference group on self confidence, while remaining in the average category in relation to the 51 political leader group. Of course, Blair said much less on Iraq during a short period of time than on foreign policy over his entire period in office, and so the scores derived from Iraq material are based on a much smaller sample of his speech—this sampling effect is the probable source of the small variation observed. The overall stability shown across the two analyses provides support for the proposition that the method is picking up underlying personality traits.

In terms of the decision making process, Preston (1996/1997) found that leaders higher in belief in ability to control events tended to prefer proactive policy solutions and a less deliberative decision process. With his high score on this trait, we would expect from Blair a proactive policy stance and a relatively low weighting of the environmental constraints to political action in his decision calculus.

Low Conceptual Complexity

Blair scores more than one standard deviation below the means of both reference groups on conceptual complexity. This trait indicates the degree of differentiation an individual shows in describing the environment within which they operate: people, places, actors, and things (Hermann 1980a:21). Individuals higher in this trait operate with a more nuanced view of the political world, develop complex images of others, and perceive a wide array of factors as relevant to a decision. Individuals who are lower, by contrast, operate with a more black and white view of events and actors, are comfortable with relatively straightforward binary classification schemes (i.e., ''good and evil,'' ''them and us''), and make decisions based on a more restricted calculus of significant factors. Higher complexity is therefore associated with a desire to obtain more information before making a decision, and a desire to carefully monitor the environment for feedback on the results of the initial decision. Lower complexity is associated with a willingness to make decisions based upon limited information, and the possibility of a failure to perceive, or a propensity to discount, information which is indicative of a failing course of action.

In terms of linking complexity to foreign policy outputs, Hermann (1980a:40) found that lower complexity can be associated with a more committed and aggressive foreign policy (see also Suedfeld and Tetlock 1977). In examining the effect of complexity upon decision-making processes, Preston (2001) found that low complexity individuals exhibited a more decisive style, and engaged in a more restricted information search than higher complexity leaders (see also Kowert 2002). With his low score on this trait we would expect from Blair a straightforward information processing style, characterized by limited search and an emphasis on binary categorizations, a decisive decision orientation with a minimum of inner government debate and discussion, and a relatively low degree of reconsideration of fundamental policies.

High Need for Power

The final personality trait upon which Blair is distinctive is need for power, upon which he scores more than two standard deviations higher than the reference group means. Need for power, which draws upon the psychology of motivation, indicates the impulse to gain, maintain, or restore the individual's control over people, policy process, and outcomes. Individuals higher in the need for power require greater personal control and involvement in policy, and have an increased concern that the policy output reflect their preference, rather than be a consensual group decision. By contrast, the lower the need for power, the greater the willingness to delegate and to accept an outcome contrary to the individual's desire. As a central motivational factor in leadership style, need for power has a long lineage in the study of political elites (Winter 1987, 1992, 1993) Hermann (2003:195–196) suggests that individuals high in the need for power will acquire a great degree of expertise in sizing up situations and people, such that they will be very skilled in ensuring that outcomes reflect their preferences.

Preston (2001) found that need for power was a central determinant of decision-making processes, in particular shaping the nexus between leaders and advisory groups. Individuals higher in need for power, Preston found, shaped advisory processes that facilitated their constant involvement in policy formulation, decision,

and implementation. They tended to concentrate debate and decision within tight "inner circles" of advisers who did not necessarily occupy positions of formal authority, but were of like mind and personally dependent upon the leader. Preston argued that while this minimized policy drift and bureaucratic delay, there was a cost in terms of the diversity of viewpoints that were represented in the decision process (see also Preston and t'Hart 1999). By contrast, individuals lower in the need for power exhibited less activist leadership styles, and were more comfortable with delegating responsibility and working through regularized structures that diffuse authority to others. Given Blair's high score in need for power, we would expect him to be heavily involved in all aspects of policy formation, and to shape an advisory and decision process based upon small groups of hand-picked individuals, relegating formal structures such as the cabinet and the Foreign Office to at best a "rubber stamp" role.

In summary, Blair scores as having a high belief in his ability to control events, a low conceptual complexity, and a high need for power. These scores allow for the generation of predictive hypotheses concerning decision-making behavior and policy preferences. With expectations established as to the impact of Blair's personality upon policy outputs and processes, I turn to an examination of Iraq decision making in Britain.

