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Statecraft, Decision-Making, and the Varieties of Historical Experience: A Taxonomy

William Inboden[a]

[a] University of Texas-Austin
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Statecraft, Decision-Making, and the Varieties of Historical Experience: A Taxonomy

WILLIAM INBODEN

University of Texas-Austin

ABSTRACT This article constructs a taxonomy of the various ways that national security policy-makers attempt to use history. It identifies four *types* of history: experience, memory, tradition, and study. It then defines and describes three categories of how history is used in national security policy: predictive, prescriptive, and existential. Each category is distilled further into specific manifestations. The article agrees with existing scholarship that policy-makers often misuse history, but argues that nevertheless policy-makers engage with history in more diverse and complex ways than are commonly understood. Thus before scholars attempt to critique and improve the manner in which policy-makers use history, we should first employ a more sophisticated understanding of the multiple ways that policy-makers approach history in the first place.

KEY WORDS: History, Decision-Making, Statecraft, Policy

After ordering the deployment of additional American forces to the Persian Gulf in response to Iraq's invasion of Kuwait, in November 1990 President George H.W. Bush traveled to Prague. In the midst of attempting to manage Eastern Europe's transition as the Cold War ended, Bush now faced a looming new war in the Middle East. He also realized that European publics euphoric over the fall of communism had little appetite to support another war in a seemingly distant land. In his speech in Prague, Bush cautioned against dismissing Kuwait's quandary as 'just a quarrel in a faraway land, between a people of whom we know nothing'. As former National Security Council staff member Robert Hutchings recalls, Bush's words repeated 'Neville Chamberlain's dismissive line from 1938, which helped seal Czechoslovakia's fate at the hands of the Third Reich...it was of course instantly recognized by the president's audience in Czechoslovakia's

federal assembly.'[1] Munich continued to prey on Bush's mind as he contemplated going to war against Iraq. On 31 December 1990 he wrote a letter to his five children. In it he asked 'How many lives might have been saved if appeasement had given way to force earlier in the late [19]30s or earliest [19]40s? How many Jews might have been spared the gas chambers, or how many Polish patriots might be alive today? I look at today's crisis as "good" vs. "evil" – yes, it is that clear.'[2]

Munich was not the only historical analogy that influenced Bush's thinking. Less than two months later, after the launch of Operation 'Desert Storm' saw Iraqi military units appear to begin withdrawing from Kuwait amidst statements of defiance from Iraqi dictator Saddam Hussein, Bush wrestled with his war aims and desire for an unambiguous victory. On 25 February 1991 he confided in his diary 'We don't want to have another draw, another Vietnam, a sloppy ending.' The next day's diary entry found his angst turning to sanguinity, even while Vietnam remained a preoccupation: 'Isn't it a marvelous thing that this little country will soon be liberated…We're doing something decent, and we're doing something good; and Vietnam will soon be behind us…It's surprising how much I dwell on the end of the Vietnam syndrome.' Yet even as his diary entries and subsequent memoir contain numerous references to the Vietnam War amidst the Gulf War planning and operations, the 'Vietnam syndrome' itself remains imprecise and multifarious. At various times Bush referenced Vietnam in terms of domestic political divisions, presidential micro-management of military operations, lack of presidential commitment to war aims, an uncertain dénouement to the war, domestic criticism of military tactics, and an American defeat. Even as Vietnam clearly shaped his mindset and decision-making, its precise historical lessons remained less clear.[3]

Whatever other factors may have motivated the first Bush administration's decision to employ force in the Frst Gulf War, such as the security of petroleum reserves and energy supplies for global markets, the regional balance of power in the Middle East, deterrence of future aggression, and the fragility of the 'new world order' in the inchoate post-Cold War strategic environment, Bush's private letter and diary

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[1] Robert Hutchings, *American Diplomacy and the End of the Cold War: An Insider's Account of US Diplomacy in Europe, 1989–1992* (Washington DC: Woodrow Wilson Center Press 1998), 228–229.

[2] Cited in Jeffrey Goldberg, 'Letter from Washington: Breaking Ranks', *New Yorker*, 31 October 2005, <www.newyorker.com/archive/2005/10/31/051031fa_fact2?currentPage=all>.

[3] George Bush and Brent Scowcroft, *A World Transformed* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf 1998), 483–4.

entries reveal that the lessons of history seem to have shaped his response as well. Yet just how history functioned in his decision-making remains elusive even from primary sources reflecting his own thinking, such as the letter and diaries. Did the Munich analogy determine Bush's actual decision to go to war? Or did it shape his tactical response of marshaling a multinational coalition and seeking multilateral sanction from the United Nations Security Council? Or was it instead a convenient rhetorical device to use in mobilizing public support for the war? Or perhaps instead an *ex post facto* justification for a decision that had already been made on the basis of national interests? The Vietnam analogy is even more complex and elusive. Did a desire to overcome the 'Vietnam syndrome' play any role, even subconsciously, in Bush's decision to go to war against Iraq? Or did Vietnam's lessons only influence him and his war council at the tactical level, such as in decisions to employ overwhelming military force rather than gradual escalation, or to defer to the military on operational details? Or were Vietnam's lessons neither strategic nor tactical but rather political, whether in the need to maintain domestic support for the decision to go to war and the military forces that would fight it, or the need to marshal a broad-based international coalition committed to the same war aims? While these possibilities are all plausible, they are not mutually exclusive. Perhaps two or more of these types of history could have been operative simultaneously.

While the precise role(s) of history in influencing decision-makers may be unclear, the frequent invocation of historical lessons by policy leaders also comes under frequent scholarly criticism. Yet before scholars attempt to correct and improve the manner in which policy-makers use history, we must first employ a more sophisticated understanding of the multiple ways that policy-makers engage with history. This article develops such a taxonomy.

Most treatments of the use of history by policy-makers focus on its misuse. Lamenting what he regarded as the impoverished and distorted invocations of history in national security debates, Arthur Schlesinger, Jr decried the 'depressing persistence of the mentality which makes policy through stereotype, through historical generalization wrenched illegitimately out of the past and imposed mechanically on the future. Santayana's aphorism must be reversed: 'too often it is those who can remember the past who are condemned to repeat it.'[4] Offering a similar critique in his classic *Perception and Misperception in International*

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[4] Arthur Schlesinger, Jr, 'The Inscrutability of History', in *War and the American Presidency* (New York: W.W. Norton 2004), 133.

Politics, Robert Jervis laments that 'those who remember the past are condemned to make the opposite mistakes'.[5]

The most authoritative treatment to date of the relationship between history and statecraft, Ernest May and Richard Neustadt's *Thinking in Time: The Uses of History for Decision-Makers*, was written with the presumption that history is *mis*used by policy-makers as much as it is ignored. Beyond its critique, the book attempted to offer a constructive set of guidelines for decision-makers on how and why to employ historical thinking in the craft of policy. Margaret MacMillan offers a more recent contribution to the literature, and the title of her book reveals its pessimistic orientation: *Dangerous Games: the Uses and Abuses of History*.[6]

Judging from these critiques, at least two things can be said about the relationship between national security policy and the 'lessons' of history. First, policy-makers find history almost irresistible in national security matters, and reflexively grasp for its lessons when confronted with policy choices. Second, scholars invariably find fault with the ways that policy-makers try to employ history, often critiquing them as facile, inaccurate, tendentious, or worse.

