Constraints on Foreign Policy Decision Making

Stability and Flexibility in Three Crises

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Since the usual theoretical approaches to explain foreign policy decision-making—that is, to isolate a single explanatory factor—have proven less than satisfying, a different perspective is proposed here. Normally the explanation is framed in a "this factor causes that behavior" statement. The perspective offered is that decision makers are constrained by certain factors to a limited range of choice. The factors of stability and flexibility are used as the causes of constraints and applied to three illustrative crisis situations—World War I, the Korean War, and the Cuban Missile Crisis. The results of the application indicate that stability influences the range of options considered and that flexibility gives the location of the range on the behavior taxonomy. The intensity of flexibility appears to indicate the probable location within the range of the behavior to be selected. These results give support to the proposition of constrained decision-making.

The foreign policy decision-making perspective has been attractive as a framework to explain foreign policies and actions. Unfortunately, the results of using the decision-making approach to explain foreign policy have been unsatisfactory. It has been recognized that the decision-making approach in its original form is not a formal theory (Rosenau, 1967). This point has been conceded by the approach's major figure (Snyder, in Paige, 1968: xiii). This weakness, however, has not stopped political scientists from trying to use decision-making theoretically.

While the difficulty of establishing the relationships between the variables involved and then testing them has discouraged

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macroapproaches,[1] many single-factor theories have been proposed and tested. Among these have been theories based on such internal factors as rational actor goals (Allison, 1971), societal pressures (Caspary, 1970), psychological factors (Sniderman and Citrin, 1971), innate or biological inheritance (Corning, 1971), elite effects (Barnet, 1973), bureaucratic impacts (Allison, 1971), and the effects of particular capabilities (Garnham, 1976). On the other hand, some political scientists have tried to explain foreign policy decisions using external or systemic factors. One such approach is systemic configuration such as bipolarity or multipolarity or both (Rosecrance, 1966), while another is systemic features such as the existence of alliances and their longevity (Wallace, 1973). All of these theories try to explain foreign policy decisions by emphasizing a specific variable.

The findings of the single-factor explanations have been contradictory and inconclusive, casting doubt on each theory. Inconclusive findings implicitly, if not explicitly, demonstrate that there are other variables and relationships operating (for a discussion of theories and their evidence, see Sullivan, 1976).

This lack of success can be attributed to inherent features within the act of decision and to the perspective brought by the theory to the act. As for the act, successful theories in any discipline are based on repetition. The actors or elements do not change, or change so slowly as to be assumed constant. Hence, the act is regarded as normal. And for social acts, there is little risk associated with them.[2] While transactions in international politics meet these conditions, these are not the acts which have attracted attention (for a discussion of transactions, see Azar et al., 1972: 38). Political scientists have been drawn to the unique in foreign policy. For obvious reasons, they study decisions that occur sporadically, that are faced by different decision makers, and that risk national or global survival. Unfortunately, these events do not meet the conditions for theory construction.

The dramatic event will always attract our attention and thus warrants some consistent explanation. The single-factor perspec-

1. For one of the few efforts at macrotheory, see Rummel's Dimensions of Nations project (1972, 1975, 1976).

2. For political science, the study of voting behavior meets these conditions and has been the most sophisticated area of theory development and testing.

tive selects a variable and then tries to predict a result. In repetitive acts, these predictions should hold, but not for essentially unique events. For these events, a reversal of the intellectual process may have more encouraging results. If a clue is taken from Sherlock Holmes in *The Sign of Four*—"How often have I said to you that when you have eliminated the impossible, whatever remains, *however improbable,* must be the truth"—"theory" would state those variables that restrict or constrain the range of possible results (for a similar discussion of constraints, see Almond and Genco, 1977: 492-493).

Constraints

To adapt the "Holmesian" approach to foreign policy decision-making, one would first have to accept all the possibilities, no matter how improbable, can occur. This hypothetical range would then be narrowed or constrained to those possibilities considered by the actors. The constraining variables would restrict the range of alternatives considered and indicate where within the hypothetical possibilities this range was located.