The Iraq Decisions

Recently available evidence makes it possible to explore the making of policy toward Iraq in detail. The decision-making process has since become quite controversial, and consequently many of the relevant facts have become public record, offering a metaphorical window into the "corridors of power" through primary sources, and supplementing the large secondary literature and press accounts.[3] In drawing together the evidence, my goal here is to establish whether the expectations concerning Blair's decision-making behavior derived from his personality profile receive support in the Iraq case. Table 3 summarizes Blair's expected behaviors and impact on policy given his personality, and the evidence from the Iraq decisions.

With Blair's high score on belief in ability to control events, we would expect him to show evidence of a proactive policy orientation rooted in a perceived internal

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[3] The controversy has been a boon to researchers, who would ordinarily have had to wait 30 years for the release of some of the information on the government's decision making now available. Five main primary sources of information, supplementing numerous secondary accounts, have become available. Firstly, the two cabinet ministers who resigned over the decision to fight without a second UN resolution, Leader of the House of Commons Robin Cook and International Development Secretary Clare Short, published detailed book-length accounts of the decision-making process. Short's account reproduced verbatim large chunks of her contemporaneous diary. Secondly, the death under curious circumstances of Dr. David Kelly was investigated by the independent "Hutton Inquiry." Dr. Kelly, a WMD expert who advised the British government on Iraq's WMD activity, emerged as the source for a BBC report alleging that a dossier released by the government intended to bolster the public perception of a threat from Iraq had in fact, in the memorable phrase of the BBC correspondent, been "sexed up" beyond what the intelligence could support. Dr. Kelly was subsequently identified publicly by the government as the source for the report, and some days later committed suicide. The Hutton inquiry thus indirectly investigated questions pertaining to the use of intelligence in the decisions. Thirdly, the "Butler inquiry" pursued a wider remit concerned with the use of intelligence, and also processes of decision-making such as the involvement of cabinet more generally. Fourthly, the standing House of Commons Committee on Foreign Affairs investigated the entirety of "the decision to go to war with Iraq," extending its inquiry beyond the originally allotted time period. Hutton, Butler, and the Foreign Affairs Committee received direct testimony from senior ministers, and Prime Minister Blair himself. Finally, the controversy over the legal basis of the war has led to the release of the secret personal advice to Blair from the British attorney general, in documents that also touch upon the differences in interpretation of the U.S. and the U.K. in March 2003. In addition minutes of a July 2002 discussion of Iraq by Blair's closest advisers (the "Downing Street Memo") were leaked on the eve of the May 2005 General Election. The cumulative effect is that a detailed narrative of the decisions and the role of the major participants can now be established. While of course fresh details will emerge with the full release of the government's records, there does exist an unusual opportunity to study a recent episode using high quality sources.

TABLE 3. Expectations and Evidence of the Impact of Blair's Personality on Britain's Iraq Decisions

Trait	Hypothesized Behavior	Evidence from Iraq Decision Making
Belief in ability to control events (high)	High perceived degree of personal control over environment Discounting of barriers to successful action Preference for proactive policies	Activist, interventionist foreign policy stance Blair's belief in likelihood of positive outcome, in terms of securing domestic support and U.N. backing Blair's belief in ability to influence foreign policy of United States and European opponents of war—France, Germany, Russia
Conceptual complexity (low)	Black and white view of political actors and environment, binary classification scheme Propensity to discount/ignore information discrepant with existing perceptions Decisive style, with low need for information and minimal debate	Black and white view of Iraq, expressed in public and noted by cabinet colleagues and advisers Greater weight given to intelligence supportive of existing policy disposition, with discounting of information indicating doubts over Iraq WMD capability Framing of Iraq question as moral issue of 'right and wrong' Absolutist framing of alliance with United States, unwilling to consider nuanced positions short of complete support
Need for power (high)	Greater personal control and involvement in policy Tendency to impose personal views rather than seek consensus Concentration of decision making within small, informal groups hand picked by leader	High personal involvement in Iraq decisions Restriction of opportunities for open debate on Iraq policy Restriction of information on advanced state of policymaking by mid-2002 and on legal aspects of war Use of informal small groups and bilateral discussions with ministers meeting in prime minister's "den" Limited use of cabinet and formalized decision-making structures, including foreign office. Cabinet presented with 'pre-packed' decision reached elsewhere Exclusion of dissenters from core policymaking group

