The Influence of Advisers and Decision Strategies on Foreign Policy Choices: President Clinton’s Decision to Use Force in Kosovo

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In the following paper, I analyze the influence of advisers and domestic political factors on President Clinton’s decision to use force against Slobodan Milosevic and the Serbs in Kosovo in March 1999. I present an analysis and examination of President Clinton’s decision-making process, using press reports, personal speeches, etc. In other words, I attempt to trace the process by which Clinton came to the decision to use force in Yugoslavia. Specifically, using the poliheuristic theory, I argue that President Clinton’s decision was influenced by noncompensatory domestic political calculations and the strong influence of his Secretary of State, Madeleine K. Albright. Examining how advisers interact with one another, their status in the advisory group, and the manner in which presidents solicit information from advisers will further our understanding of how, when, and under what conditions national security-level decision makers make decisions.

Keywords: poliheuristic theory, noncompensatory strategies, Kosovo, advisers, Madeleine Albright, foreign policy decision making

In this paper, I present a case study that examines the influence of advisers on foreign policy decision making. Specifically, I use President Clinton’s decision in 1999 to launch air strikes against Slobodan Milosevic and the Serbs in Kosovo to highlight and further analyze the manner in which advisers influence foreign policy processes and outcomes. I chose this case for several reasons. First, the U.S. decision, under NATO auspices, to attack Milosevic and the Serbs is an important one and bears examination. Second, the somewhat recent nature of the attack provides an opportunity to analyze post-Cold War U.S. foreign policy decision making. Third, preliminary accounts of the crisis illustrate the extensive involvement of President Clinton’s advisers in the foreign-policy-making process. Such involvement offers researchers the chance to examine the specific influence of advisers on foreign policy decision making and choice (Maoz, 1990; Purkit, 1992; Hoyt and Garrison, 1997; Garrison, 1999). More generally, examining how advisers interact with one another, their status in the advisory group, and the manner in which presidents solicit information from advisers will further our understanding of how, when, and under what conditions national security-level decision makers make decisions.

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More specifically, understanding the impact of advisers on foreign policy decision making is important for several reasons. Advisers can have a profound impact on foreign policy decisions. Moens (1991), in a study of President Carter’s advisers and the fall of the Shah of Iran, points out that poor decision-making processes led to bad decisions. Specifically, Moens (212) states that the decision-making process failed because Carter’s advisers reached a consensus too quickly on how the Shah could ease tensions in his country, and because “Carter received lopsided advice on the one hand and procedural manipulation by an isolated security adviser on the other hand.” Moreover, understanding the influence of advisers can be important for policy makers who are concerned about how they will set up their advisory systems (see, e.g., Johnson, 1974; Hermann, 1978; George 1980; Burke and Greenstein, 1989; Hoyt and Garrison, 1997; Stern and Sundelius, 1997). Maoz (1990) points to the need to think about the impact of advisers from a strategic perspective (see also Mintz and Astorino-Courtois, 2001). Policy makers negotiating with other countries need to understand how their opponents’ advisers influence decision making and policy choices if they are to negotiate effectively. Along these lines, policy makers also need to be concerned about the possibilities that their own advisers, or an opponent’s, will attempt to frame certain issues or set the policy agenda (Hoyt and Garrison, 1997; Mintz and Redd, 2003). Examining Madeleine Albright’s influence on President Clinton’s decisions in Kosovo as well as the decision-theoretic aspects of their decision processes may shed light on similar situations that have occurred in the past or that may occur in the future. The Kosovo crisis provides one opportunity to look back and examine these issues.

On March 24, 1999, the United States, in cooperation with NATO forces, launched offensive air strikes against the former Republic of Yugoslavia. The stated reason for the attack was to stop Slobodan Milosevic, the leader of the rump Yugoslavia and Serbia, from continuing his campaign of ethnic cleansing in the Republic of Kosovo. Kosovo, still part of the former Yugoslavia, is 90 percent Albanian, yet ruled by Serbia. The United States had earlier similar experiences with Slobodan Milosevic in the mid-1990s in the Balkans when Milosevic was attempting to maintain his rule over and ethnically cleanse the provinces of Slovenia, Croatia, and Bosnia-Herzegovina. Why did the United States, under the auspices of NATO, attack a sovereign nation, a first in NATO history? How did the Clinton administration come to the decision to initiate air strikes against Slobodan Milosevic and the Serbs? This paper will examine these questions and others from a decision-theoretic perspective. Specifically, I explore the influence of advisers and the decision strategies used by President Clinton on his decision to attack Milosevic and the Serbs. Using the poliheuristic theory as a theoretical foundation, I argue in this paper that President Clinton’s decision to initiate air strikes against Milosevic and the Serbs was the result of a combination of the influence of Secretary of State Madeleine Albright and the noncompensatory nature of the political ramifications of the use of force (see Mintz (1993) and Redd (2002) for a more thorough discussion of noncompensatory decision making).

The Decision to Use Force Against the Serbs: Possible Explanations

Because the air strikes against the Serbs occurred relatively recently, there is very little scholarly literature concerning the reasons for U.S. involvement or more specifically the calculus of U.S. decision making. To be sure, journalists, pundits, think tanks, and the like have written much about why the United States attacked the Serbs. That being said, I would like to identify briefly some of the arguments.

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1 See McGwire (2000), Daalder and O’Hanlon (2000), and Larrabee (1994) for more detailed accounts of the recent history of Yugoslavia and Kosovo and the events leading up to, and through, the U.S. use of force against Milosevic and the Serbs.
that have been presented addressing the reasons behind the U.S. decision to launch air strikes.

The “official” reasons for U.S. involvement, as stated by President Clinton himself, are threefold. In his address to the nation on March 24, 1999, the night of the first air strikes, President Clinton made the following statement:

We act to protect thousands of innocent people in Kosovo from a mounting military offensive. We act to prevent a wider war; to diffuse a powder keg at the heart of Europe that has exploded twice before in this century with catastrophic results. And we act to stand united with our allies for peace. By acting now we are upholding our values, protecting our interests and advancing the cause of peace (Clinton, 1999e:1).

To summarize, the president’s stated reasons for acting were based upon (1) humanitarian, (2) national interest, and (3) credibility concerns. He further justified U.S. air strikes stating that we were acting not only in terms of national interest but also based on our values as well as for the cause of peace worldwide. President Clinton’s statement gives us a clue about the “official” line concerning why the United States initiated air strikes against Milosevic and the Serbs. The humanitarian justification for intervening was made early and often by the Clinton administration. The argument was made that because the United States was the world’s only remaining superpower, it was the only actor capable of intervening on behalf of groups being ethnically cleansed.

Often, humanitarian justifications for conflict are insufficient (see Jentleson, 1992; Jentleson and Britton, 1998), so President Clinton also referred to the national security aspects and utility of using force in Kosovo. Specifically, he often referred to the possibility that conflict in Kosovo could spill over into the neighboring countries of Albania and Macedonia, which could eventually involve NATO countries such as Turkey and Greece, making for a much wider conflict. Finally, intervention was justified in terms of protecting the credibility of NATO. NATO powers had been threatening Milosevic with the use of force for over a year. Failure to act after so many threats, according to President Clinton and others, would have sent the message that NATO was not united and in turn, not powerful enough to confront aggressors such as Milosevic. By referring to values, the Clinton administration was usually referring to democracy and the rule of law, as well as free and open access to economic opportunities that exist within the family of Western European nations (Clinton, 1999a).

