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Foreign Policy Decisionmakers as Practical-intuitive Historians: Applied History and Its Shortcomings

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In performing judgment, inference and choice functions in the foreign policy decisionmaking process, decisionmakers acting as practical-intuitive historians rely on a variety of procedures. These include: rules of thumb, heuristics, propositional knowledge structures and non-propositional structures of a more schematic nature. These procedures draw, among other sources, on the decisionmakers' subjective information and comprehension of events, situations and personalities from one's own nation's history or foreign nations' histories, and are applied to current tasks. This study attempts to introduce a systematic theoretical analysis of how decisionmakers use these historical analogies, metaphors and extrapolations. The main questions discussed are: What are the functions the use of history serves? How are past, present and future compared? What motivates the use of history? And what are the typical shortcomings of using history as expressed in potential biases and errors? The study concludes with a number of prescriptive suggestions for controlling the risks of abusing history.

Introduction

The use of history by foreign policy decisionmakers is a common phenomenon. The decisionmaker acts as a practical-intuitive historian rather than approaching history in a scientific manner. He is practical in the sense suggested by Michael Oakeshott who distinguishes the 'practical past' from the 'historical past'. The first is:

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. . . artifacts and utterances alleged to have survived from the past and recognized in terms of their worth to us in our current practical engagements . . . And they become available to us, not in a procedure of critical enquiry but merely in being recalled from where they lie, scattered or collected, in the present (Oakeshott, 1983: 35, 38).

He is intuitive in the sense suggested by the lay person–scientist analogy which has become an important focus of research in cognitive psychology and, more particularly, attribution theory (Nisbett and Ross, 1980). The same analogy applies to the decision-maker playing the historian.

These practical-intuitive historians are a mixed breed. They range from more naive historians (e.g., Harry Truman, Lyndon Johnson) through self-educated, aspiring analytical historians (e.g., Winston Churchill, Jawaharlal Nehru) to academic professional historians turned politicians (e.g., Woodrow Wilson, Henry Kissinger). Their cumulation of knowledge, sophistication and breadth of historical vision varies widely. In a word, they operate from significantly different databases, which range from sketchy information to detailed, in-depth knowledge. Yet even those with an academic historical background are not acquainted in equal depth with all historical aspects, periods and events; they too have only selective knowledge.

In both cases the image of particular past events or situations is often based, in some degree, on a tapestry of fact and fiction not always clearly distinguished. It is a combination of historical facts, mass media reports, national mythologies, artistic impressions in writing, painting or artifacts, and is supported by the person's own imagination and selective memory. These images can be grossly inaccurate with regard to detail and yet accurate enough in their general outline, so as not to be completely misleading; and they are still relevant, depending on the purpose for which they are used.

In spite of the differences among the individuals who apply historical knowledge to current tasks, they have a number of properties in common. First, they show great confidence and lack of inhibition in using the past in various forms. Second, intuitive historians, much like professional historians, rely on historical facts and have to resort to methods of transforming them by summarizing, evaluating, analyzing, inferring, judging, and interpreting. All depend on conscious or unconscious techniques for coding, storing and retrieving data. These activities do not strictly follow rules of scientific historical epistemology, and this holds true even for professional historians who have become decisionmakers. Once removed from their academic milieu, they act as intuitive historians, albeit more knowledgeable and sophisticated.

It follows that history in this context is phenomenological history, that is, the subjective perception and comprehension of past events, near or more distant, and their meaning. History to the practical-intuitive historian is all those past human activities and situations of societal significance which are perceived by him, accurately or not (cf. Dray, 1964: 4). His subject matter is similar to that of the professional historian yet his goals and treatment of it are not.

The purpose of this paper is to suggest a theoretical approach for a descriptive, explanatory, and prescriptive analysis of the practical-intuitive historian's practice of history by focusing on the following issues. What are the policy-making functions served by the use of history? How and under what circumstances are past and present compared? What are the possible motivations behind the widespread use of history? And what typical shortcomings, biases and errors, are potentially inherent in the use of historically based knowledge structures and heuristics? Thus, the paper deals with a

range of contingencies in terms of tasks, processes, motives and outcomes.

One important qualification should be noted. This study is based upon the meta-theoretical hypothesis that it is useful to approach decisionmakers as if they were practical-intuitive historians. As such it does not claim comprehensiveness and exclusiveness. Other perspectives and metatheories on decisionmaking could provide plausible reconstructions and explanations of the processes involved (Bobrow, 1972). More particularly, not all decisionmakers act as practical-intuitive historians, nor do those decisionmakers who act as such do it all of the time. The only claim made here is that this approach is useful in explaining some of the decisions some of the time.

Throughout this article the term 'use' with reference to history connotes a reliance on, and/or employment of, knowledge about past occurrences in performing or contributing to any task related to the process of decisionmaking in its most comprehensive sense. The 'abuse' of history connotes, in this context, a use of past events which is faulty in that it violates the rules of logical and/or statistical judgment and inference.

Functions of the Use of History

The use of history may serve four broad functional building blocks associated with information processing and decisionmaking:

- (a) defining the situation—the search for structuring and interpretation of information with the purpose of constructing a consistent, valid and meaningful body of knowledge about the nature of the international environment and the actors perceived to impinge on the actor's goal and value achievement;
- (b) circumscribing role—the recognition of roles and status appropriate for the actor in the international system;
- (c) determining strategy—the search for ideas and orientations about the most effective range of policies for coping with acute problems facing the actor and the choice among these policy alternatives;
- (d) justifying strategy—the process of convincing other relevant participants, domestic or foreign, that a particular policy is the most logical, practical and normatively acceptable.

The Use of History in Defining the Decisionmaking Situation

A definition of the situation is accomplished through the following cognitive operations employing knowledge of the past in various forms and levels of sophistication.

1. *Association.* Images of historical events feed the individual's or the collective's associative systems. Even though these may have no specific effect, or at least no effect that can be accurately pinpointed, they can become either a background against which present events are viewed, or a prism through which they are interpreted, as in the Holocaust syndrome in Israel's foreign policy (Brecher, 1974: 333–334). History may also serve as a source generating associative metaphors or similes, which come to the fore in the verbal expressions used, and are 'useful and ornamental in the articulation of ideas' (Fischer, 1970: 224), affecting manner of argumentation rather than substance.

It is difficult in such cases to determine the exact input of history for any specific behavior output, but it probably fulfills a descriptive function by helping to characterize present events or highlight some of their specific features, making them more vivid, salient or meaningful. For example, in the first days of the Yom Kippur War, when the Israeli Chief of Staff wanted to impress on his officers that the Egyptian army must not

be allowed, at any cost, to cross the Gidi and Mitla Passes in Sinai, he used the following metaphor: 'This is our Masada, this must not fall to the Egyptian army' (Bartov, 1978: 156). This type of historical association may introduce or remove psychological barriers, thus setting and determining the intensity of the motivational input for a particular action or its inhibition.

2. *Reality testing.* History can be used for reality testing by searching for consistency between knowledge and beliefs the decisionmaker holds (Skemp, 1979: 28) and knowledge and beliefs based on the lessons of history. In an environment where information is a legitimate target of manipulation by opponents, and as such suspect or at best ambiguous, history seems to provide an anchor of validity and truth. History, it seems, cannot be manipulated, for the facts and outcomes are known and the true meaning of the past is there for everybody to see. Attempts to manipulate it can be detected and averted. History becomes a safety net and measuring rod against which and with which other sources and the information they provide are compared and checked for credibility and validity. Such a romantic view, of the fact and truth seemingly contained in history, is unreal and may be of little real consequence to a decisionmaker seeking validity and certainty amidst ambiguity and potential deception.

