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Accepting Risks and Making Bold Gestures: Why Decision-Makers Initiate Conciliation in Rivalries

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Accepting Risks and Making Bold Gestures: Why Decision-Makers Initiate
Conciliation in Rivalries

A dissertation submitted in partial satisfaction of the requirements for the degree of
Doctor of Philosophy in Political Science

by

Shahin Berenji

2017
The conventional argument in the international relations and social-psychological literature maintains that states should employ an incremental, or step-by-step, approach to initiate conciliation with their adversaries. Decision-makers are cautioned against making large, costly conciliatory gestures since they denote weakness, embolden rivals, and expose them to audience costs. Given these risks, it is puzzling why some leaders undertake bold conciliatory gestures when smaller, less radical avenues exist to engage rivals. This project applies theories and approaches from political psychology to examine why, and the conditions under which, decision-makers extend these types of olive branches in international relations. I employ a least-similar cases research design and select several rivalries – Egypt-Israel (1973-1979), the U.S.-the Soviet Union (1985-1987), and India-Pakistan (1998-2004) – to examine these questions. I found that Egyptian President Anwar Sadat, Soviet General Secretary Mikhail Gorbachev, and Indian Prime
Minister Atal Behari Vajpayee undertook bold moves when they confronted strong, hawkish governments; when they found the rivalry costly to sustain; and when negotiations reached a deadlock. In each case, the leaders were personally involved in shaping and deciding on these initiatives since they were disillusioned with either their foreign policy bureaucracy or with third-party intermediaries. Showing considerable empathy, they were motivated to undertake such gestures to mitigate their rivals’ insecurity and remove the psychological barriers such as fear and mistrust that, they believed, had stalemated negotiations.
The dissertation of Shahin Berenji is approved.

Robert F. Trager

Stanley Wolpert

Deborah W. Larson, Committee Chair

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2017
For My Parents
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Chapter 1: Bold Gestures in International Relations

In international relations, states live in constant fear because they cannot discern the present and future intentions of others with complete certainty. This uncertainty forces states, even those who are not aggressive, to arm themselves and prepare for war so that they can protect their country from known and unknown threats.\(^1\) This action, in turn, threatens the security of others and helps fuel the *security dilemma* and *conflict spirals*.

Given that uncertainty drives much of the tension and conflict between states, a number of scholars from the rational choice and social-psychological literature suggest that it can be substantially reduced if decision-makers reassure their adversaries through a series of small or moderately costly gestures. They argue that by using these conciliatory gestures to signal their preference for peace (or maintenance of the status quo), states can not only mitigate this uncertainty but they may also be able to elicit reciprocal measures from their counterparts, facilitating a positive exchange that may help reduce the mistrust between rivals. The international relations (IR) literature generally cautions states against signaling via *bold acts*, or *bold gestures*, since the states who do so risk being rebuffed, exposed, and betrayed by the target state.\(^2\) Moreover, the gestures designed to reveal one’s benign intentions may actually be misinterpreted either as a ruse to spread misinformation or as a sign of the initiator’s weakness, leading target states to increase their guard and/or increase their demands, respectively. As for the leaders who attempt such overtures, they imperil not only their personal reputation but they

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\(^1\) Robert McNamara, the longest serving U.S. Secretary of Defense (1961-68), argued that in such an environment, “a strategic planner must be conservative in his calculations; that is, he must prepare for the worst plausible case and not be content to hope and prepare for the most probable.” Quoted by Lawrence Freedman, *U.S. Intelligence and the Soviet Strategic Threat* (London: MacMillan, 1977), 85.

\(^2\) In this dissertation, bold gestures, bold moves, bold act, and bold initiatives are used synonymously.
also risk incurring the reproach of their domestic audience. In spite of all these risks, why do some states willingly employ bold initiatives when they can either choose to do nothing or when smaller, less radical avenues exist to reassure their rivals and induce cooperation? What are the conditions under which states are most likely to attempt such initiatives? And finally, what effect, if any, do such initiatives have on the short and long-term relationship between states locked in a rivalry? These questions will be addressed in this dissertation.

As used in this project, a bold gesture refers to a conciliatory act or statement in which one state makes a unilateral concession to its adversary that is unprecedented, irreversible, noncontingent, and extremely costly. One party’s decision in a rivalry dyad to initiate conciliation under conditions of uncertainty and irrespective of the statements and/or actions of the other side is a move fraught with great risk as it leaves the initiator, or signaler, vulnerable to exploitation. Assuming that survival is not only the primary goal of states but also the quintessential objective of leaders, one would expect to see decision-makers play it safe and err on the side of caution when they interact with their rivals. Because leaders who make bold gestures expose themselves as well as their states to a myriad of risks, it presents something of a mystery to those who subscribe to the fatalist logic of realism since states ought to be suspicious of the intentions and motivations of others.

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3 These consequences may arise regardless of the move’s success in inducing the other side to cooperate. By initiating such a high level of cooperation, leaders are likely to appear weak on national security and to be susceptible to charges of appeasement. For more information on the domestic costs of cooperating, see Michael Colaresi, “When Doves Cry: International Rivalry, Unreciprocated Cooperation, and Leadership Turnover,” *American Journal of Political Science* 48, no. 3 (2004): 555-570. There is also the personal cost that is not included here where a leader who pursues a strategy of reconciliation, as opposed to one of confrontation, will anger his countrymen and endanger his own life. History is full of examples of leaders who were sadly assassinated for attempting bold initiatives.


5 The strategic dilemma of cooperation is best captured through the prisoner’s dilemma game where each player has a dominant strategy of defecting, regardless of the other player’s action.
In a literature where actors are generally assumed to have prisoner’s dilemma preferences, the use of bold gestures seems irrational. While scholars are quick to argue that such acts are infrequent, they overlook the fact that bold gestures are regularly mentioned in the policy-making literature where they are seen as an instrument that can reduce the uncertainty endemic to both intrastate conflicts (i.e. insurgencies, civil wars) and interstate rivalries.6 Journalists, diplomats, and third-parties (individuals, other states, IOs) frequently appeal to disputants to “take bold initiatives for peace.”7 In fact, it has not been unusual to hear one side in a rivalry ask its adversary to provide a bold gesture as proof of its benign intentions.8 An examination of the post-World War I era furnishes us with a set of cases showing that they are anything but an aberration in world politics.

While the frequency with which they have been used indicates that these types of gestures are a salient signaling device, it is surprising that they have received so little scholarly attention. This study therefore fills a gap in the international relations literature by examining a tool of statecraft that has up to now been recognized by policy-makers but neglected for the most

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8 Sometimes a state may request a bold action to be carried out by the other party since “deeds, not words” may matter more to the side seeking proof of its rival’s benign intentions.
part by academics.\(^9\) Bridging the divide between theory and policy, this study not only identifies the effects of bold gestures on rivalry dyads but it also assesses their efficacy in eliciting cooperation from adversaries, informing our understanding as to when decision-makers should risk making such gestures. Furthermore, by revealing what factors affect decision-makers’ strategic calculus for initiating significant cooperation, this study offers clues as to how states can influence rivals to undertake them.

A survey of the dominant paradigms in the cooperation and trust-building literature shows that few of them can account for this phenomenon. Assuming leaders have risk-neutral or risk-averse preferences, rational choice theories cannot account for these “extreme” acts of cooperation. Rationalists cannot explain why one state would choose to cooperate first; they cannot explain where such a preference actually comes from or how it is formed since it is rational to defect.\(^10\) While rationalists such as Andrew Kydd and Russell Hardin believe it is possible to reduce the uncertainty of other actors, they argue that states reassure their rivals and build trust gradually through small or moderately costly gestures.\(^11\) This logic is also captured by Robert Axelrod’s tit-for-tat strategy and Charles Osgood’s GRIT (Graduated Reciprocation in

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10 Rationalists assume preferences are fixed and are exogenously given.

Tension-Reduction) proposal, both of which are designed to induce cooperation between adversaries through modest conciliatory gestures.\textsuperscript{12}

The bold gesture is something that is poorly understood since much of the existent scholarship assumes risk-taking behavior just does not occur or it occurs too infrequently to warrant any systematic attention. While some scholars such as Rose McDermott and Yaacov Vertzeberger have examined risk-taking behavior, they have limited their analysis to explaining cases involving the use of force such as military interventions, special operations, etc.\textsuperscript{13}

Unlike these earlier studies, this dissertation project shifts the focus to the other side of the conflict-cooperation spectrum where decision-makers accept risks to manage, resolve, and prevent future conflicts. Drawing from the insight of social and cognitive psychology, I propose three alternative hypotheses—security dilemma sensibility, moralistic trust, and prospect theory—to explain this phenomenon. My fourth hypothesis, image projection, combines arguments from psychology, diplomacy, and communication studies and represents an interdisciplinary explanation to our puzzle. To test the explanatory power of these hypotheses, I carry out a least-similar (or most-different) case research design involving several case-studies.

**LITERATURE REVIEW**

To fully understand the theoretical contributions of this study, this section examines the extent to which existing paradigms can explain our puzzle. Each of the explanations presented


here draws insight from different academic disciplines – political science, economics, and social psychology, giving us an overview of the varying approaches in the field of international relations. While all the explanations share many of realism’s basic assumptions about the structure of the international system, they offer different prescriptions about whether and how states ought to communicate their intentions. A few scholars argue that this is unnecessary since all states are presumably aggressive whereas others argue that states can communicate their intent, reassure potential adversaries, and mitigate their fear. Those who maintain this sanguine view of international relations, however, argue that judicious leaders only do so by initiating conciliation through small or modest steps. Bold moves are not attempted because decision-makers ought to refrain from exposing themselves or their countries to excessive risks.

The remainder of the section outlines all these arguments in more detail but before proceeding with a summary of the relevant literature, it is important to understand the assumptions they share about the nature of the international system. Realism is rooted in the assumption that the structure of the international system is anarchic. In this Hobbesian state of nature, states merely concerned about their survival have no choice but to arm and prepare for the worst since they are unable to discern the present and future intentions of other actors. Uncertainty makes it difficult for states to ascertain whether others who arm do so because they are benign, security-seeking states or because they are “greedy,” aggressively motivated states.14 This uncertainty surrounding the intentions of other actors helps fuel what John Herz called the

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security dilemma. The security dilemma is a dangerous action-reaction cycle and according to Robert Jervis, it forms the foundation for conflict spirals. Indicative of its far-reaching effects, uncertainty has been also invoked to explain other phenomena in international relations such as the commitment problem and the origins of preventive and preemptive wars.

If uncertainty not only causes states to grow fearful and suspicious but it also drives them towards security-competition (such as arms races) and war, it is important to ask whether this condition can be mitigated in some way. This begs the question of whether a security-seeking state can, in fact, reduce uncertainty and mistrust by revealing its hidden preferences. While states theoretically can communicate to one another to reduce the likelihood of conflict, Fearon points out that they have strategic incentives to misrepresent their preferences. For instance, an aggressive state may feign to be a peaceful one in order to deceive its opponent into believing that it will not launch an attack. The incentive to misrepresent therefore gives target states strong reasons to doubt the credibility of diplomatic signals, particularly those that are not costly for the initiator to make. While Fearon suggests uncertainty is not impossible to overcome, he maintains that signals need to be costly in order to be informative.

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17 Uncertainty is also a cause of what has been called the commitment problem. See James D. Fearon, “Rationalist Explanations for War,” *International Organization* 49, No. 3 (Summer 1995): 379-414.

18 Without some sort of cost attached to a signal, it is likely that it would not be credible and would be dismissed as just ordinary communication or “cheap talk” by the receiver, or target state. That is to say, there
Offensive realists such as John Mearsheimer believe uncertainty is immutable; that is, it conditions states to remain fearful of all others in the international system. Because “intentions are impossible to divine with 100% certainty,” Mearsheimer simply argues that states worried about their survival have little choice but to assume the worst about other states’ intentions.19

Mearsheimer’s pessimism is something that is not shared by the other strands of realism. Defensive realists such as Robert Jervis and Charles Glaser contend that the state of the offense-defense balance in addition to the distinguishability of offensive and defensive postures influence whether a state can reassure others.20 Motivational realists, also called Bayesian realists, such as Andrew Kydd are even much more sanguine than defensive realists because they believe security-seekers have a wide variety of military and diplomatic tools to reveal their intentions and reassure potential adversaries.21

would be no way to differentiate an aggressor feigning to be a security seeker and an actual security-seeker if signals were not associated with costs. The logic here is that aggressors are less willing to take risks than are security-seekers since the latter attach a higher value on ensuring that they are able to successfully reassure their adversaries. There is a great deal written on costly signaling in the crisis bargaining literature. Ibid. Also see James D. Fearon, “Domestic Political Audiences and the Escalation of International Disputes,” American Political Science Review 88, No. 3 (September 1994): 577-592; James D. Fearon, “Signaling Foreign Policy Interests: Tying Hands versus Sinking Costs,” Journal of Conflict Resolution 41, No. 1 (February 1997): 68-90; James D. Morrow, “Capabilities, Uncertainty, and Resolve: A Limited Information Model of Crisis Bargaining,” American Journal of Political Science 33, no. 4 (1989): 941-972; James D. Morrow, “The Strategic Setting of Choices: Signaling, Commitment, and Negotiation in International Politics” in Strategic Choice and International Relations, eds. David A. Lake and Robert Powell (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1999): 77-114. For the origins of the costly signaling argument, see Michael Spence, “Job Market Signaling,” The Quarterly Journal of Economics 87, no. 3 (1973): 355-374.


In stark contrast to offensive realists, defensive and Bayesian realists both agree that reassurances can reduce the uncertainty surrounding state intentions. As used here, reassurance "is the process of building trust…it involves convincing the other side that you prefer to reciprocate cooperation, so that it is safe for them to cooperate." In order for these signals to be believed, however, these realists draw upon Fearon’s work and argue that they must impose some sort of a cost on the sender or initiating state. They maintain that these signals must be costly enough to be informative but not too costly to expose decision-makers to excessive political risks. By restricting their analysis to these types of signals, they rule out the possibility that decision-makers can communicate their intentions via bold gestures.

While defensive and motivational realists maintain that such a signal must be costly, they differ as to the type of signal states should employ. Whereas defensive realists rely exclusively on military signals such as troop drawdowns or unilateral arms reductions, Bayesian realists argue that states have a gamut of military and nonmilitary gestures to meaningfully communicate their intentions. Because states have so many avenues to convey their motivations, Kydd claims uncertainty is not as serious as other realists would have us believe since "states possess abundant means to reduce it to manageable levels." Leaders develop an objective understanding of the types of states – security-seekers or aggressors - they confront in the international arena, according to Kydd, because they continuously update their beliefs about others. Assuming decision-makers behave rationally and revise their beliefs in response to new


23 Kydd, “Sheep in Sheep’s Clothing,” 117. While Bayesian realism shares the same Hobbesian framework as offensive and defensive realism, it departs from them in a number of important ways. Bayesian realism is not predisposed to draw pessimistic conclusions about the intentions of others based solely off the distribution of military capabilities. The importance of power, the dominant variable in the realist tradition, is downplayed in Bayesian realism since states have an ability to discern the intentions of others. Uncertainty here is treated as a lack of information; as a result, it is a condition that can be mitigated since states have strategies to reveal their intentions and to learn about one another.
information and/or new experiences, Kydd argues that it is possible for states, even those who are adversaries, to fundamentally change their attitudes about one another’s trustworthiness.24 These assumptions, which are absolutely crucial to Bayesian realism, come from rational actor decision-making models and so, make Kydd’s variant of realism a hybrid between rational choice and realism.25

Echoing the arguments made in the rational choice literature, Kydd maintains that trust is developed when individuals have accumulated enough information that leads them to believe that their rivals wish to reciprocate cooperation. Signals provide one such method to communicate information. One important observable implication of Kydd's costly signaling theory of reassurance, however, is that "the lower the level of trust, the smaller the size of the costly signal, the higher the level of trust, the greater the size of the signal."26 The logic underpinning this claim seems sound because if the initiator fears the target state, then it would be unwilling to take great risks since its cooperation could be exploited by the other side. And so, to avoid being taken advantage of, Kydd concludes that a reassuring state ought to send moderately costly signals to build trust.

Other scholars such as Robert Axelrod have looked at altering the structure of the situation to generate cooperation between actors. Axelrod found that when two players anticipate future interactions, or when the “shadow of the future” hangs over the present, as in an iterated

24 One major criticism of this approach is that it assumes decision-makers given the same information will make the same choices. This ignores the role of emotions, group dynamics, and cognitive barriers that affect how leaders ultimately reach their decisions.


prisoner’s dilemma, egoists are able to cooperate using the simple tit-for-tat strategy.\textsuperscript{27} In this strategy, one actor initiates cooperation through a single cooperative move and depending on the other side’s response, he reciprocates (in the next round) whatever his counterpart does. The cooperative gesture included in the tit-for-tat strategy is something small; as Larson points out, it is not strong enough to “shake rigid images and undermine mistrust.”\textsuperscript{28}

It seems that the size of the “single cooperative move” in tit-for-tat is similar to the “small or moderately costly gesture” discussed in Kydd’s theory. While these rationalist approaches are undoubtedly different, they offer a similar prescription for how states ought to initiate cooperation in an anarchic world. Relying on small steps to reduce the uncertainty between rivals, both tit-for-tat and costly reassurance represent what can be called a play-it-safe attitude. As for their implications to this study, these paradigms predict that decision-makers will not attempt bold gestures in international relations.

This prediction is also supported by Charles Osgood’s GRIT proposal, a social-psychological theory on reassurance.\textsuperscript{29} GRIT was developed at the height of the Cold War and it involves one state making a modest, cooperative gesture to reassure the other side of its benevolent intentions. The overall purpose of such a gesture is to alter the target state’s image and perceptions of the initiator so that the former’s suspicion is gradually eased in favor of increased trust. It differs from tit-for-tat in that the initiator continues providing moderately risky concessions over some period of time, regardless of the other side’s response. If successful, the conciliatory act presumably sets in motion a series of small cooperative gestures that gradually

\textsuperscript{27} Axelrod, \textit{the Evolution of Cooperation}.


\textsuperscript{29} Charles Osgood, \textit{Alternative to War or Surrender}; Etzioni, \textit{Hard Way}.
increase the level of trust between rivals. Over the years, scholars have found substantial support for GRIT in the experimental psychology literature as well as in case-studies from the Cold War era.\textsuperscript{30} As in the rational choice literature, however, we see that the GRIT strategy has no explanation for why a decision-maker would choose to initiate cooperation through bold acts. Osgood tells us that tension-reducing initiatives should be continued over a period, regardless of immediate reciprocation; however, the series of cooperative gestures should be moderately costly and graduated in the degree of risk. He explicitly states “it is essential that we do not stake everything on a single dramatic gesture…”\textsuperscript{31}

And so, the argument that longstanding adversaries should overcome their fear gradually through moderately costly gestures is well grounded in the different strands of the cooperation and trust-building literature. Kydd’s costly signaling theory of reassurance and Osgood’s GRIT proposal are excellent examples of what has been described as the gradualist or step-by-step approach to trust-building.\textsuperscript{32} This approach has also been mentioned in the rapprochement literature where it is viewed as something that can produce mutual accommodation without putting the initiator at too much risk.\textsuperscript{33} The normative implication of this approach is that


\textsuperscript{31} Osgood, \textit{Alternative to War or Surrender}, 103-104.


decision-makers ought to play it safe in the international arena; that is, they should foster trusting relationships by sending small to moderately costly signals. It is generally hoped that these conciliatory actions would set in motion a series of exchanged gestures and the outcome of this iterative process would be the development of knowledge-based or strategic trust.\(^{34}\) This specific type of trust refers to an actor’s willingness to place his interests under the control of a trustee after carefully obtaining information that would justify his trust in the other actor. Strategic trust is slowly nurtured over time as each actor learns more about the other side’s intentions through signals, repeated interactions, etc. The shortcoming of this type of trust is that it cannot explain why decision-makers choose to take gambles in the first place, particularly in rivalries where the level of trust between two sides is initially very low.\(^{35}\) In the next section, I present four hypotheses to shed light on this puzzle.

ARGUMENT

To understand the meaning of such an ambiguous term as bold gestures, I provide an overview of the contexts in which they may be used by foreign policy practitioners. As part of this discussion, I describe how decision-makers may undertake bold gestures to make different types of concessions in international relations. I then highlight the characteristics bold gestures


\(^{35}\) Trust, as pointed out in earlier studies, is a necessary (though not sufficient) condition for states to cooperate in international relations. See Deborah Welch Larson, “Trust and Missed Opportunities in International Relations,” *Political Psychology* 18, No. 3 (September 1997): 701-734.
tend to possess and create a framework for the identification of these types of signals. The remainder of the section provides a description of my four hypotheses.

Bold gestures may refer to dramatic moves that are meant to reduce the uncertainty of adversaries through symbolic acts or grand political statements/declarations.\textsuperscript{36} They need not be limited to public displays as they can also include conciliatory acts that reassure others by affecting the material and/or military capabilities of the initiator. These moves directly impact the security of the signaling state and as a result, pose great risks for states locked in rivalries. Possible examples of these types of strategic gestures include, but are not limited to, instances where states implement unilateral arms reductions, remove specific weapons systems, alter military postures, concede and/or unilaterally renounce claims to strategic pieces of territory.\textsuperscript{37}

Regardless of the type of concession involved with the bold gesture, they share a number of fundamental characteristics; they all:

- Represent something unprecedented/novel – Unanticipated; they represent a radical departure from the actor’s previous statements, actions, and/or policies.\textsuperscript{38}
- Constitute irrevocable acts – They cannot be changed, amended, reversed, rescinded, or annulled. Once you “cross the Rubicon,” you reach a point of no return.\textsuperscript{39}

\textsuperscript{36} A grand gesture is a common colloquial expression and it refers to the risks individuals take to display (often through symbolic acts) or profess their love for a significant other. In romantic relationships, grand gestures are given by someone usually after his or her feelings have been questioned by the other person. In this context, they constitute a type of reassurance attempt. In international relations, the phrase grand gesture was first used by Louis Kriesberg. See Louis Kriesberg, “Non-coercive inducements in US-Soviet Relations,” Journal of Political and Military Sociology 9 (Spring 1981): 1-16; Louis Kriesberg, “Social Theory and the De-escalation of International Conflict,” the Sociological Review 32, No. 3 (August 1984): 471-491.


• Tend to be noncontingent – They are not contingent on a desired prior response from the other actor. A unilateral act is something that is considered noncontingent and it is made by the initiator irrespective of the other side’s actions.  

• Have a positive or reassuring effect – They have a reassuring effect. The active quality of the gesture differentiates it from cases where the initiator passively signals by refraining from carrying out a negative sanction. According to Mitchell, “it must involve some positive action by the initiator, rather than being an abstention from harmful action.”

• Leave the initiating state vulnerable – They leave the initiator vulnerable to actions from the other side by affecting the former’s military and material capabilities, bargaining reputation, image, and resolve.

• Involve personal and/or political costs to the decision-maker – They arouse domestic political opposition either from the public or from political elites within the initiating state. There is also a real personal cost because leaders who pursue a strategy of reconciliation, as opposed to one of confrontation, risk angering their countrymen and endangering their own life.

• Are undertaken by a representative of the state in question – Gestures made by retired politicians and/or civilians do not count since they do not represent their state’s official interests abroad.

All these features make bold initiatives a risky means of communicating with others in the international system, particularly with those perceived as rivals.

**Security Dilemma Sensibility**

While the conventional way to build trust is through some modest gesture, some scholars have argued that frame-breaking conciliatory moves help break through diplomatic impasses and

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overcome profound psychological barriers. Applying concepts from political psychology such as **cognitive consistency** and **enemy images**, I first provide a social-psychological explanation as to why leaders often dismiss, ignore, and/or misinterpret signals from other states. I then argue that the characteristics of bold gestures give them a distinct advantage in breaking through these cognitive barriers.

The theory of cognitive consistency tells us that people tend to assimilate new information to their pre-existing beliefs and images. As a consequence, incoming information is not evaluated objectively since people tend to “fit incoming information into pre-existing beliefs and to perceive what they expect to be there.” This means decision-makers accept incoming information that confirms their expectations of another state, but on the other hand they resist discrepant information that conflicts with their pre-existing beliefs and images. This **cognitive closure** therefore suggests that leaders will be slow to revise their beliefs about the intentions of another state, especially if the signal is small and ambiguous enough to accommodate multiple interpretations.

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45 As Jervis argues, “actors are more apt to err on the side of being too wedded to an established view and too quick to reject discrepant information than to make the opposite error of too quickly alerting their theories.” *Ibid*, 187.


The dynamics associated with enemy images further exacerbate the psychological barriers described above. Enemy images are mental constructs that paint the rival state as unalterably aggressive and untrustworthy; it conditions political leaders to fear their adversaries and to view their actions as inherently evil.\textsuperscript{48} As a result, small gestures designed to reveal one’s benign intentions may sadly be misinterpreted as a ruse to spread misinformation or as a gesture necessitated out of pure weakness.\textsuperscript{49} Moreover, because of mirror image thinking, each state fails to see how its own actions may be misinterpreted since leaders will mistakenly assume that the other side surely sees us as we see ourselves. This feature of the mirror image is highly problematic because it makes leaders unaware of how they are actually being perceived by their rivals.\textsuperscript{50}

Given that leaders’ belief systems are highly resistant to change, it stands to reason that costlier gestures are needed to overcome the various types of cognitive barriers that prevent


\textsuperscript{49} As Thomas Schelling noted, “words are cheap, not inherently credible when they emanate from an adversary.” See Thomas C. Schelling, \textit{The Strategy of Conflict} (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1980), 150.

actors from correctly processing discrepant information. The effectiveness of bold gestures has
to do with the fact that they not only transmit more information but they actually do so at a much
faster rate than other types of signals. These characteristics have important implications for its
success; according to Jervis,

Greater change will result when discrepant information arrives in a large batch than when
it is considered bit by bit. In the former case, the contradictions between it and the
prevailing view will be relatively obvious. But when discrepant information arrives
gradually, the conflict between each bit and what the person believes will be small
enough to go unnoticed, be dismissed as unimportant, or necessitate at most slight
modifications.

While it is still plausible that leaders may avoid changing their central beliefs, they will at the
very least revise their lower-level beliefs in response to these gestures. And so, it seems that
decision-makers are more sensitive to discrepant information if they obtain it in sizable chunks.

Unfortunately, in a rivalry where both sides suffer from psychological barriers, it is
difficult for one side to even contemplate modest cooperation, let alone a bold gesture. I argue
that actors initiate significant cooperation only once they are able to critically reflect on their
own practices and understand the extent to which their actions are partially responsible for

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51 Mitchell, *Gestures of Conciliation*, 132-33; Jervis, *Perception and Misperception*, 308-310; Robert L. Kahn and
Roderick M. Kramer, “Untying the Knot: De-escalatory Processes in International Conflict,” in
139-180, 168.

52 Louis Kriesberg found in his study that small positive gestures were not taken seriously by disputants. See
Inducements in U.S.-Soviet Relations: Report of a Pilot Study,” Syracuse University Program on the Analysis and


54 Philip E. Tetlock, *Learning in U.S. and Soviet Foreign Policy: In Search of an Elusive Concept* (Boulder, CO:

55 Kelman agrees with this point; he said “if attitude change is to occur…there must be clear disconfirmation
of a strongly held expectation, so that people are forced to reexamine their attitudes.” See Kelman, “The
Psychological Impact,” 127.
provoking the other side’s perceived aggressiveness. Learning that rivals may be motivated by fear instead of a lust for more power helps decision-makers empathize with their enemies, prompting them to pursue a strategy of reassurance. The ability of an actor “to perceive, and show responsiveness towards” the intentions of others has been termed security dilemma sensibility.56

Nevertheless, before exercising security dilemma sensibility, one state needs to somehow enter into the other’s counter-fear to realize that mutual fear and suspicion is driving the rivalry. In other words, one state needs to put itself in the other’s shoes. To learn about the motivations of other states, the rational choice literature focuses almost exclusively on studying signals but because they can be manipulated, they lack credibility and tend to be discounted by receivers. Indices, on the other hand, convey more information than signals since they are thought to be reliable and unbiased; according to Jervis, they are “beyond the ability of the actor to control for the purpose of projecting a misleading image.”57 Of particular relevance are those indices where one state obtains information through intelligence services, third parties, and secret, backchannel contacts without the knowledge of the other party.58 This may have the effect of making such information more credible, or believable.


58 The period before and after crises offers an especially propitious opportunity for states to learn more about their rivals through indices. In the rivalry literature, it is often argued that crises serve as exogenous shocks, forcing states to re-evaluate what they already know about their adversaries. In some cases, crises serve as catalysts, causing states under certain conditions to abandon confrontational policies in favor of reconciliation and rapprochemen. For more on this, see Jerel A. Rosati, “Cycles in Foreign Policy Restructuring: The Politics of Continuity and Change in U.S. Foreign Policy,” in Foreign Policy Restructuring: How Governments Respond to Global Change, eds. Jerel A. Rosati, Joe D. Hagan, and Martin W. Sampson III (Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 1994); Jeffrey T. Checkel, Ideas and International Political Change: Soviet and Russian Behavior
The information gleaned through these types of indices helps break through the psychological barriers that inhibit leaders from exercising security-dilemma sensibility. Leaders who recognize that they are locked in a vicious cycle of fear and competition later undertake bold initiatives so that they can moderate the security dilemma. These bold acts, in turn, constitute an index unto themselves because actors cannot use them to project a manipulated image “without incurring prohibitive costs.”

H1A: Bold gestures are attempted once decision-makers can avail themselves of large-batches of information about the motivations of their adversaries. Indices in conjunction with signals provide a more credible means to assess the intentions of others and help shatter the psychological barriers that inhibit leaders from exercising security-dilemma sensibility.

H1B: With information from different sources, leaders who perceive their rivals to be motivated by fear instead of greed will offer bold gestures to reassure their adversaries and accelerate the trust-building process.

These hypotheses are predicated on the belief that obtaining information about the other side’s intentions is necessary to develop trust between rivals. Whereas the null hypothesis emphasizes the gradual accumulation of information (through signals) and incremental trust-building, our alternative hypothesis highlights the availability of multiple sources of information and accelerated trust-building.

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59 For more on how bold acts or gestures may serve as indices, see Jervis, the Logic of Images, 28-29
Moralistic Trust

One shortcoming of strategic trust is that it cannot explain why leaders choose to provide a unilateral concession when they have little information about the preferences of the other side. Furthermore, it cannot account for the fact that decision-makers under the same circumstances often show different propensities to cooperate with their rivals.

Given the limitations of the security dilemma hypothesis, I apply Eric Uslaner’s *moralistic trust* to provide another answer to our puzzle.60 This variety of trust presents an optimistic worldview in which actors believe that others are generally trustworthy, preferring to reciprocate rather than exploit one’s cooperation. An actor’s faith in the goodness of others is a critical dimension of moralistic trust; however, it is something entirely dependent on the disposition of the trustor. Those people who possess a benign view of human nature are most likely to trust because they believe others are inherently peaceful or honorable. While trustees have an undoubted self-interest to take advantage of trustors, moralistic trusters believe they do not do so because trustees feel, or ought to feel, a moral duty or a fiduciary responsibility to fulfill the trust placed in them.61 Absent firm, concrete information about the interests of the other side, actors often make judgments about the character of potential partners in order to ascertain if they possess the right qualities that inspire trust.

To take an example of moralistic trust from the real-world, we see professors often administer exams based on the honor system. While students have an opportunity to work together and cheat because they complete their tests without a proctor, professors expect them to abide by the honor code and as a result, they exercise moralistic trust. The fact that many

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60 Uslaner, *The Moral Foundations of Trust.*

professors not to mention universities and secondary-schools fail to endorse such a system is indicative of the extent to which moralistic trust is something endemic to the individual trustor. Some people trust their students to do what is right whereas others simply do not. In international relations, scholars such as Brian Rathbun have used moralistic trust to explain cooperative outcomes such as the United States’ impetus to create international security institutions after World War I and World War II. These earlier studies offer a useful guide on how to measure something as complex and intangible as moralistic trust.

Applying moralistic trust to my puzzle, I argue that the decision-makers who take the initial gamble and cooperate with their adversaries do so because they are moralistic trusters. Believing that their rivals will reciprocate cooperation, this future expectation leads decision-makers to employ costlier, bolder signals to communicate their intentions. In contrast to the previous section, please note that trust is treated here as a cause rather than an effect of bold gestures. This means first movers rely on these types of gestures because they already have some degree of trust in the good character of their rivals.

H1: In rivalries, leaders attempt bold initiatives precisely because they believe that their adversaries will reciprocate cooperation. The disposition of decision-makers affects their trust in another party and in turn, affects their propensity to undertake bold initiatives.

Prospect Theory

Prospect theory is well-suited for this puzzle because it provides a systematic way to explain and predict a decision-maker's risk propensity under conditions of high uncertainty. In


63 Rathbun, Trust in International Cooperation, 40-53.

64 Guido Mollering, Trust: Reason, Routine, Reflexivity (San Francisco: Elsevier, 2006).
simple terms, it predicts that leaders making decisions from a domain of losses (bad position) will be risk-seekers whereas those operating from a domain of gains (good position) will be risk-averse. Once the domain, or the internal and external environment, has been framed relative to a reference point, prospect theory then predicts that it will influence the decision-maker’s risk propensity (see figure 1).65

![Figure 1 – Simplification of Prospect Theory](image)

Prospect theory is rooted in the assumption that people are more sensitive to gains and losses “from a reference point than to levels of wealth and welfare.”66 This assumption counters the axioms of expected utility models since it posits that changes in asset levels matter more to people than total assets. One key hypothesis of prospect theory is that there is an asymmetry with respect to gains and losses. In a series of controlled experiments conducted by Daniel Kahneman and Amos Tversky, they found that people dramatically overvalue losses relative to comparable gains. This phenomenon is called *loss aversion*.67 The framing of a situation in terms of gains or losses thus has an effect on what has been called *risk orientation*. According to prospect theory, the domain determines the risk-propensity of individuals so that people tend to be risk-averse in

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66 Ibid., 277.

a domain of gains and risk-tolerant in a domain of losses. A domain is considered one of gains or losses vis-a-vis a neutral reference point, or the psychological state that the person has grown accustomed to.\(^{68}\) The pattern of risk orientation just described is even more likely when the losses are perceived to be certain.\(^{69}\) According to Levy, "prospect theory implies that all of these effects would be reinforced if the threat of loss were perceived to be certain in the absence of corrective action, for the over-weighting of certain outcomes relative to others would further increase the incentive to undertake excessive risks in order to avoid that loss."\(^{70}\) This is called the \textit{certainty effect}.

While prospect theory was first derived and tested in laboratory experiments, there have been many tests of its external validity as scholars have used it to explain leaders’ decisions to escalate and/or initiate conflicts.\(^{71}\) Noticeably absent from these analyses are cases where decision-makers take risks by initiating cooperation with their enemies. As mentioned earlier in the section, prospect theory tells us that as a result of loss aversion, leaders who find themselves in a domain of losses take great risks to recoup past losses. And so, if we extend this logic to our

\(^{68}\) In most circumstances, the reference point is the current status quo, but often the reference point may be an aspiration level or a former status quo. While the reference point is a subjective standard because it is influenced by factors such as history, culture/ethnicity, religion, and expectations, it affects the choices people make and so it is very much relevant to the study of decision-making. See McDermott, \textit{Risk-Taking}, 10-20, 37-39; Jack S. Levy, "Prospect Theory, Rational Choice, and International Relations," \textit{International Studies Quarterly} 41 (1997): 87-112.


research puzzle, then it follows that leaders will offer bold gestures only when they are, or when they perceive themselves to be, in a realm of losses.

H1: The domain in which decision-makers perceive themselves to be operating influences their propensity to take risks. So, we would expect leaders operating in a domain of losses to show a greater willingness to accept risks by offering bold gestures to their adversaries.

Image Projection

Leaders understand that their conciliatory initiatives, regardless of their costliness, may fail to elicit the desired reaction from the target state’s leadership. This is all the more likely if the other side’s leaders are perceived as intransigent and/or if the rivalry has lasted for such a long period of time that they are prone to simply dismiss conciliatory acts and/or statements.

Signaler therefore undertake bolder, costlier conciliatory initiatives to communicate their benign intentions directly to the public of the target state. Because these types of moves are unequivocally and unmistakably positive, they better help countries project a benign image abroad.72 The motivation behind bold gestures lies not just in persuading the public audience but also in exerting pressure on the other side’s decision-makers. Because these signals draw considerable media attention, they generate public pressure on the leaders of recipient, or target, states to reciprocate conciliatory acts. Bold gestures communicated in private can also exert pressure since decision-makers can always leak the contents of private discussions and unveil the types of concessions they were willing to make to the other side.73 Whether delivered publicly or privately, such a signaling device is an important part of public diplomacy, in which decision-

72 Jervis wrote, “a decision-maker’s image of another actor can be defined as those of his beliefs about the other that affect his predictions of how the other will behave under various circumstances.” Jervis, The Logic of Images, 5.

makers attempt to correct societal misperceptions by directly communicating their interests and intentions to foreign publics.

Assuming the target audience accepts the favorable image being projected by the adversary, then it stands to reason that it would exert pressure on its government to alter existing policies. At the height of the Cold War, scholars such as Charles Osgood wrote about how states could effectively employ such a strategy. As part of GRIT, he proposed that decision-makers should not only make unilateral concessions to their adversaries but should announce them publicly so that the target is pressured to do something in return. 74 Unfortunately, the use of such positive sanctions has its drawbacks, as Larson points out, since “the target may ignore or discount a conciliatory gesture from the enemy – thinking, for example, that it is a propaganda ploy, a means to buy time for armament, or a response to domestic opponents.” 75 This in fact was one of the criticisms levelled at Soviet concessions, namely that they were part of some propaganda offensive meant to deceive the United States and the NATO alliance.

The existing literature on public diplomacy assumes that concessions delivered in such a manner are not simply misinterpreted or misperceived but are in fact primarily intended to spread propaganda. States, according to this account, use psychological warfare to win the hearts and minds of foreign publics and refrain from making substantive changes to their own behavior since they seek to continue the confrontation. 76 While this may sometimes be true, it cannot be

74 Charles Osgood, An Alternative to War or Surrender, 26-33, 84-124.
75 Larson, Anatomy of Mistrust, 27.
applied broadly to describe how, why, and when states choose to conduct public diplomacy in international relations.

I argue that states undertake bold initiatives to overcome either their target’s or other actors’ suspicions about their motives. They use the characteristics of bold gestures to not just project a benign image but to do so in a way that reassures the public in the target state. In doing so, they create domestic and international pressure on the leaders of target states to reciprocate acts of cooperation. Projecting a favorable image, according to Jervis, determines “whether and how easily a state can reach its goals. A desired image…can often be of greater use than a significant increment of military or economic power.”

H1: Decision-makers believe small or modest conciliatory initiatives will not elicit a favorable response from the other side. They therefore undertake a bold gesture to reassure the public in the target state and generate domestic pressure on the rival state’s leadership to reciprocate their conciliatory moves.

**Observable Implications**

Thus far, I have presented four different hypotheses to explain our research puzzle. To evaluate the validity of these hypotheses, it is important to understand the types of evidence we would expect to observe if they were proven correct. Generating these observable implications is an important part of research design as it helps scholars test their hypotheses against the large body of data and information available from the real world.

In this study, I generate observable implications by observing how leaders defend their foreign policy decisions either in private with trusted advisors or in public before their domestic audience. Of the two, the former is the most important since leaders are more likely to truthfully...

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disclose the motives behind their decisions, including their willingness to initiate conciliation, in private discussions with their advisors. Political leaders have a strategic incentive to misrepresent their motives in public to avoid either domestic or international repercussions. While the public domain helps us ascertain if there is any consistency between a leader’s public and private statements, it is not as helpful in generating observable implications.

If a decision-maker was exercising *security dilemma sensibility*, then a bold gesture would be rationalized as a necessary means to reduce a rival state’s fear and insecurity. The discussion would revolve around the need to make major concessions to persuade the other side’s decision-makers that one possesses benign, or peaceful, intentions. I expect this line of argumentation would only be made in private and only before a few advisors that a political leader fully trusts since empathizing with one’s adversary may be interpreted as appeasement and may expose the leader to strong criticism. Statements in which leaders argue in favor of small, incremental steps as a means to reduce mistrust would disconfirm this argument.

Whereas building trust is the objective of security dilemma sensibility, the existence of *moralistic trust* explains why leaders are willing to undertaking bold initiatives in the first place. I anticipate that leaders who act in this way will personally assume their adversaries prefer to reciprocate cooperation, even without obtaining a priori information about their rival’s willingness to do so.

Regarding *image projection*, I predict that decision-makers would emphasize the need to reassure adversaries but would shift the primary target of the bold gesture from the target state’s leaders to its public. Privately, leaders would express doubts about the other side’s willingness to respond to their conciliatory actions and/or statements. Decisions based on this type of analysis would be shared with all foreign policy advisors since it is less likely to be opposed by those
operating within government or within the foreign policy bureaucracy, or the agencies and
departments responsible for implementing a state’s foreign policy.

And finally, if leaders behave as prospect theory predicts, then they will defend their bold
initiative based on their perceived situation. I anticipate that decision-makers would, in their
private discussions, comment extensively on the precarious political and economic situation
within their country and/or the unfavorable international environment they face. A bold initiative
must be presented here as a risky option, or a gamble, that could backfire as this would separate
an explanation based on prospect theory from one based on structural pressures, whether
domestic or international.

By taking what are otherwise theoretical propositions from our hypotheses and
translating them into concrete expectations, this section has attempted to show the kinds of
evidence I will be relying on to support my hypotheses.

METHODOLOGY AND RESEARCH STRATEGY

In order to establish the external validity of my arguments, I employ a least-similar cases
research design.79 The cases selected for this study are - the Arab-Israeli conflict involving
Israel-Egypt (1970-1977); the India-Pakistan rivalry (1998-2005); and lastly, the end of the Cold
War between the United States and the Soviet Union (1985-1991). While there are indeed many
post-World War II cases to draw from, the aforementioned cases were chosen because they
satisfy five important criteria.

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79 Adam Przeworski and Henry Teune, *The Logic of Comparative Social Inquiry* (New York: Wiley- Interscience,
1970), 31-46; Andrew Bennett, “Case-Study Methods: Design, Use, and Comparative Advantages,” in *Cases,
Numbers, Models: International Relations Research Methods*, eds. Detlef F. Sprinz
and Yael Wolinsky (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2004), 27-65; Alexander L. George and Andrew
First, the actors in each case are states. Given that states are the primary unit of analysis in international relations, I purposefully omit those cases from Appendix A that include intrastate actors such as opposition groups, insurgent/terrorist organizations, etc. I further limit my analysis to mid-level and great powers, or states that possess sufficient military and economic resources to fight a conventional war against their counterparts. The reason for this decision is that the leaders of these types of states have foreign policy options available to them - do nothing or fight - that are otherwise foreclosed to weaker states. Because mid-level and great powers have real alternatives to cooperating with their rivals, it is therefore puzzling why and when they choose to initiate cooperation.

Second, the states in each dyad were bitter adversaries who were engaged in rivalries that had not only led to major crises but in the case of Egypt-Israel and Pakistan-India, multiple wars. This means that bold gestures were attempted by at least one actor in a relationship where there was considerable fear, hostility, and mistrust. This requirement provides a tough test for our hypotheses because under such circumstances, states, according to conventional explanations, are least-likely to risk cooperating with their adversaries. Nonetheless, this theoretical expectation does not seem to fit our cases. In the Arab-Israeli conflict, Egyptian President Anwar Sadat went to Jerusalem at a time when diplomatic attempts to resolve the Arab-Israeli conflict had reached an impasse and more importantly, at a moment when Egypt and Israel each suspected the other was using war games as a pretext for an attack. For our India-Pakistan case,

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80 George and Bennett, *Case Studies and Theory Development*, 120-123.

81 In October and November of 1977, the level of trust between Israel and Egypt was very low as both countries mistakenly prepared for a possible war. In response to an Israeli training exercise, Egypt nervously mobilized its military units close to the border in preparation for what it thought was an Israeli first-strike. These actions, in turn, made the Israelis fearful of a possible preemptive attack by Egypt. The mistrust was so great that even though both states knew they were not interested in going to war, they were unsure of the intentions of the other side. The extent of the misunderstanding was revealed later during Sadat's visit to Jerusalem when Dr. Boutros Boutros-Ghali, Egyptian Foreign Minister, and Mustafa Khalil, Secretary of the Arab Socialist Unity (ASU) Party, both asked
Indian P.M. Atal Bihari Vajpayee traveled on the inaugural run of the New Delhi-Lahore bus service and met his Pakistani counterpart, P.M. Nawaz Sharif, a year after both states had escalated tensions by conducting nuclear tests. This historic meeting became known as the Lahore summit (1998). And finally, President Ronald Reagan and General Secretary Mikhail Gorbachev met at Reykjavik (1986) as relations between the United States and the Soviet Union had deteriorated to their worst level since détente. If, as these cases suggest, states offer bold gestures under conditions of great uncertainty (such as during an interstate crisis, a period of heightened tension, or a real or perceived threat of war), then this provides strong evidence that these gestures are not only real but that new explanations are needed to shed light on them.

Third, the cases were selected because they are heterogeneous. In effect, this means that each dyad involves states from different parts of the world and it has features that separate it from others such as differences in regime type, differences in power relationships (equal,

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83 By the end of 1983, Reagan’s blistering anti-Soviet rhetoric in conjunction with his creation of new weapons programs (i.e. Mx ICBMs, Star Wars) and his substantial increase in defense expenditure caused US-Soviet relations to deteriorate to a level not seen since the Cuban Missile Crisis. George Kennan, the esteemed diplomat and advisor during the Cold War, aptly described US-Soviet relations at the time as “ominous” and “in a dreadful and dangerous condition.” So tense was the atmosphere that in the fall of1983, the Soviet Union had mistaken NATO’s nuclear-release simulation exercise called Able Archer to be preparation for a first-strike against the Warsaw Pact. At the height of the crisis, the Soviet Union placed more than a dozen nuclear-capable aircraft in East Germany and Poland on high alert and readied military units in the Baltic and Czechoslovakia in response to what it perceived to be a preemptive nuclear attack by NATO. For more on the Able Archer Crisis, see Benjamin B. Fischer, “The Soviet-American War Scare of the 1980s,” International Journal of Intelligence (Fall 2006): 480-517; Arnav Manchanda, “When Truth is stranger than fiction: the Able Archer incident,” Cold War History 9, No. 1 (February 2009): 111-133; Nathan Bennett Jones, “ ‘One Misstep Could Trigger a Great War’: Operation RYAN, Able Archer 83, and the 1983 War Scare,” Master’s thesis from George Washington University (May 2009). For info on the general state of U.S.-Soviet relations, see Don Oberdorfer, The Turn: How the Cold War came to an end – the United States and the Soviet Union, 1983-1990 (London: Jonathan-Cape, 1992), 28-32.
asymmetric), etc. This is advantageous because it allows us to determine if our findings are applicable to a wide variety of other cases, thereby allowing us to comment on the generalizability of our results.

Fourth, the outcome in each of these cases was very different. While Sadat’s Jerusalem initiative and the Reykjavik summit were noted for changing the relationship between Egypt and Israel and the United States and the Soviet Union, respectively, the positive effects of the Lahore summit on Pakistani-Indian relations were later undermined by the Kargil conflict.⁸⁴ Given that one of our research questions is about the short-term and long-term effects of bold gestures, we must choose cases that possess variable outcomes.

Fifth, each case covers an extensive period of time. By lengthening the period under study, we double the total number of cases because within each individual case-study, there are multiple examples to study. In 2001, for instance, Vajpayee invited General Pervez Musharraf, the mastermind behind the Kargil conflict, to the Agra summit and in doing so, rewarded Pakistan’s new leader with an official head of state visit. This was Vajpayee’s second attempt to initiate conciliation with Pakistan and it was quite extraordinary because his new counterpart was the very person responsible for sabotaging earlier diplomatic negotiations.⁸⁵

To supplement this comparative case design, I plan to use the process-tracing technique to ascertain whether the causal mechanisms identified in our hypotheses actually influence the decisions of political leaders to undertake such gambles. With its emphasis on histories, secondary sources, archival documents, interviews, and media reports, process-tracing helps us


piece together a narrative for each case-study, and in doing so, it enables us to see whether the predictions and expectations stemming from our hypotheses actually fit the empirical record. In addition to hypothesis testing, the process-tracing method helps us account for equifinality (or “multiple convergence”) because it forces us to consider the alternative causal pathways that may have led to the desired outcome. This, in turn, helps us detect spurious relationships and uncover variables that were originally left out of the analysis.  