U.S. involvement in Kosovo has also been attributed to the earlier experiences of the United States in Bosnia in the early to mid-1990s. Pevehouse and Goldstein (1999:539) note that “U.S. policy makers, in crafting Kosovo policy in 1998 and early 1999, relied on Bosnian ‘lessons’ about Milosevic’s responses.” The Clinton administration’s foreign policy with respect to the problems in Bosnia and Croatia vacillated throughout the course of the crisis and by the end of 1994, an estimated 200,000 people had been killed and approximately 2 million refugees existed. President Clinton repeatedly stated that he took action in Kosovo because he could not stand by and watch the same thing happen in Kosovo that occurred several years earlier in Bosnia (Clinton, 1999a, e). He even expressed regret about not having acted in Rwanda and that he had learned a valuable lesson when he stated that the United States would act where it could (Clinton, 1999b). While these are the “official” reasons for U.S. intervention, I am interested in what other factors help explain, “why President Clinton launched air strikes against Milosevic and the Serbs?” Furthermore, “how did he arrive at the decision to initiate such strikes?” In the next section, I analyze and discuss the factors that led President Clinton to use noncompensatory strategies and how these factors and his decision-making strategies led to the decision to launch air strikes against Milosevic and the Serbs.
Before attempting to answer these questions, a few caveats are in order. Because the Clinton administration just recently left office, any records needed to answer these questions conclusively will be classified. Moreover, any such records are very likely to remain classified in the near future. The only sources available are public documents such as transcripts of public speeches, press conferences, press releases, etc. These sources tend to be more journalistic in nature and some are not first-hand accounts of the events that transpired as they relate to the Kosovo crisis. However, even with these constraints, I believe that the numerous sources I accessed and present as evidence in this paper corroborate each other, thereby strengthening the veracity of the assumptions and conclusions I make (see Posen, 2000:40 for a similar argument). In the future, it would be beneficial to conduct personal interviews with those involved in the crisis to verify and/or shed new light on this subject.

The Decision to Use Force Against the Serbs: The Influence of Advisers, Political Factors, and Noncompensatory Decision Strategies

As Mintz (1993:605) states, “War and peace decisions are rooted not only in international politics, but also in considerations of domestic politics” (see also Russett, 1990; Mintz and Russett, 1992; Putnam, 1993). Typically, decisions to use force consist of a combination of factors: (1) decision makers must calculate the domestic political consequences of using force abroad, and (2) leaders must factor in military/strategic considerations such as relative military capabilities, projected casualties, geography, etc. (Bueno de Mesquita and Lalman, 1990, 1992). A crucial intervening variable here, though, is the fact that most of the information received by the decision maker, the president in this case, with respect to these issues comes from advisers. Therefore, advisers become an important factor in both the political and military/strategic calculations concerning the use of force (see Burke and Greenstein, 1989; Russett and Starr, 1996). In the following analysis, I will show that the advice given by Secretary of State Madeleine Albright, combined with political considerations, led President Clinton to initiate air strikes against Slobodan Milosevic and the Serbs. Specifically, the president eliminated alternatives that were unsatisfactory based on a noncompensatory political calculation of alternatives and outcomes.

The noncompensatory principle posits, “a low score on one dimension cannot be compensated for by a high score on another dimension” (emphasis added) (Ford, Schmitt, Schechtman, Hults, and Doherty, 1989; see also Hogarth, 1987; Billings and Scherer, 1988; Payne, Bettman, and Johnson, 1988, 1993). Mintz (1993) extended the noncompensatory principle to foreign policy decision making in his study of the Persian Gulf War. He (Mintz, 1993:598) specified the use of the non-compensatory principle in foreign policy decision making by asserting that the political dimension is the paramount attribute and that “in a choice situation, if a certain alternative is unacceptable . . . politically, then a high score on another dimension . . . cannot compensate/counteract for it, and hence the alternative is eliminated” (emphasis in original) (see also Mintz and Geva, 1997; Redd, 2002).

In attempting to assess the role of advisers in influencing President Clinton’s decision to use force in Kosovo, I am essentially asking three basic questions. First, did President Clinton’s advisers play equal versus unequal roles in the decision process leading up to the choice to attack Milosevic? Second, was the influence of the president’s advisers on the final decision affected by the order in which they contributed to discussions about what to do in the former Yugoslavia? Third, was advice from some advisers noncompensatory, that is, was the advice given by any particular adviser(s) not overridden by other advisers’ evaluations of alternative courses of action? Again, I am interested in how advisers help shape the decision situation or matrix as well as how they affect foreign policy choices. On a broader
level, all three questions attempt to ascertain the influence of advisers on both the processes of decision making as well as on the final choice.

I would expect to find that as Secretary of State Albright became the president’s primary adviser, President Clinton would be more likely to use noncompensatory strategies. Likewise, as she became his primary adviser, I would also expect President Clinton to avoid the politically risky option of using ground troops. I would also expect to find that the order in which President Clinton consulted his advisers would also influence his selection of decision strategies as well as choice. Specifically, I expect to observe different behavior on the part of the president in the first year of the crisis (when Sandy Berger was the president’s chief foreign policy adviser) as opposed to the last few months of the crisis (when Madeleine Albright was the president’s chief foreign policy adviser).

The chief advisers consulted by President Clinton in the year prior to the actual air strikes (recall that the problems in Kosovo resurfaced in the spring of 1998) were National Security Adviser Samuel (Sandy) Berger, Secretary of Defense William Cohen, and Madeleine Albright, Secretary of State. Most public documents identify these three individuals as the three major advisers to President Clinton concerning foreign policy on Kosovo (see also Paris, 2002).² To be sure, other advisers, members of the Clinton administration, and friends and acquaintances probably talked with President Clinton at one time or another about Kosovo. However, I restrict my analysis to those who appeared, from the public record, to have the most direct contact with and possible influence on President Clinton’s decision to attack the Serbs.

President Clinton’s stated objectives in Kosovo were to end the ethnic cleansing by the Serbs against the Kosovar Albanians, to prevent a diffusion of the conflict, and to stand with NATO for peace. In order to achieve these objectives, the administration identified six possible alternatives: (1) air strikes, (2) ground troops, (3) containment, that is, continue with sanctions and diplomatic pressure, (4) do nothing, (5) allow the United Nations to take the lead in a peace initiative, and (6) arm the Kosovar Albanians (Priest and Trueheart, 1999). As was the case in the Persian Gulf War (Mintz, 1993), decisions with respect to Yugoslavia were dependent on previous decisions.³

As mentioned previously, the Clinton administration had already dealt with Milosevic in the early to mid-1990s in Bosnia-Herzegovina. Moreover, in dealing with Kosovo, President Clinton and NATO had earlier run-ins with Milosevic. These earlier interactions with Milosevic and the Serbs led to a tendency by the Clinton administration to reject alternatives that were passive, for example, containment, and/or allowing the United Nations to intervene, or the “do nothing” alternative at later dates. Moreover, in reality, the sanctions alternative was akin to doing nothing since the Clinton administration had made numerous threats that action would be taken if Milosevic did not comply with NATO’s demands. The administration also rejected outright arming of the Kosovar Albanians because of the president’s oft-stated goal of not wanting the conflict to spread (Lockhart, 1999a, b).