Such was the case with Zbigniew Brzezinski, President Carter's national security adviser, who believed that: 'It is a well-established Soviet practice to quickly take the measure of a new US President by pressuring him strongly on some issue. Carter was no exception.' Shortly after assuming office, Carter approached the Soviet leadership with a broad proposal on arms control and Soviet-American collaboration. Brezhnev's response was described by Cyrus Vance, the Secretary of State, as 'good, hard-hitting, to the point'. But Brzezinski's diagnosis was quite different. He viewed it in terms of the first encounter between Khrushchev and Kennedy when the Soviet leader tried to browbeat Kennedy into concessions. He perceived Brezhnev's letter in the same light and as further confirmation of his belief about Soviet patterns of behavior (Brzezinski, 1983: 153-156).

3. *Causal inference.* Past events are used to uncover the causes of present events. Two process modes may be involved here, analogy and extrapolation. In analogizing, a historical event whose causes are perceived to be known is located and then defined as equivalent to the present event, followed by an analogy between the causes of both events. This actually entails a two-stage process: establishing an analogy between the two events and another one between their causes, inferring that similar outcomes convey similar causes. Searching for a rationale, explaining Giap's causes for investing and risking so many resources in an attempt to seize Khe Sanh, Westmoreland analogized from Dienbienphu. According to this line of reasoning, Khe Sanh was the key to the control of the northern provinces of South Vietnam prior to negotiation, just as the battle for Dienbienphu was intended to buttress the North Vietnamese bargaining posture at the Geneva Conference of 1954 (Karnow, 1983: 540). On the other hand, extrapolating involves perceiving the present event as an organic extension of a past event whose causes are known. The assumed continuity is applied also to the causes of the present situation which, by definition, are then the same as those of the earlier event.

4. *Motives and intentions judgment.* Much of a decisionmaker's time and effort are taken up by trying to uncover the intentions of other actors within his own decisionmaking system, as well as those beyond his national borders. As in causal inference, there are two paths to the use of history in this context. In analogizing, a past event in which intentions are known is compared with the current event, and the actor's intentions in the current event are deduced accordingly. For example, when in May 1967 the

Egyptian army moved troops across the Suez Canal into Sinai, Egypt's motives defied explanation by Israeli intelligence. The problem was then defined by analogy to the 1960 precedent, when Egyptian troops had advanced across Sinai to the Israeli border to demonstrate solidarity with Syria, only to withdraw a few weeks later. It was assumed by the Israeli military that, in light of the tensions on the Israeli–Syrian border in 1967, Egyptian motives were the same as in 1960 (Eban, 1977: 323). On the other hand, when the extrapolation path is followed, knowledge of the actor's intentions in the past provides understanding of his present intentions through the assumption of continuity in intentions.

5. *Detection of continuity and change.* Viewing current events in a historical perspective may help highlight continuity and change in patterns of behavior of self and others. Consequently a single specific event acquires meaning far beyond its immediate implications. Once such a current event is placed in the context of or seen as one more link in a consistent chain of events which have a coherent meaning, it gains salience beyond its actual proportions. It then becomes not an isolated event but part of a pattern and sometimes a law of history, and what is merely descriptive information is given diagnostic value.

6. *Predictive inference.* Not only is history useful in identifying continuity and change after they have occurred, but past events are used to predict future events or the pattern of evolution of a present event. The analogical inference employed here is one of the following: 'In the past, general category of events "x" led to general category of outcomes "y"', or, alternatively, 'specific event "a" led to specific outcome "b"'; the same holds true for the current situation'. The analogy involves identifying a past event with a present event and then accepting the premise that the same past outcomes will repeat themselves in the future.

The American administration knew almost nothing about the Hanoi leadership and its intentions. It tended toward perceiving it as a unitary rational actor calculating cost and risk and ready to back off whenever the cost-benefit calculus would tilt decisively toward increased cost over gains. This assumption rested to a certain degree on the lessons of the Korean War: 'We were inclined to assume, however, that they [North Vietnam's leadership] would behave like the North Korean and the Red Chinese of a decade before: that is they would seek an accommodation with us when the cost of pursuing a losing course became excessive' (Taylor, 1972: 15; Thies, 1982: 218–220).

7. *Dissonance reduction.* When threatened by potential postdecisional cognitive dissonance, history may serve to relocate the burden of responsibility from the decision-maker to the metaphysical, the 'course of history'. Thus, reluctance to make a decision is overcome, especially in high-risk choice situations. Furthermore, the observed tendency toward postdecisional regret and its related urge for decision reversal (Festinger and Walster, 1964) are avoided.

The Use of History in Circumscribing an Actor's Role and Determining Strategy

A second type of function served by the use of history is the circumscribing of actors' roles, at the individual and national levels, through history's impact on the shaping of self-perception. It provides important inputs for the definition of self, as well as a sense of self-esteem at both the individual and national levels (Thorne, 1983: 125–127). Nations learn from history their role, their status, what their aspirations should be, and how they are different from other nations. The past they rely on is not necessarily actual history, but at times invented history which is either devised and interpreted from remembered history or actually fabricated (Lewis, 1975).

A self-portrait and sense of elitism or mission, therefore, may become a powerful source of preference for specific behavioral patterns, as demonstrated, for example, by Jewish, Japanese, German, or French history. History becomes a source of some of the core national central beliefs about the nature of the world and the nation's role and status in it which are shared by both leaders and followers (Bar-Tal, 1983).

Circumscribing an actor's role has indirect effects on the choice of strategy, but the use of history could also serve as a direct input determining strategy.

1. *Problem recognition and formulation.* Coping requires recognition of problems and then solving them. Problems, real or imagined, are not detected and recognized only by observation or logical reasoning but frequently through inference from analogical reasoning. Awareness of past problems focuses attention on current problems of a similar type. When such an analogy is missing, it is not unusual for vigilance towards problems to decline until their consequences call attention to their existence. At that point it may be too late to adjust and cope effectively.

But when problem recognition is stimulated by historical knowledge, this knowledge is bound to become an input to the manner in which current decision problems are formulated, that is, deciding what options and outcomes are to be considered, and how the terms of the problem are operationalized. Kahneman and Tversky's (1979b) 'prospect theory' has demonstrated that the way in which problems are formulated can have strong effects on the attractiveness of related options. The implication is that historical knowledge, which is instrumental in recognizing the problem and formulating it, thus affects indirectly the attractiveness and hence the ranking of preferences for alternative solutions, even when the considered solutions or options in themselves are derived logically and not analogically.

The Germans' 'Copenhagen complex' illuminates these points. In the autumn of 1807 the British Navy launched a surprise attack on Copenhagen leading to the seizure of the Danish fleet and the bombardment of Copenhagen. During the years before 1914, Kaiser Wilhelm II and his military and political advisers feared a repeat performance which would destroy the Imperial Navy and with it Germany's world position.

It [the Copenhagen complex] seeped into men's perceptions and became part of the vocabulary of political life. By becoming a fixed point in the German picture of the outside world, the 'Copenhagen complex' in its turn helped to shape the events themselves and played a part often as crucial in the formulation of German policy as the more tangible 'facts' of traditional diplomacy and military strategy (Steinberg, 1966: 23–24).

German military planning and, in particular, the expansion and role assigned to its naval power was heavily affected by the Copenhagen complex. Diplomatically, the Copenhagen complex acted to limit the flexibility on the range of options open to German foreign policy, by providing assurance of inherent bad faith on the part of England and its intention to 'Copenhagen' (surprise attack) Germany at the first convenient occasion, contributing to occasional panics and deterioration of relations with England (although the effect of the Copenhagen complex declined after 1907, when other more comprehensive fears of encirclement displaced the specific fears of a British attack) (Steinberg, 1966).