CHAPTER OUTLINE

The remainder of the dissertation is organized as follows. Chapter 2 examines the classic case often referenced to illustrate a bold move, Sadat’s visit to Jerusalem. In one dramatic stroke, he conferred recognition and legitimacy upon Israel, recognized her security needs, and promised “no more war” between Egypt and the Jewish state. I find that prospect theory helps explain Sadat’s willingness to accept risks whereas security dilemma sensibility helps us understand his motivations for reassuring Israel through a bold gesture. Chapter 3 examines the Reykjavik summit where Gorbachev offered unprecedented concessions to the U.S. in an effort to persuade and pressure Reagan to negotiate a comprehensive nuclear arms control agreement. This case provides support for our security dilemma sensibility and image projection hypotheses. And finally, Chapter 4 gives the reader an account of Indo-Pakistani relations between 1998 and 2001. I argue that Vajpayee, like Sadat and Gorbachev, exercised security dilemma sensibility when he visited Lahore in February 1999. The dissertation concludes with a summary of our

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case-studies and an overview not just of our study’s theoretical contributions but of its implications for policy-makers as well.
“An extremely important and dangerous step but only a first step in a long, long road, a rough road, a road full of hazards, in a journey whose outcome is still not guaranteed. It has a great deal of chance and risk. No one today can say with confidence that this road will actually lead us to the comprehensive and just peace that we seek.”

- Boutros Boutros Ghali

On November 9, 1977, President Anwar Sadat announced in his address to Egypt’s People’s Assembly that he was prepared to go the “ends of the Earth” for peace, surprising many audience members by adding extemporaneously that he was even willing to visit Israel and speak before its Parliament, the Knesset, if this would help save the lives of his soldiers. This statement was unprecedented because for the first time in Israel’s history, an Arab head-of-state was offering to negotiate directly and publicly with the Jewish state and to do so by visiting the contested city of Jerusalem no less. This pronouncement was shocking because it was made by the leader of a country that remained in a state of war with Israel and had threatened its existence, denounced its legitimacy, and fought against it on five separate occasions since 1948.

Given the level of hostility between the two states, Sadat’s olive branch was not taken seriously either by officials in the Arab World or their counterparts in the West. They mistook

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1 Boutros Boutros Ghali Papers, November 19, 1977, box 4, folder 4, p. 42, Hoover Institution Library and Archives.


4 A day after Sadat had delivered his speech to the People’s Assembly, the U.S. Ambassador to Egypt, Hermann Eilts, sent a telegram to the State Department, stating “Sadat’s offer to go to the Knesset is a first for an Arab leader and should be seen as his way of dramatizing lengths to which he is prepared to go to achieve peace, not as serious possibility. Principle aims of Sadat’s obviously carefully thought out, although seemingly extemporaneous and
Sadat’s pronouncement to be an empty gesture since they believed Sadat was using this statement as a rhetorical device to merely demonstrate the lengths to which he was willing to go to achieve peace. The international community watched in disbelief ten days later when Sadat landed at Ben-Gurion airport on the outskirts of Tel Aviv where he was welcomed with warm applause from Israel’s political and military leaders who awaited him on the tarmac. In a historic scene that was televised and broadcast to millions around the world, a smiling Sadat deplaned and met a crowd of Israeli dignitaries; he talked to Prime Minister Begin, kissed former Prime Minister Golda Meir, and laughed and joked with Israel’s military heroes Moshe Dayan and Ariel Sharon (both of whom were now part of Begin’s Cabinet). As the motorcade left the airport for Jerusalem, the highway was lined with crowds of euphoric Israelis waving to the Egyptian delegation, weeping out of happiness, swaying Egyptian and Israeli flags, and singing “Hevenu Shalom Aleikhem” (“We’ve Brought Peace upon You”). Golda Meir likened Sadat’s arrival and the emotional outpouring it triggered throughout Israel to the coming of the Messiah.


day, Sadat addressed the Knesset in a special session, describing his intentions in coming to Jerusalem and reassuring Israel in no uncertain terms that “in all sincerity, I tell you, we welcome you among us, with full security and safety.”

While Sadat’s decision to visit Jerusalem constituted a significant departure in Egypt’s official foreign policy, his actions and statements in Israel were no less shocking. In one dramatic stroke, he conferred recognition and legitimacy upon Israel, honored her history and fallen warriors, recognized her security needs, and promised “no more war” between the two countries. This sequence of events was striking given that Egypt had maintained prior to November that the state of war would be terminated and recognition would be granted if and only if Israel withdrew, or agreed in principle to withdraw, from the territories it had occupied since the 1967 war: the Golan Heights, the Sinai Peninsula, the Gaza strip, and the West Bank.

This important precondition, however, was suddenly abandoned when Sadat traveled to Jerusalem.

We see that Sadat’s decision to initiate cooperation irrespective of the statements and/or actions of Israel was a move fraught with great risks as it left his country vulnerable to possible noncooperation by the other side. Sadat received nothing in return for his two major unilateral

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11 The strategic dilemma of cooperation is best captured through the prisoner’s dilemma game where each player has a dominant strategy of defecting, regardless of the other player’s action.
concessions — de facto recognition and “no more war” — and as a result, he gave away bargaining chips that his country may have been able to use as leverage in future rounds of negotiations. 12 Meeting publicly with the Israelis in Jerusalem also entailed significant personal and political risks for Sadat because it exposed him to domestic and international audience costs. 13 He was subjected to verbal and physical attacks from the Arab world for breaking the Arab taboo of not negotiating with the Jewish state. Domestically, by embarking on such a controversial course of action, Sadat incurred the reproach of a number of Egyptians, including members of his own inner circle such as Egyptian Foreign Minister Ismail Fahmy. Believing such a strategy was antithetical to Egypt’s long-term interests, Fahmy and his deputy, Mohammed Riad, ultimately resigned in protest.

Assuming that survival is not only the primary goal of states but also the quintessential objective of regime leaders, one would expect Sadat to play it safe and err on the side of caution when interacting with his country’s longtime rival. On the contrary, however, Sadat took a leap

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12 As Foreign Minister Ismail Fahmy cautioned Egypt's President before his decision to visit Jerusalem, “If we take the plane and go to Jerusalem, the act implies the automatic recognition of Israel and the termination of the state of belligerency. We play our two major political cards and gain nothing. The gain is all on Israel's side and their bargaining power is doubled. We also make the Arabs and Palestinians furious. And once we go to Jerusalem, we cannot retreat. We have no fall-back position, Mr. President. We will be cornered, without room for maneuvering in order to force Israel toward a comprehensive settlement.” Ismail Fahmy, Negotiating for Peace in the Middle East (London: American University in Cairo Press, 1983), 257, 260-61. For more on how other Egyptian officials felt about Sadat’s gesture, see Reports from the U.S. Embassy in Cairo noted how the “best informed officials are, however, clearly apprehensive that Sadat is conceding too much…and unlikely to get anything from Israelis in return.” US Embassy Cairo, “Subject: Thinking the Unthinkable: Egyptians’ Reaction to Sadat Visit to Jerusalem,” November 16, 1977,” RG 59, Document 19100. In another message, the U.S. Embassy reported in December 1977 that “a small minority of officials and intellectuals deeply apprehensive and believe fatal flaw in Sadat’s strategy was to give too much away with no guarantee of Israeli response.” US Embassy Cairo, “Subject: Egyptian Apprehension over Israeli Reaction to Sadat Peace Moves,” December 3, 1977,” RG 59, Document 20110. Also see Boutros Boutros Ghali Papers, November 19, 1977, box 4, folder 4, p. 42, Hoover Institution Library and Archives.

into the unknown, undertaking a costly positive sanction that was unprecedented, unambiguous, irreversible, and noncontingent (or unconditional). As many scholars have since noted, it was a bold, or grand, gesture. If traveling to Jerusalem exposed Egypt’s President to a myriad of risks, it is puzzling as to why Sadat chose to accept such risks in the first place? That is, if smaller and less costly avenues existed for initiating conciliation with Israel, then why did Sadat overlook these alternatives and pursue the riskier option?

Sadat’s decision presents something of a mystery to those who subscribe to the fatalist logic of realism since states ought to be suspicious of the intentions of others. Rational choice theories meanwhile also cannot account for these “extreme” acts of cooperation since they assume leaders have risk-neutral or risk-averse preferences. As a result, rationalists cannot explain why one state would choose to cooperate first; they cannot explain where such a preference actually comes from or how it is formed. Given that the most common paradigms in international relations cannot fully account for this phenomenon, this case therefore constitutes a deviant case-study.

Some Middle East experts argue that Sadat’s actions were motivated by his recognition that the high level of mistrust between Egypt and Israel needed to be reduced to resolve the

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14 Lawrence Wright called it a “bold gesture,” Kenneth Stein referred to it as a “grand gesture,” and Benny Morris described it as a “bombshell.” Yaacov Bar-Siman-Tov writes that a variety of phrases were used by Israeli decision-makers to describe their initial impressions: “great event,” “turning point,” “a momentous visit,” “a historic visit,” “a very important visit,” “unprecedented event,” “the first time in two thousand years.” Wright, Thirteen Days in September, 26; Stein, Heroic Diplomacy, 228-9, 264-5; Morris, Righteous Victims, 449; Bar-Siman-Tov, Israel and the Peace Process, 53. Herbert Kelman stated that Sadat was following a “strategy of unilateral reward.” Kelman, "Overcoming the Psychological Barrier.”

15 Rationalists assume preferences are fixed and are exogenously given.

Arab-Israeli conflict. Sadat’s Jerusalem initiative was therefore an attempt to mitigate Israel’s deep-rooted fear that none of its Arab neighbors really wanted peace. Other scholars argue that the intended target was not Israel but rather the United States. By visiting Jerusalem, Sadat sought to pressure the Carter administration to discontinue its fruitless work on a comprehensive Arab-Israeli peace plan and redirect its attention to the Egyptian-Israeli peace process. Employing the logic of realism, others contend that Egypt’s willingness to offer concessions was driven by its interests in cultivating a strategic U.S.-Egyptian partnership for power-political reasons. Because negotiating peace with Israel was a precondition for such an alliance, Sadat changed course to realize this goal.

In addition to systemic factors, a large group of scholars have relied on a state level of analysis to explain Sadat’s decision, arguing that his peace initiative was motivated by Egypt’s

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18 According to Maoz and Felsenthal, “Sadat’s feeling was that the difficulties of progression toward peace involved a fundamental problem of mistrust. Namely, Israel’s evaluation has been that, regardless of what it would do, Egypt would not be willing to sign a peace treaty with it; hence, it had no incentive to withdraw. Sadat’s visit to Jerusalem was, therefore, a basic trust-inducement move.” Zeev Maoz and Dan S. Felsenthal, “Self-Binding Commitments, the Inducement of Trust, Social Choice, and the Theory of International Cooperation,” International Studies Quarterly 31, No. 2 (June 1987): 177-200, 191.


domestic economic and political crises.21 According to this argument, Sadat’s actions were
driven by self-interest since peace with Israel offered the quickest means to preserve his regime
and remedy his country’s economic problems.

Despite the fact that thirty-eight years has now elapsed since Sadat’s historic visit to
Jerusalem, there is still little consensus as to what precisely motivated Egypt’s President to
undertake such an extraordinary gamble. While much has already been written on this topic, this
paper departs from previous studies because it not only integrates the disparate explanations into
a single, well-connected answer but it also furthers our understanding of Sadat’s actions in two
fundamental ways. First, most scholars heretofore have failed to explain why Sadat chose to
initiate conciliation through bold initiatives when other, less costly alternatives were available.
Understanding why he by-passed these alternatives is critical to developing a complete
explanation of our puzzle. Second, this study applies concepts from the field of cognitive and
behavioral psychology to shed light on the black-box of foreign policy decision-making.
Following this approach, I trace the process through which Sadat reached his decision, focusing
on those perceptions, attitudes, and beliefs that led him to change course in the fall of 1977.

Using recently declassified material from both the United States and Israel, I provide a
thorough and well-supported historical account of Sadat’s actions. To my knowledge, these
primary documents have not been used thus far and so, this study fills a lacuna in the literature,

21 Scholars who maintain there was a direct link between Egypt’s domestic situation and Sadat’s bold initiatives
include, but are not limited to, Mark N. Cooper, The Transformation of Egypt (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University
Press, 1982); Mohamed Heikal, Autumn of Fury: The Assassination of Sadat (New York: Random House, 1983);
uses two sets of variables to explain why Sadat went to Jerusalem in November 1977. She says this was due to
Egypt’s “domestic political and economic crisis” as well as Sadat’s sense that the Geneva negotiations were doomed
to fail because of the intransigence of the other Arab states. Janice Gross Stein, “The Political Economy of Security
Agreements: The Linked Costs of Failure at Camp David,” in Double-Edged Diplomacy: International Bargaining
and Domestic Politics, eds. Peter B. Evans, Harold K. Jacobson, Robert D. Putnam (Los Angeles: University of
providing an excellent glimpse into Egyptian decision-making at a crucial time in the peace process.

I argue that the strategic interaction between Egypt and the other parties involved in the Arab-Israeli conflict helps explain why and when Sadat suddenly decided to abandon multilateral diplomacy in favor of direct talks with Israel. While Sadat had maintained a strong preference for peace since the end of the October War, his ability to realize this outcome was circumscribed by his continued reliance on U.S. mediation. At the start of 1977, Sadat placed his hopes in newly elected President Jimmy Carter, believing he would be able to reconvene the Geneva Middle East Peace Conference but as the year progressed, Sadat grew frustrated by Syrian President Hafez Assad’s attempts to delay this conference and somewhat discouraged by the Carter Administration’s focus on procedural rather than substantive issues. At the same time that Sadat was growing disillusioned with the pace and efficacy of multilateral diplomacy, he received positive signals from Prime Minister Begin, which, in effect, gave him sufficient reason to be cautiously optimistic about the prospects of resolving the Arab-Israeli conflict, or at least some portion of it, through direct negotiations with Israel.

Egypt’s interactions with Syria, Israel, and the United States is in and of itself insufficient to explain why Sadat chose to initiate negotiations with Israel in such a dramatic and unprecedented manner. I argue that Sadat’s behavior can be explained by the application of prospect theory and security dilemma sensibility.

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The former is well-suited for this case-study because it provides a systematic way to explain and predict a decision-maker's risk propensity under conditions of high uncertainty. I argue that the economic and political situation within Egypt was dire and it placed Sadat in an operative domain of losses relative to his reference point. This, in turn, affected how Sadat evaluated his existing policy options and the level of risk he was willing to tolerate to achieve peace.

The latter, security dilemma sensibility, explains Sadat’s underlying motivation for initiating conciliation through a large instead of a small, or modest, conciliatory gesture. An examination of the primary evidence clearly shows that Egypt’s President believed the level of mistrust between the two parties was too high to facilitate meaningful face-to-face negotiations. Cognizant of Israel’s security concerns and its apprehensiveness towards the Arab states, Sadat ultimately concluded that only a bold, highly symbolic gesture could reduce her doubts and suspicions and break through the psychological barriers of the Arab-Israeli conflict.

As outlined in figure 2 (end of chapter), the remainder of this chapter is organized into three distinct sections. In the first section, I examine the diplomatic interactions and key events in 1977 that led Sadat to circumvent Geneva and negotiate directly with Israel. I then apply prospect theory to explain Sadat’s evaluation of available policy options and his willingness to accept one that was much riskier than the rest to begin face-to-face talks with Begin’s government. Thereafter, I use security dilemma sensibility to explain the motivations behind Sadat’s visit to Jerusalem. I conclude the paper with a summary of my findings and a short discussion of the theoretical implications of this case-study for the study of bold gestures in international relations.
Since the end of the October War, Sadat had desired peace but translating this preference into reality was difficult since Egypt (at least until November 1977) had refused to sit down and negotiate directly with Israel. As a result, Sadat depended on the U.S. to mediate between the two rivals, hoping that the U.S. would be able to facilitate talks and use its influence as Israel’s patron to pressure her into offering concessions.

Under the Ford administration, Secretary of State Henry Kissinger’s step-by-step or shuttle diplomacy had helped Egypt and Israel negotiate the First and Second Disengagement Agreements, often referred to as Sinai I and Sinai II, which, among other points, imposed an UN-monitored buffer zone between the two countries and returned a narrow sliver of the Sinai back to Egypt. These agreements, from the Egyptian perspective, were a minor victory because the bulk of the Sinai Peninsula, not to mention the other territories occupied after the 1967 war, remained under Israeli control. After the 1976 U.S. presidential election, Sadat sought a comprehensive Arab-Israeli peace and in this endeavor, he found a willing partner in the new U.S. President, Jimmy Carter.

The Elusive Search for a Comprehensive Peace: Prelude to Sadat’s Peace Initiative

As soon as he entered office, Carter invested considerable time and energy to reconvene the Geneva Middle East Peace Conference, a multilateral forum co-chaired by the U.S. and the Soviet Union. The purpose of holding such a conference was to ostensibly bring all the parties

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24 The reason Arab states like Egypt had refused to negotiate with Israel had much to do with the Arab League’s Khartoum Summit (August 1967). At this summit, the parties agreed to a diplomatic formula known as the “three Nos”; they were no peace with Israel, no recognition of Israel, and no agreement to negotiate with Israel. This formula, in effect, meant that negotiations with Israel would have to be conducted through third-parties. Morris, Righteous Victims, 345-346, 350; Smith, Palestine and the Arab-Israeli Conflict, 304-305.

25 To support this point, Sadat often liked to point out that the U.S. “gives Israel everything from a loaf of bread to a Phantom jet.”
involved in the Arab-Israeli conflict – Egypt, Israel, Jordan, Syria, and the Palestinians - together so that they could negotiate a comprehensive peace. To prepare for the conference and better understand the position of each country, the Carter administration met with the foreign ministers and leaders from each state involved in the conflict. The Arab states were not only heartened to see that the U.S. was fully engaged in the peace process but they were pleased to hear Carter publicly endorse the creation of a Palestinian homeland. From their perspective, this indicated that the new administration was committed to applying UN Security Council Resolution 242, which established the land-for-peace formula, to all territory that had been obtained by Israel in the 1967 war, including the West Bank and Gaza strip.

The Egyptian-Syrian rapprochement was another positive development in the Middle East conflict. Shortly after Sadat signed Sinai II in September 1975, Syria led a harsh campaign to mobilize Arab public opinion against Egypt. Syria’s opposition to Sinai II stemmed from the fact that this agreement included a new commitment by Egypt to refrain from the threat or use of force against Israel and it permitted nonmilitary cargo en route to Israel to pass through the Suez Canal. Believing these concessions violated Arab unity and signaled Egypt’s willingness to negotiate a separate peace with Israel, Assad violently denounced the agreement. The rift between Egypt and Syria lasted until October 1976 when Saudi Arabia finally intervened and brought about a rapprochement between Cairo and Damascus. By 1977, the two rivals were

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26 In a townhall meeting in Clinton, Massachusetts, President Carter had said “there has to be a homeland provided for the Palestinian refugees who have suffered for many, many years.” National Security Advisor Zbigniew Brzezinski later commented that this statement was analogous to the Balfour Declaration. Stein, Heroic Diplomacy, 193-199, 301 [n. 27, 28, and 32].
united in the stated objective of reaching a comprehensive peace, irrespective of their many other foreign policy differences.  

The year 1977 therefore seemed most promising for reaching a diplomatic settlement since the Arab states as well as the Carter administration were both working towards the same objective, the reconvening of the Geneva Conference. While Sadat initially hoped Geneva could be used to ceremoniously conclude peace agreements between the Arabs and the Israelis, it soon became apparent that the convening of the conference was an end in and of itself. This automatically delayed peace with Israel as it forced Egypt to wait until Geneva reconvened to begin the long and arduous task of conducting negotiations.

To accelerate the peace process, Sadat and his foreign minister, Ismail Fahmy, insisted throughout 1977 that Geneva needed to be preceded by advanced preparations: Through the creation of a pre-Geneva working group, Sadat argued that the substantive issues could be resolved prior to Geneva so that the conference itself would be a mere formality, leading to the symbolic signing of agreements. It can be said that the Carter administration underestimated the importance Sadat attached to this matter because while it had initially sought to reach some agreement on the substantive issues, it abandoned this goal by the summer. Sadat’s repeated calls for advanced preparations went unheard as the pre-Geneva discussions began to focus solely on the technical and procedural aspects of the conference such as who would represent the

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Palestinians? How would their representatives be included in the talks? What would be the structure of the conference? And what would be on the agenda? 30

As a leader who focused on the big picture, Sadat grew irritated with all of these procedural obstacles; he simply viewed this entire process as a complete waste of time.31 As he told the U.S. Ambassador to Egypt, Hermann Eilts, “peace is slipping through my fingers for procedural reasons.”32 In his well-known address to the Knesset on November 20, 1977, Sadat stated "many months in which peace could have been brought about have been wasted over differences and fruitless discussions on the procedure of convening the Geneva conference."33

The Geneva conference also concerned Sadat because it threatened to reduce his freedom to maneuver. The conference organized all the Arab states into a single delegation for the plenary session before it was supposed to split into national, or geographic, subcommittees such as Syria-Israel, Egypt-Israel, and Jordan-Israel. Sadat expressed misgivings about the role and structure of the plenary session since each Arab state clearly had different interests at stake, resulting in very different preferences for peace.34 If this body was empowered to actually negotiate and/or re-convene at the end of the conference to approve agreements which were reached in bilateral negotiations, then this would give other Arab states like Syria a veto over Egypt’s actions. Given


32 Quote taken from Stein, Heroic Diplomacy, 208.

33 Quandt, Camp David, 346.

34 Quandt, Peace Process, 177-191; Eilts, “Sadat’s Journey,” 14. Reporting on a discussion he had with Sadat, Eilts reported that “Sadat said he was ‘fed up’ with the procedural debate (he repeated this four or five times)...He did not wish to waste time discussing sterile, procedural issues...He wanted to go to Geneva and tackle substance.” See US Embassy Cairo to Secretary of State, “Subject: Presidential Message for Sadat,” October 28, 1977, Record Group 59, Document 17863 (Washington, D.C.: National Archives).
Syria’s prior opposition to agreements reached between Egypt and Israel, Sadat reasoned that Syria would hold any progress in the Egyptian-Israeli talks hostage to an overall Arab-Israeli settlement. Fearing such an outcome, Sadat repeatedly informed the Carter administration that the plenary session must be given a minimal role at the Geneva Conference.  

While the October 1977 version of the Geneva Working Paper (WP) addressed Sadat’s concern regarding the plenary session, this paper was strongly opposed by Assad. In a letter to Carter, Assad rejected the WP and insisted that the plenary session be given a fundamental role to negotiate substantive issues. Syria also opposed the Working Paper because it failed to include any reference to the Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO) and its participation at the Geneva Conference.

Despite the Arab states’ public and private protestations, Israel would neither acknowledge nor accept the PLO as a separate delegation. Sadat’s compromise solution was that very low-level PLO officials could be represented within the plenary and vetted by Israel but this too was something Israel was loathe to accept. In the final working paper that had been worked out by Carter-Vance-Dayan on October 4th, any reference to the PLO was ultimately omitted. This action greatly upset Syria and to a lesser extent Egypt and for this reason, the October Working Paper was derogatorily labeled in the Arab world: “the U.S.-Israeli Working Paper.”

Though Egypt was dismayed by the fact that the Palestinians would not be formally represented

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at the Conference, Sadat reluctantly supported the Working Paper. This was due in part to Carter’s personal appeal in which he asked Sadat in a handwritten letter to publicly endorse the Working Paper as a basis to reconvene the conference.38

Syria meanwhile remained adamant that the draft needed to change. To persuade Sadat from going to Geneva based off the October Working Paper, Assad sent his special envoy, Major General Naji al-Jamal, to hold consultations with Egypt’s President.39 Eilts learned of the contents of this discussion after talking with Egyptian Vice-President Husni Mubarak; according to Eilts,

Mubarak told me that Sadat concluded, after yesterday’s talks with Assad’s emissary Anji Jamil, that Syria is worse than Israel in seeking to ‘hinder’ the reconvening of Geneva. Jamil had brought the ‘Syrian Plan,’ which had been sent to President Carter and had urged that Egypt report it…Mubarak said Sadat’s reaction to the Syrian Proposal is negative. Sadat is convinced that the Syrians, despite lip service to the concept of reconvening Geneva, really do not want the Conference to take place.40

While Sadat had long questioned Syria’s peaceful intentions, his difficult meeting with Assad’s envoy reinforced his mistrust of Syria. In his autobiography and in a series of public interviews given afterwards, Sadat repeatedly stressed that it was “a meeting” with Assad’s envoy that

38 In his letter, Carter had said “the time has now come to move forward, and your early public endorsement of our approach is extremely important – perhaps vital – in advancing all parties to Geneva.” Quandt, Camp David, 138-143. In response to Carter’s letter, Sadat promises to undertake “a bold step.” For more on Carter’s personal appeal to Sadat, see Jimmy Carter, Keeping Faith: Memoirs of a President (New York: Bantam Books, 1982), 295-296; Jimmy Carter, White House Diary (New York: Farrar, Straus, and Giroux, 2010), 126.

39 Major General Naji al-Jamal was a member of the National Command of the Arab Socialist Ba’th Party, deputy defense minister and commander of Syria’s air force and air defense. Indyk, Sadat’s Jerusalem Initiative, 46, 68-9 [ns. 131-2]).

discouraged him about Syria’s true desire for peace.\textsuperscript{41} Syria’s uncompromising position regarding the working paper ultimately gave Sadat sufficient reason to doubt the “Syrian leadership’s ability to participate in an overall peace conference.”\textsuperscript{42} In short, it led him to believe that Assad was determined to paralyze the peace process.\textsuperscript{43}

With Syria adhering to a hardline position, Sadat grew pessimistic about the likelihood that the Geneva Conference could be held and about the chances that such a conference could actually lead to a comprehensive peace agreement.\textsuperscript{44} In a meeting with Eilts just days before he announced his willingness to visit Jerusalem, a despondent Sadat asked the U.S. Ambassador if his country had any ideas to break through the deadlock.\textsuperscript{45} When Eilts responded in the negative, this must have impressed upon Sadat the necessity of negotiating peace through a

\textsuperscript{41} While Sadat does not give a name in either his autobiography or in his interviews, it stands to reason that he was referring to his meeting with Naji al-Jamal given the timing and context. Anwar Sadat, \textit{In Search of Identity} (New York: Harper and Row, 1977), 305; “As-Sadat Grants Interviews to U.S. TV Networks,” Interview with NBC, November 27, 1977, FBIS Daily Reports, Middle East and North Africa (FBIS-MEA-77-229); “October Magazine Publishes As-Sadat Interview,” \textit{October Magazine} (Arabic), December 11, 1977, FBIS Daily Reports, Middle East and North Africa (FBIS-MEA-77-239).


\textsuperscript{43} In a statement that was later made to \textit{Oktubar} newspaper, Sadat said: “The Syrian Baath party will not go to Geneva, and if it did the picture would be like this: the Soviet Union has the Syrians in its pocket and Syria has the Palestinians in its pocket also. In Geneva, we would busy ourselves with all things we have had enough of - semantic and legalistic arguments, the modalities, and the names of the topical, geographical, and historical committees. All this, in addition to what we know about the nature of the Syrian Baath party. And the result would be that the Geneva Conference would greatly add to our level of disillusionment.” This quote is reported in Quandt, \textit{Camp David}, 146 [n. 12]. In April 1978, Sadat had said that: “The road to Geneva got lost amongst all the papers…Had we continued to discuss going to Geneva or any other country, the shape of the table we would sit around, whether there would be one or more tables, the flag under which we would sit, and the form of the Arab delegations, all these things would have taken a long time, without us achieving a single solution.” Quote reported by Kenneth Stein, “Sadat’s Journey,” in \textit{Sadat and His Legacy: Egypt and the World, 1977-1977}, 34. Quandt states “it is fair to say that the American side consistently underestimated the degree of distrust between Sadat and Assad….“ Quandt, \textit{Peace Process}, 188, 192.

\textsuperscript{44} Jehan Sadat, \textit{A Woman of Egypt} (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1987), 371. Sadat later told his foreign minister Mohamed Ibrahim Kamel, Fahmy’s permanent replacement and Boutros Ghali’s successor, that “he could not maintain a policy which tied Egypt to the Arab present course, with its jealousies and struggles for leadership.” Mohamed Ibrahim Kamel, \textit{The Camp David Accords} (New York: Methuen, Routledge, and Kegan Paul, 1986), 22.

\textsuperscript{45} Indyk, \textit{Sadat’s Jerusalem Initiative}, 48, 70 [n. 144].
different channel because after months of diplomatic inertia, the parties were still debating the same procedural issues that had originally stalemated the peace process. As described in the next section, Sadat’s pessimism towards Geneva occurred at the same time that he was growing more optimistic about the possibility of reaching peace through direct negotiations with Israel.  

Sadat’s Reassessment: Peace through direct talks

In the May 1977 elections, Israelis voted for the Likud bloc over the long-dominant Labor Party and in doing so, they gave control over the Knesset for the first time in Israel’s history to a coalition of right-wing parties led by Menachem Begin. This sent shockwaves throughout the region since Begin had long established a reputation in Israeli politics as an intransigent, hawkish statesman who was driven by the revisionist Zionist teachings of Ze’ev Jabotinsky. This ideology emphasized the necessity of maintaining control over the entire biblical land of Israel, including over the West Bank (or, as Begin liked to refer to it, Judea and Samaria). Demonstrating his adherence to this position, Begin resigned from Israel’s National Emergency Government seven years before to protest its acceptance of UN Security Council Resolution 242. And so, Begin’s beliefs presented something of a challenge for those who

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46 According to William B. Quandt, a member of the U.S. National Security Council, "more than any other single element, it was this concern that later seems to have prompted Sadat to go to Jerusalem." See Quandt, Camp David, 61; See Morris, Righteous Victims, 448-450.

47 Wright, Thirteen Days in September, 36-38.

48 This position was part of Begin’s Likud platform. Spiegel, The Other Arab-Israeli Conflict, 334.

49 Morris, Righteous Victims, 446; Quandt, Peace Process, 194, 472-73 [n. 29].
sought to achieve a comprehensive peace agreement, particularly one that involved resolving the Palestinian issue.50

While Sadat was initially upset by the formation of the Likud-coalition government, he was encouraged to see that Begin appointed Moshe Dayan as Israel’s Foreign Minister. Having served previously under Labor Prime Minister Golda Meir, the Egyptians were familiar with Moshe Dayan and they recognized that he was much less ideological than other members of Begin’s cabinet. Sadat’s statements to Ambassador Eilts and Secretary of State Vance reveal that he viewed Dayan as a pragmatist and as someone with whom the Egyptians could do business with.51

As the year progressed, Sadat’s views of Begin changed as he received positive information from credible third-parties regarding the Prime Minister’s willingness to make peace. In the summer of 1977, Begin visited Carter in Washington in his first state visit to the U.S. since his surprise election in May. In his discussions with Carter and Vance, Begin revealed his government’s readiness to make substantial concessions in the Sinai.52 Given Begin’s

50 Carter, Keeping Faith, 288. Begin’s unshakeable views on this matter would become increasingly clear once Israel entered negotiations with Egypt and the U.S. in the wake of Sadat’s Jerusalem Initiative. In a meeting with Vance on January 15, 1978, Begin reportedly told Vance “that this [Judea and Samaria as Begin liked to refer to it] is the land of Israel; I can never agree to give it up. But I won’t be prime minister in five years; who knows who’ll be here. I will never be the prime minister who will agree to relinquishe maybe my successor will… I won’t annex the territory; I won’t claim sovereignty, but I’m not going to be the one who ever gives up the [West Bank].” Quote from Stein, Heroic Diplomacy, 243. 309 [n. 51].

51 Eilts states “In May 1977, Likud won the elections in Israel. This upset Sadat. He said to me. ‘You know, there’s only one good man in that new government, and that is Moshe Dayan…” Hermann Frederick Eilts, “Sadat’s Journey,” in Sadat and His Legacy: Egypt and the World, 1977-1977, ed. Jon B. Alterman (Washington, D.C.: the Washington Institute for Near East Policy, 1998), 14. In a telegram from Secretary of State Vance to the White House and State Department, Vance states, “He [Sadat] then said I should tell Dayan that he (Sadat) is ready to conclude peace with him. He commented that he is pleased Dayan is Foreign Minister, as he believes he is flexible and wants to make peace.” Telegram from Secretary of State Vance to the White House and the Department of State, “Meeting with President Sadat,” August 2, 1977, in FRUS, 1977-1980, Vol. 8, 381.

hawkish image, his openness to making territorial concessions was received positively by the Carter administration and it signaled some degree of flexibility. Shortly after Begin left Washington, Carter relayed this important information to Sadat.

Throughout 1977, Sadat received similar accounts from other third-parties such as President Ceausescu of Romania and Austrian Prime Minister Dr. Bruno Kreisky. The information all seemed to indicate that Begin was serious about entering negotiations and this point was once again made to Sadat in his visit to Romania in late October. It was reported that when he arrived back to Egypt, he supposedly announced before his National Security Council that “Begin is ready to make peace.”

While this third-party information was helpful to Sadat, he also established contacts with Israel beginning in September 1977 to learn firsthand about Begin’s commitment to the peace process. On September 16, 1977, Sadat’s Deputy Prime Minister, Hassan Tuhami, secretly met with Israel’s Foreign Minister, Moshe Dayan, in Morocco to discuss the prospects for peace. While it is unclear precisely what was said, the consensus among historians seems to be that Dayan led Tuhami to believe that Egypt would receive most of the Sinai if it negotiated peace with Israel. Tuhami himself reports something to this effect in an interview given years later to an Egyptian newspaper.

53 Meital, Egypt’s Struggle for Peace, 157-164 [n. 20,24-28].
54 Stein, Heroic Diplomacy, 202.
55 Ibid., 205-6.
57 Stein, Heroic Diplomacy, 207.
58 Meital, Egypt’s Struggle for Peace, 160-2, 191 [n. 26-28]; Morris, Righteous Victims, 447 [n. 13]; Haber et al., Year of the Dove, 9-12.
While reaffirming the information Egypt had already received from intermediaries, we also learn from the secret Tuhami-Dayan meeting that Egypt’s willingness to sit down and negotiate with Israel had much to do with the strength of Begin’s government. One of Sadat’s frequent critiques of Begin’s predecessor, Yitzhak Rabin (1974-1977), was that he led a weak and divided government and this, in turn, made it difficult for Rabin to conduct negotiations. After Kissinger’s shuttle diplomacy between Jerusalem and Cairo was suspended in March 1975 (six months prior to the conclusion of Sinai II), Sadat had told Eilts that “the Israeli domestic situation had undercut negotiating prospects. Israel lacked a leader who could guide the public.”60 Sadat said much the same thing in February 1977 when he jokingly remarked that he missed Rabin’s predecessor, Golda Meir, who, according to Sadat, “had guts and could face the Knesset.”61

The secret talks reveal that Sadat was encouraged by the fact that Israel’s new government was led by someone strong like Begin. This impression may have been reinforced by members of the Carter administration who also commented on this point.62 In a memo to Israel’s foreign ministry in which he summarized the main points of his meeting with Tuhami, Dayan reports that

Tuhami stresses that Sadat had no confidence in former Israeli government, that your present (government) is strong and will take dynamic decisions.


60 Hermann Eilts’ Unpublished Memoirs, “Getting to Sinai II,” Herman Eilts Collection, Boston University, Box 45, Folder 15, March 25, 1975, 212-213.


62 After his first meeting with Begin, Carter recorded in his diary that “Begin is a strong leader. ‘quite different from Rabin.’” Carter, White House Diary, 71.
Therefore, Sadat wants these talks and because he trusts us, he agreed to this contact with us.63

Sadat was convinced he confronted a leader who was strong enough to make the difficult decisions for peace. In a separate report prepared by Israel’s intelligence agency, Mossad, Tuhami is quoted as saying in the meeting, “Sadat did not trust your previous Government, but he trusts you.”64 Begin’s commanding majority in the Knesset in addition to his autocratic style of running Israel’s Cabinet must have given Sadat some hope that he had a partner who could convince Israel’s public and ruling coalition to negotiate peace.65 Knowing that Begin was not only willing to make some territorial concessions but that he was capable of selling an agreement back home made Sadat less averse to holding direct talks.

Because his reliance on U.S. mediation had achieved so little, Sadat finally decided to circumvent Geneva altogether and negotiate directly with Israel.66 Such a strategy purposefully reduced U.S. involvement in the peace process and it was clear after Sadat’s dramatic visit that this calculation was indeed part of his foreign policy reorientation.67 By embarking on this

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63 “Main Points from the Meeting of Foreign Minister Moshe Dayan with Egyptian Deputy Prime Minister Hassan Tuhami in Rabat,” September 17, 1977, Israel Prime Minister’s Office, Box 4313, file 4.


65 Bar-Siman-Tov, Israel and the Peace Process, 54 [n. 16]. Ahmed Maher, an Egyptian foreign ministry official at the time, said “in his [Sadat’s] mind…if [someone like] Begin…is willing to concede, then others would not object, then others would also agree…” Ahmed Maher, from Cold Peace – Going it Alone, 06:45, Al Jazeera English Documentary, posted by Al Jazeera English, March 23, 2009, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=6qi9PIGOzQ.

66 Kamal Hasan Ali, chief of Egypt’s military intelligence, wrote that Sadat “understood perfectly well that waiting for a uniform Arab stand would take a long time, and to leave the Arab cause in pawn to such a dream would be a crime toward the Arabs and most of all toward Egypt. Egypt’s economic situation did not admit delay…” Quote taken from Meital, Egypt’s Struggle for Peace, 169. As Spiegel points out, “He [Sadat] had quite literally extended the hand of friendship to Israel and with one deft stroke seized the initiative in Arab-Israeli diplomacy and rendered irrelevant the U.S. move for a Geneva Conference.” Spiegel, The Other Arab-Israeli Conflict, 341.

67 On November 23rd, Sadat told Eilts in a meeting that “It is our problem” and “we should not need guardians to handle this for us.” In a telegram to the State Department, Eilts reported that Sadat is “thinking of announcing in the People’s Assembly on Saturday that, after his visit to Israel, the Geneva Conference is really not needed any
pathway to peace, Sadat sought to break through the stalemated peace talks and set in motion direct negotiations that would lead in principle to a comprehensive Arab-Israeli peace agreement. Nonetheless, by traveling down the road not taken, Sadat accepted great personal and political costs for an outcome — comprehensive peace — that was at best merely probable. Other options were readily available to Egypt’s President; he could have continued the secret Dayan-Tuhami backchannel or could have met publicly with Begin in a neutral, third-county (such as the U.S. or Switzerland). As pointed out by Fahmy, the latter would fit with Sadat’s stated objective of jumpstarting the peace talks but would help Egypt reduce the anger of other Arab states. These two policy options entailed far fewer risks for Sadat but he interestingly dismissed them in favor of a riskier option.

Sadat’s aversion to inaction, or the diplomatic status quo, and his tolerance for taking excessive risks can be explained by prospect theory. In the next section, this psychological model longer.” Telegram from Embassy in Egypt to the Department of State, “Subject: Sadat’s Assessment of his Visit to Israel and Where do we go from Here,” November 23, 1977, in FRUS, 1977-1980, Vol. 8, 772-3. “Sadat’s Assessment of His Visit to Israel and Where Do We Go From Here,” November 23, 1977, NLC 16-41-5-6-8, Jimmy Carter Presidential Library and Museum (Carter Presidential Library), Atlanta, Georgia. In his November 26th speech, Sadat stated “Everyone should have known, the day I came to your Assembly and declared my decision, that since I assumed this position our line has been very clear, namely, that we do not accept mediation concerning our affairs, and we shall never allow anyone to become trustee over our affairs with others.” Quote taken from “President Sadat Speech to the People’s Assembly,” 26 November 1977, Anwar Sadat Archives-President Speeches, Anwar Sadat Chair for Peace and Development, University of Maryland, College Park, http://sadat.umd.edu/archives/speeches%5CAADK%20Sadat%20Speech%20after%20Jerusalem%2011.26.77.pdf. After hearing this speech, the U.S. Ambassador to Egypt sent a message back to the Secretary of State stating that, “Sadat was critical of ineffectiveness of Working Paper Exercise (which made dramatic Knesset Trip necessary) and perhaps tried to put some distance between us by declaring Egypt has no need for intermediary nor guardian.” US Embassy Cairo to Secretary of State, “Subject: Sadat’s November 26 Speech,” November 26, 1977,” Record Group 59, Document 19584 (Washington, D.C.: National Archives). Also see, Haber et al., Year of the Dove, 124-125.

68 Despite his public and private protestations, there is some evidence that Sadat was receptive to the idea of a bilateral settlement if a comprehensive settlement could not be worked out. This information was privately revealed to the Carter administration but for strategic reasons, Sadat and members of the Egyptian delegation dismissed such an offer when it was brought up by Israeli officials in Jerusalem. Telegram from Secretary of State Vance to the White House and the Department of State, “Meeting with President Sadat,” August 2, 1977, in FRUS, 1977-1980, Vol. 8, p. 382. Also see Stein, Heroic Diplomacy, 195, 301 [n. 38]; Carter, Keeping Faith, 310.

69 Fahmy, Negotiating for Peace, 258-260.
is applied to shed light on the way in which Egypt’s President evaluated his available policy options.

**PROSPECT THEORY**

As applied to international relations, prospect theory tells us that leaders operating in a realm of losses will be risk-seekers whereas those operating in a realm of gains will be risk-averse.\(^{70}\) It is worth noting that prospect theory has already been used to explain Sadat’s willingness to offer concessions at the Camp David summit but it has not, as far as the author knows, been applied to shed light on Sadat’s Jerusalem initiative.\(^{71}\) I argue that the risks associated with Sadat’s conciliatory actions were overlooked because the territorial, military, economic, and political situation within Egypt placed him in a realm of losses.

**Sadat’s Reference Point**

After the 1967 war, the Arab confrontation states had each lost a major piece of territory; Syria had lost the strategically important Golan Heights, Jordan had given up historic, eastern Jerusalem and the West Bank, and Egypt had surrendered the Gaza strip and the Sinai Peninsula. While Syria and Egypt waged another war in 1973, this war also ended in defeat because at the end of the conflict, Israel still maintained control over the same territories. The war in 1973 is

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interesting, however, because while it too was another defeat for the Arabs, they hailed it as a political and military “victory.” The successful use of the oil weapon by the Arab Gulf states coupled with the quick, military successes of Egypt's forces during the first few days of the conflict had given President Sadat an enormous popularity boost in Egypt and the Arab World.72

Sadat's territorial reference point had always been the Middle East boundaries as they existed before the 1967 war. The reason for this is that Sadat, in line with prospect theory’s endowment effect, never normalized to the new status quo, or the boundaries that existed after 1967, since he perceived the Arab states’ losses to be illegitimate, especially the occupation of the Sinai. Unlike Israel’s borders with Jordan, the West Bank, and/or the Gaza strip, its pre-1967 borders with Egypt had been the legally demarcated international border between the two countries. Therefore, from the Egyptians’ perspective, they had a moral and legal right to every inch of the Sinai and this entitlement was fair and non-negotiable, precluding Israel’s continued use of the Sinai’s airfields, oilfields, and/or preservation of its settlements and outposts.73

Tuhami told Dayan something to this effect when they had secretly met in Morocco; he stated Sadat “is a soldier who had his land conquered” and for this reason, he is willing “to discuss and argue on all subjects, but not about the sovereignty over his own land.”74 Before and well after his trip to Jerusalem, Sadat had repeatedly argued that he could be flexible on all issues except

72 The ignorance of the Arab public as to how desperate Egypt's military situation had become at the end of the war undoubtedly helped perpetuate the myth that the Arab forces had "beaten" Israel. Nonetheless, it is well-known that Egypt's third army was surrounded and about to be wiped out by Israel's army when a ceasefire was brokered. Another indication of how bad Egypt's military situation had become was the fact that Israeli forces were within 60 miles of Cairo.


on “land and sovereignty.” The fact that Sadat maintained considerable flexibility in later negotiations but had consistently refused to conclude a peace agreement unless the Sinai had been fully restored to Egypt lends further support to this interpretation.

In the absence of any historical evidence to suggest otherwise, it is safe to say that Sadat wanted to remain President. Sadat’s reference point was also based on this aspiration that he would continue in office and so, he framed his choices and options around this expectation. By 1977, Egypt’s deteriorating economy coupled with its relative decline in power seriously eroded Sadat’s political support among the Egyptian public and the Egyptian military, placing him in an unbearable situation in which he perceived inaction, or continuation of the status quo, as an outcome that would threaten the future stability of his regime, respectively.

Kahneman and Tversky aptly point out that individuals engage in risk-seeking behavior when their reference point is well above the status quo. Levy notes that when “the reference point is not congruent with the status quo,” the effects may be destabilizing as individuals pursue actions and/or policies that that would lead them away from their current state. Given the sharp contrast between Sadat’s reference point and the territorial and political status quo as it existed in

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75 Carter, Keeping Faith, 328-329, 339, 351, 360; Quandt, Peace Process, 185, 199-201, 215; Wright, Thirteen Days, 90, 97-8, 207, 224.

76 Carter, Keeping Faith, 339; Quandt, Camp David, 215, 220.

77 While the assumption that Sadat sought to continue as Egypt’s President is largely based on what Sadat did not say versus what he did say, sometimes the “dogs that don’t bark” are what matter most.

78 According to Kahneman and Tversky, “there are situations in which gains and losses are coded relative to an expectation or aspiration level that differs from the status quo...A change of reference point alters the preference order for prospects. In particular, the present theory implies that a negative translation of a choice problem, such as arises from incomplete adaptation to recent losses, increases risk seeking in some situations...This analysis suggests that a person who has not made peace with his losses is likely to accept gambles that would be unacceptable to him otherwise...a failure to adapt to losses or to attain an expected gain induces risk seeking.” Daniel Kahneman and Amos Tversky, "Choices, Values, and Frames," American Psychologist 39, no. 4 (1984): 341-350, see 345.

the Middle East, Sadat perceived his domain to be one of losses and this, in turn, increased his tolerance for taking risks.

Sadat’s Domain

By 1977, Sadat, the hero of 1973, had little to show for his military and diplomatic prowess since Israel still retained control over most of the Sinai. From a reputational standpoint, this was damaging since he had talked about the fruits of “victory” but years later, he could still not deliver them. 80 In his secret meeting with Dayan, Tuhami had reportedly said that “the problem is the returning of the territories. This is the key to peace. This is a question of sovereignty, of national dignity, and Sadat’s survival.”81 He later went on to tell Dayan that “once he [Sadat] receives Begin’s word that he agrees to withdrawal, Sadat’s dignity will be rehabilitated.”82 These passages illustrate that the continuation of the status quo was a painful prospect for Sadat and perhaps one reason he sought to recover Egyptian territory was to restore prestige.

Sadat was also motivated to initiate cooperation with Israel for domestic economic and domestic political reasons. Between 1973 and 1977, Egypt's economy went from bad to worse. By 1977, Egypt’s national debt had climbed to $13.2 billion as a result of high oil prices, defense expenditures (postwar rearmament), corruption, population growth, and most notably, trade imbalances.83 The latter greatly contributed to Egypt’s national debt because the country was simply importing far more than it was actually exporting. In 1976, Egypt spent $5.375 billion on


83 Figures come from “Egypt: Economic Data Sheet,” Hermann Eilts Collection, Boston University.
imports but only exported $2.160 billion, resulting in a trade deficit of roughly $3.215 billion.\textsuperscript{84}

The consistent threat of another regional war forced Egypt to allocate 25\% - 28\% of its annual budget to military expenditures even though the country was strangled by massive debt.\textsuperscript{85} This diverted money that could have otherwise been used to promote economic growth and service and repay Egypt's military and nonmilitary loans to foreign creditors.\textsuperscript{86}

For most Egyptians, the debt problem was not as important as the high inflation accompanying the economic crisis, which increased the cost of living by a staggering 65\% between 1973 and 1976.\textsuperscript{87} Because incomes were relatively stagnant, the increased cost of living generated many hardships for ordinary Egyptians and it lowered their standard of living. While inflation affected the poor the most, they were insulated to some extent by the regime's subsidies on basic goods such as sugar, gas, bread, clothing, etc. but their situation was becoming desperate. The educated and skilled workers of the middle class hardly fared any better. For many years, Egypt's population had been growing at an unprecedented level of around 2.5\% so that around one million people were added annually to what was already the most populous Arab state.\textsuperscript{88} Egypt's unbridled population growth occurred without any concomitant economic expansion and without greater government investment into infrastructure and development.