To operationalize the idea of constraints, a behavior typology giving a hypothetical range of possibilities is needed. While almost any such typology would do (see for example McClelland and Hoggard, 1969; or Hermann et al., 1973), the "behavior modes" is used here (Price, 1975). These typologies define the behavior possibilities on a spectrum scale from intensely cooperative through neutrality to intensely conflictual. As will be seen below in the three illustrative cases, decision makers consider a limited, serial range of options beginning with the most recent policy.

In considering variables to use as constraints, two seem particularly suited to the ideas of range and location. The first is stability. Stable systems consistently select the same or similar policies. Thus, a stable system would consider a narrow range of alternatives. Conversely, systems are unstable because their range of options is so wide. Stability, which is a multifactor variable, is operationalized here on the basis of the interaction of its component parts.

The first component is the number of other actors that have to be considered when arriving at a decision. The assumption is that the larger the number involved, the more difficult it is to change behavior and consequently the greater the pressure to continue in the same manner. This component has been frequently discussed as if it alone accounts for stability (see Deutsch and Singer, 1964; and for contrast Waltz, 1967 and Rosecrance, 1966).

The second component of stability is the length of time that the same behavior has been selected by decision makers, i.e., the system's inertia. The rationale for inertia is that the longer a particular behavior is consistently selected, the more agencies and institutions are created to perform the behavior. These structures constitute a series of "payoff systems" to those who work within them. These people with a stake in the continuance of the system form constituencies pressuring decision makers. Thus, the longer a system has been in existence, the greater the pressure to continue it.[3]

The third and last component of stability is satisfaction with the system. Whatever one's goals within the system—and they can vary greatly (Allison, 1971: 167)—this component defines whether decision makers perceive their goals as being met in at least a minimal or satisfactory manner. This can be a countervailing pressure. No matter how many actors are involved or how long the system has been in existence, if satisfaction is low enough the system will become unstable. Thus, the greater the satisfaction, the greater the pressure to continue the system.[4]

Stability is a constraint that defines the range of possibilities that decision makers will consider. The basis for this assertion is that the higher the stability, the less the desire to change the system. Decision makers will look for actions that are similar to

3. This constituency effect probably accounts for the difficulty of such Presidents as Nixon and Carter in reducing the size of the U.S. governmental bureaucracy.

4. Wallace (1973) tested the numbers and stability hypotheses and found a curvilinear result. The probable reason for this result is the countervailing feature of satisfaction in stability.

the present one—a narrow range of possibilities. Conversely, the greater the instability, the greater the desire to change the system and thus consider alternatives that may be quite dissimilar to the current behavior—a wide range of alternatives. Therefore, the higher the stability, the narrower will be the range of alternatives considered; while the higher the instability, the wider will be the range considered.

If stability as a constraint gives the range of decisional considerations, the location of that range can be established by flexibility. While flexibility in decision-making is normally perceived to be good, a person who is too flexible is thought to be unreliable. An inflexible decision maker would continue in the behavior direction already established by the current behavior—if cooperative, more intensely cooperative; if conflictual, more intensely conflictual. A flexible decision maker would reverse the direction and the location of the range toward the other end of the behavior spectrum.

Flexibility describes how the decision makers pursue their goals. It indicates a willingness to try something else, whereas inflexibility indicates that more of the same is considered desirable. "Flexibility requires an ability to view matters inclusively, to take as much as possible into consideration, to change direction easily" (Levi and Benjamin, 1977: 406). Evidence of this attitudinal variable can be gained through the expressions of the decision makers involved (see Holsti, 1969). As a constraint, flexibility indicates on which side of the present characteristic behavior the range of possible actions is located.

While flexibility locates the range, it may also indicate where within that range the probable decision is. The intensity of flexibility should indicate probable choice. The reason is that the greater the intensity the further from the current behavior is the probable choice. Conversely, the lesser the intensity, the closer to the current behavior is the probable choice.