Frequently this scholarly criticism is warranted. Decision-makers often do reach reflexively for tired historical clichés in ways that appear to distort the past, reinforce existing biases, or make emotive or polemical appeals, rather than offering genuine insight or guidance on a particular policy matter. Yet the habitual abuse of analogies does not provide a full picture of how national security decision-makers attempt to draw on history. A more careful, systematic exploration reveals that policy-makers engage with history in more diverse and often complex ways than are commonly understood or appreciated by scholars. The distorted use of analogies may be the most apparent and thus most lamented of ways that policy-makers employ history. However, suspending the analysis at that point risks missing numerous other types of the use of history in the realm of statecraft.

History as a discipline sits uneasily between popular use and academic scholarship. To the non-scholar, history appears to be more accessible than other specialist disciplines such as political science or economics. As John Lukacs observes, at the most elemental level, a sense of history is a defining aspect of being human. 'Scientific knowledge, dependent as it is on a scientific method, is by its nature open to

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[5] Robert Jervis, *Perception and Misperception in International Politics* (Princeton UP 1976), 275.

[6] Ernest May and Richard Neustadt, *Thinking in Time: The Uses of History for Decision-Makers* (New York: Free Press 1988); Margaret McMillan, *Dangerous Games: The Uses and Abuses of History* (New York: Modern Library 2010).

question. The existence of historical knowledge, the inevitable presence of the past in our minds, is not. We are all historians by nature, while we are scientists only by choice.'[7] One of history's forms, narrative, in particular offers to non-scholars an appealing portal to historical insight, including policy-makers searching for a knowledge base or other heuristic to help bring some intelligibility to the world or to a particular policy issue. Yet history as a scholarly discipline also has a sophisticated method of its own that draws in part on the scientific method, though as John Lewis Gaddis and others have argued, the historical method is often underappreciated even by many academic historians.[8]

If academic historians are prone to being unreflective about scholarly method (at least in contrast to political scientists, some of whom are prone to obsessiveness about method), decision-makers who invoke history appear to not give such method any thought whatsoever.

To be clear, this article does not address the prescriptive questions of <u>how</u> or <u>why</u> policy-makers <u>should</u> use history. It rather takes up the prior question of <u>how do</u> policy-makers attempt to use history. It attempts to map out these uses of history in a taxonomy, in order to equip both scholars and policymakers to recognize the different varieties of history in various stages of statecraft. To maintain a feasible scope and internal coherence, this article focuses on American leaders and national security policy.

In practice decision-makers, even if not self-aware or formally trained, use many varieties of history. There are multiple *types* of history that function in the policy-maker's mind, and multiple *uses* in which policy-makers attempt to employ history. This taxonomy matters for at least two reasons, the first analytical and the second normative. First, while much prior scholarship has been undertaken critiquing the use and misuse of history in statecraft, such assessments would be strengthened and refined by a more systematic appreciation of precisely how policy-makers do try to employ history in their decision-making. Too often such scholarly critiques focus on the purported negative policy outcomes that result, and identify a distorted use of historical analogy as a primary cause. Yet the decision-maker might not in fact be using history as an analogy to predict an expected outcome, but for another purpose, whether consciously or not. While the erroneous use of history can indeed often lead to imprudent policy choices, sometimes the problem is not the invocation of history itself but simply the policies

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7 John Lukacs, *At the End of An Age* (New Haven, CT: Yale UP 2002), 50.
8 See, for example, John Lewis Gaddis, *The Landscape of History: How Historians Map the Past* (New York: OUP 2004) and Edward Hallett Carr, *What is History?* (New York: Vintage 1967).

that are employed. Developing a taxonomy of the multiple uses of history will improve the precision and rigor of scholarly assessments of how history shapes statecraft. The second reason follows from the first. Understanding how decision-makers try to employ history will strengthen prescriptive efforts to improve the use of history in statecraft, and provide a more substantial foundation for normative efforts to explain why history can help leaders in making foreign policy. In other words, given the frequency with which policy-makers invoke history, most do not need to be persuaded that history can be useful. Rather they need to be persuaded of how history can be used better, with more insight, nuance, and precision.

History can exist and function in numerous ways in a policy-makers' consciousness. In the realm of statecraft, history includes more dimensions than its scholarly incarnation as a body of written research describing an aspect of the past. Lukacs offers a pithy summary: 'There is the past; there is the remembered past; there is the recorded past…Thus history is more than the recorded past; it consists of the recorded and the recordable and the remembered past.'[9] In this manner, there are at least four *types* of history as it is understood and used by policy-makers: experience, memory, tradition, and study. While of these four types, 'study' is the only one that corresponds to academic history as practiced by historians, all four categories can function as 'history' in the policy-maker's mind and can play roles in the policy process.

Experience describes the firsthand policy experiences that shape the policy-maker's personal history and worldview bearing on future policy decisions. One example is the Obama administration's 2009 Afghanistan Policy Review, where Secretary of Defense Robert Gates and CENTCOM Commander General David Petraeus both drew on their own recent experience with the new Iraq counter-insurgency strategy and force escalation of 2007 – popularly known as the 'surge' – to argue successfully for a similar new strategy in Afghanistan.[10]

Memory is a related version, but distinct from experience in that it entails first-person experiences that the policy-maker lived through as a person but did not shape as a decision-maker. Henry Kissinger's boyhood in Germany illustrates this category. Kissinger's personal experience of the deterioration of the Weimar Republic and the subsequent rise to power of Hitler and the Nazi Party seared in the young Kissinger an aversion to social breakdown and the loss of order, from which all manner of injustices and maladies can ensue. After finding refuge with his family in the United States in 1938, Kissinger carried

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[9] Lukacs, *At the End of An Age*, 52.
[10] See James Lee Ray, 'Historical Analogies, Military Surges, and Economic Crises: Who Should be Consulted?,' *The Forum* 9/2 (2011) Article 1.

the memories of how Weimar chaos led to Nazi tyranny throughout his subsequent professional career. These historical memories in turn helped shape Kissinger's *realpolitik* and statecraft that privileged the maintenance of order and stability in the international system.[11]

Tradition is history as it is passed down through popular consciousness and embodied in a culture or sub-culture. It is not history as a policy-maker worked on, lived through, or studied, but rather functions as an understanding of the past in the prevailing worldview that the policy-maker inherited and inhabits. For example, Senator Richard Russell of Georgia, the venerable chairman of the United States Senate Armed Services Committee during the twentieth century's pivotal middle decades, experienced an impoverished boyhood in a Georgia steeped in the tradition of the 'Lost Cause' of the erstwhile Confederacy. In Robert Caro's description, 'Richard Russell's boyhood imagination was bound up in that cause – and so was his entire life.' This tradition also shaped Russell's influential support for a robust defense budget and force modernization of the American military during the early Cold War, exemplified by an exchange with a fellow United States Senator from North Dakota puzzled over Russell's fervent commitment to the military. Russell replied that 'you'd be more military-minded too, if Sherman had crossed North Dakota'.[12]

