

Constraint Respecters, Constraint Challengers, and Crisis Decision Making in Democracies: A Case Study Analysis of Kennedy versus Reagan

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Models linking domestic political constraints (audience costs, pressures for the diversionary use of force, democratic norms and institutions) to foreign policy behavior generally assume that leaders simply recognize and submit to constraints in their domestic environments—a strong structural argument. In contrast, research on political leadership and decision making suggests that leaders vary systematically in their orientations toward constraints: “constraint respecters” tend to internalize potential constraints, while “constraint challengers” are more likely to view them as obstacles to be overcome. This article develops an integrative theoretical framework that explicitly incorporates these insights and applies them to the domain of crisis decision making. After identifying leaders’ expected orientations toward constraints via at-a-distance methods, the plausibility of hypotheses derived from this framework is examined through case studies that explore the decision-making processes employed by President Kennedy (a “constraint respecter”) and President Reagan (a “constraint challenger”) during international crises. The results suggest that there is important variation in how leaders perceive and respond to domestic constraints, and that leadership style is one—though not the only—important source of this variation.

KEY WORDS: presidential leadership style, crisis decision making, domestic constraints, audience costs, John F. Kennedy, Ronald Reagan

Models linking domestic political constraints to foreign policy behavior generally assume that these constraints affect all leaders in similar and straightforward ways. Whether the constraints in question involve domestic audience costs (e.g., Fearon, 1994; Leeds, 1999; Schultz, 1998; Smith, 1998), domestic political pressures for the diversionary use of force (e.g., Ostrom & Job, 1986), or presumably

pacifying democratic norms and institutions (e.g., Dixon, 1994; Russett, 1993), decision makers are assumed to recognize, and behave in accordance with, these constraints in a rather uncomplicated fashion—a strong structural argument (e.g., Bueno de Mesquita & Lalman, 1992, pp. 153–177; Morgan & Campbell, 1991, pp. 190–193; Ostrom & Job, 1986, pp. 547–550; Russett, 1993, pp. 30–40). While this assumption may be necessary in order to posit a direct link between states' domestic structures and their foreign policy behavior, it is problematic for two reasons: (1) it contradicts theory and research on political leadership and decision making, and (2) whether or not leaders have the presumed perceptions of, and responses to, domestic constraints is an empirical question that must be tested. Simply put, “a compelling explanation cannot treat the decider exogenously” (Hermann & Kegley, 1995, p. 514).

Political scientists who study decision making have frequently emphasized the importance of beliefs, perceptions, and other cognitive processes in explaining and predicting behavior and have warned against assuming a one-to-one correspondence between “objective” situational structures and the cognitive representations of individuals (e.g., George, 1979; Herrmann, 1988). Indeed, important refinements to structure-oriented approaches including neorealism (e.g., Jervis, 1976; Walt, 1987) have been premised on the insight that the same objective international structure—for instance, a distribution of power that favors a potential adversary—may lead to very different state reactions, ranging from aggressive balancing behavior to no action whatsoever, depending upon decision makers' subjective perceptions of such factors as the potential adversary's capabilities and intentions. Unfortunately, these insights have not been systematically integrated into theories that seek to explain the impact of domestic political constraints. Just as international structure-oriented theories have been made more determinate by integrating agency-based insights, so too will theories emphasizing domestic structure gain from taking decision makers and their perceptions seriously.

In order to illustrate one path by which such integration can profitably proceed, this project develops a theoretical framework that specifies how key elements of leadership style will shape leaders' perceptions of, and responses to, domestic constraints in the domain of crisis decision making. This framework draws on theory and research from political science, psychology, and management science—work which strongly suggests that leaders vary systematically in their sensitivity to domestic constraints: “constraint respecters” tend to internalize constraints in their environments, while “constraint challengers” are more likely to view domestic constraints as obstacles to be overcome.¹ In other words, contrary to prevailing structure-based theories, *potential* constraints in any polit-

¹ I am indebted to Margaret Hermann for suggesting the terms “constraint respecters” and “constraint challengers.”

ical environment must be *activated* by leaders' responsiveness to them before they can influence policy behavior.

Leaders' scores on key characteristics (based on at-a-distance assessment methods) are used to identify their expected inclination to challenge or respect domestic constraints. Then, hypotheses derived from the theoretical framework are tested through case studies that examine the decision making processes employed by President Kennedy (a "constraint respecter") and President Reagan (a "constraint challenger") during international crises. The results suggest that there is indeed important variation in how leaders perceive and respond to domestic constraints, and that leadership style is one—though not the only—important source of this variation. A concluding discussion highlights the implications of these findings for research on domestic political constraints, examines the scope conditions surrounding leadership tendencies (e.g., was Kennedy always a "constraint respecter?"), and considers the next crucial steps for theory building in this area.

The Nature of Domestic Political Constraints: Direct or Potential?

Domestic constraints that presumably exert either a pacifying or incendiary influence on decision makers include public opinion (Fearon, 1994; Ostrom & Job, 1986), power-sharing institutional arrangements (Russett, 1993), institutionalized opposition (Morgan & Campbell, 1991; Schultz, 1998), and norms involving dispute resolution (Dixon, 1994). Conventional models assume that these constraints are highly potent and unlikely to be circumvented by decision makers. For example, in discussing the logic of diversionary war models, Smith suggests that "leaders who enjoy popular support do not enact [risky foreign policies], not wanting to jeopardize their survival" (1998, pp. 625–626). Similarly, Rousseau, Gelpi, Reiter, & Huth argue that, due to the ease of opposition mobilization in democracies, "democratic decision makers must be more sensitive to these potential domestic costs . . . [they] should be more concerned with protecting themselves from a political backlash by avoiding risky military confrontations" (1996, p. 513).

However, a careful analysis of the assumed causal mechanisms underlying such constraints suggests that most of these are appropriately viewed as *potential* constraints vis-à-vis the immediate decision making process. For instance, domestic "audience costs," or executive accountability to an electorate that can remove one from office, do not directly limit leaders' options in a given decision-making episode. Instead, such constraints presumably have their influence as leaders anticipate the political consequences of various policy decisions, or perceive normative reasons for adhering to public preferences (e.g., Foyle, 1999).

Certain *direct* constraints do exist (e.g., power-sharing arrangements requiring the leader to get other domestic actors' consent before committing state resources). Such constraints will inhibit leaders' pursuit of their preferred policies

regardless of whether or not they believe themselves to be constrained. However, direct constraints are the exception. Most constraints either are open to multiple interpretations or can be overcome in the short term (though the longer-term political or personal consequences may be very serious).

The American system provides an excellent illustration of these points. Constraints on the war-making powers of the President are notoriously ambiguous and porous. Constitutional murkiness regarding the roles of the President versus Congress in the domain of foreign policy generally, and war powers in particular, has been described as an “invitation to struggle” (Corwin, 1957). Invested with the power to declare war, Congress can claim to have some legitimate authority over decisions to use force, but as struggles surrounding the War Powers Resolution have made clear, Presidents have repeatedly claimed for themselves the authority to initiate military action, and they have generally been successful in doing so without Congressional support. Congress could certainly cut off funds for operations it has not authorized, and could even impeach the President (direct constraints), but these are retrospective rather than anticipatory sanctions, and their deterrent value is limited by the fact that Congress has traditionally declined to directly challenge the President in this way. The constraining power of executive accountability to the public—whether its effect is assumed to be pacifying or provoking—is likewise ambiguous, particularly given the relative freedom allowed at certain periods within the election cycle, the capacity of the president to lead public opinion through the influence of the “bully pulpit,” and the well-known “rally around the flag effect.” Normative constraints are the least direct type of constraint, operating only insofar as leaders accept and apply specific norms. They cannot be externally imposed.

This all means that there is a considerable gap between *de jure* and *de facto* constraints on the executive in the American system. *Potential* constraints are myriad, and for leaders who are sensitive to them for normative or practical reasons, they may be viewed as frustratingly insurmountable. But direct constraints are strikingly absent, and for those who are inclined to accept political risks and to subordinate public approval, congressional support, constitutional safeguards, or democratic norms to other objectives, these constraints have proven surprisingly ephemeral. The crucial point is that the dense network of potential constraints in the American system (and in democracies more generally) have adequate constitutional and normative weight to be viewed as highly constraining. But they also are porous and ambiguous enough to be regarded as insubstantial or even illegitimate, particularly in the context of crisis decision making: what one leader views as legitimate Congressional or public opposition that deserves to be accommodated may be seen by another as activity that is harmful to state interests or even treasonous. Which interpretation of these potential constraints is embraced by any leader in a given situation cannot be deduced from the nature of the constraints themselves, just as leaders’ perceptions of threat cannot be deduced solely from the distribution of power in the international

system. In order to determine how these potential constraints will be viewed and incorporated into the policymaking process, one must know something about the decision makers themselves.

