I. Introduction*

What is the role of personality in the political process? The least exclusive answer to this question is that some conditions encourage the expression of individual attributes more than others. First, before personal characteristics can shape events, they must be liberated from the normative and praxiological constraints that normally homogenize human differences into patterns of behaviour. In other words, a person must be temporarily emancipated from the ever-present forces of morality and conventional rationality. Second, a person must be in a position to influence political events, which means he must command the resources necessary to intervene strategically and decisively in the political process.

These criteria narrow the number of political situations in which personality may become causally significant. Perhaps the most obvious and interesting would be the crisis decision-making of modern chief executives. I have in mind a situation in which a president (or prime minister, or other leader) becomes the target of a personally “resonant” policy stimulus, for example one that simultaneously challenged the will of a nation and the self-esteem of its leader. Under these circumstances, the decisional process of the executive system could easily become fused with the psycho-dynamic processes of the executive, and the resolution of a policy crisis could ultimately depend on the outcome of a personal emotional crisis. In other words, politics could become a matter of psychotherapy.

In order to demonstrate the heuristic merit of this approach, I have chosen to examine (in purely hypothetical and impressionistic terms) the impact of John F. Kennedy’s personality on four crisis decisions: the Cuban missile crisis, the steel price fiasco, the Bay of Pigs crisis, and the Meredith case. Execution of

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* I wish to acknowledge the contribution to this project of seven talented former students of political science at Queens College of the City University of New York: Richard Allinson, Harold Cohen, Steven Goldberg, Ralph Nurnberger, Adolph Schifrin, Simeon Soterakis, and Miss Susan Reardon. It was their deep interest in John F. Kennedy that stimulated me to undertake this study.


2 The most complete and informed discussion of the principle of strategic intervention is to be found in Tadeusz Kotarbinski, Praxiology: An Introduction to the Science of Efficient Action, (Warsaw, 1965).

3 The term “resonance” denotes deep personal significance. A discussion of the term can be found in Greenstein, “The Impact of Personality on Politics.”

4 These decisions were selected from a sample of sixteen which were originally examined because they seemed intuitively representative of the salient aspirations of Kennedy administration. The sixteen were classified along foreign/domestic and command/consent dimensions.
La personnalité et la prise de décision : J. F. Kennedy dans quatre situations de crise

L'article vise à préciser le rôle de la personnalité dans la dynamique politique. On a considéré que la personnalité est un paramètre significatif (a) lorsque les agents politiques sont en position et ont les moyens d'exercer une influence stratégique sur le processus politique et (b) s'ils sont momentanément dégagés des impératifs de l'éthique et de la raison qui tendent à banaliser le comportement humain. La décision prise par un chef d'État moderne, lors d'une crise, correspond à une telle conjoncture.

L'auteur assume au départ que les situations qui exigent la formulation d'une politique sont fréquemment porteuses de caractéristiques en harmonie avec la personnalité et susceptibles, de ce fait, de ramener le circuit décisionnel du système politique aux éléments de thérapie associés aux réactions psychiques du gouvernant. Pour vérifier le valeur heuristique de cette hypothèse, on a groupé, selon diverses conjectures, des faits révélateurs de la personnalité, chez Kennedy, d'après les exigences d'un modèle cybernétique. Après quoi fut examiné le rôle hypothétique des facteurs spécifiques à quatre décisions.

L'étude révèle que la personnalité de Kennedy suivait un seul schème de motivation et que ce schème était différemment affecté par deux aspects dans chaque décision à prendre. Placé devant ce qui lui semblait être la perspective de régler une affaire (l'affaire cubaine et la crise de l'acier), il réagissait positivement, de manière à rétablir l'image qu'il se faisait de lui-même; placé devant un problème auquel il n'entrevoyait pas de solution (l'affaire de la Baie des Cochons et le cas Meredith), il se retraitait dans l'expectative. Une réaction positive se trouvait donc à intensifier chez lui le besoin d'agir, alors qu'une réaction attentiste réduisait de fait ce besoin. La différence de résultat (succès ou échec) s'expliquait par le fait que ses mécanismes de réglage (pessimisme, prudence et scepticisme) affectaient chaque situation de façon identique : une réaction aggressive se trouvait ramenée à des proportions manœuvreables, ce qui entraînait des programmes d'action adaptés; une réaction défaitiste se trouvait amplifiée au point de le confiner à des stratégies marginales et inadaptées.

this conceptual experiment requires exposition of an integrated model of personality,5 description of Kennedy's personality in terms of the categories of the model,6 and conjectural exploration of the dynamics of the model to demonstrate how specific elements in Kennedy's personality determined the outcome of each decision. I emphasize the term "conjectural exploration" because no

5The concept of personality adopted here is basically sociological (or organizational) and can best be described as an integrated model because it attempts to bring some rather disparate strands of modern psychology together into the same framework. Motivation, cognition and perception, ego structure, performance and learning are viewed as internal parts and processes of a cybernetic system. The use of these concepts in this way is consistent with the description of personality put forward by David C. McClelland, Personality (New York, 1961).