The fourth type of history is the most conventional: the *study* of the past, primarily through reading historical scholarship or conducting original research. Countless instances could be cited. For example, when serving as the United States Ambassador to the United Nations, in 1999 Richard Holbrooke gave a speech at the National Press Club on the future of the UN. Holbrooke began by invoking a history that he had studied, revealing the ostensible purpose of the inchoate organization as envisioned by Franklin Roosevelt and Winston Churchill in their early planning for the post-World War II settlement and international organization. In Holbrooke's description, FDR and Churchill's vision 'wasn't some wooly-headed scheme; it was simply in their words "realism", born of the lessons they learned after World War I.'[13]

As distinct as these four types of history may be, each of them functions as 'history' in the minds of decision-makers, and decision-makers employ each in various ways as a 'lesson' of history. In turn,

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[11] Jeremi Suri, *Henry Kissinger and the American Century* (Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press 2007).

[12] Roert Caro, *The Years of Lyndon Johnson: Master of the Senate* (New York: Vintage 2003), 164, 180.

[13] Richard Holbrooke, 'The United Nations: Flawed but Indispensable,' reprinted in Derek Chollet and Samantha Power (eds), *The Unquiet American: Richard Holbrooke and the World* (New York: Public Affairs 2011), 251–6.

just as there are multiple <u>types</u> of history in the minds of decision-makers, there are multiple <u>uses</u> in which decision-makers attempt to employ history. Policy uses of history fall under three broad categories: predictive, prescriptive, and existential. *Predictive* means just as it implies: an effort to use episodes from the past in present-day scenarios to help predict probable outcomes and future contingencies. The predictive use of history asks of the past 'What will happen in the future?' *Prescriptive* uses of history are efforts to draw policy ideas from the past. It asks of history 'What can be done now?' The *existential* category may be less obvious but is no less intriguing. It describes the use of history by policy-makers to define their own identity and the identity of their nation. It asks the past to answer the question 'Who are we, and why does it matter?'

Moreover, these categories of history and their related functions are not mutually exclusive. All three categories implicate potential courses of action – whether informed by a view of what history predicts, what history prescribes, or what history tells about a nation's identity. At times two or more functions might be invoked in simultaneous or overlapping ways in any given policy situation. Following is a taxonomy identifying and describing a range of different ways history is used by decision-makers.

Predictive

Analogical Prediction

This is perhaps the most common use of history in statecraft. Analogical prediction describes the use of historical analogy by policy-makers to predict the most likely trajectory of current events. It involves selecting an episode from the past, implicitly or explicitly treating that episode as analogous to a present-day situation, and then using the outcome of the past episode to predict the likely (or even certain, in the hands of its most fervent advocates) outcome of the present situation.

Examples abound, but Yuen Foong Khong highlights a particularly illustrative set in his book *Analogies at War: Korea, Munich, Dien Bien Phu, and the Vietnam Decisions of 1965*. In Khong's persuasive description, President Lyndon B. Johnson and his advisors employed a competing set of analogies during their debates in 1964–65 over whether and how the United States should escalate its military commitment in South Vietnam. Each analogy was chosen because its advocate presumed that it offered the most cogent prediction of the course that events in Vietnam would follow and the policies that the United States should therefore adopt. Johnson, Secretary of State Dean Rusk, and Assistant Secretary of State William Bundy in particular believed the

Korean War to be most analogous to the situation in Vietnam. They held that just as Korea revealed Soviet and Chinese support for expansionist Communism in Asia and the need to confront it, so in South Vietnam the US needed to take similar steps to intervene against Communist aggression from the north. The Munich analogy played a similar role, particularly in the minds of Johnson and Rusk, as an analogical prediction of the futility of 'appeasing' aggression, whether emanating from Nazi Germany or North Vietnam. On the contrary, Under Secretary of State George Ball eschewed the Korea and Munich analogies in favor of a different historical precedent: the 1954 defeat of the French by Viet Minh forces at Dien Bien Phu. In Ball's mind, the Dien Bien Phu analogy foretold the likelihood of Western militaries being defeated by Vietnamese Communist forces.[14]

Error Avoidance

This is 'learning from history' in the classic sense. It describes invoking the lessons of the past to show how certain contemporary policy options or assumptions might be ineffective or mistaken, and should be rejected because similar actions taken in the past turned out to be erroneous. While 'error avoidance' overlaps partially with 'analogical prediction', it is distinct in at least two respects. First, error avoidance does not assume that a past historical situation is analogous to a present-day circumstance in the 'like for like' manner of analogies, but rather only that a discrete action taken in the past that produced a negative outcome should not be repeated in a new situation, even if the circumstances are otherwise different. Second, it does not presume the same degree of predictive power towards the future that analogical prediction does. In short, error avoidance as an analytic category does not involve forecasting precisely what a future outcome will be, but only that a particular action will not achieve its intended result.

President Woodrow Wilson's approach to the post-World War I settlement offers one example. A native Virginian, Wilson reacted to what he regarded as the errors of post-Civil War Reconstruction – specifically that it was too punitive and draconian – to argue for a more moderate peace settlement with a defeated Germany in the wake of World War I. Reflecting on the post-Civil War South in an article he authored for the *Atlantic* in 1901 while still a professor, Wilson lamented that 'what followed the reconstruction…was in almost every instance much worse than what had had to be endured under military rule'. As Gideon Rose observes, 'the minister's son would do unto the

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[14] Yuen Foong Khong, *Analogies at War: Korea, Munich, Dien Bien Phu, and the Vietnam Decisions of 1965* (Princeton UP 1992).

beaten Germans as he wished others had done unto the beaten confederates.[15] For all of the manifest differences between the American Civil War and World War I, in Wilson's mind the North's past error of an excessively punitive peace settlement on the South meant arguing for less harsh terms for a defeated Germany. Wilson's own failures at Versailles, it seems, were shaped in part by his efforts to avoid what he saw as the errors of a half century earlier in his own country.

Strategic Depth

This involves looking in depth at the history of a particular issue or person to gain more understanding of the present situation and the likely future course of events. It is a version of what May and Neustadt describe as 'the histories of issues, individuals, and institutions', and what Francis Gavin calls 'vertical history'.[16] 'Strategic depth' as a use of history bears some similarities to 'analogical prediction,' but it differs in a crucial respect. While analogical prediction involves selecting a different episode or actor from the past and trying to draw a like-for-like comparison with a present-day circumstance, strategic depth means exploring the background of the present-day circumstance on its own terms. In other words, analogical prediction assumes that 'A' is like 'B,' and asks A to predict what will happen with B. Strategic depth merely asks what is the history of 'B' and how does that history influence the present circumstances and future trajectory of B.