The ultimatum given to Milosevic and the Serbs at the Rambouillet peace talks in February 1999 further limited President Clinton’s options at a later stage. The administration had on previous occasions (as recently as October 1998) threatened Milosevic with air strikes if the ethnic cleansing did not cease. Each time, Milosevic pulled back just enough to get the United States and NATO to call off the threatened air strikes (Gutman, 1999). However, the Rambouillet peace accords were more comprehensive in scope and called for both a military and political solution to the problems in Kosovo (U.S. Department of State, 1999). Basically speaking, the Rambouillet Accords consisted of a 3-year interim agreement that would provide

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²Of course there is the possibility that President Clinton consulted others in private.
³Joseph Nye (1999:35) notes, “history is path-dependent, since choices, once made, eliminate certain options and create others.”
democratic self-government, peace, and security for all those living in Kosovo. The security aspect was to be guaranteed by international troops deployed on the ground in Kosovo. After 3 years, an international meeting would be convened to determine a mechanism for a final settlement for Kosovo (U.S. Department of State, 1999). The Serbs were warned that if they did not capitulate to the demands of NATO and stipulate to all aspects of the Rambouillet peace agreement, then NATO would have no choice but to use force to gain compliance. Milosevic indicated that he could abide by the political aspects of the accord but he would not accede to the military demands, i.e., NATO troops in Kosovo. By March 1999, the president had essentially backed himself into a corner such that the only viable options left were the use of air strikes and/or ground troops.

The president’s decision making followed the two-stage model of the polieuristic theory (see Mintz, Geva, Redd, and Carnes, 1997; Redd, 2002). In the first stage, the president rejected passive options such as doing nothing, allowing the United Nations to take the lead, and allowing sanctions more time. In the second stage, the president was left with deciding between ground troops and air strikes. I posit that in the second stage, President Clinton used a maximizing rule focusing on analyzing various aspects of using ground troops versus undertaking air strikes. In the next sections, I examine the dimensions that were crucial in evaluating these remaining options and in influencing the president’s decision. I also examine the influence of the president’s advisers on the decision-making process and on the president’s final choice to use air strikes.

**Political Dimension**

There is much in the literature on foreign policy decision making to suggest that domestic political factors affect decisions to use force. Besides the diversionary theory of war and the roles of presidential popularity and the state of the economy, other explanations such as the “rally round the flag effect” (Mueller, 1973) and the military–industrial complex thesis (Rosen, 1973; Russett and Hanson, 1975), just to name a few, attempt to account for domestic reasons behind uses of force abroad. A powerful reminder and example of the importance of the influence of domestic politics comes from President Kennedy and his advisers during the Cuban Missile crisis. Secretary of Defense Robert McNamara told President Kennedy on the first day of the crisis “it’s not a military problem that we’re facing. It’s a political problem” (Allison and Zelikow, 1999:113). Allison and Zelikow (1999) emphasize that McNamara also alluded to the domestic political implications of any American action or inaction. Referring to the fact that the “do nothing” option was not viable, President Kennedy stated, “I don’t think there was a choice” (Allison and Zelikow, 1999). His brother, Robert Kennedy concurred, stating, “Well, there isn’t any choice. I mean, you would have been, you would have been impeached” (Allison and Zelikow, 1999). President Kennedy echoed that statement saying “Well, I think I would have been impeached” (Allison and Zelikow, 1999:114). Allison and Zelikow (1999) conclude their analysis by stating “Even allowing for the hyperbole of the moment, the comments underscore the sense that doing nothing was not a serious alternative for the president.” In much the same way, President Clinton was faced with an international crisis that could have significant ramifications for him politically, depending on his choice.

President Clinton, according to most accounts (e.g., Clarke, 1999; Schwarz and Layne 1999; Sciolino and Bronner, 1999), decided to actually initiate air strikes against Milosevic and the Serbs shortly after the Kosovar Albanians agreed to the Rambouillet Accords in early March 1999. The Clinton administration and NATO had approved air strikes prior to this time but were delayed by the fact that the Kosovar Albanians themselves rejected the Rambouillet Accords (Priest and Lippman, 1999). Once this obstacle was cleared, it was quite evident that the United
States and NATO would proceed with their intent to use air strikes against the Serbs. Of interest here is the process by which President Clinton came to this decision as well as the factors that contributed to his decision.

President Clinton was not in a precarious position overall with respect to the public, as evidenced by his consistently high approval ratings (see Table 1). However, the American public was quite divided about what to do in Kosovo (see several poll results in Table 2). President Clinton also had to concern himself with another domestic constituency: Congress (see Hendrickson (2000) for a more detailed discussion of the influence of Congress on decisions in Kosovo). In the summer of 1998, shortly after Milosevic reinitiated his attacks on the Kosovar Albanians, many members of Congress, especially Republicans, pressured the White House to consider deploying troops as part of a NATO-led force to stop Milosevic’s attacks in Kosovo. The Clinton administration publicly expressed doubts about getting involved. Trent Lott, R-Miss., Senate Majority Leader at the time, stated “What we’re seeing happen once again is slaughter, people being left dead in the streets and ethnic cleansing. If we don’t do something pretty quickly, stronger than we’ve done so far, we’re going to have the same sort of disaster occurring in Kosovo that you had in Bosnia” (Pomper, 1998a:1628).

Naturally, not every member of Congress was behind initiating military action against the Serbs in Kosovo, and even among those in favor of the use of force, there were many differences of opinion on specific tactics. Some favored air strikes over ground troops and vice versa. Still, many members of Congress continued to pressure the Clinton administration throughout the summer to take action. On July 30, 1998, Rep. Eliot L. Engel, D-N.Y., introduced H Con Res 313, which called for self-determination in Kosovo. Self-determination would have likely led to independence, something the Clinton administration had opposed from the beginning. Suddenly, in October 1998, only a few short months later, many in Congress did an about-face. CQ Weekly reported that “Lawmakers, many of whom previously called on the Clinton administration to take action in the region, apparently became skeptical after talking to administration officials and reviewing the Pentagon’s plans” (Pomper, 1998b:2759). Senate Majority Leader Trent Lott, R-Miss., who had earlier pressured the administration to take action, stated that an October 1 briefing

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Source: Gallup Poll at http://www.gallup.com/poll/releases/pr990402.asp. Based on the following question: Do you approve or disapprove of the way Bill Clinton is handling his job as president? Full trend based on national adults (N = 1,078). Margin of error is ± 3 pct. pts. *Based on one-night poll; margin of error = ± 4 pct. pts., with additional possible error due to limitations of polls conducted in only one night.
by Albright and Cohen left senators “shaken, because there’s no real plan to carry this out” (Pomper, 1998b). Others expressed doubts as well about the administration’s plans. Even Senator Edward M. Kennedy, D-Mass., a loyal supporter of the president, said that air strikes had only hardened the enemy’s resolve in Vietnam and in other conflicts. Senator John McCain, R-Ariz., and Republican presidential candidate, agreed and encouraged President Clinton to address these concerns if he wanted both congressional and public support for military action (Pomper, 1998b). To be sure, another contributing factor to the change in position of many in Congress was that, as a result of the president’s sex scandal, many Republicans simply did not trust President Clinton, and doubted his motives for using force against the Serbs.