The Importance of Leadership Style: Constraint Respecters versus Constraint Challengers

This project follows in a rich tradition of theoretical and empirical work at the intersection of political science, psychology, and management science, which suggests that leaders' characteristics and interpersonal styles play an important role in shaping their decision-making processes and policy behavior. Scholars including George and George (1964), Barber (1972), Stoessinger (1979), and Renshon (1996, 2003) have examined the relationship between American presidents' characteristics and their political behavior, concluding that a range of crucial American policy orientations and specific policy actions—many of which have had profound ramifications for U.S. and world history—can be traced, at least in part, to the attributes of the leaders who made these pivotal decisions. More broadly, work on operational codes (George, 1969; Holsti, 1970; Leites, 1951; Walker, 1977; Walker, Schafer, & Young, 1998), cognitive mapping (Axelrod, 1976; Young, 1996), and images (Boulding, 1956; M. Cottam, 1994; R. Cottam, 1977; Herrmann & Fischerkeller, 1995) has demonstrated that leaders' beliefs and worldviews can shape their decision making in critical ways. Many studies have focused on the behavioral implications of a range of specific characteristics, including need for power, achievement, and affiliation (Etheredge, 1978; McClelland, 1961, 1975; Terhune, 1968a, 1968b; Winter, 1973, 1987), cognitive complexity (Driver, 1977; Hermann, 1984; Suedfeld & Tetlock, 1977; Tetlock, 1985), task/interpersonal emphasis (Bales, 1950; Blake & Mouton, 1964; Byars, 1972, 1973; Hersey & Blanchard, 1982), locus of control (Davis & Phares, 1967; Hermann, 1987c), self-confidence (Hermann, 1987c; House, 1990; Winter, Hermann, Weintraub, & Walker, 1991), and beliefs including distrust and nationalism (Driver, 1977; Druckman, 1968; LeVine & Campbell, 1972; Stuart & Starr, 1982; Tucker, 1965).

While the conventional wisdom assumes that domestic structural constraints will shape leaders' behavior in straightforward, undifferentiated ways, the evidence accumulated in these myriad studies strongly suggests that variation in key dimensions of leadership style will lead to systematically different perceptions of, and responses to, domestic political constraints. This project proceeds by highlighting a crucial typological distinction that has been identified by scholars of political leadership—a distinction based on divergent general approaches to the political context (including domestic constraints). Then, the set of specific leadership characteristics that appears, theoretically and empirically, to be most responsible for determining leaders' orientations toward key domestic constraints in the domain of crisis decision making will be identified.

Leaders' Varying Approaches to the Political Context

Scholars seeking to classify leaders according to general typologies have discovered a crucial distinction. Some leaders are more dispositionally driven; their behavior is guided by a set of inner beliefs or goals and tends to remain consistent across a range of situations. Other leaders are more situationally responsive, or pragmatic; their behavior is guided by the nature of the immediate context and may vary dramatically according to the setting. The categorization of leaders as "Crusaders" versus "Pragmatists" (Stoessinger, 1979) is based on this key distinction. Other, similar typologies include: "ideologue" versus "opportunist" (e.g., Ziller, Jackson, & Terbovic, 1977), "directive" versus "consultative" (e.g., Bass & Valenzi, 1974), "task-oriented" versus "relations-oriented" (e.g., Fiedler, 1967), and "transformational" versus "transactional" (e.g., Burns, 1978).

How sensitive leaders are to the political context has important implications for how they will respond to domestic constraints (Hermann & Kegley, 1995). More pragmatic leaders tend to internalize potential constraints, by allowing their policy choices to be guided by the preferences of the constituencies to whom they are accountable, and by avoiding (or reversing) policies that provoke serious political opposition or are unlikely to receive support from those actors with whom power is shared. In contrast, "Crusaders" tend to view the preferences of other political actors as obstacles to be overcome in the pursuit of their own objectives. Such leaders govern according to a more directive management style, viewing others as tools to be used to fulfill the mission, rather than as actors with legitimate views that must be respected or accommodated. Based on their orientations towards domestic political constraints, these two categories of leaders will be referred to as "constraint respecters" and "constraint challengers," respectively.

Constraint challengers and respecters, as described, represent ideal types. Some leaders resemble these vivid portraits, but most leaders fall in between these two poles. Nevertheless, leaders generally exhibit a tendency toward one or the other profile, and the closer a leader is to either pole, the more confidence one may have in predicting which set of variables (dispositional or situational) will play a more important role in shaping their decisions. One must also keep in mind that these leadership styles are not straightjackets: as discussed in the conclusion, "constraint challengers" will compromise under certain conditions, and in some situations "constraint respecters" are likely to pursue unpopular policies. The contrasting leadership orientations described here are therefore meant not as law-like categories but as probabilistic predictors of general attitudes and first instincts vis-à-vis political opposition.

Predicting Leaders' Responses to Potential Pacifying Constraints

This study focuses on how leaders respond to domestic constraints in the domain of crisis decision making. More precisely, it develops and tests proposi-

tions concerning leaders' willingness to challenge *potential pacifying constraints* in the pursuit of violent crisis responses. "Potential pacifying constraints" involve opposition to violent policy responses from key domestic actors, including the public, Congress, and intra-administration sources. Importantly, it is *not* assumed that domestic constraints, even in democracies, will always be of the pacifying variety: bellicose public opinion, for instance, has sometimes encouraged violent policy actions. However, *when* key domestic actors oppose the use of force, certain leadership characteristics play a key role in determining whether or not leaders will be sensitive to these constraints.

The political science, psychology, and management science literature provides strong theoretical guidance here, suggesting that four characteristics are particularly relevant to whether a leader behaves as a constraint respecter or a constraint challenger in regard to such constraints. (This is not to imply that these are the *only* characteristics that play a role in shaping one's openness to information or sensitivity to the political context; see especially the discussion of cognitive complexity in the conclusions section.) *Task emphasis* and *need for power* shape one's sensitivity to constraints in general; *distrust* and *nationalism* indicate one's tendency to use violent policy instruments. Each attribute is best viewed as a continuum—not a dichotomous variable. Where a willingness to challenge constraints is married to a proclivity to resort to force, potential pacifying constraints are most likely to be circumvented. The theoretical basis for these expectations is as follows.

Task versus interpersonal emphasis is the extent to which, in one's dealings with others, one is relatively more concerned with getting the task accomplished versus attending to the feelings and needs of others (Bales, 1950; Byars, 1972, 1973; Fiedler, 1967). Throughout the management science literature, the task versus interpersonal distinction is linked to autocratic versus democratic decision processes, respectively (Hersey & Blanchard, 1982; Likert, 1967; McGregor, 1960). Task-oriented leaders tend to pursue their management duties in a more directive fashion (challenging constraints) while relations-oriented leaders favor a more democratic or participatory managerial process (internalizing constraints). For instance, Blake and Mouton's (1964) Grid Theory sets forth the implications of varying combinations of concern for people and concern for production. Leaders with a maximum concern for production and a minimum concern for people are expected to display an "authority-obedience" management style: the leader dictates orders to subordinates and expects unconditional compliance; disagreement is equated with insubordination and is suppressed (Blake & Mouton, 1964, pp. 18–56). In contrast, those with a minimum concern for production and a maximum concern for people will pursue a "country club" management style: the leader encourages an open exchange of views in a nonconfrontational environment and rejects the hierarchical establishment and imposition of objectives in favor of the collaborative creation of general goals based on consensus (Blake & Mouton, 1964, pp. 57–84).

Need for power involves the desire to influence, control, or dominate other people and groups (McClelland, 1975; Winter, 1973). Individuals scoring higher on this motive are more competitive and manipulative toward their opponents in bargaining situations, willing to violate norms of "fair play" to achieve their goals (Terhune, 1968a, 1968b). Specifically, in Prisoner's Dilemma games, subjects high in need for power (termed "Nepos" by Terhune) exhibit a tendency to defect when they expect cooperation from their partner, thereby playing the partner for a "sucker" in order to achieve personal gains. In offering explanations for their behavior, Nepos consistently express more self-interested motives, as opposed to a concern for maximizing mutual gains. Nepos are also more likely to engage in "deadlocks" (five or more Defect-Defect trials in succession) and to describe the opposing player with such terms as "yielder," "competitor," "gambler," and "resister" (Terhune, 1968b). Indeed, Winter notes that the need for power in political leaders is generally associated with "combat against political, personal, and system foes" (Winter, 1973, p. 48). When such a leader confronts domestic constraints, this orientation suggests a willingness to "bend the rules" to circumvent the authority of those with whom one shares formal power or to whom one is theoretically accountable. Finally, it is important to note that, as with task emphasis, the need for power has been linked to a relatively "autocratic" style of organization and decision making characterized by the centralization of authority and the suppression of dissent (Fodor & Smith, 1982; McClelland, 1961; Preston, 2001; Winter, 1973, p. 124).