The George H. W. Bush administration's handling of the dissolution of the Berlin Wall and reunification of Germany illustrates this effort to use history as a source of strategic depth. Amid 1989's euphoria over the apparent end of the Cold War, a bewildering array of questions over Germany's future emerged, including whether Germany should be reunified or not, whether it would be a member of NATO (and whether NATO would even continue to exist), what West German Chancellor Helmut Kohl's attitudes and actions would be, whether American forces would still be based in a new Germany, how lingering post-war border disputes would be resolved, and what role the World War II victors, particularly the Soviet Union, would have in the deliberations over Germany's fate and future. President Bush and several of his administration's senior officials, including Brent Scowcroft, James

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[15] Woodrow Wilson, 'The Reconstruction of the Southern States', *The Atlantic* (Jan. 1901), 11; Gideon Rose, *How Wars End: Why We Always Fight the Last Battle* (New York: Simon & Schuster 2010), 32. Rose also cites Wilson's *Atlantic* article.

[16] May and Neustadt, *Thinking in Time*, 91; Francis Gavin, 'History and Policy', *International Journal* (Winter 2007–08), 166–7.

Baker, Robert Blackwill, Robert Zoellick, Condoleezza Rice, and Philip Zelikow regularly drew on their collective knowledge of German and Cold War history to add depth to their understanding of unfolding events and their consequent policy development. Examples of this use of history included the Bush administration's aversion to creating 'another Yalta-style deal' whereby outside powers – principally the United States and Soviet Union – again determined the fate of Europe, the related reluctance to acquiesce in Russian efforts to split Germany from NATO, an appreciation for Kohl's desire to play a Bismarckian role in unifying Germany, and especially an interest in honoring Kohl's inherited sense of West Germany's destiny to be a democratic anchor for German identity. In their scholarly memoir, Rice and Zelikow describe Kohl as 'always conscious of history'. Noting his urgency on the reunification question, Rice and Zelikow conclude that:

> whenever Kohl wanted to push harder or faster, he turned to George Bush for support. He found that the American president believed in the promise the West had made to Adenauer: the Federal Republic of Germany was an incubator for German democracy until the day the German people could be joined together in one state. In 1989 Bush told Kohl unambiguously that he was ready to deliver on that bargain.[17]

In short, even while Bush and his national security team were mindful of their own roles in the unfolding of the Cold War's dénouement, they attempted to shape this history by drawing on the deeper history of the conflict and Germany's role.

Epistemic Caution

This describes how history can demonstrate the limits of present-day knowledge and understanding. It refers to the use of history by policy-makers to identify what is unknown and to frame policy choices accordingly. One illustrative example comes from the Eisenhower administration's famous 'Project Solarium' strategic planning exercise. While Project Solarium is often cited as a successful example of inter-agency strategic planning, less appreciated are its intellectual origins in President Eisenhower's understanding of history. Upon being sworn into office, Eisenhower's assessment of the national security challenges facing his administration emphasized the *unprecedented* nature of the situation. Drawing on his own extensive military experience,

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[17] Condoleezza Rice and Philip Zelikow, *Germany Unified and Europe Transformed: A Study in Statecraft* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard UP 1995), 366–7.

Eisenhower realized that never before in history had the United States been in the role of a global superpower, in a bipolar system, in a nuclear age. H. W. Brands describes the new existential reality that Eisenhower faced upon taking office:

> Before the 1950s, the countries of the world knew danger; neither the powerful, such as Britain, nor the isolated, like the United States, felt completely immune from enemy threats. But only the weakest countries faced the possibility of national extinction. For the rest, hostile action might entail defeat and surrender; yet life would go on. During Eisenhower's tenure as president, such assurance vanished.[18]

The prospect of global nuclear annihilation was not the only defining feature of this ahistorical age. Never before had the United States faced the challenge of maintaining domestic economic growth simultaneously with a substantial standing military that included permanent deployments overseas. Adding to the unprecedented nature of the prevailing circumstance was the fact that Soviet dictator Josef Stalin had died on 5 March 1953, just weeks after Eisenhower's inauguration, thus removing the only Russian leader the Americans had dealt with over the past three decades. Simply put, there were few if any historical analogies available to inform Eisenhower's decision-making. Furthermore, he was mindful of two recent intelligence failures that had led directly to America's entry into two wars – the failure to detect the Japanese attack at Pearl Harbor, and the failure to detect North Korea's invasion of South Korea. These intelligence failures reinforced a different dimension of epistemic caution: history's capacity to surprise. Marc Trachtenberg summarizes the profound questions of this 'new world' that confronted Eisenhower and his administration: 'Should the nation simply accept this new world of thermonuclear weapons and nuclear plenty? Should it resign itself to an almost inevitable loss of strategic superiority, and to living in a world where an absolutely devastating surprise attack might be a very real risk?'[19]

The epistemic caution that history provided in turn helped shape Project Solarium as a planning exercise constructed around imagining alternative futures. Because of the profound discontinuities between the past and the present, history offered little predictive power for what might come next. Rather, history revealed the opacity of the future. Accordingly, Eisenhower instructed his senior staff to develop three

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[18] H.W. Brands, 'The Age of Vulnerability: Eisenhower and the National Insecurity State,' *American Historical Review* 94/4 (Oct. 1989), 963–89.
[19] Marc Trachtenberg, *History and Strategy* (Princeton UP 1991), 135.

different possible scenarios based on varying strategic assumptions, threat assessments, and resource allocations, yet all taking into account the unprecedented nature of the Soviet threat in a bipolar world and a nuclear age. The three Task Forces, generally summarized as 'containment', 'deterrence', and 'liberation', all attempted to project the costs, benefits, and likely trajectories of their respective strategies. As different as each scenario was, all three reflected the use of history for revealing the limits of strategic knowledge.[20] In other words, while decision-makers often rely on history to tell them how their present situation is similar to the past, sometimes decision-makers use history to tell them how different their present situation is from anything that has gone before.

Bureaucratic Intelligence

While policy-makers most often use history to help interpret foreign policy issues overseas, sometimes they turn to history to navigate bureaucratic disputes within their own government over national security. Historical episodes are consulted for the insight they purportedly offer on how bureaucratic rivals in the interagency might best be handled – in short, to predict an adversary's behavior. Adding complexity to this category, sometimes bureaucratic competitors draw opposing lessons from the same historical analogy.