\textsuperscript{84} Ibid.


projects, leaving hundreds of thousands of educated and skilled young workers without suitable employment. Sadat's \textit{infitah} or open-door policy was supposed to ameliorate the situation and increase the general level of prosperity by attracting foreign investment. The hope was that heavy doses of foreign capital would rejuvenate the country's struggling economy, create a thriving private sector, generate badly needed jobs, and cure many of the country's economic ills. But far from promoting economic growth, \textit{infitah} actually increased the economic and social disparity within the country.\footnote{Mohamed Heikal, a noted Egyptian journalist and onetime Sadat confidante, estimated that only 4\% of the educated men and women could actually find suitable employment after graduation. To escape this situation, a growing number of Egyptians immigrated to nearby countries. See Heikal, \textit{Autumn of Fury}, 88-89. If Heikal was right, then only 16,000 of the roughly 400,000 students enrolled in Egyptian universities would be employed after they completed their studies. The data on student enrollment comes from “Egypt: Economic Data Sheet,” Hermann Eilts Collection, Boston University.}

While the observable indicators show that Egypt faced an economic crisis that led to considerable social and economic dislocations, one could argue that Sadat and other Egyptian political elites did not perceive the situation in this way. In their discussions with American officials, however, it is absolutely clear that the Egyptians were not only well aware of their domestic problems but that they actively sought help from the U.S. to remedy their situation. When Vance visited Cairo on February 17, 1977, Fahmy told him in no uncertain terms that “Egypt has great economic problems” and that its economy is in need of “overhauling.”\footnote{The foreign investment that entered Egypt went into fields such as construction, real estate, tourism, and oil exploration and production, which enriched the entrepreneurs and speculators inside and outside the country but resulted in little growth to the country as a whole and more importantly, little financial benefit to the poor. If anything, \textit{infitah} angered the poor because the immediate beneficiaries of this policy were clearly foreigners and rich Egyptians. Moseley, “Egypt's Economic Crisis,” H7; Marvin Howe, “Egypt is Uneasy as Sadat Juggles Promises of Peace and Prosperity,” \textit{Special to the New York Times}, August 23, 1977, 2; Heikal, \textit{Autumn of Fury}, 85-89; Burrell and Kelidar, \textit{Dilemmas}, 23-24.} Less than two months later, Sadat and his Minister of the Economy, Hamid Sayeh, traveled to

\footnote{Memorandum of Conversation, February 17, 1977, in \textit{FRUS, 1977-1980, Vol. 8}, 58.}
Washington where they briefed Carter and members of his administration on the desperate state of Egypt’s economy.  

Recently declassified material from the Israeli State Archives (or the ISA) shows that the Egyptians also revealed their plight to Israeli officials. In his visit to Jerusalem, Sadat privately confided in Prime Minister Begin, repeatedly telling him “our economic situation is horrible” and attributing this crisis partly due to Egypt’s population explosion. 93 According to Begin’s later report to the Israeli Cabinet, Sadat had mentioned how Egypt “could not afford another war, mostly because of socio-economic reasons.”94 In the context of this discussion, Sadat had also complained about the level of military expenditures, telling Begin “we don’t have money for that.”95 Boutros Boutros Ghali, Egypt’s acting foreign minister (after Fahmy resigned), repeated the same points when he accompanied Sadat on his trip. In a private conversation with Israel’s Defense Minister, Ezer Weizman, and Israel’s Deputy Prime Minister, Yigal Yadin, he said, 

I concentrated in what I said on the effect the population explosion had had on the economic and social conditions in Egypt and the danger of not taking this into consideration in planning for the future. I moved from this explanation to Egypt’s need for lasting peace so that it could confront the urgent economic and social issues.96

92 In contrast to Fahmy’s earlier discussion with Vance, the Carter-Sadat meeting featured a more extensive discussion about Egypt’s economic woes. Speaking on behalf of the Egyptian delegation, Egypt’s Minister of the Economy, Hamid Sayeh, described to Carter and other members of the U.S. administration the problems Egypt confronted as it tried to both reduce inflation and trim its deficit. The fact that Sadat allowed his Minister to lead part of this high-profile meeting illustrates the importance he must have attached to these matters. See Memorandum of Conversation, “Subject: President’s Meeting with President Anwar Sadat of Egypt,” April 5, 1977, FRUS, 1977-1980, Vol. 8, 181-184.


94 Ibid.

95 Ibid.

96 Boutros Boutros Ghali Papers, November 20, 1977, box 4, folder 4, 47-8, Hoover Institution Library and Archives.
These general statements illustrate not only that Sadat and members of his inner circle assessed the economic situation correctly but that they anticipated it would get worse in the near future.97

From the Egyptians’ perspective, this was problematic because if the economic situation continued to deteriorate, then this could lead to the type of domestic turmoil the country experienced at the start of the year. In January 1977, the regime sought a loan from the IMF but to qualify for this financial package, the country had to reduce state expenditures and so, Sadat suddenly removed subsidies on two dozen basic commodities. Riots immediately erupted across the country and while this anger was triggered by the regime’s decision to implement austerity measures, the underlying cause was Sadat’s failure to address Egypt’s worsening economic crisis.98 The tens of thousands of people who rioted nationwide in cities like Cairo and Alexandria were not just upset with the policies of the regime, their anti-Sadat slogans and chants revealed they were unhappy with a regime they perceived to be out of touch with reality.99 To reduce the fallout from this dramatic event, Sadat asked the military to enforce martial law and impose a curfew, something that had not been done since the 1952 revolution. When Sadat asked Commander-in-Chief and War Minister, General Abdel Ghani el-Gamasy, to disperse the protestors, Gamasy refused to execute this order unless Sadat restored the subsidies. Absolutely powerless to stop the restive crowds, Sadat reluctantly agreed to this condition and

97 Statements that were made by Ismail Fahmy also lend support to the view that Egypt’s domestic economic problems were acute. See Fahmy, Negotiating for Peace, 257-258.


99 These people suddenly presented a direct challenge to the regime because they had successfully rallied urban workers, policemen, civilian authorities, and state employees to their side. Ibid.; Handel, Diplomacy of Surprise, 323.
so, while the military still supported Sadat, the riots demonstrated that the armed forces would not blindly defend the regime, particularly in confrontations against ordinary Egyptians.\(^{100}\)

Statements by political commentators, journalists, and members of Sadat's inner circle all confirm that Sadat faced a serious political crisis by 1977.\(^{101}\) The icing on the cake is that Sadat’s own assessment of the situation fits that of a leader who perceived his environment as one of certain losses. In the aftermath of the January riots, Sadat reportedly told Tuhami that an “immediate settlement of the Arab-Israeli conflict was necessary to reduce his regime’s vulnerability.”\(^{102}\) So, Sadat was very much aware that not only was his situation precarious, but that the continuation of the status quo threatened his very survival.\(^{103}\) According to William Quandt, a member of the U.S. National Security Council, Sadat's desire to quickly resolve the Arab-Israeli conflict "must have been due in part to his difficult domestic situation as reflected earlier in the year by riots, student strikes,..."\(^{104}\) The implication is that there was a strong link between Egypt's foreign policy objectives and its domestic politics such that Sadat willingly gambled on peace to preserve his regime.\(^{105}\)

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\(^{100}\) Heikal, *Autumn of Fury*, 90-92. In the wake of the riots, Sadat sought to rectify the situation by repressing all those individuals and groups that posed a threat to his regime.


\(^{102}\) Indyk, *To the Ends of the Earth*, 10, 56 [n. 14].

\(^{103}\) It has also been said that Sadat was personally disturbed by just how much anger existed within Egyptian society and the degree to which this resentment was directed against his regime. According to Mohamed Heikal, “He was bitterly hurt by what he saw as his rejection by the people. He felt that his part in the October War was forgotten, the image of the national leader, the father of his people, which he had tried to project to the world, had been destroyed in a matter of hours.....he felt himself spurned and isolated, and almost in despair.” Heikal, *Autumn of Fury*, 93.

\(^{104}\) Quandt, *Camp David*, 51 [n. 36].

\(^{105}\) Heikal, *Autumn of Fury*, 93; Friedlander, *Sadat and Begin*, 43-44. For more information on the connection between Egypt's foreign policy and its domestic politics, see Stein, "The Political Economy of Security Agreements,” 77-103.
One other political factor that increased Sadat’s propensity for taking risks was the growing discontent within the Egyptian military. Sadat’s inability to secure adequate weapons and spare parts for his military coupled with the growing power imbalance between Egypt and Israel left the military establishment utterly dissatisfied with the continuation of the status quo, or no war-no peace.106

By 1977, the balance of power in the region had shifted decisively in Israel’s favor since Egypt’s political moves to align itself more closely with the U.S. had disrupted its relationship with its main arms supplier, the Soviet Union.107 By refusing to ship arms and spare parts to Egypt, the Soviets prevented Egypt from replacing losses sustained during the October war, leaving much of Egypt’s advanced weaponry, including MIG fighters, radar installations, and air defense systems, inoperable.108 At the same time, Israel had since 1973 increased its defense expenditures and received greater arms shipments from the United States. This growing power imbalance was clearly understood by Egypt’s decision-makers who believed that the situation now foreclosed any military solution.109 In repeated interactions with Eilts, General Gamasy admitted privately that if Egypt went to war with Israel, “he was under no illusion that the result would be anything other than defeat, this time perhaps more disastrous than on previous


109 See Fahmy, Negotiating for Peace, 180, 185; Riad, The Struggle for Peace, 303-4.
occasions.” The historical evidence shows that Sadat also shared this assessment; he recognized that Israel’s military superiority over Egypt had dramatically increased and would continue well into the future, precluding the use and/or credible threatening of military force to recover territory from Israel.

The weakening of the armed forces not only restricted Sadat’s freedom to maneuver but it more importantly, strained his relationship with the military, the most powerful actor in Egyptian politics. Tasked with protecting the country against external threats (e.g., Israel, radical Arab states like Muammar Qaddafi’s Libya), the military sought to maintain its state of readiness by modernizing its armed forces and acquiring the parts necessary to repair and service existing war material. After the Soviet Union cut off Egypt’s supply of weapons, it became increasingly difficult for Sadat to maintain morale and satisfy his general’s appetite for new hardware. Fahmy explained the potential danger of this situation to Vance in February 1977, telling him that in a developing country like Egypt, pacifying the military “is a matter of life and death...” While “the army was not posing a problem now,” Fahmy went on to say “we don’t want it to develop

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111 Sadat told an American Congressional Delegation “while the Soviets have had an arms embargo against Egypt, Israel has received ‘heaps and heaps’ of most sophisticated arms from the U.S. According to a recent Pentagon estimate, the Israeli military capability is not 160 Percent of what it was in October 1973 and Israel can ‘crush our bones in no time at all.’” US Embassy Cairo, “Congressional Delegation Price Meeting with Sadat,” November 13, 1977, Record Group 59, Document 18863 (Washington, D.C.: National Archives), 2.

112 Libya and Egypt had border skirmishes in 1977. So bad was the relationship that not only was the threat of open war real but both sides had been engaged in a clandestine war against the other across Africa and within the other’s country. In fact, Qaddafi had in fact attempted to assassinate Egyptian and American officials operating inside of Egypt.

113 Memorandum of Conversation, February 17, 1977, in FRUS, 1977-1980, Vol. 8, 58. Fahmy actually went insofar as to suggest that the Soviet Union’s decision to withhold arms deliveries to Egypt was motivated by this desire to “to squeeze the army and create discontent” within the armed forces.
into one.” 114 These poignant comments attracted Vance’s attention because when he sent a telegram back to the state department, he noted how “Fahmy stressed at length the problem posed for Sadat by the cut-off of Soviet arms supplies, putting this in the context of Sadat’s need to retain support of the army if he was to pursue his peace policies successfully.”115

Months later, the Policy Review Committee of the National Security Council met to discuss a range of topics relating to the Middle East, including Egyptian requests for U.S. arms.116 Because of the continuation of the Arab-Israeli conflict, the officials agreed that the political circumstances made it an inauspicious time to sell lethal military equipment to Egypt but Harold Brown, U.S. Secretary of Defense, noted that “even if Sadat understands [the U.S. refusal to provide arms], he has political problems with his military.”117 Sadat’s inability to mollify the military raised the possibility that it would no longer support his regime. While the military supported the peace process as it would reduce the likelihood of a conflict for which Egypt was ill-prepared to fight, the prospects for peace seemed remote in the fall of 1977.118

114 Ibid.


117 Minutes of a Policy Review Committee Meeting, “Subject: Middle East,” June 10, 1977, in FRUS, 1977-1980, Vol. 8, 301. In response to Brown’s statement, U.S. National Security Advisor, Zbigniew Brzezinski, said Sadat’s situation is dependent on the progress towards peace; that is, “if we are moving with determination or whether there is a stalemate. If the latter, his situation could become desperate.” Ibid.

How Sadat Framed His Choices

Sadat’s domain was one of losses since Egypt had failed to obtain the bulk of the Sinai Peninsula either militarily through the 1973 war or diplomatically through the two U.S.-brokered Sinai disengagement agreements. For years, Sadat had promised that Egypt’s military, territorial, and economic situation would improve as a result of the “Arab victory,” however, it was increasingly clear to most Egyptians that little had in fact changed by 1977. Unable to satisfy the people’s high expectations, Sadat’s reputation was hurt by the continuation of the status quo. Statements by Sadat and members of his inner circle also indicate that they understood that the economic conditions were not only deteriorating but that that this downward spiral would continue into the future since it was caused by a myriad of factors, many of which were immutable in the short term (i.e. Egypt’s population explosion). The food riots of 1977 reinforced the perception that without any corrective action, the country’s worsening economic conditions would generate political turmoil. The Egyptian military’s guarded response to the riots coupled with its discontent to Sadat’s inability to procure weapons for the armed forces constituted another possible, though less immediate, threat to Sadat’s regime.

Framing his choices from a domain of losses, Sadat viewed inaction as something that would lead to a certain loss and so, to avoid such an outcome, he quickly sought to negotiate peace with Israel. Concluding peace with Israel was a way for Sadat to recover the Sinai, restore prestige, reduce state expenditures, and cement Egypt’s strategic alliance with the U.S. so that he could obtain the financial and military resources necessary to pacify the public and the military, respectively. It offered Sadat a face-saving way to restore the old territorial status quo without waging another unsuccessful war and once peace was concluded, it would also enable him to
allocate more funds for development instead of on defense.\textsuperscript{119} As a reward for negotiating peace with Israel and realigning Egypt’s geopolitical interests with the U.S., it was believed the Carter administration would furnish Egypt’s military\textsuperscript{120} with advanced weaponry and provide it with a Marshall Plan-like option to rebuild its shattered economy.\textsuperscript{121}

Sadat’s preference for peace and his urgency to achieve a settlement drew the attention of the Carter administration. In his first tour of Egypt as Secretary of State, Vance noted in February 1977 how “…the Egyptians reflect a sense of urgency about getting the process [peace process] started and having early, visible activity to point to.”\textsuperscript{122} When Vance again visited Egypt six months later, he sent a telegram back to the White House in which he noted how Sadat felt that “the time was ripe and we must achieve peace very soon. Time is running out…”\textsuperscript{123} Philip Habib, U.S. Undersecretary of State for Political Affairs, shared the exact same view as

\textsuperscript{119} In an interview with \textit{Time Magazine} shortly after his Jerusalem visit, Sadat was asked what impact peace would have on Egypt’s economy. He emphatically responded: “Enormous! Enormous! Do you know that there are two big powers in the world now that have standing armies of 700,000? The U.S. and the Soviet Union. And Anwar Sadat also has 700,000! Can you imagine? For sure, the impact on our economy, on our reconstruction, on our rebuilding will be tremendous. Tremendous…” \textit{Time Magazine}, "Anwar Sadat: Man of the Year," January 2, 1978, 13-14. The important nexus between peace and economic growth was something that was widely recognized by Egyptian officials. In an interview given to a German newspaper (\textit{the Hannover Zeitung}), Dr. Osama el-Baz, Sadat’s state secretary for foreign affairs, said “The Arabs have much to gain by peace, economically, politically, and culturally. Why should we fight another war? Forty percent of our national income must be invested in our army annually. However, we want to educate our people better, we want to build schools, universities, hospitals, apartments, and factories. We want to improve the quality of life in this region. In order to do that we need peace, a true peace with all our neighbors. A new war would not only cause uncountable loss of life, it would also mean the useless expenditure of great sums of money. See “US Embassy Bonn, “Interview with Egyptian Foreign Minister Fahmi,” November 8, 1977, Record Group 59, Document 18565 (Washington, D.C.: National Archives), 5-6.

\textsuperscript{120} In a discussion with Carter about his desire to obtain U.S.-made weapons such as the F5E fighter jet, Sadat said “the main issue is peace, to try to concentrate on peace this year [1977]. That will solve my problems, because then it will be easier to get what I need.” See Memorandum of Conversation, “Subject: President’s Meeting with President Anwar Sadat of Egypt,” April 5, 1977, in \textit{FRUS, 1977-1980, Vol. 8}, 185.


\textsuperscript{123} Telegram from Secretary of State Vance to the White House and the Department of State, “Meeting with President Sadat,” August 2, 1977, in \textit{FRUS, 1977-1980, Vol. 8}, 381.
Vance, his boss at the State Department. In a briefing he provided to Treasury Secretary Michael Blumenthal before the latter’s departure to Egypt, Habib told Blumenthal, “…the peace process must bear fruit within the next five to six months or he [Sadat] will be in serious trouble.”\textsuperscript{124}

One of the predictions of prospect theory is that a leader will take great risks to minimize \textit{certain} future losses. Confronting a domestic situation that was bad and that looked as if it was only going to get worse, the certainty and immediacy of this outcome reinforced Sadat’s willingness to take risks for peace. As mentioned earlier, some Middle East scholars have argued that Sadat’s moves were motivated by domestic considerations and as such, were driven by rational self-interest but such a situationalist explanation suffers from two serious shortcomings. First, it fails to shed light as to why Sadat dismissed less costly alternative options to achieve the same objective. Second, explaining Sadat’s actions as something motivated by domestic economic and/or domestic political reasons fails to account for the fact that Sadat’s gamble could actually backfire. Given Sadat’s precarious position within the country, one can argue that it was against Sadat’s interests to travel to Jerusalem.\textsuperscript{125}

The way in which Sadat pursued peace therefore defies the logic of what is considered "rational" under standard models of expected utility. By visiting Jerusalem and negotiating publicly and directly with Israeli officials, Sadat risked incurring large but uncertain losses to avert what was by comparison moderate but certain losses.\textsuperscript{126} This fits the prediction of the \textit{certainty effect}, namely that individuals will take "a chance on a larger loss that is merely


\textsuperscript{125} Telhami and Lorenz both make these same points in their books. See Telhami, \textit{Power and Leadership}, 9-10; Lorenz, \textit{Egypt and the Arabs}, 81-83.

\textsuperscript{126} Stein, "International Cooperation and Loss Avoidance," 222-223.
probable rather than face a smaller loss that is certain..." He ultimately chose to avoid the immediate, certain losses resulting from the continuation of the status quo, or the "no war, no peace" situation, by taking a large gamble and he did this in spite of the fact that such a gamble could potentially lead to even greater losses.

While prospect theory explains Sadat’s propensity to accept risks, it does not help us understand his exact motivations for traveling to Israel and/or beginning direct talks with Begin in Jerusalem, the most highly contested city in the Arab-Israeli conflict. In the next section, I argue that Sadat’s visit as well the as costliness and symbolism of his actions such as his speech before the Knesset and his visit to Yad Vashem and the Tomb of the Unknown Soldier reflect the behavior of a leader exercising security dilemma sensibility.

SECURITY DILEMMA SENSIBILITY: OVERCOMING MISTRUST

In longstanding rivalries, mutual fear and suspicion renders it difficult for any single party to contemplate initiating conciliation through small or modest steps, let alone through bold gestures. Nonetheless, understanding that rivals may be motivated by fear instead of greed, or a lust for more power, helps decision-makers empathize with their enemies, creating a state-of-mind where they may be able to pursue a strategy of reassurance and exercise what Booth and Wheeler call security dilemma sensibility. As applied to our case-study, we see that Sadat had been mindful of Israel’s insecurity and had understood the way in which mistrust fostered misperceptions and misunderstandings between Egypt and Israel, imposing what he often referred to as a “psychological barrier” to resolving the Arab-Israeli conflict. This was not

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simply an awareness that mistrust existed but rather it reflected a fundamental understanding that this problem was fueled by Israel’s deep-rooted fears and suspicions of Egypt’s intentions. Believing these intangible forces presented a “psychological barrier” to bilateral talks, Sadat traveled to Jerusalem to unequivocally reassure the Jewish state that Egypt was sincere about its desire for peace.

The timing of the bold gesture can be explained not by a change in Sadat’s beliefs about Israel’s intentions but by a strategic change in diplomatic tactics. Relying on the U.S. to provide Israel with assurances and guarantees (prior to November 1977), Sadat felt that with American involvement, Arab-Israeli negotiations could be conducted without trust-building exercises. This attitude changed once Sadat decided to forego multilateral diplomacy in favor of direct talks since he realized that without an intermediary, Egypt would need to reduce Israel’s fears and build confidence between the parties.

While this trust-building argument has already been made in the literature, previous studies failed to explain why Sadat by-passed other, less costly alternatives to reassure Israel and they could not account for the timing, the size, and the symbolism of Sadat’s conciliatory gesture. These earlier studies were also weakly supported as they relied merely on historical secondary sources (i.e. autobiographies, memoirs) and open source material (i.e. interviews, public statements) to validate their claims. Given that decision-makers have incentives to misrepresent the truth in their personal and public accounts of major foreign policy decisions, this type of evidence is often unreliable. To obtain an unvarnished understanding of Sadat’s true motivations, I examine recently declassified primary documents from the U.S. and Israel to see

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what Sadat and other Egyptian officials actually said in private at the time they were making decisions.


Sadat sought a diplomatic solution to the Arab-Israeli conflict but astutely recognized that the level of mistrust was just too high between Israel and its Arab neighbors to facilitate any meaningful negotiations. He had repeatedly stressed this point since 1973 and he did so once again in a discussion with Vance on August 1, 1977, months before he embarked on his peace offensive. Quandt notes how Sadat had told the Secretary of State how “Egypt and Israel were incapable of reaching anything together” simply because “too much distrust existed on both sides.”

Sadat told Vance that these mutual fears and suspicions were “only quite natural after 29 years, four wars, and so much violence.” Admitting that mistrust presented a veritable obstacle to peace, Sadat’s comment to Vance is noteworthy because political leaders often overlook the way in which psychological factors affect interstate relations.

Sadat’s ability to empathize with his rival was facilitated by the discussions he held with members of the Carter administration who provided reliable information on the Israeli perspective and who explained how Egypt’s actions – particularly its unwillingness to meet with Israeli officials – were partially responsible for driving the cycle of mistrust. As Carter reportedly told Sadat during their meeting in the spring of 1977, the Israelis mistrust Egypt because they take the fact that “you refuse to meet with them” as a sign that “you are not serious

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130 Quandt, *Camp David*, 88.

about peace.” Whether due to his own intuition or to the information he received from the Carter administration, Sadat understood that Israel’s mistrust had its origins in the violence and hostility of the Arab-Israeli conflict and in the Arab states’ adamant refusal to negotiate publicly and directly with the Jewish state.

While the Arab states’ actions contributed to mistrust, Sadat claimed that Israel’s feeling of insecurity was also caused by her own “psychological complexes.” In a meeting with Eilts in 1975, Sadat said that the “Israelis were victims of their own psychological complexes. Even if they are heavily armed, they are paranoid on security.” In other words, there was something unique about the Israeli psyche that made its decision-makers less likely to trust other states, regardless of the circumstances. This view was held by other Egyptian officials like Boutros Ghali who noted “that doubt and doubting are part of the Jewish personality as a result of the tragedies and persecution that the Jewish people have known throughout history.” Because they had endured so many hardships, Ghali concludes that “the Jews want to be reassured every day and every hour.”

Sadat recognized well before November 1977 that Israel was fearful of its Arab neighbors. Realizing that Israel’s actions and statements may have been motivated by fear rather than greed (or aggression) enabled Sadat to empathize with his adversary and exercise security dilemma sensibility. For instance, when negotiations to conclude a Second Egyptian-Israeli

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132 This quote comes from a private conversation between noted Egyptian journalist and newspaper columnist, Ahmed Bahaa al-Din, and President Sadat days after the latter returned to Egypt from Jerusalem. See Ahmed Bahaa al-Din, *Muhawarati ma’a al-Sadat [My Dialogues with Sadat]* (Cairo: Dar al-Helal, 1987), 157.


134 Boutros Boutros Ghali Papers, November 20, 1977, box 4, folder 4, 48, Hoover Institution Library and Archives.

135 *Ibid.* It has been argued that Boutros Ghali developed such a deep understanding of the history of the Jewish people since he had married Leah Nadler, a Jewish woman whose family had settled in British-occupied Egypt after fleeing the anti-Semitic persecution of Romania. For more on this point, see Haber et al., *Year of the Dove*, 58.
Disengagement Agreement reached a complete standstill in March 1975, Sadat noted to Eilts that “what is needed, more than ever, at this difficult time is patience, perseverance, and understanding – a greater understanding of both sides of the other party’s point of view- and renewed efforts.” At a time when some Egyptian Generals were counseling mobilization and reversion to a war-time posture, Sadat’s statement illustrates the cognitive complexity of a leader who sought to better understand his adversary’s point of view.

Convinced that Israel’s intransigence during Kissinger’s shuttle diplomacy was partially triggered by fear, Sadat therefore attempted to reassure rather than threaten his rival. After March 1975, Sadat made a series of conciliatory gestures to denote Egypt’s turn away from war and its focus on development and reconstruction; he reopened the Suez Canal in June 1975, continued to rebuild the devastated Canal Zone cities (such as Ismailia, Port Said, and Suez), and finally, relocated Egyptian refugees back into these once deserted cities. By reopening a busy commercial waterway and inserting thousands of Egyptian civilians in between the west and east banks of the Suez Canal, Sadat made it more difficult for Egypt to launch a surprise attack against Israel. While these moves were significant, they were reversible and ambiguous enough to accommodate multiple interpretations and were neither novel nor unprecedented since


137 Ibid.

138 At around the same time, Sadat returned the bodies of 39 Israeli soldiers without any quid pro quo. Quandt, Peace Process, 165-66.

139 The intent of these actions was conveyed by an Egyptian official Simcha Ehrlich, Israel’s Finance Minister, when Sadat and members of his delegation held talks with Israel’s government. According to Ehrlich, “he told me that they rebuilt the canal cities at the expense of more than two billion dollars and raised the population to 20 percent more than it was before. He said ‘we don’t want to destroy these cities again.’” “Stenographic Record of a Government Meeting” (in Hebrew), November 24, 1977, ISA/A/4270/1, p. 29, retrieved from http://www.archives.gov.il/NR/rdonlyres/B6777C2B-8675-4849-8472-71F6C4791661/0/Egypt36.pdf.
they did not deviate from the parameters of the Arab bargaining position – no peace and
negotiation with Israel and no recognition of the Jewish state.

And so, despite the fact that these conciliatory acts were quite notable, they did not
compare in size and scope to those that would later accompany Sadat’s Jerusalem Initiative. The
way in which Sadat reassured Israel changed from 1974 to 1977 and while there are many
plausible explanations to account for this, I argue that it is largely due to the fact that Sadat
suddenly adopted a different strategy on how to negotiate a peace agreement. Sadat initially
believed that a trusted intermediary such as the U.S. was needed to engage in the peace process
and help Egypt and Israel resolve their longstanding conflict since both parties had little, if any,
trust in the other. It is for this reason Sadat often claimed that “99 percent of the cards” in the
Middle East were in American hands; he said,

> no one else except the United States can play this role, namely, that of mediator between
two sides that harbor intense hate for one another – a gulf of blood, violence, and
massacres…Hence my assertion that the United States holds 99 percent of the cards in
this game.140

Sadat up until the fall of 1977 pinned his hopes for peace on U.S. mediation, relying on the
Carter administration to bridge the differences between the disputants. He reasoned that if the
U.S. could apply diplomatic pressure and provide third-party guarantees to a fearful Israel, then,
despite the lack of trust between the two parties, she would be more inclined to negotiate with
Egypt. Under these circumstances, Sadat therefore reassured Israel through smaller gestures
since the establishment of trust was simply not needed to resolve the Arab-Israeli conflict.

While Sadat initially relied on the U.S. to reach a peaceful settlement, he was determined
by the end of the year to circumvent the Carter administration’s efforts to reconvene the Geneva

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140 Sadat, *In Search of Identity*, 293.
Conference. Frustrated by the pace and procedural obstacles of reaching Geneva, Sadat sought to seize the diplomatic initiative and accelerate the peace process and one way to do so, from Sadat’s perspective, was to reduce his country’s dependence on an intermediary and negotiate directly with Israel. The start of face-to-face talks not only diminished the role of the United States over the peace process but it more importantly led to a fundamental transformation in Egypt’s diplomatic calculus on how to negotiate peace with the Jewish state. After thirty years of hostility, Egypt and Israel regarded each other with mutual fear and suspicion and so, without the benefit of U.S. mediation, bilateral negotiations would fail due to the high level of mistrust between the two parties. To avert such an outcome, Sadat initiated conciliation through a bold gesture to overcome what he referred to as the “psychological barrier, or “the huge wall of suspicion, fear, hate, and misunderstanding,” that made each side doubt and misinterpret the intentions of the other.\footnote{Sadat, In Search of Identity, 303. In his speech before the Knesset on November 20th, Sadat defined the psychological barrier as “a barrier made up of suspicion; a barrier of animosity; a barrier of fear of deception, a barrier of doubt about any action or decision; a barrier of erroneous caution interpretation of every event or statement. This psychological barrier is what I meant when I said in official statements that it constitutes seventy percent of the problem.” See Speeches and Interviews of President Anwar El Sadat, July-December 1977, Volume VII, Part 2 (Cairo: Arab Republic of Egypt, State Information Service, 1979), 470-471.} He reasoned that if these deeply entrenched barriers could be removed, then the substantive issues could more easily be resolved since 70 percent of the Arab-Israeli conflict, as Sadat liked to say, was simply psychological.

To break through these barriers, Sadat traveled to Jerusalem, accepting considerable personal and political risks to fully convince Israel’s citizens and decision-makers that Egypt, the most powerful and populous Arab state, was indeed ready to make peace. At a time when Arab leaders threatened Israel and refused to publicly sit down and talk face-to-face with her officials, the timing, location, and symbolic nature of his reassurance made it an unmistakable, grand gesture of peace.
Reassuring Israel: Anwar Sadat, In His Own Words

While the psychological argument presented above has received little attention, there is a treasure trove of evidence to support this interpretation of Sadat’s actions. In his autobiography, Sadat presents a detailed account of how the peace process by the end of 1977 had reached a stand-still and the “root cause was none other than...the psychological barrier.”\textsuperscript{142} Attributing the failure to reconvene the Geneva Conference to these obstacles, Sadat said that a “new approach” was needed to help the Arabs and Israelis “pull down the barrier of mistrust” and “break out of the vicious circle and avert the blind alley of the past.”\textsuperscript{143} While similar arguments were made by Sadat in the months and years after his peace initiative, Sadat’s personal recollection may not be accurate and may in fact be misleading because leaders have an incentive to provide a self-serving account of important events.\textsuperscript{144} And so, to better ascertain the motivations underlying Sadat’s actions, the rest of this section examines Sadat’s speeches, public statements, interviews, and private meetings to see what Sadat said at the time. While making an inference about motivations, a construct that cannot be directly observed or measured, is difficult, I accomplish this task by looking for patterns in the source material that reveal continuities in the way Sadat rationalized his initiative.

In November 1977, Sadat made a series of important speeches in which he not only discussed the psychological barriers and their negative effects on the Arab-Israeli conflict but more importantly, he presented his bold initiatives as a vigorous response to remove or destroy these barriers. On November 21\textsuperscript{st}, a day after delivering his speech in front of Israel’s Knesset,

\textsuperscript{142} Sadat, \textit{In Search of Identity}, 302.

\textsuperscript{143} \textit{Ibid}, 303-304.

\textsuperscript{144} On June 4, 1979, Israel’s Foreign Minister Moshe Dayan met with Sadat and during this meeting, Sadat told him that “the principle reason for my decision [to visit Jerusalem] was the one I have told one. I said to myself ‘Israel has security problems, and she is sheltering behind them, and demanding direct, face-to-face negotiations. Very well, I will go myself, meet directly and alone – I and Israel.’” Dayan, \textit{Breakthrough}, 87-88.
Sadat held a meeting with the various parties that made up Israel’s coalition government and he issued a short statement that summarized what he hoped to accomplish by visiting Jerusalem. He said that

Our target [today] is to end or bring down the great barrier that has always separated us and has built distrust, has built bitterness, has built hatred. My main aim...was to end this state of distrust between us and as I said yesterday when I was addressing you in the plenary session that in the past yes, we didn’t agree to your being here but now I came here to tell you that we agree. ..What is the main issue now? It should be security for Israel. I quite agree with you...we agree...we are ready and we have no objection to whatever measures that can be agreed upon to provide you will full security.145

In the first part of this passage, Sadat clearly identifies the purpose of his trip as a way to combat the psychological barriers that have “built distrust” and “hatred”, lending some support to our argument. The second part of this passage provides evidence of Sadat exercising security dilemma sensibility; Egypt’s President explicitly reassures Israel’s Knesset members, restating what he had said a day earlier that his country is not only ready to live peacefully with Israel but is also ready to agree to measures to ensure her “full security.”146

In a series of interviews given to western media outlets prior to his Jerusalem initiative, Sadat sought to explain his otherwise puzzling actions and statements to a baffled international audience and he did so by citing the need to break through the psychological barriers.147


146 This was a restatement of the more formal reassurance Sadat had provided a day earlier in his November 20th address to the Knesset where he stated “today we agree to live with you in permanent peace and justice. Israel has become an accomplished fact recognized by the whole world and the superpowers. We welcome you to live among us in peace and security.” Time Magazine, "Anwar Sadat: Architect Of a New Mideast with one stunning stroke he designed a daring approach to peace," January 2, 1978, 11.

147 On the plane flight to Jerusalem, Sadat told TIME Cairo Bureau Chief Wilton Wynn that “what I want from this visit is that the wall created between us and Israel, the psychological wall, be knocked down.” Time Magazine, "Anwar Sadat: Architect Of a New Mideast with one stunning stroke he designed a daring approach to peace," January 2, 1978, 11. In an interview with Canadian television on November 16, 1977, when asked what he hoped to achieve by visiting Jerusalem, Sadat responded by saying “My real aim, really, from this visit, is that, as I told you, I
after his visit, he continued to reiterate the same theme in his many other public appearances. In an interview with the West German magazine Der Spiegel, Sadat in unambiguous terms laid out the logic behind his visit; the following is an excerpt from this interview,

SADAT: All I wanted to achieve with that visit was the following: A psychological wall existed between us and Israel for 30 years. While in the process of dealing with preparations for Geneva, I found that we were about to again get into the old endless circle of Israel’s doubting our intentions 100 percent and we doubting Israel’s 100 percent. What good are negotiations if both sides mistrust each other? That is the first point...

INTERVIEWER: But your visit established the first direct contact between an Arab government and Israel. So far the Arabs doggedly refused to establish such a contact. So it was another concession made in advance.

SADAT: That is the second point. Why should somebody else by the advocate of a cause? Why should the United States or the Soviet Union negotiate instead of me? I am in a good position to lead the negotiations myself. All these considerations were behind my visit.

The importance of this exchange is that Sadat not only emphasizes the need to reduce mistrust but he outlines a new approach to the peace process whereby Egypt reduces its reliance on third-parties by negotiating directly with Israel. It seems that Sadat’s decision to reassure Israel was linked to his strategic decision to seize the diplomatic initiative and pursue bilateral instead of multilateral negotiations. As Sadat himself conceded, his moves had now placed him “in a good

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148 In an interview with ABC television on November 28, 1977, Sadat said, in describing the reason for his visit to Jerusalem, “my main aim was let us bring down this barrier of psychological problems and difficulties and differences.” Ibid, 528.

position to lead negotiations”\textsuperscript{150} because after the visit, “the results were clear …we have reached political maturity and we no longer need a mediator between us.”\textsuperscript{151}

While it could be argued that Sadat’s explanation was meant to appease a western audience that had up until 1977 viewed the Arab world as unalterably aggressive, Sadat’s interviews at home in Egypt and other parts of the Arab world belie such a notion. In these interviews, Sadat had defended his actions as something necessary to overcome years of mistrust, thereby echoing the exact same points he had made to western media outlets.\textsuperscript{152} Given that displaying any public sensitivity to Israel’s fears was perceived as weakness and treacherous in the Arab world, Sadat’s statements were incredibly costly for an Arab leader to make. It stands to reason that Sadat would not have provided such a justification unless there had been some measure of truth to it.

Because leaders often have an incentive to misrepresent their motives in their public statements and interviews, this type of open source material needs to be corroborated with archival evidence. And so, I examine what Sadat said in his private communications with Egyptian, American, and Israeli officials as this gives us an undistorted and unbiased view into the motivations underlying Sadat’s visit. Ismail Fahmy wrote in his memoirs that “he never

\textsuperscript{150} Ibid.

\textsuperscript{151} “October Magazine Publishes As-Sadat Interview,” \textit{October Magazine} (Arabic), December 11, 1977, FBIS Daily Reports, Middle East and North Africa (FBIS-MEA-77-239).

\textsuperscript{152}“The main aim of my visit. This was to remove the barriers of doubt, suspicion, and bitterness, to remove the so-called psychological barrier between us.” See “As-Sadat Interviewed on Peace Initiative, Other Topics by Tunisian Radio-TV,” Tunisian Radio-TV, December 4, 1977, FBIS Daily Reports, Middle East and North Africa (FBIS-MEA-77-234); “October Magazine Publishes As-Sadat Interview,” \textit{October Magazine} (Arabic), December 11, 1977, FBIS Daily Reports, Middle East and North Africa (FBIS-MEA-77-239). Mohamed Heikal, a prominent Egyptian journalist and historian, refers to the “constant talk” about the “psychological factor” and describes it as an important factor influencing Sadat’s decision-making. See Mohamed Heikal, \textit{Hadith Al-Mobadara} (The Talk of the Initiative)(Beirut: Dar al-Qadaya, 1978).
heard anything from Sadat about the so-called theory of the ‘psychological barrier.’”

He asserts that Sadat cleverly appropriated this arcane argument from others to later “justify his trip” and “enhance his prestige as a world leader.”

Benny Morris, an Israeli historian who has written an authoritative account of the Arab-Israeli conflict, makes the same point; he writes that the “psychological barrier” argument was “Sadat’s own postfactum explanation of his decision to fly to Jerusalem.”

The primary evidence, however, does not support either Fahmy’s or Morris’s account.

Sadat had long recognized that mistrust was very much at the heart of the Middle East conflict and so, Sadat’s sudden decision to reassure Israel would not necessarily be out of place given his understanding of its insecurity. In his private meetings with officials from the U.S. and other Arab states (such as Jordan and Syria), Sadat before, during, and after his trip had justified his actions by citing the need to overcome the psychological barrier. The available archival material provides the closest thing possible to a “smoking gun” that helps us establish a link between Sadat’s professed desire to build trust and his 1977 peace initiative.

Prior to visiting Jerusalem, Sadat held discussions with a number of high-profile Americans and in these meetings, he explained what he hoped to accomplish by embarking on such a historic, fateful mission. Speaking to a congressional delegation led by House Majority Leader James C. Wright, Sadat reaffirmed what he had often told the media, namely that that “70 percent of the problem is psychological and 30 percent substance.”

The purpose of his visit, as explained by Sadat, was to therefore address the psychological aspects of the conflict so that

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153 Fahmy, Negotiating for Peace, 279.

154 Ibid, 279.

155 Morris, Righteous Victims, 448.

the parties could then engage in substantive discussions with one another. Sadat later reiterated this point in a meeting he held with Ambassador Eilts on the morning of November 19th, the same day he flew to Jerusalem. In a message to the Secretary of State and to the White House, Eilts summarizes one of his conversations with Sadat, saying that

The primary purpose of the visit, Sadat asserted, is to try to break down the psychological barrier that has for so long divided the Arabs and Israelis. He recalled that he has often said that 70 percent of the problem is psychological. If his visit can somehow remove that 70 percent, the remaining 30 percent, while difficult, should be more manageable. He hoped that what he will have to say will be accepted in Israel in good faith. At the very least, it should generate a dialogue on the subject within Israel itself.157

The importance of this passage is that it demonstrates an incredible level of consistency between Sadat’s public and private statements.

Given that Sadat’s strategic objective since 1973 had been to establish a special U.S.-Egyptian partnership, one could cynically argue that Sadat’s private statements to U.S. officials were misleading since they were simply meant to curry American favor. The implication is that Sadat had undertaken his bold moves for a wholly different reason but sought to justify his actions in a positive way that would appeal to the Israeli sympathies held by U.S. legislators and the Carter administration. If this were true, however, then one would naturally expect Sadat to have defended his actions differently in front of others, especially in front of Arab leaders like King Hussein and President Assad. Nonetheless, months after Sadat’s trip, Assad revealed to Mahmoud Riad, the Egyptian secretary-general of the Arab League, that prior to visiting Israel, Sadat had told him that the “problem [Arab-Israeli conflict] was not the Israeli occupation of the Arab territories but the psychological barrier that prevented them from releasing their grip on

these territories.” Sadat’s *a priori* rationalization of his visit to Jerusalem illustrates the logic of a leader exercising security dilemma sensibility; he realized that a fearful Israel needed to be heavily reassured, so much so that it would feel secure enough to offer concessions and trade land for peace.

After visiting Jerusalem, Sadat held an important meeting with King Hussein of Jordan whereupon he sought to account for his recent actions. King Hussein later reported the contents of this meeting to the U.S. Ambassador to Jordan, Thomas Pickering, who, in turn, forwarded this information to the Secretary of State and the White House. According to Pickering, Sadat had told Hussein that the “process [peace process] was bogging down in procedural minutiae and the U.S. could not move the Israelis. Psychological problem was for Israelis very real. Arabs had never talked to them...Sadat was resolved to break the deadlock.”

Sadat’s public and private statements reveal that he justified his trip before different audiences - Israeli, American, and/or Arab - using the same psychological arguments and verbal expressions. This consistency provides strong support for the security dilemma sensibility hypothesis because anytime leaders say the same exact things over time and across situations, this is an excellent indicator of their true beliefs. Sadat clearly believed engaging in direct, face-to-face negotiations would ultimately fail unless Egypt reassured Israel and challenged her


long-held beliefs about the Arab states. At a time when he sought to pursue bilateral instead of multilateral negotiations, trust-building was an essential task and it was ultimately one of the reasons Sadat chose to initiate conciliation with Israel in such a dramatic and unprecedented way.

Sadat’s concerns regarding the “psychological barriers” were well-grounded, if not prophetic, because Egypt and Israel had unknowingly approached the brink of war just weeks before his visit and this was simply due to the lack of trust between the two sides. In late October, Israel launched a series of military exercises and Egypt, unsure of Israel’s intentions, responded by mobilizing her forces in the Sinai.\(^{161}\) As the Jerusalem meetings later revealed, each state perceived its own actions as a means to deter aggression, but mistakenly believed that its rival used these same exercises as a false pretext to launch a first-strike.\(^{162}\) The situation resembled a classic security dilemma.\(^{163}\)

As Sadat had commented many times prior to his trip, the vicious cycle of mistrust between the Arabs and the Israelis led each side to doubt and misinterpret the words and actions of the other. The war scare provided irrefutable proof of this problem, validating Sadat’s long-

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\(^{161}\) Please note, Israel had announced its military maneuvers beforehand whereas Egypt had not.


\(^{163}\) It was not until both sides later met in Jerusalem where they learned how their respective actions had in fact provoked the other side and increased the risk of an accidental war. See the “Stenographic Record of a Government Meeting” (in Hebrew), November 24, 1977, ISA/A/ 4270/1, pp. 8-9, 13-15, 17, retrieved from [http://www.archives.gov.il/NR/rdonlyres/B6777C2B-8675-4849-8472-71F6C4791661/0/Egypt36.pdf](http://www.archives.gov.il/NR/rdonlyres/B6777C2B-8675-4849-8472-71F6C4791661/0/Egypt36.pdf). For more background on the war scare, see Haber et al, *Year of the Dove*, 29-32.
held belief that “psychological barriers” created real obstacles to resolving the Arab-Israeli conflict. He described the war scare in a speech to the People’s Assembly\(^{164}\) and later, in a series of interviews he had given to Arab and Western news outlets,\(^{165}\) using this near-miss episode to not only demonstrate the consequences of these “barriers” but to also provide an ex post (or post factum) justification for visiting Jerusalem. While he was unaware of the misunderstanding prior to his trip, Sadat argued that it proved he had been right in trying to mitigate the mistrust between Egypt and Israel.

CONCLUSION

Throughout this case-study, I have attempted to map the process through which Sadat made his consequential decision to travel to Jerusalem (refer to figure 2). Examining the political and strategic context, we see that Sadat pursued direct talks with Israel once he believed

\(^{164}\) “At a meeting with the Israeli Defense Minister Ezer Weizmann, he asked me why we were going to attack them during the past ten days. I replied in the negative and told him that they had begun maneuvers, and in accordance with the line we have adopted since the October War, and as a civilized country aware of its responsibilities, General Al-Gamassy also started maneuvers in the same strength. He showed me his intelligence reports which said that we were going to stage a sudden attack, and he was extremely nervous about it. I assured him that this was not so, but that we shall immediately retaliate against any action on their part. When they started maneuvers, Al-Gamassy started his maneuvers also and on the same scale…This is what I mean by the psychological barrier between us. Ten days before my visit they were extremely nervous and tense. They have been so ever since the October War.” Quote taken from “President Sadat Speech to the People’s Assembly,” 26 November 1977, Anwar Sadat Archives-President Speeches, Anwar Sadat Chair for Peace and Development, University of Maryland, College Park, http://sadat.umd.edu/archives/speeches%5CAADK%20Sadat%20Speech%20after%20Jerusalem%2011.26.77.pdf.

\(^{165}\) “As I told the deputies today, at one time, as I learned from the Israeli Defense Minister, we were on the verge of entering a war 10 days ago because of this psychological barrier. They had no confidence in us, we had no confidence in them. After the October War they became very nervous about a surprise attack. Well, the Israelis thought of this at the time we held maneuvers here while they were holding their maneuvers. They announced their maneuvers but we did not. Therefore, they believed that we were preparing for war. For this reason, I say that I took the whole situation into consideration. My assessment proved correct because 10 days ago we and the Israelis could have entered a war beyond our will. This was due to the psychological barrier and the lack of trust between the parties concerned.” Quote taken from “As-Sadat Grants Interviews to U.S. TV Networks,” Interview with NBC, November 27, 1977, FBIS Daily Reports, Middle East and North Africa (FBIS-MEA-77-229). Similar statements were made in a number of other interviews. See “Interview with CBS,” CBS News-Face the Nation, November 28, 1977, FBIS Daily Reports, Middle East and North Africa (FBIS-MEA-77-229); “President As-Sadat Gives Interview to ABC TV,” ABC; “DER SPIEGEL Interview with Egyptian President Anwar as-Sadat,” Der Spiegel, December 5, 1977, 137-148, FBIS Daily Reports, Middle East and North Africa (FBIS-MEA-77-234); “As-Sadat Interviewed on Peace Initiative, Other Topics by Tunisian Radio-TV,” Tunisian Radio-TV, December 4, 1977, FBIS Daily Reports, Middle East and North Africa (FBIS-MEA-77-234).
U.S.-led efforts to reconvene the Geneva Conference were doomed to fail. Egypt’s continued reliance on U.S. mediation had not brought the disputants any closer to resolving the Arab-Israeli conflict and under these circumstances, Sadat sought another way to achieve peace. One way to do so was to challenge the conventional orthodoxy and pursue direct talks with Israel. From the summer to the fall of 1977, Sadat grew cautiously optimistic about the prospects of bilateral negotiations since he received information from third-parties and the Dayan-Tuhami backchannel that confirmed Israel’s genuine interest in peace. Sadat sensed an opportunity to pursue direct negotiations and he was only encouraged by the fact that Israel’s new government was led by a strong, hawkish prime minister.