Ambivalence and indecision among members of Congress continued right to and through the decision to launch air strikes against the Serbs. The Clinton administration was in a no-win situation with respect to Congress. President Clinton and his advisers were criticized by some for acting too slowly, by others for not acting forcefully enough when they did act, and still by others for deciding to act at all—and often the same members of Congress were doing all three. My point here is not to excuse President Clinton or his advisers for actions taken or not taken, but merely to illustrate the diversity of opinion emanating from Congress and how difficult it was to take a particular course of action based solely on what Congress wanted to do because Congress itself presented no clear consensus about what should be done.

President Clinton consistently avoided directly dealing with the mounting problems in Kosovo until he was more or less forced to deal with the situation. The Economist (1999e:27) notes that:

For months he [Clinton] had done his best to ignore this approaching test of his leadership, preparing neither public nor Congress for the possibility of war. Then, with the breakdown of peace talks in France on March 19th, the president

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**Table 2. Approval Ratings for President Clinton on the War in Kosovo**

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*Based on one-night poll; margin of error = ± 4 pct. pts., with additional possible error due to limitations of polls conducted in only one night.

**Source:** Gallup Poll (Gillespie 1999a,b). Based on sample of national adults (N = 675). Margin of error is ± 4 pct. pts.

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scrambled to make up for his past negligence. He called a press conference, his first in nine months.

Senator John McCain, R-Ariz., also alluded to the president’s propensity to put off dealing with the problems in Kosovo. The senator was quoted in a March 25, 1999, *New York Times* (Broder, 1999b:15(A)) article as saying “I’ve never heard a President do what he did a couple of weeks ago. He allowed two deadlines to pass when he said there would be action, unless deadlines were met. There is a problem with credibility there.” John M. Broder (1999c:19(A)) quotes presidential historian Michael Beschloss as saying “From the beginning of 1993, Clinton was very affected by the view that Americans do not care about foreign affairs.” The implication is that if the public is not concerned about foreign policy, why should the president spend political capital in getting the public to change its mind? Put differently, the president was determined not to act in foreign affairs until it was politically expedient and necessary for him to do so. Why risk military action—which could lead to casualties and a definite backlash in public opinion against him—unless he was pushed into it by others and/or circumstances?

As reported in the *New York Times* on March 28, 1999 (Broder, 1999c), Clinton’s fears were born out. A CBS News poll, taken after the president’s speech to the nation on March 24, 1999, showed a decline in support for his handling of foreign affairs to 60% from 69% in January. Typically, presidents can count on a “rally ’round the flag effect” immediately following the use of force (Russett, 1990). In this case, we see that the opposite occurred. Broder (1999c:19(A)) also quotes a former senior military officer from the National Security Council during President Clinton’s first term as saying “Clinton vacillates a lot because of the political capital he does not have and has never had.”

President Clinton was also less inclined to push forcefully for the use of force because of the upcoming midterm elections. The conventional wisdom was that the Democrats were on the run (Sciolino and Bronner, 1999). Moreover, the use of force ran the risk of continuing for an extended period of time, harming Vice President Al Gore’s campaign for the presidency. Much of Clinton’s decision on whether or not to use force hinged on what type of force would be used and how that decision would affect Clinton’s standing with the public. Gellman (1999:1(A)) remarks that “It is something of a puzzle to some critics, given Clinton’s evident qualms about risking and taking lives, why he has threatened and used military force on so many occasions.” I believe the answer to this puzzle rests on the fact that when he used military force, in every instance he resorted to missile and air strikes because they were relatively risk-free. As I demonstrate below, in Kosovo as before, the decision on whether to use air strikes or ground troops—military decisions—was most certainly made based on political calculations.

**Political Ramifications of Choosing Among Military Options**

President Clinton was faced with two viable alternatives following the Serb failure to agree to the demands of NATO at the peace talks in Rambouillet, France: air strikes and/or ground troops. The question was what form of use of force would he use and why? In a nutshell, air strikes were easier and less risky but perhaps not sufficient to attain the goals President Clinton had outlined. Inserting ground troops would have required a significantly greater amount of time and effort to implement, were much riskier in terms of potential loss of life, but had a much higher probability of actually achieving NATO’s goals of stopping Milosevic’s ethnic cleansing of the Kosovar Albanians and removing Milosevic from office. An unnamed State Department official admitted that bombing alone “just doesn’t get us where we want to be” (Whitelaw and Smucker, 1999:35). However, as I show below, the political costs of using ground troops were too high.
NATO planners did look into what it would take to invade Yugoslavia. Western officials commented that the numbers “were staggering. As many as 200,000 soldiers would be needed for a ground war” (Sciolino and Bronner, 1999:1(A)). Alexander Vershbow, the U.S. representative to NATO, and former National Security aide, suggested a plan to the Clinton administration entitled “Kosovo: Time for Another Endgame Strategy” (Sciolino and Bronner, 1999:1(A)). However, the plan came with a “heavy political price tag. The possible dispatch of NATO soldiers just before a midterm election and in the midst of the impeachment fight” (Sciolino and Bronner, 1999:1(A); see also Economist, 1999b). An editorial in the Economist (1999b, 31) stated forcefully that “The biggest question is clearly the issue of ground troops.”

It was quite obvious from the beginning that the Clinton administration most likely would refrain at all costs from using ground troops. Broder (1999c:19(A)) notes that “Mr. Clinton adopted this low-risk, high-technology approach to warfare after President Bush’s last military foray became his [Clinton’s] first—the dispatch of soldiers on a humanitarian mission to Somalia—and ended in humiliation and bloodshed.” Ivo Daalder, former White House specialist on Bosnia in the mid-1990s and now at the Brookings Institution, expounds stating, “They [Clinton administration] believe that Somalia demonstrates conclusively that you cannot have any casualties. They take this as a matter of faith” (Harden and Broder, 1999:1(A)).

Apparently, the Clinton administration had the same philosophy several years earlier in Bosnia. General George A. Joulwan, former Supreme NATO Commander, remarked that he constantly had to fight President Clinton’s assumption that a majority of the American public demanded a zero-casualty war.4 “The problem with the White House is that rather than say why did casualties occur, they just said we cannot take casualties any more” (Harden and Broder, 1999). Broder (1999c:19(A)) notes that since the crisis in Haiti, President Clinton’s “military operations have involved high-technology, relatively risk-free strikes from afar. Since August [1998], Mr. Clinton has rained ordnance on Sudan, Afghanistan, Iraq and, now, Yugoslavia.”