locus of control, and a high sense of efficacy in terms of shaping the course of events. Blair's foreign policy, both during the Iraq case and in general, has indeed been based on activist, interventionist principles (Dunne 2005). As has been repeatedly noted, Blair is the "waringest" prime minister in British history, having used force on five occasions in eight years. The clearest elaboration of Blair's proactive, interventionist philosophy came in his widely reported "Doctrine of the International Community" speech in Chicago during April 1999. Blair suggested that the principle of noninterference in the internal affairs of states should not be regarded as an insurmountable constraint, and "must be qualified in important respects." For Blair, "the most pressing foreign policy problem we face is to identify the circumstances in which we should get actively involved in other people's conflicts" (Blair 1999). Blair argued that dictatorial regimes forfeit their sovereign right to noninterference both on moral grounds of harming their people and practical grounds of threatening others: "it is states that are repressed, that are dictatorial, that give their people no freedom, that don't allow them to exercise democratic rights that in my experience and judgment end up threatening others" (Blair 1999).

This interventionist view, which relies on a belief in the efficacy of action by one's state as well as the moral imperative to do so, was applied in particular to the Iraq case (Meyer 2005b). The "Butler Commission," set up as an independent official inquiry into the veracity of the government's claims on Iraqi WMD, reports that Blair in testimony:

> . . . told us that even before the attacks of 11 September 2001, his concern in this area was increasingly causing him to examine more proactive policy options . . . The prime minister's view was that a stand had to be taken, and a more active policy put in place to prevent the continuing development and proliferation of nuclear, biological, and chemical weapons and technology, in breach of the will of the international community. (Butler 2004:105, paragraph 426)

In terms of the impact of Blair's strong internal locus of control on the decision-making process in the Iraq case, participants have suggested that Blair believed he could accomplish several difficult tasks in shaping the course of events: convince U.S. President George W. Bush to seek UN authorization for an attack, convince public opinion in Britain of the wisdom of such a course of action, and convince parliament, and those with substantial doubts in the cabinet, that an attack was necessary. President Bush did seek an initial UN resolution, which the Leader of the House of Commons and former Foreign Secretary Robin Cook states was "the only point in the whole saga where it is possible to pinpoint a clear instance where British influence made any difference to U.S. policy on Iraq" (Cook 2004:205).

In the other instances, Blair appears to have overestimated the degree to which he could influence events. Cook reports being struck on several occasions by Blair's upbeat assessment of the prospects of securing full UN authorization (Cook 2004:308, 309, 314), and when this did not transpire, of Blair being "mystified" and "baffled" as to how he had got into such a situation (Cook 2004:320, 324). During January 2003, when it was far from certain that the necessary UN resolutions could be obtained, Blair confided in a cabinet colleague his confidence in the outcome: "We'll get UN cover under all conceivable circumstances. Trust me, I know my way through this" (Kampfner 2004a:256). However, ministers were said to be "united in their slightly nervous wonderment at his certainty" of a positive outcome (Stephens 2004:219), while a senior cabinet minister recalls that "he has got himself into a situation with no exit strategy. He became subject to forces he could not control" (Kampfner 2004a:255).

Those who have interacted with Blair find this to be a characteristic of his political style. A close aide comments that

> Tony is the great persuader. He thinks he can convert people even when it might
> seem as if he doesn't have a cat in hell's chance of succeeding. Call him naïve, call
> it what you will, but he never gives up. He would say things like "I can get Jacques
> (Chirac) to do this" or "leave Putin to me"(Kampfner 2004a:127).

A French official suggests that "(t)here is not a single problem that Blair thinks he cannot solve with his own personal engagement—it could be Russia, it could be Africa." However, this can also lead to overreach: "The trouble is, the world is a little more complicated than that" (Kampfner 2004a:128).

Given Blair's low score on conceptual complexity, we would expect him to frame situations in a black and white manner, exhibit a largely undifferentiated view of his political environment, engage in limited information search before making decisions, and show a general reluctance to reconsider policy decisions. There is evidence that Blair did indeed operate in this manner during the Iraq decisions. Firstly, Blair defined the Saddam Hussein regime in black and white terms: it was "evil" (Webster 2002), these "are not people like us . . . They are not people who obey the normal norms of human behavior" (Parker 2002). The justification for action was "very simple": WMD. The need for military action was also categorical: "Iraq must be denied the means to make them" (Webster and Hall 2002).