Distrust (Stuart & Starr, 1982; Tucker, 1965) is conceptualized as the belief that others' statements and actions are often insincere and that one should regard with suspicion the motives underlying others' behavior. Very similar to the psychological concept of "hostile attributional bias,"² distrust promotes aggressive behavior because it tends to magnify threats. Holsti (1962) linked John Foster Dulles' distrustful beliefs about the USSR to a specific mode of information processing that confirmed his suspicions of the Soviet threat, and Driver (1977) found distrust to be strongly related to decisions to go to war in the Inter-Nation Simulation (INS). Driver labels distrust a "stress-inductive" belief, and notes that "trust . . . acts as a filter in the perception of threat. A high state of trust reduces the credibility of any threat and as a result reduces the necessity for aggressiveness. A low level of trust, on the other hand, tends to increase threat credibility and, in turn, increases the incidence of aggressive behavior" (1977, p. 340).

Nationalism (Druckman, 1968; LeVine & Campbell, 1972) implies a view of the world in which one's own nation or group is virtuous, exceptional, and superior in key respects to other nations and groups, which are generally seen as hostile, meddlesome, or weak. Nationalism involves strong emotional attachments

² "Hostile attributional bias," or the tendency to perceive hostile intent on the part of others even when it is really lacking, plays an important role in producing aggressive behavior in both children and adults (e.g., Dodge, Pettit, McClaskey, & Brown, 1986).

to one's own group, with an emphasis on national honor and identity. Such beliefs may promote aggressive behavior by stimulating both perceived threats (from myriad sources hostile to the in-group) and perceived opportunities (to exploit or eliminate inferior and meddlesome out-groups). Extreme forms of nationalism are associated with attempts to "purify" the state, region, or world of foreign influences and to reshape others in the image of one's nation or group, converting or destroying resisters (e.g., Smith, 1993). As with distrust, research employing decision-making simulations suggests a relationship between nationalistic attitudes and aggressive foreign policy actions (Crow & Noel, 1977).

While task emphasis and need for power are more directly related to leaders' willingness to challenge constraints, and distrust and nationalism are more closely tied to leaders' proclivity to use force, there is evidence that the former characteristics may also increase one's tendency to use force, while the latter characteristics may also decrease one's general sensitivity to constraints. Specifically, the power motive—especially when combined with a low need for affiliation (a motive associated with an interpersonal emphasis)—has been linked to aggressive foreign policy behavior (e.g., McClelland, 1975, pp. 314–359; Winter, 1973), and distrust and nationalism have been tied to a tendency to circumvent, crush, and view as treasonous domestic opposition to those forceful acts deemed necessary to safeguard the state's national interests (Hagan, 1994). Hence, this project combines leaders' scores on these four characteristics into an index representing their expected inclination to challenge potential pacifying constraints in the pursuit of aggressive foreign policy behavior. It is important to emphasize that leaders were assigned to the categories "constraint respecter" and "constraint challenger" purely through at-a-distance assessment of these four characteristics, based on content analysis of verbal material (see below)—*not* through any evaluation of their decision-making styles in actual cases. Hence, the labels themselves serve as hypotheses concerning behavior: after leaders were assigned to these "anticipated categories," the case studies then examined whether two leaders whose scores placed them in different categories indeed behaved as their labels would indicate during foreign policy crises.

Hypotheses

One of the defining attributes of constraint challengers is their reliance upon internal beliefs, principles, and perceptions as a guide to decision making. Their tendency is to define a situation and determine the appropriate policy responses based on their underlying beliefs and their own conception of state goals and interests—not through a dialogue with others or a survey of the political landscape. Consequently:

H1: Constraint challengers will *not* engage in an extensive search for information concerning the preferences of key domestic actors.

Due to their basic need to avoid being controlled by others (need for power), the priority they place on accomplishing the mission over and above satisfying others' preferences (task emphasis), their zero-sum view of the political universe and inclination to impute hostile motives to political opponents (distrust and nationalism), and their consequent tendency to equate opposition with disloyalty and treason, constraint challengers will not perceive themselves to be constrained to pursue policies consistent with the preferences of key domestic actors.

H2: Constraint challengers a) will *not* perceive themselves to be constrained to pursue policies consistent with the preferences of key domestic actors, and b) will instead decide which policy actions to pursue based on their own conception of state goals and their own beliefs about how best to achieve these goals in the present situation.³

For constraint respecters, it is the political situation, rather than their internal beliefs and perceptions, that generally drives problem definition and policy choice. The decision-making process begins with a survey of the political landscape, in order to determine which definition of the problem is broadly accepted and which policy responses would likely receive widespread support or provoke opposition.

H3: Constraint respecters will search for information about the views of key domestic actors concerning responses to the crisis situation, unless the leader perceives that these views have already been effectively communicated to him/her.

Due to their sensitivity to others' preferences (interpersonal emphasis), lack of a desire to dominate or be in control (low need for power) and a tendency to view politics as nonzero-sum, disputes as amenable to compromise, and political adversaries as inherently reasonable and nonhostile (low distrust and nationalism), constraint respecters will conceive of their task in terms of discerning areas of agreement, working toward consensus or compromise outcomes, and not alienating or provoking opposition from any key set of domestic actors. That is, such leaders will view themselves as the agent of their constituencies and the equal of those actors with whom they share power, and they will therefore perceive their policy choices to be constrained by the preferences of these key domestic actors. This decision-making pattern implies the following:

H4: Where clear consensus among domestic political actors can be discerned in favor of (or against) a particular foreign policy approach or action, constraint respecters (a) will perceive themselves to be con-

³ Unless the leader perceives that his/her preferred policies will provoke opposition from key domestic groups to such a degree that the leader's future effectiveness or continuation in office will be seriously jeopardized by the pursuit of such policies.

strained to act according to this consensus, and (b) will choose the consensus approach.

H5: Where no clear consensus emerges among these actors regarding the appropriate policy approach or action, constraint respecters (a) will perceive that this lack of consensus prevents them from making a policy choice that largely favors the preferences of one set of actors over another and (b) will either seek to identify and implement a compromise among the competing viewpoints that satisfies the minimal aspirations of key domestic actors (deferring action where no such compromise appears viable), or “table” the issue outright, putting off any decision until an acceptable compromise approach emerges.⁴

Methods

Prior to selecting cases for in-depth study, a statistical analysis of 39 leaders' responses to 147 foreign policy crises⁵ was conducted. The 39 heads of state,⁶ representing a wide variety of cultures, regions, ideologies, and political systems, were scored on task emphasis, need for power, distrust, and nationalism, using the leadership trait assessment system developed by M. Hermann (1987a, 1987b).⁷ This system utilizes content analysis of spontaneous verbal material (press conference answers and interview responses) to develop scores on eight personal characteristics of political consequence.⁸ Leaders' scores on each of the four relevant characteristics were standardized,⁹ then combined to create an index of leaders' expected propensity to challenge pacifying constraints in the pursuit of aggressive foreign policy actions. Within each geographical region, leaders were

⁴ Constraint respecters may pursue foreign policy actions that do not represent a consensus or compromise approach if either (a) an extreme threat is perceived to the state's vital interests, which the leader believes cannot be dealt with using any means other than the chosen response or (b) domestic political actors favor violent responses which the leader wishes to temporarily delay or supplement with nonviolent methods.

⁵ Foreign policy crises were identified based on criteria developed by Brecher & Wilkenfeld: “three conditions, deriving from a change in a state's external or internal environment, are perceived by the highest-level decision-makers of the state: (a) a threat to basic values, (b) an awareness of finite time for response to the external threat to basic values, and (c) a high probability of involvement in military hostilities” (1998).

⁶ The original “subject pool” included 69 heads of state coded by Hermann. Only 39 are represented in the empirical analysis, since many leaders did not experience foreign policy crises, and a few leaders held power in states that could not be classified as either clear democracies or autocracies based on the clustering of Polity III summary scores (Jaggers & Gurr, 1996). Specifically, 63 of 69 leaders' regimes fell into one of two categories: -6 to -9 (autocracies), and 7 to 10 (democracies).

⁷ For a discussion of reliability and validity issues, see Hermann, 1980a, 1980b, 1987a, 1987b.

⁸ For each leader, at least 50 press conference answers and interview responses of 100 words or more were content-analyzed according to the procedures set forth in Hermann, 1987a.