Such was the case with the Obama administration's 2009 strategic review over the war in Afghanistan. Influential Pentagon figures, led by Army Generals Stanley McChrystal and David Petraeus, advocated for a substantial force increase and a robust counter-insurgency strategy. Senior White House officials, led by Vice-President Joseph Biden, Deputy National Security Advisor Thomas Donilon, and Chief of Staff Rahm Emmanuel, favored a much more modest commitment in both troops and time, along with a more circumscribed mission focused on counter-terrorism. Both camps drew explicitly on the Vietnam War as a favored analogy – and both camps used competing interpretations of Vietnam as a proxy for their own bureaucratic contest with each other. The counter-insurgency advocates at the Pentagon publicized their reading of Lewis Sorley's *A Better War: The Unexamined Victories and Final Tragedy of America's War in Vietnam* to contend that a counter-insurgency campaign can succeed as long as political leaders maintain their support for the military. Against this narrative, the White House

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[20] One of the most authoritative treatments of the Project Solarium exercise is Robert R. Bowie and Richard H. Immerman, *Waging Peace: How Eisenhower Shaped an Enduring Cold War Strategy* (New York: OUP 1998).

disclosed the wide Pennsylvania Avenue readership, led by President Obama, of Gordon Goldstein's book *Lessons in Disaster: McGeorge Bundy and the Path to War in Vietnam* as a cautionary tale against political leaders letting the military lure the nation into an unwinnable war of uncertain purpose and indefinite commitment. Each camp certainly used their respective books in part to help sway public opinion on Afghanistan policy. Yet a significant rationale for the reading choices was also for each side to use history to understand, predict, and ultimately defeat the policy positions of their bureaucratic opponents.[21]

Successor Shaping

Mindful of the contingent nature of their policies and their own standing in history, political leaders will often take deliberate steps to influence the environment their successor inherits. This sometimes involves a particular use of history to shape the policies and posture of a successor, and thus predict how the successor will act. To accomplish this, the leader will compare himself to a favored historical figure and then note how the historical figure's successor adopted the same strategy and policies. Creating such a framework is a complicated move. It first requires persuading the public and opinion-shapers to accept the comparison with the historical figure, followed by persuading the leader's successor to adopt – or at least find plausible – the analogous comparison with the historical figure's successor.

President George W. Bush seems to have had this use of history in mind with his references to the Truman administration, which he invoked in part to persuade his successor to adopt the analogous role of Eisenhower. Consider this passage from Bush's 2006 West Point commencement address:

> As President Truman put it towards the end of his presidency, 'When history says that my term of office saw the beginning of the Cold War, it will also say that in those eight years we set the course that can win it.' His leadership paved the way for

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[21] Peter Spiegel and Jonathan Weisman, 'Behind Afghan War Debate, a Battle of Two Books Rages', *Wall Street Journal*, 7 Oct. 2009, <http://online.wsj.com/article/SB125487333320069331.html>. See also Marvin Kalb, 'The Other War Haunting Obama,' *New York Times*, 8 Oct. 2011, <www.nytimes.com/2011/10/09/opinion/sunday/the-vietnam-war-still-haunting-obama.html?pagewanted=all> and Gordon Goldstein, 'Lessons in Disaster: Why is the Obama Administration Reading up on its Vietnam History?', *ForeignPolicy.com*, 6 Oct. 2009, <www.foreignpolicy.com/articles/2009/10/06/lessons_in_disaster?page=full>.

subsequent Presidents from both political parties – men like Eisenhower and Kennedy and Reagan – to confront and eventually defeat the Soviet threat. Today, at the start of a new century, we are again engaged in a war unlike any our nation has fought before – and like Americans in Truman's day, we are laying the foundations for victory.[22]

Given that the Republican Eisenhower had campaigned against the Democrat Truman's foreign policy, only to then largely adopt Truman's strategic framework once in office, Bush sought here to set up a similar parallel. Aware that his successor as president could well be a Democrat, Bush deliberately described Truman's legacy in bipartisan terms alongside an explicit comparison between the grand strategies of the Cold War and the War on Terror. In short, Bush was attempting to lay the foundation for his successor to be a latter-day 'Eisenhower' and thus continue within Bush's strategic framework.

Prescriptive

Option Identification

Often when confronted with a new security challenge, decision-makers will turn to history to help identify specific policy options that might apply in the present situation. Implicit in this selection of analogies is the assumption, or at least hope, that the likely outcomes can be predicted from the policy options selected. In his study of the Carter administration's use of historical analogies during the 1979 Iran hostage crisis, Christopher Hemmer finds that the White House consulted seven different past hostage episodes in large part to determine a set of policy options for dealing with the situation in Tehran. These past episodes were all within recent history, with the earliest being the imprisonment of American Consul General Angus Ward by Chinese Communist forces in 1948–49. Other analogies the Carter administration examined included the *Pueblo* and *Mayaguez* incidents, the February 1979 assault on the US Embassy in Tehran, the Son Tay raid in Vietnam, the Entebbe and Mogadishu hijackings, and the Perot rescue. These various episodes in turn presented a range of policy options for hostage crises, from quiet negotiations

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[22] George W. Bush, Commencement Address at the United States Military Academy at West Point, 27 May 2006, West Point, New York, <www.presidentialrhetoric.com/speeches/05.27.06.html>.

to diplomatic pressure to rescue attempts.[23] Unfortunately for the Carter administration, the contingencies of history were also operative in the Iran hostage crisis, and the dissimilarities from previous episodes ultimately constrained the utility of any particular analogy and policy prescription.

Paradigm Erosion

Policy-makers sometimes use history to demonstrate that the limitations or prejudices that shape a prevailing policy paradigm may not necessarily be valid. The conventional wisdom of the day might privilege certain assumptions that, in light of history, are either incorrect or needlessly restrictive. George Kennan used Edward Gibbon's *The Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire* in this way at the outset of the Cold War. As John Lewis Gaddis describes, Kennan's multiple transatlantic journeys during World War II afforded him ample opportunity to read and reflect on Gibbon's multivolume classic. From it Kennan took away several insights that he applied to his seminal Cold War manifestos, the 'Long Telegram' and the 'Sources of Soviet Conduct' essay. To appreciate Kennan's use of Gibbon requires recalling the mind-set of the time. In the aftermath of World War II, American leaders believed it had taken the most catastrophic war in history to defeat the totalitarian foe of fascism. So in the months immediately following the war, as the American national security establishment anxiously watched what appeared to be a series of aggressive moves by the Soviet Union, the strategic choices available seemed grim. Gaddis describes 'the despair of 1946 when war or appeasement appeared to be the only alternatives open to the United States'.[24]

The story of Kennan responding from Moscow with his 'Long Telegram' is famously well-known. Less appreciated, however, is how Kennan drew on Gibbon to erode the prevailing paradigm of war-or-appeasement as the only possible responses to totalitarianism. One of Gibbon's arguments for the eventual dissolution of the Roman Empire emanated from, as Kennan described it in an earlier essay, 'the unnatural task of holding in submission distant peoples'. Channelling Gibbon, Kennan regarded conquered territories as sources of vulnerability that would lead in the Soviet case to overstretch and internal weakness. As Kennan put it in 'The Sources of Soviet Conduct,' the

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[23] Christopher Hemmer, *Which Lessons Matter? American Foreign Policy Decision Making in the Middle East*, 1979–1987 (Albany: State University of New York Press 2000), 36–45.

[24] John Lewis Gaddis, *George F. Kennan: An American Life* (New York: The Penguin Press 2011), 275.