2. *Prescription.* The past provides prescriptions for what should or should not be done. This may be in the form of simple rules of thumb. However, it may also take more complex forms such as guides for behavior with different levels of generality and abstraction. A case of a most abstract and philosophical prescription is Kissinger's

assertion that: 'If history teaches anything it is that there can be no peace without equilibrium and no justice without restraint' (Kissinger, 1979: 55). A less abstract but general foreign policy orientation, is 'no more Vietnams', which, however, because it does not suggest a case-specific policy, might become a cause of dispute between policy-makers as to what is its operational meaning (Ravenal, 1980). But the past can also be a source of more specific policy directions for certain issue areas, or towards specific actors, such as friendliness, trust, alliance, or a very specific policy recommendation for a particular situation or circumstance.

3. *Choice.* In complex choice situations, the decisionmaker, in order to eliminate some of the available alternatives, may select particular aspects and apply them to the alternatives at hand, eliminating those not possessing such aspects. He repeats this process until he is left with the one alternative having the requisite criteria. According to Tversky (1972), people prefer this approach when faced with an important decision which stimulates the search for a principle of choice more compelling than relying on estimation of relative cost-benefit or other similar computations. Within this strategy of choice, historical experience can be a source of such aspects, the question posed being whether alternative 'x' has aspect 'y', which was present in a similar choice situation in the past (e.g., support of a superpower for alternative 'x'). Alternatively, the mere existence of a historical precedent might in itself be the aspect of choice, such that all alternatives not having a historical precedent are eliminated without being considered further.

The Use of History in Justifying Strategy

Once a preference for a specific strategy emerges, its proponents can also use history to justify it logically or normatively. This process may occur either before the actual choice is made, or after the strategy is chosen or implemented.

1. *Argumentation.* When information about the situation is complex and poses a high level of uncertainty and where power is shared (Axelrod, 1977), argumentation by reference to history is a vital component of policy formulation and serves as a means of persuading both self and others. This form of argumentation is essential in clarifying the causal structure of the situation and the inherent logic of a cause/effect or means/end sequence. It helps in highlighting trends or in narration, i.e., revealing meaning and coherence in a complex set of events.

In 1969, Nixon attempted to bring the Vietnam War to an end by emulating Eisenhower's method of extracting America from another unpopular war, the Korean War. Responding to a question in August 1968, while a presidential candidate, he said:

How do you bring a war to a conclusion? I'll tell you how Korea was ended. We got in there and had this messy war on our hands. Eisenhower let the word go out—let the word go out diplomatically—to the Chinese and the North Koreans that we should not tolerate this continual ground war of attrition. And within a matter of months, they negotiated. Well, as far as negotiation [in Vietnam] is concerned that should be our position . . . (Hersh, 1983: 51–53).

He was referring to the use of a nuclear threat as in 1953 which, in his view, brought the war to an end.

2. *Legitimacy acquisition.* History is used to legitimize policies, rules of behavior or demands made of other actors. In that regard, history may provide the sources for the two types of legitimacy, normative and cognitive, that a political leadership requires for its policies in the estimation of its domestic public and of the international community.

Normative legitimacy establishes the desirability of a policy in terms of its being consistent with fundamental national or international values. History, however, may also be a source of cognitive legitimacy, which depends on a leadership's ability to prove the feasibility of its policies.¹ For example, in the argument just advanced by President Nixon, the proven effectiveness of the nuclear threat in the Korean context provides both cognitive and normative legitimacy to such a policy. Normative legitimacy stems from the mere fact that there was a precedent to the 'madman strategy', and cognitive legitimacy is the result of the recognition that the policy worked in the past and led to the settlement of the Korean War.

At a more general level, history is used to promote the legitimacy of a social order by proving that its policies are analogical to policies which achieved desired results in the past or, alternatively, that the same leadership has had a record of past successes. In the latter case, the analogy between events is replaced by an analogy between the abilities and/or quality of performance of the leadership in the past and the present. When Hitler decided to repudiate the Locarno Treaty and reoccupy the Rhineland in 1936, he did this despite strong protests and dire warnings from the German High Command. That he emerged from that affair with his first major victory increased his faith in what he described as his 'schlafwandlerische Sicherheit' (sleepwalker's assurance) in foreign affairs. This was to cause him to reject all warnings about his daring ventures following the Rhineland affair. After the Munich Affair of 1938, most of the General Staff were convinced that the Führer was invincible and that there was no choice but to go along with his grandiose schemes (Craig, 1964: 486–489, 500).

This exhaustive list of decisionmaking-related functions served by the application of historical knowledge illuminates the scope of its utility and relevance through all stages of decisionmaking: diagnosis of the problem, search for information, revision of estimates, evaluation of alternatives, choice and postdecisional consequences. It is now imperative to understand the process through which this mental operation unfolds, in order to comprehend the range of contingent outcomes and consequences.

The Process of Comparing Past, Present, and Future

The practical-intuitive historian applies his knowledge of history, whatever it is, to current problems in three different but related ways: analogy, metaphor, and extrapolation. The first two rest on a premise of *transfer* which assumes *discontinuity* between the past and present or future, but at least some *correspondence* between events or processes at two different points in time. The third, extrapolation, assumes *continuity* between the past and present or future. These are reflected at one level in common judgmental heuristics, such as *representativeness*, *anchorings*, and *availability*, which are shortcuts to inferential tasks.

At a different and more sophisticated level, historical data provide knowledge structures which have multiple purposes and different forms of representation in terms of structure, abstraction, and propositional content. This store of knowledge could be represented as abstract general beliefs or theories. It is particularly characteristic of professional historians entering politics. For example, Kissinger observes: 'When I entered office, I brought with me a philosophy formed by two decades of the study of history' (Walker, 1977; Kissinger, 1979: 54).

A second type of representation has a schema-like and less propositional structure that anchors generic expectations about persons, objects, situations, and event-sequences

¹ The distinction between these two types of legitimacy is discussed in George (1980).

(processes). Schemas are of two main forms: *personae*, which are cognitive structures representing the personal characteristics and typical behaviors of particular 'stock characters' (Cantor and Mischel, 1979; Nisbett and Ross, 1980: 35), e.g., Hitler, Chamberlain, Genghis Khan; and *script*, which is:

. . . a hypothesized cognitive structure which when activated organizes comprehension of event-based situations. In its 'weak' sense, it is a bundle of inferences about the potential occurrence of a set of events, and may be structurally similar to other schemas which do not deal with events. In its 'strong' sense, expectations are present about the order as well as the occurrence of events (Abelson, 1980: 8).

e.g., Balkanization, Trojan Horse. Both types provide an interpretive framework—which resolves ambiguity—and have a 'gap filling' role by supplementing information given with much assumed information (Nisbett and Ross, 1980: 29). Thus the decision-maker overcomes anticipatory regret, is less hesitant to venture beyond the most immediate implication of the information at hand, and is more prepared to confront rather than avoid complex, uncertain situations.

Past events' storage and representation could, however, take the form of an available knowledge kit—that is, disjointed concrete bits of information about a single historical event or a number of events stored in memory—to be assembled when circumstances demand it and trigger the recall of the data in question. Structure is then imposed on the components of the kit. The particular immediate needs serve as the diagram guiding the assemblage of the knowledge kit into a picture or pattern of the past, which may be accurate or false, but nonetheless has diagnostic value. Once it has served its purpose the assembled kit is restored to memory, either in its assembled form to be used again in the future, or it could be disassembled and the different components stored independently.