Harden and Broder (1999:1(A)) commented after the bombing had begun that “It is a calibrated war, enabled by high-tech weaponry, guided by the flickering light of opinion polls and shackled by fear that a few American combat deaths could turn the public against any military intervention in an obscure place called Kosovo.” They further note by way of comparison that the Powell doctrine under President Bush was the doctrine of going to war only when victory was guaranteed by overwhelming force and was designed to crush a foreign enemy. In contrast, the Clinton doctrine is an ever-changing policy called “coercive diplomacy,” and one that is designed to “achieve military and political goals overseas without losing votes” (ibid.; see also Galloway, 1999). Mandelbaum (1999:5) argues “Because no national interest was at stake, the degree of public support the war could command . . . was severely limited. . . . Its military operations were thus confined to bombardment from high altitudes.” On April 13, 1999, less than a month after the bombing began, the Economist (1999c:51) paraphrased General Wesley Clark, NATO’s supreme commander in Europe, as saying “NATO’s military aims were not an end in themselves but designed to serve a political purpose.”

Perhaps the following assessment from the Economist (1999d:30) most forcefully demonstrates the thinking behind President Clinton’s decision to use air strikes instead of ground troops:

In public, the administration claimed the decision was taken to avoid upsetting Russia and to prevent a paralysing debate within NATO. In private, however,

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4See Burk (1999) and Feaver and Gelpi (2004) for a broader discussion of casualty aversion.
officials concede that the calculation was largely domestic: the president reckoned the public and Congress would not tolerate the loss of American lives. And Vice-President Al Gore feared his presidential chances could become collateral damage in a ground war (emphasis added).

Finally, after the bombing ceased, the Economist (1999f:23) evaluated the outcome of the conflict by noting that while the president had an advantage over a Congress and public that were unsure about what should be done in Kosovo, “what [Clinton] wanted (such as no ground troops), was often dictated by what he knew the public would swallow.” As stated previously, President Clinton was hard-pressed to adopt a particular course of action because of the divided nature of both public opinion and the Congress, but he would certainly reject options if he thought any given choice would damage his political fortunes.

These external assessments demonstrate that President Clinton’s decision to use air strikes and avoid the use of ground troops was a noncompensatory political choice. First-hand accounts illustrate this noncompensatory political dynamic at work. In February 1999, Under Secretary of State for political affairs, Thomas Pickering, told members of Congress at a House hearing on the United States’ role in a Kosovo settlement that “we are not seeking to introduce American ground forces into a situation in which they would have to engage in combat” (Becker, 1999:9(A)). Sandy Berger, National Security Adviser, noted that the president had been presented with a group of unpalatable options such as doing nothing and sending U.S. ground troops into Kosovo. Instead, the president chose limited air strikes. Sandy Berger stated that even though air strikes had only a modest chance of succeeding, they were better than all the other choices (Broder, 1999b).

A month and half before the air strikes began, on February 4, President Clinton stated that sending troops into Kosovo was dependent on having a strong and effective peace agreement. “If both parties have not committed to stop killing each other, there is no point in our sending Americans and other NATO forces and other allied forces into a situation where we cannot succeed” (Clinton, 1999d:2). He made essentially the same comments a week later in his radio address to the nation (Clinton, 1999c).

In his speech to the nation on March 24, 1999, President Clinton stated “I do not intend to put our troops in Kosovo to fight a war” (Clinton, 1999e:3). A Gallup poll (Gillespie, 1999b:4) conducted on March 25, 1999, asked the question “If the current NATO air and missile strikes are not effective in achieving the United States’ objectives in Kosovo, would you favor or oppose President Clinton sending U.S. ground troops into the region to stop the Serbian attacks on Kosovo?” Only 31% were in favor while 65% opposed the use of ground troops (Gillespie, 1999b). In fact, a month after initiating air strikes, one of President Clinton’s advisers stated that the president was concerned about how the public perceived his handling of the war and was making a concerted effort to not appear too eager to commit American youth to combat (Broder, 1999a). To signal his discomfort concerning possible plans to implement ground troops, President Clinton allowed NATO officials and the more hawkish British to announce the new policy [that ground troops were at least being considered] (Broder, 1999a).

The poliheuristic theory of foreign policy decision making would predict that national security decision makers would use a two-stage process in making foreign policy decisions. President Clinton, in the first stage, eliminated the passive alternatives of doing nothing, continuing with sanctions, and allowing the United Nations to intervene on behalf of the United States. This decision was based on the political costs of “doing nothing,” stemming from the fact that President Clinton had made repeated threats against the Serbs and their actions against the Kosovar Albanians. The decision to use air strikes rather than ground troops in the second stage was also a politically motivated decision meant to maximize the president’s
standing with the public by minimizing losses. Sixty-five percent of the public opposed the use of ground troops, so this was a noncompensatory factor in Clinton’s decision-making calculus. Air strikes may not have been the best option for accomplishing the administration’s stated goals, but air strikes were by far the safest politically.

President Clinton did not make these decisions in isolation, however. He was greatly influenced by his advisers. I illustrate below how President Clinton came to rely almost exclusively on Secretary of State Madeleine Albright’s information and opinions concerning policy options in Kosovo. She, more than any other adviser, influenced President Clinton’s decision-making process and, as a result, the final choice to use air strikes against Milosevic and the Serbs. I argue that she influenced both stages of Clinton’s decision-making process: in the first stage she helped influence his decision to reject certain options and narrow the choice set; in the second stage she was the primary architect behind the argument to use air strikes against Milosevic.

Advisers

In this section, I discuss the different impact each adviser had on the decision to launch air strikes. As mentioned earlier, because of the fairly recent nature of the Kosovo operation, very little direct and/or declassified information is available indicating which advisers President Clinton consulted with in making his decision to attack the Serbs. For example, a study by Smith (1984/5) concerning the Teheran Hostage Rescue Mission during President Carter’s administration was able to document the specific discussions that took place among Carter’s policy advisers over the course of several meetings. To my knowledge, no such records exist concerning Kosovo. However, absent these records, one possible way to gauge the influence of President Clinton’s advisers is to measure their participation in the policy-making process using public accounts, such as their own speeches, the president’s speeches, reports from journalists, and press reports and conferences (see Paris (2002) for a similar approach).

A preliminary analysis using LEXIS®–NEXIS® and specific keyword searches yielded rather interesting results. The sources searched on LEXIS®–NEXIS® included major newspapers, magazines, and journals, newsletters, and abstracts from news, business, and financial publications. Entering the keywords “Cohen” and “Kosovo” yielded 12 hits; “Berger” and “Kosovo” yielded 28 hits; and “Albright” and “Kosovo” yielded 291 hits for the time period January 1, 1999 through April 1, 1999. This first-cut examination shows that Secretary of State Madeleine Albright received over 10 times the media exposure in connection with the Kosovo crisis compared with National Security Adviser Sandy Berger, and over 24 times the coverage compared with Secretary of Defense William Cohen. Without any further analysis, one might speculate that Cohen and Berger were simply reticent while Albright sought the media spotlight, or that Albright served as the official spokesperson for the Clinton administration on Kosovo policy. However, neither was the case.