To explain the motivation underlying Sadat’s Jerusalem Initiative and his decision to pursue such a risky act, I then applied security-dilemma sensibility and prospect theory to my case-study. When Sadat had decided to forego multilateral diplomacy in favor of bilateral negotiations, he believed this new approach would be unsuccessful given the fear and suspicion between Egypt and Israel. These “psychological barriers” needed to be “eliminated” to reduce mistrust and establish the climate necessary for both sides to conduct meaningful negotiations. Sadat therefore traveled to Jerusalem to reassure Israel in no uncertain terms that Egypt was sincere about peace. While there were other ways to begin face-to-face negotiations, Egypt’s President chose such a risky course of action not just because he sought to overcome the psychological barriers but also because he sought to quickly improve his domestic position. The deteriorating political and economic conditions within Egypt in addition to the brewing discontent within the Egyptian military placed Sadat in an operative domain of losses and as predicted by prospect theory, it increased his tolerance for taking risks.
In the introductory chapter, I drew from the insight of cognitive and behavioral psychology and hypothesized that security dilemma sensibility and/or prospect theory explained leaders’ willingness to undertake risks and initiate conciliation with rivals, respectively. Both hypotheses were well-supported by my case-study. A close examination of the historical record shows that Sadat’s decision to travel to Israel was motivated by a number of psychological factors, in particular his beliefs about Israel’s intentions, his recognition of her fear and insecurity, and finally, his definition of the domain he found himself to be operating in. The former two allowed Sadat to exercise security dilemma sensibility whereas the latter increased Sadat’s willingness to accept risks for peace. While critics often contend that prospect theory is only supported by experimental findings, the application of this theory to our case-study illustrates that it has some degree of external validity as well. This paper lends further support to the existing body of scholarship that has attempted to explain foreign policy decisions through this paradigm.

Together, security dilemma sensibility and prospect theory provide a cognitive-behavioral psychological framework that helps us open up the black box of the state and analyze the process through which leaders like Sadat make actual foreign policy decisions. The richness of a process-oriented approach is that it offers an analysis that integrates relevant factors from the individual, state (or domestic), dyadic, and systemic (or international) levels of analysis into a single, multilevel explanation.

While understanding the process through which policy-makers arrive at decisions helps enhance the accuracy and comprehensiveness of our explanation, suffice it to say that these benefits come at the expense of parsimoniousness. Sacrificing predictive power in favor of
greater explanatory breadth, this case-study therefore makes a critical trade-off but one which is necessary given the complexity of the phenomenon being studied in this dissertation.
Figure 2: Sadat’s Decision-making Process

Section 1- Timing of Peace Initiative? From Multilateral to Bilateral Negotiations
Sadat's decision to circumvent Geneva and pursue bilateral talks
Explanation: Diplomatic interactions and key events in 1977 led to Sadat's reassessment

Section 2- Sadat's Willingness to Accept Risks and Pursue Direct Talks with Israel?
Sadat's evaluation of foreign policy options
Explanation: Prospect theory (Kahneman and Tversky)

Section 3- Sadat's Motivation for Visiting Jerusalem (Speaking Before the Knesset; Symbolic Visits to Yad Vashem & Israel's Tomb of the Unknown Soldier)
Sadat's Reassurance Strategy and his diagnosis of "the psychological problem"
Explanation: Security Dilemma Sensibility (Booth and Wheeler)
Chapter 3: Gorbachev and the Windy Road to Reykjavik

“In any event, there was at least one active side there [Reykjavik] – ours. It does not take two for every tango after all. To change relations for better – or worse – it is enough to have just one side that is ready to take initiative. And there was one like this. And where there is one, the rest had to adjust.”

- Georgii Arbatov

On October 11, 1986, the world’s attention was drawn to the quiet city of Reykjavik where U.S. President Ronald Reagan met with Soviet General Secretary Mikhail Gorbachev. Though far removed from the frontlines of the Cold War, Iceland’s capital was suddenly at its epicenter, playing host to the leaders of the two most powerful countries. President Reagan and members of his team thought that Reykjavik was a short, two-day mini-summit (or pre-summit) and would merely prepare the groundwork for the General Secretary’s later visit to Washington.

Unbeknownst to the American delegation, Gorbachev had called for a summit to present radical, new proposals on reducing nuclear weapons and curbing the arms race. As soon as the summit began, Gorbachev unveiled them to Reagan and his esteemed Secretary of State, George Shultz. They were shocked by the scale and number of concessions Gorbachev was prepared to make on a range of issues, ranging from missile defense (and “space-based” arms) to strategic (or long-range) and intermediate (or medium) range nuclear weapons.


3 Reagan wrote, “George and I couldn’t believe what was happening. We were getting amazing agreements. As the day went on I felt something momentous was occurring.” Ronald Reagan, An American Life (New York: Simon and Shuster, 1990), 614-615. According to Shultz, Gorbachev’s proposals “astonished Reagan.” George P. Shultz, Turmoil and Triumph: My Years as Secretary of State (New York: Charles Scribner’s Sons, 1993), 771; Jack F.
After years of fruitless negotiations, the Soviet Union changed many of its positions and in one spectacular stroke, made unprecedented concessions to its longtime adversary, beginning with its most menacing arms – strategic nuclear weapons (or START). Traditional Soviet proposals to reduce strategic weapons categorized any weapon system as “strategic” if it could reach the other party’s territory. Such a broad interpretation had been opposed by the U.S. since it would force the U.S. to unilaterally reduce its INF and cruise missiles based in Europe without affecting Soviet intermediate-range forces targeting American allies. At Reykjavik, Gorbachev agreed to limit reductions to the strategic triad -- intercontinental ballistic missiles (ICBMs), submarine launched ballistic missiles (SLBM), and heavy bombers-- and agreed to equal 50% reductions in all sub-categories. Given that the United States’ tactical (or short-range) and intermediate-range nuclear weapons were within striking range of the Soviet Union, this was a concession since there was no equivalent threat to the U.S (see table 1 at the end of the chapter).

On intermediate range nuclear forces (or INF), the Soviets agreed to eliminate all their missiles in Europe provided the U.S. did the same. This was notable because the Soviets would not only be making asymmetric cuts in comparison to the U.S. but they would also be abandoning their prior condition linking the zero option to constraints on the British and French

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4 For instance, the Soviets introduced a proposal on September 27, 1985 calling for a 50% reduction in strategic weapons. While significant in and of itself, the Soviets categorized any weapon as strategic as long as “it could hit the other side’s territory.” Such a proposal favored the Soviet Union. Deborah Larson, the Anatomy of Mistrust: U.S.-Soviet Relations During the Cold War (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1997), 202-203.

5 The Soviets’ also announced their willingness to implement “significant” or “substantial” reductions to their feared SS-18 ICBM, a missile armed with multiple nuclear warheads.

nuclear arsenals. They also offered to negotiate over their INF missiles in Asia and stated their willingness to enter talks on short-range INF missiles (see table 1). Finally, as in their offer for strategic weapons, the Soviets accepted the most intensive verification measures, including on-site inspections, to ensure treaty compliance.

In missile defense and “space-based” arms, the Soviets reduced the suggested period of non-withdrawal from the Anti-Ballistic Missile (ABM) treaty from 15 to 10 years, moving closer to the 7.5-year provision favored by the Reagan administration. During that time, Gorbachev agreed to allow the U.S. to research and test its Strategic Defense Initiative (SDI) as long as it was restricted to the laboratory (see table 1).

All these concessions were unilaterally given without the traditional *quid pro quo* that occurs in bargaining. The only condition was that the proposals had to be accepted as part of a comprehensive package; they could not be separated from one another. The novelty and generosity of Gorbachev’s olive branch was not lost on either Reagan or Shultz who immediately recognized that it was dramatic departure from their rival’s earlier positions. These proposals then initiated a serious, and at times surreal, dialogue on disarmament, enabling the two sides to

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7 Gorbachev, *Memoirs*, 417-418.

8 Short-range INF missiles are generally those with a range between 500 to 1000 km whereas long-range INF missiles are missiles with a range between 1000 to 5500 km.

9 Gorbachev, *Memoirs*, 418-420. The Anti-Ballistic Missile Treaty, which entered into force in 1972, was intended to prevent either the United States or the Soviet from deploying nationwide ABM defenses. By leaving the superpowers’ territory vulnerable to retaliation, the intent of the treaty was to preserve the logic of mutually assured destruction and discourage any side from launching a first strike. This treaty was challenged by the Reagan administration’s SDI program, which constituted an attempt to develop and deploy a ballistic missile defense system.

10 Interestingly enough, Gorbachev had maintained in a meeting with Margaret Thatcher that he would only seek “…mutually acceptable measures. One-sided measures or concessions were something which the Soviet Union would not accept.” “Meeting between the Prime Minister and the General Secretary,” March 13, 1985, 10 Downing Street, Margaret Thatcher Collection, p. 3.
reach agreements on systematically eliminating greater numbers and types of nuclear weapons than ever before.\textsuperscript{11}

While all these agreements were sacrificed over Reagan’s refusal to constrain SDI and Gorbachev’s failure to untie the package, the summit was still seen as an amazing breakthrough because in just two days, the superpowers had resolved a myriad of complex issues. And so, despite its tragic ending, Reykjavík represented a turning point in the Cold War, enabling decision-makers from either the U.S. or the Soviet Union to see that they could indeed conclude agreements with each other.

Given that the significance of Reykjavik owes much to Gorbachev’s bold proposals, it is worth examining why Gorbachev suddenly changed his country’s negotiating platform. Gorbachev’s readiness to accept risks to induce his rival to cooperate is puzzling. It defies the conventional wisdom on how decision-makers should exercise caution when they negotiate with their enemies. What is even more baffling is that Gorbachev’s proposals were introduced at a time when the confrontation between the U.S. and the Soviet Union had escalated to a dangerous level.

By making so many concessions, Gorbachev not only risked appearing weak but he risked increasing his partner’s intransigence to extract even more concessions. He also reduced his freedom to maneuver since he revealed his entire hand to the other side, showing how much he was willing to give up without obtaining anything tangible in return. This undermined his leverage in future rounds of bargaining because once you show your cards, you cannot take that knowledge away from the other side, even if the offer is later withdrawn. Believing Gorbachev’s

\textsuperscript{11} The discussion reached a climax on the second day when both Gorbachev and Reagan realized their long professed goal of eliminating nuclear weapons by agreeing to remove all strategic nuclear forces.
plan posed serious risks, some of the General Secretary’s own advisors expressed reservations about the summit.\textsuperscript{12}

Despite incurring the reproach of some officials, Gorbachev went ahead and made a series of unprecedented, unconditional, and irreversible concessions at Reykjavik to reach a comprehensive agreement, or grand bargain, with the United States. In doing so, he exposed himself to personal and political risks and left his country vulnerable to noncooperation from the other side. Why did Gorbachev undertake such a bold move when other, less costly avenues existed to reach agreements with the U.S.? And why did he do so in October of 1986, nineteen months after assuming office?

While much has been written about the Reykjavik summit, the existing literature does not adequately explain why Gorbachev accepted such an extraordinary gamble. A few scholars have altogether downplayed the enormity of the gesture, arguing that Gorbachev’s concessions were either not costly or that they were part of a GRIT strategy.\textsuperscript{13} These studies treat Reykjavik as merely one of many other Soviet moves designed to reassure and build trust with the United States. Others meanwhile have examined Reykjavik but chose to investigate its effects,

\textsuperscript{12} Marshall Sergei Akhromeyev, Chief of the General Staff and Gorbachev military aide, reportedly contemplated retirement over Gorbachev’s concessions in strategic nuclear weapons. S.F. Akhromeyev and G.M. Kornienko, \textit{Glazami marshala I diplomata} (Through the Eyes of a Marshal and a Diplomat) (Moscow: Mezhdunarodnyye otnosheniya, 1992), 108-109; Robert English, \textit{Russia and the Idea of the West: Gorbachev, Intellectuals, and the End of the Cold War} (NY: Columbia University Press, 2000), 218. Anatoli Adamishin, Soviet deputy foreign affairs minister, observed that the reaction of Soviet elites is important and the General Secretary should take into consideration their misgivings. He wrote, “an empty meeting with no results could be worse than none at all.” Anatoli Adamishin Papers, September 15, 1986, Box 1, 1986 Diary, Hoover Institution Library and Archives (HILA).

particularly how it was interpreted by American decision-makers and how it affected their perceptions of Soviet intentions. The focus here has been in understanding how observers, or targets, interpret signals. Finally, a larger group of scholars have written about the short and long-term effects of Reykjavik, noting how it subsequently affected bilateral relations.

Gorbachev’s motivations for cooperating with the U.S. are cursorily examined in the voluminous literature on the end of the Cold War. Realists have explained Gorbachev’s actions as a function of material factors such as the Soviet Union’s deteriorating economy and its inability to compete economically, technologically, and militarily with the United States. In the same vein, others have argued that it was a decline in Soviet power coupled with renewed pressure from the Reagan Administration that forced the Soviet Union to make substantial concessions. Constructivists meanwhile have shown that Gorbachev, and members of his inner circle, changed course because they began embracing new ideas encouraging greater cooperation and interdependence with other states.

Since the fall of the Soviet Union, scholars have drawn from these well-known international relations theories to explain why Gorbachev sought greater cooperation instead of confrontation with the U.S. One problem, however, is that realists and constructivists assume

14 Keren Yarhi-Milo, Knowing the Adversary: Leaders, Intelligence, and Assessment of Intentions in International Relations (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2014).


their arguments are generalizable, and subsequently, attribute all changes in Soviet behavior to material and ideational factors, respectively. They oversimplify reality and ignore the many domestic (or state), dyadic, and systemic (or international) changes that took place between 1985 and 1991. While realist and constructivist arguments merit some degree of consideration, they are ill-suited to our case-study given that they explain general patterns of Soviet behavior.

The purpose of this paper is to narrow our focus and examine the Soviet leadership’s motivations in preparing bold proposals for Reykjavik. My goal is to not only trace the process through which Soviet decision-makers -- Gorbachev and his inner-circle of advisors -- came to abandon orthodox positions but to also explain their reasons for doing so. In attempting to explain the motivation and timing of these transformational changes, the chapter provides a pre-summit account of Soviet decision-making. While the discussions that took place at Reykjavik between October 11th and 12th are in and of themselves very significant, they are outside the scope of this paper.

After more than thirty years, there is still considerable debate over what Gorbachev’s team sought to accomplish at Reykjavik. The difficulty in accessing primary documents from the former Soviet Union had initially made it challenging to answer this question. Because Soviet intentions at Reykjavik were too difficult to ascertain, scholars came to accept a hodgepodge of potential explanations but this method obfuscated how, why, and when Gorbachev drafted his package. Even though Reykjavik is one of the most important Cold War summits, there is not a consensus on the motivations of the Soviet leadership. In this chapter, I attempt to fill the void in the literature by using recently declassified American, British, and Soviet materials. Through these new sources, I provide a fuller and more nuanced historical
account of the process through which Gorbachev and members of his inner circle reached their consequential decision.

Situating Reykjavik within its proper context, we see that the interactions between the Soviet Union and the United States helps us understand the timing of the summit. As soon as he became General Secretary, Gorbachev immediately received signals from third-parties and the Reagan administration on the latter’s interest in improving relations and pursuing arms control negotiations. At the Geneva summit held in November 1985, Reagan met with Gorbachev and personally assured Gorbachev of his country’s peaceful intentions. By the end of the year, Gorbachev had concluded that despite Reagan’s unabashed anti-communist positions, it was still possible to resume a dialogue with him. The optimism that had been restored by the “spirit of Geneva” dissipated as U.S.-Soviet relations were damaged by a wave of crises throughout 1986. These unexpected incidents created a tense and hostile environment and as U.S.-Soviet relations soured, the arms control talks made little progress and Gorbachev’s planned visit to Washington was cancelled. With the Soviet economy reeling from high defense expenditures, Gorbachev needed to mitigate the arms race to improve his country’s precarious situation. Desperate to jumpstart negotiations and alleviate domestic problems, Gorbachev convened Reykjavik to break the diplomatic inertia.

In presenting new proposals, Gorbachev had a Machiavellian plan to overcome the stalemate. He would make concessions to reduce mistrust but if reassurance failed, then he would later publicize Soviet concessions to pressure the Reagan administration to reciprocate his cooperative moves. The logic here was to introduce a package that could demonstrate the Soviet Union’s peaceful intentions and challenge the threat perception of political elites and the public.
Unlike his predecessors, Gorbachev astutely recognized that the Soviet Union was perceived to be aggressive and understood that this perception contributed to the mistrust, suspicion, and fear that fueled the arms race. Gorbachev sought to remove American doubts over his peaceful intentions and present irrefutable evidence that he was a different type of Soviet leader. After smaller moves had failed to elicit a positive reaction, Gorbachev decided to offer radical new concessions, taking into account U.S. interests and concerns and exercising *security dilemma sensibility (SDS)*.18

While scholars have already used this argument to explain Gorbachev’s later actions, I argue that it can be applied to understand his early behavior as well, including his preparation for Reykjavik. The personal dimension of Reykjavik, however, cannot just be explained by an attempt to reassure American decision-makers. I argue that Gorbachev exercised SDS but did so by appealing to Reagan so that he could circumvent the organizational biases of American and Soviet bureaucrats.

Though motivated by a desire to reassure his rival, Gorbachev also unveiled his proposals to exert some degree of post-summit pressure on Reagan. If the U.S. rebuffed his offer, then Gorbachev planned to publicize the talks. He would reveal what proposals had been tabled and how they failed to lead to any agreements due to Reagan’s intransigence. Believing such a move would expose Reagan to domestic and international criticism, the Soviet leadership hoped to use public diplomacy to pressure the President to reevaluate his response. To challenge the West’s general perception of Soviet offers, Gorbachev and his advisors crafted a series of proposals that, if leaked and/or revealed, would unmistakably communicate their sincerity and seriousness in curbing the arms race.

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At first glance, the decision to pressure and reassure the Reagan administration may seem contradictory but the strategy was well designed to achieve Gorbachev’s objective because it appealed domestically to the hardliners and reformers within the communist party, respectively. As Gorbachev needed to obtain the Politburo’s approval for proposing a new package, his concessions were justified in a way that appealed to its members.

The remainder of the chapter is organized as follows. I first examine the domestic situation within the Soviet Union to provide background on the type of country Gorbachev inherited after he became General Secretary. In the second section, I review the interactions between the U.S. and the Soviet Union to provide some historical context for the Reykjavik summit. I then trace how and when Gorbachev began to self-reflect on the way in which his country’s actions were interpreted threateningly by the United States. Following a discussion of Gorbachev’s recognition of this problem, I explain how Gorbachev sought to change the Soviet Union’s aggressive image by unveiling radical, new proposals at Reykjavik that were designed to reassure and pressure U.S. decision-makers. The chapter ends with a discussion of how this case-study contributes to our understanding of the motivations and timing of bold gestures in international relations.

PRELUDE TO THE GORBACHEV ERA

On March 11, 1985, Mikhail Gorbachev was selected by the Politburo to become the Soviet Union’s sixth General Secretary. At just fifty-four years of age, he stood in stark contrast to his septuagenarian predecessors – Leonid Brezhnev, Yuri Andropov, and Konstantin
Chernenko, all of whom suffered from poor health and had been physically and mentally unable to keep up with the demands of office.¹⁹

Representing a dramatic change from the traditional gerontocracy, the selection of a healthy and active General Secretary was welcomed by the Central Committee (CC) and lower-rank party elites who enthusiastically confirmed the Politburo’s decision.²⁰ Gorbachev became the youngest General Secretary to head the country and the speed with which he advanced through the ranks of the communist party owes much to the impressive qualities he exhibited throughout his career.²¹ He was promoted to candidate member and then full member of the Politburo in 1979 and 1980, respectively.²²

The appointment of someone like Gorbachev had occurred none too soon because by the 1980s, the Soviet Union needed a leader who had the energy and stamina to address the country’s many problems. Its economy was steadily deteriorating and the Cold War confrontation with the United States had escalated to a level not seen since the Cuban Missile Crisis. George Kennan, the esteemed diplomat and advisor during the Cold War, aptly described US-Soviet relations at the time as “ominous” and “in a dreadful and dangerous condition.”²³

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¹⁹ Gorbachev comments on the health of his predecessors, particularly Chernenko’s, in his memoirs. Gorbachev, Memoirs, 154-157.

²⁰ Vladislav Zubok, A Failed Empire: The Soviet Union in the Cold War From Stalin to Gorbachev (Chapel Hill: the University of North Carolina Press, 2009), 278-279.

²¹ Prior to entering national politics, Gorbachev was first general secretary of the Stavropol region where he had established a reputation as an intelligent, hard-working, and talented party official. Moscow took immediate notice, particularly of Gorbachev’s achievements in agricultural production, and selected him in 1978 to head the Central Committee’s Department of Agriculture, hoping that he could also improve agricultural output at the national level. Once in Moscow, Gorbachev became Andropov’s protégé and was promoted by the latter to more influential posts. By 1984, Gorbachev’s role within the Politburo had increased as he began chairing some of its meetings in place of its ailing General Secretaries, Andropov and Chernenko. He became the heir apparent.

²² Service, End of the Cold War, 119-121.

²³ Don Oberdorfer, The Turn, 30.
Members of the *nomenklatura* or political elite, including some of Gorbachev’s predecessors (most notably Andropov), generally recognized these problems but did not adequately address them.\(^2^4\) The last few years of the Brezhnev era followed by the interregna of Andropov and Chernenko left the Soviet Union without a healthy, authoritative leader who could direct policy from above.

The ideological rigidity of the Politburo members, such as Foreign Minister Andrei Gromyko and Defense Minister Dmitri Ustinov, who often exercised power in lieu of the General Secretary ensured that few, if any, changes would be made to Soviet policy.\(^2^5\) Seeking to maintain their own power and influence, Gromyko and Ustinov as well as other high-ranking party officials simply did not want to upset the delicate balance of power that had been established. While the continuation of the status quo may have been politically expedient and ideologically sound, it served to exacerbate the problems mentioned above.

Gorbachev’s appointment was meant to change an otherwise ossified Communist Party whose political elites were either unable or unwilling to introduce reforms. While Gorbachev entered office without a precise plan on implementing reforms, he nonetheless recognized that they were indeed needed.

\(^2^4\) Fyodor Burlatsky, a contributor for the *Literary Gazette* and journalist who had been close to Andropov, describes how there was widespread acceptance among the political elite that the Soviet Union was experiencing an economic crisis. In his interview with Don Oberdorfer, Burlatsky comments extensively on Andropov’s views on Afghanistan, the economy, and the Cold War. Fyodor Burlatsky interview, January 25, 1990, interview transcript, Don Oberdorfer Papers, 1983-1990, Seeley G. Mood Manuscript Library, Princeton, NJ, Box 1, Folder 5.

\(^2^5\) At the start of 1984, the members of the Politburo that influenced Soviet foreign policy was the *triumvirate* composed of Foreign Minister Andrei Gromyko, Defense Minister Dmitri Ustinov, and General Secretary Yuri Andropov. After Andropov’s death on February 9, Ustinov and Gromyko developed a virtual monopoly over this domain as Andropov’s ailing successor, Konstantin Chernenko, was too sick and inexperienced to develop foreign policy initiatives on his own. For more information on the behind the scenes leadership between 1980 to 1985, see Dmitri Volkogonov, *Autopsy For An Empire: The Seven Leaders Who Built the Soviet Regime* (New York: The Free Press, 1998), 329-422; Anatoly Dobrynin, *In Confidence: Moscow’s Ambassador to America’s Six Cold War Presidents* [1962-1986] (New York: Times Books, 1995).
Over the years, multiple sources of information had helped Gorbachev reach this important conclusion. In his capacity as the Party’s Agriculture Secretary, Gorbachev’s expertise was on the agrarian sector but he was encouraged by his patron in the Politburo, Andropov, to obtain more information about the health of the overall Soviet economy.\textsuperscript{26} To better educate himself, he asked economists such as Abel Aganbegyan and Tatyana Zaslavskaya to brief him on this matter.\textsuperscript{27} Between 1978 and 1985, Gorbachev maintained close contact with Soviet academics and through these interactions, he developed a more objective and unbiased assessment of the domestic and international situation. One other source of information came from Gorbachev’s diplomatic trips to Western countries where he learned the extent to which the Soviet Union had fallen far behind its rivals in technology and development.\textsuperscript{28} Gorbachev’s experiences as a party official helped him learn about the problems facing his country and helped instill in him a desire to pursue reforms. Before entering office, he had privately confided to his wife, Raisa Maximovna, and to others who were close to him, “we can’t go on living like this.”\textsuperscript{29}

\textsuperscript{26} Gorbachev, \textit{Memoirs}, 146-147.

\textsuperscript{27} Valentin Falin interview, January 11, 1990, interview transcript, Don Oberdorfer Papers, 1983-1990, Seeley G. Mood Manuscript Library, Princeton, NJ, Box 1, Folder 6. Abel Aganbegyan was an economist who also briefed members of the Central Committee on economic matters.

\textsuperscript{28} Other than Gromyko, Gorbachev was the second most well-travelled person sitting in the Politburo.

\textsuperscript{29} In his memoirs, Gorbachev recounts his conversation with Raisa the night before becoming General Secretary. He writes, “You see, I have come here with hope and the belief that I shall be able to accomplish something, but so far there was not much I have done. Therefore if I really want to change something I would have to accept the nomination – if it is made, of course. We can’t go on living like this.” Gorbachev, \textit{Memoirs}, 165. According to Primakov, former Head of the Institute of World Economy and International Relations [IMEMO], Gorbachev told him “we can’t proceed the way we did before.” Yevgeny Primakov interview, January 11, 1990, interview transcript, Don Oberdorfer Papers, 1983-1990, Seeley G. Mood Manuscript Library, Princeton, NJ, Box 1, Folder 19.
While accepting that the status quo was untenable, Gorbachev lacked a detailed plan on how to ameliorate the situation. The only overarching principle that guided his first few years in office was that he perceived the country’s problems to be closely interrelated. The widespread belief shared by Gorbachev and members of his inner circle, including his personal aide Anatoli Chernyaev and his Foreign Minister Eduard Shevardnadze, was that if the confrontation could be de-escalated and the arms race slowed down, then the country’s economic problems could be resolved. By reducing the country’s inflated defense budget, they hoped to free up the human, financial, and technological resources traditionally reserved for the military-industrial complex and unleash this reservoir of human and financial capital to bolster the civilian economy. A rapprochement with the U.S. was therefore considered necessary, according to Gorbachev, “to create the best possible external conditions” for the country’s economic and social development.

Gorbachev said as much when he held discussions with his advisors on what he sought to accomplish at Reykjavik; he stated,

Our goal is to prevent the next round of the arms race. If we do not do this, the threat to us will only grow. And if we do not compromise on some questions, even very important ones, we will lose the main point: we will be pulled into an arms race beyond our power, and we will lose this race, for we are presently at the limit of our capabilities.


The excerpt comes from a speech Gorbachev delivered at the Foreign Ministry on May 23, 1986. In the same speech, Gorbachev also stated, Soviet diplomacy “must contribute to the domestic development of the country.” For more on this speech, see Oberdorfer, *From the Cold War to a New Era*, 162-163. In a meeting with French President François Mitterand, Gorbachev told him “our grand internal projects need a favorable exterior environment.” Jacques Attali, *Verbatim Chronique des Annees 1986-1988*, Tome 2 (Paris: Fayard, 1995), 112.

“Gorbachev’s Instructions to the Reykjavik Preparation Group,” October 4, 1986, in *the Reykjavik File*, National Security Archive Electronic Briefing Book No. 203, Doc.#5, p. 4. Gorbachev said something similar in front of the Politburo a few days later; he stated, “The most important task is to prevent a new round of the of arms race. Otherwise [we will have] modernization of strategic weapons. ‘Tridents.’ ‘Minutemen…’ entering the space with weapons. Then [we will face] a degradation of our ecological, strategic, and political security – a loss on all sides, because first and foremost it lead to a wearing-out of our economy This is impermissible…” *Chernyaev’s Notes from the Politburo Session,* October 8, 1986, in *the Reykjavik File*, National Security Archive Electronic Briefing Book No. 203, Doc.#8, p. 4.
Realists have explained Gorbachev’s readiness to make concessions at the end of the Cold War as resulting from the decline in Soviet power. Applying their logic, Gorbachev’s actions at Reykjavik can therefore be explained as follows. As the weaker party, the Soviet Union wanted to extricate itself from the arms race but because it had fewer options, it simply needed to concede more to the United States. This explanation suffers from two weaknesses.

It ignores the simple fact that the Soviet leadership did not perceive the seriousness of their economic problems until a couple of years later. While Gorbachev and members of his inner circle realized by the mid-1980s that economic growth rates had declined, they did not see foresee an imminent collapse. Upon assuming office, Gorbachev thought modest social reforms, such as enforcing greater work discipline, fighting corruption, and reducing alcoholism, as well as a relaxation in the arms race would be sufficient to address the situation. The lack of urgency explains why a policy like perestroika, or economic restructuring, had been discussed but had eluded systematic definition and implementation during Gorbachev’s first two years. At that time, radical reforms were simply not deemed necessary.

This was not naïve optimism but rather it was just an inaccurate assessment of the true state of the economy. The economic indicators that were reported to the Politburo had been routinely manipulated by lower-level officials who sought to cover up economic mismanagement and inefficiency. The lack of transparency, or openness (glasnost), also allowed officials to

33 Zubok, A Failed Empire, 279.


35 Gorbachev complained to Politburo members about this practice and stated that he needed objective information to make informed decisions. By 1986, it was estimated in a Politburo report that some 40% of the economic figures that had reached Gorbachev’s desk were in inaccurate. Gorbachev Letter to Politburo, November 29, 1985, the
hide “secrets” in the budget, enabling actors like the military-industrial complex and state-run enterprises to cover up their wastefulness. Gorbachev himself wrote that “…many ‘secrets’ of the budget were so well kept that I found out about them only on the eve of my stepping down as President.” Whether due to a lack of information or misinformation, members of the Soviet leadership were aware that their economy was experiencing difficulties but were unaware that it was headed towards crisis.

One other shortcoming of a realist explanation is that it fails to shed light on why Gorbachev chose to initiate cooperation by undertaking a bold move when other, less costly alternatives were available. Realism’s inability to shed light on this puzzle limits its explanatory power. While economic considerations undoubtedly led to a reassessment in Soviet foreign policy and “thus explains why change was necessary, it does not necessarily explain why

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36 The military-industrial complex systematically underreported its expenditures to hide the vast sums of money it was spending.

37 Gorbachev, Memoirs, 147. According to Gorbachev, “Even at the next stage in my capacity as General Secretary and de facto head of the Soviet state, I had enormous difficulty squeezing out of our military lobby genuine information about the amount of money poured into this bottomless barrel. First of all, this was because the people in charge had got accustomed to not having to report to anybody about how the money was being used and they certainly did not to sacrifice their privileged status. Secondly, quite ofteh they themselves did not possess total information.” Grachev, Gorbachev’s Gamble, 6-7.

38 The General Secretary and others around him would later revise their assessment when a series of financial shocks highlighted the precariouness of the Soviet economy. These shocks, particularly the precipitous decline in revenue from alcohol and oil sales, provided the type of indisputable evidence that helped Soviet decision-makers realize that their economy needed radical reforms. Beginning in 1985, Gorbachev sought to minimize alcohol consumption by limiting its production and purchase but while motivated by good intentions, the anti-alcoholism campaign later backfired and harmed an industry that had until then been performing relatively well. The second and more compelling explanation for the sudden deterioration of the Soviet economy had to do with the precipitous drop in oil prices. Since oil was one of its primary exports, the 1986 oil crash was particularly acute for the Soviet Union but its effects, according to the historical evidence, were not felt until the year after. On the drop in oil prices, see Service, The End of the Cold War, 179-180.
Gorbachev sought change in the way that he did.” At Reykjavik, Gorbachev changed many core positions in a way that decisively favored the U.S., offering “concession after concession” and “gift after gift.” It is only by understanding why Gorbachev circumvented incremental, step-by-step changes in favor of a new proposals that we can better account for his true motivations.

In the next section, I examine the key events and diplomatic interactions that led to Gorbachev’s decision to propose a mini-summit in Iceland. By looking at the circumstances and conditions that led up to Reykjavik, we can better make sense of the summit’s timing.

**U.S.-SOVIET RELATIONS, 1985-1986: FROM CONFRONTATION TO NEGOTIATION**

**Getting to Geneva: Gorbachev’s First Nine Months**

At the start of the decade, the U.S.-Soviet rivalry began to escalate in response to the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan and the election of Ronald Reagan. While known for his role in helping to end the Cold War, Reagan’s inflammatory statements during his first term helped intensify it. Labeling the Soviet Union an “evil empire” and predicting that “the march of freedom and democracy…will leave Marxism-Leininism on the ash-heap of history…,” Reagan’s statements made it seem as if the new administration sought to defeat rather than contain communism.

The fact that his rhetoric was matched by deeds only made Soviet officials even more insecure. Between 1980 and 1985, the U.S. underwent one of the greatest peacetime military

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40 Quote from George Shultz in Yarhi-Milo, *Knowing the Adversary*, 198.

buildup in history and it began investing in a strategic defense project known as SDI or Star Wars. From the Soviet perspective, the latter was particularly destabilizing as it would violate the ABM Treaty and begin a new stage in the arms race, either on land or in space, where each side would develop weapons systems to shield themselves from ballistic missiles. The overarching fear was that such systems would change the calculus for initiating a first-strike, rendering the logic of Mutually Assured Destruction or MAD obsolete.

As tension continued to increase, the two sides ceased high-level meetings, discontinued nuclear arms control negotiations, and intensified the arms race, leading to a revival of the Cold War and the end of détente. The atmosphere grew so bad that by 1983, the two sides nearly approached the brink of war over the Soviet Union’s misinterpretation of a NATO exercise. Inheriting an international situation where the threat of war seemed real, Gorbachev entered office intent on normalizing relations with the U.S. By mitigating the tension with the U.S., he hoped to not only prevent the outbreak of hostilities but to more importantly, slow, if not end, an arms race that was spiraling out of control. Gorbachev had strong material incentives for doing so given the poor state of the Soviet economy; it would simply be too costly to match the U.S.

Instead of Gorbachev, it was Reagan who surprisingly initiated the dialogue and he did so immediately after his counterpart was elected General Secretary. Sending Vice-President Bush

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43 In the fall of 1983, the Soviet Union had mistaken Able Archer, NATO’s nuclear-release simulation exercise, as a cover for a first-strike against the Warsaw Pact. At the height of the crisis, the Soviet Union placed more than a dozen nuclear-capable aircraft in East Germany and Poland on high alert and readied military units in the Baltic and Czechoslovakia in response to what it perceived to be a preemptive nuclear attack by NATO. For more on the Able Archer Crisis, see Benjamin B. Fischer, “The Soviet-American War Scare of the 1980s,” *International Journal of Intelligence* (Fall 2006): 480-517; Arnav Manchanda, “When Truth is stranger than fiction: the Able Archer incident,” *Cold War History* 9, no. 1 (February 2009): 111-133; Nathan Bennett Jones, “‘One Misstep Could Trigger a Great War’: Operation RYAN, Able Archer 83, and the 1983 War Scare,” Master’s thesis from George Washington University (May 2009).
and Secretary of State Shultz to attend Chernenko’s funeral, Reagan gave them a letter which they delivered to Gorbachev. The President extended an invitation to Gorbachev to visit Washington, signaling his interest in improving the bilateral relationship. The quickness with which Reagan engaged his counterpart owes much to Thatcher who had informed Reagan of her positive impressions of the Soviet statesmen; as she told him, “he’s a man we can do business with.”

In the months that followed, Reagan continued to communicate his desire to not only meet with Gorbachev but to jointly work together to reduce, or in his own words “eliminate,” nuclear weapons. At a lower level, arms negotiations once again resumed at the Geneva nuclear and space talks (NST) where both sides began discussions on strategic defense and strategic and intermediate range nuclear weapons. While Reagan’s openness to negotiate contrasted with his earlier rhetoric, it was in fact consistent with a foreign policy change that had begun the previous year.

Gorbachev and his aides viewed Reagan’s receptiveness towards a summit as something positive despite having some suspicions about his underlying intentions. It was widely thought

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44 Service, The End of the Cold War, 113-114. According to General Edward Rowny, chief arms negotiator on START and Reagan’s special advisor on arms control, “I think the most profound of all was Gorbachev’s meeting with Margaret Thatcher and its effect on Reagan. I can remember distinctly right after that happened that Reagan said ‘You know, I trust Margaret Thatcher’s judgment of people more than any other leader in the world and if she thinks we can do business with Gorbachev, I think maybe we can do business with Gorbachev.’” See “Understanding the End of the Cold War [An Oral History Conference],” May 8, 1998, Session 3, available from the National Security Archive.


46 Yakovlev’s Memorandum for Gorbachev, “About Reagan,” March 12, 1985, in To the Geneva Summit, National Security Archive Electronic Briefing Book No. 172, Doc.#3, p 1. According to Soviet Ambassador to the U.S., Anatoly Dobrynin, “I was certainly impressed by the news…for the first time during his presidency, Reagan had chosen to express openly, albeit through his characteristically guarded secretary of state, his desire for a summit meeting. Gorbachev instantly noted the extraordinary signal from Washington, the more so because it fitted his own
that if someone as ideological as Reagan was willing to cooperate, then this was proof that policy
changes were indeed taking place within the U.S.⁴⁷ Some officials also believed that Reagan’s
domestic popularity and hawkishness made him a favorable partner since he was well-positioned
to negotiate and sell agreements back home.⁴⁸ The President’s openness to high-level talks as
well as his strong domestic position gave them a partner with the moral and political authority to
make hard decisions. Remembering their success in conducting negotiations with former
President Richard Nixon, another hardliner, “some people recalled that and said that we needed
to make agreements specifically with Reagan.”⁴⁹ Overall, the general sentiment was one of
cautious optimism.

The very fact that Reagan sought better relations created a positive international
environment that made it possible for Gorbachev to pursue his foreign policy plans.⁵⁰ It enabled
him to engage in cooperative behavior that would otherwise have been impossible to justify to

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Mood Manuscript Library, Princeton, NJ, Box 1, Folder 6, p. 16.

⁴⁸ According to Chernyaev, “Gorbachev realized and took into account that the President had a tremendous moral
authority in his country. That was his strength and that was why he could solve global issues…” A.S. Chernyaev
eds. Gordon M. Hahn and Viktor B. Kuvaldin, Hoover Institution and Gorbachev Foundation Collection (HIGFC),
box 10, p. 244. Also see Anatoly S. Chernyaev, My Six Years with Gorbachev (University Park, PA: Pennsylvania
State University Press, 2000), 77. Before becoming General Secretary, Gorbachev had been advised by a “highly
placed American politician” to “start discussing matters of nuclear disarmament with the right-wing Western
politicians rather than with the left.” Grachev, Gorbachev’s Gamble, 51.

⁴⁹ P.R. Palazhchenko, Gorbachev’s advisor and translator, stated “there were also opinions with more nuances,
mindful of the fact that such a conservative, reactionary U.S. President as Nixon made a very serious agreement with
China and the Soviet Union. Some people recalled that and said that we needed to make agreements specifically
with Reagan. This was another opinion…” P.R. Palazhchenko interview, “Soviet-American Relations, 1985-1991,”
in The Making of the End of the Cold War: An Oral History, eds. Gordon M. Hahn and Viktor B. Kuvaldin, HIGFC,
box 10, p. 228.

⁵⁰ According to Anatoly Dobrynin, the Soviet Union’s longtime ambassador to the United States, “if the president
had not abandoned his hostile stance toward the Soviet Union for a more constructive one during his second term,
Gorbachev would not have been able to launch his reforms…” Dobrynin, In Confidence, 611.
hard-liners back in the Soviet Union. Gorbachev shortly thereafter softened his rhetoric; communicated his interest in cooperation, peace, and trust-building; and introduced a new, dynamic style of conducting Soviet diplomacy. Matching words with deeds, the General Secretary undertook a series of small conciliatory gestures in 1985; he froze the deployment of SS-20 [INF] missiles in late March, halted nuclear tests in August (and would renew the moratorium several times until February 1987), and proposed deep cuts in strategic weapons in September. While none of these early moves elicited an American response, it did help ease tensions prior to the summit.

At the end of the year, Gorbachev and Reagan finally met in Geneva where they undertook a series of actions that helped normalize U.S.-Soviet relations. Both had agreed in principle to reduce strategic weapons by 50% and they decided to meet again in Washington and Moscow in 1986 and 1987, respectively. Of more consequence to the Soviet Union, however, was the joint statement where the two sides agreed that “a nuclear war cannot be won and must never be fought” and that “they will not seek to achieve military superiority.” Addressing one of Gorbachev’s chief concerns, the statement also referenced how the leaders “agreed to accelerate” negotiations to “prevent an arms race in space and to terminate it on earth.” Soviet decision-makers were pleased with these limited results because these commitments helped alleviate the tension that had been building up for so many years. Also, the summit generated some optimism that the Soviet Union could reach agreements with someone as hawkish as

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52 Ibid.
Reagan. According to Gorbachev, “I realized by the end of our two-day meeting that Ronald Reagan too was a man ‘you could do business with.’”

In spite of its positive reception, the summit had failed to produce any meaningful breakthroughs on substantive issues. Reagan insisted on maintaining SDI whereas Gorbachev made a 50% reduction in strategic weapons conditional on its complete elimination. On INF, the Soviets would not eliminate their SS-20 missiles in Europe solely for the destruction of U.S. Pershing and long-range cruise missiles. The zero-option was vehemently opposed since it would lead to asymmetric cuts for the Soviet Union, which had far more INF missiles than the U.S. As compensation, Gorbachev intended to draw the British and French governments into negotiations to reduce the size of their nuclear forces but the Americans objected to this point.

53 Garthoff, The Great Transition, 234-248; Service, The End of the Cold War, 156-160. According to Chernyaev, who had been the deputy director of the Central Committee’s International Department at the time, “a cardinal thing happened: the arms race is continuing, nothing has changed in military confrontation, but a turning point in international relations is taking shape. We are coming closer to acknowledging that no one will start a war; to understanding that we cannot keep provoking it either in the name of communism, or in the name of capitalism…” Entry from November 24, 1985, in The Diary of Anatoly Chernyaev [1985], National Security Archive Electronic Briefing Book No. 192, p. 94. According to Adamishin, the head of the European Affairs Department in the Foreign Ministry, “The fact that we could agree on the final document with significant plans for the future…surprising, we couldn’t expect more…the confirmation of the formula [negotiating formula] is fundamentally important, the speeding up of the on-going negotiations [NST] in Geneva, the agreement on the impossibility of nuclear war, even support expressed in a general way has political meaning…most importantly and definitely – we were able to agree to continue the dialogue – almost everyone welcomes it, there will be new meetings…There is no danger overestimating what we have reached. This is the most right, the most reactionary administration in the U.S. But even under these difficult circumstances, we were able to achieve something…to work with this administration.” Anatoli Adamishin Papers, November 25, 1985, Box 1, 1985 Diary, HILA.

54 Gorbachev, Memoirs, 405. Shevardnadze, Gorbachev’s Foreign Minister, said much the same thing. He said, “we saw that Reagan was person you could deal with, although it was very hard to win him over to persuade him of the other point of view. But we had the impression that this is a man that keeps his word and that he’s someone that you can deal with and negotiate and reach accord.” Eduard Shevardnadze interview, January 17, 1990, interview transcript, Don Oberdorfer Papers, 1983-1990, Seeley G. Mood Manuscript Library, Princeton, NJ, Box 1, Folder 21, p. 3.
Optimism and Disappointment: The Washington Summit that Never Was

To overcome these disagreements and build off the “spirit of Geneva,” Gorbachev presented on January 15, 1986 a three-stage plan to globally eliminate nuclear weapons. This vision of a nuclear-free world appealed to Reagan and its specificity and imaginativeness also attracted interest from Shultz who noted Soviet acceptance of stringent verification measures [including on-site inspections]. Nonetheless, the President and his advisors believed the offer was detrimental to the security interests of the U.S. and its allies because if they accepted, then they would be vulnerable to the numerical superiority of Soviet conventional forces.\textsuperscript{55} The way in which the proposal was unveiled also raised questions about its credibility as it was reminiscent of prior Soviet initiatives where leaders like Khrushchev used public diplomacy to issue slogans for “general and complete disarmament.”\textsuperscript{56} Whether due to its content or its method of delivery, the initiative was ultimately dismissed but only after triggering a debate within the Reagan administration over its authenticity.\textsuperscript{57}

Gorbachev’s initiative was meant to be bold but it did not have the characteristics of a bold gesture since it was neither novel nor unconditional. It was costless because it had been sanctioned by the most conservative actors within the foreign ministry, the military, and the defense industry who sought to offer something that they knew the other side would never

\textsuperscript{55} The offer was deemed favorable to the U.S.S.R. because it would allow the country to escape out of an arms race at the very time its economy was seen to be suffering. Moreover, the offer ignored reductions to conventional weaponry, an area where the U.S.S.R. maintained a numerical superiority.

\textsuperscript{56} Larson, \textit{Anatomy of Mistrust}, 22-23; Oberdorfer, \textit{From the Cold War to a New Era}, 156.

\textsuperscript{57} This proposal was carefully studied by the National Security Council Policy Group (NSPG) the following month. Shultz, \textit{Turmoil and Triumph}, 699-700; Matlock, \textit{Reagan and Gorbachev}, 177-178.
While Gorbachev had intended to use the January 15th proposal to stimulate substantive discussions, he had completely failed to do so.

When the fourth round of the Geneva NST talks began in 1986, there were high expectations that the seriousness with which both sides attached to negotiations would translate into meaningful agreements. Nonetheless, these expectations were dashed as the talks remained deadlocked over whether the ABM treaty allowed such a program as SDI to exist. The Soviets applied a restrictive definition to argue that SDI was not permitted whereas the Americans used a broad definition to defend Reagan’s program. In other areas where disagreement existed such as in intermediate range and strategic nuclear forces, the two sides failed to move any closer to an agreement. In his meeting with Shultz, Soviet Ambassador to the U.S. Anatoly Dobrynin expressed frustration that in previous rounds [of Geneva] the U.S. side had not taken a single step toward the Soviet position. He had heard nothing in his meetings in Washington thus far to change this view. The U.S seemed to have an ‘all or nothing’ position.

There was a general feeling that the negotiations needed a “spark.” To break through the impasse, Gorbachev made a major concession in late May, abandoning his prior position on SDI

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58 Its primary authors were First Deputy Foreign Minister Georgi Kornienko and Marshall Akhromeyev. Dobrynin, In Confidence, 596-597; Service, The End of the Cold War, 164-168; Larson, Anatomy of Mistrust, 206. According to O.A. Grinevskii, “…It was clear from the start that the military made a smart move – there would be a lot of talking about this ‘big’ goal, and in the meanwhile no one will remember about the real disarmament. Sheer propaganda. We told them that a program of a complete and total disarmament of all sides would be seen by the West as mere propaganda covering up the Soviet Union’s unwillingness to take any realistic, serious steps towards disarmament.” In the same vein, N.N. Detinov said, “that was a well-planned move by the military to replace the real agreements on intermediate-range missiles, which were already shaping out, with propagandist declarations that were not really offering any solutions, but bearing very well with the public.” V.I. Kataev stated, “the military enjoyed when we made declarations like this, because they knew such global statements from us would never see any practical development or any adequate response…” Grinevskii, Detinov, and Kataev interviews, “Soviet Decision-Makers and Decision-Making Under Gorbachev,” in The Making of the End of the Cold War: An Oral History, eds. Gordon M. Hahn and Viktor B. Kuvaldin, HIGFC, box 10, pgs.126, 130, 139.