Because historical knowledge is stored in long-term memory, its use involves recall and retrieval. Access to it then depends on the ease of retrieval, which entails the use of heuristics such as availability or representativeness.² Following retrieval comes organizing the components of knowledge about relevant historical events in a form that will make it usable for current tasks and circumstances. In those cases when a historical event has been transformed and stored at a high level of abstract representation, it could cause a perceived high completeness of the analogy, not necessarily justified, by deleting the mismatching details. As a consequence, future availability of the analogy will be facilitated (Gick and Holyoak, 1983).

Some of the knowledge regarding historical events is shared by a majority of the individuals within the same social group as part of the common national heritage; other knowledge about history is stored in the individual's memory in a particularistic form which is unique to him. That observation is important for understanding the individual-specific differential trigger mechanisms of retrieval and usage of the same past events by different members of the decisionmaking elite.³ It also has implications for the impact of

² The availability heuristic is used to judge the frequency and likelihood of events through their accessibility in the process of perception, memory or construction from memory (Tversky and Kahneman, 1973, 1974). The representativeness heuristic is based on the use of perceived similarity between the known attributes of the object and the features presumed to be characteristics of the category (Kahneman and Tversky, 1971).

³ At the organizational level different organizations in the same country will learn dissimilar and selective lessons from the same historical experience and will assimilate varied facets of the same experience, in response to their particular prevailing task orientations and performance indicators, defined by organizational subculture or the external guidance provided to the organizations by the administration in power (Lovell, 1984).

shared historical knowledge on the emergence of groupthink in small-group dynamics. The appearance of groupthink symptoms in this context will depend on a number of preconditions:

1. a situation which triggers in the minds of the group's members the *same* historical associations;
2. a *similar* interpretation of this historical data by group members;
3. a felt *need* for consensus within the group.

History can then provide the common denominator for the emergence of consensus. In the period preceding the United States' 1965 intervention in the Dominican Republic, preoccupation with avoiding a 'second Cuba' predominated thinking at all decision-making forums in Washington. This became the prism through which events and personalities related to the Dominican Republic were interpreted, leading to a widely shared diagnostic, prognostic and prescriptive consensus which was actually based on distortion and misperception (Lowenthal, 1972: 153–154).

The search for and retrieval of what is perceived as currently relevant knowledge about the past must be followed by the critical stage of comparing and defining the perceived similitude between the compared events.⁴ Its outcome largely determines if and how the decisionmaker will proceed in applying this historical knowledge to current needs and tasks. The process of comparison could result in one of the following contingent conclusions regarding the fit between the compared cases along the spectrum from identity to irrelevance:

1. *Identity*. The compared events are considered to be virtually identical, one almost an exact replication of the other. In April–May 1945 a crisis over the control of Venezia Giulia and later Trieste emerged between Tito and the Allies, when Tito's partisans took over Venezia Giulia and Trieste. Secretary Grew analyzed the situation as follows: 'The parallels are *precise* with what Hitler did before, during and after Munich'. Consequently Truman was ready to reverse his earlier firm resolve not to get the United States involved in Balkan politics and use force if necessary, because Truman now overestimated the probability that Tito's territorial demands would expand like Hitler's due to what seemed an exact analogy (Welch-Larson, 1982: 238–239).

2. *Similarity*. The more common case is when the main attributes of the compared events are perceived as identical but at the same time it is recognized that there are attributes and dimensions that differ, which should not be allowed to interfere with learning lessons from the analogy.

3. *Familiarity*. A category may be created around a prototypical historical event/personality (exemplar) to which a current event/personality is compared. What we have then is a fuzzy category that does not have clearly distinct borders, nor do the components included in it need to be similar in any sense, but have only a family resemblance. Reflecting on Vietnam, President Johnson came to the conclusion that the conflict in Vietnam 'included elements of the Korean War, of the Huk Rebellion in the Philippines, and of the Greek Civil War, yet it was unlike any of them' (Johnson, 1971: 241).

4. *Contradiction*. Compared events that are perceived to be the reverse mirror images of each other carry a lesson learned by counter-analogy. General Westmoreland was aware of the Khe Sanh/Dienbienphu analogy which dominated the thinking in

⁴ This might lead to a biased search for similarity, with the individual attending more to common than to distinctive features of the events (Tversky, 1977: 339). The salience of an analogical event is also in itself an incentive to search for similarity between it and the immediate concerns of the decisionmaker.

Washington and among his own staff. He, however, pointed out that in spite of the superficial resemblance of the terrain, weather and the enemy, Khe Sanh was very different from Dienbienphu. Dienbienphu was a deep valley while Khe Sanh was a plateau; unlike the French, the Americans held four key dominating terrain features; he could give artillery support to the defender from the outside and had immense air power and superior aerial supply capability which the French lacked (Westmoreland, 1976: 337–338). Hence he expected the outcomes to be Dienbienphu in reverse, that is a decisive defeat to General Giap.

Analogies of the ‘contradiction’ category could act as a guide for eliminating certain alternatives as inappropriate to the event at hand, thus restricting the number of alternative explanations, predictions or prescriptions. This reduces the choice load and eases trade-off calculations and cost-benefit analyses facing the decisionmaker.

5. *Irrelevance*. The compared events are perceived to be neither similar nor dissimilar but noncomparable and therefore irrelevant to each other. Rejecting an analogy can serve as a reason or justification for the inference that the present event or situation is novel, hence providing legitimacy for adopting creative deviant policies or interpretations, and offering an opportunity for innovation.

The degree to which any analogy is perceived as closer to one or the other side of the continuum, from identity to irrelevance, has a number of general implications. First, different decisionmaking functions call for different levels of trust in the validity of what is learned from historical analogies. Validity is perceived to be related to the level of fit or similitude between the compared events, which is set by the decisionmaker as the minimal threshold for valid inference from analogizing. The more demanding, committing and risky (in terms of the cost of failure) the task before him, the higher will be that threshold, even for a satisficer. When the decisionmaker commits himself and carries responsibility for policy outcomes, he will tend to avoid taking action unless he is as sure as possible: (a) of the validity of the analogy (thus requiring him to set stricter conditions for validity); (b) that there is no other, better, easier, or more reassuring path to reach a conclusion; (c) that there is a pressing need to arrive at operative conclusions and that procrastination and delay are impossible.

When conditions (b) and (c) are present, the strict conditions for validity may sometimes be relaxed, in spite of the high-risk personal commitment by the decisionmaker. This is so, for example, in recurring international crises, which have analogies with preceding crises that were met by successful strategies. Under such circumstances, an impetus for repeating these same strategies is there, which leads to neglect of the particular circumstances to which they owed their success. Thus, Edward Grey, on the eve of World War I, expecting that Germany would again restrain Austria, was preparing for a ‘restrain allies and hold conference’ strategy, which worked so well in the 1909 Morocco Crisis and the 1912–1913 Balkan conferences (Snyder and Diesing, 1977: 370–371).

But the question whether the past analogy is perceived to have been a success or a failure has further significance (Jervis, 1976: 232–233; 275–279; Leng, 1983). In the former case, the same strategy is to be repeated, and the decisionmaker positively knows what he should do, as Nixon’s approach to the Korean analogy demonstrates. A past failure, on the other hand, is used as a guide to what *should not* be done. Thus it eliminates certain policy alternatives but does not serve as a guide to what *should* be done (unless there are only two policy options). History, in the latter case, serves only as a means of limiting the number of alternatives that have to be considered, thereby lightening the burden of choice.