⁹ For each characteristic, scores were standardized to a distribution with a mean of 50 and a standard deviation of 10, in order to allow comparability among the components of the index. These standardization procedures are described in detail in Hermann, 1987b.

split into three equal groups based on their positions along this dimension (constraint respecters, moderates, and constraint challengers).¹⁰

For this quantitative overview, the unit of analysis was the foreign policy crisis, and the dependent variables (*violence centrality* and *violence severity*) focused, respectively, on the degree to which leaders relied upon violence as a central crisis management technique, and the severity of violence employed as a crisis response.¹¹ This investigation employed ordered probit analysis¹² to examine the effects of leadership style and regime type on crisis responses, while controlling for key contextual variables including system polarity, power discrepancy between the crisis actor and adversary, the nature of the crisis trigger (violent or nonviolent), the gravity of the values threatened, the possession of nuclear weapons by the crisis actor, and the conflict setting (protracted or nonprotracted).¹³ While the full results of this analysis are examined in detail elsewhere (Keller, 2005), the most important findings for the present study concern the crisis responses of democratic leaders.¹⁴ Table 1 summarizes these findings, which were generated by converting probit estimates from the full model (including all controls) into predicted probabilities that different types of leaders in democracies will employ violence at each level of centrality. Similar results were found with respect to the second dependent variable, violence severity (Keller, 2005).

The striking difference between the crisis responses of constraint respecters and constraint challengers within democracies is one of the most important findings to emerge from this analysis. As shown in the upper third of Table 1, when all control variables are held at their means, constraint respecters are expected to

¹⁰ The regions were: Africa, Asia, Central and South America, CIS/former Soviet Union, Europe, Middle East, and North America. Region was used to delineate the reference group for each leader due to certain regional differences in scores that may be partly a function of situational phenomena. An alternative leader classification scheme, comparing each leader's scores to those of all other leaders, led to similar though less significant results in the statistical analysis. In regions where leaders could not be divided evenly into three groups, remaining leaders (those between groups) were placed in the category of leaders they "leaned" most heavily towards—that group whose mean score on the index was closest to their own.

¹¹ Possible values on the "centrality of violence" variable range from (1) no violence, to (2) violence being used, but playing a minor role in relation to nonviolent crisis management techniques, to (3) violence playing an important role, but still supplemented by nonviolent methods, to (4) violence as the preeminent crisis management technique. For the "severity of violence" variable, possible values are: (1) no violence, (2) minor clashes, (3) serious clashes, and (4) full-scale war. See Brecher and Wilkenfeld (1998) for a description of precise coding criteria.

¹² Ordered probit analysis, rather than OLS regression, is appropriate here because the dependent variables are ordinal scales.

¹³ See Keller (2005) for descriptions and coding criteria for each of these variables.

¹⁴ The full results indicate that constraint respecters in democracies exhibit extraordinarily pacific crisis responses, while constraint challengers in democracies and both types of autocratic leaders are demonstrably more aggressive. While this suggests that there may be something special and uniquely pacifying about the interaction between constraint respecters and the potential constraints found in democratic regimes, such claims fall beyond the scope of the current project, which focuses on an in-depth examination of the decision making processes of democratic leaders in the context of a small number of crises.

Table 1. Probability of Democracies Using Violence as an Increasingly Central Crisis Management Technique, as Leadership Style Varies

ALL VARIABLES AT MEANS ($N = 56$, $P < .01$)			
	Constraint Respecters	Constraint Challengers	Change in Probability
<i>Crisis Response</i>			
No Violence	.828	.233	-.595
Violence Minor	.034	.046	.012
Violent Important	.109	.308	.199
Violence Preeminent	.029	.413	.384
NONVIOLENT CRISIS TRIGGER ($N = 32$, $P = .116$)			
	Constraint Respecters	Constraint Challengers	Change in Probability
<i>Crisis Response</i>			
No Violence	.925	.414	-.511
Violence Minor	.018	.055	.037
Violent Important	.048	.293	.245
Violence Preeminent	.010	.238	.228
VIOLENT CRISIS TRIGGER ($N = 24$, $P < .01$)			
	Constraint Respecters	Constraint Challengers	Change in Probability
<i>Crisis Response</i>			
No Violence	.593	.084	-.509
Violence Minor	.055	.023	-.032
Violent Important	.237	.217	-.020
Violence Preeminent	.114	.676	.562

Source: Keller, 2005.

use purely nonviolent crisis management techniques 82.8% of the time; there is a mere 2.9% likelihood of such leaders employing violence as the preeminent technique. Contrast this with constraint challengers, who are expected to avoid violent responses only 23.3% of the time, while relying on violence as the preeminent crisis management instrument in 41.3% of crises. Varying the nature of the crisis trigger yields additional insights; see the lower two-thirds of Table 1. Even in response to violent crisis triggers (e.g., attacks on one's territory, allies, or interests) constraint respecters are expected to respond using purely nonviolent methods nearly 60% of the time—compared to a mere 8.4% “violence avoidance rate” for constraint challengers. When faced with violent crisis triggers, constraint respecters rely on violence as the preeminent crisis management technique in only 11.4% of cases, while constraint challengers are expected to rely on violence as the preeminent method in an astounding 67.6% of cases.

In order to investigate the underlying causes responsible for these dramatic differences in the crisis responses of constraint respecters and constraint chal-

lengers within democracies, a set of cases was selected for intensive study. In other words, while the statistical overview of crisis responses focused on general patterns of policy *outputs*, the case studies are designed to probe the *processes* responsible for these observed patterns. Based on the body of leadership literature discussed earlier, it was expected that constraint challengers would rely on relatively violent crisis responses because their relatively high levels of distrust, nationalism, need for power, and task emphasis fused a preference for violent instruments with a willingness to defy political opposition in the pursuit of their own objectives. (Hence, where opposition to the use of force existed, it would likely be challenged.) Conversely, it was assumed that constraint respecters would exhibit less violent crisis responses because their relatively low levels of distrust, nationalism, need for power, and task emphasis implied the marriage of a distaste for violent instruments with a sensitivity to domestic constraints. Where domestic constraints were pacifying, these would be respected, and where domestic constraints provided incentives for forceful policy responses—e.g., bellicose public opinion—the clash between such leaders' relatively pacific tendencies and their responsiveness to the political context would likely lead to efforts to “water down,” delay, or at least supplement violent responses with nonviolent crisis management techniques.¹⁵

To examine whether or not these hypothesized causal processes were in fact responsible for the observed outcomes, four cases were selected whose values on the dependent variable were consistent with the expected policy behavior for the different leadership categories and represented “extreme values” on the dependent variable (e.g., constraint respecters using *completely nonviolent* crisis management techniques, and constraint challengers using violence as the *preeminent* crisis response). Cases exhibiting “extreme values” on the dependent variable were selected because they represent the prototypical behavior of each type of leader. For instance, constraint challengers' use of violence as the preeminent crisis management technique is both expected given the theoretical profile of such leaders developed above and empirically typical for such leaders based on the statistical results. Selecting crises that exhibit the prototypical policy responses of each type of leader facilitates an examination of the decision making processes and perceptions underlying their distinctive behavior.¹⁶ Furthermore, since the most dramatic differences in crisis responses occurred when the crisis trigger was violent—a condition that seemingly maximized the behavioral variation between categories of leaders—an effort was made to select cases with violent crisis triggers.

¹⁵ See footnote 3 for this important addendum to Hypothesis 5.

¹⁶ Coupling such studies with an examination of the processes underlying *atypical* policy responses for various categories of leaders would allow causal inferences to be drawn with greater confidence and comprehensiveness; the study of atypical cases is therefore an important priority for future research in this area.

Based on the coding criteria described above, President Ronald Reagan's scores placed him in the "constraint challenger" category, and President John F. Kennedy's scores identified him as a "constraint respecter."¹⁷ These two leaders were selected from the pool of democratic leaders due to: (a) the availability of sources regarding their decision making in key cases; (b) an effort to hold the cultural, strategic, and institutional context relatively constant (the Cold War era American presidency); and (c) the availability of cases that matched the selection criteria: these leaders each behaved as hypothesized, in terms of crisis responses, in at least two cases. The four crises chosen for study were: Vietnam, 1961 (Kennedy), Laos, 1961 (Kennedy), Grenada, 1983 (Reagan), and Libya, 1986 (Reagan). Each of these crises was provoked by a violent crisis trigger. Kennedy used solely nonviolent techniques in dealing with the Vietnam and Laos crises, and Reagan employed violence as the preeminent crisis management technique in the Grenada and Libya crises.