Thus, beginning at the present characteristic behavior, the probable new behavior will be within a range defined by stability; the range will be in a location indicated by flexibility; and the probable choice will be indicated by the intensity of the attitude toward flexibility.

Limited Choice and Three Crises

While the idea of constraints on decision-making can be discussed, the effect has to be demonstrated before such an explanation can be undertaken. The effect of constraints would show that decision makers considered a limited, sequential set of options rather than a large, random collection of possibilities. To establish this effect, the behavior modes typology is used to categorize the behaviors considered in three crises. Table 1 gives the modes of behavior with a characteristic description and an example of each mode.

The three crises to be analyzed for choice limitations are the German decision in the summer of 1914 that resulted in World War I; the U.S. decision in June 1950 to enter the Korean War; and the U.S. decision in October 1962 to establish a blockade around the island of Cuba. Among the reasons for selecting these cases are their familiarity to most students of foreign policy making and a fairly well established consensus as to the alternatives considered in each case.

THE WORLD WAR I DECISION

The decisional period for Germany began with the assassination of its ally's Archduke, Francis Ferdinand of Austria-Hungary, on June 28, 1914 in Sarajevo, and ended with a series of declarations of war during the first days of August.

During this six-week period, Germany had a number of opportunities to make decisions and to consider the alternatives available. Farrar (1972: 9, 17), in his study of this crisis, lists eight moments of decision for Germany and the behavior chosen. This list, seen as alternatives considered, constitutes the set of options considered by the Germans:

(1) reassurance of unqualified support for Austria-Hungary

(2) covert involvement

(3) reassure Austria-Hungary of German support

(4) support Austria-Hungary and military counterthreat against Russia

TABLE 1

The Behavior Modes with Characteristic Descriptions and Examples

Behavior Mode	*Description*	*Example*
No Contact	"does not exclude the possibility of awareness, but the decision is made not to increase behavior or allocate resources"	foreign policy of ancient Greece to ancient China
CONFLICTUAL		
Ignore	"similar to No Contact in appearance . . . and a commitment of resources"	not replacing an Ambassador
Threat	"verbalization of the antagonisms . . . to change behavior without actually having to act"	statement of the Monroe Doctrine
Threat with demonstration	"not only to verbalize the threat but to demonstrate the willingness [capability] to carry it out"	maintaining a standing army
Threat demonstration with contact	"to show resolve and to clearly signal that you are willing to take the next step and use physical violence"	creating an organization as NATO
Physical violence without death	"to marshall and use your force potential . . . that does not threaten the existence of the other(s)"	maintaining a blockade
Physical violence with unplanned but accepted death	"does not plan fatalities, but the possibility has been considered . . . and is acceptable"	conducting a surgical air strike
Physical Violence with Planned Death	"accepted killing to accomplish a resolution of the antagonism and to gain control over the other(s)"	conducting a war
Acommunity	"commits all resources to physical violence with accepted death towards all other actors"	activities in Hobbes's state of nature

TABLE 1 (Continued)

Behavior Mode	*Description*	*Example*
COOPERATIVE		
Tolerate	"a willingness to be associated with the other actor(s)"	Soviet Union's foreign policy toward Romania
Promise	"verbalization of a co-operative solution to the antagonism"	statements as "the year of Europe"
Promise with demonstration	"beyond verbalization to demonstrate the intent [capability] to carry out the promise"	giving grants for economic assistance
Promise demonstration with contact	"establishing formal reciprocal arrangements to carry out negotiations"	conduct of normal diplomacy
Co-operation	"display a willingness to actually begin to work together in a joint endeavor to solve the antagonism"	signing and implementing treaties
Co-operation with functional integration	"does not go so far as to produce a structure or institution that is charged with continuously being in session but limits itself to an arrangement to meet when a problem . . . arises"	operation of organization as OPEC
Co-operation with structural integration	"structures or institutions are created to meet continuously to oversee single or multifunctional activities"	operation of organization as EEC
Community	"all time and resources are committed to co-operative behavior for the purposes of benefiting all"	activities in Marx's classless society

SOURCE: Price, 1975: 427-433.