Finally, it follows from the logic of analogical reasoning that the greater the perceived correspondence between past and present or future, the greater the perceived credibility of the analogy and the appropriateness of analogical reasoning perceived to be. Consequently, the relative weight of inferences and definitions of the situation based on learning from history, as compared with competing inferences and definitions of the situation based on other knowledge structures such as deductive logic, is higher. In the same vein, the greater the perceived correspondence the more likely is high credibility and trust in the validity of the analogy, and hence the more resistant to disconfirmation by dissonant information become predispositions and inferences drawn by such analogy.

Motivations for the Use of History

Types of Motivations

Why is the use of history so tempting and widespread among decisionmakers? In a nutshell, because it is functional, convenient, habitual and socially acceptable. The past, as has been argued, can be exploited for coping with a wide variety of information-processing and decisionmaking-related tasks, and the mental procedures involved are familiar and accessible to political leaders. Foreign policy decisionmakers are not, in most cases, specifically trained and prepared for coping with the complexities of international politics. When beset with the realities of foreign policy problems and with the complexities and uncertainties of the international political arena, it is natural that they bring to bear those coping mechanisms with which they have had past experience. By transferring skills acquired in other professions and issue-areas to the political field they avoid the stress and sense of inadequacy which may result from having to search for and apply new, for them untested, coping strategies with which they have had no experience.

Reasoning by analogy is pervasive in everyday experience, and applying this method to foreign policy problems thus comes naturally and seems appropriate, especially since it is flexible and does not preclude and could fit with the use of other strategies. Hence the extensive use of historical analogies in performing foreign policy-making tasks. That sense of familiarity, however, has its drawbacks. It prevents or delays recognition of the limits of validity of the lessons of history to current decision tasks and the difference between the realm of politics and other issue-areas, because '[Subjects] are remarkably consistent in their approaches to analogy problems, even with problems different widely in content, format and difficulty' (Sternberg, 1977: 376). Consequently, preference for information processing and decisionmaking by analogy, as well as an exaggerated perception of similitude between past events and present problems and information, are enhanced.

The tendency to lean on history is further promoted by the nature of human cognitive style, needs, and limits. International politics is one of the more complex and uncertain arenas of human involvement and occupation. Coping with it is, accordingly, most demanding and stressful. Decisionmakers thus frequently, consciously or unconsciously, opt for non-rational decision procedures or bounded rationality procedures (Allison, 1971; Steinbruner, 1974; Stein and Tanter, 1980). It is troublesome or even impossible to define and reach consensus on what is 'good', 'rational', or 'successful' policy, even post facto, when outcomes are already known, not to mention the difficulties of establishing what will be the 'best' alternative before decisions are taken and implemented.

As the stakes get higher and the environment less predictable and more complex, failure becomes both more probable and costly at the same time. It becomes tempting to define 'good' policy as that which is easy to explain and justify to self and others (Tversky, 1972; Slovic, 1975; Anderson, 1981). The use of history provides then a precedent and a key to choice, which meets the criterion of 'accountability' rather than the usual normative cost-effectiveness criterion of rationality. Decisionmakers with a cognitive style of preference for little deliberation and swift reflexive decisions will be particularly prone to use simplistic historical analogies in support of the predicted outcomes of such a decision process, even when faced with the most complex problems.

Another motive is ingrained in the social environment. Current foreign policy problems are often grounded in past national history, and thus decisionmakers are forced to take cognizance of that history and be attuned to it. It becomes part of their evoked set, and as such an immediate input into task performance. At the same time, the role of national leadership focuses the attention of role-occupants on the common denominators of the national entity. One of the most important of these is the shared heritage of national experience. Moreover, being in a national leadership role requires awareness of national missions, aspirations, and identity which draw on the history of the nation, its past glories, defeats, achievements, and performance.

And, finally, the use of history as a guide might be part of a personal world-view and philosophy, or an attribute of the national culture, or both. Some individuals show a *déjà vu* syndrome. They have a strong sense of history, and to them the past is a living reality to be almost always consulted and a rod against which present and future realities are to be measured. In the same vein, some nations, especially those with a history reaching back to ancient times, are strongly history-minded and pass this orientation on to their individual members as part of the socialization process. Hence, for example, Chinese or Israeli political leaders may show a stronger tendency to use past experience than American decisionmakers (cf. Hoffmann, 1968; Glenn, Johnson, Kimmel, and Wedge, 1970).

All except for the last motive are universal in their application, which explains the cross-cultural character of the phenomenon we are dealing with. Yet calling upon knowledge about past experience in decisionmaking tasks is a practice applied differently by individuals in comparable situations, even in the rare case when the reservoir of historical knowledge of two individuals is quite similar. This is partly so because storage formats of historical data in memory differ between persons, and recalling and retrieving past experiences is dependent on a particular stimulus for each individual which will then trigger the proper search mechanism, decide what information will be recalled, and in what format; these differences will affect how the historical knowledge will be applied to current needs.

The Interaction Between Motivations and Circumstances

The next step is to stipulate the situational circumstances which interact with these motivations to trigger the use of history by decisionmakers, either by itself or in conjunction with other coping strategies and knowledge structures. The nexus of motivations and circumstances is summarized in Table 1 and articulated below.

First, when response time is too short to go through and follow formal rules of judgment and inferential procedures in order to give meaning, predict or produce a prescription, the retreat to the lesson of history, if an appropriate one seems available, is a tempting and even a logical shortcut. Past experience then could become a standard operating procedure (SOP) and part of a cybernetic path to choice. Second, those

TABLE 1. Situational Trigger—Motivation Nexus

| <i>Situational triggers</i> | <i>Motivation</i> |
|-----------------------------|--|
| 1. Short response time | 1. Transfer of experience 2. Cognitive limits 3. Justification |
| 2. Ambiguity | 1. Cognitive limits 2. Justification |
| 3. High risk/uncertainty | 1. Cognitive limits 2. Justification 3. Evoked set |
| 4. Issue-area | 1. Evoked set 2. World-view (individual or cultural) |
| 5. Societal climates | 1. Evoked set 2. World-view (individual or cultural) |

situations where information is ambiguous, or where evidence seems equally given to contradictory interpretation, provide an impetus to search for a decisive input to resolve ambiguity. A historical precedent would serve this end.

Third, in situations of high risk and uncertainty, when a decisionmaker cannot rely for reinforcement on his immediate social circle—because, for example, he is considered too far above them to receive their approval of his conduct—he will fall back on a higher authority: history. Thus it is not incidental that charismatic leaders so often use historical analogies. Ironically, the same approach can be adopted by a weak indecisive leader who cannot get support and assurance from his immediate social group, which is unsure and unwilling to make risky decisions. He will then tend to look for support in past experience where he might find both cognitive and normative legitimacy for his diagnosis and prognosis, and will gain a sense of control over his environment. This is especially true of high-threat situations where the risks involved in a mistaken interpretation of the situation, and the costs of choosing an inappropriate course of action, are high. Support from past experience or historical personalities, which are used as authorities and crown witnesses, becomes a source of assurance and comfort in the face of possible failure and the excessive cost it might entail.

Fourth, certain issues areas, such as national security, seem more prone than others to invite the use of past national experience as a means of coping. This may perhaps be attributed to the fact that past events in this area are more vivid and therefore more available, being easier to recall. Furthermore, nations tend to perceive their historical continuity in the context of a security-political frame of reference and hence are more likely to extrapolate from the past into the present in this area.

Finally, political leadership operates in the context of social emotional climates, and societies pass through periods in which escape into past glories or suffering becomes a pronounced aspect of their mood. In such times it is to be expected that national leaders will feel tempted to manipulate and make more intensive use of the past in performing their tasks. Special attention will be given to those historical events on which either the societal climate is already fixated, or that best reflect the prevailing national mood.