The decision-making processes in these cases were explored through archival research at the Kennedy and Reagan Presidential Libraries. Primary source material including memoranda between the president and advisers, minutes of meetings, diary notes, and reports was examined, along with secondary sources, including the memoirs of key participants. Much more primary source material was available for the Kennedy cases than for the Reagan cases; as a result, it was necessary to rely upon key officials' memoirs (e.g., Weinberger, Shultz) to a greater degree in the Reagan cases. Obviously such sources present some special validity problems, but it is believed that through cross-checking various accounts and remaining vigilant concerning potential "presentation biases," these limitations have been explicitly recognized and adequately dealt with. Many of the declassified primary documents found in the Kennedy Library's archives have

¹⁷ Recall that within each region, leaders were split into three equal groups based on their positions on the composite index: constraint respecters (those scoring lowest), moderates, and constraint challengers (those scoring highest). Among North American leaders in the data set (the "reference group" for Kennedy and Reagan), Reagan scored highest on this index, and Kennedy scored second-to-lowest (only President Clinton scored lower). The difference in standardized scores between Reagan and Kennedy was greatest on task emphasis and nationalism: on task emphasis, Reagan scores 63.4 and Kennedy scores 49.2; on nationalism, Reagan scores 57.3 and Kennedy scores 46.2. On distrust, Kennedy (55.4) actually scores slightly higher than Reagan (51.6), and on need for power, Reagan edges Kennedy 53.3 to 49.3. The composite index scores were 50.0 for Kennedy and 56.4 for Reagan (although Kennedy scored second-lowest among North American leaders in the sample, his average scores are statistically at the mean due to the exceptionally low scores of President Clinton). When those North American leaders who did not experience crises are included in the reference group ($n = 11$, rather than $n = 7$), some of these statistical peculiarities are attenuated: Kennedy's score on the composite index is 48.7, and Reagan's is 54.1. Although President Clinton scored lowest among North American leaders on the composite index, he was not selected as the "constraint respecter" for study because (a) at the time cases were selected, the ICB data set only ran through 1994 and did not include crises for Clinton with violent triggers; and (b) the lack of declassified memos, meeting minutes, personal notes, and key officials' memoirs at the time of this research—particularly in comparison to the wealth of material available for Kennedy—would have imposed severe limitations on efforts to undertake an in-depth analysis of Clinton's decision making.

been reprinted in the Foreign Relations of the United States (FRUS) volumes on Vietnam and Laos; the FRUS citations are used here (as opposed to the archives' box and folder designations) for ease of reference and access.

The full research project examined 12 hypotheses in the context of these four crises (Keller, 2002). Due to space limitations and the focus of this article, evidence regarding only the aforementioned five hypotheses will be examined here, in the context of two foreign policy crises.¹⁸ The five hypotheses chosen are those that relate most directly to how different types of leaders perceive and respond to domestic political constraints. Because of the limited number of cases, the analysis reported here is best viewed as a plausibility probe, rather than a comprehensive test of the observable implications of this theoretical framework (Eckstein, 1975).

The two cases examined below (Vietnam, 1961, for Kennedy; Grenada, 1983, for Reagan) were selected from the full set of four cases for several reasons. First, they are the cases for which the most evidence is available. Second, similar results were found in the two Kennedy cases and the two Reagan cases, making it possible to focus on one crisis involving each leader, with the understanding that the evidence presented is representative of the larger set of cases. Finally, the cases are parallel in key respects, not only in terms of the structure of the basic crisis situation (e.g., short decision time, high perceived threat to basic values), but because advances by Communist forces in less-developed countries were instrumental in triggering both crises. By no means were these crisis situations identical, but the parallel nature of certain key situational features allows some degree of control over extraneous factors that may be capable of producing some variation in the decision-making processes under investigation.¹⁹

Kennedy Case: Vietnam, 1961

On September 18, 1961, Vietcong forces supported by the North Vietnam regime captured and briefly held Phuoc Vinh—a provincial capital only 55 miles from Saigon. The provincial governor was publicly beheaded, and despite the fact that government troops quickly recaptured the city, the South Vietnam regime was severely demoralized. These events triggered a crisis for the United States (and South Vietnam). On September 29 South Vietnam President Diem requested a bilateral defense treaty with the United States. On October 11 President Kennedy sent National Security Advisor Walt Rostow and General Maxwell Taylor to Vietnam to assess the political and military feasibility of U.S. intervention. Taylor and Rostow's report, delivered to the President on November 3, recommended,

¹⁸ The remaining hypotheses dealt with how constraint respecters versus constraint challengers view the crisis adversary and how they perceive and utilize violent versus nonviolent policy instruments.

¹⁹ The criteria used to examine each hypothesis (e.g., the exact empirical "signposts" that were specified in advance, which would lead to the conclusion that a particular hypothesis was supported or not supported by the evidence) are developed in detail in Keller, 2002.

among other things, increased U.S. aid to South Vietnam and the deployment of a small combat force. On November 15, President Kennedy decided to increase aid and dispatch advisors to South Vietnam, but American combat forces were not introduced. This decision ended the crisis for the United States.²⁰

H3 states that constraint respecters will gather information about the views of key domestic actors concerning responses to the crisis situation, unless the leader perceives that these views have already been communicated to him/her. As shown below, Kennedy perceived that he understood how Congress and the American public felt about the key policy questions concerning Vietnam, making an extensive search for these preferences unnecessary. However, the empirical record suggests that Kennedy did in fact conduct a sweeping information search concerning other actors' views throughout the Vietnam crisis. He consistently pummeled intra-administration advisors, bureaucracies, and personal confidants with a host of questions designed to elicit the intricacies of their views and to unearth areas of agreement and disagreement (e.g., FRUS, 1988, pp. 532–534, 576–577, 605). Therefore, H3 is clearly supported by the data.²¹

According to Hypothesis H4, where constraint respecters perceive that a consensus exists among domestic political actors regarding a particular foreign policy approach or action, they will perceive themselves to be constrained to act according to this consensus (H4a), and they will choose this consensus approach (H4b). Only one policy approach, at the level of general objectives, received virtually unanimous support among key domestic actors during this crisis: the United States must not lose South Vietnam to Communism. In a memorandum to the President, the Joint Chiefs of Staff (JCS), Secretary of State, and Secretary of Defense agreed that the fall of South Vietnam would lead to Communist control over all of Southeast Asia and constitute a threat to U.S. interests globally (FRUS, 1988, p. 561). Even those officials who did not believe the United States should use force or create an American satellite in South Vietnam (e.g., Galbraith, Harriman, Bowles) presented proposals to the President for alternative approaches involving diplomacy and neutralization, which were designed to prevent the fall of South Vietnam to Communism (FRUS, 1988, pp. 322–325, 474–476, 580–582). Kennedy also perceived that Congress and the American public desired to “get tough on Communism” (though not necessarily through the commitment of American military forces), and would react very negatively to any apparent American capitulation to Communist aggression (Roberts, 1963, p. 30; Schlesinger, 1965, p. 333).

²⁰ This crisis overview (including identification of the trigger, primary U.S. response, and resolution of the crisis) is based on the account in Brecher & Wilkenfeld, 1997, pp. 185–186.

²¹ It should be noted, however, that it is unclear whether this information search was primarily motivated by the desire to determine others' views for political reasons or for substantive, policy-related reasons. Many of Kennedy's questions seem focused on gaining full information and determining the best policy response in a “rational” or objective fashion. Therefore, although H3 is supported by the evidence, the assumptions underlying H3 (concerning the motivation behind this information search) cannot be tested in this instance.

President Kennedy apparently accepted this minimal, consensus policy goal of not losing South Vietnam to Communism. The implications of a Communist victory for U.S. prestige, American commitments throughout the world, and the security of the Free World weighed heavily on his mind as he considered his options both in Laos and in Vietnam. As Schlesinger notes, “. . . given the truculence of Moscow, the Berlin crisis and the resumption of nuclear testing, the President unquestionably felt that an American retreat in Asia might upset the whole world balance” (1965, p. 548).

Kennedy's acceptance of this consensus objective appears to be a consequence of multiple factors, both international and domestic, whose independent effects cannot be easily disentangled given the available evidence. Clearly, the President was very concerned about the international consequences of losing South Vietnam to Communism. The domino theory was viewed not as academic conjecture but as a frightening description of the reality that would necessarily befall Southeast Asia if the first “domino” (whether it was Laos or South Vietnam) fell to Communism. But Kennedy also perceived unacceptable domestic political costs to be associated with the loss of South Vietnam: “Kennedy told Rostow that Eisenhower could stand the political consequences of Dien Bien Phu and the expulsion of the west from Vietnam in 1954 because the blame fell on the French; ‘I can't take a 1954 defeat today’” (Schlesinger, 1965, p. 339). Consequently, although Hypothesis H4b receives clear support (Kennedy accepted the minimal consensus goal of not losing South Vietnam to Communism), support for H4a (which hinges on whether Kennedy perceived he was constrained to embrace this objective because it represented the consensus of key domestic political actors) is more ambiguous.

The objective of preventing the fall of South Vietnam to Communism was the beginning and the end of domestic consensus concerning Vietnam in 1961: the question of which specific policy actions should be undertaken to accomplish this goal produced a range of competing, and often contradictory, proposals. The Taylor-Rostow mission produced a detailed report that recommended three main categories of policy actions: (1) political, administrative, and military reforms should be demanded of the Diem government; (2) the United States should provide increased military and economic aid to South Vietnam (including American advisers and equipment); and, most controversially, (3) the United States should deploy around 8,000 U.S. combat troops to South Vietnam (FRUS, 1988, pp. 479–481). In their subsequent contact with the President, Taylor and Rostow continued to make their case for the commitment of a limited number of ground forces.