60 Ibid., p. 9.
and accepting that the program could be continued if the U.S. stopped testing and deployment for a period of 15 to 20 years. 61 Despite Gorbachev’s willingness to cooperate over SDI, Washington sought a much shorter timeframe for adhering to the ABM treaty (around 7.5 years) and could not agree to limit SDI to the “laboratory.” 62

The lack of progress in the negotiations was accompanied by something more ominous, the gradual erosion of the “spirit of Geneva.” Between March to September 1986, the U.S. had taken a series of military and political actions that increased the tension between the two sides. 63

Regarding the former, the U.S. used its navy to probe the Soviet coast and to also launch an attack against Libya, a Soviet client state, in retaliation for Gadhafi’s sponsorship of a terrorist attack. 64 Politically, the Reagan administration reduced the size of the Soviet Union’s UN mission and announced that the U.S. would no longer abide by SALT II, raising questions about the President’s stated interest in better relations. 65 On a more personal note, Gorbachev and

61 Larson, the Anatomy of Mistrust, 210.


63 Many of these concerns, including the U.S. naval provocations, the attack against Libya, and U.S. measures against the Soviet delegation to the U.N., were loudly voiced by Shevardnadze and Gorbachev in their meetings with Arthur Hartman, U.S. Ambassador to the Soviet Union and U.S. Congressional delegations. Cable from the United Kingdom’s Embassy in Moscow to Foreign Commonwealth Office, “Hartman’s Call on Shevardnadze,” April 8, 1986, Telno #397, Margaret Thatcher Foundation. Also see Larson, Anatomy of Mistrust, 209-210; Shultz, Turmoil and Triumph, 713; Garthoff, The Great Transition, 274.

64 On March 13, 1986, two naval ships moved to within six miles of the Soviet coastline in the Black Sea. Roughly a month later, the U.S. bombed Libya on April 15. In response to this attack, Soviet Foreign Minister Shevardnadze cancelled his scheduled visit to Washington from May 14 to May 16th to meet with Shultz. This was the immediate political fallout. On May 8, Hartman pressed Shevardnadze to reschedule a meeting with Shultz but Shevardnadze demurred given the circumstances. He said, “that circumstances were not yet right for a meeting between himself and Shultz. More time had to pass but this meeting would take place ‘at some time.’” Cable from the United Kingdom’s Embassy in Moscow to the Foreign Commonwealth Office, “U.S./Soviet High Level Consultations,” May 12, 1986, Telno #568, Margaret Thatcher Foundation. Also see Larson, Anatomy of Mistrust, 209-210; Shultz, Turmoil and Triumph, 713; Garthoff, The Great Transition, 274.

65 On May 27, 1986, Reagan announced that the U.S. would no longer abide by the Salt II limits on strategic arms. Garthoff, The Great Transition, 268-272; Oberdorfer, From the Cold War to a New Era, 168; Shultz, Turmoil and Triumph, 717-719.
other Soviet officials were deeply offended by the Reagan administration’s statements regarding the Chernobyl disaster. They believed their rival “exploited the accident to discredit the Soviet Union,” using a national tragedy to score political points. Relations reached a nadir in September when the superpowers were locked in a bitter row over the publicized Nicholas Daniloff-Gennady Zakharov spy affair.

As the relationship once again worsened, Gorbachev delayed his scheduled trip to Washington because he did not want to reward the U.S. for either its intransigence or its provocative behavior. Upsetting American officials, he insisted that any visit to Washington would have to be preceded by progress in negotiations, essentially adding a precondition for a future summit. In retrospect, the post-Geneva period was, as Gorbachev described it, one of “missed opportunities.”

66 On May 15th, Gorbachev met with American businessman Armand Hammer and Dr. Robert Gale. During the meeting, the General Secretary lambasted the United States for its criticism of the Soviet Union’s delayed response to the Chernobyl accident. He “accused official Washington of exploiting the accident to discredit the Soviet Union…he referred to speculation about the accident and unforgivable attempts to exploit the incident to discredit the whole policy of the Soviet Union and sow distrust towards its peace initiatives.” Cable from the United Kingdom’s Embassy in Moscow to the Foreign Commonwealth Office, “Gorbachev Meeting with Hammer and Gale on 15 May,” May 16, 1986, Telno #593, Margaret Thatcher Foundation. Describing the same meeting, Hammer had said Gorbachev was “boiling mad” in their meeting. Palmer, U.S. deputy assistant secretary of state, met his Soviet counterpart, Aleksandr Bessmertnykh, in Washington and found him “in a similar mood.” Cable from the United Kingdom’s Embassy in Washington to the Foreign Commonwealth Office, “U.S./Soviet Relations,” May 19, 1986, Telno # 1347, Margaret Thatcher Foundation. For more on this, also see Garthoff, The Great Transition, 277-278.

67 Matlock, Reagan and Gorbachev, 198-202.

68 In a meeting with American businessman Armand Hammer and Dr. Robert Gale, Gorbachev discussed the prospects of a summit. “On the U.S./Soviet summit…Gorbachev confirmed his ‘agreement in principle to a new meeting’ repeating that two simple things were necessary: a readiness for it to bear tangible and practical results ‘if only in one or two matters of concern to the whole world,’ and a ‘corresponding political atmosphere.’” Cable from the United Kingdom’s Embassy in Moscow to the Foreign Commonwealth Office, “Gorbachev Meeting with Hammer and Gale on 15 May,” May 16, 1986, Telno #593, Margaret Thatcher Foundation. Also see Memorandum of Conversation, “Secretary Shultz’s Meeting with CPSU Secretary Dobrynin,” April 9, 1986, Ronald Reagan Presidential Library and Archives, Matlock Files, Box 44, Folder: U.S.-U.S.S.R. Relations March-May 1986 (1), p. 7. Reagan grew unhappy with Gorbachev’s decision to make a summit visit conditional on progress in negotiations.

69 Gorbachev himself wrote to Reagan that, “the months which have passed since our meeting have turned out to be a kind of a period of missed opportunities.” Gorbachev letter to Reagan, June 19, 1986, Ronald Reagan Presidential Library and Archives, Matlock Files, Folder: Head of State Correspondence June 1986, p. 1. According to
While the situation indeed looked bleak, Gorbachev was heartened by the fact that Reagan chose not to abandon diplomacy despite the mutual accusations and recriminations. In public statements and in private correspondence with the General Secretary, Reagan repeatedly signaled his interest to continue negotiations at the highest-levels. The onus was largely on Gorbachev to decide if and how he wanted to respond to Reagan. Though growing disillusioned with the pace and efficacy of negotiations, Gorbachev was strongly encouraged by third-parties to continue the dialogue with Reagan.

On July 7, 1986, France’s President Francois Mitterand visited Moscow and tried to disabuse Gorbachev of his belief that Reagan’s policies were those of the military-industrial complex. While conceding that such forces exerted pressure on the Reagan administration, Mitterand told Gorbachev that Reagan is “a product of his milieu, and he is not without common sense and intuition.”70 He went on to tell him that,

Nothwithstanding his political past, Reagan is one of those statesmen who is intuitively striving to find a way out of this dilemma [status quo]. You may find this judgment contradictory but it is really true. Unlike many other American politicians, Reagan is not an automaton [machine]. He is a human being.71

The implication was that Reagan, unlike some of those advising him, was “sensible to the language of peace” and was a leader whose perceptions, attitudes, and beliefs were susceptible to

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Shevardnadze, “Unfortunately the train put together in Geneva began to spin its wheels rather quickly, and the development of events acquired a nature that was not at all what we had expected. Instead of hopes realized, the period after Geneva, in the words of M.S. Gorbachev, became a time of missed opportunities.” “‘Spies’ Standoff: Cut in U.N. Staff Asked,” Pravda, September 22, 1986, translated in the Current Digest of the Soviet Press 38, No. 38: 11-12.


71 Chernyaev, My Six Years with Gorbachev,76. Though slightly different, the French translation from this meeting makes the same exact points. See Attali, Verbatim, 112.
change. Gorbachev described this information as “extremely important” and said “I’m taking special note of it.” While Gorbachev did not explain his comments, Chernyaev said third-parties like Mitterand had helped challenge Soviet stereotypes and helped Gorbachev develop a “different perspective on the objectives of the United States and its leader.”

Mitterand’s comment also reinforced Gorbachev’s own perception that it might be easier to influence U.S. policy by meeting Reagan face-to-face. One complaint from the Soviet side was that interagency and/or factional disagreements within the U.S. government had made it difficult to conduct negotiations with someone who had the full authorization and backing of the President. Gorbachev noted to Mitterand the different reactions his June proposal elicited. Whereas Reagan and the State Department offered a positive response, other officials, including the U.S. negotiators at Geneva led by Ambassador Max Kampelman, had been cool and indifferent. Such a contrast supported Mitterand’s point that Reagan was more receptive and open-minded to new information than other officials. Gorbachev told the French President that

72 Attali, *Verbatim*, 112.
73 Chernyaev, *My Six Years with Gorbachev*, 76.
75 In a discussion with Sergei Rogov, a Soviet political scientist and close friend of Georgi Arbatov (an academic and advisor to Gorbachev), Matlock learned of the extent to which interagency and factional struggles affected the way the Soviets conducted negotiations. Upon asking why the Soviets withheld a new disarmament offer at the Geneva NST talks, Rogov responded “because negotiating with Kampelman [head of the U.S. team] is like negotiating with the entire Reagan administration, and that is impossible. There are people who want one thing and people who want another.” Later in the conversation, Rogov had stated that “he was increasingly pessimistic about whether anybody in the Administration was in a position to negotiate seriously with the full authorization of the President.” Cable from Jack Matlock, “Sergei Rogov,” May 30, 1986, Ronald Reagan Presidential Library and Archives, Matlock Files, Box 44, Folder: U.S-U.S.S.R. Relations March-May 1986 (2), pgs. 3-5. In a Politburo meeting, Gorbachev himself referred to some within the Reagan administration as part of the “military group.” Politburo Meeting, April 3, 1986, Chernyaev Papers, Oxford University, St. Anthony’s College Archive, Box 2, pgs. 16-18.
the situation made it difficult to visit the U.S. but Mitterand cleverly proposed a summit in a neutral, third-country.78

Gorbachev was further encouraged to convene a summit after his meeting with Richard Nixon. The former President visited Moscow on July 18th and attempted to provide some insight into U.S. foreign policy; he told Gorbachev that,

Reagan views the American-Soviet relationship as his personal responsibility…He has been very impressed by your conversations as well as your personal commitment to the cause of peace between our countries. He also thinks that he made a certain personal connection with you [at Geneva] and, based on that, he believes that an agreement is possible if you work together.79

Despite the ongoing tension, Nixon reassured Gorbachev that Reagan was still committed to improving the bilateral relationship. The salience of Nixon’s message was not about what it communicated about U.S. intentions but rather about what it suggested about Reagan’s style of leadership. Parsing Nixon’s statements, we see that Reagan was the type of leader who attached great weight to the chemistry, or personal relationships, he developed with other leaders. Reinforcing what the Soviet leadership already learned from the Geneva summit, Reagan was a leader who could best be influenced through direct talks.80

Face-to-face talks also seemed like an attractive option because Gorbachev mistrusted the career diplomats and arms control specialists who negotiated on his behalf, particularly those from the Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MFA). This was an issue that Shevardnadze had attempted

78 Ibid.

79 Chernyaev, My Six Years with Gorbachev, 77; Cherniaev, “Gorbachev’s Foreign Policy,” 122.

80 According to Falin, after the Geneva summit, “I heard myself his words [Gorbachev’s words] that he got convinced that [when] he speaks directly to Reagan and personally to the President than [then] his political lexicon becomes more rich in comparison when Reagan makes presentations with a text prepared by his speechwriters and assistants” Valentin Falin interview, January 11, 1990, interview transcript, Don Oberdorfer Papers, 1983-1990, Seeley G. Mood Manuscript Library, Princeton, NJ, Box 1, Folder 6, p. 15. Also see entry from November 24, 1985, in The Diary of Anatoly Chernyaev [1985], National Security Archive Electronic Briefing Book No. 192, p. 94.
to resolve through his personal intervention but to no avail. In April 1986, Gorbachev levelled accusations that the slow progress in negotiations was attributable to the gap between his political declarations and the actual positions undertaken by Soviet negotiators. The following month, Gorbachev delivered a fiery speech at the MFA to inspire its personnel to overcome their ideological and/or organizational prejudices and to clearly outline the country’s new direction in foreign affairs. Despite his attempts to change the culture at the MFA, Gorbachev bitterly complained about how “they [MFA personnel] still had not learned to think big. They got caught in details, were afraid of being accused of softness, of losing face. They weren’t prepared to take big steps.”

Gorbachev was increasingly frustrated with lower-level bureaucrats and grew

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81 Oleg Grinevsky, Soviet chief negotiator at the Stockholm talks, stated that “on March 23, 1986, Shevardnadze assembled the people participating in the arms control talks. He spoke approximately the way Anatoly Sergeivich [Chernyaev] has described. He said, ‘You do not understand today’s tasks. Try to understand, we need an agreement today, we cannot wait. We will not let an abnormal situation take place. When the general-secretary of the Communist Party starts farreaching peaceful initiatives, including at the Party Congress, and nothing changes at the talks, we have a gap between our words and our deeds. If this continues we will have to change the members of the delegation and they will do the job.’ We tried explaining to him that you can change the members of the delegation but you cannot change the existing diplomatic practice and the position of our country, but here is where all of the difficulties were.” “Understanding the End of the Cold War [An Oral History Conference],” May 9, 1998, Session 6, available from the National Security Archive.

82 In an April Politburo meeting, Gorbachev stated that “the priority in the negotiation process should be the political decision. Negotiators should adjust to it, and not the other way around. If someone has doubts, then he needs speak up and stop whispering afterwards. Now is the opportunity to speak your mind. When we discuss it, it is okay to have different opinions. But once we have decided – that is it! And if someone starts whispering after the decision has been made – this is another question.” Politburo Meeting, April 24, 1986, Chernyaev Papers, Oxford University, St. Anthony’s College Archive, Box 2, pgs. 26. Chernyaev said “And he [Gorbachev] accused not only the American negotiators, but even more his own Soviet negotiators. He often said – it was his favorite phrase – ‘this whole thing smells of moth balls. We really should give a shake-up to all of this old clothing in Geneva.” Chernyaev interview, Witnesses to the End of the Cold War, ed. William C. Wohlforth (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1996), 166.

83 According to Chernyaev, Gorbachev reportedly said “despite the good long talk he’d had with the Foreign Ministry personnel in May – when they spoke openly and showed their professionalism and commitment – they still had not learned to think big. They got caught in details, were afraid of being accused of softness, of losing face. They weren’t prepared to take big steps.” Chernyaev, My Six Years with Gorbachev, 78. Gorbachev wrote in his memoirs that “but our generals and even some people in the Foreign Ministry and in our negotiating team in Geneva were doubtful. They were firmly stuck in a logic of antagonism, and the military sought to protect their corporate interests. The existing state of affairs seemed to suit some of negotiators in Geneva, who enjoyed having their wages paid in hard currency, thinking ‘the longer the negotiations, the better for us.’” Gorbachev, Memoirs, 415-416.
resolved to use personal diplomacy to break through the stalemate. The information provided by Mitterand and Nixon could only have encouraged him to pursue this channel. 84

By the fall of 1986, the Soviet leadership was disappointed that their initiatives had not elicited a positive response from the U.S. An intense debate took place over how to respond to Reagan’s intransigence; some officials argued they should continue to “test” the U.S. whereas others maintained that “they should give up on direct, meaningful Soviet-American arms control ‘until the early 1990.’”85 Gorbachev and his inner circle of advisors, including Shevardnadze and Chernyaev, were in favor of the former approach because they knew continuing the status quo was unacceptable. To jumpstart the negotiations, the Soviet leadership therefore drew on Mitterand’s idea and decided to meet Reagan in Iceland.86

On September 15, 1986, Gorbachev wrote a letter to Reagan in which he articulated his concerns, stating that “the negotiations need a major impetus.” He ended the letter by telling Reagan “they [negotiations] will lead nowhere unless you and I intervene personally” and went on to suggest that “we have a quick one-on-one meeting…may be just for one day, to engage in a strictly confidential, private, and frank discussion (possibly with only our foreign ministers

84 Garthoff noted, “he was determined to find a way to present the ideas to Reagan directly and not, as he put it to an aide [Chernyaev], ‘to keep Karpov [head of the Soviet delegation at the NST talks] living well in Geneva for the next three years.’” Garthoff, the Great Transition, 280 [n.89].


86 Gorbachev reportedly told Chernyaev while he was on a vacation in Crimea, “‘Anatoly, I don’t like it at all. Such routine! We were writing about the negotiations that just keep on spinning without any result! Geneva is behind us now. It was devaluated and let drop. We need a bold step that would change the situation. Nothing would do [except] by a personal meeting with the President. Only we could break this settled ritual with whiskey, vodka, and black caviar in unlimited quantities, with walks outside…” While I was saying that, an idea started forming in my head right then to set up a meeting with the President…’” Gorbachev Interview in The Making of the End of the Cold War: An Oral History, eds. Gordon M. Hahn and Viktor B. Kuvaldin, HIGFC, box 10, 448-449.
Also upset by what he perceived to be a downward spiral in U.S.-Soviet relations, Reagan eagerly accepted the invitation.

The letter provides proof that Gorbachev’s intent was to use Reykjavik to appeal directly to Reagan. To test Reagan’s personal commitment to disarmament, Gorbachev chose to present new proposals at Reykjavik without providing advanced notification that he would be doing so. The feeling was that if the Soviet Union introduced its proposals in advance, then it would either not be believed or it would invite a response from the very same experts and agencies that had, in their opinion, obstructed negotiations.

In this section, I have attempted to re-create the context that preceded Reykjavik. I argued that Gorbachev’s reliance on personal diplomacy explains the form and shape of the summit whereas the timing of Reykjavik can be explained through the strategic interaction between the Soviet Union and the United States. While this analysis helps us better understand Gorbachev’s goals, it does shed light on his exact motivations for introducing bold proposals. A judicious leader seeking to achieve a breakthrough would do so by introducing small or modest changes and offering small or modest concessions. In the next section, I argue that Gorbachev’s actions were intended to change the aggressive and threatening image of the Soviet Union.

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87 At the start of the letter, Gorbachev criticized the United States’ actions and negotiating positions. He wrote, “the overall character of U.S. actions in international affairs, the positions on which its representatives insist at negotiations and consultations, and the content of your last letter, all give rise to grave and disturbing thoughts. One has to conclude that in effect no start has been made in implementing the agreements we reached in Geneva on improving Soviet-American relations, accelerating the negotiations on nuclear and space arms, and renouncing attempts to secure military superiority.” Gorbachev Letter to Reagan, September 15, 1986, Ronald Reagan Presidential Library and Archives, NSC Head of State Files, Box 40, Folder: U.S.S.R. General Secretary Gorbachev (8690616, 8690659), p. 2, 6

88 Oberdorfer, From the Cold War to a New Era, 187.
Before Gorbachev assumed office, there was an overwhelming consensus among political elites that the country could ill-afford another costly arms race. To reduce defense expenditures, Gorbachev clearly needed to improve U.S.-Soviet relations but his ability to engage the Reagan administration was circumscribed by Washington' deep-rooted mistrust and suspicion of Soviet intentions.

Despite Moscow’s repeated statements regarding its peacefulness, the Soviet Union was still viewed as an expansionist state by many in the international community. Gorbachev’s visits abroad and his close contacts with Soviet security specialists prior to 1985 made him aware of how Moscow’s past policies had given rise to this perception. The information he obtained at home and abroad exposed him to the other side’s perspective and helped him realize how Soviet policies, even those that were meant to be defensive, were misperceived as threatening. Learning that American military actions may have been motivated by fear of rather than aggressiveness changed Soviet threat perceptions of the West, enabling Gorbachev and his top advisors to exercise security dilemma sensibility.89

To overcome what the Soviets referred to as the “vicious circle” or “vicious action-reaction cycle,” Gorbachev and his advisors reassured the U.S. of their benign intentions and did so in a way that would address the very sources of American insecurity. Such a change was possible only after the leadership developed a greater understanding of the role their own actions had played in fueling a conflict spiral.90 While security dilemma sensibility has already been

89 Booth and Wheeler, the Security Dilemma.

90 According to Jervis, “the first step must be the realization, by at least one side but preferably by both, that they are, or at least may be, caught in a dilemma that neither desires.” Robert Jervis, Perception and Misperception in International Politics (Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1976), 82. Also see Collins, the Security Dilemma and the End of the Cold War, 147-148.
used by other scholars to explain Soviet cooperation, they have not shown how this argument sheds light on Gorbachev’s decision to unveil a radically new proposal at Reykjavik. Applying SDS to broadly explain the very end of the Cold War, the summit is surprisingly given very little attention in their accounts.\textsuperscript{91} Moreover, these earlier studies were also weakly supported as they relied on secondary sources and open source material to validate their claims. Because decision-makers have incentives to misrepresent the truth in their personal and public accounts of foreign policy decisions, this type of evidence is unreliable unless it is corroborated with primary sources. Using oral histories and recently declassified archival documents, I provide a much more thorough account of Gorbachev’s motivations.

I also argue that changes in Soviet behavior cannot be attributed to security dilemma sensibility alone since Soviet decision-makers did not believe their actions were solely responsible for escalating tensions. Gorbachev and his inner circle of advisors understood that fear and mistrust were also exacerbated by the Soviet Union’s 	extit{enemy image}.\textsuperscript{92} Such a mental construct, which was fueled not only by past interactions but by the stark ideological differences between the two powers, made it difficult to convince either American officials or the American public that the Soviet Union was serious about ending the arms race. Throughout 1985 and 1986, repeated conciliatory signals that were sent by the Soviet Union were either dismissed or misinterpreted by U.S. officials as a ruse to spread disinformation or propaganda. Eager to

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\textsuperscript{91} Using Gorbachev’s later actions to provide evidence for their argument, these scholars have overlooked an important case and one that shows that Gorbachev in fact exercised SDS much earlier than is commonly thought. Collins, 	extit{the Security Dilemma and the End of the Cold War}, 139-211; Booth and Wheeler, 	extit{the Security Dilemma}, 137-170.
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project a benign and peaceful image, Gorbachev learned from these failures and offered larger and costlier concessions to unequivocally reassure his adversary.

Western stereotypes about the Soviet Union in conjunction with the dynamics of a conflict spiral made it difficult to slow, or end, the arms race. Gorbachev and members of his inner circle such as Chernyaev were aware of these forces and ultimately decided to undertake a bold move at Reykjavik to overcome these psychological barriers. They recognized that “new thinking” was needed and so, modified existing negotiating positions and offered concessions to reflect changes in their country’s foreign policy.

**Learning about the Sources of Mistrust**

Throughout the Cold War, the Soviet Union and the U.S. each viewed the other as a security threat. To protect not only themselves but their allies as well, the rivals increased their nuclear weapons and engaged in a relentless competition to modernize their arsenals. In the mid-late 1970s, the Soviets took a dramatic step when they replaced their older, single-warhead strategic and intermediate-range ballistic missiles with new, multiwarhead designs (or MIRV) such as the SS-18 and the SS-20 that were not only more destructive but also had greater accuracy and survivability to a first-strike, respectively.  

Representing a new generation of weaponry, the deployment of these missiles showed that the Soviet Union was not quite as peaceful as its leaders continuously professed. Though Gorbachev’s predecessors prioritized the improvement of nuclear delivery systems, their other policies were just as alarming to other states, including the invasion of Afghanistan, the

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93 The latter was particularly concerning because the Soviets increased their numbers of INF missiles since this category of weaponry was not affected by SALT I and SALT II limits. Grachev, *Gorbachev’s Gamble*, 17-19; Sergei Akhromeyev interview, January 10, 1990, interview transcript, Don Oberdorfer Papers, 1983-1990, Seeley G. Mood Manuscript Library, Princeton, NJ, Box 1, Folder 1, pgs. 4-6.
suppression of the Solidarity Movement (in Poland), and Soviet expansion in the third-world. These policies tarnished the Soviet Union’s image and confirmed American decision-makers’ long-held belief that their rival was an expansionist and militaristic state. When the Reagan administration responded to this perceived threat, mirror imaging prevented the Soviet leadership from understanding how their own actions had in fact provoked the U.S.

While foreign affairs experts commented on this dangerous action-reaction cycle, decision-makers either in office (i.e. Brezhnev, Andropov, Chernenko) or behind-the-scenes (Gromyko, Ustinov) dismissed their analysis. Reagan’s bellicose rhetoric and actions were attributed to the intrinsically “aggressive character of capitalism” and not as a response, or countermeasure, to the Soviet military buildup.\(^94\) Soviet decision-makers’ cognitive rigidity made it difficult for them to overcome their ideological stereotypes and to interpret and process information that did not coincide with their pre-existing attitudes and beliefs about the United States.\(^95\)

Gorbachev entered national politics at the end of the 1970s and unlike his colleagues, was already critical of the Soviet Union’s foreign policy. Unhappy about the status quo, Gorbachev reportedly told Shevardnadze as far back as 1979 that the country’s foreign policy needed to change.\(^96\) As a novice in this area, however, Gorbachev did not yet know what type of change was necessary and sought to make up for his inexperience by listening to the mezhdunarodniki, or foreign affairs experts such as policy analysts, journalists, and academics.\(^97\) To satisfy his


\(^95\) Interestingly, Dashichev later restated his argument publicly in a newspaper article. See “Wrong Turns in Soviet Foreign Policy,” *Literary Gazette*, May 18, 1988, p. 14.


“insatiable thirst for knowledge,” Gorbachev also became an avid reader of Soviet and Western writings and traveled quite extensively throughout Europe.98 As shown over the next few pages, Gorbachev’s openness to learning made him more receptive to revise his beliefs and helped reframe his worldview prior to becoming General Secretary.99

Policy advisors played a central role in shaping Gorbachev’s view of international relations before and especially after he “joined the Central Committee apparatus.”100 Cognizant of how Soviet actions were perceived as threatening, these lower-level party officials cautioned decision-makers against attributing U.S. policies to domestic rather than systemic forces. They argued that while the Reagan administration escalated the arms race, it did so due to its uncertainty regarding Soviet intentions. Under these circumstances, it was essential to reassure rather than threaten the U.S. if the Soviet Union hoped to mitigate the tension and stop the arms race. Viacheslav I. Dashichev, an aide to Andropov, had written a memorandum making such a

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98 Ibid., 212.

99 For more Gorbachev’s appetite to learn. See Ibid., 12, 212; Shaknazarov and Chernyaev statements in “Understanding the End of the Cold War [An Oral History Conference],” May 9, 1998, Session 5, available from the National Security Archive; Valentin Falin interview, January 11, 1990, interview transcript, Don Oberdorfer Papers, 1983-1990, Seeley G. Mood Manuscript Library, Princeton, NJ, Box 1, Folder 6, pgs. 3-4. Dobrynin recalled a visit to the Politburo in the early 1980s; he said, “I walked around to meet the leaders of the Politburo and almost no one asked me any questions. They said, ‘How was life?’ I said, ‘Well, it’s okay,’ and that was it. There was one man, just one man who asked me twenty, thirty questions. His name was Gorbachev. He was so interested. And what’s surprising, he had read so many books about the United States. Gorbachev took all the books he could find about the United States and read them all.” See Janice Gross Stein, “Political Learning by Doing: Gorbachev as Uncommitted Thinker and Motivated Learner,” International Organization 48, No. 2 (Spring 1994): 155-183, 175.

100 Gorbachev stated, “The International Department was very strong, one of the strongest. They had politically mature, well-educated people there. I met some of them when I was still working as a Secretary of Stavropol regional Party Committee, during some foreign visits. In fact, I met quite a few of them. I first met Cherniaev in 1972, during a visit to Belgium. I was the head of the delegation; he was in it from the Central Committee. That’s how I met them. Long before I joined the Central Committee apparatus. They helped me a lot later, when I was working there.” Gorbachev Interview in The Making of the End of the Cold War: An Oral History, eds. Gordon M. Hahn and Viktor B. Kuvaldin, HIGFC, box 10, pg. 437. Most of these individuals would later be promoted after Gorbachev became General Secretary. These policy-advisors were from the “men of the sixties generation,” or the generation that had come of age during the 1960s when General Secretary Khrushchev removed Stalin-era restrictions on culture, art, education, literature, and policy analysis. For more information on the role of Soviet experts on Gorbachev’s decision-making, see Larson, Anatomy of Mistrust, 200.
policy recommendation but was largely ignored by decision-makers. Similar suggestions were also made by a small but like-minded group of experts within the foreign ministry and the Central Committee’s International Department; they included people such as Anatoly Chernyaev, Vadim Zagladin, Georgi Shakhnazarov, and Sergei Tarasenko.

In addition to the traditional actors within the foreign policy apparatus, Gorbachev also relied on the Academy of Science’s think tanks to learn more about national security policy. Unlike many state or party institutions, the think tanks were one of the few places where experts had greater autonomy to evaluate and criticize Soviet policies. The studies conducted by such think tanks as the Institute of World Economy and International Relations (or IMEMO) and the Institute of the United States and Canada (or ISKRAN) were relatively nuanced and objective. Gorbachev was immediately drawn to their work and over the years, developed a close relationship with the heads of IMEMO and ISKRAN, Alexander Yakovlev (1983-1985) and Georgi Arbatov (1967-1995), respectively. Over the years, academics working at these prestigious institutes often served as informal policy advisors to political elites. During the end of the 1970s, for instance, Arbatov repeatedly warned the Soviet leadership against deploying the SS-20 missiles since such a move would erode détente. While his admonitions were ignored by

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102 Chernyaev commented on the evil empire rhetoric and he said that in certain circles, “this term and this propaganda was perceived as a punishment for what we did in Afghanistan. In other words, we felt that we deserved it…” “Understanding the End of the Cold War [An Oral History Conference],” May 9, 1998, Session 7, available from the National Security Archive.

Gromyko and Andropov, Arbatov, like many of his colleagues, encouraged decision-makers to at least be mindful of the way in which their actions would be perceived.\(^{104}\)

The rigorous studies conducted by these institutes also accomplished the same objective; they offered a fundamentally different understanding of the world and often prompted officials to reconsider the effects of their policies. One study that had been started under Nikolai Inozemtsev, the former director of IMEMO, and then completed under his successor Yakovlev illustrates this point. After examining the war preparations of NATO and the Warsaw Pact, IMEMO’s researchers shockingly concluded “there was no military threat from the West”\(^{105}\) since the composition of the former’s conventional forces was not suitable for engaging in large-scale military operations and/or prolonged conflict.\(^{106}\) They reasoned that the actions of the U.S. and its allies were motivated by the offensive orientation of Soviet conventional forces.\(^{107}\) Sergei Blagovolin, a military-affairs analyst and one of the contributors to this multi-volume study, said that it revealed an “absolutely new picture of the world.”\(^{108}\) This study is notable not just because of its conclusions but because it represents a striking example where Soviet academics, like those


\(^{106}\) To make this assessment, the researchers relied on many different indicators – including ammunition, weaponry, equipment, and the structure/organization of NATO’s forces. Sergei Blagovolin interview, January 19, 1990, interview transcript, Don Oberdorfer Papers, 1983-1990, Seeley G. Mood Manuscript Library, Princeton, NJ, Box 1, Folder 3.


within the foreign policy apparatus, commented on the security dilemma. While it is unclear if Gorbachev read this work, it is likely that he was familiar with its content given his relationship with Yakovlev and given the fact these types of reports were part of a “steady flow of information” to him.109

The statements Gorbachev later made as General Secretary suggests he had internalized many of the criticisms of Soviet foreign policy. He recognized that the Soviet Union was partially responsible for the arms race; according to Chernyaev,

Of course, Gorbachev was sure that we were not aggressors. We were not going to attack anybody. Still there was a belief that the world thought of us as aggressors...in our personal conversations he would say ‘I feel that it is our fault that this arms race is still going on.’ Of course he couldn’t state that officially because if he had said that, he would have been retired...So publicly, he could not make such a pronouncement, but in the depth of his soul he knew that.110

Believing Soviet policies forced the West to adopt military countermeasures, Gorbachev and other Soviet decision-makers began to publicly attribute their adversaries’ actions to fear rather than innate aggression.111 Privately, Gorbachev conceded that the stalemates that had been previously reached in arms negotiations were due to Soviet, not American, intransigence.

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109 Quote taken from English, *Russia and the Idea of the West*, 185. Gorbachev is credited with bringing Yakovlev back to Moscow from his diplomatic exile in Canada where he served as Soviet Ambassador (1973-1983). When Gorbachev later became General Secretary, he promoted Yakovlev to the Central Committee’s Propaganda Department. In March 1986, Yakovlev became a Central Committee member and was specially appointed a Central Committee secretary. By January 1987, he was elected a candidate Politburo member and was elevated in June 1987 to full Politburo member. “Appendices,” in *The Making of the End of the Cold War: An Oral History*, eds. Gordon M. Hahn and Viktor B. Kuvaldin, HIGFC, box 10, pgs. 470-471.


111 On August 19, 1986, Gorbachev publicly said “it, this fear, is a direct participant in the arms race: by increasing distrust and suspicion, it forces a vicious circle of aggravated tension.” “Gorbachev Extends Test Ban Until Jan. 1,” *Pravda*, August 19, 1986, translated in *the Current Digest of the Soviet Press* 38, No. 33: 5. Anatoly Dobrynin noted how worst-case thinking contributed to the arms race; he wrote, “the development of new armaments by one side motivates the other to take corresponding steps, based on the worst possible scenario in the development of events. In turn, this influences the side which initiates that specific round in the arms race. It is thus that the vicious circle is closed. The arms race gains its own inertia and distorted development logic, taking all of us closer to the line beyond which it could become uncontrollable irreversible. With every single round the military confrontation rises
While the *mezhdunarodniki* helped Gorbachev reassess the nature and the severity of external threats, his beliefs were also affected by what he learned abroad. Prior to becoming General Secretary, he was one of the most well-traveled members of the Politburo, frequently leading Soviet delegations to Western countries.¹¹² Indoctrinated to believe the “imperialist” West was preparing for war, Gorbachev’s trips abroad provided evidence that debunked this claim.¹¹³ Moreover, he realized that the West was made up of a very heterogenous group of states, none of which were the fortress countries depicted in the Soviet media.¹¹⁴ Gorbachev’s statements as General Secretary reflected the thinking of someone who fundamentally disagreed with the alarmist rhetoric and stereotypical images that had sustained Cold War tensions.¹¹⁵

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¹¹² Gorbachev was the second most well-travelled Politburo member after Andrei Gromyko. Before 1985, Gorbachev had already visited Canada, Belgium, England, France, Italy, West Germany, and the Netherlands. English, *Russia and the Idea of the West*, 182.

¹¹³ Through his trips abroad, he learned that his rivals were in “no way preparing to attack or invade the Soviet Union.” Grachev, *Gorbachev’s Gamble*, 46. Chernyaev made a similar point. He said, “me, despite being a communist, a Marxist, and a Leninist, I never believed that the Americans were going to attack us, although whenever it was necessary I said the proper words.” “Understanding the End of the Cold War [An Oral History Conference],” May 8, 1998, Session 2, available from the National Security Archive.

¹¹⁴ Grachev, *Gorbachev’s Gamble*, 46-47. Gorbachev’s advisors such as Arbatov, Yakovlev, Chernyaev, and Shakhanazarov had lived abroad during the Khrushchev era, or the thaw era, and had considerable exposure to Western society. English argues that such exposure had altered or changed their beliefs and stereotypes about Western countries. English, *Russia and the Idea of the West*, 70-76.

¹¹⁵ Gorbachev wrote to Reagan that, “We are for casting aside the stereotypes and outdated modes of thinking, hindering the advance movement, and for tackling in a bold and new manner the resolution of issues which you and I simply do not gave the right to postpone.” Gorbachev’s letter to Reagan, January 14, 1986, *The Reagan Files*, ed. Jason Saltoun-Ebin, available: [http://www.thereaganfiles.com/19860114.pdf](http://www.thereaganfiles.com/19860114.pdf). In a speech before the Ministry of Foreign Affairs in May 1986, Gorbachev stated, “the new quality of our work requires us to overcome the preconceptions, smugness. And inertness that still exist in our consciousness.” Savranskaya et al, *Masterpieces of History*, 225. A month earlier, on April 3, 1986, Gorbachev told the Politburo, “What prevents us from working there is our orthodox ideology. Everything which does not look like us, or which is unfamiliar to us – raises suspicions, doubts in political leaders’ decency, in the ability to conduct business with them honestly. We should end this.” Politburo Meeting, April 3, 1986, Chernyaev Papers, Oxford University, St. Anthony’s College Archive, Box 2, pgs. 16-18. According to Chernyaev, Gorbachev began telling his aides by the spring of 1986, “If you will be suggesting to me here any proposals that we will one day fight a war with America, then I will not accept such a proposal. Until now, during the period of stagnation, we had assumed in our planning that a war is possible, but now, while I am general secretary, don’t even put such plans on my desk.” Wohlforth, *Witnesses to the End of the Cold War*, 37.
Believing there was “no real threat of an attack from the U.S.…,” Gorbachev and his advisors grew willing to accept greater risks during arms control negotiations. While his willingness to compromise drew complaints from the military and the military-industrial complex, Gorbachev’s response reflected his skepticism with their threat perception; he retorted, “why are you looking at the West through a gun port? Take off your blinders.”

Gorbachev’s diplomatic trips not only affected his perception but it also made him more cognizant of his rival’s point of view. Soviet officials like Gorbachev who traveled in Western countries were not only met by protests and demonstrations but were received by irate foreign leaders, many of whom decried Soviet provocations in Europe and the third-world. These visceral reactions reaffirmed what Gorbachev had learned and showed him firsthand how political elites and publics actually viewed the Soviet Union. After becoming General

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116 Ibid., 5, 37. Chernyaev wrote two weeks before being appointed Gorbachev’s aide, “He [Gorbachev] is going for that very ‘risk,’ in which he has boldly recognized the absence of risk, because no one will attack us even if we disarm totally.” Entry from January 18, 1986, in The Diary of Anatoly Chernyaev [1986], National Security Archive Electronic Briefing Book No. 192, p. 6. Savranskaya noted “In 1985, 1986, and 1987, there is not one discussion [Politburo discussion] saying that we are threatened by the West.” Savranskaya comment, in Military Planning for European Theatre Conflict During the Cold War: An Oral History Roundtable Stockholm, April 24-25, 2006, eds. Jan Hoffenaar and Christopher Findlay (Zurich: Centre for Security Studies), 208-209.


118 Adamishin, deputy foreign affairs minister and head of the Africa desk, wrote, “we need to account for the fact that propaganda has created a twisted image of the U.S.S.R. in the western countries: we are seen as expansionist, militaristic, and as the repressors our own citizens’ individual freedoms.” Anatoli Adamishin Papers, November 25, 1985, Box 1, 1985 Diary, HILA. According to Sergei Tarasenko, deputy foreign affairs minister and head of the U.S. desk, “…there were always demonstrations wherever we’d go abroad. Wherever our leaders went they would encounter protests and petitions. So the image of our country at that point, when Gorbachev came to power, was actually the worst it had ever been in the eyes of international society. I think that one of the first concerns of the Gorbachev administration was to repair this image so the Soviet Union wouldn’t be viewed as the ‘evil empire.’” “Understanding the End of the Cold War [An Oral History Conference],” May 8, 1998, Session 3, available from the National Security Archive.

119 The Supreme Soviet’s special committee had been created by Andropov in 1983 and Gorbachev had been promoted to head this body. English, Russia and the Idea of the West, 184. According to Vadim Zagladin, deputy head of the Central Committee’s International Department and a member of this special committee, Gorbachev “repeatedly said…‘Check out the public opinion about us abroad. I am not talking about the governments – that’s only one side – how does general public view us?…We need to listen to what they say about us…” V.V. Zagladin
Secretary, Gorbachev’s contacts with foreign leaders increased and further helped him empathize with his rivals.

While Gorbachev had recognized that Soviet actions fueled an enemy image, he also attributed its crystallization and durability to Western stereotypes. These “biases,” in his view, led others to systematically misjudge Soviet policies and misperceive Soviet intentions. Regardless of its origins, Gorbachev understood that the existence of such an image contributed to the other side’s suspicion and mistrust and made it far more difficult to end the arms race.

Between March 1985 and June 1986, Gorbachev sought to undermine this threatening image by promoting people-to-people contacts, softening his rhetoric, and finally, making a series of small to moderate conciliatory gestures. His stated goal throughout this period was to “build trust” and reduce the suspicion between the two sides to facilitate meaningful negotiations. Members of Gorbachev’s inner circle were generally supportive of these moves

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120 On June 10, 1985, Gorbachev wrote a letter to Reagan and stated that past leaders had cooperated when they had “enough wisdom and realism to overcome bias caused by difference in social systems, in ideologies…” Gorbachev letter to Reagan, June 10, 1985, The Reagan Files, ed. Jason Saltoun-Ebin, available: http://www.thereaganfiles.com/19850610.pdf. At the end of the Geneva summit, Gorbachev issued a short statement in which he expressed some optimism that he was able to overcome some of the “biased judgments about the Soviet Union and its policies…‘you cannot establish trust in one day.’” Gorbachev, Memoirs, 411.

121 In a Politburo meeting, for instance, Gorbachev commented on how establishing more people-to-people contacts was an “important” way to disabuse others of their belief in a “Soviet threat.” As Gorbachev stated, it would help restore “an accurate perception of us [the Soviet Union]…let them [Westerners] come here as much as possible. Let them look, let them see what we are like in reality. We are not so bad.” Entry from August 27, 1985, in The Diary of Anatoly Chernyaev [1985], National Security Archive Electronic Briefing Book No. 192, p. 75.

122 Commenting on this period, Gorbachev wrote that “that because of the prevailing mistrust between East and West, only specific measures could contribute to establishing trust. And without trust even the slightest improve in world affairs would be impossible to achieve.” Matlock, Reagan and Gorbachev, 172-173. In a May 1985 meeting with Italian Prime Minister Bettino Craxi and Italian Foreign Affairs Minister Giuliano Andreotti, Gorbachev stated his intention was to reduce the suspicion between the two sides. Service, the End of the Cold War, 140-141.
but, as mentioned earlier, none of these initiatives elicited a response from the U.S. They were either dismissed or misinterpreted as a ruse to spread disinformation or propaganda.

Gorbachev briefly commented on this point at the Geneva summit; he told the American delegation, “even the signals we send to you are distorted by you.” Experiencing failure helped Gorbachev learn just how resistant such images are to change and undoubtedly inspired him to make even greater overtures to the Reagan administration. As described in the next section, one of these changes was the application of new thinking, or new political thinking (NPT), to Soviet foreign policy.

**Overcoming the Psychological Barriers**

Before assuming office, Gorbachev was strongly opposed to continuing the arms race, believing that it was not only dangerous but unnecessary and financially wasteful. The very same policy advisors that had helped Gorbachev reach this conclusion also circulated new ideas on

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123 Chernyaev, who was deputy head of the international department at the time, wrote, “To the Americans he [Gorbachev] proposed (besides two moratoria) a considerable reduction in strategic and Euro missiles…instead of the Strategic Defense Initiative. They won’t go for it, but we will be in the win. The stereotype of ‘the Soviet threat’ is being torn down.” Entry from September 21, 1985, in *The Diary of Anatoly Chernyaev [1985]*, National Security Archive Electronic Briefing Book No. 192, p. 81. Chernyaev later wrote, “However, something has been done to change people’s ideas about us. Most importantly, we tried to be appealing to Europe, or rather tried to openly show Europe our good intentions; we are changing…” Entry from October 7, 1985, in *The Diary of Anatoly Chernyaev [1985]*, National Security Archive Electronic Briefing Book No. 192, p. 82.

124 Adamishin, deputy foreign affairs minister, wrote “the hand we have extended to the USA and the West is hanging in the air.” Anatoli Adamishin Papers, April 9, 1986, Box 1, 1986 Diary, HILA. On June 25, 1986, Shevardnadze lamented to Oleg Grinevsky, Soviet chief negotiator at the Stockholm talks, “Understand, please understand, we have a critical situation. We have put forth very serious proposals on controlling conventional and nuclear armaments and they received no response from the West. At the talks in Geneva, we’ve reached dead end after dead end on testing, on intermediate range missiles, on strategic missiles. Why? They don’t trust us, do they, or do they want to corner us instead of meeting us half way?...this graduated response can’t work” “Understanding the End of the Cold War [An Oral History Conference],” May 9, 1998, Session 6, available from the National Security Archive.

125 Oberdorfer, *From the Cold War to a New Era*, 135.

how to reduce tensions and mitigate the arms race.\textsuperscript{127} Academics did much the same thing; they refined, developed, and disseminated the ideas later associated with NPT. Arbatov, in particular, played a critical role because as a result of his participation in conferences and transnational organizations (i.e. the Palme Commission, the Pugwash movement, the Dartmouth meetings, etc.), he was exposed to foreign ideas about diplomacy, military doctrines, and national security policy, all of which he imported back to Moscow.\textsuperscript{128} While the tenets of new thinking had existed as early as the 1970s, security specialists did not have the ear of an influential official until Gorbachev’s arrival.

Influenced by their work, Gorbachev accepted many of the ideas associated with NPT. After entering office, adumbrated a series of loosely-connected propositions that challenged the longstanding concepts and ideologies that had until then guided policy-making.\textsuperscript{129} Instead of emphasizing Marxist-Leninist class struggle and the inevitability of conflict between communism and capitalism, he changed the political lexicon and emphasized themes such as cooperation, interdependence, and universal values. Unlike his predecessors, he argued that

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\textsuperscript{127} Shakhnazarov, for instance, published an important article, “The Logic of Political Thinking in the Nuclear Era,” in 1983 that identified the key elements of what would later become Soviet new thinking. For general information on the individuals who espoused many of the ideas later associated with new thinking, see Larson, \textit{Anatomy of Mistrust}, 208; Garthoff, \textit{the Great Transition}, 261.


\textsuperscript{129} Many of these ideas were laid out in Gorbachev’s book on perestroika. See Gorbachev, \textit{Perestroika}, 139-144.
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security can be better ensured through political instead of military means and through the pursuit of mutual (or collective) instead of unilateral security. Countries interested in reducing tensions and ending the arms race had to account for the fears and insecurity of the other side and could not seek to achieve security at another’s expense. While Gorbachev privately espoused many of these ideas in 1985, he officially unveiled new thinking before the 27th Party Congress on February 25, 1986.\textsuperscript{130} In line with NPT, Gorbachev also initiated a reform process to change the country’s security doctrines and replace \textit{parity} with \textit{reasonable sufficiency}. The former posited that security required matching the capabilities of the U.S. and its allies whereas the latter assumed security is achieved when states keep the lowest possible level of weapons.\textsuperscript{131} While such a remarkable change officially occurred in 1987, the push for \textit{reasonable sufficiency} and \textit{non-offensive defense} in fact began as early as 1985.\textsuperscript{132} The salience of these ideas is that they provided the theoretical underpinning for defensive military postures and asymmetric reductions in nuclear as well as conventional forces.

At first glance, an ideational variable seems to explain the central features of the Soviet’s Reykjavik proposal. Gorbachev and his advisors pursued disarmament at lower levels of strategic balance, reduced (and offered to forfeit) the weapons that threatened the United States’ and Western Europe’s security, and for the first time, proposed asymmetric cuts. While

\textsuperscript{130} Larson, \textit{the Anatomy of Mistrust}, 208-209; Garthoff, \textit{The Great Transition}, 255-256; Service, \textit{The End of the Cold War}, 179. For the full content of the Political Report that was delivered to the Party Congress, see “Political Report of the CPSU Central Committee to the 27th CPSU Congress,” \textit{Kommunist} No. 4 (March 1986).


Reykjavik admittedly fits a constructivist narrative, the paradigm cannot explain the origins of ideas and the mechanism(s) driving their adoption. As pointed out by scholars and Soviet decision-makers themselves, NPT served as an intellectual framework to justify changes in foreign policy and to signal that Soviet “acts of cooperation” were part of a new, dynamic approach. It does not in and of itself shed light on the decision-making process and it tells us relatively little about Gorbachev’s motivations prior to Reykjavik.

I argue that Gorbachev’s concessions had been inspired not by new thinking but rather by a growing awareness that his country was viewed as a threat and possessed an almost unalterable image as an aggressive and intransigent state. Learning that past Soviet policies were responsible for this perception, Gorbachev exercised security dilemma sensibility and begun changing the Soviet Union’s rhetoric, military doctrine, and negotiating positions to address the very sources of American insecurity. Recognizing that the Soviet Union – whether rightly or wrongly – was ascribed an enemy image, Gorbachev moderated Soviet foreign policy to reassure the U.S. At the end of 1985, Gorbachev wrote to Reagan that “we have been able to overcome the serious psychological barrier which for a long time has hindered dialogue…” but such

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133 Larson and Shevchenko, “Shortcut to Greatness,” 78. Ideational explanations do not sufficiently account for the process through which elite preferences change.

