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A Profile of National Leader Profiles and the Social Construction of the Self: An Example of Information Warfare

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Abstract. This article hypothesizes some implications of the social construction of the self for the construction of personality profiles of national leaders and their employment in information warfare.

A recently released textbook, *The Psychological Assessment of Political Leaders*, describes various approaches towards the construction of personality profiles of national leaders. The textbook's editor and contributors support the hypothesis that a reliable and valid description of a national leader's personality can help national policymakers and policy implementers through the development of estimative intelligence and in the management of summit meetings, negotiations, and crises. Although at least one United States (US) President has publicly vouched for the value of profiles (Carter, 1983), one might still maintain an agnostic stance--especially when mulling over social constructionist perspectives of perception, cognition, affect, motivation, and the very whole of intrapsychic functioning.

The essence of the social constructionist perspective may be most easily arrived at through stipulating what it does not denote. It does not denote that mental life--content and process--is totally shaped and developed through one's experience. It does not denote that there is some objective reality to which or against which the optimal of mental life should correspond. It certainly does not suggest that there is no reality, no truth, no ethics nor morality. Instead, it denotes that-- both wittingly and unwittingly--one constructs aspects of what one is aware of, on what levels one is aware of it, as well as the how, when, and why of awareness. It also denotes that there are certain degrees of freedom as to what one becomes aware of, to what can be constructed, and to the what of what can be constructed including the what of experience.

Part of mental life--part of some level of awareness--comprises the profiling of others and the evaluation of these profiles. This is the case both for laypeople and the priesthood of socially sanctioned profilers of national leaders. Another way of stating this is that socially sanctioned profilers of national leaders and lay people--regardless of whether either group is engaged in the profiling of a national leader or some other task of life--share the same constructivist characteristics. Thus, there are degrees of freedom as to what can be constructed as to profiling and to how profiles can be evaluated. This conclusion could be taken pessimistically on the part of some epistemologists--e.g., those bent on the quest to champion a falsification criterion for the rightness of profiling. But the conclusion could also be viewed optimistically by policymakers and policy implementers seeking information warfare means to successfully emerge from political conflict via summits, negotiations, and crises.

As but one example, the information within a profile of a foreign leader developed by a government's socially sanctioned experts could be either publicly released or transmitted so that the foreign leader could become aware of it along with that leader's allies, adversaries, and neutrals. At this point, the information could have several effects. It might strengthen or weaken self-elements of the foreign leader or perceptions of selected self-elements of that leader by allies, adversaries, and neutrals. These phenomena could occur either through witting or unwitting acceptance of profile information or

through reactance against this information. The consequence could be opportunity or threat for the profile transmitter that would affect the summit, negotiations, or crisis at hand.

As to estimative intelligence, an opportunity for the profiler and a threat for the policymaker would involve the omnipresent possibility of politicizing analyses. Here the profiler might develop information to strengthen or weaken the perception of self-elements of a foreign leader by the policymaker to advance one's own preferred policy.

Back to the utility of profiles: one might jettison criteria more closely associated with the vitality of profiles such as parsimony, coherence, relevance, narrative resonance, and statistical relationships with convergent and divergent constructs for temporal relationships with desired or undesired events. Or one might point to the seeming lack of subjective pain or adaptive dysfunction associated with the profile and claim orthogonality from the mire of delusion. When the ultimate political consumer, the US President, can write (about profiling employed for the 1978 Camp David negotiations with Anwar Sadat and Menachen Begin) that "After spending 13 days with the two principals, I wouldn't change a word" (cited in Post, 2003, p. 59), this might be the best one can do.

(See Carter, J. (1983). *Keeping faith: Memoirs of a President*. Bantam; George, A.L., & George, J.L. (2001). *Presidential personality and performance*. Westview Press; Ilhanus, J. (2001). Profiling Russian leaders from a psychohistorical and a psychobiographical perspective. In O. Feldman, & L.O.Valenty. (Eds.). *Profiling political leaders: Cross-cultural studies of personality and behavior*. (pp. 129-147). Praeger Publishers/Greenwood Publishing Group, Inc.; Post, J.M. (2003). *The psychological assessment of political leaders*. University of Michigan Press; Renshon, S.A. (1996). *The psychological assessment of presidential candidates*. New York University Press.) (Keywords: Assessment, Leadership, Personality, Profiling .)