6Data used to describe Kennedy's personality and decisional behaviour were drawn from
attempt will be made to state and verify hypotheses. My strategy of investigation is designed to demonstrate possibilities, not to settle burning theoretical or empirical questions. Nothing in this essay is meant to add or detract from either the reality or the myth of John Fitzgerald Kennedy.

II. A cybernetic model of personality

Kleinmuntz defines personality as the “unique organization of factors which characterizes an individual and determines his pattern of interaction with the environment.” This would be a perfectly acceptable definition if it did not evade the fundamental question of structure. Most psychological theorists posit some structure, but no firm consensus has so far emerged concerning its exact shape. We have one indication of rough agreement on the salient dimensions of personality in the high frequency with which certain terms appear in the more recent literature of social psychology: motivation, perception and cognition, ego structure, performance, and manipulation. Although it provides only one answer to the problem, my thesis is that these dimensions stand in a stable and functional relationship to one another, the precise character of which is determined by the cybernetic organization of the central nervous system. Thus, personality denotes unique content organized by (and within) a universal cybernetic structure.

Conceived in cybernetic terms personality is organized into four major component systems: a motivational (energy) system; a perceptual/cognitional (detection/evaluation) system; an ego (selector) system; and a skill (effecting) system. The function of the personality is the disposal of motivational stimuli in ways that enhance the biological, neurological, and emotional welfare of the individual. The action of the personality can thus be reduced to the internal management of motivational stimuli evoked either internally or externally. In terms of general process, the stimulus first arrives at the detecting system where it is evaluated for meaning and forwarded on to the selecting system where alternative methods of disposal are considered. Disposing of a stimulus involves deciding what values to pursue, when and how. This means choosing among available value alternatives and formulating a course of action capable of acquiring the following sources: (a) John F. Kennedy, Why England Slept (New York, 1963); (b) John F. Kennedy, Profiles in Courage (New York, 1956); (c) Richard Whalen, The Founding Father: The Story of Joseph P. Kennedy (New York, 1964); (d) James McGregor Burns, John Kennedy: A Political Profile (New York, 1960); (e) John Henry Cutler “Honey Fitz”: Three Steps to the White House (New York, 1962); (f) Paul Fay, Jr., The Pleasure of His Company (New York, 1966); (g) Rose Kennedy, John F. Kennedy: As We Remember Him (New York, 1965); (h) Theodore Sorensen, Kennedy (New York, 1965); (i) Arthur Schlesinger, Jr., A Thousand Days (Boston, 1965); (j) Evelyn Lincoln, My Twelve Years with JFK (New York, 1965); (k) Joseph F. Dinneen, The Kennedy Family (Boston, 1959); (l) Theodore White, The Making of the President, 1960 (New York, 1961).


Although somewhat mechanical in structure and operation, the cybernetic model is consistent with the conception of man as a complex information-processing system found in James March and Herbert Simon, Organizations (New York, 1958), 9–11. In my model, concepts like motivation, perception and cognition, ego structure, and skill traits provide a convenient method of classifying items of information about personality in terms of functional relationships. The model and the way in which information about Kennedy is classified are purely speculative. A readable discussion of cybernetic systems can be found in Alfred Khun, The Study of Society: A Unified Approach (Homewood, 1963), 42–7.
ing the value chosen at the least cost. When the proper situation emerges, the action scenario chosen is put into operation by the effector system. At this point, the motor system becomes a source of performance and manipulation. When the desired value is gained at (or near) the predicted cost, the whole pattern of relationships between personality items that produced success is reinforced through a "feedback loop"; in this context, feedback is another way of saying "learning." Successful repetition of the sequence gradually creates a stable response pattern, which means that when the person is similarly motivated under similar conditions he can be expected to make similar choices and perform similar actions. Patterns of response evolve from a mixture of sign conditioning and latent learning. The basic structure and process envisaged for the model are presented schematically in Figure 1.

III. Kennedy's personality: a static description

A. MOTIVATION
The primary function of a motivational system is to deploy the motor activities of the organism automatically toward the acquisition of those values necessary

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11 The distinction between "sign conditioning" and "latent learning" (thinking) is found in Michael Polanyi, Personal Knowledge: Towards a Post-Critical Philosophy (New York, 1964).
for survival and well-being. The basic constituents of motivational systems are needs, which fall into three general classes: biogenic, neurogenic, and emotional.12 Because needs define what is important, values also fall into three classes: material values, activities, and sentiments.13 Biogenic and neurogenic needs are presumably innate and universal to all species possessing complex vegetative and associational systems; emotional needs are distinctly human, and are acquired through conditioning.14 They account for most of the motivational variation in human populations. Perhaps the most significant and widespread motivational pathology is a neurosis, which involves the internalization of two conflicting emotional needs. By "conflicting" I mean that anything done in service of one need tends to undermine whatever is done in service of another.15