The Shortcomings of Using History

Using knowledge about the past in decisionmaking-related tasks may involve abuses

resulting in biases and fallacies. These can be grouped into four categories of abuses: contextual, transformation, epistemological, and subconscious.

Contextual Errors

Contextual abuses are those which are related to the social or learning contexts. Einhorn (1980) contends that rules which were learned inductively are extremely context-oriented. It follows that the decisionmaker is faced with an obstacle in transferring rules learned from prior events to current events, because contexts always differ at least somewhat. To overcome this problem, he can manipulate either the attributes of the initial context from which the rules were deduced or the current context. In the first case, the past context will be defined in the most basic simplistic manner so as to make it more similar and therefore relevant to more future and present occurrences than it should. In the latter case the current context is manipulated, and an assimilation process distorts the current event to make it look as analogous as possible to a similar past event.

The context of learning defines how much is learned and with what effects. Historical events, in which the decisionmaker participated or observed first-hand involving his nation, have much stronger and lasting effects than other types of historically based data. Consequently, these are more likely to become sources of hot cognitions (Janis and Mann, 1977), are more available, are recognized early as candidates for analogy, and will be used by the decisionmaker more often for this purpose—which in turn will further increase their availability. These events are for the decisionmaker a source of more concrete information than other historical events and, being more vivid, are likely to call up additional information and/or organized schemas and scripts from memory (Borgida and Nisbett, 1977; Nisbett and Ross, 1980: 54). They become a dominating feature in his mental procedures, are used more frequently, and more is learned from such experience compared with other contexts of learning (Jervis, 1976: 232–242).

At the extreme such events are overlearned and consequently used mindlessly, leading to premature cognitive commitment and low creativity in task enactment. And yet, experiencing or participating in a historical event would not necessarily make it always available when a current relevant situation or problem occurs. Suppression of past experiences could happen in the same manner and for the same reasons other cognitive components are suppressed, although not unlearned or destroyed (Bjork, 1978). Suppression may serve such needs as ego-defense or preserving consistency.⁵

Inferences learned from history are suppressed rather than unlearned due to their resistance to disconfirmation; history provides the practical-intuitive historian with generic knowledge, hypotheses and theories about the nature of the world and the actors in it. Moreover, research has shown that there is a general preference for attempting to confirm initially held hypotheses rather than disconfirm them or thoroughly check alternative hypotheses (Wason and Johnson-Laird, 1972: 241; Anderson, Lepper, and Ross, 1980: 1045–1047; Hansen, 1980: 1009). This would also seem to suggest that theories, conclusions and lessons drawn from historical knowledge tend to bias one's acquisition and use of further information towards confirmation and away from disconfirmation.

In particular, knowledge which is embedded in traumatic historical events, which contains a strong affective element and becomes a source of central beliefs, is immensely difficult to refute or falsify. It encourages a persistent search for validating evidence and

⁵ See, for example, Nehru's analysis of the global system in the context of the Sino-Indian Conflict (Vertzberger, 1984: 80–84, 231–256).

has stereotypical effects with regard to the expected behavior of other actors, which is accorded a higher likelihood of occurrence than such behavior should have had (Snyder and Swann, 1978). It follows that conclusions and interpretations which are based on applying historical scripts are even less amenable to logical or evidential challenges than deductive abstract theories (Ross, 1978). The historical event sequence is perceived as closed, based on irrefutable fact, and is not in doubt, while theories until proven can at least be questioned.

Biased sensitization to confirming evidence leads to decreasing awareness or even a complete disregard for disconfirming evidence, which provides a false sense of security in the validity of the belief in question. A self-perpetuating process is then produced due to the tendency toward a superior recall for data confirming previously held expectancies and beliefs (Rothbart, Evans, and Fulero, 1979). As a result, such beliefs become too readily accessible, leading to premature cognitive closure and cascading errors.

Furthermore, the decisionmaker's data bank of historical knowledge is in most cases too limited and superficial for further validation or disconfirmation of initial conclusions. Herbert Feis describes President Truman's knowledge of history as 'sketchy' (1967: 101). In spite of that, Truman did not hesitate to use spontaneous historical analogies as the basis of his definition of the problem of and reactions to the North Korean attack on South Korea, as can be seen from his own description of his gut reaction to the situation (Truman, 1956: 378-379). It is not by chance that where we find decisionmakers learning the lesson of history, a process of updating this lesson, in the Bayesian sense, is often missing.

Another learning context fallacy is associated with a critical learning function of every organism, that is, to observe and assess change in its environment and adapt its reaction to this change so as to assure optimal adjustment at minimal cost. Detecting and observing abrupt revolutionary change is relatively simple because this type of change attracts attention. However, in the context of gradual, continuous, incremental change, it is much more difficult to detect the nature of change, and learning is limited and selective. Slowly evolving change, spread over long periods of time, is elusive and does not attract attention until the observer is faced with the final transformation. This has often been the case in international politics. Decisionmakers are unaware of change until shocked into recognition of it by war or some other major crisis.

Change is defined by the transformation of an object or situation between two points in time. Hence, observing change implies an act of memorizing the object/situation as it was in t_0 and comparing it to its state in point t_1 in time. Consequently, observing and defining the nature of change will depend on the quality of historical memory. We have already noted that historical memory is prone to manipulation, whereby it transforms the past to look more like the present (Snyder, 1981) or involves selective learning and memorizing. Consequently, the observation of change and the accuracy of its perception will depend on the extent to which the past was manipulated by memory-encoding processes.

Social context provides a different opportunity for context-related judgment biases. Decisionmaking within a small-group environment involves commonly shared knowledge and affect about dominating historical events and could lead to groupthink even in face of reliable dissonant information. What keeps group members in line and prevents deviation is the authority of History, which plays the role usually ascribed in groupthink theory to one of the group members—the whip. One can argue, sometimes, with the authority of another human being; it is more difficult to argue with a meta-

physical entity such as history. When such historical analogy generates a strong sense of external threat associated with the current situation, it makes intra-group dissent even less likely, and conformism comes to predominate group discussions.

Transformation Errors

A second category of errors and biases is related to the consequences of transformation, or the insidious elevation effects which historical analogies and metaphors may have on information. In extreme cases certain historical events are elevated to become myths. When this transformation occurs, the affective power of the event involves hot cognitive processes whenever that event comes up in decision tasks. A myth cannot be disconfirmed even when there is no evidence to prove it or even when the evidence actually disproves it. The double effect of a myth being easily available and vivid in the minds of the decisionmakers and its perseverance makes it a factor continuously affecting cognitive tasks, consciously and unconsciously, and a powerful barrier to adjustment to new and dissonant information.

Another problem area is what Fischer (1970: 244) has termed the use of 'insidious analogy', which relates to the use of metaphor in everyday speech. Metaphor is sometimes a form of analogy, but the user may be unaware that he is using an analogy. These types of artificial or 'insidious' analogies (e.g., terms such as Quisling, Renaissance, Spartan) have a strong impact upon conceptualization by the spillover of analogous connotations, and thus, unknowingly, bring biases into the interpretation of information. Such metaphors direct attention to some aspects of the subject at the expense of others (Verbrugge and McCarrell, 1977), and not always the most important and relevant aspects. Thus, what is used only for the purpose of the literal manner of articulation becomes inadvertently and, unbeknownst to the user, an input into channelling and allocating attention.