Secretary of Defense McNamara and the JCS agreed with most of the Taylor-Rostow report's recommendations, but they rejected any limited commitment of forces. The United States had to be prepared to commit up to 200,000 troops to Vietnam—if events warranted—or else send no troops at all (FRUS, 1988, pp. 532–534, 543–544). Kennedy's National Security Advisor McGeorge

Bundy argued that the United States should not send troops immediately (and certainly not for morale purposes alone), but should immediately make the commitment “to send about one division when needed for military action inside South Vietnam” (FRUS, 1988, p. 605).

While these prominent voices were calling for various degrees of military intervention, other advisors whom Kennedy respected highly were urging extreme caution concerning the commitment of U.S. forces. John Kenneth Galbraith (Ambassador to India), Averell Harriman (Ambassador at Large), and Chester Bowles (Under Secretary of State) each advanced proposals for political solutions to the crisis, which were designed to prevent the fall of South Vietnam to Communism, while avoiding the commitment of U.S. troops (FRUS, 1988, pp. 322–325, 474, 580; Schlesinger, 1965, p. 545). Against this backdrop of intra-administration disagreement, President Kennedy also perceived that Congress and the American people were not in favor of committing U.S. troops (FRUS, 1988, pp. 253–254, 577–578, 610; Roberts, 1963, p. 30; Schlesinger, 1965, p. 333).

Hypothesis H5 states that where no consensus emerges among key domestic political actors regarding the appropriate policy approach or action, constraint respecters (a) will perceive that this lack of consensus prevents them from making a decisive policy choice that largely favors the preferences of one set of actors over another, and (b) will either seek to identify and implement a compromise among the competing viewpoints that satisfies the minimal aspirations of key domestic actors (deferring action where no such compromise appears viable), or “table” the issue outright, putting off any decision until an acceptable compromise emerges.

Despite the strident disagreement among Kennedy’s advisors and other domestic actors concerning whether and to what extent U.S. military force should be utilized in South Vietnam, there were certain policy steps that virtually all actors agreed should be taken immediately. Such actions represented an area of minimal consensus that Kennedy identified and embraced. The first two categories of recommendations produced by the Taylor-Rostow mission (increased assistance and Diem government reforms) received support from a range of actors including the Secretaries of State and Defense, the JCS, and key members of Congress (FRUS, 1988, pp. 468, 561–566). In short, there was clearly a set of policy actions short of the commitment of troops that received widespread support among key domestic actors, representing these actors’ minimum common aspirations. Consistent with Hypothesis H5b, it was precisely this limited set of actions that President Kennedy authorized on November 13 (FRUS, 1988, pp. 591–594).

Furthermore, as Hypothesis H5b anticipates, with regard to the exceedingly controversial issue of committing U.S. ground forces, where no viable compromise could be discerned, Kennedy refused to make any final decision. Significantly, as with the contentious question of military intervention in Laos, he did *not* decide explicitly against military intervention in Vietnam, but instead allowed *planning* to proceed concerning the advanced positioning of troops in the Pacific

and the actual deployment of forces to Vietnam (FRUS, 1988, p. 591), while refusing to ever make a conclusive decision—an approach that frustrated Bundy and others (FRUS, 1988, p. 605). As Hilsman notes, “In an interesting example of one type of gambit in the politics of Washington policy-making, the President avoided a direct “no” to the proposal for introducing troops to Vietnam. He merely let the decision slide, at the same time ordering the government to set in motion all the preparatory steps for introducing troops” (1967, pp. 420–424).

The evidence concerning Hypothesis H5a (which states that constraint respecters will perceive they cannot “choose sides” among domestic actors where no clear consensus or compromise approach emerges) is generally supportive, but with a few caveats. Kennedy’s own words, in key meetings and in discussions with confidants, provide strong evidence that he perceived his policy options to be severely constrained by the views of Congress and the American public. In a November 11 White House meeting, Kennedy noted, “We have a congressional prob[lem]. Sen. Russell & others are opposed . . . [the deployment of troops] will create a tough domestic problem” (FRUS, 1988, pp. 577–578). Minutes from the NSC meeting of November 15 are particularly revealing. The President “expressed his strong feeling that . . . the United States needs even more the support of allies in such an endeavor as Viet Nam . . . in order to avoid sharp domestic partisan criticism as well as strong objections from other nations of the world . . . The President compared the obscurity of the issues in Viet Nam to the clarity of the positions in Berlin, the contrast of which could even make leading Democrats wary of proposed activities in the Far East” (FRUS, 1988, p. 608). Later in the meeting, “The President asked how he could justify the proposed courses of action in Viet Nam while at the same time ignoring Cuba” (FRUS, 1988, p. 610). Toward the end of the meeting, “The President again expressed apprehension on support of the proposed action by the Congress as well as by the American people. He felt that the next two or three weeks should be utilized in making the determination as to whether or not the proposed program for Viet Nam could be supported. His impression was that even the Democratic side of Congress was not fully convinced” (FRUS, 1988, p. 610).

These statements suggest that Kennedy viewed a substantial degree of Congressional and public support for his Vietnam policies (especially decisions involving the commitment of U.S. troops) as an inescapable requirement. The fact that he spoke in terms of his administration *needing* allied support *to avoid sharp domestic partisan criticism*, the need to *justify* his policy decisions in terms the American people *would support*, and the need to gauge *whether or not the proposed program for Viet Nam could be supported* [by Congress and the American people] provides strong evidence that Kennedy perceived these important extra-administration actors as holding virtual veto power over his major policy decisions with regard to Vietnam.

Therefore, although Kennedy technically did not choose sides on the issue of military intervention (by refusing to decide), he appears to have *implicitly* rejected

military intervention due to public and Congressional opposition. This finding diverges somewhat from H5a, which presumes no implicit weighting of various groups' importance in Kennedy's decision calculus. It suggests that for constraint respecters, certain domestic political actors (perhaps those who can affect the leader's continuation or future effectiveness in office, or those with whom decision-making authority is formally shared, as opposed to appointed officials) reign supreme and these actors' preferences will be given disproportionate attention in decision making.

Although H5a does not receive unqualified support in this case, the theoretical basis for this hypothesis (which suggests that constraint respecters will perceive themselves to be constrained by the preferences of key domestic political actors—however those are actually weighted or prioritized) appears very solid. One could hardly hope to find more convincing evidence of a leader's perception of being powerfully constrained in his policy choices by key domestic actors than Kennedy's repeated, anguished statements about his inability to chart a policy course in Vietnam that was not supported by Congress and the American public.²²

Reagan Case: Grenada, 1983

The Marxist New Jewel Movement (NJM) came to power in Grenada through a coup in March, 1979. By 1983, Grenada had close ties to many Communist-bloc countries and was, with Cuban assistance, building a large airport capable of handling military aircraft. The Reagan administration viewed Grenada as a potential base for Soviet power projection in the Western Hemisphere and as a threat to U.S. interests in the Caribbean. On October 19, 1983, Grenada's Prime Minister, Maurice Bishop, was executed in the course of a coup, and a more radical Marxist faction took control, instituting a shoot-on-sight curfew. These events triggered a crisis for the United States; the Reagan administration perceived a threat not only to U.S. influence in the Caribbean and Western Hemisphere, but to the approximately 1,000 U.S. citizens on Grenada (most of them university students). An urgent request for U.S. assistance came from the Organization of Eastern Caribbean States (OECS) on Saturday, October 22. On October 23, U.S. marine barracks in Lebanon were bombed, killing 241 marines. On Monday, October 24, Reagan made the decision to intervene militarily in Grenada. On October 25, 1,900 U.S. troops, along with a small force from OECS countries, landed on the island and had accomplished their primary military objectives by October 28. This ended the crisis for the United States.²³

²² While Kennedy's apparent sensitivity to certain domestic actors' preferences should not be minimized, it is worth noting that other, nondomestic considerations (e.g., fear of escalation, combined with the need to deter the adversary) almost certainly played a role in his decisions both not to deploy American forces and not to explicitly rule out this possibility.

²³ This crisis overview (including identification of the trigger, primary U.S. response, and resolution of the crisis) is based on the account in Brecher & Wilkenfeld, 1997, pp. 527–529.

Hypothesis H1 expects that constraint challengers will *not* engage in an extensive search for information concerning the preferences of key domestic actors. The evidence surrounding this crisis provides strong support for H1. Unlike President Kennedy, Reagan did not emphasize gathering a wide range of opinions from officials and trusted friends. There is a notable absence of such activity in the record regarding the Grenada decision, especially in comparison to the frenetic search for information and advice that characterized the Kennedy cases. From the moment the crisis began, eyewitnesses and other associates agree that Reagan essentially knew how he wanted to respond and did not waste time soliciting others' views (Cannon, 1991, p. 441; Shultz, 1993, p. 329; Weinberger, 1990, pp. 112–113). In fact, Reagan actively sought to exclude extra-administration actors from playing any role in the decision making process (see below).