A primary factor that affected the influence of advisers over the president’s decision-making process was the Monica Lewinsky scandal. The Lewinsky scandal created an atmosphere in which advisers, specifically Madeleine Albright, significantly influenced foreign policy decision making and choice because of President

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5One can speculate that such findings could simply be the result of role selection, i.e., Secretaries of State, because of their powerful role, would naturally receive more attention from the media and take the lead in foreign policy crises. However, this is not always, nor necessarily, the case. Smith (1984/5) and Hollis and Smith (1986) point out that during the Teheran Hostage Rescue Mission, Zbigniew Brzezinski, who was Carter’s National Security Advisor, played the most active role during the foreign policy decision-making process.
Clinton’s preoccupation with defending himself from prosecution (see Sciolino and Bronner, 1999). Sciolino and Bronner (1999) note that on January 19, 1999, Secretary of State Madeleine Albright met with President Clinton’s top aides and pushed forward a plan to use the threat of air strikes against Milosevic and the Serbs to force a peace agreement. However, President Clinton was not even at the meeting. Instead, he was with his attorneys who were preparing to argue on the Senate floor against the removal of the president from office. They further state that his troubles gave him less maneuvering room in which to make his decisions. Former Senator Bob Dole, after having met with President Clinton prior to the impeachment vote, stated that he thought “a lot of attention was diverted” from Yugoslavia and other foreign policy issues because of the impending impeachment vote, and that Kosovo “may have been one of the casualties” (Sciolino and Bronner, 1999:1(A)). One of President Clinton’s political advisers remarked in an interview “I hardly remember Kosovo in political discussions. It was all impeachment, impeachment, impeachment. There was nothing else” (Sciolino and Bronner, 1999). In this atmosphere, and with the public and Congress divided about what to do in Kosovo, President Clinton was particularly susceptible to the influence of his advisers.

Of President Clinton’s three advisers, perhaps the one with the least interaction with and influence on the president was Secretary of Defense William Cohen. The public record shows that Cohen was much less involved in the actual decision-making process and instead, more active in policy implementation. There is very little evidence showing Secretary Cohen’s involvement in policy formation. The few times that Cohen did speak about Kosovo his comments were quite general.

In October 1998, the president outlined in a letter to senators plans for NATO air strikes should Milosevic not accede to NATO demands. At a private meeting with NATO defense ministers, Secretary Cohen challenged his colleagues to embrace a new role for the alliance, asking if NATO could not gather support for a threat against Milosevic under these circumstances, what was the point of the alliance (Sciolino and Bronner, 1999)? However, Sciolino and Bronner (1999:1(A)) further noted that “The Defense Secretary’s toughened stance was striking.” As illustrated above, the decision to use air strikes against the Serbs was not a function of military costs and calculations that might have been provided by the Secretary of Defense. Instead, the decision was primarily based on the political costs of the different military options proposed.

While Berger’s influence paled in comparison with Albright’s, he was not unimportant. An early example of Sandy Berger’s attempted influence on the process of decision making in Kosovo occurred in the early days of renewed fighting in Kosovo in the spring and summer of 1998. An article in the New York Times on April 18, 1999 points out that in the spring of 1998, Secretary Albright began to make the case for military action in response to Milosevic’s refusal to end the ethnic cleansing in Kosovo (Sciolino and Bronner, 1999). At a key meeting in May 1998, Robert S. Gelbard, U.S. envoy to the region, argued that the time had come for air strikes. Sandy Berger was opposed, arguing that the United States could not threaten without being prepared to follow up with specific action (Sciolino and Bronner, 1999). He was concerned about the political fallout that would occur if the president threatened the use of force and then did not make good on the threat. Of particular interest here is the statement made by Gelbard, “When I had the lead role on Kosovo issues I had the complete support from the President and the Secretary of State” (Sciolino and Bronner, 1999:1(A)). Berger’s policy proposals were contrary to Secretary Albright’s and President Clinton’s; yet no threats of military action were made until later in June, after NATO came on board and supported the threat of force. In the early stages of the Kosovo crisis in 1998, Berger’s advice to the president was also based on political calculations. The president was hesitant to use force because of the possible negative political repercus-
sions. Berger knew that in the early stages of the crisis military options were less feasible and he counseled the president against even threatening the use of force.

On January 30, 1999, the Washington Post reported that top national security advisers, including Secretary Berger, decided that the United States should commit several thousand troops to an international peacekeeping force in Kosovo in order to monitor any eventual cease-fire there. Berger himself even made telephone calls to various senators in trying to enlist their support for such a plan (Sciolino and Bronner, 1999). However, Berger was definitely opposed to sending ground troops to Kosovo without a peace agreement signed by Milosevic. Less than a week after the bombing began, he told a group of political pundits on ABC’s This Week, “I do not believe that sending several hundred thousand soldiers into occupied Serbia for the next 5 or 10 years is the right way to deal with this problem” (Nichols, 1999:5(A)).

Another example of his influence came on March 5, 1999, when Italy’s Prime Minister, Massimo D’Alema, asked President Clinton in a meeting what the United States would do if no deal was reached and if subsequent bombing failed to subdue Milosevic. Incredibly, the president did not answer himself, instead turning to National Security adviser Sandy Berger, who replied “We will continue the bombing” (Kelly, 1999:29(A); see also Sciolino and Bronner, 1999).

Both Cohen and Berger were not in favor of military action in the early phases of the Kosovo crisis. Berger counseled against even using the threat of military action because of the possible negative political effects. As the use of force became more likely as the crisis progressed, Berger counseled against the use of ground troops because this option was the most politically risky of the available options. However, as I show below, Secretary of State Madeleine Albright was the driving force behind the decision to finally confront Milosevic, and to use air strikes against the Serbs.

Albright began taking the lead on issues relating to the former Yugoslavia in the early 1990s when she was still U.S. ambassador to the United Nations. “Her criticisms of British and French reluctance to do anything serious against the Serbs in Bosnia from 1992 to 1994 were ferocious” (Simpson, 1999:30). As early as March 1998, when the problems in Kosovo began to resurface, Albright stated, “we are not going to stand by and watch the Serbian authorities do in Kosovo what they can no longer get away with doing in Bosnia. . . . The time to stop the killing is now, before it spreads” (Economist, 1999a:30). Shortly after the bombing began a year later in March 1999, President Clinton admitted, indirectly, that Secretary Albright might have been correct all along about the need for NATO action (Economist, 1999a). It should be noted, though, that Albright was never in favor of sending in ground troops into anything but a “permissive environment” (Albright, 1999c:6, 9, 10). She reiterated this stand the day before the air strikes began. In answer to a query from CNN news personality Larry King about whether or not the United States would use ground troops, she remarked “We have made very clear that the only ground troops that would be used would be to implement a peace agreement, and we have no plans to use ground troops in an aggressive way—only to implement a peace agreement” (Albright, 1999b:2; see also Albright, 1999a).

Perhaps the turning point in the Kosovo crisis occurred on January 16, 1999, when the bodies of 45 peasant farmers and their children were found massacred in the village of Racak (Sciolino and Bronner, 1999). On January 19, 3 days after the bodies were found, Madeleine Albright presented a new plan at a White House meeting (although as mentioned previously, President Clinton was not present because he was meeting with lawyers concerning the Lewinsky scandal). Albright’s plan again threatened air strikes if Milosevic did not agree to a peace plan for Kosovo; however, for the first time, it demanded that Milosevic accept NATO troops in Kosovo to enforce a deal under which Milosevic would withdraw his security forces and grant Kosovo broad autonomy (Sciolino and Bronner, 1999; see also Ratliff, 2001). Sandy Berger was opposed to Albright’s new plan, as were
Secretary Cohen and Gen. Hugh Shelton, Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff. In the end, however, the advisers accepted Secretary Albright’s plan and sent it to President Clinton, who accepted it. This was the point at which Secretary Albright began to assert her greatest influence over the foreign-policy-making process.