The available secondary data suggest strongly that John F. Kennedy suffered for most of his life from the effects of a neurosis caused by a deep conflict between two emotional needs: an overpowering fear of failure (infavoidance) and a generalized need for assistance (succorance).16 The infavoidance need was the result of a continuing failure in boyhood competition with his older brother, Joe, Jr. Competition between the children was deliberately fostered in the Kennedy household by the elder Joseph Kennedy to prepare his sons for protracted conflict with the WASP establishment. The senior Kennedy was convinced that only superior preparation could break the pattern of exclusion that had denied the Kennedy clan social and political recognition commensurate with obvious financial and political accomplishments. His cynical social darwinism apparently led him to the conclusion that the best method of ensuring com-

12This classification was borrowed from John L. Fuller, Motivation: A Biological Perspective (New York, 1964), 42–53.
14Biogenic and neurogenic needs are presumably functional for the maintenance and efficient operation of the vegetative and associational systems: see Joseph Altman, Organic Foundations of Animal Behavior (New York, 1966), chap. 15. Emotional needs are “implanted” by the surplus sentiments that habitually accompany material values and activities during the socialization process. When a child is finally capable of improved discrimination, sentiments become independent sources of motivational arousal. McClelland, Personality.
16Definitions of infavoidance and succorance were borrowed from Henry A. Murray, “Variables of Personality,” in Henry A. Murray ed., Explorations in Personality (New York, 1965), 182–91. Concealment of disfigurement is taken as evidence of infavoidance: a person hampered by a fear of failure is apt to present himself to others in ways that encourage them to believe he is perfect and whole. Kennedy (a) underplayed the seriousness of his Addison’s Disease; (b) never discussed his back injury with even his most intimate colleagues; (c) frequently hid his crutches from constituents; (d) always took his pills in private; (e) avoided his glasses in public and in the presence of photographers; (f) refurbished his tan with a sun-lamp when the beach was unavailable. Sorensen, Kennedy, 38–49; Lincoln, My Twelve Years with JFK, 53, 234; Burns, John Kennedy: A Political Profile, 154.

Helplessness is taken as an indicator of succorance: a person who wishes to be cared for is apt to feign helplessness and dependence to elicit nurturant responses. Kennedy: (a) became notorious for his lack of order and sloppiness at Choate; (b) could not remember names, telephone numbers, and appointments in the presence of his Senate secretary, Evelyn Lincoln; (c) took his boyhood nanny (Margaret Ambrose) with him to Washington as housekeeper. According to Lincoln, Mrs. Ambrose “babied him like a mother hen with her brood” and she wondered whether Mrs. Ambrose “had as much difficulty picking up after the Senator at home as I had at the office.” Whalen, The Founding Father, 166–7; Lincoln, My Twelve Years With JFK, 21–6.
petitive superiority was to expose his children, especially his sons, to a demanding and competitive family environment. His entrepreneurial instincts led him to identify the American presidency as the "line of least resistance" because of its strategic importance for the entire social structure. Kennedy senior openly nurtured presidential ambitions, but if he could not be president himself, at least he could prepare the way for his first-born son (Joe, Jr.). One can envisage his corporate mind defining the presidency as a family enterprise, in which his other sons would form the necessary reserves to perpetuate the new political dynasty.

Because Joe, Jr. was given the mantle of family aspiration early in life, he gained an obvious competitive advantage over the other children. His status in the family appears to have been more a matter of ascription than of achievement. Kennedy senior introduced him to friends as a future president of the United States. Mother Rose held him up as a model for the other children, especially Jack, and gave him an unsupervised role in disciplining the other children. Under these circumstances, it was inevitable that Jack would choose his older brother as a target of confrontation to earn an equal (and requisite) share of attention, recognition, and affection; it was equally inevitable that Joe, Jr. would ruthlessly subordinate Jack in order to retain his own superior status. But Joe was older, stronger, faster, more accomplished, and more self-confident (probably because he had the unequivocal emotional support of his parents). No matter how hard he tried, Jack could neither conquer his older brother nor equal his competitive triumphs outside the family arena.

The reason for Kennedy's failure in these confrontations, and to some extent his fear of failure, was the succorance need, which was reinforced as a consequence of chronic childhood illnesses.17 I say "reinforced" because the need to be cared for is presumably present in every infant, but disappears slowly as the child begins to gain control of the environment. Kennedy undoubtedly discovered that illness released many of the values he could not win competitively, and hit upon the strategy of feigning helplessness as a way of avoiding the costs of competitive failure. Failure evoked the helplessness ruse, which deprived him of the opportunity to develop the poise, wit, and self-assurance necessary to compete effectively. Because the environment conceded the highest rewards for competitive spirit and winning, Kennedy was persistently driven to compete again, only to fail again because he was so ill-prepared for the contest. Each failure increased his fear of failure and encouraged even greater reliance on helplessness as a substitute for preparation and success. The result was a hopeless motivational dilemma: confrontations to suppress the fear of failure ended in failure because of the manner in which his succorance need undermined his capacity to perform.