H2 states that constraint challengers (a) will *not* perceive their decisions to be constrained by the preferences of key domestic actors, and (b) will instead make policy choices based on their own beliefs concerning state goals and how to achieve these in the present situation. The evidence suggests that Reagan's core beliefs about the nature of Communism and the threat it posed to U.S. interests through Grenada (both the immediate threat to U.S. students and the more diffuse, but perhaps more important, threat to U.S. interests and friends in the region) powerfully shaped how the situation was defined and which response options were viewed as acceptable. Any response that left Grenada functioning as a Communist outpost was excluded by Reagan's definition of the situation or his problem representation (Sylvan & Thorson, 1992). Significantly, the evidentiary record makes clear that these geostrategic considerations, flowing directly from Reagan's core beliefs and perceptions, overwhelmingly (if not exclusively) drove the decision to intervene in Grenada, independent of political calculations or concerns about which domestic groups would support various responses (providing strong support for H2b).

Reagan not only did not seek out information concerning the views of Congress, the public, the media, or U.S. allies, but in areas where he had knowledge or suspicions concerning such actors' preferences, he acted in ways that were contrary to these preferences (providing additional support for H2b and circumstantial support for H2a). Reagan faced some intra-administration opposition to his preference for swift military action. Vice President Bush worried that an all English-speaking rescue would look bad and favored getting Venezuela on board, but Reagan countered that "a request to Venezuela would delay our action and might well leak, thereby forgoing the advantage of surprise. Ronald Reagan was ready to go" (Shultz, 1993, p. 329). The JCS and Defense Secretary Weinberger expressed repeated concerns between Saturday, October 22, and Monday, October 24 (when the final decision to proceed was made), that more time was needed to plan, collect intelligence, and rehearse the more complex aspects of the operation. Despite intense debate, Reagan "held firm against the Pentagon's desire for more

time to prepare" (Shultz, 1993, p. 344), indicating he understood and accepted the risks (Weinberger, 1990, pp. 111–112).

Perhaps more importantly, in terms of the political risks involved, Reagan faced anticipated or actual opposition from key extra-administration sources including the American public, Congress, the media, and U.S. allies. The common belief that there would be a public outcry against further deployments and bloodshed on the heels of the Beirut disaster was expressed strongly by several administration officials.²⁴ In NSC meetings on Sunday, October 23, Reagan and his inner circle "were aware that public revulsion to the killing of the marines would argue against committing our forces in Grenada [and yet] the President gave the go-ahead to the planning and said he would make his final decision on Monday" (Meese, 1992, p. 217). Meese records a highly significant exchange between the President and the JCS Chairman at that decisive Monday meeting:

Again the political factors came into play. In the course of the military briefing, Gen. John Vessey, chairman of the Joint Chiefs, gave voice to the NSC's apprehensions when he said, "Mr. President, we think we ought to bring up, even though it is not a military matter, the fact there is a potential public opinion downside to this because of what happened to the marines." He and his colleagues thought too much of their commander-in-chief not to at least raise the question. The President asked one question: "Is there any military reason for not going ahead with the operation?" The chiefs answered no; militarily, the plan was feasible. The President thereupon gave the order to proceed; he signed the official authorization at 6:55 P.M. on Monday evening. (1992, pp. 217–218)

Reagan's ability to focus on what he perceived to be the central strategic mission (arguably to a degree that put the politically conscious Joint Chiefs to shame) and to simply ignore the views of key domestic actors is a striking exhibition of the constraint challenging leader in action.

The decision to intervene was made without consultation with Congress.²⁵ On Monday evening, *after* signing the formal authorization to proceed, Reagan called the very top leadership of Congress to the White House. Exhibiting a remarkable concern for secrecy, Reagan directed that these leaders be brought to the upstairs family sitting room by a variety of means (Weinberger, 1990, p. 117), and they were forbidden even to tell their wives they were coming to the White House (Reagan, 1990, p. 454). The Congressional leaders were briefed

²⁴ The tight coincidence of the events in Lebanon and Grenada has led some to suggest that the Grenada operation was a diversionary response to the Lebanon disaster. The preponderance of the evidence, however, appears to indicate that Reagan had decided to intervene before learning of the Beirut bombing, and that the casualties sustained in Beirut were perceived by Reagan and other officials as arguing *against* intervention in Grenada (e.g., see Cannon, 1991, pp. 445–447).

²⁵ Congress was apparently not even told of the urgent request from the OECS states for U.S. assistance until after it had been accepted and early elements of the operation were underway.

on the Grenada operation, and although the Republicans were supportive, the Democratic leaders (especially House Speaker Tip O'Neill) were apparently concerned about the operation and irritated that they had not been consulted prior to the decision being made.²⁶ Shultz recalls the reaction of the Speaker: "'Mr. President, I have been informed but not consulted,' O'Neill said. With that, he stomped out of the family quarters of the White House" (Shultz, 1993, p. 335). (In contrast, President Kennedy held several meetings with large Congressional delegations during the Laos and Vietnam crises, asked for their opinions, took detailed notes as to their attitudes toward intervention, and assured them that no final decisions had been made.)

Great Britain voiced stiff opposition to the prospect of an invasion of Grenada. On Monday morning, October 24, Ambassador Oliver Wright informed U.S. leaders that Britain was opposed to military intervention: "Margaret Thatcher, he said, preferred economic and political pressure" (Shultz, 1993, p. 331). That night, a cable to the President from Prime Minister Thatcher arrived, expressing her "gravest concerns" about military intervention (Weinberger, 1990, p. 119). There followed a heated phone conversation between Reagan and Thatcher, during which she protested having not been notified and insisted that he call off the operation. But Reagan recalls that "I couldn't tell her that it had already begun. This troubled me because of our close relationship" (Reagan, 1990, pp. 454–455). That "close relationship," however, did not trump the security of the mission—even after Thatcher knew the landings were imminent, Reagan "couldn't tell her" the operation had already begun. Meese notes that "The President was deeply disappointed, but he stood firm, telling her that we intended to go ahead" (1992, p. 217).

More generally, Reagan recognized that international opposition could arise from the United States, seemingly unilaterally, intervening in Grenada, but the alternative (building a broader coalition that would receive more international support) was viewed as too risky. Reagan rejected Vice President Bush's suggestion that Venezuela be included, on grounds that such efforts would jeopardize the secrecy of the mission. At 9 a.m. Saturday morning (soon after the OECS request for assistance had been received), an NSC meeting was convened in the White House situation room, during which concerns about international perceptions of American imperialism were raised: "When a White House staff member observed that there could be a 'harsh political reaction' to a U.S. invasion of a small island nation, Reagan replied, 'I know that. I accept that'" (Cannon, 1991, p. 442). Once again, Reagan's priorities come through remarkably clear: multilateralism, though perhaps desirable if it did not interfere with the secrecy, swiftness, and effectiveness of the mission, was a luxury the United States could not afford in this instance.

²⁶ Many other members of Congress were outraged by this lack of consultation; Rep. John Conyers' federal lawsuit accusing Reagan of violating the Constitution is an extreme example.

Finally, it is important to highlight some evidence that bears directly on Hypothesis H2a (Reagan's perceptions concerning normative or practical constraints emanating from key domestic actors). In his memoirs, Reagan is very blunt about the fact that his motivations for maintaining such high levels of secrecy and keeping Congress and even key allies "out of the loop" involved not just the security of the operation, but *the perceived need to avoid preemptive public criticism and opposition* from Congress, the media, and other sources:

I suspected that, if we told the leaders of Congress about the operation, even under terms of strictest confidentiality, there would be some who would leak it to the press together with the prediction that Grenada was going to become "another Vietnam." We were already running into this phenomenon in our efforts to halt the spread of Communism in Central America, and some congressmen were raising the issue of "another Vietnam" in Lebanon while fighting to restrict the president's constitutional powers as commander in chief . . . I knew that if word of the rescue mission leaked out in advance, we'd hear this from some in Congress: "Sure, it's starting small, but once you make that first commitment, Grenada's going to become another Vietnam." Well, that wasn't true. And that's one reason why the rescue operation in Grenada was conducted in total secrecy. We didn't ask anybody, we just did it. (Reagan, 1990, p. 451)

Significantly, opposition from Congress and the media regarding Grenada in particular and policies comprising the "Reagan Doctrine" more generally is viewed in Reagan's mind as an irrational and damaging phenomenon that undermines America's national interests and therefore must be circumvented, preempted, or silenced, for the good of the nation. Such opposition is *not* viewed as a legitimate constraint that must be respected or accommodated; instead, it represents a serious obstacle to the clear-headed defense of America's interests. It is his *duty* as President to see that such voices do not influence his decision making.

