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## National Security Decision Making: When Does the Personal Matter?

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**Abstract.** This article describes elements of personal psychology that may significantly affect national security decision making.

Scandal in a security bureaucracy embraces some variant of illegal, immoral, or unethical behavior. Even if that behavior seems to lack face validity and a consensually validated nomological network embracing the bureaucracy's mission--e.g., decision making in a crisis--one often posits an underlying linkage. Adultery is said to suggest a weakness in character obviating resolute crisis management. So are financial improprieties for personal gain, racial and ethnic biases, or beliefs in the paranormal. Alternatively, clinical and social psychological research has identified an element of the personal--cognitive styles--that make up some of one's personality and often strongly color how one perceives and reacts to crisis.

Emotionally depressed individuals often are likely to blame themselves when things go wrong. In a national security crisis, they might well be more likely to relabel the threatening behavior of others in the international environment as reasonable reactions to their own (the depressed) miscalculations. There could well be less likelihood to ascribe blame to others and more likelihood for self-blame. This self-blaming cognitive style could be activated to attenuate the probability of effecting deterrence, containment, or a roll back of others' aggressive and even rapacious actions. Moreover, this cognitive style seems to be stable and applied to many if not all facets of a depressed individual's life. It will most likely be salient when crisis options and decisions are being formulated.

Paranoid and paranoid-like individuals often are likely to blame others when things go wrong. This could involve one's fellow decisionmakers as well as one's allies, neutrals, competitors, and adversaries throughout the world. These individuals--even if they ascribe noxious events to external political, social, cultural, or economic phenomena--may do so in a manner that allows at least indirect blame for other individuals as well. This cognitive style seems especially likely to nurture perceptions of others that warrant deterrence, containment, or roll back--others in one's own working environment and throughout the world. Given that many contemporary political crisis analysts, observers, and educators eschew power ideologies founded on cooperative instincts, love, and human goodness, one should not be surprised that the paranoid cognitive style seems to be quite prevalent in security bureaucracies among personnel who continue to protect or amass power. This cognitive style, like the depressed above, is stable and applied to most if not all facets of the possessor's life--most certainly to crises that often may be largely cognitive style-induced.

The overriding similarity of depressed and paranoid cognitive styles is that they are salient regardless of some objective or consensual notion of threat and crisis. Moreover, they are easily reinforced. The reinforcement occurs through (1) a concurrence with some objective or consensual notion of reality even at extremely low base rates and (2) intrapsychic gains, e.g., in the paranoid cognitive style the reduction of self-ideal discrepancies, in the depressed cognitive style a sense of control. (In this last regard, even the so-called learned helplessness of some depressives may be an attempt to achieve intrapsychic mastery, e.g., meaning, through belief in no control.)

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A scandal publicly focused on cognitive styles may rarely occur--even if scandal based on successfully resolved psychological problems, e.g., history of psychiatric treatment, more likely occurs. However, there may be more riding on cognitive than sexual style when national security is threatened. (See Fear, C.F., Sharpe, H., & Healy, D. (1996). Cognitive processes in delusional disorders. *British Journal of Psychiatry*, 168, 61-67; Kinderman, P., & Bentall, R.B. (1997). Causal attributions in paranoia and depression: Internal, personal, and situational attributions for negative events. *Journal of Abnormal Psychology*, 106, 341-345; Robins, C.J., & Hayes, A.H. (1995). The role of causal attributions in the prediction of depression. In G. M. Buchanan & M. E. P. Seligman (Eds.), *Explanatory style* (pp. 71-98). Hillsdale, NJ: Erlbaum.) (Keywords: Cognition, Decision Making, Security, Typology.)