Similarly, the power of analogies that are used only for clarification, better understanding, and a more vivid argument, is such that they are sometimes taken, mistakenly, as proof for those arguments. In such cases, the plausibility which an analogy adds to an argument is confused with validity. Furthermore, when concrete historical analogies compete with information presented in statistical form, their effect is stronger than that of the pallid but highly probative information represented by the statistical data (cf. Nisbett and Ross, 1980: 55-59). Historical metaphors add vividness to a data set, and nondiagnostic data thereby gain a diagnostic impact they do not deserve. This impact is enhanced by the fact that certain types of data which have a diagnostic substance do not lend themselves to effective metaphorical representation; that is the case with statistics as opposed to anecdotal information.

A vivid perception of threat, triggered or interpreted in the context of an analogical historical situation, seems more real and is pervasive and dominates attention as well as affective and cognitive processes. It is not an abstract source of anxiety but a specific detailed picture. The historical analogy transforms the threat by injecting into it a sense of fake reality which may go beyond its actual reality. This is particularly true when the analogy is a historical event which was already the object of literary and artistic attention. President Johnson, who was aware of the gruesome details of Dienbienphu, began dreaming and having nightmares about it during the battle of Khe Sanh, which prevented him from sleeping. Johnson began to spend his nights in the White House basement reading cables, demanding detailed information, photographs and maps, but the image of Dienbienphu was always with him (Pisor, 1983: 105, 114).

Epistemological Errors

The third category includes epistemological abuses, i.e., those biases and errors resulting from the misuse of legitimate rules and heuristics, such as anchoring, representativeness and availability heuristics, sample treatment, and comparative analysis. For example, extrapolation of the past into the present (continuity) is tempting for two reasons: it is simple and it conforms with the widely used anchoring heuristic (Tversky and Kahneman, 1974: 1128). At the same time, however, the present may not be an extrapolation of the past, for there are often discontinuities in human affairs. And even when continuity basically exists between the two, some important elements of discontinuity might also be present. Hence, the past can serve as an anchor for knowledge about the present, but necessary adjustments need to be made.

Second, representativeness might be triggered by anecdotal similar features of compared situations, increasing the availability of certain past events; this phenomenon may make irrelevant schemas seem representative of a current situation. In the early months of World War I, President Woodrow Wilson found himself in dispute with the British over American rights on the seas. The diary of Colonel House records the President as saying:

Madison and I are the only two Princeton men that have become President. The circumstances of the war of 1812 and now run parallel. I sincerely hope they will not go further (May, 1973: ix).

The anecdotal information that both he and Madison, the incumbent presidents, were Princeton men led Wilson to draw an analogy between the two events.

Also, a state of affairs that is characterized as similar to an event in the past hardly makes it identical with the past case. However, there is a propensity to use the representativeness rule to find identity where there is only limited similarity relevant to the problem at hand. The result may be the tendency observed by Jervis (1976: 230) of belittling the significance of the unique circumstances and making misplaced generalizations.

In the same vein, scripts based on historical knowledge structures are activated when an evoking context is present and the decisionmaker decides to apply them to situations at hand. Once a central component for such a script is recognized in a current problem, a false script could be evoked and a gap-filling process might be triggered where false recognition of nonexistent events could occur. A fictitious reality is then constructed in the perceiver's mind with its related misguided expectations. This process is due to two related fallacies which are inherent in the logic of script-based information processing: (a) neglect to take into account that *different* scripts could share common particular scenes, and thus there is need for more evidence before identifying the relevant script; (b) the existence of some script components do not necessarily lead to the unfolding of the rest of the script, as the representativeness heuristic inclines the perceiver to expect. Hence, certainty about the evolvment pattern of events is sometimes unwarranted.

Third, the availability heuristic gives rise to a fallacy, related to the fact that policy-makers are satisfied to rely on a small set of examples of perceived similar past events. They tend to believe that if a certain political process or outcome has occurred a limited number of times, it will recur again, even though the sample is too small to justify such inferences. The tendency to assume such similitude between past and present or future may be attributed to the preference for consistency. Assumptions about similarity or continuity serve this motive. At the same time perceived consistency increases confidence in the validity of the evidence (Kahneman and Tversky, 1979a). Thus, in spite

of the smallness of the available historical sample decisionmakers have more confidence in it than in a larger body of evidence that contains inconsistencies. This would perhaps explain the avoidance of looking at all relevant historical analogies, because as the number of cases observed grows, so does the probability that inconsistencies will emerge and muddle what looks like a clear-cut consistent lesson.

A more extreme manifestation of this phenomenon is the reliance on a sample of one (Jervis, 1976; Read, 1983). Reasoning from a single available exemplar may satisfy simultaneously the availability heuristic and consistency and simplicity motives. The tendency of relying on a particular single analogical past case to draw unwarranted conclusions is reinforced when the very same decisionmakers are in similar roles in the two observed and compared situations at the two points in time. The combined effects of representativeness and availability heuristics, on the one hand, and the search for consistency on the other, produce the assumption that the same decisionmakers will have the same motivations and the same patterns of behavior in what is perceived as a quite similar context. Continuity, in terms of the personalities making decisions, triggers a search for similar past behavior by those same decisionmakers; it then becomes an input for perceiving similarity between situations which are not really similar, which is then followed by inferences of consistency in motivation or behavior in the present or future. There is, of course, no objective unconditional truth in each of the three links of this reasoning chain, and hence such a reasoning chain is unjustified.

A different aspect of the use of a small or single-case sample is that in learning from history, the practical-intuitive historian may engage in comparative analysis of the 'structure-focused comparison' type (George, 1979), but not follow the appropriate methodology. When a single historical case is used, the decisionmaker does not check whether it answers the criteria of a 'critical case study' as suggested by Eckstein (1975). When more than one case history is used, he usually behaves as a 'satisficer' rather than as a 'maximizer'; that is, he does not look for more cases to test and further shore up his conclusions and hypotheses. He finds meaning even in randomly produced data (Fischhoff, 1982: 344), interpreting history, even when it is primarily a product of chaos, as if it were the product of calculated conspiracy. The problem in learning from history is thus not only that the sample is small and biased, but also that the procedures used in utilizing it are often faulty, undermining the validity of the conclusions.

The use of faulty epistemology is not limited to the layman who has had no experience in using scientifically valid procedures but is shared by individuals who entered the political arena from an academic background with a distinguished record of research experience. Such was the case for example with the 'best and the brightest' who served as advisers to Presidents Kennedy and Johnson and who had impressive academic backgrounds. It seems that the temptation of careless use of historical knowledge overpowers acquired epistemological and methodological skills. It could well be that once these individuals are removed from the academic atmosphere with its exacting standards and the exposure to critical review of their peers, they tend to adapt to the less exacting standards and succumb to the pressures for conformism of the political environment.

In the final account, available analogies are not necessarily those most appropriate to the event or case with which they are compared. This is so because some of the factors accounting for an analogy's availability may have little to do with its relevance to the matter at hand. These factors are:

1. The range and scope of the policy-maker's knowledge of history may well be limited to inappropriate analogies, which, however, constitute the sole reservoir of intellectual capital he has to draw upon.

2. Those past historical events in which the policy-maker was personally involved will be more compelling and available for comparing and being applied to current tasks.
3. The nearer in time the past event is to the present information, the more accessible it is. Hence, great importance is attached to events that occurred during the lifetime of the policy-maker and which become part of his inventory of first-hand personal knowledge, especially if the events took place during the formative stage of the development of political awareness and those events that took place after he started his political career (Jervis, 1976). However, the analogy nearest in time is not always the most relevant.
4. The more vivid and salient the event, the more available it becomes, and the more often events of the same type are believed to have taken place, much more often than such events actually did occur. Assertions such as 'small countries have always involved the powers in major wars' are usually not anchored in systematic historical research, but in acquaintance with a striking event in modern history, such as the outbreak of World War I. This analogy is available not because it is the most relevant, but because it comes easiest to mind.