Soviets' 'own aggressive intransigence with respect to the outside world began to find its own reaction; and they were soon forced, to use another Gibbonesque phrase, "to chastise the contumacy" which they themselves had provoked'. This provided the historical foundation for Kennan's recommended policy of containment because Soviet power 'bears within the seeds of its own decay, and…the sprouting of these seeds is well advanced'.[25] In Kennan's mind, the insights from Gibbon's history eroded the dominant paradigm when facing tyranny of fight or flight, and provided a third way forward.

Value Formation

Decision-makers invariably bring a set of assumptions, biases, and presuppositions to their positions. Variously described as a 'worldview' or 'operational code', embedded within this framework are a set of values that function not just as analyses of how the world supposedly works but also normative judgments about how the world <u>should</u> work.[26] These values are often seemingly abstract notions such as stability, peace, liberty, or justice. Yet in the mind of the policy-maker, such values provide a convenient cognitive filter through which to assess events and a blueprint to help determine how to respond. History plays a foundational role in forming the values on this blueprint.

Henry Kissinger describes this process in the mind of the policy-maker, and then applies it to his own career. 'Any statesman is in part the prisoner of necessity. He is confronted with an environment he did not create, and is shaped by a personal history he can no longer change…When I entered office, I brought with me a philosophy formed by two decades of the study of history…If history teaches anything, it is that there can be no peace without equilibrium and no justice without restraint.'[27] In this passage, Kissinger identifies his study of nineteenth-century Europe and the post-Napoleonic order wrought by the Concert of Vienna as foundational history that formed his own convictions as a policy-maker. This is no doubt true. Yet the historical formation of

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[25] Gaddis, *George F. Kennan*, 259–61, 278; George Kennan, 'The Sources of Soviet Conduct', *Foreign Affairs* 25 (July 1947), 566–82.

[26] The literature on worldview and operational code is vast. Two foundational articles are Alexander George, 'The "Operational Code": A Neglected Approach to the Study of Political Leaders and Decision Making', *International Studies Quarterly* 13/2 (June 1969), 190–222, and Ole Holsti, 'The "Operational Code" Approach to the Study of Political Leaders: John Foster Dulles' Philosophical and Instrumental Beliefs', *Canadian Journal of Political Science* 3/1 (March 1970), 123–57.

[27] Henry Kissinger, *White House Years* (Boston: Little, Brown 1979), 54–5.

Kissinger's values also emanated from Kissinger's boyhood in the deteriorating Weimar Republic. Living firsthand through the breakdown of German democracy and rise of Nazi tyranny, Kissinger learned that democracy, in Jeremi Suri's words, 'gave succor to violence, demagoguery, and cowardice'. From there, Kissinger 'constructed his career around the presumption that in a cruel and violent world powerful leaders, not democratic politics, offered the best protection for life and liberty'.[28]

Institutional Guidance

This describes using the history of how institutions were constructed in the past for guidance on how to construct new institutions in the present. For example, the Clinton administration looked to the establishment of international security and economic institutions in the early Cold War years for blueprints on developing a new set of international institutions for the post-Cold War world. The Clinton administration's 1995 *National Security Strategy* (*NSS*) makes this point explicitly:

> After World War II, we learned the lessons of the past. In the face of a new totalitarian threat this great nation did not walk away from the challenge of the moment. Instead it chose to reach out, to rebuild international security structures and to lead…We must seek to be as creative and constructive – in the literal sense of that word – as the generation of the late 1940s. For all its dangers, this new world presents an immense opportunity – the chance to adapt and construct global institutions that will help to provide security and increase economic growth throughout the world.

The *NSS* then cites an array of international institutions that the Clinton administration either designed, created, or helped implement, all inspired by or directly expanding upon post-war institutions. These include the NATO Partnership for Peace setting the path for NATO expansion, the signing of the START II arms reduction treaty, the creation of the World Trade Organization (WTO), convening the Asia Pacific Economic Cooperation (APEC) forum, passage of the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA), and creating the Community of Democracies.[29] Here the Clinton administration's invocation of the early Cold War also reflects other uses of history, such as error avoidance, analogous prediction, and public

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[28] Suri, *Henry Kissinger and the American Century*, 38, 270.
[29] The White House, *A National Security Strategy of Engagement and Enlargement*, Feb. 1995, 2–4.

conscience mobilization. But most notable are the administration's self-conscious efforts to draw guidance from the early Cold War years on how to construct institutions for the emerging post-Cold War world.

Perspective Enhancement

This is the use of history to create a broadened perspective through which contemporary circumstances can be contextualized and assessed. Policy-makers employing history for perspective enhancement are not looking for one particular lesson or policy solution, but rather seeking a framework in which to situate – and presumably navigate – their prevailing challenges. They look to history for policy options and for the entire context it offers of how various issues together shape a geopolitical environment, for how multiple American polices work in that environment, and for how domestic politics interact with foreign policy. This is similar to what Francis Gavin describes as 'horizontal history', where history 'can expose horizontal connections over space and in depth' and provide 'a more holistic picture of how policymaking actually works, allowing government officials to organize their processes to more effectively consider horizontal linkages in their work'.[30]

President George W. Bush's interest in the Truman administration illustrates this use of history. During his presidency, Bush frequently invoked the Truman administration's strategic posture during the early Cold War years as precedents for Bush administration policies in the Global War on Terror. For example, in his previously cited West Point commencement address, Bush drew the Truman parallels at great length. These were not limited to public rhetoric. Bush also privately studied Truman's presidency, and saw in Truman's persona and challenges numerous parallels to his own. These included a populist diction style, low approval ratings, an unpopular localized hot war amidst a global ideological conflict, disputes with Congress and the Supreme Court over executive authority, efforts to forge new domestic and international institutions to address the prevailing security threat, and confidence in the eventual vindication of history.[31]

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[30] Gavin, 'History and Policy', 170, 172.

[31] Michael Abramowitz, 'Truman's Trials Resonate for Bush', *Washington Post*, 15 Dec. 15, 2006; Timothy J. Lynch and Robert S. Singh, *After Bush: The Case for Continuity in American Foreign Policy* (New York: Cambridge UP 2008), 2–3, 291–92; George W. Bush, *Decision Points* (New York: Crown 2010), 174-5. The author also worked on the National Security Council staff from 2005–2007, and responded to Bush's interest in Truman by writing multiple memos drawing on the lessons of the Truman presidency.

Existential

Public Conscience Mobilization

Political leaders often appeal to historical antecedents in their efforts to evoke a certain frame of mind in the public and thus marshal support for a specific policy agenda. This use of history attempts to define the public identity based on an episode from the past, and to connect that past episode and identity with an ostensible present-day need for a particular action. Almost all presidents have used this type of history for public conscience mobilization in one way or another. For example, in his efforts to galvanize a reticent American public behind his Cold War program of internationalism, with its increases in military and foreign assistance budgets as well as treaty commitments and permanent deployments abroad, President Truman repeatedly invoked American isolationism after World War I. His words from a 1948 speech are illustrative: 'We are faced now with what Almighty God intended us to be faced with in 1920. We are faced with the leadership of the free peoples of the world. We must assume that leadership, if we expect our children not to have to go through the same situation that we had to go through with during the last five or six years. Get these things in your mind, and use your influence to do what God Almighty intended us to do: to get the right sort of peace in the world.'[32]

Truman's employment of history in this way also has elements of other types such as analogical prediction and error avoidance. But his primary intention was to create in the collective mind of the American people an understanding of their nation as one that embraces rather than shirks international leadership and commitments. He used his nation's own history of isolationism and failure to prevent World War II as a spur to mobilize the public conscience behind his Cold War platform.

