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# In Passing: The Political Psychology of "As If" as a Tool of Security Policy

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**Abstract.** This article comments on the adaptive consequences for international security policy of formally ascribing a reality to a reality that seemingly doesn't exist.

In ethnocentric or racist societies, one who looks like a member of the ethnic group or race that nomothetically holds significant political power but is a member from an entity that hold little may choose to pass as one of the former. In sexist societies and societies that manifest stigmatization towards some sexual orientations, one who looks like a member of a stigmatizing sexual orientation but is of a stigmatized one may choose to pass as the former. In social intercourse, individuals may decide to pass through impression management as stronger or weaker, as more positive or negative than one's actual status. (As inferred from the construct of the totalitarian ego and the adage that perception is reality, one's actual status may be quite difficult to delineate--for self and for other.)

In the international security arena, one may choose to pass as what one looks like as opposed to what one is--a variant of strategic or tactical deception. Leaders of a country may effect passing as a nuclear power, as a possessor of other weapons of mass destruction, as bearing a currency that is justifiably strong, as bearing legitimate revanchist tendencies. Passing may also occur to effect stances and images weaker than actuality--e.g., formalizing emerging famine policies, even if one doesn't exist, in order to receive unwarranted aid.

Another variant of passing that affects international security policy is the formulation of passing agreements with other political entities bordering on the delusional, *la folie grande*. Chechnya is part of Russia or it's not. Northern Ireland is part of the United Kingdom or it's not. Khalistan is part of India or it's not. Taiwan is part of the People's Republic of China or it's not. Yet formal agreements between adversaries may simultaneously contain contradictory elements. Other countries and political entities line up to take perceptual sides. They can agree that the emperor is fully clothed even when there's simultaneously not a stitch in sight.

Another variant of passing in international security policy is for a leader to profess positions not sincerely espoused only to maintain political viability. A recent case relates to Kosovo's Ibrahim Rugova who is professing the goal of Kosovo's independence even as he truly espouses reinstated autonomy within a continued political union with Serbia or a rump Yugoslavia.

What all these examples have in common is the desired consequence of increasing the probability of achieving political goals. In fact, passing may be the oldest profession of intent--so pervasive and so often effective that the most rigid ethical, moral, and legal proscriptions and penalties against have little effect. It seems that one passes through a life that is intrinsically political without the option of passing on passing. (See Bozeman, D.P., & Kacmar, K.M. (1997). A cybernetic model of impression management processes in organizations. *Organizational Behavior and Human Decision Processes*, 69, 9-30; Crant, J.M. (1996). Doing more harm than good: When is impression management likely to evoke a negative response? *Journal of Applied Social Psychology*, 26, 1454-1471; Ernesto Guevara de la Serna, Che Guevara, and the Power of "As If." (October 17, 1997). *IBPP*, 3(12); Hedges, C. (March 13, 1998). Kosovo

International Bulletin of Political Psychology

leader urges resistance, but to violence. The New York Times, A5; Kern, J.M. (1996). Objective detection of faking on role play tests of assertion. Psychological Reports, 78, 355-361; The "As Ifs" of Political Psychology. (July 11, 1997). IBPP, 2(11).) (Keywords: Adaptation, As If, Deception, Passing.)