It was Albright who summoned the Serbs and the KLA to the French chateau of Rambouillet, presenting them with her plan that she originally introduced to fellow advisers on January 19 (Mandelbaum, 1999; see also Priest and Lippman, 1999). Department of State Spokesman, Rubin (1999:1), noted the extent of Albright’s involvement during the Rambouillet meetings:

Secretary Albright is having a one-on-one meeting with President Milutinovic in her hold room. She has held meetings with him with the other Ministers. She has met with the Ministers as a group. She has addressed the entire Kosovo Albanian delegation. She has met privately with three or four of the key Kosovo Albanian leaders and their work is very intense.

She also demanded that both sides sign the agreement, and then threatened, on behalf of the United States and NATO, military reprisals if the Serbs did not agree to sign (Rubin, 1999; see also Trueheart, 1999). The Washington Post (Priest and Lippman, 1999:17(A)) reported that Albright called Milosevic to say “he will be hit hard’ with NATO air strikes and ‘deprived of the things he values.’ To back up her threat, hundreds of NATO warplanes in Europe were put on a 48-hour alert.” Albright even warned Milosevic that it was time to “wake up and smell the coffee” (Cullen, 1999:2). At one point during the negotiations at Rambouillet, she even commented “It’s all stick now” (Corliss, 1999:32). Even her European counterparts recognized her influence and power over the Rambouillet negotiations. An unnamed European diplomat commented that “she has massive clout—she’s the one who can say to the Serbs, ‘sign this, or we’ll bomb the hell out of you’” (Walker, 1999:1; see also McGwire, 2000; Ratliff, 2001).

The KLA, to the surprise of Albright and the other negotiators, refused to sign; but after much persuasion and some concessions on the part of NATO, the KLA eventually agreed to sign the Rambouillet plan. Albright even worked the phones for 3 weeks following the two parties’ initial refusal to sign, enlisting the help of Bob Dole, George Soros, and others to lobby the Kosovar Albanians to sign the Rambouillet agreement (Hirsch, 1999). However, no such additional negotiating took place with the Serbs. It was apparent that NATO felt that further concessions to the Serbs were unnecessary because after a few nights of air strikes, Milosevic would capitulate. When the bombing began, Secretary Albright said “I think this is . . . achievable within a relatively short period of time” (Mandelbaum, 1999:4).

The day before the air strikes began, President Clinton, in an address to the American Federation of State, County, and Municipal Employees association, commented how Secretary Albright “dispatched Ambassador Dick Holbrooke to Belgrade to talk to President Milosevic one last time” (Clinton, 1999a:7). This is further evidence that, among President Clinton’s many advisers, Secretary Albright was the lead on Kosovo foreign policy and that she had the greatest influence on the president’s decisions. Additional evidence of Albright’s lead role occurred approximately a month after the air strikes began, when, testifying before the House International Relations Committee on April 21, she stated “The best way to deal with genocidal acts of Milosevic is to pursue an intensified and sustained air campaign” (Towell, 1999:969).

Hirsch (1999:34) referred to Secretary Albright as a “cold warrior lost in the wrong decade, habitually casting foreign-policy flare-ups as challenges to U.S. might.” He further remarked that “Again and again, she has tried to pull her boss, Bill Clinton—who is nothing if not equivocating—in a more aggressive direction, only to look over her shoulder and find he’s not there” (Hirsch, 1999). One of Albright’s former aides commented that “she is always marching up the hill and
marching down again’’ (Hirsh, 1999). Hirsh (1999:34) even notes that there is a marked difference between Albright and “the more cautious, realpolitik-minded Berger: while she believes bombing may bring Milosevic to sign the peace plan, White House sources fear strikes will produce only war.”

The above discussion highlights the disparate roles that President Clinton’s advisers played in the Kosovo decision-making process and on the final choice to bomb Milosevic. Secretary of State Madeleine Albright led the way in arguing for air strikes both domestically, within the Clinton administration, as well as even among NATO representatives. Perhaps as the final measure of the significance of her influence on President Clinton’s decision to attack Milosevic, it was widely reported that the military offensive was “Madeleine’s War” (Gailey, 1999; Isaacson, 1999; Slavin, 1999; Ratliff, 2001). Isaacson (1999) wrote an entire article in *Time* magazine about why both critics and allies alike considered the attack on Milosevic to be “Madeleine’s War.” “But more than anyone else, she embodies the foreign policy vision that pushed these men into this war. And she is the one most responsible for holding the allies—and the Administration—firm in pursuit of victory” (Isaacson, 1999:26).

To summarize the influence of Madeleine Albright from a decision-theoretic perspective and the two stages of the poliheuristic theory, we see that Albright played a critical role in pushing Clinton to reject several options in the beginning stages of the crisis in a noncompensatory fashion. She convinced President Clinton that, from a political perspective, he could not ignore the crisis. While President Clinton was distracted by the Monica Lewinsky scandal during January of 1999, Albright was beginning to formulate options for dealing with Milosevic. After President Clinton decided to act forcefully in Kosovo, the second stage if you will, Albright once again influenced Clinton’s decision strategies. As demonstrated above, she was the primary adviser to Clinton in his decision to pursue air strikes rather than the use of ground troops in dealing with Milosevic. We can also see that once the decision to use force was made in the first stage, Albright helped Clinton pursue a maximizing strategy in the second stage wherein all aspects and ramifications of the use of air strikes and ground troops were examined. As shown in the above discussion, Albright and Clinton focused on these two options and opted for the former because of noncompensatory political calculations.

**Policy Implications**

The poliheuristic theory in general and the noncompensatory principle in particular, as well as the preceding discussion of the influence of advisers on foreign policy processes and outcomes may help us understand future presidential policy making. I first illustrate more generally how the poliheuristic theory and the noncompensatory principle can help us better explain and predict the behavior of leaders. I then discuss how an examination of advisors helps us better understand how leaders make use of decision strategies such as the noncompensatory principle.