Identity Construction

This describes using the nation's past to construct an identity that determines a role in the world. It asserts 'this is who our past says we are; therefore this is what we should do'. While similar to public conscience mobilization, it merits a distinct category for two reasons. First, it is an effort to construct an overall identity and role in the world, rather than merely draw on a particular past episode. Second, it is positive rather than negative. It offers the promise of national reward

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[32] Cited in William Inboden, *Religion and American Foreign Policy, 1945–1960: The Soul of Containment* (New York: Cambridge UP 2008), 105–6.

if it is followed, rather than the punishment of adverse consequences if it is disregarded, as in the case with appeals to the public conscience.

Identity construction is a favored trope of presidents. For example, Ronald Reagan used the American past to rhetorically construct an identity for the United States as an active leader for liberty in the world. Its antecedents can be found in a 1974 speech he gave while governor of California to the Conservative Political Action Conference. The context is particularly notable as he spoke in the immediate aftermath of the American withdrawal from Vietnam, when public appetites for idealistic and costly overseas commitments were at a nadir. After an expansive survey – at least by the standards of political speechmaking – of American history, Reagan proclaimed in his closing peroration:

> We cannot escape our destiny…The leadership of the free world was thrust upon us two centuries ago in that little hall of Philadelphia. In the days following World War II, when the economic strength and power of America was all that stood between the world and the return to the dark ages, Pope Pius XII said, 'The American people have a great genius for splendid and unselfish actions. Into the hands of America God has placed the destinies of an afflicted mankind. We are indeed…the last best hope of man on earth.'[33]

In this passage alone, Reagan drew a composite from the American founding, Lincoln, World War II, and the Cold War to craft his vision of an American whose history dictated the active promotion of liberty worldwide and, in the context of the Cold War, a robust confrontation with Soviet communism. Earlier in this speech Reagan also quoted the 'city upon a hill' passage from the Puritan John Winthrop's 1630 sermon aboard the ship *Arbella*. Winthrop used the 'city upon a hill' phrase as a quotation from Jesus Christ in the Gospel of Matthew to describe the obligation of the church to be a model to the watching world, which in Winthrop's particular context meant the Anglican Church in England that the Puritans hoped to reform. Reagan, following in the tradition of John F. Kennedy among others, appropriated the phrase to instead describe the American nation-state.

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[33] Ronald Reagan, 'We Will be a City Upon a Hill', 25 Jan. 1974, <http://reagan2020.us/speeches/City_Upon_A_Hill.asp>. See also Ronald Reagan, 'Remarks Accepting the Presidential Nomination at the Republican National Convention', 23 Aug. 1984, Dallas, Texas, <www.reagan.utexas.edu/archives/speeches/1984/82384f.htm> and 'Farewell Address to the Nation' 11 Jan. 1989, <www.reagan.utexas.edu/archives/speeches/1989/011189i.htm>.

While Reagan held the United States as a global model, he also added a new dimension whereby the nation would actively work to bring freedom to the world. Luminously embellishing the phrase to become a 'shining city on a hill,' it became a favourite of Reagan's throughout his presidency. The notion of the United States as a singular nation with a unique calling to advance liberty in the world almost certainly reflected Reagan's genuine beliefs. His frequent use of the 'city on a hill' image in his public rhetoric also reflected his efforts to persuade the American people that this was their nation's identity, and that this identity determined their nation's role in the world. During Reagan's presidency, this translated into a range of policy initiatives such as his massive defense budget increases or the creation of the National Endowment for Democracy following his 1982 Westminster speech – all indicative of a nation working to reshape the world.

Policy Precedent

This describes the use of historical precedent of a nation's past actions to argue for why the nation should (or should not) pursue that same policy in the present. This category is also similar to public conscience mobilization, but with the distinction that it deals with the internal mind-set of policy-makers themselves rather than appeals to public opinion.

One example comes from the contentious debates over prisoner repatriation in the Korean War that bedevilled both the Truman and Eisenhower administrations. As Gideon Rose describes, one impediment to negotiations between the United States and China over ending the Korean War concerned the fate of North Korean and Chinese prisoners of war (POWs) held in South Korea. A sizeable number of these POWs had pleaded that if released they did not want to return to their homelands under Communist rule. Truman and his Secretary of State Dean Acheson both recalled with regret the recent history of Russian POWs in World War II who had been captured by the Germans. Upon the defeat of Nazi Germany, these prisoners were involuntarily repatriated by the Allies to the Soviet Union, where under Stalin's paranoia most of them suffered imprisonment or execution.

Truman and Acheson believed this policy had been a mistake and remained a stain on the American conscience. In Rose's words, 'Acheson had been opposed to the repatriation of displaced persons to the Soviet Union and had helped stir the misgivings of the newly anointed President Truman on this issue in the fall of 1945…Seven years later, in the next war, the two men decided together to reverse

what they had always considered a morally bankrupt policy.' Hence in their negotiations with China over the terms to end the war, they insisted on a voluntary repatriation policy for North Korean and Chinese POWS. China regarded this as unacceptable, and it remained a primary obstacle that prolonged the Korean War through the end of the Truman administration. Assuming the presidency with a promise to end the war, Eisenhower, mindful of his own recent World War II history, maintained the Truman administration's insistence on voluntary repatriation. Only when other factors including the death of Stalin, nuclear threats, and multilateral pressure from the United Nations helped break the negotiating impasse did the Communist nations agree to armistice terms that included voluntary repatriation.[34]

While other political pressures from concerned publics in South Korea and the United States played a role in the American insistence on voluntary repatriation, the personal determination of Truman, Acheson, Eisenhower, and Dulles to reverse the policy precedent and reshape their nation's history was paramount. History in this case functioned as a burden and source of regret. Yet without this history, the American posture in the Korean War negotiations cannot be understood.