B. EGO STRUCTURE
The selector component of the personality is an ego system, which performs executive functions.18 In general this means three things. First, intensive and

17These included scarlet fever, diphtheria, an appendectomy, a chronic allergy of the stomach, two bouts with jaundice, and a serious back injury. His illnesses typically struck while he was away attending school: Choate, the London School of Economics, Princeton, and Harvard. Schlesinger, Jr., A Thousand Days, 80.
18John Bucklew, Paradigms for Psychopathology (Chicago, 1960), 34–6.
programatic reality testing which keeps operational beliefs in tune with situational change. Second, discovery and selection of value alternatives and lines of co-ordinated activity best calculated to achieve values at a profit. Third, the co-ordinated management of the components of the personality necessary to see a given course of action through to completion. Moreover, the ego performs each of these functions in ways that are relevant to the disposal of motivational stimuli. The skill with which these functions are performed and the degree to which the internal resources of the individual are focused on a given disposal problem refers to personal competence. Personal competence rests on self-esteem, which is in turn the product of the historic ratio between success and failure. Success (regardless of source) increases self-esteem, and the inflation of self-esteem improves the probability of successful confrontations with the environment in the future.

Ego structures are of two basic types: "satellizing" and deviant. The kind of structure a child acquires depends upon the quality of his early relationship with his parents. All children presumably experience the same initial ego developments. This involves the inflation of the infant's self-concept through permissive and indulgent nurturing by parents. Infants are obviously incompetent and lack of refined perceptual discrimination leads them to attribute their apparent success in the world to their own efforts. At some point the parents assume socialization roles, and begin to make rewards contingent on conformity to socially acceptable patterns of behaviour. The structure of the child's ego is determined by the manner in which he conceptualizes his relationship with his parents when this traumatic turnabout in parental behaviour occurs. If the child thinks he is intrinsically valued, he will deflate his self-concept, align with his now powerful parents, and begin to develop aspirations consistent with his limited capacity for performance. This is the "satellizing" ego. Alternatively, if the child thinks he has been extrinsically valued, he will protect his omnipotent self-image through fantasy, resist identification with parents and other social agents, and will attempt to increase his capacity to perform to meet the burden of vastly inflated aspirations. This is the deviant ego.

In dynamic or causal terms, intrinsic valuation produces an ascribed status, which gives the child a feeling of being loved regardless of his failure to perform adequately. This provides the security necessary to risk a truly experimental and tutorial relationship with his parents. Increasing dependence on parental gratifications reduces the child's tolerance of frustration, which means that frustration can be employed by the parent as an incentive for deflating aspirations and inflating performance skills simultaneously. Extrinsic valuation reverses the process because the child knows he is acceptable only when his performance meets parental standards. He is forced to achieve his status, which gives him a larger range of personal and social challenges from which to choose. This freedom may encourage a number of consequences. First, the child is apt to develop

20David Ausubel, Earl Balthazar, Irene Rosenthal, Leonard Blackman, Seymour Schpoont, and Joan Welkowitz, "Perceived Parent Attitudes as Determinants of Children's Ego Structure," Child Development, 25 (1954), 173–183. The authors have produced suggestive experimental evidence for the dichotomy between the satellizing and what I have chosen to call the deviant ego. My derivations are purely speculative.
eclectic and highly personalized standards of achievement, which emancipates him from social and parental ideology. Second, the child will develop a strong resistance to frustration, which means that the parent cannot easily manipulate incentives to encourage deflation of aspiration. In fact, given the uncertainty injected into the environment by parental rejection, unrealistic aspirations become invaluable motivational benchmarks that substitute for the goals the parents have attempted to impose. Fantasy and ritualistic conformity are apt to be employed to nurture the omnipotent self-image and protect unrealistic aspirations against the persistent threats of reality. Finally, the search for balance between aspirations and skills will be oriented toward the inflation of performance capacities.

Kennedy's "ego profile" is almost a perfect representation of the deviant structure. In other words, his behaviour patterns exhibit the external indicators (omnipotent self-concept, unrealistic aspirations, resistance to frustration, ideological independence of parents) of ego deviance and his early socialization experiences occurred under the conditions posited for the deviant structure (extrinsic valuation, manipulation of fantasy to maintain self-esteem, and constructive inflation of performance traits). The existence of an omnipotent self-concept is revealed in the staggering fact that Kennedy coveted the most demanding and inaccessible role in American politics (the presidency) and finally sought the office in spite of the barriers of chronic illness21 and political obscurity.22 The intensity and magnitude of his aspirations are revealed in his disdain for anonymity,23 his tendency to act brashly in order to attract attention and exploit opportunities,24 and his willingness to undertake exceptionally difficult and risky investments to gain higher political office.25 His capacity to resist fail-

21Kennedy sustained his second spinal injury when PT 109 went down in the Solomons. During early convalescence prior to being discharged from the Navy, he contracted malaria and sciatica. After his first unsuccessful operation, he acquired Addison's Disease. He nearly died from hepatitis during a Congressional junket to the Far East in 1951. A staphylococcus infection after the second spinal operation became so serious that he was given the last rites of his church twice. Subsequent novacaine treatments to ease his pain caused anemia. Orthopedic shoes and a back brace brought his spinal difficulty under partial control (his left leg was almost an inch shorter than his right and produced spinal pressure when he walked). Nutritional supplements cured his anemia, and cortisone kept the Addison's Disease in check. Sorensen, Kennedy, 38-42; Schlesinger, Jr., A Thousand Days, 95–6.