In summary, Reagan's response to potential and actual opposition from the American people, Congress, the media, and international actors during the Grenada crisis provides consistent support for both elements of Hypothesis H2. Clearly, in this crisis President Reagan perceived (and treated) Congressional and public opposition not as legitimate constraints on his policymaking authority, but rather as ill-informed or even dangerous views that could greatly undermine U.S. security if heeded (consistent with H2a). Reagan's exclusive focus, throughout the crisis, remained fixed on accomplishing the mission of rescuing U.S. students and eliminating a threatening Communist outpost, even if that meant taking some heated criticism from a range of key domestic and international actors. Without exception, the action imperatives shaped by his strongly anti-Communist world view and his perception of the threats to U.S. interests posed by Grenada drove his decision making on strategy, tactics, and timing (consistent with H2b).

Potential and actual domestic opposition was dealt with through a variety of means: it was ignored, circumvented, or silenced through secrecy and misdirection. Accommodation or compromise with this opposition was never attempted, nor apparently contemplated, however, providing direct support for H2b and circumstantial support for H2a.

Conclusions and Extensions

Leaders' responses to domestic constraints in any given situation may be shaped by a multitude of factors, including situational pressures external to the leader. The framework developed here focuses on how key elements of leadership style may affect leaders' responses to constraints. A complete model would include propositions about how situational factors—including the precise character of the constraints themselves—will limit, overwhelm, or enhance leaders' basic tendencies or orientations toward constraints. That is, it is important not to reify the leadership categories employed here: although general predispositions toward domestic constraints may be discerned, "constraint respecters" may stand firm against opposition in some contexts, and "constraint challengers" are likely to compromise on certain issues. Specifying more precisely the conditions under which these different behaviors manifest themselves is a critical task for future research. For instance, leaders whose styles and beliefs incline them toward ideological rigidity are likely to become particularly inflexible (and thus willing to challenge domestic and international opposition) when their core ideological values are made salient by the situation at hand; they are likely to be more flexible and willing to accommodate opposition on issues they consider peripheral to these values. It was often observed that Reagan was particularly stubborn and played a more active role in policymaking when his core values (e.g., anti-Communism, smaller government) were "triggered" by the situation—or his perception of it—but he was much more passive and willing to delegate and compromise when these core convictions were not considered relevant to the immediate issue. President George W. Bush's willingness to defy domestic and international opposition in leading the march to war against Iraq in late 2002 and early 2003, once he had defined disarmament of the Saddam Hussein regime in terms of the war on terror—Bush's self-described post-September 11 "crusade," or *raison d'être*—can be interpreted in a similar light. Even when core values are at stake, constraint challengers may "cave in" to exceptionally strong political opposition (e.g., that which threatens their continuation in power), and constraint respecters may pursue unpopular policies when they believe vital state interests or values can be secured through no other means. Other factors such as experience, level of interest, and the crisis versus noncrisis nature of the situation may also affect leaders' responses to constraints. Therefore, specifying the scope conditions surrounding leaders' general orientations is crucial if we are to better understand how domestic constraints will be perceived and incorporated into the policymaking process in specific situations.

One of the situational variables that will shape leaders' responses to constraints is the nature of the constraints themselves; although constraints are often treated as a constant within a specific type of system (e.g., democracies), they may vary greatly over time and across issues. Although both Kennedy and Reagan faced anticipated or actual opposition to the use of force ("potential pacifying constraints") from intra-administration sources, Congress, and the American public during the cases examined, one cannot automatically conclude that these domestic constraints were identical, or even roughly comparable, in an objective sense. Numerous factors, including Presidential approval ratings, period within the election cycle, and the balance of seats in Congress between Democrats and Republicans, can modify the objective character of these constraints. Yet to the degree that one seeks to establish that different perceptions and behavior during crisis situations are a consequence of leadership style as opposed to situational factors, one must demonstrate that the domestic and international constraints facing different leaders were in fact objectively similar on important dimensions.

Arguments for the comparability, across the crises examined, of key situational features relating to the nature of the crisis trigger, the military balance vis-à-vis the crisis adversary, and the general domestic context have already been advanced above. Some important differences should be noted, however. The complexity of the Vietnam situation (including the intractability of guerrilla warfare, the political problems of the Diem regime, and the potential involvement of China) relative to Grenada may have made military intervention less attractive in the Vietnam crisis. Grenada's location in the American "sphere of influence" may also have allowed greater freedom of action on Reagan's part. On the other hand, the optimism of the Kennedy team regarding counterinsurgency tactics and the fact that many of Kennedy's trusted advisors were confidently calling for a commitment of combat forces suggests that the pitfalls of intervention in Vietnam are clearer in hindsight than they may have been for Kennedy.

Furthermore, the lingering specter of the McCarthy era—particularly for Democrats, who were often accused of being soft on Communism in the wake of China's fall—could be seen as encouraging, or at least providing political cover for, forceful action. The Bay of Pigs debacle, though no doubt inducing caution in Kennedy, was also viewed as an embarrassment whose effects on U.S. credibility would have to be overcome through American toughness in Vietnam (e.g., Halberstam, 1992, pp. 66–76). The evidence examined suggests that Kennedy was indeed responding to some strategic pressures in both Laos and Vietnam—some of which discouraged military action—but the evidence regarding his sensitivity to potential public and Congressional opposition in these crises is also clear and should not be diminished.

Important features of the specific domestic constraints facing Kennedy and Reagan during these crises appear to be roughly comparable, although it is difficult to weigh the precise importance of different factors in creating an objective indicator. Some of the identifiable differences indicate that Reagan may have been more "objectively constrained" than Kennedy—a conclusion which would give

added significance to, rather than undermine, the findings involving Reagan's constraint-challenging behavior and Kennedy's constraint-respecting actions. The Vietnam and Laos crises occurred in 1961, in Kennedy's first year in office; this period represents the most "unconstrained" period within the election cycle. The Grenada crisis occurred roughly one year before the 1984 Presidential election (indicating a higher level of objective constraint). The margins of victory in previous elections indicate a higher level of objective constraint for Kennedy (the 1960 election was extremely close; Reagan won in 1980 by a decisive margin). As noted, however, the ghost of McCarthyism may have diminished or even reversed the potential pacifying nature of Kennedy's lack of an electoral mandate. Kennedy enjoyed solid Democratic majorities in both houses of Congress; Reagan faced Democratic control of the House, but enjoyed Republican control of the Senate. One could argue that the Bay of Pigs debacle imposed important constraints on Kennedy in early 1961, although the Beirut disaster in the midst of the Grenada crisis could be viewed as having similar effects in terms of discouraging the use of force (see the analysis of these points in the results section).

In sum, while important differences between these cases should be kept in mind, it is by no means apparent that the very different perceptions and responses to potential pacifying constraints exhibited by Kennedy and Reagan can be attributed entirely to these situational differences. This suggests that leadership style should be included as one important moderating variable in our models of how domestic constraints shape foreign policy behavior. The case study findings strongly suggest that even in democratic systems, *direct* constraints are often more apparent than real, and that many domestic constraints are properly conceived of as *potential* constraints, whose policy impact depends on the degree to which they are internalized by key decision makers. Even if one assumes that these two Presidents' very different approaches toward constraints in these cases are entirely accounted for by situational factors, the undeniable variation in their perceptions and responses is a key finding that calls for modification of existing, overly static conceptions of domestic constraints and their policy impact.

The difficulty associated with precisely measuring and comparing domestic political constraints across cases highlights the need for a more nuanced and sophisticated measure of "objective constraints." Such a measure for the American system would include not only electoral margins of victory, period within the election cycle, Presidential approval ratings, and the balance of seats in Congress, but such factors as the success of the President's legislative agenda in Congress, and whether or not the President had received recent public criticism from powerful allies within his administration or his own party in Congress.

While the specific set of personal characteristics used here to assess leaders' anticipated orientations toward potential pacifying constraints is theoretically grounded and appears to have done a reasonably effective job of anticipating differences in decision-making styles, there is also evidence that other characteristics may shape leaders' responsiveness to constraints. Self-monitoring (e.g.,

Snyder, 1987), belief in one's ability to control events (e.g., Hermann, 1999), and cognitive complexity (e.g., Preston & 't Hart, 1999) have been explicitly linked to one's responsiveness to the political context and openness to information. Lower levels of cognitive complexity may be associated not only with less sensitivity to the political environment, but also with a greater willingness to resort to forceful instruments (e.g., Driver, 1977; Hermann, 1984; Preston, 2001). Additional research must examine the relative importance of each of these characteristics in shaping leaders' responses to constraints. For instance, is the power motive a more potent predictor of leaders' inclination to challenge constraints than is task emphasis or conceptual complexity? Creatively designed experimental studies may be necessary in order to disentangle the effects of these characteristics and to examine their relative potency.

The new theoretical and empirical directions advocated here are intended to supplement and enhance, not replace, structural approaches. Scholars emphasizing domestic structure have made important contributions to our understanding of how potential and direct constraints may shape policy behavior; but such explanations remain incomplete. Just as international structure-oriented theories have been made more determinate by integrating agency-based insights, so too will theories emphasizing domestic structure gain from taking decision makers and their perceptions seriously.

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