Mintz (2004:5) points out that the poliheuristic is applicable “to a rich menu of decisions in international relations: decisions on the use of force, nonuse of force, initial reaction to crisis, crisis escalation, crisis termination, framing, learning, negotiation, peace, rivalry termination, and conflict resolution” (see Mintz, 2004:4 for a listing of studies that address these substantive issues). Many of these studies are experimental in nature but many are also case studies of presidential decision making. Decisions by presidents Eisenhower, Reagan, and George H. W. Bush have been analyzed by Taylor-Robinson and Redd (2003), DeRouen (2001, 2003) and Mintz (1993). In all, these scholars found that the poliheuristic theory in general and noncompensatory principles in particular guided presidential decision processes (see also Goertz, 2004). For example, Mintz (1993) demonstrated that the political dimension was the most salient, that is, noncompensatory, in President Bush’s
decision calculus with the military/strategic dimension also playing a critical role in his decision to attack Iraq. Mintz (607) also points out that there was no comprehensive, that is, search for compensatory trade-offs, evaluation of all the alternatives and in fact it was quite obvious that President Bush never considered the withdrawal option. Taylor-Robinson and Redd (2003) show how Eisenhower’s attentiveness to the American public’s concern with communism was a noncompensatory factor in his decision to support the 1953 coup in Guatemala in which a democratically elected Arbenz was forced to leave office. As Mintz and Geva (1993) also show, “the noncompensatory principle played a role in President Bush’s 1991 war termination decision not to pursue Saddam Hussein in Baghdad when then-president Bush was enjoying very high levels of public approval” (quoted in Mintz, 2004:6).

The broad policy implication of this theory and these case study and empirical studies is that leaders will often be constrained by domestic/political considerations above all else. Moreover, leaders will use a two-stage process wherein they will first eliminate alternatives that are not feasible or are risky from a political perspective. When analyzing and predicting presidential decision-making attention should be focused first, and foremost, on domestic or international factors that might affect the political standing of the leader. Noncompensatory decision rules are an especially important factor in the highly charged political setting of foreign policy crises. As the political stakes rise in a foreign policy setting, we could expect to find presidents and other national security-level decision makers resorting to noncompensatory strategies to a greater degree in an effort to simplify the decision task and to avoid political losses.

Of course, one of the most important influences on a president’s decision-making processes is his interaction with advisers. The reality of presidential decision making is that presidents interact with advisers. Because advisers participate extensively in presidential decision making, any explanation of processes and outcomes in foreign policy analysis should account for their presence. The use of noncompensatory strategies discussed above is surely contingent upon the order in which advisers present information to the decision maker. For example, if a low evaluation pertaining to a given course of action is received from the political adviser, when that information is received is likely to be very important. Is it received in the first stages of the information acquisition process or later on after considerable cost and effort have been expended in gathering additional information?

The use of noncompensatory rules and their effects on choice may be contingent upon advisory group dynamics. Factors such as who is included in the group, group size, the heterogeneity among group members, and group power and status structures may all influence how noncompensatory rules are implemented as well as the extent to which the final choice is affected. Of particular relevance here, and related to the notion of group status structures, is the proposition that the distribution of the importance of advisers affects the use of noncompensatory strategies and foreign policy choices. For example, if for some reason a leader’s political adviser has been marginalized or has even been successfully excluded from group deliberations, then any subsequent information processing and choice may be based less on political considerations than would otherwise be predicted. Certainly the converse is also possible, i.e., the deliberations and conclusions reached by the president may be too politically motivated if other substantive advisers (e.g., diplomatic, military, or economic) are marginalized or absent. These issues are compounded by the order in which alternatives and advisers are accessed in the choice set.

**Conclusion**

President Clinton’s initial indecision about whether to confront the Serbs, and his final decision to initiate air strikes against Milosevic, was substantially influenced by his concern over how both Congress and the public would react to the use of force.
More specifically, he feared that any loss of American life would have a negative impact on his political fortunes and this was a risk he was hesitant to take. Broder (1999a:7(A)) commented that:

President Clinton has perfected the art of exquisite followership in many of his domestic initiatives, accurately reading public opinion and then offering policy solutions . . . that precisely mirror the public mood. But it is surprising to hear this approach applied to matters of war and peace. Mr. Clinton has bucked public opinion in foreign policy issues earlier in his Presidency—on Haiti and on Bosnia, for example. But on Kosovo, Mr. Clinton seems content to lag behind the more hawkish sentiments of . . . even his own Secretary of State, Madeleine K. Albright.

Even when he did finally decide to use military force, his choice was guided by two main factors. First, he chose a form of military force that was generally risk free. Although the Serbs had excellent air defense weapons, U.S. and NATO bombers flying at altitudes of 15,000 feet were relatively safe. Moreover, the generous use of sea-launched missiles all but guaranteed that the United States would experience few, if any, casualties. The fact that no Americans were being killed meant that the president could pursue air strikes without the fear of domestic political reprisals. In effect, some segments of the public and members of Congress ended up being the ones calling for the more risky use of ground troops. Bacevich (1999:1(B)), a professor of international relations at Boston University, commented that:

The appeal of air power derives less from its proven operational utility in adjudicating civil wars or bringing dictators to heel than from the political advantages it offers to an administration operating with one eye fixed on the opinion polls. Relying on air power both reduces the risks of large-scale American casualties, and all but precludes the nightmare of another Mogadishu. . . . Unlike operations by ground forces, air campaigns do not involve enduring commitments or responsibilities. Finally, air power provides assurances that the United States will not be drawn unawares into some quagmire from which it cannot easily extract itself (emphasis added).

Second, Clinton’s Secretary of State, Madeleine Albright, heavily influenced his policy-making process and choice of policies with respect to Kosovo. Slavin (1999:3(A)) concludes that Albright “has been the most vocal senior administration advocate of standing up to Yugoslav leader Slobodan Milosevic.” Hans Binnendijk, director of the National Defense University, concurs, saying, “She has been the single driving force on this (Kosovo) policy” (Slavin, 1999:3(A)). The evidence clearly shows that Secretary Albright influenced President Clinton’s decision to finally initiate air strikes against the Serbs on March 24, 1999. Without her presence, it is quite possible that the president would have relied more on Sandy Berger and his more cautious approach. It is clear in this case that, overall, Albright played a significant role in influencing President Clinton’s decisions concerning Kosovo. President Clinton was more reluctant to use force in the initial stages of the crisis in Kosovo, when Berger seemed to have the upper hand, but he was more aggressive in the latter stages beginning in January 1999, when Albright began to assert herself more forcefully.

This case provides a broader lesson in assessing the relationship between foreign policy decision making and the use of force. It suggests, once again, that leaders tend to pursue noncompensatory strategies based on political calculations (Mintz, 1993). More specifically, Clinton’s decision processes support the two-stage process of decision making posited by the poliheuristic theory, that is, first eliminating nonviable options in order to reduce the choice set, and then in the second stage using a more analytic choice rule. It also points to the important influence that
advisers have on presidential decision making in foreign policy crises. In cases where presidents have the reputation of being reluctant to use force, are overly concerned with public opinion, and/or are distracted by other pressing domestic matters (e.g., a scandal), advisers may tend to have greater influence over foreign policy decision making and choice (see also Smith, 1984/5; Hollis and Smith, 1986). This last point concerning presidential scandals is one that bears more discussion.

Many presidents have had to deal with various scandals or distractions while in office. Examples include Nixon and Watergate, Reagan and Iran-Contra, and Clinton and Monica Lewinsky just to name a few. Future research should examine how these scandals, as well as other distractions, have affected national security decision making. Specifically, were advisers able to gain more power and influence during these periods and influence policy making to a greater degree than at other times? How did the relationship between the advisers change during these time periods? These and other questions would help us gain a better understanding of the impact of advisers on decision strategies and choice in general as well as more specifically in situations where presidents are preoccupied or distracted by scandal.

References