22Not only was he Catholic, but he was only forty-two. Among “realistic” contenders (Stevenson, Humphrey, Johnson) he was the least distinguished.

23Kennedy thought of his years in the House as "boring" and was offended by the unpromising committee assignments allocated by the Senate leadership. Sorensen, Kennedy, 27, 43.

24Kennedy permitted publication of a poorly written bachelor's thesis a year after his graduation from Harvard. He ran for the House at twenty-nine, the Senate at thirty-five and the vice presidential nomination at thirty-nine. His impulsive entry into the VP race seems to have been partly motivated by the loss of his seat on the Harvard Board of Overseers in 1955, a seat highly prized by the clan because his father had failed to acquire it in 1936. Kennedy's drive for the vice presidential nomination was so hastily organized that it collapsed when his supporters discovered that Stevenson preferred a Protestant running mate. When Stevenson unexpectedly turned the decision over to the convention, Kennedy plunged back into the race with less than twenty-four hours to regroup his forces. Whalen, The Founding Father, 222; Sorensen, Kennedy, 18, 78–92.

25Instead of relaxing after the 1956 election, Kennedy launched his own drive for the White House immediately, subsisting on “hamburgers and milkshakes” as he travelled the country for the next three years in a gruelling search for the support of potential delegates. Sorensen, Kennedy, 99–106.
ure has become legendary, and there is ample evidence to suggest that he struggled to cast off the trappings of his father’s conservative social and political ideology. Extrinsic valuation was clearly present, especially in light of the emphasis his parents placed on competition and winning, and the special position in the family accorded Joe, Jr. If Kennedy came to resent his brother’s advantages in the family, he could easily have defined his own position in extrinsic terms. Although muted by affection and respect, his resentment was obvious. That he viewed his situation as an extrinsic one is supported by constant references to the fact that he was merely a replacement for his older brother.

Kennedy’s situation as a child would also have been ideal for the manipulation of fantasy to protect his image of greatness. These images should have been shattered by competitive failures, but instead they were sustained by the comforts of illness, which included a diet of epic novels, any one of which would have provided sufficient reinforcement for his self image. Later reading put the flesh of reality on his images of heroism; his favourite books during adolescence and early adulthood were the biographies of gifted and eccentric political leaders. The strong continuity between childhood and adult reading patterns, and his own book on courage, give partial support to the thesis that he harboured romantic images of greatness.

The deep conflict between infavoidance and succorance called Kennedy’s self-image and high aspirations constantly into question. His emotional health would have eventually required an adjustment of the gap between high pretension and poor performance. However, certain alternatives were foreclosed from the outset. Deflation of aspiration was ruled out because of the neurotic pressures for achievement from the family. The pressure to prepare for a career ruled out continued use of fantasy. The only remaining alternative was a massive effort to inflate his performance capacities, which required a strategy of managing the symptoms of his neurosis and turning his weaknesses into competitive assets. Kennedy began his experiment with self-reformation during his last two years at Harvard, and projectively reported the conceptual basis for his strategy in his bachelor’s thesis. Three lines of adjustment were followed. First, the effects

26His first back injury at Harvard ruled out continued competition in contact sports, so Kennedy turned to swimming. He practised the backstroke secretly while confined to the infirmary with influenza; his friend Torbert McDonald drove him to and from the pool because he was too weak to walk. He managed to graduate cum laude from Harvard in spite of two earlier years of marginal work. And when his back injury caused him to fail the Army’s physical examination, he exercised until he could pass the Navy’s. Rose Kennedy, John F. Kennedy, 22; Schlesinger, Jr., A Thousand Days, 85-6.
28Burns, John Kennedy, 28.
30Especially Marlborough, Melbourne, Quincy Adams, Lincoln, Calhoun, Talleyrand. Ibid., 80, 105.
31The original title, Appeasement at Munich, was changed to Why England Slept when the thesis was published. His central theme was that in struggles with totalitarian regimes, democracies are handicapped by institutional weaknesses which can only be compensated for by superior leadership. This could easily have been a restatement in political terms of the conclusions Kennedy had reached about the solution of his own problem, namely that disciplined and learned self-management, based on merciless self-criticism, was the only way to suppress his destructive succorant tendencies and finally rival the accomplishments.
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of succorance (helplessness, sloppiness, lack of order) were rigorously confined to intimate settings, like the family, where they were not only tolerated but encouraged. In this way, helplessness could be removed as a barrier to career proficiency. Second, latent abilities capable of contributing to successful competition were defined, embellished, and developed. These included a disarming shyness, a probing curiosity, and a capacity for personal detachment. Kennedy's shyness and good looks made him attractive company. His exaggerated need to know, which undoubtedly emerged as an intellectual compensation for motor deficiencies, removed much of the drudgery from the routine of preparation required to improve personal competence. He enjoyed discovery, and the sense of impending adventure in some new experience became a constant motivational stimulus. This may account for his restlessness and the fact that in intellectual situations he tended to be precocious. Personal detachment allowed him to find the heart of an issue and still find aesthetic enjoyment in the peripheral aspects of controversy. The third strategy was to openly accept or find especially difficult tasks, and to disarm criticism of pretension by modestly calling attention to minor shortcomings. This witty self-derision, which reflected a merciless introspection, undermined criticism early and at the same time elicited reassurance and support from other people.