Cabinet colleagues felt that Blair did not take sufficient notice of the nuances associated with this policy, nor the range of views on the matter among members of both the British government and the UN Security Council. Clare Short, the International Development Secretary at the time, felt he showed a distinct "lack of attention to detail" (Short 2004:175), a position subsequently echoed by Sir Christopher Meyer, U.K. Ambassador to the United States until the eve of the war, who noted that while Blair "liked the vision thing . . . he was wasn't interested in the ballast behind the ideas" (Glover and MacAskill 2005). An expert on Iraq within the British government, who advised Blair before the war, comments somewhat pejoratively that "I was staggered at Blair's . . . inability to engage with the complexities. For him, it seemed to be highly personal: an evil Saddam versus Blair–Bush. He didn't seem to have a perception of Iraq as a complex country" (Naughtie 2004:62). Indeed, accounts of Blair's policymaking style invariably stress his focus upon fundamental principles over detail, his limited information search, and his lack of receptivity to information which does not accord with his existing beliefs (Naughtie 2004:14, 17; Seldon 2004:599, 616, 624).

This provides some explanation for Blair's handling of intelligence on Iraqi WMD, which the Butler Report (2004:67, paragraph 270) described as "sporadic and patchy," but Blair apparently viewed as unequivocal. In his foreword to the government's "September" dossier on Iraqi WMD, Blair stripped the intelligence of caveats, writing "(w)hat I believe the assessed intelligence has established beyond doubt is that Saddam has continued to produce chemical and biological weapons, that he continues in his efforts to develop nuclear weapons, and that he has been able to extend the range of his ballistic missile program . . . I am in no doubt that the threat is serious and current, that he has made progress on WMD, and that he has to be stopped" (Blair 2003:3). The Hutton inquiry investigated the process of putting together this dossier, finding that the prime minister had called for its "strengthening" on several occasions. Presented with the assertively worded final draft, Blair's close adviser Alastair Campbell reported to the authors that the prime minister found it "good: but I pointed out to him that he is not exactly a 'don't know' on the issue." (Hutton 2004:133, paragraph 212). The Butler inquiry (2004:82, paragraph 331) suggested that the interpretation of the intelligence in this dossier went to the "outer limits" of what was reasonable. Blair's use of the intelligence in a manner which did not recognize the caveats and uncertainties involved is consistent with the information processing style of lower complexity leaders.

Blair's lower complexity score also provides some explanation for his much commented upon moralistic style and, unusually for a British prime minister, use of religious references (Seldon 2004:515–516). Indeed, it has been suggested (mostly by British observers) that the shared religiosity of Blair and President Bush can help explain their shared view of the Iraq situation (Shawcross 2003:46–47; Ferguson 2004:12–14). Paul Hoggett (2005:418) suggests that the prime minister succumbed to "a number of powerful illusions touching upon notions of imminence, teleology and salvation through which Blair's religiosity found expression in the secular field of global politics." However, "religiosity" in itself is an insufficient explanation for foreign policy actions: there were, to lodge only the most obvious objection to this as an explanatory variable, many people of faith who did not support the war. That being said, the particular interpretation of morality by Blair, especially his comfort with black and white judgments of right and wrong, would be expected given his lower scores on conceptual complexity. Blair's explanation of his faith is consistent with this interpretation. As he wrote in the foreword to a collection of essays on faith and politics:

> Christianity is a very tough religion, it is judgmental. There is right and wrong. There is good and bad. We all know this, of course, but it has become fashionable to be uncomfortable about such language. But when we look at our world today and how much needs to be done, we should not hesitate to make such judgments. (quoted in Kampfner 2004a:74)

The salient point is not that Blair's faith directs his foreign policy, but that his interpretation of issues of morality and faith is essentially dichotomous, and that he shows evidence of viewing foreign policy as having a significant moral dimension. As William Shawcross (2003:47), who is supportive of Blair's choices, puts it "(t)here is of course far more to Blair's decision making than his religion. But he brought his views of right and wrong to the conduct of Britain's foreign policy."