TABLE 2
The German Considerations in the World War I Decision

Considerations	*Behavior Mode*	*Target*
1. Preserve the current alliance system	Threat with demonstration	Triple Entente (France, Russia, and Britain)
2. War	Physical violence with planned death	Triple Entente (France, Russia, and Britain

(5) military threat against France

(6) implement threats

(7) reject British mediation

(8) reject British military threat.

This list may overstate, however, the actual considerations by implying a series of separate decisions. For Germany, the first decision was the crucial decision. The original incident involving Austria-Hungary and Serbia challenged the German conception of peace. They saw two possibilities: (1) to preserve the current system by refusing or restraining the Austro-Hungarians, or (2) if war was imminent anyway, a decision then for war would be better than a decision for war later (Farrar, 1972: 12). They perceived the world as divided into two hostile alliances. Their actions subsequent to July 5, 1914 merely carried out the logic of a concept the Germans had already accepted. Thus, as seen in Table 2, the Germans considered only a very limited range of conflictual behaviors.

THE KOREAN DECISION

After information reached the United States that on June 24, 1950 the army of North Korea had invaded South Korea, the United States entered a decisional period that resulted in its participating in the Korean War.

Whether one argues that the collection of decisions that put American ground combat troops in Korea was a series of single decisions "not in comparison with other alternatives" (Snyder

and Paige, 1958: 376), or that while taken individually the decision makers knew from the beginning all things were possible up to and including having "to apply force" (Truman, 1956: 335), the actual alternatives considered were limited. Paige (1968: 279) reformulated the nine decisions, or alternatives that he and Snyder (Snyder and Paige, 1958: 368) had identified earlier into six:

(1) to call for a Security Council meeting

(2) to adopt a strong posture of resistance

(3) to commit air-sea forces; to keep the conflict limited; and to avoid direct confrontation with the Soviet Union

(4) to extend operation into North Korea and to employ combat troops as evacuation cover

(5) to commit one regimental combat team to combat

(6) to commit necessary ground troops.

Unlike the German decision in World War I, the Korean decisions of the United States show a division of targets. The first two decisions indicate the target was the communist world. Paige (1968: 51) comments that by June 1950 the American policy makers saw "the world as divided into two contending camps." This view was reflected in President Truman's belief (1956: 337) that "the Reds were probing for a weakness in our armor," and Secretary of State Acheson's assertion (1969: 405) that the attack had been "instigated by the Soviet Union" through "a Soviet puppet." This perspective is apparent in the series of actions on June 25 and 26, which included aid to areas other than Korea thought threatened by communist forces—the Philippines and Indochina.

Yet by the third decision, it is apparent that the United States had two targets. One was North Korea, against which the goal of stopping the invasion was pursued. But the Soviet Union was separated from North Korea. Other modes of behavior were directed against it. The reason for this division was a desire "to prevent a third world war" (Truman, 1956: 345). Thus, after June 26 the United States had two different targets and two different

TABLE 3
United States Considerations in the Korean Decision

Considerations	*Behavior Mode*	*Target*
1. Call Security Council meeting	Threat	Communist World
2. Adopt strong posture	Threat with demonstration	Communist World
3. Commit air-sea forces;	Physical violence with planned death[a]	North Korea
Keep conflict limited;	Threat demonstration with contact	Soviet Union
Avoid confrontation with USSR	Threat demonstration with contact	Soviet Union
4. Extend operation into North Korea and employ troops for evacuation	Physical violence with planned death[a]	North Korea
5. Commit one regimental combat team	Physical violence with planned death[a]	North Korea
6. Commit necessary ground troops	Physical violence with planned death[a]	North Korea

a. Escalation from a circumscribed to a more uncircumscribed use.

goals. The choices considered to pursue these ends, as can be seen in Table 3, were greater than those considered by Germany in World War I, but they were a limited number of possibilities when compared to the behavior modes taxonomy.