134 Arbatov, the architect of new thinking, described NPT as a means to “deprive the West of its enemy.” Arbatov’s interview, “Military-Strategic Aspects of the Soviet-American Relations,” in The Making of the End of the Cold War: An Oral History, eds. Gordon M. Hahn and Viktor B. Kuvaldin, HIGFC, box 10, pgs. 252, 255. Commenting on Gorbachev’s address to the 27th Party Congress, for instance, Shevardnadze wrote that NPT had been adopted to “remove the stone of enmity and mistrust.” Shevardnadze, The Future Belongs to Freedom, 48. Shevardnadze also wrote, “it was clear to all that the old methods of confrontation…were no longer suitable. By remaining stuck in the old positions, we would not stop the arms race, which was bleeding our already anemic country, or reestablish cooperation with the West…To achieve this, we had to rebuild confidence, convince the world of the absence of a Soviet threat, and reassure our partners that our intentions were pure and sincere. In time, we marshaled convincing arguments with the policy of new thinking.” Shevardnadze, The Future Belongs to Freedom, xi. Many scholars have also made a similar point, see Larson, Anatomy of Mistrust, 208.

135 According to Grachev, “Gorbachev, starting from the early Perestroika years, declared that his intent was to refute the Western notion of the Soviet Union as a reality threatening them [the Western countries].” A.S. Grachev interview, “Military-Strategic Aspects of the Soviet-American Relations,” in The Making of the End of the Cold War: An Oral History, eds. Gordon M. Hahn and Viktor B. Kuvaldin, HIGFC, box 10, p. 261.
optimism quickly dissipated as the NST talks reached a stalemate and a series of events increased tensions. To overcome this “barrier,” Gorbachev decided by the end of 1986 to undertake a bold move to unequivocally and unmistakably signal his peaceful intentions. It was clear to Gorbachev and Chernyaev that something was desperately needed to remove the suspicion and mistrust between the two sides. In the next section, I use recently declassified primary documents from the Soviet Union to lend support to this argument.

BREAKING THE DEADLOCK: REYKJAVIK & THE TWO-PRONGED STRATEGY

The evolution of Soviet proposals leading up to Reykjavik reveals a great deal about Gorbachev’s underlying motivations and the fundamental role Chernyaev played throughout the pre-summit process. The idea was conceived in August 1986 and it began when Gorbachev instructed the Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MFA) to draft a routine reply to Reagan’s July 25th letter. Gorbachev received the “paper” while on vacation in Crimea and his impression was that it could not “unblock the strategic talks in Geneva…” Chernyaev, who had accompanied Gorbachev, shared the same view.

Eager to “give new impetus to the peace process,” Gorbachev proposed a summit meeting and instructed the agencies and institutions involved in arms control – the MFA, the Ministry of Defense, the Central Committee International Department, and the Military - to

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136 Gorbachev’s letter to Reagan, December 24, 1985, Ronald Reagan Presidential Library and Archives, Matlock Files, Box 66, Folder: Head of State Correspondence Jan. 1986 (1 of 2). Dobrynin used the same exact phrase as Gorbachev. He wrote in his memoirs that the Geneva summit had helped the two sides overcome a “certain psychological barrier.” Dobrynin, In Confidence, 592.

137 Chernyaev, My Six Years with Gorbachev, 77-78.

138 Quote from Gorbachev, Memoirs, 414. Similar remarks were also made in Gorbachev’s Interview in The Making of the End of the Cold War: An Oral History, eds. Gordon M. Hahn and Viktor B. Kuvaldin, HIGFC, box 10, 448-449.

139 Chernyaev, My Six Years with Gorbachev, 77-78.
prepare a serious platform.\textsuperscript{140} Representing these bureaucracies, members of the Interdepartmental Working Group (\textit{Malaya Piatierka}) - Marshall Akromeyev of the Defense Department/Military, Georgi Korienko of the CC International Department, and Yuri Vorontsov of the Foreign Ministry - developed a set of directives for the summit.\textsuperscript{141} Disappointed by their inflexibility and unimaginativeness, Chernyaev criticized their draft and gave Gorbachev a radical, alternative proposal to consider.\textsuperscript{142} Days before Reykjavik, Gorbachev abandoned the more conservative draft in favor of the one prepared by Chernyaev.\textsuperscript{143} Because the final package was so heavily influenced by Gorbachev and Chernyaev, I focus on their oral testimony and public and private statements to understand Soviet motivations.

By making a series of major concessions, the duo would persuade Reagan to cooperate in ending the arms race but in the event of failure, would mobilize public opinion to pressure him to do so. While these strategies seem inconsistent, they were chosen because they offered two very different mechanisms to overcome the diplomatic inertia in U.S.-Soviet negotiations.

To induce Reagan to cooperate, Gorbachev and Chernyaev proposed a far-reaching offer that would address American fears and insecurity. Exercising security dilemma sensibility, they made profound changes to the Soviet bargaining position on START and INF and did so in a way that would reduce mistrust. While Gorbachev could have unveiled such an offer at the

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\textsuperscript{140} Gorbachev, Memoirs, 414.
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\textsuperscript{142} \textit{Ibid.} Also see Chernyaev, \textit{My Six Years with Gorbachev}, 81-83; Chernyaev Memorandum to Gorbachev, October 3, 1986, Chernyaev Papers, Oxford University, St. Anthony’s College Archive, Box 1, Reykjavik Folder.
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\textsuperscript{143} Matlock, \textit{Reagan and Gorbachev}, 207.
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Geneva NST talks, he deliberately circumvented Washington’s and Moscow’s bureaucrats. Believing their perceptions were skewed by organizational and/or individual biases, Gorbachev chose to deliver his proposal directly to Reagan. The General Secretary convened and presented a bold proposal at Reykjavik to communicate his peaceful intentions and to personally reassure Reagan about his seriousness in ending the arms race.

His actions were also driven by a desire to project a benign image so that the Soviet Union could credibly challenge its threatening image. If he was unable to reassure Reagan, then Gorbachev and his team planned to publicize Soviet concessions to exert public pressure on the Reagan administration to reciprocate Soviet overtures. Because this post-summit strategy appealed to hard-liners within the Communist Party, it was used by Gorbachev in Politburo deliberations to justify Soviet concessions.

In short, adopting a proposal that could pressure and reassure his rival well-suited Gorbachev’s objective of ending the arms race because it made it possible for him to appease skeptics at home and abroad, respectively.

**Reassuring Reagan**

After he became General Secretary, Gorbachev had publicly made a series of conciliatory gestures to reassure the Reagan administration but they were rebuffed and/or misinterpreted. American decision-makers largely believed Gorbachev was trying to score propaganda points and were deeply suspicious of his professed commitment to peace and nuclear disarmament.144

Past reactions helped Gorbachev realize that if he wished to revive the stalled negotiations, then he needed to “present serious, realistic, far-reaching proposals” that were

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144 Disgruntled with the United States’ indifference, Gorbachev reported to the Politburo on March 24, 1986, “we understand that our peaceful intentions are being tested, checked.” Politburo Meeting, March 24, 1986, Chernyaev Papers, Oxford University, St. Anthony’s College Archive, Box 2, pgs. 9-13.
“without even a slightest touch of propaganda.” As he told Chernyaev, “we need a bold step that would change the situation.” The Akromeyev-Kornienko-Vorontsov draft was not such a “bold step” as it simply restated conventional Soviet positions with minor modifications. On October 3rd, Chernyaev wrote to Gorbachev, “the main goal of Reykjavik, if I understand you correctly in the South, is to sweep Reagan off his feet by our bold, even ‘risky’ approach to the central problem of world politics… This draft does not satisfy your plan either in form or content.” Through Chernyaev’s memorandum, we learn that Gorbachev’s “goal” was to not only change Reagan’s perception but to also gain his immediate endorsement of the Soviet package. While Gorbachev wanted a breakthrough agreement, Chernyaev believed the draft was too conservative to induce Reagan to cooperate. And so, he argued that the Soviets needed to better address American concerns by prioritizing START reductions, accepting the zero option for INF forces in Europe (irrespective of British and French weapons), and finally, appealing to Reagan’s aversion to nuclear weapons.

Chernyaev’s memorandum clearly had an effect because on the next day, October 4th, Gorbachev instructed the Reykjavik Preparation Group to follow this approach. He told them,

We must place strategic weapons, not nuclear testing, as the top priority of our push-and-breakthrough position. Strategic weapons concern everybody most of all other issues. And we must emphasize that we are proposing the liquidation of nuclear weapon, which

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146 *Ibid.* On October 8th, Gorbachev told the Politburo that “we had to prepare bold but realistic proposals for Reykjavik.” Gorbachev, *Memoirs*, 415.

147 Chernyaev, *My Six Years with Gorbachev*, 81.


149 The members of the Reykjavik Preparation Group who were present for this meeting were: Anatoli Chernyaev (Gorbachev’s personal aide), Viktor Chebrikov (head of the KGB), Lev Zaikov (head of the military-industrial complex, Central Committee’s Party Defense Department), Anatoli Kovalev (Deputy Foreign Minister), and Marshall Sergei Akromeyev (Chief of Staff, ministry of defense’s representative).
we already discussed with the President in Geneva. The talks must be devoted precisely to this goal. We should link this position with my January 15th statement.150

Gorbachev proposed equal 50% reductions of strategic weapons, including, for the first time, “significant” or “substantial” reductions of heavy missiles. Given that the Soviet’s land-based ICBMs such as the SS-18 posed the greatest, if not most immediate, threat to U.S. national security, Soviet reductions were intended to mitigate American fears.151 In limiting reductions to the triad, Gorbachev abandoned the prior Soviet position of counting INF, sea-based cruise missiles, and forward-deployed, or forward-based, nuclear systems as part of the strategic category. When asked years later what motivated Gorbachev to make these concessions, Chernyaev simply replied that “he wanted to introduce his idea in the simplest way, the idea that we’re not going to hurt anybody and we can negotiate.”152

By focusing on START, Gorbachev’s instructions reveal that he wanted to reassure Reagan, making concessions on those issues most worrisome to the U.S. and the international community. On a broader level, Gorbachev told the Planning Group to consider U.S. security interests otherwise “nothing will come out of it [Reykjavik] if our proposals lead to a weakening of US security. The Americans will never agree to it.”153 Such an expression of empathy is


151 As Gorbachev later wrote, the Soviet Union’s land-based ICBM force “was our most powerful strategic weapon and was considered a major threat by our ‘potential enemy’…But we would have agreed to this step to unlock the stalemate in the disarmament process,…” Gorbachev, Memoirs, 417.


consistent with earlier statements Gorbachev had made regarding the need to take American interests into account.\textsuperscript{154}

Gorbachev’s concessions on INF were in line with this approach. Without consulting either the military or the MFA, he accepted the zero option for Europe irrespective of changes to British and French nuclear arsenals and proposed maintaining 100 INF missiles in Asia.\textsuperscript{155} In defending this specific position, Gorbachev told his advisors that “the pivotal idea in the course of all talks must be: are we planning to go to war?! We, the Soviet Union, are not planning to go to war. That is why we are acting like this.”\textsuperscript{156} Gorbachev seemed to be telling members of his inner circle that the Soviet bargaining position needed to better reflect the country’s peacefulness. The positions advanced in the draft proposals made it appear, according to

\footnotesize{\textsuperscript{154} On April 3, 1986, Gorbachev addressed the Politburo and stated, “Not ambition, but respect towards other nations – this is what earns us points. The Americans cannot compete here with us. And we move rapidly, because we propose serious approaches to the world’s problems, and we recognize the U.S. interests, but not their hegemonic claims. This is our ‘our position of power.’” Politburo Meeting, April 3, 1986, Chernyaev Papers, Oxford University, St. Anthony’s College Archive, Box 2, pgs. 16-18. Immediately prior to Reykjavik, Gorbachev made the following statements: On September 22, Gorbachev told the Politburo “I made our response more dramatic, and named specific issues, with which I would be ready to go to a summit with Reagan. Whether Reagan would agree on them or not is another matter. But we cannot make offers to the Americans, which we know beforehand they would not accept. This is not a policy.” “Conference with Members of the Politburo and Assistants,” September 22, 1986, in the Reykjavik File, National Security Archive Electronic Briefing Book No. 203, Doc.#2, p. 2. Describing his account of the September 22\textsuperscript{nd} Politburo meeting (though more likely he was referring to the September 29\textsuperscript{th} meeting Gorbachev had with his assistants), Chernyaev recounted that Gorbachev stated “we have to understand that, in advancing our proposals, we also have to take their interests into account and not expect to get 100 percent of what we want.” Chernyaev, My Six Years with Gorbachev, 81. On September 29, Gorbachev told his assistants, “but we have to understand: when we are putting our proposals forward, we have to take their interests into account too, [understanding that] we will not get 100% satisfaction on any of the issues.” “Gorbachev’s Conversations with Assistants,” September 29, 1986, in the Reykjavik File, National Security Archive Electronic Briefing Book No. 203, Doc.#3.

\textsuperscript{155} According to General Nikolai Detinov, Soviet arms control negotiator, Gorbachev’s INF proposal “was the first decision on a military subject that Gorbachev made on his own.” “Understanding the End of the Cold War [An Oral History Conference],” May 9, 1998, Session 5, available from the National Security Archive.

\textsuperscript{156} “Gorbachev’s Instructions to the Reykjavik Preparation Group,” October 4, 1986, in the Reykjavik File, National Security Archive Electronic Briefing Book No. 203, Doc.#5, pgs. 1-2. Chernyaev records the same passage, he wrote “he rejected any arguments that contradicted this idea, weighing them against a rhetorical but meaningful question: ‘What are you doing, still preparing to fight a war? Well I’m not, and this is what determines everything else. If we’re still trying to conquer the entire world, then let’s discuss how to defeat the Americans in the arms race. But then we can forget all that we’re said about our new policies.’” Chernyaev, My Six Years with Gorbachev, 83.
Chernyaev, as if the Soviet Union was still preparing “to fight a war.” The reaction from both Gorbachev and Chernyaev suggests that if the Soviets wanted to reassure Reagan, then their proposals needed to truly demonstrate their benign intentions.

Nothing would better convince Reagan of this fact than Gorbachev’s restatement of his desire “to liquidate nuclear weapons.” In his memorandum, Chernyaev had strongly encouraged Gorbachev to outline such a goal, writing

> We should start with the thesis about the necessity of liquidating nuclear weapons, which has been repeatedly stressed by the U.S. President as well. This goal should define our intentions to reduce and liquidate strategic arms.

Chernyaev wanted to reframe the package in a way that would highlight Gorbachev’s commitment to disarmament. Gorbachev immediately accepted Chernyaev’s suggestion and instructed the Reykjavik Preparation Group to modify the package to show that he too shared a vision of a world without nuclear weapons. By couching massive reductions in strategic weapons as part of a wider campaign to eliminate nuclear weapons, Gorbachev hoped to unmistakably communicate his peaceful intentions. He was also appealing to Reagan’s well-known aversion to nuclear weapons but rather than doing so publicly as he did on January 15th, he now chose to do so privately. The Soviets long understood that the U.S. attached greater weight to messages given in private and so, they hoped to use this channel to avoid any

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157 Chernyaev, *My Six Years with Gorbachev*, 79.

158 Ibid., 82.

159 Accepting Chernyaev’s suggestion, Gorbachev told the Reykjavik Preparation Group that “the leitmotif is the liquidation of nuclear weapon” and “my ultimate goal is the liquidation of nuclear weapons.” “Gorbachev’s Instructions to the Reykjavik Preparation Group,” October 4, 1986, in *the Reykjavik File*, National Security Archive Electronic Briefing Book No. 203, Doc.#5, p. 2.

160 As Gorbachev stated on the return flight back to Moscow, “We wanted to give a real practical expression to those things, on which we in principle agreed on with Reagan in Geneva during our talks at the highest level. In other words – to give an impetus to the process of elimination of nuclear weapons.” “Gorbachev’s Thoughts on Reykjavik,” October 12, 1986, in *the Reykjavik File*, National Security Archive Electronic Briefing Book No. 203, Doc.#19, p. 1.
misunderstandings and/or misinterpretations. Gorbachev and Chernyaev wanted their message to be clearly relayed.

To achieve a breakthrough in the negotiations, the duo understood that they needed to change the draft proposal to overcome American suspicions and convince Reagan and Shultz that they were serious about ending the arms race. On October 8th, the Politburo met in its final meeting before Reykjavik; Gorbachev told its members, we must “prepare bold but realistic steps” for the summit. Gorbachev was trying to challenge the beliefs and attitudes of American decision-makers, most of whom still viewed the Soviet Union as untrustworthy, aggressive, and intransigent. Long viewed as the obstacle to meaningful negotiations, the Soviet Union needed to change such a perception and Reykjavik would provide a means to do so. By making concessions and framing them as part of grandiose objectives, the Soviets were attempting to “improve the image” of their foreign policy.

Reykjavik will allow us to improve the image of our foreign policy. It will highlight its constructivism, our desire to untie the knots, to end the deadlock that Geneva brought us into. Something needs to be done on this central direction after all. It needs to be pushed forward. The United States has an interest in keeping the negotiations machine running idle, while the arms race overburdens our economy. That is why we a need a breakthrough; we need the process to start moving.

Gorbachev told its members, we must “prepare bold but realistic steps” for the summit. 161 He defended his decision to do so, noting that:

Gorbachev was trying to challenge the beliefs and attitudes of American decision-makers, most of whom still viewed the Soviet Union as untrustworthy, aggressive, and intransigent. Long viewed as the obstacle to meaningful negotiations, the Soviet Union needed to change such a perception and Reykjavik would provide a means to do so. By making concessions and framing them as part of grandiose objectives, the Soviets were attempting to “improve the image” of their foreign policy.163

In the month following Reykjavik, Gorbachev would continue to employ this strategy to quicken the pace of arms control negotiations. By the end of October, Gorbachev prepared yet another concession to overcome Reagan’s objections to limitations on SDI. He would broaden

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163 Gorbachev also made a similar reference in his memoirs. Commenting on the October 8th Politburo meeting, he wrote “everyone agreed at the Politburo meeting that Reykjavik would improve our image in the world, demonstrating our determination to prevent a new arms race.” Gorbachev, *Memoirs*, 415.
the definition of “laboratory testing” to allow the U.S. to test SDI-related components “in the air, on the test sites [on the ground], but not in space.”164 Despite criticism from Politburo members, Gorbachev defended such a concession, telling its members:

I am not afraid to say, contrary to Andrei Andreevich [Gromyko] that if we agree to everything, they will overtake us through space. They will not go very far without space, and [they] are still very far from [deployment] in space. But so far we are increasing the potential of trust, we agreed to big concessions, we are not touching Britain and France. We took American security interests into account.165

Interestingly, Gorbachev suggests that the Soviets should make further concessions not out of fear of SDI but as a means to build trust with the U.S.166

Since the Cold War ended, a group of scholars have written that the Soviets were fearful of SDI and were willing to trade their strategic weapons for constraints on Reagan’s pet project. The package unveiled at Reykjavik can therefore be explained because a decisive shift in the balance of power had occurred and would worsen over the coming decade. There is a growing body of archival evidence that raises questions about the validity of this argument since Gorbachev understood that SDI or “space weapons” (as the Soviets referred to them) were far from deployable. The General Secretary’s chief science advisor, Yevgeni Velikhov, confirms that Gorbachev and other members of the Soviet leadership were aware that SDI did not pose a serious military threat. If anything, Soviet scientists and the military-industrial complex led

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165 Ibid., p. 4.

166 Though outside the scope of the paper, Gorbachev would continue to reassure Western leaders but by 1987, would do so by reforming the Soviet Union’s political system.
Gorbachev to believe that the Soviets could devise a cheap, asymmetric response to counter SDI.167

Throughout 1985 and 1986, Gorbachev’s central objective was to end the arms race for economic reasons. At Reykjavik, he unveiled sweeping proposals to reduce mistrust and induce Reagan to cooperate but if reassurance failed, then he planned to publicize them to pressure the President to respond.

**Exerting Pressure on the U.S.: Gorbachev’s Post-Summit Strategy**

If Reykjavik ended without a comprehensive agreement, Gorbachev intended to leak the package to highlight the flexibility and generosity of the Soviet offer. He would pin the blame for a failed summit on Reagan’s intransigence and show that it was the U.S. rather than the Soviet Union that was truly uninterested in nuclear reductions. The objective was to generate political costs for Reagan such that he would feel pressured to return to the negotiating table and agree to a compromise agreement.

Such a strategy was pursued because Gorbachev and members of his inner circle believed the Reagan administration was growing susceptible to domestic and international pressure.168

While public opinion had failed to sway Reagan in the past, Gorbachev and Chernyaev wanted to

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167 According to Chernyaev, “he [Gorbachev] let himself be convinced that ‘we had an answer to SDI’ and that it would be a real surprise for them [the U.S.]” Chernyaev, *My Six Years with Gorbachev*, 90.

168 On October 4th, Gorbachev told the Reykjavik Preparation Group, “We must find such an approach that would allow us to pull Reagan into the conversation, so he would agree on directives to the negotiators... Europe, the world community, and the [U.S.] Congress are putting pressure on Reagan. Trudeau warns us that we will not be able to come to an agreement with Reagan, who is a product of certain forces, and who has been appointed and sponsored by them. But, he says, you are doing the right thing and have already reached the ears of the [U.S.] Congress.” “Gorbachev’s Instructions to the Reykjavik Preparation Group,” October 4, 1986, in the Reykjavik File, National Security Archive Electronic Briefing Book No. 203, Doc.#5, p. 1. At the Politburo Meeting on October 8th, Shevardnadze said “I would not exclude a positive result in Reykjavik, because there is a very strong pressure on the USA... An acute domestic struggle is going on in the West and in the USA....” “Chernyaev’s Notes from the Politburo Session,” October 8, 1986, in the Reykjavik File, National Security Archive Electronic Briefing Book No. 203, Doc.#8, p. 3.
make a series of concessions and deliver them in such a way that Americans could not dismiss them as propaganda. Reagan would be placed on the defensive, having to account for his decision to refuse a package in which the Soviets made enormous concessions on START, INF, and strategic defense.

We see evidence of this strategy as early as August and September 1986 when Chernyaev criticized earlier negotiating positions, arguing that they were not costly enough to turn public opinion against Reagan. In an important letter to Kovalev, deputy foreign affairs minister, he wrote:

Employing all kinds of interim variants, we are trying to get Reagan to make concessions. But nothing will come of it. He will only change his stance if we get Western Europe on our side and are really able to turn public opinion against him. But by keeping our SS-20s in Europe, we’ll certainly never get the West Europeans on our side…Going to Reykjavik with little progress beyond that reached over the past year’s negotiations in Geneva would condemn this summit to failure and provoke universal disappointment. The summit in Reykjavik is not aimed at experts who know all the fine points of modern weapons, but at nations and states, the world community. Therefore, big policies should be in its forefront, not negotiating minutiae. The world must hear major, sweeping proposals from Reykjavik, in the spirit of the January 15 program.169

Disappointed with the ideas from the MFA and later the draft proposal prepared by Akhromeyev, Vorontsov, and Kornienko, Chernyaev proposed a series of changes which he believed were in line with Gorbachev’s dual strategy of reassuring and pressuring Reagan.

In the days and weeks leading up to Reykjavik, Gorbachev explained to his other advisors what he hoped to accomplish at the summit. On October 4th, he issued instructions to the Reykjavik Preparation Group and stated that “…to move Reagan, we have to give him something, something with pressure and breakthrough potential has to be done. If we fail, then

169 Chernyaev, My Six Years with Gorbachev, 79-80.
we can say – look, here’s what we were prepared to do!”170 He later added that “if Reagan does not meet us halfway, we will tell the whole world about this. That’s the plan.”171 When Gorbachev met with the Politburo, he noted that “these are the alternatives we are facing: either we achieve practical results, or we expose the absence of practical policy in this administration [Reagan administration].”172

The oral and written testimony provided by Gorbachev and Chernyaev lends strong and unambiguous support to this interpretation of the archival material. Their post-Cold War accounts corroborate what they said at that time and prove that exerting pressure on Reagan was part of the summit strategy.173 Anatoly Dobrynin who at the time served as head of the Central Committee’s International Department confirms that this was Gorbachev’s Machiavellian plan.174

Gorbachev cited the pre-summit strategy and the need to execute it after Reykjavik ended without an agreement. Upon returning from Iceland, Gorbachev briefed the Politburo on October 14th and told its members that it was time “for unmasking American positions” to “…win over to

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171 Ibid., p. 3


173 Gorbachev said, “And if the President had rejected them [the Soviet proposals], then to make it all public knowledge. To reveal to all there was nothing behind all the rhetorics about trying to achieve an agreement on nuclear arms reduction, etc. I presented this plan to the Politburo.” Gorbachev Interview in The Making of the End of the Cold War: An Oral History, eds. Gordon M. Hahn and Viktor B. Kuvaldin, HIGFC, box 10, p. 449. Chernyaev said, “Reykjavik was the crucial moment. That was a break-through towards new relations…Our mindset before Reykjavik was that if Reagan did not agree to our proposals, we would expose and label him as a demagogue who did not really want peace but war. We would declare this to the whole world using all available to us means of propaganda.” Chernyaev interview, “Soviet-American Relations, 1985-1991,” in The Making of the End of the Cold War: An Oral History, eds. Gordon M. Hahn and Viktor B. Kuvaldin, HIGFC, box 10, p. 247. Also see Gorbachev, Memoirs, 415, 419; Chernyaev, My Six Years with Gorbachev, 78-81.

174 Dobrynin, In Confidence, 621.
our side the public in foreign countries."\textsuperscript{175} He would engage in an unprecedented media blitz – giving interviews, conducting press conferences, and issuing statements – to deliver information for public consumption. The Politburo members endorsed Gorbachev’s plan in which the Soviets would not only leak their original proposals but also the contents of the summit meeting itself.

Gorbachev repeated the same argument on October 22\textsuperscript{nd}, telling the Politburo

\begin{quote}
we have to continue putting pressure on the American administration by explaining our positions to the public and by showing the responsibility of the American side for the breakdown of an agreement on the issues of reductions and elimination of nuclear weapons.\textsuperscript{176}
\end{quote}

In the weeks and months after Reykjavik, the Soviet leadership employed this strategy, particularly after the Reagan administration retreated from what had been orally agreed to in Iceland.\textsuperscript{177} It was no longer just about exerting pressure but also about correcting the record over what had been discussed at the summit itself. Criticized at home and abroad for making too


\textsuperscript{177} On October 30\textsuperscript{th}, Gorbachev told the Politburo, “Nothing will be achieved in the negotiations in Geneva. This is garbage. And now it is garbage with mothballs. Shevardnadze should feel out the U.S. positions in Vienna. What does America want after all? They are perverting and revising Reykjavik, retreating from it. They are engaging in provocations again, they are spoiling the atmosphere.” Gorbachev ended the meeting by telling the Politburo members, “Let us conduct talks with Shultz firmly. Let him answer to all our questions! [Tell him] that we preserved everything from Reykjavik. And you retreated from everything, confused everything. And [let us] give a leak to the press: that nothing is clear in the administration’s positions. The risk is justified by the fact that we discovered all their genuine positions, as well as the positions of West Europeans. The voice of criticism regarding the Americans’ behavior in Reykjavik and afterwards sounds sharper and sharper. Look what they write in Italy – even sharper than I spoke…The population – yes, they want negotiations. Therefore, we should put emphasis on the people’s mood, on the public. In Western Europe the attitude toward the U.S.-Soviet negotiations is beginning to change in parts. Therefore, we should now exploit our strong, post-Reykjavik positions. And our people will support such an approach.” Quotes taken from “Notes from the Politburo Session,” October 30, 1986, in \textit{the Reykjavik File}, National Security Archive Electronic Briefing Book No. 203, Doc.#23, pgs. 4-5. Similar passages are also recorded in Chernyaev, \textit{My Six Years with Gorbachev}, 88.
many concessions, the U.S. publicly downplayed Reagan’s counter-offer to liquidate ballistic missiles and his agreement (in principle) to eliminate all strategic nuclear weapons.\textsuperscript{178}

Gorbachev’s closest advisors, Yakovlev and Chernyaev, commended Gorbachev for conducting a public relations campaign but pressed the General Secretary to intensify his work in public diplomacy to expose what had truly happened.\textsuperscript{179} Yakovlev sent a memorandum to Gorbachev in which he wrote “the Soviet side should not allow Washington to sow doubts about our intentions, shift the responsibility for the absence of progress in the negotiations to the USSR.”\textsuperscript{180} He advised Gorbachev “to increase pressure on Reagan and the circles standing behind him” and suggested that “adding more flexibility and dynamism to the Soviet approach would strengthen such pressure.”\textsuperscript{181}

As explained in the last section, the Soviets began changing their stance towards SDI after Reykjavik, making yet again another major concession to the United States. While Gorbachev wanted to reassure Reagan, the archival evidence also suggests that he wanted to improve his country’s image to exert greater pressure on the President to agree to a comprehensive package. And so, Gorbachev not only exercised a dual-pronged strategy prior to the summit but he also continued this strategy well after Reykjavik had ended.

\textsuperscript{178} Chernyaev, \textit{My Six Years with Gorbachev}, 87-88.
\textsuperscript{179} \textit{Ibid.} Also see Memorandum from Yakovlev to Gorbachev, “To the Analysis of the Fact of the Visit of Prominent American Political Leaders to the USSR,” in \textit{Alexander Yakovlev and the Roots of the Soviet Reforms}, National Security Archive Electronic Briefing Book No. 168, Doc. 3, p. 2.
\textsuperscript{180} Memorandum from Yakovlev to Gorbachev, “To the Analysis of the Fact of the Visit of Prominent American Political Leaders to the USSR,” in \textit{Alexander Yakovlev and the Roots of the Soviet Reforms}, National Security Archive Electronic Briefing Book No. 168, Doc. 3, p. 2.
\textsuperscript{181} \textit{Ibid.}
CONCLUSION

In retrospect, Reykjavik was a turning point because in less than two days, the U.S. and the Soviet Union had agreed in principle to eliminate more classes and types of nuclear weapons than ever before. Gorbachev and Reagan grew optimistic about the prospects of future negotiations since they saw just how far the other was willing to go to reach an agreement.\footnote{On Gorbachev’s attitudinal changes after Reykjavik, see Grachev, \textit{Gorbachev’s Gamble}, 95, 244 [n. 5]; Chernyaev, \textit{My Six Years with Gorbachev}, 86-87; Dobrynin, \textit{In Confidence}, 610, 622. On Reagan’s positive impression of Gorbachev post-Reykjavik, see Yarhi-Milo, \textit{Knowing the Adversary}, 198. Jack Matlock referred to the summit as a “psychological turning point.”} The summit helped build trust between the two leaders and helped set in motion the steps that would lead to the signing of the Intermediate Range Nuclear Forces Agreement in December 1987. The significance of the summit owes much to Gorbachev and the package of proposals that he unveiled at the very first session.

In this paper, I have attempted to map the process through which Gorbachev made his decision to convene Reykjavik and present such a bold package. Since becoming General Secretary in March 1985, Gorbachev’s overarching objective was to save the ailing Soviet economy. At the time, he believed that if he could reduce defense expenditures and stop the arms race, then he could devote greater financial, technological, and human resources to bolster economic development. Domestic economic considerations were a shared background condition that affected Gorbachev’s as well as Sadat’s decision to undertake a bold move.

By the start of 1986, Gorbachev hoped to build off the “spirit of Geneva” to reach an agreement but despite his repeated initiatives, there was little to no progress. Over the spring and summer, the U.S.-Soviet relationship deteriorated to a new low and the two sides began a familiar pattern of mutual recriminations over who was responsible for the re-newed tension.
Much like Sadat, Gorbachev was unhappy with the status quo and decided to overcome the diplomatic inertia by undertaking a bold move.

Suspicious of both American and Soviet negotiators whom he believed were representing their narrow bureaucratic interests, Gorbachev wanted to circumvent these officials and meet with Reagan directly. Gorbachev’s meetings with Mitterand and Nixon made him cautiously optimistic about negotiating with the President and inspired him to use personal diplomacy.

While situational and bureaucratic factors shed light on the timing and decision to convene a summit meeting, they do not explain Gorbachev’s motivations for making so many concessions. Reykjavik was part of the General Secretary’s Machiavellian plan to reassure and pressure Reagan to agree to his proposals. He would make concessions to address the primary sources of American fear and insecurity but if reassurance failed to induce cooperation, then he would publicize Soviet proposals and mobilize public opinion against Reagan. At first glance, the strategies may seem contradictory but they were well-suited to achieve his goal of ending the arms race.

This explanation admittedly sacrifices parsimoniousness but it does so for the sake of developing a better and fuller account of Gorbachev’s pre-summit motivations. Material and ideational explanations fail to offer a convincing account of Gorbachev’s actions and show the limitations of applying systemic factors to explain complex foreign policy decisions. The argument presented here is therefore unique as it combines disparate explanations at different levels of analysis into a single, well-connected answer.
Table 1: The Evolution of Soviet Arms Control Proposals, January – October 1986

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Missile Defense</th>
<th>Prior to Reykjavik</th>
<th>Reykjavik</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>U.S.</td>
<td>Non-withdrawal from ABM treaty - 7.5 yrs</td>
<td>Non-withdrawal from ABM treaty - 10 yrs</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Soviet</td>
<td>Non-withdrawal from ABM treaty - 15-20 yrs</td>
<td>No testing, No deployment</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>No deployment, No testing outside of &quot;lab&quot;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>START</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>U.S.</td>
<td>START limited to the nuclear triad</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Equal reductions across all categories</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Soviet</td>
<td>Broad def. of strategic, START not limited to triad</td>
<td>Soviets concede on every point</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Reductions based on composition of arsenals</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>No agreement to include Soviet &quot;heavy missiles&quot;</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>INF</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>U.S.</td>
<td>Zero INF option in Europe</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>No constraints on UK and French arsenals</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Open discussions on SRINF and INF-Asia</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Soviet</td>
<td>Equal reductions in European INF forces</td>
<td>Soviets concede on every point</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Constraints on UK and French arsenals</td>
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</tbody>
</table>
Chapter 4: From Lahore to Agra - Vajpayee’s Pursuit of an Indo-Pakistani Détente

On February 20, 1999, Atal Behari Vajpayee became the first Indian Prime Minister since Rajiv Gandhi to travel to Pakistan and the first since Nehru to visit Lahore. Unlike his predecessors, Vajpayee entered Pakistan via the Wagah border crossing and made history by ceremoniously inaugurating the Delhi-Lahore bus service on its maiden trip.¹ As part of Vajpayee’s bus yatra (or pilgrimage), he also delivered conciliatory speeches and courageously visited the Minar-e-Pakistan, a monument honoring the location where the Muslim League adopted its resolution calling for the creation of a homeland for South Asia’s Muslims.² No Indian leader had ever taken such an extraordinary step and the fact that Vajpayee was the first one to do so was stunning since he was the flagbearer for the Bharatiya Janata Party or the BJP, a far-right Hindu nationalist party.³

In the wake of tensions arising from India and Pakistan’s nuclear tests, Vajpayee’s actions and statements signified an important de-escalation. The Lahore summit ended successfully with a joint statement issued by Vajpayee and Pakistani Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif and the signing of two important documents, the Lahore Declaration and the Memorandum of Understanding (MOU). The latter outlined nuclear confidence-building measures whereas the former committed the two sides to peacefully resolve all their disputes.


³ In English, the party’s name is the Indian People’s Party.
including over Jammu and Kashmir.\(^4\) From the Pakistani perspective, India’s formal, repeated acknowledgement that Kashmir needed to be resolved was a meaningful gesture.\(^5\)

Unbeknownst to the public, the summit also led to the establishment of extensive backchannel contacts to resolve the Kashmir issue within a specified timeframe (between twelve to eighteen months). Publicly, Vajpayee had articulated India’s traditional positions that Kashmir was part of undivided India but behind-closed-doors, he proposed that the two sides move beyond stated positions and open the Line of Control (LOC).\(^6\) For the first time, India was showing flexibility and signaling its readiness to reach a final settlement over Kashmir. Unfortunately, the progress that was made after Lahore was undone weeks (and/or months) later when Pakistan surreptitiously sent its troops, disguised as irregular Kashmiri fighters, to occupy the mountaintops across the LOC in Kargil.\(^7\) In one stroke, Pakistan destroyed “the spirit of Lahore” and precipitated the fourth Indo-Pakistani war.\(^8\)

Despite Pakistan’s initiation of the Kargil conflict and its continued support for terrorist attacks against India, Vajpayee extended another olive branch to his rival. In May 2001, he

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\(^4\) The province of Jammu and Kashmir actually incorporates three distinct areas: Kashmir, Jammu, and Ladakh. In referring to this province, I will hereafter simply refer to the province as Kashmir.


\(^6\) The Line of Control is the unofficial, or de facto border, separating the Pakistani and Indian controlled parts of the former princely state of Jammu and Kashmir.

\(^7\) Wolpert, *India and Pakistan*, 73. Vajpayee was later criticized for not just establishing backchannel contacts but with continuing these contacts during the Kargil war. While the focus of the talks changed from Kashmir to Kargil, the feeling in India was that all talks should be halted until Pakistani forces withdrew from India. See J.N. Dixit, *India-Pakistan in War and Peace* (New York: Routledge, 2002), 76.

\(^8\) India and Pakistan went to war in 1947, 1965, and 1971.
suddenly abandoned preconditions for holding bilateral talks and issued an invitation to General Pervez Musharraf, the architect of the coup against Sharif and the mastermind behind Kargil, to attend the Agra summit. The very official who had delivered belligerent anti-India speeches and had been publicly depicted as an unapologetic militarist was now awarded a state visit to India. Given the strained relationship between India and Pakistan, Vajpayee’s announcement constituted another diplomatic bombshell.

Between 1999 and 2001, Vajpayee had undertaken two bold moves to improve Indo-Pakistani relations but his actions beg the question why he accepted such risks when smaller, less costly avenues existed to initiate conciliation.\(^9\) Despite the fact that almost twenty years have since elapsed, little is still known about Vajpayee’s true motivations.

As the stronger party, India ostensibly could have waited until Pakistan had taken the first step. Nonetheless, by adopting such initiatives, Vajpayee placed his reputation on the line, exposed himself to audience costs, and threatened to make India appear weak. A more judicious leader would have waited for conditions to have improved and/or would have pursued a détente through small, incremental steps. The purpose of this chapter is to ascertain why Vajpayee and his inner circle of advisors -- External Affairs Minister Jaswant Singh, Home Secretary L.K.

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\(^9\) Referring to the Lahore initiative, Ganguly wrote “Vajpayee’s actions and words were nothing short of bold and could have constituted a watershed in Indo-Pakistani relations.” Wirsing used a similar vocabulary to describe Vajpayee’s actions; he wrote, “some questioned the sincerity of his motives, but the boldness and novelty of the idea stirred up enormous excitement on both sides of the international boundary…” See Sumit Ganguly, *Deadly Impasse: Kashmir and the Indo-Pakistani Relations at the Dawn of the New Century* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2016), 33; Wirsing, *Kashmir in the Shadow of War*, 18-19. The Pakistanis described Vajpayee’s actions at Lahore in the same way. Pakistani Information Minister, Mushahid Hussein, said, “we feel that Vajpayee has taken a very bold initiative…he has acted in a very non-traditional manner…he has bypassed the Indian establishment’s rigid and obsolete approach to Pakistan.” Quote taken from Nicholas J. Wheeler, “‘I Had Gone to Lahore with a Message of Goodwill But in Return We Got Kargil’: The Promise and Perils of ‘Leaps of Trust’ in India-Pakistan Relations,” *India Review* 9, No. 3 (2010): 319-344, 329. Bruce Riedel, a National Security Council official in charge of the South Asia desk, described Vajpayee’s bus diplomacy “a bold effort…at reconciliation with Pakistan.” See Bruce Riedel, “American diplomacy and the 1999 Kargil Summit at Blair House,” in *Asymmetric Warfare in South Asia: The Causes and Consequences of the Kargil Conflict*, ed. Peter R. Lavoy (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2009), 130-170, 133.
Advani, and Principle Secretary/National Security Advisor Brajesh Mishra -- decided to pursue such risky, bold initiatives.

To trace the process through which they made these decisions, I examined primary sources, public source material, and available archival documents from India and the United States. Of particular salience was the series of volumes recently published by India’s Ministry of External Affairs (MEA) on the country’s foreign relations. These volumes included government documents such as press releases, public statements, meeting minutes, cables, letters, and memoranda from the Vajpayee era (1998-2004). I also examined the BJP party archives since Vajpayee and his advisor, Advani, led the party since its founding in 1980 and as such, helped shaped its manifestos, election platforms, and policy documents. Finally, I examined declassified documents from the National Security Archives (NSA) and the Clinton Presidential Library since the U.S. played an instrumental role attempting to defuse Indo-Pakistani tensions. This material sheds light on American interactions with Pakistani and Indian officials and it also provides insight into American assessments of the political, economic, and military situation in South Asia. Such information helps us understand the international context in which Indian leaders found themselves to be operating under at the time.

My extensive use of archival documents separates this study from the others that have been written on this period. It has given this chapter a more comprehensive and nuanced account of the timing, motivations, and conditions under which Vajpayee undertook such gambles. While scholars have sought to explain either the Lahore or Agra summit, no one has attempted to answer these questions as part of a comprehensive analysis of Vajpayee’s peace initiatives. This paper therefore not only fills an important gap in the academic literature but it also helps us
understand when Indian decision-makers may be most likely to attempt such initiatives in the future.

The historical evidence shows that a similar set of background conditions existed prior to Vajpayee’s initiatives. Indo-Pakistani relations had reached a stalemate before each summit and while such a situation may have been tolerable (in the past), India and Pakistan’s acquisition of nuclear weapons and their development of the means and technology to deliver them gave leaders a strong incentive to normalize relations. Unfortunately, after the nuclear tests in 1998 and the Kargil war in 1999, negotiations either slowed or ended between the two countries, respectively. The calculus of Indian decision-makers was also affected by the conflict in Kashmir which, despite minor improvements since the early 1990s, raged on between Indian forces and Pakistani supported insurgents. The proxy war showed no signs of relenting and in fact, had escalated between 1999 and 2001, making the continuation of the status quo costly. Negotiating with Pakistan was therefore the only way to meaningfully stabilize the situation and reduce regional tensions.

Prior to the Lahore and Agra summits, Indian decision-makers had also grown cautiously optimistic about negotiating with Sharif and Musharraf but for very different reasons. In their first attempt at pursuing détente, Indian officials believed they had found a partner in Nawaz Sharif who had begun a promising dialogue with Vajpayee’s predecessor, Inder Gujral. After Sharif was ousted in a military coup in October 1999, Indian leaders reluctantly decided to talk to General Musharraf since he was, in their opinion, a strong and decisive leader. Pakistani officials communicated the same message to their Indian counterparts, suggesting that if an agreement could be reached with Musharraf, then he could sell it back home. As Musharraf
began signaling his readiness for talks, the Indian leadership decided to test the intentions of Pakistan’s new chief executive.

While these conditions shed light on the timing and circumstances under which Vajpayee pursued his initiatives, they do not account for his motivations. I argue that Vajpayee and his inner circle wanted to build trust with Pakistan and chose to reassure its officials that India was sincere about pursuing negotiations. Given the cautiousness and conservativeness of the foreign affairs establishment, the Indian leadership decided to pursue the initiative at the highest level to circumvent the bureaucracy. In Lahore, Vajpayee moved beyond a simple trust-building exercise and undertook symbolic, emotive actions to reassure Pakistani officials in a way that would appeal to their insecurity about Indian intentions. He exercised what Booth and Wheeler call security-dilemma sensibility (SDS).10

Indian decision-makers were also motivated by a desire to have other countries, particularly Pakistan, trust India as a responsible nuclear power. After being the first to inaugurate its nuclear weapons, India was treated as a pariah not just because it had crossed the nuclear threshold but also because the government executing such a decision was known as a hawkish, far-right Hindu nationalist party. Vajpayee therefore decided to take the initiative to show that India, despite occasional Pakistani provocations and despite new changes in government, was a peaceful and restrained power.

The remainder of the paper is outlined as follows. In the first section, I provide some background on the BJP party and introduce the reader to the party’s leaders and ideology. I then examine the relationship between India and Pakistan and review the diplomatic and military interactions between the two countries between 1998 and 2001. This background section is

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followed by an in-depth analysis on how Indian officials sought to build trust through the Lahore and Agra summits. The paper concludes with a review of bold gestures and the way in which this case-study contributes to our understanding of this tool of statecraft.

THE ASCENDANCE OF THE BJP-PARTY: ITS POLICIES AND LEADERS

In March 1998, national elections were held and Vajpayee’s BJP party won 181 seats in the 545-seat lower house, the Lok Sabha. As the largest single party, the BJP formed a coalition with fourteen smaller parties and obtained enough seats in Parliament to secure a slim majority, thus beginning India’s first political experiment with a BJP-led government. While some citizens rejoiced at the change, others anxiously wondered if the right-wing coalition, called the National Democratic Alliance (NDA), would forever change India.

Fears of the BJP were not unfounded given its promotion of Hindutva and its close ties with the Sangh Parivar, the family of Hindu nationalist organizations inspired and supported by the Rashtriya Swamsevak Sangh (RSS). These groups sought to “…recast the image of India’s plurality within the framework of an assertive Hindu ethos” and as such, their vision of India contrasted with the secular, inclusive country envisioned by India’s founding fathers. Since the colonial era, the RSS stirred controversy over its members’ willingness to use violence to promote the religion of the Hindu majority. Despite their role in fueling communal tensions, their actions were generally supported and/or condoned by the Bharatiya Jana Sangh and its successor, the BJP. The most high-ranking members of the BJP, including Vajpayee and


13 The Jana Sangh party was essentially the BJP party prior to 1980.
Advani, had in fact begun their careers as RSS apparatchiks. And so, when Vajpayee was elected, the question was whether India would remain a secular state that embraced its diversity and afforded special protections to its religious, ethnic, and linguistic minorities. Stoking public fears, especially among Muslims, the BJP campaigned to implement a Uniform Civil Code (UCC) and to end Kashmir’s special political status within India.\footnote{Under Article 370 of the Indian Constitution, Jammu and Kashmir maintains considerable autonomy from the central government. With the exception of defense, foreign affairs, and communications, the state government must give its consent before applying all other laws and/or policies. While intended to be a temporary provision, Article 370 has become a permanent feature of the Constitution and has given Kashmir a separate status within the Union. The BJP has pledged to abrogate this article and fully integrate the province into India. L.K. Advani, My Country, My Life (New Delhi: Rupa & Co., 2008), 672-679.}

While Vajpayee’s reputation as a seasoned politician and BJP-moderate reassured Indians, it was not clear if he or more hard-line BJP party members such as Advani would exercise control.\footnote{As concerns periodically arose about Vajpayee’s health between 1998 to 2004, speculation grew over how much influence Advani exercised in the Cabinet and over whether he would replace Vajpayee as Prime Minister.} After years of leading the opposition, Vajpayee had successfully softened the party’s image and helped guide it toward the political mainstream. Advani, on the other hand, appealed to the ideological, hard-line wing of the BJP and boasted of his contacts with the sangh parivar and his political advocacy of the \textit{Hindutva} movement. The contrast was also highlighted in their mannerisms, style, and personality. Vajpayee’s calm, measured tone as well as his oratory and romanticism, particularly his love for reciting and writing poetry, made him statesmanlike whereas Advani’s emotional appeal to populist and nationalist sentiments made him a polarizing figure.\footnote{In some ways, Vajpayee resembled the philosopher-king Plato had described in his epic work, \textit{the Republic}.} Upon becoming Prime Minister, many people wondered if Vajpayee could rein in the hard-liners and how long his health would allow him to lead the country.\footnote{Such concerns were also shared in the U.S. See “India: the BJP after Vajpayee,” Intelligence Report from the Office of Near Eastern, South Asian, and African Analysis, September 24, 1998, in \textit{U.S. Intelligence on Weapons of Mass Destruction: From World War II to Iraq}, Digital National Security Archive Collection.}
Another big unknown was how the BJP would conduct foreign policy. The BJP’s party documents in addition to the party’s history in the opposition show that its leaders subscribed to a realist worldview of international relations. In its election platforms, including the one from 1998, the BJP explicitly outlined its commitment to bolster, in their view, the country’s neglected military capabilities. It planned to test nuclear weapons, develop (and deploy) Agni ballistic missiles, and increase defense expenditures. The stated purpose of these measures was to deter aggression but they were undoubtedly also intended to enhance India’s prestige and project its power, both regionally and internationally.