C. PERCEPTION AND COGNITION

The detector component of the personality is a perceptual/cognitional system capable of constructing and testing complex symbolic representations of the world upon which to base value-oriented action, and of evaluating information. I have intentionally unified perception (sensory experience) and cognition (understanding and thinking) on the philosophical assumption that the manner in which the world is understood ontologically prefigures the organization of most perceptual experience. Ontological maps place boundaries around inherently ambiguous and initially meaningless information, and in doing so construct unified perceptual experiences.

Two types of conceptual (linguistic) implements are involved in cognitive processes: operational and ontological beliefs. Operational beliefs may be
thought of as testable approximations of immediately relevant events; ontological beliefs attempt to interpret the unknown and to supply guidelines for dealing with the moral aspects of social behaviour. Operational beliefs are important because the more a person understands his immediate environment, the higher the probability that his choices and actions will be adapted to the objective requirements of value situations. Ontological beliefs are equally functional because the more a person thinks he understands what cannot be known in an immediate sense, the greater his cognitive security. Cognitive security is undoubtedly related positively to adaptive potential. Ontological beliefs also enable people to recognize profitable options with respect to the moral expectations of the community, in addition to providing those important moral justifications without which decisions could not be made and pursued. Operational beliefs are open to revision, but ontological beliefs are generally resistant to change, except under conditions of stimulus deprivation. Thus, all men are simultaneously open-minded and dogmatic. The relative importance of ontological and operational beliefs in the overall content of a person's detector system will certainly define which factor (open-mindedness or dogmatism) predominates.

At an ontological level, Kennedy was a genuine Aristotelian, with an ethical commitment to the golden mean, especially in the regulation of passion. He disliked passion in politics and feared the undisciplined intellect it was thought to encourage. Like many of his contemporaries, Kennedy extrapolated directly from the moderating aspects of the golden mean to the balance of power as a principle for understanding and responding to social change. He characterized himself as an "idealist without illusions," a proposition that captures the delicate balance in his own cognitive system. Kennedy also shared the Aristotelian obsession for excellence. He typically defined happiness as the full use of one's abilities along lines of excellence. The hallmark of humanity was voluntarily to shoulder difficult tasks, to do them with daring and precision, and to accept accolades with modesty when successful. In particular, the stylistic aspects of action were as important ethically as the object of action. This was clearly what he had in mind when he defined courage as "grace under pressure." Altruism, excellence, daring, and modesty dominated his choice of idols, and competence became the sole basis for many of his relationships with other political actors. Competent people were invariably drawn to his service, and exploitation of their abilities extended his own effectiveness as a political operator.

Kennedy's concern for excellence appears to have been affected by a sense of human impotence. He was firmly convinced that man was the pawn of powerful
cosmic forces, but equally convinced that under special conditions, some men could influence the course of human development. He sensed the dramatic possibilities for influencing events through strategic intervention, and he counted his own generation among the fortuitous and fortunate few to whom the opportunity, resources, and position necessary for exerting influence had fallen. Failure was always more probable than success, but human dignity obliged men to make the effort to change the world with the firm intention of achieving success. Even in failure, man could prove his essential nobility by facing impossible tasks confidently with acknowledged limitations.

At an operational level, Kennedy was a cool, sceptical, pessimistic realist. He was chary of ideological discourse, and invariably fastened on the immediate and practical consequences of a problem. His primary test of relevance for a policy was pragmatic: can it be done, can we do it, and how much will it cost in dollars and power? Feasibility and ease of implementation usually became the primary criteria for adopting value alternatives. For every positive answer he received to each of these questions, Kennedy would ask another question, and frequently pursued answers so relentlessly and in such detail that he literally frightened unseasoned advisers. In most encounters, it became apparent that he knew the kinds of answers he wanted. Most of the time, he was better prepared than opponents or advocates of policy alternatives, and in the presidency digested mountains of information daily in order to maintain informational superiority. Because he enjoyed gaming, the peripheral aspects and nuances of issues and programs interested him, which probably explains his capacity to deal with large volumes of information and why he could find genuine merit in almost every point of view. Too much knowledge of the intricacies of political life reinforced his pessimism concerning the limits of human action. As a consequence he persistently underestimated the possibility of domestic political action, and overestimated the possibility of affecting the forces of global change. Pessimism and excessive scepticism often undermined his capacity to act, or narrowed his leeway for effective action. On the other hand, these same traits produced brilliant and daring programs of action that were well adapted to the situation. Kennedy faced the problem of developing programs with the patience and reserve of a master craftsman. Everything he knew about people and politics told him to remain doubtful, ask questions, and move slowly and dispassionately.