THE CUBA DECISION

In October 1962, the United States became aware of a Soviet attempt to place offensive missiles on the island of Cuba. The United States then entered a decisional period which resulted in the placing of a blockade around the island of Cuba.

During the deliberations, the Cuban decision had a number of alternatives that were advocated and considered. The number of alternatives varies from ten listed by Janis (1972: 150) to four noted by Schlesinger (1965: 803-804) and Hilsman (1964: 195-196). These are all, however, subsumed under the six alternatives listed by Sorensen (1965: 682) and Allison (1971: 57-61):

TABLE 4
United States Considerations in the Cuban Decision

Considerations	*Behavior Mode*	*Target*
1. Blockade	Physical violence with unplanned death	Soviet Union
2. Surgical air strike	Physical violence with unplanned but accepted death	Soviet Union
3. Invasion[a]	Physical violence with planned death	Soviet Union

a. An invasion was never directly considered.

(1) do nothing
(2) diplomatic pressure
(3) secret approach to Castro
(4) blockade
(5) air strike
(6) invasion.

Yet of these six, three alternatives were not considered. The first—do nothing—was rejected by President Kennedy (Schlesinger, 1965: 803; Kennedy, 1969: 33), as was the second alternative—diplomatic pressure—before the deliberations began (Sorensen, 1965: 683). The third alternative was "set aside" rather than considered because the target of the U.S. actions was the Soviet Union, and, no matter what bargains were struck with Castro, the Soviets controlled the missiles (Sorensen, 1965: 683).

Of the remaining three alternatives, invasion was not actively considered as it was felt to be an inappropriate first step (Sorensen, 1965: 683). However, it was not far from the minds of the decision makers, as can be seen by the marshaling of troops that would form the invasion force (Schlesinger, 1965: 803; Kennedy, 1969: 55). The remaining two alternatives—air strike and blockade—were the ones actively considered (Sorensen, 1965: 683; and Kennedy, 1969: 45). The arguments for and against both of these alternatives are well-developed in the works on this decision, so that the only comment needed here is that the type of

air strike contemplated was of the "surgical" variety, or one designed to destroy the missiles and missile sites with little or no loss of life.

The target of the American actions was not Cuba, but the Soviet Union—as noted above. The deliberations never indicated that Cuba was considered a major factor. This conclusion is reinforced when U.S. caution in dealing with the Russians is contrasted with U.S. support for the Cuban refugee invasion when it was dealing against Cuba alone in 1961. The goal for the United States versus the Soviets was the removal of the offensive missiles and the threat they constituted. The number of alternatives considered represents a very narrow range on the behavior modes taxonomy.

Constraints in Three Foreign Policy Decision-Making Cases

Of the three crises used here as illustrations, all exhibit a limited and sequential range of choices considered. Given this finding, it is possible to see if the variables of stability and flexibility act as constraints indicating the range and location of the possibilities considered in each case.

THE WORLD WAR I DECISION

As war approached, the characteristic behavior of the European states was a series of alliances that constituted a *threat with demonstration* system. Each had threatened and joined alliances directed against others and all had demonstrated their capability to carry out the threats.

The number of actors in the system was two. While some maintain that the system was multipolar, in reality it had solidified into two opposing alliances. By the time of the Bosnian crisis of 1908, the basic configuration of Britain, France, Russia, Japan, and Italy versus Germany and Austria had emerged (Sabrosky, 1975: 8-9). The length of time this system had been in operation can be dated from the resolution of the Bosnian crisis, or six years.

TABLE 5
An Analysis of the German Decision in World War I
as Constrained by Stability and Flexibility

Stability	*Flexibility*	*Expectation*	*Actual*
Number of Actors (Small-2)	Inflexible	Wide range	Physical violence with planned death[b]
Inertia (Moderate-6 years)	High intensity	Same direction	Physical violence with unplanned but accepted death
Satisfaction (Low)		Extreme distance	Physical violence with unplanned death
			Threat demonstration with contact
			Threat with demonstration[a]

a. Current behavior.
b. Selected behavior.