The BJP also maintained tough, hawkish positions on national security matters, especially on how to bring security to Kashmir and how to effectively “deal” with Pakistan. Some BJP leaders nursed hopes of re-unifying Pakistani-controlled Kashmir (Azad Kashmir) with Indian controlled Kashmir. Many of the sangh parivar’s leaders, close allies of the BJP, espoused support for restoring undivided India, or Akhand Bharat. Entertaining irredentist claims on neighboring countries, they sought to fully re-absorb Pakistan and Bangladesh and unify the subcontinent under the mantle of “Greater India.” While the BJP leadership distanced itself from Akhand Bharat, many of its political figures and grassroots supporters shared this vision.

How the BJP’s positions and ideas would be translated into a foreign policy was unclear since the party had never run a government. There was international concern over what the BJP would do and the extent to which it would fulfill its campaign pledges. Based off prior

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19 Dixit, *India-Pakistan in War and Peace*, 362.

20 Vajpayee led a thirteen-day government back in 1996 but was forced to resign because he lost a vote of confidence in Parliament. Hiro, *The Longest August*, 281-283; Talbott, *Engaging India*, 39 [n.13].
interactions with Vajpayee, American officials, for instance, knew that he wanted to test nuclear weapons but were unsure if he would pursue such a decision. Given that “the statesmenlike Vajpayee had long reassured US officials that he would champion a moderate agenda,” the U.S. held hope that the new Prime Minister would moderate the BJP’s policies.

Despite their misgivings about a BJP-led government, American officials sanguinely believed its ascendance to political power offered a promising new opportunity to improve Indo-Pakistan relations. As reported by the intelligence community, the “BJP’s strong nationalist and security credentials might allow it to make concessions that other Indian parties – fearing accusations of being ‘soft’ on Pakistan – have been unwilling to consider.” This assessment was also shared by other South Asia experts such as Sir Nicholas Barrington, the former UK High Commissioner to Pakistan, who personally relayed such a message to Advani years earlier. BJP leaders themselves recognized that their hawkish reputation gave them greater flexibility to engage Pakistan and this, at least in part, contributed to their willingness to

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21 In 1996, Vajpayee met with U.S. Ambassador to India, Frank G. Wisner, and probed him as to the American reaction to “underground nuclear tests.” Wisner sent a cable back to the State Department with a summary and analysis of his meeting with India’s opposition leader. He wrote, “…we interpret his question about testing as indicating that Vajpayee and the BJP would favor a test. We must conclude that Vajpayee, like other Indian interlocutors, is simply not prepared to be persuaded by reason on these matters.” Telegram 9250 from U.S. Embassy New Delhi to the State Department, “Ambassador’s Meeting with Opposition Leader,” August 12, 1996, in The Clinton Administration and the Indian Nuclear Test that Didn’t Happen, 1995-1996, National Security Archive Electronic Briefing Book No. 412, Doc.#12.


23 Ibid., p. 4. Such a view was later articulated when India made a concession to begin the composite dialogue with Pakistan. According to the State Department’s Bureau of Intelligence and Research, “The BJP-led government was able to make this gesture because of its impeccable nationalist credentials. There is no party on its right that would accuse it of ‘selling out’ to Pakistan or crumbling before international pressure.” Cable from State Department to White House, “Secretary’s Morning Summary for 10/06/98,” October 6, 1998, in U.S. Intelligence on Weapons of Mass Destruction: From World War II to Iraq, Digital National Security Archive Collection, p. 4.

undertake costly peace initiatives.\textsuperscript{25} The public was simply less likely to accuse the BJP of betraying India since, according to Advani, “Hindus will never think whatever we have done can be a sell-off.” \textsuperscript{26}

**TWO STEPS FORWARD, ONE STEP BACK: INDO-PAKISTANI RELATIONS FROM 1998 TO 2001**

**The Road to Lahore**

The new government was carefully watched by Islamabad where Vajpayee was viewed with caution but also with some degree of hopefulness as well. The Pakistanis knew they faced a strong, right-wing leader who was better positioned to negotiate with them. They also remembered how Vajpayee had initiated a thaw in Indo-Pakistan relations when he served as India’s External Affairs Minister from 1977 to 1979.\textsuperscript{27} At that time, he helped end his country’s estrangement with neighboring countries by re-opening talks with Pakistan and China. In his first letter to Vajpayee, Sharif commented on his counterpart’s past and said we “recall your contribution to the promotion of Pakistan-India relations…” and expressed “hope that the Bharatia Janata Party government under your leadership can bring forth a firm resolve to join us in building a happier, more prosperous future for our peoples.”\textsuperscript{28}

\textsuperscript{25} Advani wrote that “the desire to work for normalization of relations between India and Pakistan was also rooted in my conviction that the BJP, among all the Indian parties, was best-positioned to accomplish this goal.”\textsuperscript{\textit{Ibid.}}, 787.


\textsuperscript{27} Vajpayee served in the Janata government led by Prime Minister Morarji Desai. The government was made up of small parties who united to oppose Indira Gandhi’s Congress Party in response to its imposition of a state of emergency between June 1975 and January 1977. The common perception was that she was becoming increasingly authoritarian and so, Indians elected a non-Congress government to restore their democracy.

\textsuperscript{28} Letter from Pakistani Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif to Prime Minister Atal Behari Vajpayee, March 19, 1998, Document 1412 in\textit{ India-Pakistan Relations 1947-2007, Vol V}, pp. 3592-3593. Pakistan’s High Commissioner to India, Ashraf Jehangir Qazi, told Vajpayee in a meeting, “People remembered the Prime Minister’s role 20 years ago as Foreign Minister in improving Indo-Pakistani relations. They were looking to him for guidance this time too. This was the vision also of Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif.” Record of the Call by Pakistan High Commissioner
Pakistani officials were hoping that Vajpayee would continue his predecessor’s work and begin the *composite dialogue* that had been agreed to by Inder Gujral and Nawaz Sharif. Such a negotiating process provided a comprehensive framework to “address all outstanding issues of concern to both sides” and offered a mechanism for reaching solutions.\(^29\) The composite dialogue represented a diplomatic compromise as it not only placed Kashmir on the agenda per Pakistan’s wishes but it also made normalization contingent on addressing other bilateral issues, something favored by India.\(^30\)

Nonetheless, instead of launching the composite dialogue, Vajpayee immediately ordered a series of nuclear tests on May 11 and May 13\(^31\) at the Pokhran test range.\(^32\) While the tests alarmed neighboring countries, it was the statements made by Vajpayee’s friends and advisors that further raised tensions with Pakistan. On May 18\(^{th}\), in a visit to Srinagar, the summer capital

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\(^{30}\) India has consistently favored an integrated, broad-based approach to build a wide-ranging relationship whereas Pakistan has historically advocated a single-issue agenda focused on Kashmir.

\(^{31}\) In one of the biggest intelligence failures, the U.S. intelligence community was caught unaware of India’s military preparations at Pokhran. Meanwhile, while U.S. officials recognized that the BJP campaigned to test nuclear weapons, they believed that the party would not fulfill its pledge given the political and economic risks associated with such a decision. At the behest of CIA Director George Tenet, Admiral David Jeremiah examined the failure of the intelligence community and issued a candid report known as the *Jeremiah Report*. In a press conference where he unveiled his findings, Admiral Jeremiah began by noting “I suppose my bottom line is that both the intelligence and the policy communities had an underlying mindset going into these tests that the BJP would behave as we behave. For instance, there is an assumption that the BJP platform would mirror Western political platforms. In other words, a politician is going to say something in his political platform leading up to the elections, but not necessarily follow through on the platform once he takes office and is exposed to the immensity of the problem.” Jeremiah News Conference, June 2, 1998, in *U.S. Intelligence and the Indian Bomb*, National Security Archive Electronic Briefing Book No. 187, Doc.#39.

\(^{32}\) These tests have come to be referred to as Pokhran-II since India conducted its first “peaceful” nuclear explosion at Pokhran in 1974. According to available information, the decision to test India’s nuclear weapons was made by only a few people within Vajpayee’s Cabinet. No consultation either with the BJP’s coalition partners or with the opposition parties took place. See Talbott, *Engaging India*, 48-51.
of Kashmir, Advani commented on terrorism within the restive province and said India’s nuclear weapons status brought about “a qualitative new stage in Indo-Pakistani relations.” Advani warned that India would now respond to provocations in a manner “costly for Pakistan” and would adopt a more “offensive” posture. 33 As part of this approach, he refused to rule out cross-border raids and terrorist “hot-pursuits” into Pakistani-controlled Kashmir. For years, India chose not to pursue terrorists and destroy terrorist training camps across the LOC but Advani now signaled that India was ready to retaliate for Pakistan’s support for Kashmiri militants.34 Advani’s saber-rattling was taken seriously given his influence in the government and given that Vajpayee transferred responsibility for Kashmir from the Prime Minister’s Office (PMO) to the Home Ministry.35 Known for his desire to restore “law and order,” Advani’s statements were perceived as a veiled threat to Pakistan and undoubtedly, played some role in pressuring Sharif to

33 Advani demanded that Pakistan “roll back its anti-India policy” otherwise these new tactics might be employed in Kashmir. For more on this, see “India: BJP Flexing Muscles, But How Far Will It Go?” Intelligence Report from the Office of Near Eastern, South Asian, and African Analysis, Central Intelligence Agency, May 29, 1998 in *U.S. Intelligence and the Indian Bomb*, National Security Archive Electronic Briefing Book No. 187, Doc.#37, pp. 1-3. Also see Ajith Pillai, *Off the Record: Untold Stories from a Reporter’s Diary* (Gurgaon, India: Hachette, 2014), 136-138.


end his country’s nuclear ambiguity. Similar warnings were also given by other Indian officials and BJP-party members.

Tensions later climaxed on May 27th when Islamabad received “credible information” that Delhi was preparing a preemptive strike against Pakistan’s nuclear installations. Believing India wanted to forestall Pakistan’s nuclear tests, Sharif alerted the U.S. and the UN Security Council that there was an Indo-Israeli plan to attack his country. Pakistan also sent a warning to Vajpayee via Satish Chandra, India’s High Commissioner to Pakistan, that any attack “would warrant a swift and massive retaliation with unforeseen consequences.” While they had agreed to prohibit the targeting of nuclear sites, Pakistan was seemingly unsure whether the new-BJP government would honor India’s prior commitments. The war scare signified Pakistan’s fear of its more powerful southern neighbor and perhaps more importantly, the high levels of mistrust between the two countries. On May 28th, 1998, Pakistan tested its nuclear weapons and in doing so, raised the specter of a regional nuclear arms race.

While Vajpayee and Sharif escalated the rivalry to a whole new level, their decision to test was generally welcomed in each country. The Prime Ministers benefitted from a sudden

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37 BJP party spokesperson Sharma, for instance, urged the Indian government to take a “a tough stand and foil Pakistan’s efforts to stoke militancy” in Kashmir and warned that Pakistan would pay a “heavy price” for “fueling the conflict.” Cable from State Department to White House, “Secretary’s Morning Summary for 5/21/98,” May 21, 1998, in U.S. Intelligence on Weapons of Mass Destruction: From World War II to Iraq, Digital National Security Archive Collection.

38 Hiro, the Longest August, 28, 458 [n.19].

groundswell of popular support as Indians and Pakistanis *rallied behind the flag* and euphorically celebrated their country’s technological and military achievement.40

The world’s reaction, however, was wholly negative. The UN and G8 condemned the tests and the U.S. along with other great powers like Japan imposed economic sanctions on Pakistan and India.41 For two countries seeking to develop their economies, sanctions were painful but more so for Pakistan than India. Having a much larger economy and greater financial assets held in reserve, Indian decision-makers understood that their country was better positioned to withstand sanctions.42 Despite leading the global effort to isolate both countries, American officials privately acknowledged at the time that the health and sheer size of the Indian economy made it much less susceptible to outside pressure.43

Amid the global outcry, India wanted to “manage” the diplomatic and economic fallout and so, it expressed an interest to engage the Clinton administration.44 As Jaswant Singh, India’s Minister of External Affairs, wrote, “India’s economic development could not advance if relations with the United States continued to be so adversarial; we had to cooperate, to work


43 In predicting the effect of U.S. sanctions, one official wrote, “the economy will handle sanctions gracefully for the first six months or year because of the relatively small influence of US economic activity in India. Total US investment in 1996 [the most recent figures available] was approximately 0.5 percent of total domestic and foreign investment in India that year. US products constituted only about 10 percent of total Indian imports in 1996, and India can find other suppliers.” Cable from State Department to White House, “India: New Warnings on Kashmir; India: Scant Effect of U.S. Sanctions,” May 20, 1998, in *U.S. Intelligence on Weapons of Mass Destruction: From World War II to Iraq*, Digital National Security Archive Collection.

44 Singh, *In Service of Emergent India*. 235; Talbott, *Engaging India*, 76-78.
From Singh’s perspective, this was not simply an economic issue but also a “national security imperative” since India’s power was in large part related to its growing economy.46

This initiative resulted in an extensive, high-level dialogue between Singh and U.S. Deputy Secretary of State Strobe Talbott.47 In a meeting held on July 20, 1998, Talbott visited New Delhi where he outlined five benchmarks that India would need to satisfy if Clinton was to resume his cancelled visit, normalize relations, and lift economic sanctions. According to the Deputy Secretary of State, India had to sign the Comprehensive Test Ban Treaty, help negotiate a ban on the production of fissile material, pursue a “strategic restraint regime,” impose export restrictions on nuclear material and technology, and finally, resume a dialogue with Pakistan to “to address the root causes of tension between them, including on Jammu and Kashmir.”48

India’s response was either negative or non-committal about the non-proliferation benchmarks but supportive of an improvement in Indo-Pakistani relations. As Singh relayed to Talbott the following month, the latter was an area in which progress could be made and the interactions then occurring between Pakistan and India provided some grounds for optimism.49

In June, Vajpayee and Sharif exchanged letters and agreed to hold discussions on the sidelines of the tenth annual summit of the South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation.

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45 Singh, In Service of Emergent India. 235.

46 Ibid.

47 At the time, Singh was not yet Foreign Minister, he was the Prime Minister’s advisor on foreign affairs and Deputy on the Planning Commission. The Prime Minister retained for himself the portfolio of Minister of External Affairs. Singh was formally appointed Minister of External Affairs in December 1998. Talbott, Engaging India, 136-137.

48 Talbott, Engaging India, 96-98.

49 Ibid., 123-124.
(SAARC), which took place from July 28th to July 31st.\footnote{Hiro, \textit{The Longest August}, 290.} During their meeting, both prime ministers affirmed their interest in talks and issued instructions to their respective foreign secretaries to work out the modalities and technical details for beginning the composite dialogue. This positive development was followed by a series of important meetings in September on the sidelines of the UN General Assembly session. At New York, the Foreign Secretaries agreed on the mechanisms to operationalize the composite dialogue and the Prime Ministers issued a joint statement reiterating their commitment to the negotiating process and to the creation of a peaceful environment in South Asia.\footnote{One of the significant passages from the joint statement was the part that read “they reaffirmed their common belief that an environment of durable peace and security was in the supreme interest of both India and Pakistan, and of the region as a whole. They expressed their determination to renew and reinvigorate efforts to secure such an environment. They agreed that the peaceful settlement of all outstanding issues, including Jammu and Kashmir, was essential for this purpose.” Joint Statement issued at the end of the summit meeting between Prime Minister Atal Behari Vajpayee and Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif on the sidelines of the UN General Assembly session, September 23, 1998, Document 1423 in \textit{India-Pakistan Relations 1947-2007}, Vol V, p. 3606. For the joint statement issued by Indian foreign secretary K. Raghunath and Pakistani Foreign Secretary Shamshad Ahmad, see Joint Statement issued at the end of talks between the Foreign Secretaries of India and Pakistan, September 23, 1998, Document 1424 in \textit{India-Pakistan Relations 1947-2007}, Vol V, pp. 3607-3608.} Vajpayee and Sharif also reopened the hotline, restored road and rail links, and discussed the possibility of creating a Delhi-Lahore bus service.\footnote{The Delhi-Lahore bus service had existed during the colonial era but had been suspended after the two achieved independence. The move to restore this service therefore was quite symbolic. Hiro, \textit{The Longest August}, 290-292; Singh, \textit{In Service of Emergent India}, 160-162.} From the Indian perspective, it seemed that Sharif, a loud and outspoken advocate of negotiations, sincerely desired an improvement in Indo-Pakistani relations. And so, there was cautious optimism that the two sides might be able to agree on specific measures to reduce regional tensions.

The following month, the composite dialogue formally began when the foreign secretaries met in Islamabad to discuss the two most important issues, confidence-building measures (CBM) and Kashmir. A month later, a series of working groups met in Delhi to
discuss the “non-political” issues of the composite dialogue – Siachen glacier, Wullar Barrage/Tulbul Navigation Project, Sir Creek, terrorism and drug trafficking, economic and commercial cooperation, and friendly exchanges. While the launching of the composite dialogue was in and of itself a notable achievement, it did not change either India’s or Pakistan’s irreconcilable positions on key issues. The joint statements released by Pakistani and Indian officials made it woefully apparent that little progress had in fact been made in the first round of negotiations. Even though they agreed to resume discussions in mid-February 1999, each side held low expectations that future talks would offer any immediate breakthrough. Negotiations had essentially reached a deadlock.53

While there was no urgency, the Indian leadership had multiple reasons for wanting to accelerate the pace of the peace process. The international community led by the Clinton administration exerted political and economic pressure on India and Pakistan to resume negotiations after their tit-for-tat nuclear tests.54 If India successfully reduced tensions with Pakistan, then it could not only create a more peaceful environment but it could meet one of the Clinton administration’s five “benchmarks.”

Delhi also took the diplomatic initiative to forestall possible third-party involvement in its disputes with Islamabad, particularly over Kashmir. For decades, India had maintained that Kashmir could only be resolved through dialogue with Pakistan but post-Pokhran, there seemed to be a renewed international interest in this dispute.55 Despite his rising popularity, Vajpayee

53 Dixit, India-Pakistan in War and Peace, 366-367.


55 Cable from State Department to White House, “Secretary’s Morning Summary for 07/19/98,” July 19, 1998, in U.S. Intelligence on Weapons of Mass Destruction: From World War II to Iraq, Digital National Security Archive Collection, pp. 1-2. This was especially true in light of Advani’s threats to pursue terrorists and destroy terrorist training camps across the LOC. See Cable from State Department to White House, “Secretary’s Morning Summary
was criticized back home for inadvertently drawing attention to Kashmir through India’s nuclear tests. By resuming high-level talks with Islamabad, Vajpayee could remove any political justification and/or pretext for third-party interference.

Finally, the violence in Kashmir was stabilizing at unacceptably high levels that made the continuance of the status quo quite costly. Since 1988, Pakistan had waged a proxy war against India by funding, arming, and training Kashmiris as well as foreigners (such as Pakistanis and Afghans) to launch attacks across India’s northernmost state. Hoping to extract territorial concessions, Pakistan’s strategy was to destabilize India and “bleed it through a thousand cuts.” Referring to table 2, we see that there were roughly 3,000 to 4,000 terrorist incidents per year in Kashmir between 1995 and 1998. During that time, there were on average 2700 deaths per year, crossing the threshold for what most scholars consider to be a civil war.56 While security force fatalities constituted a small portion of the province’s total deaths, it had risen more than twenty-fold since 1989. This demonstrated that the security situation had, contrary to popular belief, steadily deteriorated since the early 1990s. The attacks had also more gruesome with greater numbers of mass killings, or massacres of non-Muslim civilians such as Hindus and Sikhs. Advani, the minister charged with managing the Kashmir conflict, wrote that “terrorism…was at its worst when the NDA assumed office.”57 The data published by the South Asia Terrorism


56 In India, the problem in Kashmir is treated as India’s war against religious terrorism. While Indian officials would scoff at labeling the security situation a civil war, the violence in the province meets all the benchmarks for such a designation. One of the indices scholars use to ascertain if a conflict constitutes a civil war is to ascertain if fatalities, or battle deaths, surpass a 1,000 per year. Since 1989, Kashmir has satisfied this criterion and for this reason, scholars have included this conflict in civil war datasets. According to a dataset prepared by Bethany Lacina, we see that between 20,260 (low estimate) to 28,910 people (high-estimate) have died in the conflict between 1989 and 2002. See Bethany Lacina, “Explaining the Severity of Civil Wars,” Journal of Conflict Resolution 50.2 (2006): 276-289.

57 Advani, My Country, My Life, 682-683.
Portal (SATP), the home ministry, and Praveen Swami, an Indian journalist covering Kashmir, generally supports Advani’s conclusion (refer to table 2 and figure 3).\textsuperscript{58} Kashmir, the beautiful Switzerland of the East, was a war zone.

Apart from terrorist-related violence, Kashmir also witnessed intense artillery exchanges along the LOC. Under the cover of Pakistani shelling, militants crossed into Indian-controlled Kashmir and as the infiltration increased in the spring and summer months, so too did the shelling.\textsuperscript{59} While India shelled Pakistani positions in response, it could not deter Pakistan from using its artillery and so, these regular exchanges became a regular feature along the LOC. In 1998 alone, there were 4,314 exchanges of fire and these incidents led to 156 Indian deaths, half of which were civilian.\textsuperscript{60}

The worsening security situation helps us understand the circumstances under which Vajpayee began talks with Sharif, particularly over Jammu and Kashmir. Historically, Indian governments were generally reluctant to hold discussions over Kashmir since it was viewed as a rightful and inseparable part of the country. Leaders who did so exposed themselves to audience costs by appearing weak and deferential to Pakistan. Vajpayee therefore took a gamble by placing Kashmir on the agenda through the composite dialogue, the Lahore summit, and the establishment of a secret, backchannel.


\textsuperscript{59} The seasonal nature of the shelling owes much to the fact that militants could not pass through Kashmir’s snowy mountain-tops during the winter months. As the snow melted in the spring and summer, the mountain paths became passable to militants.

\textsuperscript{60} Swami, \textit{India, Pakistan, and the Secret Jihad}, 175.
The timing of these initiatives suggests that the rising costs of the status quo likely affected his calculus for engaging Pakistan. Despite the promising nature of these talks, they ended once Pakistan surreptitiously sent its forces across the LOC and began what would become the Kargil war in the spring of 1999. Kargil destroyed “the spirit of Lahore” and essentially ended whatever prospects then existed for an Indo-Pakistani détente.61

While India defeated Pakistan’s forces and restored the ex-ante borders, the conflict was a horrible setback to Vajpayee’s foreign policy. Delhi thereafter decided to address Kashmir by talking to some of the terrorist and militant groups who were operating in the state. While this approach generated some early hope, it was clear by 2001 that it had failed to improve the security situation. Between 1999 and 2001, Kashmir in fact experienced a “sharp escalation” in violence, reaching levels the state had never seen before. As argued in the following section, Vajpayee’s later decision to invite Sharif’s successor, General Pervez Musharraf, to Agra occurred after these diplomatic initiatives ended unsuccessfully.

From Kargil to Agra

In the wake of the Kargil conflict, Vajpayee and his advisors promptly ended the high-level dialogue with Islamabad. Before resuming further negotiations, they asked Pakistan to cease its support for cross-border terrorism and abandon its hostile propaganda towards India.62

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61 While Sharif pleaded his ignorance over the initiation of military operations, the consensus seems to be that he was at the very least aware of the military plans. Ibid., 186.

These preconditions placed the onus on Pakistan’s leaders to take the first steps to end the diplomatic standoff. They were now responsible for creating, in the words of Foreign Secretary Vivek Katju, a “conducive environment” that would “enable a meaningful dialogue” to take place.63

Despite Musharraf’s professed readiness to begin talks “anywhere, anytime,” he was not yet ready to reign in the decade-long proxy war against India. Instead of ending support for terrorism, Musharraf did the exact opposite; he increased Pakistan’s efforts to destabilize Kashmir and helped Pakistani-based terrorist organizations launch attacks deep inside India. The Pakistani establishment concluded post-Kargil that “what was needed was a successful calibration of the levels of violence in Jammu and Kashmir, its expansion to new theaters, and its ratcheting up to a point where it would inflict an altogether new level of pain on India.”64 This escalation not only fueled greater mistrust of Pakistan but it more importantly, froze Indo-Pakistan relations until the Agra summit.

Between 1999 and 2001, India witnessed a series of dramatic and unprecedented terrorist attacks outside of Kashmir. Two incidents, in particular, drew widespread attention and represented the essence of this new wave of pan-India terrorism. In December 1999, an Indian airlines flight was hijacked and flown to Kandahar, Afghanistan and a year later, a small group of militants led an attack against the Red Fort in New Delhi.65 While the details of these


65 Swami, India, Pakistan, and the Secret Jihad, 198. The Red Fort in Delhi was one of the palaces of the Mughal Emperors. In present-day India, the Prime Minister delivers his annual independence day address from the ramparts of the historic Red Fort.
incidents lie outside the scope of this paper, these attacks constituted a new way for Pakistan to inflict costs on India and drew immediate international attention to South Asia.

At the same time, there was a precipitous increase in the levels of violence in Jammu and Kashmir. This, in fact, had been anticipated since Pakistan was expected to use terrorism as a means to bolster morale and save face after their ignominious defeat in Kargil. The data clearly shows that these years were indeed the bloodiest of the entire conflict, with terrorist and civilian fatalities peaking in 2001 (see table 2 and figure 3). For the first time, Indian security forces – police, soldiers, paramilitary and border forces – were losing over five hundred personnel a year, representing over a 50% increase in losses since 1998. Despite the fact that fewer terrorist attacks were actually taking place, there were now more civilian and security force deaths. This signified that the militants in Kashmir were better trained and armed since they were able to inflict greater casualties with much fewer attacks. Another alarming trend was that a growing number of the terrorists were foreigners, either Pakistani nationals or residents from other countries such as Afghanistan.

66 This anticipation was also fueled by warnings given by Sharif and then General Musharraf. Leaders of terrorist groups also made threats about their readiness to expand terrorist operations post-Kargil, particularly outside of traditional conflict zones. Dixit, India-Pakistan, 77-78.


68 Swami writes, “One particular source of concern for Indian military planners was that the ratio of terrorists killed to security force personnel lost fell to a record low in 1999, to just over 2:1. Although this ratio recovered somewhat in subsequent years, to the vicinity of 3:1, this was still lower than in the pre-Kargil period. What the figures meant was simple: India was facing better armed and trained terrorist cadre than had been seen prior to the Kargil war, and in greater numbers.” Swami, India, Pakistan, and the Secret Jihad, 193. Also see Praveen Swami, “The Roots of Crisis – Post-Kargil Conflict in Kashmir and the 2001-2002 Near-War” in the India-Pakistan Military Standoff, ed. Zachary S. Davis (New York: Palgrave MacMillan, 2011), 19-52.

69 Some Pakistani officials did not bother to deny the involvement of their nationals in Kashmir. In a conversation with former Director General of the ISI, Lt. General Hamid Gul, the Indian High Commissioner in Pakistan, Gopalaswami Parthsarathy, notes that “he [Gul] did not deny the large-scale presence of Pakistani nationals involved in militancy in Kashmir. He merely said that while 40% of the militants were Pakistanis, 60% were
In their public statements and meetings with foreign diplomats, Indian officials acknowledged that terrorism in Kashmir had intensified post-Kargil. While one could argue that the Indians had an incentive to exaggerate their problems, particularly in their conversations with outsiders, South Asia experts abroad shared the same assessment. For instance, the President and CEO of the Stimson Center, Michael Krepon, sent the White House a memorandum to prepare Clinton for his March 2000 trip to India and Pakistan. In his paper, he wrote:

…they [the Indians] have no effective answer to militancy in Kashmir, which has been more virulent since the Kargil war. Militant groups based in Pakistan are carrying out increasingly audacious operations, and the horse they've chosen to ride in Kashmir — Farooq Abdullah — has failed to get the job done. The Indian military is tired of fighting Pakistani-supported militancy with one hand tied behind its back, as in Kargil.

India’s growing problems in Kashmir were quite obvious and were clearly recognized by officials at the highest level, including Vajpayee. On September 28, 2000, the Prime Minister painted a bleak picture of the situation in a speech he delivered before the annual conference of Kashmiris.” Letter from the High Commissioner G. Parthasarathy to the Foreign Secretary Lalit Man Singh, November 29, 1999, Document 1517 in India-Pakistan Relations 1947-2007, Vol V, pp. 3782-3785. Also see Swami, “The Roots of Crisis,” 32.

Foreign Secretary Krishnan Raghunath briefed the Heads of the EU Mission; he said, “A dialogue in the present context of disarmament and non-proliferation should be looked at by analyzing Pakistan’s actions across the Line of Control. After Kargil, what saddens us is the renewed intensified terrorist action in J & K. We have seen, in the present process of elections, renewed sponsorship of terrorism. It must be understood that J & K is an issue of federal-state relations. The Pakistani factor is merely a distorting element.” Briefing of Heads of Mission of the European Union stationed in New Delhi by Foreign Secretary, September 10, 1999, Document 1502 in India-Pakistan Relations 1947-2007, Vol V, pp. 3757-3759. On March 31, 2000, the MEA released a statement, which described how “it is Pakistan, which has in recent months, intensified its state sponsored cross-border terrorism in the State of Jammu and Kashmir.” Press Release issued by the Ministry of External Affairs regarding the meeting of High Commissioner of India in Pakistan with the Pakistani Foreign Secretary, March 31, 2000, Document 1525 in India-Pakistan Relations 1947-2007, Vol V, p. 3801.

the State Commissioners and Director Generals of India’s Police Force. He provided a similar account in a speech he delivered in Karnataka on January 18, 2001; he stated,

the recent spurt in terrorist violence in Jammu and Kashmir and elsewhere in India, unleashed by Pakistan-based militant organizations has vitiated the atmosphere for resumption of talks between India and Pakistan. Terrorist attacks on our security forces and civilians have increased both in number and in their gravity. The incidents at the Red Fort and Srinigar airport, combined with the threat to strike at the Prime Minister’s Office, show that militant outfits, which are opposed to peace and normalcy in the State are alarmed at the prospects of a fruitful dialogue between India and Pakistan.

To address the situation in Kashmir, India began a series of talks with some of the terrorist and separatist groups operating in Kashmir. While the BJP had previously ruled out negotiating with militants (unless they renounced violence), Vajpayee’s government partly abandoned this condition after the NDA coalition won the parliamentary elections in October 1999.

After years of fighting, some Kashmiris, to Pakistan’s consternation, enthusiastically responded to the Indian government’s overture. On July 24, 2000, the largest terrorist group, Hizb-ul-Mujahideen (HuM), declared a three-month unilateral ceasefire with the Indian government. Less than two weeks later, a representative of the Indian government, Indian Home Secretary Kamal Pande, met with a delegation of HuM leaders. At the same time, the government began back-channel negotiations with senior leaders of the all Parties Hurriyat

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72 Vajpayee told his distinguished audience members that the “Terrorist violence in Jammu and Kashmir and other parts of India, engineered by protagonists of terror across the border, is an example of the challenges we face. We have seen no dilution in Pakistan’s attempts to intensify its proxy war against India. Indeed, Pakistan has stepped up its terror campaign in direct proportion to the mounting desire for peace among the people of Jammu and Kashmir. Everybody knows the manner in which Pakistani-backed terrorist organizations sabotaged the peace talks in Jammu and Kashmir.” Prime Minister Atal Bihari Vajpayee Selected Speeches, Volume III, April 2000-March 2001 (New Delhi: Publications Division of the Ministry of Information and Broadcasting, 2002), 130.

73 Ibid., 137.

74 Wolpert, India and Pakistan, 75.

Conference (APHC), a loose umbrella organization that represented the political wing of various Kashmiri militant groups.  

Amid these positive developments Vajpayee adopted a conciliatory position and stated that negotiations need not be conducted within the framework of the Indian constitution, something terrorist groups were loath to accept, but could be started within the framework of insaniyat (humanity). This was a departure from the government’s past position and was meant to facilitate talks but before they could even begin, the HuM called off the ceasefire amid group infighting and pressure from jihadist groups, particularly those with stronger links to Pakistan.

To encourage the pro-dialogue faction of HuM to return to the negotiating table, the Indian government reciprocated its gesture and declared a unilateral ceasefire (officially described as a non-initiation of combat operations) in November 2000. The symbolism of the move is also important as it coincided with the Muslim holy month of Ramadan. This ceasefire was renewed two times and it lasted until May 2001 but throughout the period, the violence had actually increased in Jammu and Kashmir. It seems that some terrorist groups purposefully intensified attacks in part to sabotage the peace initiative and provoke Indian forces into breaking the ceasefire. Swami suggests that Pakistan directed terrorist groups, particularly those with greater numbers of Pakistani nationals, to intensify their attacks to show that it could not be

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76 To lead these talks, the government relied on Vajpayee’s confidante R.K. Mishra (the same individual who would also conduct secret negotiations with Pakistan after Lahore), former foreign secretary M.K. Rasgotra, and Research and Analysis Chief (later, Vajpayee’s principle advisor on Kashmir), A.S. Dulat. Dixit, *India-Pakistan in War and Peace*, 321-322. Also see A.S. Dulat and Aditya Sinha, *Kashmir: The Vajpayee Years* (New York: HarperCollins, 2015).

77 On August 15, 2000, Vajpayee delivered the Prime Minister’s customary Independence Day speech at the Red Fort in Delhi. In his address, he stated that “the people of Jammu, Kashmir, and Ladakh are tired of violence and bloodshed. They are craving for peace. We need to apply the salve of brotherhood on the wounded body of Jammu and Kashmir. That is why, I recently said that India is prepared to apply the balm for Kashmir’s agony within the framework of Insaniyat (humanity).” *Prime Minister Atal Bihari Vajpayee Selected Speeches, Volume III, April 2000-March 2001* (New Delhi: Publications Division of the Ministry of Information and Broadcasting, 2002), p. 9.

excluded from negotiations. Given that greater numbers of foreign terrorists entered Kashmir, these mehmaan (or guest) mujihideen simply “had no interest in a détente process.”79

Regardless of the reasons, the security situation in Kashmir continued to deteriorate, raising the costs to India of continuing the status quo. K.P.S. Gill, the former Director General of Police of Punjab, stated that:

At some point of time, the processes of attrition will carry it beyond the point of return or recovery, and the cumulative consequences, then, would be disastrous. The evidence available suggests that we are currently set upon this course to catastrophe and lack the will and the vision to institute satisfactory correctives.80

By May 2001, Indian decision-makers were aware that their diplomatic initiatives had failed to reduce the violence. As the six-month long ceasefire was coming to an end, Vajpayee reportedly asked Advani and Singh, “Ab aage kya karna chahiye?” (or what should we do next?).81 This question, in light of the conditions, suggests that the Prime Minister recognized a new strategy was needed to address Kashmir. India’s precarious situation made its decision-makers receptive to alternative courses of action, including beginning talks with Pakistan’s new leader, General Musharraf.

While he was understandably viewed with great suspicion, the Indian government began receiving signals about Musharraf’s interest in pursuing negotiations.82 Beginning in mid-2000,


82 Indian officials mistrusted Musharraf since he was the architect behind Kargil. India’s High Commissioner in Pakistan wrote, “I told him [Pakistan’s Commerce Minister Razak Dawood]...The main reason why we had serious reservations and doubts about Musharraf’s intentions was that it was fairly well known that his predecessor General Karamat was not too enthusiastic about the kind of adventure in Kargil that General Musharraf had strongly and ardently advocated. Suspicions about General Musharraf’s intentions are, therefore, inevitably going to continue in India till such time as we are assured on the ground that he is not escalating tensions and militancy.” Letter from High Commissioner for India in Pakistan to Foreign Secretary Lalit Mansingh, February 21, 2000, Document 1522 in *India-Pakistan Relations 1947-2007, Vol V*, pp. 3795-3797.
Pakistan’s officials relayed this message to their Indian counterparts and insisted that Musharraf was much better positioned to negotiate with Vajpayee than his predecessor. According to Vivek Katju, Pakistan’s High Commissioner (PHC) to India, Ashraf Jehangir Qazi, told him while Nawaz had good instincts on India-Pakistan relations, he did not have the ability or the stamina to deliver…Musharraf was straightforward and would ensure that he delivered on all that he agreed to.83

The Pakistanis argued that Musharraf’s hawkish credentials and his control over the military gave him the standing to sell agreements back home. Providing an analogy, Pakistan’s foreign secretary, Inam ul-Haq, likened Musharraf to President Ronald Reagan; he was a strong leader who, under the right circumstances, was capable of changing his views.84 George Tenet, the Director of the CIA, reinforced this message when he visited India and told its officials that Musharraf was “a man you could do business with.”85 While the U.S. government publicly condemned Musharraf’s coup against Sharif, it was secretly encouraging Vajpayee’s government to negotiate with him.

To obtain more information, Advani secretly met with Qazi to discuss the possibility of resuming negotiations.86 Advani concluded from his “discussions with this diplomat, who was not only amiable but also earnest” that “the time was now ripe to restart the dialogue with


85 Tenet visited Indian in June 2000. The expression, “a man you can do business with,” is attributed to Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher. She described her impressions of Soviet General Secretary Mikhail Gorbachev in this manner in December 1984/January 1985.

Pakistan.” According to the Home Minister, Musharraf “was keen on resuming talks with India” because he sought to legitimize his military regime and end his country’s international isolation. Despite harboring doubts about the General’s intentions, Advani believed Pakistan’s interest in talks was sincere and as such, the Indians

Should test the mind of this military ruler who does not carry political baggage and seems to be his own master in a country where democratically elected leaders have never exercised real power.

Musharraf’s influence over Pakistan’s most important constituency, the military, therefore affected India’s decision to re-start negotiations.

The idea for the Agra summit was broached in May 2001 when Advani and Singh met Vajpayee at the Prime Minister’s Residence. While the transcript from the lunch meeting is regrettably unavailable, Advani reports that they met to discuss India’s “next course of action” since the six-month long ceasefire was drawing to an end. Advani proposed that Delhi abandon its preconditions and begin negotiations with Islamabad to break through the “existing logjam in Indo-Pakistani relations.” Despite his initial misgivings, Vajpayee ultimately accepted Advani’s suggestion and extended an invitation to Musharraf to attend the Agra summit. Ignoring Musharraf’s renewed support for cross-border terrorism, Vajpayee suddenly announced a readiness to talk to him without any *quid pro quo*. This was a concession to

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88 Ibid.

89 Ibid.

90 Ibid.

91 Ganguly, *Deadly Impasse*, 59-60.

92 Many have thus labeled Advani as the architect of the Agra summit.
Pakistan’s new leader since he was being awarded a state visit despite his direct involvement in Kargil and his escalation of the Kashmir conflict.

One could argue that Vajpayee’s initiatives – either Lahore or Agra – were motivated by domestic and/or international considerations and as such, were largely driven by rational self-interest. While such an explanation questions the boldness of Vajpayee’s conciliatory gestures, it suffers from two serious shortcomings. First, it fails to shed light as to why Vajpayee dismissed less costly alternative options to achieve the same objective. Second, it overlooks the risks involved with Vajpayee’s overtures since the outcomes from either Lahore or Agra were far from certain. These summits were not destined to succeed and they could, as many analysts noted, backfire.93

This is exactly what happened when Pakistan launched the Kargil war and sponsored a new wave of terrorist attacks after Lahore and Agra, respectively. These betrayals generated political costs for Vajpayee and tied his hands in future interactions with Pakistan since the public now demanded a tougher line against Islamabad. By undertaking such initiatives, Vajpayee also made India appear weak and perhaps, sacrificed some of India’s leverage in future rounds of bargaining with Pakistan. Vajpayee’s actions therefore do not fit the logic of what would be considered rational under standard models of expected utility.

Drawing from the insight of psychology, I argue in the next section that he undertook bold, risky conciliatory initiatives to empathetically respond to Pakistan’s concerns. By reassuring Islamabad, Vajpayee sought to break through the diplomatic inertia and build trust at an otherwise precarious time.

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93 This was especially true for Agra since there was little advanced preparation and no high-level contacts prior to the summit, reducing the likelihood of any breakthrough occurring in Indo-Pakistani relations.
LAHORE AND AGRA: DIFFERENT EXERCISES IN TRUST-BUILDING

The available historical evidence shows that Indian policy-makers adopted bold initiatives to mitigate their rival’s insecurity and remove the psychological barriers such as mistrust that, they believed, had stalemated negotiations. This explanation admittedly is much better suited for understanding Vajpayee’s motivations at the Lahore summit. Exercising security dilemma sensibility (SDS) during his visit, Vajpayee not only delivered conciliatory speeches but he performed a series of symbolic, emotive acts to unmistakably and unambiguously reassure Pakistan of India’s benign, or peaceful, intentions. Similar to Lahore, Agra was also a trust-building exercise but it was convened to show Pakistan’s new President, General Pervez Musharraf, that India was ready to resume high-level negotiations (without preconditions). Given the post-Kargil tension between the rivals, the summit was meant to initiate a thaw in Indo-Pakistani relations.

My explanation of the Lahore and Agra summits contributes to the existing literature in two fundamental ways. First, I broaden the scope of my study and explain Vajpayee’s motivations at two summits whereas prior studies tended to focus on either one or the other. By lengthening the period under study, I double the total number of cases and see if there are any notable patterns behind why, and the conditions under which, Vajpayee undertook his initiatives.

Second, I build off the work of Wheeler by providing direct evidence showing that Vajpayee indeed exercised SDS. While Wheeler applied SDS to explain the Lahore summit, his argument was supported by secondary sources and public source material (i.e. newspaper articles, public statements) and was based on what Vajpayee either did or said during the visit.94

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Given that leaders have incentives to misrepresent their intentions in public, particularly during a high-profile ceremony, Wheeler’s argument needs to be corroborated by archival evidence and supported by statements from over time and across situations. I examined the available primary sources from India - including memoirs, diplomatic correspondence, letters, government memoranda, etc.- to not only see what officials said behind closed doors but to more importantly, trace the process through which Vajpayee and members of his inner circle reached their foreign policy decisions. This approach provides a much more thorough, nuanced application of SDS as it helps us ascertain when Indian officials acknowledged Pakistan’s fears, how they learned about it, and why they chose to mitigate it through summitry. The last point is particularly salient to our research puzzle, providing insight into the reasons Indian decision-makers by-passed less costly avenues of reassuring Pakistani officials.

The following section is broken down into two parts. I first explain how India’ policy towards Pakistan was shaped and directed by Vajpayee and a small group of advisors since the government mistrusted the foreign policy bureaucracy. Eager to circumvent traditional negotiating channels, Vajpayee relied on personal diplomacy to initiate conciliation with Pakistan. After identifying the most important actors, I then use the available historical evidence to explain Indian decision-makers’ motivations at Lahore and then Agra.

Circumventing the Indian Foreign Policy Bureaucracy: Summitry and Personal Diplomacy

Beginning in 1998 and 2001, Vajpayee and his advisors sought to improve Indo-Pakistani relations but were unable to do so because of the diplomatic stalemate. They believed it was not just Pakistani intransigence that had led to this outcome but also the rigidity of their own officials, particularly those from the Ministry of External Affairs (MEA).95 The Ministry was

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95 Ganguly, Deadly Impasse, 33.
viewed as a conservative institution whose officials could not be trusted to make, recommend, or implement changes to the country’s foreign policy. T.C. Raghavan, former High Commissioner to Pakistan, once noted that “all foreign service officers are essentially conservative. This often is ‘timidity’ but equally often is born of the regimen of the doctrine of ‘estoppel.’ In brief, precedents in domestic policy can be over-ridden, not in foreign affairs.” The diplomatic culture within the Ministry made its officials loath to depart from traditional positions and reluctant to engage states like Pakistan that were viewed as rivals.

The fact that Vajpayee appointed Singh, a moderate and political outsider, to lead the Ministry reflected his reservations, if not concerns, about its officers. Singh, for his part, was highly critical of the bureaucracy, including the Indian Foreign Service (IFS), because he believed that its officials were unimaginative and biased. He wrote,

> It was difficult for me to alter the mindset of the officers of the ministry. Their views understandably reflected the residue of years of official caution, the distillate of institutional experience, and hence ‘steer a safe course’ timidity. This, too, was inevitable. Decades of management of foreign policy had left us, particularly the ministries of Defense and External Affairs, with many scars, a host of problems, and several shelf-loads of prejudices. The British-imparted civil service tradition of reasoned independent thought had been so diluted by then that to elicit views, whether dissenting or not, required repeated persuasion…. the system was simply not working at its best; the needed fuel of inspired thought and leadership was just not there.

Singh’s critique seems harsh but is in fact consistent with the views of others who have written about the IFS such as J.N. Dixit, Kanti Bajpai, Daniel Markey, and Kishan Rana. According to

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96 Singh, *In Service of Emergent India*, 117 [n.1].

97 Indian Foreign Service officers are career diplomats representing India in diplomatic missions abroad. Some of its officers also serve at the headquarters of the Ministry of External Affairs in New Delhi, situated in the South Block of the Secretariat Building.


these experts, the recruitment as well as the training and promotion of officers within the IFS contributed to its conservativeness. Conditioned to view Pakistan as India’s existential enemy, IFS officers analyze information, interpret diplomatic signals, and evaluate options from a perspective of an ongoing rivalry. This leads to a distinct anti-Pakistan bias and one that permeates the highest levels of the Ministry since it is usually led by career IFS officers, not political appointees.

If officials could not overcome their personal or organizational biases, then Singh understood that this would affect their ability to lead meaningful and substantive negotiations. Dixit, a well-known officer and scholar of the MEA, wrote that Singh’s attitudes led him to promote people outside the IFS and sidestep the Ministry on important national security issues.100 Because they were suspicious of India’s bureaucracy, Vajpayee and his closest advisors – Singh, Advani, and Mishra – ultimately made foreign policy decisions without its input.101 A small group of officials thus shaped India’s policy toward Pakistan because the feeling was that “political decisions” needed to be made at the top to overcome the diplomatic inertia.102

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100 Dixit wrote, “a major negative development during Jaswant Singh’s tenure as Minister of External Affairs was a feeling in the Foreign Service that he did not think very highly of the Foreign Service, nor did he take senior members of the service into confidence before taking major policy decisions. The general impression which he conveyed in his public pronouncements on the working of the Ministry of External Affairs was that he knew more about foreign policy-making than the professional Foreign Service. While he relied on some of the Division Chiefs (Joint Secretaries) for advice and briefings on specific issues, macro-level foreign policy matters were decided upon by him without much consultation with the Foreign Secretary and other Secretaries in the Ministry of External Affairs. He also resorted to the practice of appointing non-service advisors to the Ministry of External Affairs...Jaswant Singh appointed Mr. Arun Singh, former Minister of State for Defense in Rajiv Gandhi’s government as an advisor on foreign and security affairs. He also appointed a senior academic and journalist Sanjoy Hazarika and a former Army Officer Major General Ashok Mehta as Advisors for short periods to deal with the North-East, Myanmar, Sri Lanka, and Nepal.” Dixit, Indian Foreign Service, 241.

101 Pillai, Off the Record, 196-211.

Perhaps, nothing more tellingly illustrates this organizational mistrust than Vajpayee’s post-Lahore decision to open a secret, backchannel on Kashmir. The sensitivity of this issue made it necessary to conduct negotiations outside the normal purview of the Ministry of External Affairs. A similar development unfolded prior to Agra when a series of secret talks were held between Advani and Qazi. In this case, Vajpayee relied on his longtime friend and trusted advisor to probe Pakistan’s readiness to resume talks. Convening the Agra summit was a controversial decision but it was one that Vajpayee still made despite the reservations of senior members of the IFS.103 Similarly, Vajpayee overcame the “entrenched bureaucratic opposition” when he revived the composite dialogue and placed Kashmir back on the agenda in 1998.104 As the Prime Minister’s advisor on Kashmir – A.S. Dulat – later wrote, the BJP government repeatedly showed that it did not allow itself to be led by the bureaucracy.105

Vajpayee’s initiatives were not only decided largely outside of normal decision-making structures but they were undertaken by the Prime Minister himself. His involvement in summit meetings, particularly in one-on-one, face-to-face talks, suggests, according to Wirsing, a “lack of confidence” in lower level officials.106 Given his attitudes toward the bureaucracy, it seems that the use of summits reflected some degree of uncertainty over whether IFS officers could implement his policy directives. Such suspicions were indeed warranted since these diplomats opposed seeking a détente with Pakistan and criticized Vajpayee’s attempts to bring about a rapprochement. Moreover, they were trained to be judicious and as a result, favored initiating

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103 Dixit, *Indian Foreign Service*, 244.


conciliation through small, incremental steps rather than through bold gestures. Such a background favored continuing the status quo and made IFS officers ill-suited to advise a leader like Vajpayee who was willing to accept risks to change Indo-Pakistani relations.