D. SKILLS
The effector component of the personality takes the form of a skill system containing integrative verbal and motor patterns designed to attract interaction (performance skills) and to induce other people to part with desired values (manipulative skills). Because images schedule opportunities for interaction by determining how other people respond to invitations, performance skills are generally oriented toward the creation and maintenance of a positive image for the benefit of other people.\(^{39}\) The more positive (culturally valued) the image, the higher the probability of attracting interaction. Manipulative skills are tailored

\(^{38}\)These conclusions accord well with assessments offered by Sorensen and Schlesinger, Jr.

\(^{39}\)For an analysis of the psychology of performances, see Erving Goffman. The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life (Garden City, 1959). For the relationship between performances and attractiveness, see Peter Blau, Exchange and Power in Social Life (New York, 1964), 34–42.
to the ongoing process of interaction and involve for the actor discovery and application of those verbal and motor sequences best calculated to gain compliance.40

Kennedy appears to have employed his performance skills consciously to generate and maintain substantially different images for two different audiences. The first (his internal image) was designed to encourage a strong bond of loyalty between himself and the members of his inner circle upon whom he relied for tolerant, competent assistance. Without his staff, Kennedy was virtually impotent. The second image was devoted to the problem of gaining recognition within audiences that controlled access to political nominations: Democratic party influentials (who actually determined nominations), young people (who provided inexpensive campaign energy), and selected elements of the American electorate (especially the newly powerful suburbanites, women, and minority groups in urban industrial areas.)41

The skills necessary for the creation and maintenance of the internal image involved the careful but limited disclosure of authentic personal characteristics. Every person he knew intimately became aware of his presidential aspirations, the severity of his back pain, and his heroism in the Solomons. These became critical bases of respect and emotional attachment, as did his admiration for competence in other people. Each member filled an important gap in his own skill system, which gave each a sense of importance that could not have been gained in a system organized along functional lines. The core members of his staff realized they were making an indispensable contribution to his career, a feeling that seems to have enhanced their job satisfaction enormously. Kennedy also took direct command of his staff, a situation which gave the members considerable confidence in his judgment. Deep loyalty, high satisfaction, and confidence produced extraordinary initiative and cooperation, and resulted in an exceptionally formidable organization of activity.

E. DECISIONAL AND PERSONALITY DYNAMICS

The central thesis of this paper is that the decisional process of executive systems can be reduced to the personality dynamics of chief executives. The primary reason for this assumption is that one man (the executive) must ultimately determine the course of action of the system he heads. Buried in this assumption is the further implication that the decisional processes of the personality and the executive system are basically the same.

40As his record of failure in domestic/consent politics clearly indicates, Kennedy was not overly successful in manipulating people who were not attached to him emotionally. In a sense he was an overspecialized political actor, capable of demonstrating his attractiveness but incapable of translating attraction into policy payoffs.

41Kennedy's external skills have been excluded because they have very little bearing on the decisions examined, although his ability to keep routine political engagements during the height of the Cuban missile crisis without alerting his audiences or the press to the situation played a major role in the successful execution of the blockade scenario. Research after the assassination indicates that his efforts at image building were successful. Children and adults remembered him as a person of immense drive and self-confidence; altruism, modesty; intelligence, wit, and competence. See Henry F. Kaiser, "Image of a President: Some Insights into the Political Views of School Children," American Political Science Review, 62 (March 1968), 208–15. These images were precisely the ones Kennedy wanted his external audience to acquire.
In the most uncomplicated case, decision-making involves making two choices, first among value options (decisional phase) and then among available lines of action (implementation phase). But psychologically the decisional and implementation phases occur together, forming a response pattern. We can think of a response pattern as something that connects five different elements psychologically: a stimulus, a value alternative, a moral justification, an action alternative, and a rational justification. By “connect” I mean that all five elements are bonded to one another sequentially by sign conditioning. The stimulus is normally sufficient to evoke the entire sequence. I have included justifications in the model on the assumption that people adopt only rationalized alternatives. When faced with several options, they are likely to choose the most justified, even when that particular alternative possesses an inferior utility.

In each phase, a person can do any one of three things with respect to a given stimulus: accept (yes), reject (no), or postpone consideration (maybe). The strength of the connection between elements in a pattern (the bond) determines the flexibility of the response. Each choice (yes, no, maybe) has a different effect on the strength of the bond, and hence on the overall rigidity of the response. Affirmations increase intensity; postponements moderate intensity; and negations reduce intensity. When a person decides to accept a stimulus, he automatically increases its intensity, and in the process tightens the bonds of the pattern. Where the intensity of a stimulus is already latently strong, we observe a decisional reflex. Postponement provides greater opportunity for adjusting relationships between elements. In this case, an actor is free to experiment with novel permutations. The basic point of this model is that variations in the intensity of stimuli determine the amount of leeway a person has to adjust to situational change.