German satisfaction with the system was low. Germany was late entering the race for colonies and had contended with Britain for naval supremacy through a major naval arms race. Germany, as seen by her military leaders, was surrounded "by enemies on three sides" (Ludendorff and von Molke, as quoted in Zinnes et al., 1961: 470). The Kaiser felt that Germany was *"isolated"* in a "pure *anti-German"* world (as quoted in Zinnes et al., 1961: 476). The German attitude "repeatedly asserted that they had no choice but to take vigorous military measure" against the perceived threat (Holsti, 1965: 372). The Code of Honor rigidified the German inflexibility. The Kaiser noted that "in vital questions and those of honor, one does not consult with others" (as quoted in North, 1967: 112). As evident, the intensity of the German's inflexible attitude was high.

Given the lower number of actors, moderate inertia,[5] and low satisfaction, it is expected that the final German decision should

5. As a "rule of thumb" for inertia, Gurr's "median lifespan of the more important clusters" of nations for stability can provide the upper approximations for inertia. He noted: for European politics, 12.2 years; the Third World polities, 12.3 years; for nineteenth-century polities, 19.9 years; and for twentieth-century polities, 9.0 years (Gurr, 1974: 1493). While one might question including nineteenth-century polities, the average including them is 13.3 years, which, under this rule of thumb, means that 12 years is high inertia.

have been taken from a wide range of possibilities. The inflexible attitude indicates that the range should be in a "more of the same" location and the high intensity of this attitude should locate the probable decision at the farther end of the range. In reality, the Germans considered two possibilities, maintaining the status quo and war, which are the ends of a wide range of conflictual behaviors. The actual choice was war, *physical violence with planned death,* or the farthest choice from the current behavior of *threat with demonstration.*

THE KOREAN DECISION

Since the Truman Doctrine of 1947, the characteristic behavior of the United States vis-à-vis the Soviet Union had been to demonstrate the capability to resist communist movements in Europe or *threat with demostration.* In Korea, however, the capability had not been demonstrated and the behavior was only a *threat.* The situation in 1950 was a three-year old bipolar systemic relationship. Both small numbers and short inertia create pressure toward instability. The United States was also dissatisfied with the system due to the takeover of China by communist forces and the Soviet consolidation in Eastern Europe. Instability should be high and should produce a wide range of alternatives.

There was little doubt that the United States would respond strongly and in the same manner as it had since 1947 to the Soviet Union or, in other words, inflexibly. President Truman (1956: 339) said that "firmness now would be the only way to deter new actions in other portions of the world." Secretary of State Acheson (1969: 405) reacted similarly: "[W]e must steel ourselves for the use of force" and not "back away from this challenge." Thus, the U.S. response should be in the direction of higher conflictual behavior, and the probable choice should be at the farther end of the range of possibilities.

When the division of targets in Korea occurred, this projection remained the same for North Korea. The actions considered were in a range from *threat,* the current behavior, to *physical violence with planned death.* The choice made on the third day of the crisis was at the upper end of the possibilities, air and naval units in

TABLE 6
An Analysis of the United States Decision in the Korean War versus North Korea as Constrained by Stability and Flexibility

Stability	*Flexibility*	*Expectation*	*Actual*
Number of Actors (Small-2)	Inflexible	Wide range	Physical violence with planned death[b]
Inertia (Short-3 years)	High intensity	Same direction	Physical violence with unplanned but accepted death
Satisfaction (Low)		Extreme distance	Physical violence without death
			Threat demonstration with contact
			Threat with demonstration
			Threat[a]

a. Current behavior.
b. Selected behavior.

support of South Korea, and culminated, in three days, in a conventional war. The American choice vis-à-vis North Korea was *physical violence with planned death.*

However, the situation vis-à-vis the Soviet Union changed on June 26. The United States feared a third world war, and therefore increased the number of actors to be considered. While inertia remained the same, this change gave greater pressure toward stability. This worry also indicated a minimum or acceptable level of satisfaction with the system. Thus, stability rather than instability is indicated and the United States should have a narrow range of alternatives to consider.