To circumvent these career officials, Vajpayee personally reassured Pakistan through his own actions and statements. While this argument helps explain the form of Vajpayee’s bold gestures, it does not shed light on the reasons he accepted such risks in the first place. To make such a determination, I next examine the motivations of Vajpayee and members of his inner circle and argue that they were driven by a desire to build trust.

**India’s Quest to Build Trust**

The bitter, longstanding rivalry between India and Pakistan made it difficult for them to view one another as anything but rivals. Sahibzada Yaqub Khan, one of Pakistan’s longest serving and most well-known foreign ministers, aptly described the situation when he said that “there is a fundamental line of hatred between India and Pakistan which generates suspicion, mistrust, and antagonism.”

Vajpayee’s government viewed the establishment of trust as something necessary to improve the Indo-Pakistani relationship. Singh once told an interviewer,

> My ministry may not agree with this comment but I, personally, believe that the fundamental requirement in meeting the challenges of international negotiations is to first establish trust. Of course, negotiating countries will not abandon their respective national interests. That simply cannot be the starting point. Yet, unless you are able to talk on issues, how will you negotiate complex and intricate problems; and how can any substantial talk take place without basic trust.108

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107 Quote was taken from Dixit, *India-Pakistan in War and Peace*, 398.

The logic here was that if trust could first be developed, then this would not only help overcome the diplomatic stalemate but would help facilitate meaningful, substantive negotiations between the two sides. Trust was needed since the two sides, according to Vajpayee, remained “mired in the past, the prisoners of old contentions.” To build trust in a relationship that was otherwise fraught by decades of mutual hostility, Vajpayee at critical junctures undertook bold gestures. While he could have initiated conciliation through smaller moves, he astutely recognized that summits offered an important public venue to clearly and unmistakably communicate India’s intentions. The purpose of his Lahore visit was to challenge the threatening image India had projected in 1998 and reassure Pakistan in no uncertain terms that India, especially under the BJP-government, possessed benign, or peaceful, intentions. A little over two years later, Vajpayee extended another olive branch and convened the Agra summit to demonstrate India’s readiness to resume high-level negotiations. Both summits were motivated by a desire to overcome mistrust but whereas the former was primarily intended to address Pakistan’s insecurity, the latter was not.

When Vajpayee entered office, it was unimaginable that someone with his credentials and background would seek a detente with Pakistan. Nonetheless, his early speeches did provide some clues on his attitudes and beliefs. After forming the government in March 1998, Vajpayee delivered an address to the nation in which he pledged to improve relations with all India’s

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neighbors, including Pakistan. The goal, as he professed before Parliament a week later, was to “live as friends” since “we can quarrel with history but cannot change geography. We have to live together…so, why not live as friends…” This expression is important not just because of when and where it was said but because of the frequency with which it would come to be used by the Prime Minister to justify improved relations. In many ways, it would become Vajpayee’s catchphrase for why India should attempt to normalize relations with Pakistan.

At first glance, Vajpayee’s position is consistent with prior Indian governments since they advocated a similar policy. What separated Vajpayee from his predecessors, however, was that he publicly voiced empathy for others; he stated,

We are determined to be friends with all – and precisely because we happen to be the larger country, we shall be all the more sensitive to the aspirations and needs of our neighbors. That applies to Pakistan as much as to our other neighbors. Our relations have been and are bedeviled by needless tensions.

Showing an understanding of the way in which India’s size, and power, could inspire fear in others, Vajpayee implicitly suggested that his government would be responsive to their concerns.

One example of this was his government’s immediate attempts to reassure others that the BJP did not possess “some hidden agenda.” While this was intended to allay the fears of India’s minority groups and secular opposition parties, it was also a signal that his government did not have “hidden intentions” to re-make India and radically change its domestic and/or foreign policy. As Vajpayee repeatedly pointed out in Parliament, the government would merely pursue policies the BJP and its coalition partners had outlined in the NDA’s platform, called the

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112 Reply to the Lok Sabha’s discussion on Motion of Thanks on President’s Address, “National Agenda of Governance,” March 31, 1998, in Decisive Days, p. 67.
National Agenda for Governance. In other words, there would be no surprises since, according to Vajpayee, “in a democracy, things cannot be hidden and no effort at hiding things should be made.”

The Prime Minister showed again some level of sensitivity after India conducted a series of nuclear tests in May 1998. While testing undoubtedly exacerbated the security dilemma in South Asia, it was a decision Vajpayee and his closest advisors had made well in advance.

There was pressure on the BJP’s leaders to test nuclear weapons not just to demonstrate India’s military and technological prowess but to satisfy one of the party’s central campaign promises. Upon entering office, the question was not whether India should test but how it should manage the political crisis afterwards. A strategy was therefore developed to address the diplomatic fallout and it involved the sending of political and military signals to reassure an already fearful, insecure Pakistan. As will be shown, Vajpayee and members of his inner circle were therefore

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113 On March 28, 1998, Vajpayee told the members of the Lok Sabha, “the leader of the opposition as also several other Honorable Members have alleged that the ruling party has some hidden agenda. I do not know what they mean by it. Our agenda is open and clear. It is a national agenda. We are bound by it, we are committed to it. We have no concern with any other agenda. So long as this government is in power and I am its Prime Minister, I assure you that the Government will function in accordance with this national agenda.” Reply to the Lok Sabha’s discussion on the Motion of Confidence in the Council of Ministers, March 28, 1998, in Decisive Days, pp. 55-56. On April 3, Vajpayee told the members of the Rajya Sabha, “Mr. Chairman, Sir, besides the national agenda, we have no hidden agenda…Believe me, nothing will be hidden. This document has been prepared by the Bharatiya Janata Party and the allied parties by consensus…. So long as this government is in existence and I am its Prime Minister, it is only the national agenda and no other agenda that will be implemented.” Reply to the Rajya Sabha’s discussion on Motion of Thanks on President’s Address, “Need for Consensus,” April 3, 1998, in Decisive Days, pp. 86-87.

114 Reply to the Rajya Sabha’s discussion on Motion of Thanks on President’s Address, “Need for Consensus,” April 3, 1998, in Decisive Days, pp. 86-87.

115 During his short thirteen-day stint as Prime Minister in 1996, Vajpayee actually ordered India’s scientists to make preparations for a nuclear test. And so, it was clear before 1998 that Vajpayee was resolved to conduct such tests.

116 This had in fact been a part of the BJP’s platform during the 1998 election.

117 Talbott wrote, “Part of what drove the competition on the subcontinent was Pakistan’s chronic fear of being left behind by its large neighbor…The Pakistanis seemed to wear on their sleeve an insecurity about the cohesiveness and even the viability of their own state, not to mention the durability of its democracy.” Talbott, Engaging India, 104-105.
exercising SDS well before the Lahore summit and showed a remarkable level of consistency in their actions.

In the wake of the nuclear tests, Vajpayee attempted to deescalate the crisis by directly addressing the origins of Pakistan’s fear. In a statement before the Lok Sabha, he vividly described Pakistan’s “insecurity,” explaining how it stemmed from a mistaken belief that India had not reconciled itself to partition; that is, it had “not accepted Pakistan.”118 As he explained to his audience, “there is no reason to have such a feeling. The country was partitioned, a separate Pakistan was created. Let them be happy, let them by content, let them prosper.”119 A similarly-worded statement was delivered before the Rajya Sabha, India’s upper house, on May 29th.120

Given that some within the BJP favored restoring Akhand Bharat, or Greater India, it was comforting that the Prime Minister openly accepted the status quo.

While it is unclear if Vajpayee’s reassurance was received by Pakistan, parliamentary proceedings, especially those involving the Prime Minister, are usually broadcast in India. Moreover, the press in India, just like in the U.S., reports on the Parliament quite extensively and publishes statements issued either by the Prime Minister or Members of Parliament. Assuming the Pakistanis never received the signal, Vajpayee’s statement is still significant as it shows his

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118 Reply to the Lok Sabha’s discussion on the nuclear test in Pokhran, “India for ‘No First Use’ of Nuclear Weapons,” May 29, 1998, in Decisive Days, pp. 132-139.

119 In his statement to the Lok Sabha, Vajpayee stated that “So many people visit Pakistan, they have a relationship with the people of Pakistan, they develop friendly relations with Pakistan and on their return here they sat that the people of Pakistan have a feeling of insecurity in their minds – that India has not accepted Pakistan. There is no reason to have such a feeling. The country was partitioned, a separate Pakistan was created. Let them be happy, let them be contented, let them prosper; let us remain in peace and both of us should make an effort together to remove poverty, unemployment, disease, illiteracy – not only from this region but also from the whole world.” Ibid.,135.

120 Vajpayee told the members of the Rajya Sabha that “…I would like to make it abundantly clear that Pakistan faces no threat from India,” adding later that “we do not think ill of Pakistan and our Pakistani friends should have no misgiving that we want to finish them. Pakistan has come into existence. We wish to see it flourishing, happy, and prosperous.” Reply to the Rajya Sabha’s discussion on the Nuclear Test at Pokhran, “Nuclear Test: Need of the Hour,” May 29, 1998, in Decisive Days, pp. 126-131.
mindfulness of the other side’s insecurity. As the most important actor, the focus here is on the Prime Minister’s views but it is worthwhile to note that his advisors were also cognizant of Pakistan’s security complex.121

Two months later, Vajpayee delivered the same message to Sharif on the sidelines of the SAARC summit in Colombo, Sri Lanka. He affirmed India’s interest “in a secure, stable, and prosperous Pakistan” and went further by urging the two sides to “work together to develop trust and confidence” so that they could avail themselves “of the many opportunities for mutually beneficial cooperation…”122 While one could argue that these types of statements constitute cheap talk, Vajpayee took concrete steps to prove to Pakistan that India was not an offensive, revisionist state.

Immediately after conducting its tests, the Indian government unilaterally imposed a voluntary moratorium on testing and affirmed its interest in a “no-first use” agreement with Pakistan.123 When Pakistan ignored the offer, the Indian government still went ahead and announced their policy of “no first-use” and “non-use against non-nuclear weapons states.” The implication was that India would never be the first to use nuclear weapons, including against its rivals. This was meant to show that India would neither use nor threaten to use its weapons of mass destruction against Pakistan and China. They were intended to deter, not threaten.124

121 In an interview, Singh commented on the dangers of engaging in “an unnecessarily tough approach” towards Pakistan, saying it “could generate resentment in a smaller neighbor which already suffers from the psychological consequences of its relative size.” “The Highway Beyond Agra,” 840.


123 As Vajpayee told members of the Rajya Sabha, “these initiatives address substantially a number of concerns expressed by other countries.” See Reply to Rajya Sabha’s discussion on the Nuclear Test at Pokharan, “Nuclear Test: Need of the Hour,” in Decisive Days, pp. 126-131.

124 Vajpayee later said, “A nuclear weapon is not a weapon of attack, it is a weapon of defense. It is a weapon that has contributed to the maintenance of peace. If there was no balance of power – balance of terror – during the days of the Cold War, the odds could have been in favour of one party and it could have committed excesses.” Reply to
Vajpayee also stated at the end of 1998 that India would achieve security by maintaining a credible “minimum nuclear deterrent.” By producing a limited number of nuclear weapons and deploying them “in a manner that ensures survivability and capacity of an adequate response,” India would merely maintain sufficient strategic forces to satisfy the requirements for nuclear deterrence. Such a defensive posture was intended to reassure Pakistan, and perhaps all other countries, that India’s nuclear weapons were for security. It was also supposed to signal India’s desire to avert a costly nuclear arms race with its neighbors. While Vajpayee’s enunciation of minimum credible deterrence was meaningful, neither he nor members of his

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125 In a speech delivered on August 15, 1998 (India’s Independence Day), Vajpayee said “I wish to make it clear right now that India has been an ardent advocate of peace and will always remain so. We know and want to use weapons for self-defense only. We ourselves proclaimed to the world that we shall never be the first user of atomic weapons. We are doing neither under press nor fear of any one. We are doing it voluntarily because of our firm belief in world peace and disarmament.” Prime Minister Atal Bihari Vajpayee Selected Speeches, Volume I, March 1998-March 1999 (New Delhi: Publications Division of the Ministry of Information and Broadcasting, 2000), pp. 25-38, 28. Before Parliament, Vajpayee stated “Just as our conventional defense capability has been deployed in order to safeguard the territorial integrity and sovereignty of India against any use or threat of use of force, the adoption of our nuclear deterrent posture has also followed the same logic. We have announced our intention to maintain a minimum nuclear deterrent, but one that is credible. Mindful of our global and enhanced responsibility to address concerns of the international community, and in order to reassure all countries about the defensive nature of our nuclear capability, we have engaged in bilateral discussions with key interlocutors.” Vajpayee’s statement on Indo-U.S. Relations in Parliament, “Main Planks of our Foreign Policy,” December 15, 1998, in Decisive Days, pp. 202-206.


127 While the tenets of India’s nuclear doctrine were formally outlined in the summer of 1999, Vajpayee had in fact introduced many of its core elements in 1998. See Wirsing, Kashmir: In the Shadow of War, 99; Dixit, India-Pakistan in War and Peace, 344-345; Swaran Singh, “India’s Nuclear Doctrine: Ten Years Since the Kargil Conflict,” in The Politics of Nuclear Weapons in South Asia, ed. Bhumitra Chakma (Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2011), 57-74.

128 As Vajpayee told the members of Parliament, “We are also not going to enter into an arms race with any country. Ours will be a minimum credible deterrent, which will safeguard India’s security…” Vajpayee’s statement on Indo-U.S. Relations in Parliament, “Main Planks of our Foreign Policy,” December 15, 1998, in Decisive Days, pp. 202-206.
government took sufficient steps to clarify how this doctrine would be applied to India’s strategic forces. This, to some extent, undermined India’s reassurance.129

Nonetheless, it is notable that Vajpayee’s government still attempted to mitigate the severity of the security dilemma after India’s nuclear tests. He thus exercised SDS well before February 1999 but his trip to Lahore represented the most significant effort to reassure Pakistan. The purpose of his visit was, as he stated, “to do away with mistrust, to abjure and eliminate conflict, to erect an edifice of durable peace, amity, harmony, and cooperation.”130

He attempted to break through the psychological barriers dividing India and Pakistan by symbolically crossing the long-closed and heavily militarized border between the two countries. In another dramatic display, he became the first Indian leader to visit the Minar-e-Pakistan where he expressed his “deep desire for lasting peace and friendship” and noted that “a stable, secure, and prosperous Pakistan is in India’s interest. Let no one in Pakistan be in doubt. India sincerely wishes Pakistan well.”131 These acts were meant to reassure Pakistanis that Indians, even Hindu nationalists like Vajpayee, unquestioningly accepted Pakistan’s right to exist.132 Vajpayee addressed the legacy of partition in more detail during a civic reception at Lahore; he stated:

But whether I shall or should not visit Minar-e-Pakistan has also become a debating issue. It is true that we did not want the vivisection of India. I told you that when I came here for the first time, the entire India was one unit and it was being ruled by the British…But the country was divided and was partitioned into

129 Talbott, Engaging India, 146-148.


131 Quote taken from Hiro, The Longest August, 292.

132 According to Talbott, “…overriding the objections of BJP hard-liners, Vajpayee made a moving speech at a monument commemorating the decision of the Muslim League nearly sixty years earlier to commit itself to the creation of Pakistan.” Talbott, Engaging India, 153.
separate nation states. Our heart was wounded. The wound recovered, but the scar still remains to remind us constantly that we have to live together. And for living together, it is necessary that we move together, hand-in-hand. We wish Pakistan to prosper. And you too must be wishing the same for us. History can be changed, but not geography. You can change your friends, but not your neighbors. So, we must live like good neighbors.  

The fact that Vajpayee repeated many of these same lines before Lahore shows some level of consistency between his public statements. When leaders say the same things over time and across different situations, this usually provides an index of their true beliefs and/or attitudes. It seems therefore that Vajpayee was sincerely attempting to address the origins of Pakistan’s insecurity.

The summit was notable not just for the gestures and/or statements that were made but also for the documents that were concluded, particularly the Memorandum of Understanding and the Lahore Declaration. In these documents, India surprisingly agreed to list Kashmir as one of the central issues that ought to be resolved. The fact that none of the other “outstanding issues” except Kashmir were mentioned by name in these documents helped emphasize that Kashmir was the most important one. Given that many within the BJP supported re-unifying Pakistan-occupied Kashmir (Azad Kashmir) with Indian-controlled Kashmir, Vajpayee’s willingness to open negotiations was in and of itself quite meaningful. He showed a flexibility to negotiate over Kashmir, particularly during the secret, backchannel talks, that helped allay whatever fears Pakistan may have had about the BJP’s underlying intentions.


One could argue that Vajpayee’s display of security dilemma sensibility at the Lahore summit was simply meant for public consumption. Nonetheless, the archival evidence shows he continued to exercise SDS after the summit had ended. On April 12, 1999, Qazi met with Vajpayee and Brajesh Mishra to discuss the state of bilateral relations but during their talk, Pakistan’s High Commissioner commented on India’s test launch of Agni, a medium or intermediate-range ballistic missile. He said that “it would have security implications for Pakistan” since it posed a threat.\textsuperscript{135} Mishra attempted to allay his concerns, assuring him that Agni would not be used against his country since India would not “risk a long flight over Indian territory itself.”\textsuperscript{136} The Prithvi, India’s short-range ballistic missile, was also scheduled to be tested, according to Mishra, but had been stopped by the Prime Minister “because of Pakistani sensitivities.” Given that the Prithvi missile posed a greater threat to Pakistan than the Agni missile, the Indian leadership’s decision to cancel the former test constitutes a post-summit illustration of SDS.

The archival evidence examined before and after Lahore coupled with Vajpayee’s actions and statements during the visit itself show that he was indeed exercising security dilemma sensibility. He was attempting to allay Pakistan’s deep-rooted, psychological fears about its much more powerful southern neighbor. Between 1999 and 2001, Vajpayee was still mindful of Pakistan’s fears but chose not to address them given its actions in Kargil and its support for cross-border terrorism. There was a fear that reassuring Pakistan in a similar way as Lahore would show weakness and embolden Pakistan at a time when it’s new leader, General Musharraf, was escalating the Kashmir conflict and supporting terrorist attacks deep inside India.


\textsuperscript{136} \textit{Ibid.}
India. Despite the unfavorable circumstances, Indian decision-makers extended another live branch and convened Agra to signal their commitment to a peaceful, diplomatic resolution of all issues, including Kashmir.

The available evidence once again suggests that trust-building was the primary motivation. On August 15, 1999, Vajpayee delivered a speech from the ramparts of the Red Fort and during his independence day address, he lambasted Pakistan for beginning the Kargil war. Despite his anger, Vajpayee still maintained that “we need peace in order to raise the standard of living of the people in both countries” but “for peace, we need trust.” Over the next two years, India placed the onus on Pakistan to restore the trust that it had blatantly violated after Lahore. India specified certain preconditions before it would resume talks with Pakistan but none of them were ever met. The violence in India, particularly in Jammu and Kashmir, precipitously increased and the security environment in South Asia once again deteriorated.

Amid these circumstances, Vajpayee once again took the initiative and invited Musharraf to the Agra summit to break through the diplomatic stalemate. The goal was to revive negotiations and give the two sides an opportunity to engage in a comprehensive dialogue such that the two sides could address “all outstanding issues.” Instead of holding talks, and the possibility of any improvement in Indo-Pakistani relations, hostage to the Kashmir problem, the Indian government would use Agra to begin broad-based discussions. This would allow the two sides to make progress on simpler issues as they were tackling more complex problems such as Kashmir and cross-border terrorism.


138 Advani wrote, “As for Prime Minister Vajpayee, the feeling of hurt and outrage was especially deep. He felt that he had been personally betrayed by his Pakistani counterpart. As he would say on many occasions later, Pakistan had violated not only the Line of Control, but also the Line of Trust.” Advani, My Country, My Life, 563.
Such an approach was intended to build trust and create an environment conducive to the resolution of more intractable issues. This was the motivation behind the composite dialogue and it seems to have also inspired Vajpayee and his advisors to later convene the Agra summit. Vajpayee discussed this approach during the summit’s plenary session and Jaswant Singh did much the same in a statement and press conference given after Agra had concluded.\textsuperscript{139} India’s Foreign Minister stated:

\begin{quote} 
India is convinced that narrow, segmented, or unifocal approaches will simply not work. Our focus has to remain on the totality of relationship, our endeavor to build trust and confidence, and a mutually beneficial relationship even as we address and move forward on all outstanding issues, including Jammu and Kashmir… \textsuperscript{140}
\end{quote}

Singh later reinforced this message in a post-summit interview given to the Institute for Defense Studies and Analyses (IDSA).\textsuperscript{141}

While Indian officials had long favored a “confidence-building approach,” few were willing to undertake risks to begin such a process. Someone needed to move first but many Indian leaders simply waited for a more auspicious time and/or waited for an initiative from

\textsuperscript{139} On July 15, 2001, Vajpayee made an opening statement at the plenary session; he welcomed Pakistan’s delegation to Agra and began his statement by saying “Through the past five decades, India has held firm in its abiding desire for peace and friendship with Pakistan. We remain committed to the establishment of trust and confidence, to developing mutually beneficial cooperation and to address all outstanding issues, including Jammu and Kashmir. We believe that the core concern of our peoples is their struggle against poverty, want, hunger, and deprivation. We have always taken a comprehensive view of India-Pakistan relations because it is our conviction that we must progress where we can, even as we address the more complex issues. We believe that, rather than operating in segments, we should take a broad based approach across the spectrum of possibilities in our relationship.” Prime Minister’s Opening Statement at the Plenary of the India-Pakistan Summit, July 15, 2001, Document 1551 in India-Pakistan Relations 1947-2007, Vol V, pp. 3861-3863.


\textsuperscript{141} The Institute for Defense Studies and Analyses (or IDSA) is a think tank funded by the Ministry of Defense. It is one of India’s premier national security think tanks. Strategic Insight is one of the magazines published by IDSA. In his interview with IDSA, Singh stated that “our focus will remain on the totality of our relationship, and we shall endeavor to build trust and confidence…We shall endeavor to build a mutually beneficial relationship even as we address and move forward on all outstanding issues, including J. & K.” The Highway Beyond Agra,” 838.
Pakistan. Vajpayee was different in that he not only invited Musharraf to Agra but in the days preceding the summit, he also made a series of small conciliatory gestures. He expanded people-to-people contacts, eased travel restrictions, instructed the Home Affairs Ministry to release “civilian prisoners,” and ordered the Coast Guard to turn away rather than imprison Pakistani fishermen violating Indian maritime borders.\textsuperscript{142}

Though these actions may seem trivial, they were significant because they were undertaken at a time when Indo-Pakistan relations had reached a new low. It almost seemed like appeasement because Vajpayee abandoned India’s preconditions and rewarded Musharraf, the mastermind behind Kargil, with a high-profile state visit to his country. Vajpayee, according to Dixit, sought to project an image of India “as a country committed to peaceful means, even when, its unity and territorial integrity stood threatened by the continuing adversarial attitude of Pakistan.”\textsuperscript{143} Despite his deep reservations, he took the first move to build trust with Pakistan’s new military ruler.

At Agra, each side wanted to see the other take steps that would help overcome their deep suspicions and mistrust. The importance each side attached to trust can be seen in an interaction that took place between Musharraf and Advani. The Home Minister stated that “the most important thing is to build trust in each other” and when Musharraf asked how this could be done, Advani suggested the passing of an extradition treaty or at the very least, Pakistan’s agreement to extradite a few well-known terrorists.\textsuperscript{144} While Musharraf’s reaction was predictably negative, Advani clearly thought that trust-building measures were the best way to

\textsuperscript{142} Singh, \textit{In Service of Emergent India}, 212-219.

\textsuperscript{143} Dixit, \textit{India-Pakistan in War and Peace}, 409.

\textsuperscript{144} Advani, \textit{My Country, My Life}, 698.
normalize Indo-Pakistan relations. Vajpayee’s other advisors such as Jaswant Singh also shared the same assessment. In his interview with IDSA, Singh elaborated on what India sought to accomplish at Agra; he said,

It is important to create an atmosphere of trust, as the foundation of progress on all outstanding issues, including J & K. This is the approach we have been recommending to Pakistan. This is the only approach that can work…It is, therefore, much better to start with the general, i.e. harmonizing certain commitments or values. If trust and harmony is established, then it becomes much simpler, thereafter, to deal with details.145

Unfortunately, the summit ended unsuccessfully and Musharraf and Vajpayee left Agra without even issuing a joint statement. This led to acrimony and mutual recriminations over who bore the brunt of the blame for Agra’s seeming failure to reset Indo-Pakistani relations. Indian officials grew particularly upset when a series of high-profile terrorist incidents occurred later in the year, the most important of which was a Pakistani-supported terrorist attack against India’s Parliament. The fact that Agra ended so unceremoniously and had been followed by greater violence showed the risks Vajpayee took by inviting Musharraf to India. He ultimately had very little to show for his gamble.

CONCLUSION

At first glance, there seems to be a contradiction between the BJP’s hawkishness towards Pakistan and the conciliatory initiatives undertaken by Vajpayee. Over the years, scholars generally have failed to explain how such a nationalist government could suddenly move from a confrontational to a conciliatory policy. While Vajpayee’s cooperative behavior seems at odds with his government’s early actions and/or statements (i.e. its nuclear tests, defense expenditures increases, bellicose rhetoric, etc.), the latter were part of the Prime Minister’s grand strategy of

achieving “peace through strength.”\textsuperscript{146} By demonstrating strength and resolve, he developed the political capital to take risks and offer concessions that other Indian leaders would have found unacceptable. The fact that Vajpayee was a BJP-party leader also gave him strong national security credentials such that he could negotiate with Pakistan and expect fewer political repercussions than other politicians.

The conditions within India, of course, also played a crucial role in encouraging Vajpayee to pursue a détente with Pakistan. The nuclearization of South Asia and the costliness of maintaining security in Kashmir made an improvement in Indo-Pakistani relations quite desirable from India’s perspective. Believing he confronted a leader who desired peace and/or who could sell an agreement back home, Vajpayee grew cautiously optimistic about the prospects of negotiating with Sharif and Musharraf, respectively.

Vajpayee and his advisors understood, however, that negotiations would fail unless the two sides could establish some basic level of trust. To facilitate this process, Vajpayee traveled to Lahore and invited Pakistani officials to Agra to help overcome the mutual suspicion and mistrust between the two sides. While Vajpayee could have initiated conciliation through smaller moves, he, along with his advisors, simply distrusted the foreign policy bureaucracy. To circumvent the Ministry of External Affairs, Vajpayee relied on summits where he used personal diplomacy to affect Indo-Pakistan relations from the top-down.

\textsuperscript{146} As he explained to the Lok Sabha, “they [Pokharan-II and the Lahore bus journey] are two sides of the same coin. We must first have the needed strength to defend ourselves. Then we should extend the hand of friendship.” Prime Minister’s Reply to the Motion of Confidence in the Lok Sabha, “Who is My Successor,” April 17, 1999, in \textit{Decisive Days}, pp. 289-300, 294. Vajpayee later said before the Asia Society in New York, “If I may quote one of your Presidents, we believe that peace lies in strength.” \textit{Prime Minister Atal Bihari Vajpayee Selected Speeches, Volume III, April 2000-March 2001} (New Delhi: Publications Division of the Ministry of Information and Broadcasting, 2002), 252-253.
While the outcome of these summits is beyond the scope of this study, suffice it to say that Vajpayee’s gestures were very well-received in Pakistan, South Asia, and the world.\textsuperscript{147} They projected a benign image of India, one that was unmistakable and unambiguous enough to be received by all audiences.

Despite the stark differences between Lahore and Agra, these two summits show similarities in the reasons, and the conditions under which, Vajpayee undertook bold, risky conciliatory gestures. As described in the conclusion, this chapter shares much in common with my other case-studies, providing further evidence that there is a pattern as to why and when decision-makers make bold gestures in international relations.

\textsuperscript{147} Referring to Lahore, Talbott wrote “In the region, Vajpayee’s gesture was widely hailed as comparable to Richard Nixon’s trip to China in 1971 and Gorbachev’s opening of the Berlin Wall in 1989, and it was universally seen as a stunning symbol of Vajpayee’s personal willingness to go the extra mile for reconciliation.” Talbott, \textit{Engaging India}, 153.
Figure 3: Fatalities from the Kashmir Conflict, 1988-2005

TABLES AND FIGURES
Table 2: Fatalities from Terrorist Violence in Kashmir, 1988-2004

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<th>Year</th>
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*The numbers of terrorist incidents were not reported for 2002-2004. These numbers were obtained from Swami and cross-checked against data from India’s Ministry of Home Affairs (available via its Annual Reports)

Please note, the data from 1999 excludes battle deaths from the Kargil War.
Chapter 5: A Foundation for the Study of Bold Gestures

How do states initiate conciliation in strategic rivalries? For decades, this question has received attention by scholars in the trust-building, cooperation, rapprochement, rivalry termination, and costly signaling literature. They all contend that if one side initiates conciliation, then it must take small or modest steps to minimize its exposure to risks. The historical record, however, shows that leaders do not always behave so judiciously since they sometimes undertake bold, risky conciliatory gestures. In other words, leaders sometimes offer olive boughs instead of branches.

The several case-studies examined here show that there is a distinct pattern as to why, and the conditions under which, leaders undertake bold gestures in rivalries. Knowing why, when, and how decision-makers communicate their intentions through these types of signals has many implications for the theoretical development and practice of international relations. The contributions of this study are particularly unique given that few scholars have attempted to systematically examine this phenomenon, leaving many questions unanswered and many policy recommendations unmade. This project therefore fills a gap in the literature and offers insight into an important but yet understudied topic. The remainder of this final chapter is divided into two parts. I first provide a summary of my findings, reviewing the similarities and differences between each of our case-studies. Next, I examine what these findings mean for policy-makers and for our understanding of international relations theory.
Summary

In my study, I found that the leaders who initiated a bold move – Sadat, Gorbachev, and Vajpayee – did so under a similar set of background conditions. Each confronted domestic problems – economic and/or political – that made them receptive to deescalate the rivalry and pursue a détente with their adversary. Their overarching goal was to mitigate the tension and regulate and/or end the arms race so that they could reduce defense expenditures and devote greater human, financial, and technological resources to economic development. When negotiations reached a deadlock, the leaders undertook a bold move to improve the political environment and overcome the diplomatic inertia. As the continuation of the status quo was proving costly, they grew willing to accept greater risks to break through the stalemate.

The signalers – Sadat, Gorbachev, and Vajpayee – were encouraged to take such risks because they believed their targets – Begin, Reagan, and Sharif and Musharraf – were sincere about cooperation and/or possessed sufficient political strength to sell an agreement back home, respectively. Regardless of the source, the decision over whether to undertake a bold move was influenced by each actor’s perception that the other party had the intention and/or political capital to begin serious negotiations.

The costliness of sustaining the status quo coupled with two other conditions - diplomatic stalemate and cautious optimism - therefore explain the timing of the bold initiatives examined here. This finding corroborates what scholars from the rivalry termination and conflict resolution literature have found and shows that there is some overlap between my project and earlier studies. Zartman and Pruitt, for instance, noted that conflicts are ripe or ready for negotiation when decision-makers from both sides or at least one side perceive a hurting stalemate.\(^1\) Rasler

and Rasler, Thompson, and Ganguly argued that political and economic shocks within a country were necessary conditions for rivalry de-escalation because states would otherwise have little incentive to change their confrontational policies.\(^2\) While there are notable differences between these studies, the common denominator is that they identify the domestic conditions within a state as a factor that affects the timing of negotiations and/or foreign policy changes.

Despite its salience, the literature cited above cannot adequately explain the form that bold gestures take or more importantly, the reasons leaders undertake them. In the introduction, I proposed four hypotheses – security dilemma sensibility (SDS), moralistic trust, prospect theory, and image projection – to explain the motivations behind these types of conciliatory acts. After testing these hypotheses against several different case-studies, I found strong to modest support for two hypotheses and little to no support for two others.

There was no evidence that Sadat, Gorbachev, and Vajpayee exercised moralistic trust. These decision-makers did not undertake bold gestures because their trusting disposition led them to assume that their conciliatory acts would be reciprocated. On the contrary, they remained suspicious of their adversary’s intentions and undertook a bold move only after they obtained credible information about their rival’s interest in cooperation. This information was provided by trusted third-parties and by officials from the other side who, usually behind closed doors, communicated their state’s motivations. We see that leaders were exposed to large batches

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of information about their adversary’s intentions and this information, in turn, helped persuade them to undertake a bold gesture.

I found at best limited support for my hypothesis derived from prospect theory. While prospect theory shed light on Sadat’s Jerusalem initiative, it could not explain our other cases since neither Gorbachev nor Vajpayee was in a domain of losses (at the time a bold move was undertaken). They did not perceive any immediate political or economic crises and faced few direct challenges from other actors within the country, either from the military or military-industrial complex in the case of Gorbachev or from opposition parties in the case of Vajpayee. In fact, they had reached the apex of their political authority and comfortably exercised control over domestic and foreign policy. It is true that the Soviet Union confronted an economic crisis but its decision-makers only realized the severity of the crisis years later, well after Reykjavik.

One could argue, however, that these leaders were indeed in a domain of losses since they faced an unfavorable international situation. India post-Pokhran had grown diplomatically and economically isolated, and the Soviet Union by 1985 faced an escalating arms race, one in which it could not compete given its technological and economic inferiority. While they faced international challenges, neither Vajpayee nor Gorbachev believed their situation was dire. Vajpayee’s government skillfully used diplomacy to deflect public criticism so that by the end of 1998, international approbation had largely diminished and countries, including the U.S., had begun easing economic sanctions. Gorbachev meanwhile was informed by Soviet scientists that his country had cheap, counter-measures to address the threat posed by SDI. The Soviet Union’s ability to deter the U.S. would not be immediately affected since, as they rightly predicted, its rivals’ missile defense program was in its early stages and could be easily overwhelmed with greater numbers and types of ballistic missiles.
Like others who applied prospect theory to explain phenomena in international relations, I found that it has limited external validity. Even though it helped explain Sadat’s willingness to accept risks, prospect theory could not in and of itself explain why Egypt’s President initiated conciliation with Israel and why he did so via a bold gesture. A leader in a similar situation as Sadat might have taken risks by preparing for another war against Israel. Prospect theory therefore helps address one salient aspect of our puzzle, risk-taking, but it lacks a comprehensive answer to our broader research question.

I argue that security dilemma sensibility (SDS) offers a much better explanation. Sadat, Gorbachev, and Vajpayee seemingly understood that decades of rivalry had contributed to mutual fear and mistrust. To overcome these psychological barriers, they intended to unequivocally reassure the other party that their intentions were benign. This was not just a simple attempt to reduce mistrust but rather the three leaders did something entirely different; they exercised *security dilemma sensibility.* They purposefully made major concessions on those very issues that contributed to the other side’s insecurity. In all three cases – Sadat’s trip to Jerusalem, Gorbachev’s proposal at Reykjavik, and Vajpayee’s *bus yatra* to Lahore – each leader clearly took the interests of the other party into account either through their strategic concessions or through their dramatic, symbolic acts.

There is also evidence that each leader undertook a bold move to more convincingly project a benign image. This was done to not merely reassure the other party but to also exert pressure on the target, or recipient, of the bold gesture to reciprocate conciliatory acts. The best example of this was Gorbachev’s plan to publicize his generous proposal and “unmask” the Americans’ “true intentions” if Reagan rebuffed his concessions at Reykjavik. While pressuring Israel was not Sadat’s primary motivation, it still played a role as he “…hoped that his visit…”

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would “...generate Israeli public support for a just and durable peace.” Vajpayee did not justify his visit to Lahore in these terms but after Kargil, he frequently said that the “road to Lahore ended in Kargil” and used the sequence of tragic events to blame Pakistan for the lack of progress in Indo-Pakistani negotiations and for the failure to resolve Kashmir.

While outside the scope of the original research question, I also found that in each case, leaders were personally involved in delivering the bold gesture. They not only believed personal, face-to-face diplomacy offered a more meaningful way to reassure others but they more importantly, distrusted their foreign policy bureaucracy. Sadat, Gorbachev, and Vajpayee did not trust professional diplomats to carry out their initiatives since career officials were, in their view, incapable of overcoming their individual, group, or organizational biases. As a result, they appealed directly to their counterparts and assumed responsibility for initiating conciliation with the other side.

In summary, security dilemma sensibility and image projection together provide the best explanation of our research question. They seem to be two sides of the same coin; that is, leaders undertake bold acts to persuade and pressure their opponents to respond to their signals. The strategic calculus makes sense since signalers attempt to convince their targets to modify their behavior but should they fail, try to punish targets who fail to reciprocate their cooperation. From a domestic politics standpoint, this strategy allows leaders to build support for their bold initiatives from doves and moderates, or pragmatists, since it applies tactics that appeal to each

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3 “Sadat Visit to Israel and Message for Sadat,” November 19, 1977, NLC 16-41-4-28-5, Jimmy Carter Presidential Library and Museum (Carter Presidential Library), Atlanta, Georgia.

group. Doves favor using concessions to help persuade opponents whereas moderates, who may ordinarily be reluctant to endorse concessions, support bold moves if they are led to believe they will exert pressure on rivals. In countries where leaders do not have absolute control over foreign policy, such a two-pronged strategy allows leaders to develop a coalition to push through radical, new initiatives. Please note, hard-liners would not be a part of this coalition since they remain opposed to all concessions, regardless of the motive and circumstances.

While further research is needed to ascertain if my explanation is generalizable to other cases, my study provides, at the very least, a strong foundation for further work in this area. It offers support for psychological models of decision-making and leads us to conclude that rationalist approaches may not have as much explanatory power as its proponents would have us believe. The next section provides a more thorough discussion of the historical and theoretical contributions of this study and its implications for policy-makers.

Contributions

The importance of this dissertation project is that I examine a type of signal that has been entirely overlooked in the IR literature. In terms of size and costliness, diplomatic signals exist along a wide spectrum from cheap talk on the one side to bold costly signals on the other. Thus far, scholars have circumscribed their focus and studied those signals in the middle of this continuum since they are thought to be costly enough to be informative but not too costly to expose decision-makers to excessive political risks. More recently, there has been much renewed interest in the utility and meaningfulness of cheap talk and whether these types of signals matter in diplomacy. Absent from the entire literature, however, are those signals that lie at the

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far-end of the spectrum, bold gestures. Most scholars simply assume no one would employ such a signaling device since it denotes weakness, leaves the state vulnerable to non-cooperation (or exploitation), and exposes decision-makers to significant audience costs. As shown in this dissertation, however, this expectation does not always hold true since leaders, even those involved in strategic rivalries, sometimes accept enormous risks to communicate to the other side. This project therefore fills an enormous gap in the literature by examining a tool of statecraft that has been needlessly ignored.

While the individual cases examined here have already received considerable attention, my study provided an important new interpretation for each case. Using recently declassified archival sources, some of which have never been used before, I provided a well-supported, psychological account of the process through which Sadat, Gorbachev, and Vajpayee reached their consequential foreign policy decisions. By relying extensively on primary material to support my arguments, I presented an unvarnished account of each leader’s true motivations. Since their statements were private, they are less likely to be instrumental or “cheap talk.”

My study also differs from all others because I analyzed the policy options available to each leader and explained why they by-passed less costly avenues to initiate conciliation. We see that Sadat, Gorbachev, and Vajpayee wanted to break through the diplomatic stalemate but realized that to do so, they needed a bold gesture to overcome “the psychological barriers” that hindered negotiations. They believed that nothing but a bold move would be able to reduce the deep suspicion and mistrust that existed between the longtime rivals. This explanation gives us a

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much more nuanced account of why they undertook bold initiatives when less risky policy options were available to reassure their adversaries.

Apart from its historical contributions, my dissertation has enormous implications for policy-makers, international organizations, and transnational actors (i.e. private citizens, track II negotiators). These actors frequently appeal to disputants, either those involved in intrastate or interstate conflicts, and states locked in strategic rivalries to take “bold moves for peace.” They encourage one of the parties to initiate conciliation and leap into the unknown despite the risks of doing so. If anything, one implication of this study is that third-parties should time their calls for bold initiatives to coincide with the presence of a hurting stalemate within at least one of the disputants and/or rivals. This is the most propitious time for them to make their announcements and/or appeals.

My project also suggests that third-parties can play a crucial role in establishing the conditions necessary for one side to seize the diplomatic initiative. They can exert political and economic pressure on the parties to make the continuation of the status quo less tolerable. This, in effect, makes it far more likely that at least one of the parties will undertake a bold gesture. Referring to our case-study on India and Pakistan, we see that Vajpayee vigorously pursued diplomacy in the wake of economic sanctions and renewed international pressure to resolve the Kashmir issue. While the U.S. did not exert direct pressure on Egypt, the Carter administration, like its predecessors, made military and financial aid largely conditional upon an Egyptian-Israeli rapprochement. Given Egypt’s economic crisis, the American offer made it difficult for the leading Arab power to continue the no war-no peace situation.

Third-parties also affect decision-makers’ strategic calculus by facilitating credible information transmission. Sadat and Gorbachev, for instance, accepted risks only after third-
parties provided information regarding their rivals’ interest in de-escalation. In rivalries, each side has little to no trust in the other side and so, third-parties need to give decision-makers some optimism in pursuing negotiations, otherwise no one would initiate conciliation. Third-parties also help leaders exercise security dilemma sensibility since they transmit information about the other side’s fears and insecurity and help parties learn about how their adversaries perceive and/or interpret their actions. In the Arab-Israeli conflict, the U.S. repeatedly articulated Israel’s deep-rooted concerns to Egyptian officials so that they could understand their rival’s point of view. Gorbachev learned from his interactions with foreign leaders—such as Mitterrand and Margaret Thatcher—that the West viewed the Soviet Union as threatening. Even though states deliver similar messages to their rivals, their signals often lack credibility since they have a strategic incentive to misrepresent their views. Trusted third-parties are therefore useful to give messages greater credibility in international relations.

As for the effects of bold gestures, I found that they generally led to a dramatic turning point in two of our three case-studies. They reduced mistrust between Egypt and Israel and between the U.S. and the Soviet Union and improved the atmosphere in which future negotiations would be conducted. Begin and Reagan dramatically changed their perceptions of Sadat and Gorbachev and no longer doubted the sincerity of their rival’s professed interest in cooperation.

Less than a month after Sadat’s visit, Begin unveiled a two-part proposal involving an autonomy plan for the Palestinians and a peace agreement with Egypt. This conservative proposal, a far-cry from what Sadat had expected, was nonetheless important because it established a framework for resolving the Egyptian-Israeli conflict. Instead of managing its relationship with Egypt through temporary disengagement agreements, Israel now proposed to
end its rivalry with Egypt and realized that to do so, it needed to somehow address the Palestinian issue. For a hardliner like Begin who had insisted that the West Bank was part of ancient Judea and Samaria, this was a big step and would not have been taken if Begin and the rest of the Israeli leadership still believed that Egypt was insincere and untrustworthy. Demonstrative of Begin’s changed attitude towards Egypt, he told his Cabinet days after Sadat’s visit that “as far as a man can figure out, I can say that Sadat’s words did not strike us as empty and were not meant to deceive.” Israel, which had been reluctant up until that point to deal with the specifics of the Arab-Israeli problem, grew ready to address the most difficult, intractable issues dividing the two sides.

While the Reykjavik summit failed to result in an agreement, the discussion that took place between Gorbachev and Reagan was unprecedented. For years, Reagan had publicly and privately expressed his hope that he could “someday eliminate nuclear weapons” since they posed, in his view, a serious threat to humanity. After hearing Gorbachev’s proposals, Reagan immediately realized that he had a partner who shared his deep aversion to nuclear weapons. In response to the Soviet package, Reagan proposed the elimination of all intermediate-range and intercontinental ballistic missiles (referred to as the zero-ballistic missile proposal). On the final day of the summit, Reagan went so far as to suggest that the two sides gradually eliminate strategic nuclear weapons altogether and Gorbachev eagerly agreed. Such a far-reaching agreement was never concluded, however, since Gorbachev linked agreements on INF and START to restrictions on SDI.


Nonetheless, the fact that such a discussion took place at all showed that the relationship had indeed changed. Reagan wrote in his autobiography that

Despite a perception by some that the Reykjavik summit was a failure, I think history will show it was a major turning point in the quest for a safe and secure world...we agreed on the basic terms for what fourteen months later would become the INF agreement – a treaty that for the first time in history provided for the elimination of an entire class of nuclear weapons; we created a framework for the START agreement to reduce long-range strategic missiles on each side as well as for agreements on reduction of chemical weapons and conventional forces, while preserving our right to develop the Strategic Defense Initiative.  

Reykjavik was not just a breakthrough for the Americans but also for the Soviets as well since Reagan’s sudden and impromptu responses showed his true intentions. They realized that despite his bellicose rhetoric, Reagan did not pose a threat to the Soviet Union and in fact, shared Gorbachev’s objective in deescalating the arms race. As Chernyaev wrote, Reykjavik convinced Gorbachev that he would be able to cooperate successfully with the American President, who had a sincere and deep-seated conviction of the need to relieve the world of the nuclear threat. It was the first time that Gorbachev perceived Reagan not as a ‘representative of US imperialism’ but as a trustworthy partner, who shared similar hopes and ideas.  

Reykjavik therefore helped build trust between the two sides so that the Soviets and the Americans could later conclude agreements, such as the Intermediate Nuclear Forces Treaty (INF). It furthermore allowed the Soviets to make asymmetric reductions to their nuclear arsenal and later, to propose unilateral reductions in their conventional forces since, according to

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9 As Gorbachev privately told Shultz a year after Reykjavik, the summit had been “a kind of intellectual breakthrough.” “When people settle down,” Gorbachev said, then they would “realize that a new stage in the U.S.-Soviet political dialogue has started, especially in security issues.” George P. Shultz, *Turmoil and Triumph: My Years as Secretary of State* (New York: Charles Scribner’s Sons, 1993), 996.

10 Quote taken from Andrei Grachev, *Gorbachev’s Gamble: Soviet Foreign Policy and the End of the Cold War* (Malden, MA: Polity Press, 2008), 95, 244 [n. 5].
Chernyaev, it became “perfectly clear to Gorbachev that there was not going to be a war and that neither side was going to attack the other.”\footnote{Chernyaev interview, \textit{Witnesses to the End of the Cold War}, ed. William C. Wohlfforth (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1996), 5.} In other words, Soviet concessions would not be exploited by the U.S.

It is true that Sadat’s and Gorbachev’s bold initiatives did not lead to an immediate settlement but the road to the Camp David Accords and the end of the Cold War began with these signaling devices. And so, bold gestures can induce rivals to cooperate and can change the nature of enduring rivalries in significant ways.

On the other hand, Vajpayee’s decision to visit Lahore and then later, to convene the Agra summit shows the riskiness of these types of initiatives since they were exploited and mistakenly interpreted as signs of weakness, respectively. After Lahore, Pakistan, or more specifically its military, used the flurry of diplomatic activity as a smokescreen to surreptitiously send its soldiers across the LOC. Neither the Indian government nor the Indian military had anticipated a sudden intrusion in Kargil given that Indo-Pakistani negotiations had accelerated and seemed poised to deliver results. Pakistan’s military took full advantage of the fact that India had lowered its guard and strategically exploited this vulnerability.

Two years later, Vajpayee invited General Musharraf, the architect and mastermind behind the Kargil conflict, to attend the Agra summit. The meeting was scheduled at a time when Musharraf had just escalated his country’s support for Kashmiri militants and had helped them unleash a deadly, new wave of terrorist violence across the province. When India invited Musharraf to Agra, the General mistakenly perceived this as a sign of weakness and as such, believed the war of attrition was affecting India’s resolve to hold on to Kashmir. Shortly after the summit, Pakistani-based terrorist groups intensified their attacks in Kashmir and begun
launching attacks deeper inside India, particularly against symbolic, high-profile targets such as India’s Parliament building. Pakistan therefore grew emboldened after Vajpayee’s second bold gesture.

One implication of this case-study is that leaders should be wary about undertaking bold initiatives towards leaders who are either influenced by the military or who come from the military itself. Militaries often maintain their privileged status, particularly in developing countries, due to the existence of a major foreign threat. It not only gives them a *raison d’etre* but it allows them to influence national security matters and to obtain more money for defense expenditures. Given their institutional interests, militaries will not reciprocate bold initiatives and will sabotage attempts by their government, as happened after the Lahore summit, to reciprocate bold acts since they prefer to continue the rivalry.

The contributions of this study are preliminary since the patterns found in the case studies may not be broadly generalizable. I hope that in the future, the hypotheses that have been generated here will be tested against the historical record so that we can develop an even better understanding of this tool of statecraft.
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