Thus, availability is predicated by a series of chance variables producing inappropriate analogies. Yet, the practical-intuitive historian either will be unaware of this or neglect to take it fully into account. The availability effect and consistency motive make it easier to think of the future as a replication of the past. Hence, there is a strong tendency to forecast the future by analogy; to do so demands less effort, less imagination and less creativity. But, lack of imagination and the inability to envisage new types of threats are liable to produce zero or low probability estimates of such risks that have no available precedent, even when an objective evaluation would have called for according higher probabilities to these contingencies.

But even when the past could provide relevant probabilistic diagnostic information about future outcomes, it has been shown that it is not unusual for intuitive human judgment to have difficulties with the accurate utilization of such information (Sniezek, 1980). Knowing that a certain outcome has happened in the past increases our belief that its occurrence was inevitable (Fischhoff, 1975; Fischhoff and Beyth, 1975; Wood, 1978). Consequently, outcomes of historical events seem more inevitable than they actually were, and when analogies are made with a current situation, those outcomes analogical to the ones that have occurred are given higher probabilities of recurring than they should be given. On the other hand, those potential outcomes analogical to nonoccurrences are given lower probabilities than they should be given. Focusing attention on events and outcomes that did occur distracts attention from the lessons of events that might have happened but did not, in spite of the fact that these, too, are informative.

Subconscious Errors

Finally, the layman's learning from history runs the risk of overlooking an important but unobservable factor which may be inherent in past events. This is the hidden plane of historical reality—the motives rooted in the unconscious minds of the actors. This is a highly probable fallacy because even trained historians tend to overlook the subsurface motives of individuals and collectives in history. The reasons for this neglect are twofold: (a) even with hindsight, the subsurface factors remain nonsalient, ambiguous and difficult to prove; (b) 'Man remains ill at ease about this kind of history, partly because (as in his daily life) he has troweled over what he senses to be an illogical world. The mysterious forces that govern his unmanageable subworld constitute a jumble

which he neither likes nor understands' (Rolle, 1980: 410). The other side of the same coin is the negative consequences of the intuitive historian's lack of awareness of *his* own subconscious motives which motivate him to rely on the past for guidance, which is not necessarily based on a balanced evaluation of the particular historical event's relevance to current tasks but on a fixation on it for psychopathological reasons.⁶

To summarize, the shortcomings discussed have considerable negative effects over allocation of attention, judgment of relevance, evaluation of relative importance, interpretation of content, predisposition toward particular behavior patterns, and reaction to discrepant and dissonant information.

Conclusions

Learning from the past assumes that history repeats or replicates itself. But is this actually the case or is history copied? In light of the discussion above, both propositions have captured only part of the truth. It seems that those who believe that history repeats itself will aim to repeat the past, by learning history's lessons and reliving them. This makes it look as though history indeed does repeat itself, encouraging more people to act the same.

In fact, history rarely provides exact analogies, yet historical analogies, metaphors, and extrapolations are functionally useful. They help in cognitive economization, provide illustrations and a sense of direction, structure argumentation, and help to amplify ideas. However, their main contribution to decisionmaking tasks lies in their power to stimulate thought by pointing to potentially relevant factors, variables and causes for the diagnosis and prognosis of current events, drawn from the same types and categories of occurrences which have taken place in the past. In such instances, and when used critically, history provides at a low cost creative, open analogies, encourages the search for additional information, plus indicates interpretations and options which might have otherwise been overlooked and eluded the decisionmaker.

However, as we have noted, it can also be a source of misleading or irrelevant analogies, metaphors and extrapolations. Learning from history could in such cases negatively affect information processing and decisionmaking. It could divert attention from available relevant information; it could distract from the weight, value and validity attributed to other alternative knowledge structures based on deductive logic or ahistorical inductive reasoning; it could add to the diagnostic and prognostic importance attributed to information which does not deserve it.

Should policy-makers avoid using history because of the inherent risks involved in the practice? History should be used, but with caution and full awareness of the factors pointed out in this paper. Learning from history is no worse an approach to decision-making task performance than other shortcuts, which are also prone to biases and fallacies of the same or different nature. Still, their use is rational and even unavoidable due both to limits on human cognitive capabilities and environmental constraints on rationality.

Moreover, there is nothing necessarily deterministic in the abuses of history discussed above. These can at least be controlled and limited if not always averted, if the practical-intuitive historian is alerted to them. Yet, passive awareness of the potential pitfalls in using history is not enough in itself to avoid them because the temptation to apply perceived lessons from salient historical situations is so powerful. Active measures can

⁶ See, for example, Binion's (1969) explanation of King Leopold III's persistence in the policy of neutrality inherited from his father.

and should be taken as well to minimize the chance of abusing history and to override biases by following some simple rules:

- (a) Be suspicious of analogies that 'pop up', i.e., instant analogies. The manner in which the past is remembered in spontaneous memories, even by those who experienced the remembered event, is not necessarily the way things actually happened. There is reason to believe that the reconstruction bears little resemblance to the actual past experience, and would be distorted by secondary resources and popular accounts (Loftus and Loftus, 1980). Thus instant analogies involving spontaneous recall and recognition of similarity between past and present problems are highly suspect and their validity deserves special scrutiny.
- (b) Look for equivalents of a 'control group'. These can include: searching for additional events of a similar type and checking if they too lead to the same conclusions originally reached. Or, alternatively, apply completely different strategies, such as deductive logic, to the same problem to check whether different strategies lead to the same or different conclusions.
- (c) If time and circumstances allow, let others, if possible professional historians, scrutinize the same analogy to see whether they will reach the same conclusions. Even better, do not reveal your preferred analogical historical event but let them come up with a suggestion for an analogical event or events and see if they will come up with: the same event; the same event and the same conclusion; with different conclusions; with different events which lead to the same conclusions; or with different analogical events which lead to different conclusions. Such an approach is particularly valuable in a small-group context in order to avoid the groupthink symptoms leading to premature bolstering of shared beliefs.

Where does the use of history belong in terms of the three decisionmaking paradigms: the analytic-rational, the cybernetic and the cognitive? It is obvious that decisionmaking task and role enactment by the practical-intuitive historian fits best the cognitive paradigm. The use of historical knowledge structures and heuristics reflects the main goals of the decisionmaker: management and resolution of complexity and uncertainty, in acting as either: believer, perceiver, information processor, strategist, or learner. The process reflects the effects of the main principles of the cognitive paradigm: reality recording, inferential memory, consistency, simplicity, stability, and coherence. Theories and beliefs held are maintained and reinforced by historical knowledge despite sample size and apart from the level of its adherence to strict logic in the connections deduced (Steinbruner, 1974: 88–124; Holsti, 1976; Stein and Tanter, 1980: 38–43).

This conclusion should be qualified by the assertion that it does not follow that the use of history cannot be a component, albeit a secondary one, of the cybernetic process, for example, as the source of a predetermined repertoire of responses to contingent situations. Nor is the use of history precluded from playing a role in an analytic-rational process. After all, 'analogy is not a relatively poor use of logic; rather logic is a relatively good use of analogy' (Sacksteder, 1974: 234).

History does not contain an inherent truth which necessarily reveals itself to the scholar or practitioner. It maintains many faces even when studied with great care and through the application of scientific methodology. History teaches by analogy, enlightens by metaphors, and educates by extrapolation; but analogy could mislead, metaphor be misplaced and extrapolation misguided. That is the tightrope the practical-intuitive historian must walk, and the price he has to pay for access to the treasure house of human experience.

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