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## Trends. North Korea, the United States, and Causal Relevance: Relevant to the Contemporary Conflict?

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**Abstract:** This Trends article discusses the importance of social inferential differences in the analysis of the intentions of adversaries, especially in crises. Countries discussed include North Korea (DPRK) and the United States.

Often in contemporary conflict, political authorities may mirror image decision-making processes of an adversary. At other times, political authorities may demonize these processes. Perhaps, most often, political authorities may simplify adversarial decision-making processes. The upshot is that explicitly or implicitly inferred heuristics, operational codes, and social attributional schemata of adversaries may be hopelessly incorrect. Barring luck, this upshot may not bode well for appropriate conflict management.

A recent study by Choi, et al. (2003) illustrates how different adversaries may be in social inference--i.e., trying to figure out the who, what, why, when, and how of what is happening in the social world. And social inference is certainly crucial in a conflict like that between the North Korean (DPRK) and United States (US) governments concerning DPRK nuclear weapons development.

Choi et al. found that their Korean research subjects took into consideration a greater amount of information than either American or Asian-American research subjects in developing social inferences about behavior that was considered deviant as a transgression of norms and about behavior that was considered prosocial and cooperative. Korean research subjects also made more inferences that someone's behavior might be the result of factors outside the person--e.g., situational factors--as opposed to dispositional factors residing within a person. Moreover, a previous study by Norenzayan et al. (2002) found that Korean research subjects were more likely than American subjects to endorse situationist theories of behavior and to believe that personality was more malleable.

It would seem that such social inferential differences might prove useful in analyzing intelligence as to the working hypotheses and intentions of adversaries, crafting communications addressing a conflict, developing negotiating strategies including that of whether to negotiate versus to talk, and so on. Would the press of events, the dynamics of international crises, domestic political issues, and other distracting crises allow the finesse of employing social inferential analysis? The historical record may not be sanguine about this possibility. (See Choi, I., Dalal, R., Kim-Prieto, C. & Park, H. (2003). Culture and judgement of causal relevance. *Journal of Personality & Social Psychology*, 84, 46-59; French, H. (January 23, 2003). North Korea informs South Korea that it doesn't plan to produce nuclear weapons. *The New York Times*, <http://www.nytimes.com>; Nisbett, R. E., Peng, K., Choi, I., & Norenzayan, A. (2001). Culture and systems of thought: Holistic versus analytic cognition. *Psychological Review*, 108, 291-310; Norenzayan, A., Choi, I., Nisbett, R.E. (2002). Cultural similarities and differences in social inference: Evidence from behavioral predictions and lay theories of behavior. *Personality and Social Psychology Bulletin*, 28, 109-120; Yook, E. L., & Ahn, B. L. (1999). Comparison of apprehension about communication between Koreans and Americans. *Perceptual & Motor Skills*, 89, 161-164.) (Keywords: Conflict Management, North Korea, Nuclear Weapons.)