Blair's absolutist framing of the alliance with the United States is also consistent with a lower complexity information processing style. Robin Cook states that it is a "fixed pole" of Blair's world view, not just that the alliance is important (which would not be a particularly distinctive viewpoint), but that the United Kingdom "must be the No. 1 ally of the United States" (Cook 2004:102; Naughtie 2004:129). For Blair, there could be no position in relation to the United States which stopped short of complete support with commitment of military forces: Not for Blair Edward Heath's studied neutrality, nor Harold Wilson's refusal to commit British troops during Vietnam. In Blair's view, any deviation from absolute support risked the entire alliance, as he indicated in responding to cabinet suggestions that he could perhaps afford to be more critical of the United States: "I will tell you that we must stand close to America. If we don't, we will lose our influence to shape what they do" (Seldon 2004:574). Foreign Secretary Jack Straw suggested to Blair that on this occasion, given the domestic political difficulties and the lack of international support for war, the United Kingdom should qualify its commitment to the United States, offering political support but no troops. Blair rejected this on the grounds that the U.K. alliance with the United States was an all or nothing proposition (Kampfner 2004a:168, 203).

Blair is distinctive in one other trait: his high score on need for power. Given this, we would expect him to maintain control over policy decisions and processes, and to take decisions in small groups of hand-picked advisers or bilaterally with senior ministers. In many ways, Blair's high need for power should act to magnify the impact of his other personality traits on British foreign policy, given that individuals with a high need for power tend to take tight personal control over policy processes. In an overall sense, Blair has indeed consistently demonstrated a high degree of personal involvement in foreign policy making. Philip Gould, a close adviser to

Blair, notes that his preferred mode of operation is a "unitary command structure" (Rentoul 2001:544), while another aide commented that Blair in his degree of personal involvement sought to exercise "Napoleonic" control (Hennessy 2001:478). In the period leading up to the Iraq war, Blair's foreign secretary, Jack Straw, found it difficult to exercise much authority in foreign policy given Blair's close involvement (Maddox 2002). He confirmed this, albeit diplomatically, by noting that "There is a recognition that if there is an international crisis on this scale the head of the government will be leading the national effort, and he had sure better be" (Beeston and Webster 2001:1).

During the Iraq decisions, Blair largely made policy through what has been called his "inner–inner" circle of personal advisers (Guha 2003; Cook 2004:112). A senior minister observed that Blair was wary of open debate: "Tony says he does discuss this with colleagues, but he does not like things to get out of control," preferring instead bilateral meetings with senior colleagues or making policy in small, informal groups, often on the No. 10 sofa (White 2002). Clare Short, upset at being excluded from the core policy-making group, reported to the House of Commons Foreign Affairs Committee that policy was made by Blair and his hand-picked, nonministerial advisers: "That close entourage . . . That was the team, they were the ones who moved together all the time. They attended the daily 'war cabinet.' That was the in group, that was the group that was in charge of policy" (House of Commons Foreign Affairs Committee 2003:43, paragraph 141).

In theory, Iraq decisions should have been taken through a combination of the Cabinet Committee on Overseas Policy and Defense (OPD), a smaller group suited to handling details, and the full cabinet, which should have set the basic parameters of policy. However, Blair disliked the OPD, finding it "too formal" and "insufficiently focused" (Seldon 2004:580). Consequently, OPD never met, with Blair instead operating through his informal inner circle. Minutes of a crucial inner circle meeting from July 2002, at which personal advisers to Blair far outnumbered cabinet ministers, show that the inner circle was far ahead of the cabinet in terms of war planning. The minutes recount that, given U.S. attitudes, "military action was now seen as inevitable," and "we should work on the assumption that the U.K. would take part in any military action" (Rycroft 2002). However, as late as August 2002 Blair was resisting requests from cabinet ministers for a full discussion of Iraq, on the basis that "Anglo-U.S. decisions are still a long way off" (White 2002:1).