Ex Post Facto Justification

Mindful of their own historical standing, political leaders will attempt to write the first draft of their own history by framing their policies in a deliberately chosen historical context. To return to Truman as an example, in 1948 he overruled the fervent desires of his revered Secretary of State George Marshall and the entire State Department, and extended diplomatic recognition to the newly-created state of Israel. Numerous factors influenced Truman's decision, from political calculations to appeal to Jewish voters as the 1948 elections approached to Truman's personal religious and romantic devotion to biblical prophecy and Old Testament Israel. But ancient history also shaped Truman's decision – or at least how he later justified it. After being introduced to a group of American Jewish leaders as 'the man who helped create the state of Israel', Truman responded 'What do you mean, '*helped* to create'? I am Cyrus. I am Cyrus.' Cyrus the Great was the ancient Persian ruler who in 539 BC had defeated the Babylonian empire and returned the exiled Israelites to Jerusalem. A devoted reader of ancient history, Truman had long been fascinated by Cyrus and

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[34] Rose, *How Wars End*, 142.

characterized his own role as analogous in the creation of a homeland for the Jewish people.[35]

Truman's decision itself to recognize Israel may or may not have actually been motivated by ancient history, and Truman's intentions in referencing ancient Persia are less clear. Perhaps this was his effort to shape how history would interpret his decision on Israel. Or perhaps it was his effort to gain political advantage with a Jewish audience by portraying himself as a worthy addition to their pantheon of Gentile patrons. But his understanding of ancient history certainly shaped his efforts after the fact to characterize himself in the tradition of Gentile political leaders who served as benefactors for the nation of Israel.

Existential Succor

History's role in statecraft is not limited to influencing policy decisions. Reading history can also be a source of psychological reassurance. Political leaders often turn to history as a buffer from the burdens of office and the turbulence of the day. This is particularly true for chief executives, who are susceptible to angst over the very solitude of their position as the decision-maker of final recourse and ultimate responsibility. No staff or family member, no matter how personally close, can completely understand the executive's isolation. Here leaders often turn to history to be reminded that they are not alone, that others have gone before them and borne similar burdens. In Wilfred McClay's apt phrase, history can be used to 'disabuse us of our narcissism'.[36]

Examples of this category can be found in just about every American leader, especially presidents, who read biographies of his predecessors and other statesmen. For example, George W. Bush, an avid reader during his time in the White House, in the midst of the arduous and dismal year of 2006 read biographies of Lincoln, Churchill, and Truman. As biographer Robert Draper observers, these were 'three wartime leaders, the latter two of whom left office to something less than public acclaim'.[37] The isolation of office

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[35] See Paul Charles Merkley, *American Presidents, Religion, and Israel: The Heirs of Cyrus* (Westport, CT: Praeger 2006).

[36] Wilfred McClay, interview, *Mars Hill Audio Journal* 31 (March/April 1998).

[37] Robert Draper, *Dead Certain: The Presidency of George W. Bush* (New York: Free Press 2007), 388. The author also worked on the National Security Council staff in the Bush White House and had multiple conversations with Bush about this aspect of history.

leaves presidents virtually no peer to turn to, and so they turn to the past. This final category also serves reminder of the malleability of history for decision-makers – they look to history not only for policy guidance or public support, but for personal solace and succor.

Conclusion

The various uses of history by policy-makers also lend themselves to a variety of judgments. Most if not all of these categories by themselves can be legitimate and even helpful ways to use history in policy-making. Likewise, most if not all of these categories can also be misused and distorted, either with erroneous interpretations of the past or imprudent policy implications, or not infrequently both. No doubt the previous examples of policy-makers cited in this article span the spectrums of appropriate and inappropriate uses of history, and wise and foolish policies.

Overall, it is almost impossible to fully understand the mind-set of policy-makers and the decision processes they undergo without under-standing the role of history. As the range and variety of the foregoing categories demonstrate, history can influence every phase of the policy process. From the preconceptions and assumptions that policy-makers bring to their positions, to the lens through which they perceive events, to the specific policy options that they consider, to the risk assessments that they place on those options, to the likely outcomes that they predict, to the responses they expect from counter-parties, to the ways they mobilize public opinion behind their policies, to the retrospective justifications they offer for their decisions, history is often inescapable. Not infrequently, history plays several roles almost simultaneously, whether the invocation of different episodes of history in multiple phases of decision-making, or even the use of the same historical episode in various stages of the policy process. In evaluating these uses of history, it is important to bear in mind the differing motives of scholars and statesmen. For scholars, what matters most is that history be interpreted with accuracy and insight. For policy-makers, what matters most is that policies be crafted with sagacity and effectiveness. These goals are not inherently opposed, but neither are they inherently aligned.

Given that decision-makers will inevitably continue using history, scholars who desire to influence policy can help improve the employ-ment of history in statecraft in several ways. A full treatment is beyond the scope of this article, but it can suggest some angles for further research, effort, and focus. First, when examining the use of history in the policy process, scholars should try to understand which type of

history policy-makers are attempting to use, and for what purpose. Appreciating precisely how a policy-maker wields history can provide a wealth of insights into many other aspects of decision-making. As Jeffrey Engel observes, 'historians should rejoice, rather than squirm uncomfortably, whenever policymakers openly deploy history as a prescriptive tool, because a strategist's use of history opens nothing less than a window into their worldview'.[38]

Second, scholars should try to help answer the questions that policy-makers are asking. As obvious as this may sound, it is too often honoured in the breach, as scholars frequently lapse into promoting answers to questions that policy-makers are *not* asking. This will mean first determining which aspect of history (e.g. prescriptive, predictive, or existential) is of most concern for any given decision-maker or policy in question. For example, if policy-makers are focused on how history might help predict a certain outcome, scholars should address that rather than trying to draw prescriptive lessons. Third, on any particular issue of national security, such as post-conflict reconstruction, the rise of new great powers, nuclear proliferation, or transnational terrorism, scholars should develop a body of *multiple* historical case studies. Doing so will give policy-makers an accessible body of historical knowledge to draw on, and exposure to several cases will help ameliorate the temptation to 'cherry-pick' a single historical example that may not fit.

The final area lies in the policy realm where scholars can have the most enduring influence: training students who will become the next generation of decision-makers. Scholars can encourage students to develop a deep historical sensibility, while disabusing them of any notions that history offers simple prescriptions. In the words of philosopher Michael Scriven, 'history teaches us about human nature, and our future best choices by teaching us about possibilities rather than regularities'.[39] Or as Edmund Burke observed, from history 'much political wisdom may be learned, but 'as habit, not as precept'.[40] In other words, history's greatest value in statecraft lies in a mode of thinking rather than any trite maxims. It is through cultivating such habits of mind that history can teach students how to understand human nature, the nature of

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[38] Jeffrey A. Engel, 'Bush, Germany, and the Power of Time,' *Diplomatic History* 37/4 (Nov. 2013), advance copy in author's possession and cited by permission.

[39] Michael Scriven, 'Causes, Connections, and Conditions in History,' in William H. Dray (ed.), *Philosophical Analysis and History* (New York: Harper & Row 1966), 250. I am indebted to Philip Zelikow for introducing me to the insights in this essay.

[40] Burk quoted in Leo Strauss, *Natural Right and History* (Univ. of Chicago Press 1965), 306.

international politics, and the range of complex factors and possibilities that shape the unfolding of history itself, and our roles in that unfolding.

Acknowledgements

Note on Contributor

William Inboden is Executive Director of the Clements Center for History, Strategy, and Statecraft, and Associate Professor at the LBJ School of Public Affairs, both at the University of Texas-Austin. He has previously served on the National Security Council staff, at the US Department of State, and as a Congressional staff member.

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