While not changing from inflexibility, the intensity of the attitude is less and indicates that the selection would be closer to the current behavior. The actual American choice versus the Russians was *threat demonstration with contact,* or two behavior modes removed from its previous behavior in Korea, *threat,* but only one from its typical response in Europe, *threat with demonstration.*

TABLE 7
An Analysis of the United States Decision in the Korean War versus the Soviet Union as Constrained by Stability and Flexibility

Stability	*Flexibility*	*Expectation*	*Actual*
Number of Actors (Large-world)	Inflexible	Narrow range	Threat demonstration with contact[c]
Inertia (Short-3 years)	Low intensity	Same direction	Threat with demonstration[b]
Satisfaction (Acceptable)		Short distance	Threat[a]

a. Current behavior in Korea.
b. Current behavior in Europe.
c. Selected behavior.

THE CUBAN DECISION

At the time of the Cuban Missile Crisis, the characteristic behavior of the United States toward the Soviet Union was not only to demonstrate capability, but to show resolve. This *threat demonstration with contact* behavior can be dated from its selection during the Korean War. The system's number was two and its inertia was twelve years. With low numbers, but high inertia, the pressure is toward stability. Satisfaction for the United States is mixed. The system had so far prevented a third world war, but such incidents as the Berlin Wall had given pause to the belief that the Soviets would not risk a nuclear war. Overall, the system was moderately stable and the United States should have considered a narrow range of possibilities.

The attitude in the United States was inflexible, believing that it "would have to do something" (Kennedy, 1969: 33) and that this would have to be done in a coercive manner (Janis, 1972: 33). However, the intensity of this attitude was low given the desire to prevent a nuclear war. Therefore, the U.S. decision should be taken from a moderate range of possibilities and should be a short distance from the current behavior.

The United States actually considered two alternatives, although a third—invasion—would have been considered after the other two had failed. Of the two considered, the United States

TABLE 8
An Analysis of the United States Decision in Cuba
as Constrained by Stability and Flexibility

Stability	*Flexibility*	*Expectation*	*Actual*
Number of Actors (Small, 2)	Inflexible	Narrow range	Physical violence with unplanned but accepted death
Inertia (Long, 12 years)	Low intensity	Same direction	Physical violence without death[b]
Satisfaction (Moderate)		Short distance	Threat demonstration with contact[a]

a. Current behavior.
b. Selected behavior.

chose *physical violence without death,* a blockade, rather than *physical violence with unplanned but accepted death,* the surgical air strike. The selected behavior was only one removed from the current behavior of *threat demonstration with contact.*

Results

In all three cases, the analyses indicate that the factors of stability and flexibility offer adequate explanations of the ultimate foreign policy decision. While other factors may operate within these situations, the degree of stability and flexibility does constrain the actions considered in an identifiable manner.

Summary and Comments

This study began with comments on the lack of theoretical satisfaction with the decision-making approach to understanding foreign policy events. A different perspective was proposed as an alternative way of grasping such phenomena. Rather than taking a "this causes that" approach, a theory based on identifying the limits or possible actions was suggested. After analyzing three international crises, the factors of stability and flexibility were identified as constraints on decision-making.

What does this finding mean? To show that decision-making is a complex activity is not startling, given the shortcomings of the "this causes that" perspective. One or two factors will never explain complex events. What might be done? Assuming that the constraints perspective has merit, first a taxonomy of constraining factors must be established as exists for behaviors and events. Second, the effect of each of these factors must be determined. And third, the relationships or the "pecking order" of the factors has to be determined.

As a closing illustration, when the *Pueblo* was surrounded by North Korean gunboats there were probably few attitudinal constraints on President Johnson, few societal constraints, but action was constrained by a capability factor. The only response available was nuclear. This then brought in an external factor, the possible response of others to our use of nuclear weapons. The result was that the United States was constrained to post hoc diplomatic action. Thus, foreign policy decision-making is in reality a conscious or unconscious process of elimination of possibilities.

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