Anthony Seldon (2004:261) argues that this is characteristic of Blair's overall policy style: that he runs a "denocracy," with policy made by close advisers secluded in a private study known as "the den." Peter Stothard (2003), who spent 30 days shadowing Blair in the run up to the war, found him constantly surrounded by a hand-picked "team," with whom many of the most significant decisions were made. He also found that members of the "team" were similar to Blair in policy outlook and work habits. Further, there is some evidence that Blair is distrustful of the Foreign Office as an institution, and has preferred to conduct foreign policy through a personalized network of advisers reporting directly to 10 Downing Street (Riddell 2003:16; Kampfner 2004a:266). In this light, it is significant that Sir Christopher Meyer, British ambassador to the United States during the Iraq crisis, would later reveal that he "rarely bothered with the Foreign Office" during his time in Washington, instead talking directly to Blair or to his senior foreign policy aide Sir David Manning (Kampfner 2004a:195). Meyer (2005a) claims that "between 9/11 and the day I retired at the end of February 2003 on the eve of war, I had not a single substantive policy discussion on the secure phone with the F(oreign) O(ffice)."

The consequences of this style of operation were that when cabinet met to discuss Iraq policy, the formal processes of preparing briefing and options papers and circulating them beforehand were rarely followed. Additionally, most key decisions had been effectively taken by Blair and the inner circle in earlier meetings.

Consequently, cabinet was presented with a verbal presentation of the situation by the prime minister or foreign secretary, in the context of their being a clear "pre-packed" decision for their approval, rather than an opening to a discussion. As the Butler report states:

> Without papers circulated in advance, it remains possible but is obviously much more difficult for members of the cabinet outside the small circle directly involved to bring their political judgment and experience to bear on the major decisions for which the cabinet as a whole must carry responsibility ... We are concerned that the informality and circumscribed character of the government's procedures which we saw in the context of policymaking towards Iraq risks reducing the scope for informed political judgment. (Butler 2004:147–148, paragraph 610–611)

In this regard, the handling of the legal aspects of the war is also significant. Blair had been asked by Admiral Sir Michael Boyce, head of U.K. armed forces, to secure a definitive opinion on the legality of the use of force absent explicit UN authorization. This Blair sought from Lord Goldsmith, the attorney general, who submitted a personal memo to the prime minister on March 7, 2003. In it, Goldsmith argued that while a "reasonable case" could be made that action would be legal, there were no guarantees that opponents of the action would not bring a case, and in those circumstances "(w)e cannot guarantee that they would not succeed" (Goldsmith 2003). Goldsmith's opinion is filled with caveats and comprises 13 single spaced pages of close legal reasoning. However, when the cabinet came to consider the legal aspects on the March 17, this document was not made available to them. Instead, they were presented with the attorney general's one-page summary of his advice in the form of an answer to a parliamentary question. This had been stripped of the caveats in the original opinion.

Clare Short suggested that it was solely on the basis of the attorney general's assurances in this regard that she had not resigned on the spot over the decision. Her diary records that "I tried to start discussion and asked why it (the legal opinion) was so late, had he had doubts? ... His advice was that it was legal under (UN Resolution) 1441 and that was it" (Short 2004:186). Short further recalled that "When Goldsmith presented his findings to the cabinet that day, he began to read out his statement, only to be interrupted by Blair, who insisted that ministers could read it for themselves later. When attempts were made to question Goldsmith, Blair declared that there was no time for a discussion and that the legal opinion was 'clear'" (Kampfner 2004b:21–23). Blair later justified these procedures by arguing that the attorney general had been present at cabinet, and had presented his full opinion orally (BBC Question Time 2005). However, in light of the Butler conclusions, this seems a further instance of an informal and highly centralized style of decision making which reduced the involvement of regularized structures such as the cabinet.

In summary, Blair's personality appears to have played a substantial role in shaping the process and outcome of British decision making in the Iraq case. With a strong internal locus of control, Blair fashioned a proactive foreign policy orientation based on interventionist principles. There is evidence that he perceived environmental constraints upon applying these principles to Iraq to be surmountable—believing that UN resolutions could be obtained and that the British domestic scene would come to support the policy. Blair's lower conceptual complexity found expression in his black and white framing of the Saddam Hussein regime, the necessity for military measures to remove Iraqi WMD, and the absolutist framing of the alliance with the United States. Finally, his higher need for power disposed him to concentrate decision making within small groups of like-minded, hand-picked advisers, somewhat insulating the decision-making process

from the full range of viewpoints and debate within the cabinet and the Foreign Office.

Conclusion

I have sought to establish in this paper that an explanation focused on the personality of Prime Minister Tony Blair accounts rather well for the major aspects of the British choice in Iraq. Using at-a-distance measures, Blair's personality was recovered from his responses to foreign policy questions in the British House of Commons. These data showed that Blair has a high belief in his ability to control events, a low conceptual complexity, and a high need for power. In the Iraq decisions, the evidence indicates broad support for the expectations as to Blair's preferences and behavior derived from his personality profile. He demonstrated a proactive policy orientation, internal locus of control in terms of shaping events, a binary information processing and framing style, and a preference to work through tightly held processes in policy making.

This advances our understanding in several ways. Firstly, the extent of Blair's influence over the process and outcome of the British choice in Iraq reemphasizes the importance of actor-specific factors in theories of foreign policy. Put simply, the proposition that "who leads matters" does seem to be supported in this instance. More specifically, the patterns of policymaking followed by Blair accord with those behaviors found in individuals with similar personalities in the work of Preston (2001), Kowert (2002), Hermann (2003), and others. Secondly, the correspondence between expected and observed behavior given Blair's personality is further evidence for the validity of Hermann's technique as one which robustly distinguishes between individuals, and provides meaningful data useful in explaining foreign policy behaviors. Finally, the extension of theoretical and empirical research on leader personality and style beyond the U.S. presidency, where it has been predominantly focused, has long been recognized as desirable by scholars working in the field of foreign policy analysis (Kaarbo 1997:554; Walker 2000:600; Kille and Scully 2003:189).

At the outset of the analysis I suggested that the British–American alliance does not appear on its own to be a sufficient explanation of Britain's Iraq policy choices. Blair was a proponent of action against Iraq before the Bush administration adopted the policy, and the U.S. was quite sanguine about the prospect of British nonparticipation in the war. Moreover, the history of the "special relationship" includes instances of defection from the alliance as well as cooperation. This is not the place for a full account, but Louise Richardson (1996) shows that Britain and America sharply disagreed and acted in ways inconsistent with the other's interests in the Suez and Falklands crisis, while Jonathan Colman (2004) and Sylvia Ellis (2004) have recently published detailed accounts of Harold Wilson's refusal to contribute British forces to the Vietnam conflict in spite of repeated requests, shading into demands, by President Johnson. The indeterminate way in which the alliance affects British foreign policy in the historical record allows for the influence of other factors, such as the individual characteristics of the prime minister, on British policy choices.

Of course, further alternative explanations for Britain's Iraq policy could be forwarded. Again, a full accounting of these is beyond the scope of this article, and perhaps should await the full release of the government's records. However, the initial evidence suggests an individual level explanation fares rather well. Public opinion in Britain ran strongly against the war, indicating that there would be a political cost involved in the undertaking and counting against a domestic politics explanation. As the evidence above indicates, much of elite opinion among the ruling Labour Party and the cabinet of Prime Minister Blair was also against the war. Finally, as Akan Malici (2005) has convincingly shown, other mid-sized

European powers with security relationships with the United States, in particular France and Germany, declared their opposition to the use of force.

Clearly, there are caveats to be recognized. One is the incomplete nature of the decision making record. While a good deal of information is available, there is the danger that fresh evidence will cause a reconsideration of aspects of the argument forwarded here. A further caveat is inherent to studies of a single policy making episode. There are limits to the generalizability of the findings, and I would not want to suggest that all studies of British foreign policy, and the foreign policy of other states, should begin and end with the individual characteristics of the leader. Even with objective at-a-distance measures of personality, which find substantive confirmation in particular episodes, explanations of political outcomes rooted in individual personality must always be phrased in conditional terms and take account of situational variables (Winter 2003:133–134).

Further studies of comparable episodes would be welcome. In particular, a full reconsideration, informed by foreign policy analysis theories, of Prime Minister Harold Wilson's decisions in regard to Vietnam would be particularly appropriate, given the similarities between the two episodes in all but outcome. Further, a fascinating comparative study would develop a personality profile of George W. Bush and examine the U.S. decision to go to war in Iraq in that light. Future research aside, the evidence from the British choice in Iraq does suggest that under certain circumstances individual level explanations of foreign policy can perform well, and that Tony Blair's personality is a crucial factor in understanding why the British went to war.

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