This is an important point because the probability of successful value acquisition rests on the relative fit between value and action choices and the objective properties of a situation. A “good” fit between the two presumably requires that choices have benefit of normative relevance, accurate information, adequate preparation, and sensitive timing. In order to improve these conditions, a decision-maker must be able to alter relationships between stimuli, value and action states, and justifications. This requirement focuses attention directly on the consequences of a particular class of stimuli, namely those that carry personally “resonant” properties. Resonant stimuli are already latently intense because they affect the personality so deeply; affirmation of a resonant stimulus would undoubtedly fuse the bonds between the elements of a response pattern so tightly as to preclude adjustment. In other words, resonant stimuli provoke decisional reflexes, and in so doing threaten to subordinate the decisional process of the executive system to the psychodynamic processes of the personality. This is easily achieved because the two processes are similar if not identical.

In the four decisions examined, two stimulus conditions (abrogation and no hope syndromes) appear to have produced two radically different responses even though they were operating on the same response pattern. The pattern in question seems to have had three constants. First, Kennedy’s primary method

42Kotarbinski, Praxiology.
of sorting stimuli was the maintenance of his self-regard in the eyes of other people. Any stimulus that threatened to expose his need for assistance or his fear of failure became "resonant." Second, he responded differently to each stimulus category. When confronted by a stimulus (abrogation syndrome) that robbed him of self-esteem, he reacted decisively (yes) to restore the status quo. Alternatively, when a stimulus offered only the opportunity of failure (no hope syndrome), he rejected it (no), unless some competing stimulus aroused his profound sense of personal responsibility, in which case he would accept the stimulus but only in a weakened form (maybe). Third, in fashioning implementation programs, what I have chosen to call operational regulators (pessimism, caution, and scepticism) invariably intervened to dampen the stimulus to a manageable level.

The abrogation syndrome refers to the deceptive abrogation of a policy bargain that Kennedy thought he had reached personally with another political actor. It is the personal element in the bargain that made this kind of stimulus so personally salient. We have (in effect) a personal "double-cross" that threatens psychologically to expose personal weaknesses. The abrogation stimulus played directly on Kennedy's neurosis because a person caught in the bind between infavoidance and succorance experiences such difficulty keeping commitments to himself that he begins to place a negative value on the duplicity of others. Lack of personal responsibility is a negative idea that most people would try to avoid confronting. One method of avoidance would be projection, through which the lack of reliability of self is attributed to others. (Projection is a defense mechanism that shows up remarkably often in Kennedy's verbal and written behaviour). Placing emphasis on the reliability of other people requires a negative evaluation of duplicity. Bargains are especially important in this regard because they provide succorant people with the security of knowing what the world is going to be like from day to day. Bargains compensate for the lack of reliability of self and the duplicity of others by setting out the exact rules of the game. Giving bargains a positive value and duplicity a negative one, we derive some insight into the possible emotional significance of the deceptive abrogation of a bargain.

Kennedy's response to the abrogation stimulus was to adopt the first rationalized policy alternative that entered his mind capable of recovering the self-esteem lost. This meant restoration of the status quo. In other words, Kennedy made policy choices for psychotherapeutic reasons. The initial resonance of the stimulus required a rapid decision with a minimum of consultation. In the cases examined, the rationale employed was one or another version of the balance of power concept, which was one of Kennedy's central ontological beliefs. A positive reaction to an already resonant stimulus magnified the intensity of the stimulus, placing Kennedy under extreme pressure to adopt the first sensible action program conceived. But at this point, his operational regulators came into play, producing countervailing pressure for postponement of action. The result was that the most evaluated and best adapted scenario considered was eventually adopted. This interpretation coincides with the popular view of Kennedy as being both daring and cool under pressure. The "yes/maybe" pattern appears to
have produced relatively chancy value choices supported by exceptionally sensible programs of action. The result was usually success.

The no hope syndrome refers to a situation in which the value alternatives available for managing a stimulus are equally undesirable. In other words, you lose no matter what you do. The no hope stimulus struck deeply at Kennedy's fear of failure. His first response was to terminate consideration. However, when confronted with an ambivalent situation in which he was absolutely forced to deal with an unwanted stimulus by competing pressures, his strategy was to postpone, which meant a temporary weakening of the stimulus. However, weakening the stimulus automatically reduced the pressure of action, which worked out concretely to an extension of the implementation process and a relentless probing for unforeseen consequences. Since Kennedy's operational regulators worked the same in all situations, there was more time to consider a larger number of action programs or versions of a single program, and greater incentive to discover problems. There was more time to find more objections, which probably concealed Kennedy's reluctance to act in the first place. The result of dampening an already dampened stimulus was a grossly maladapted scenario, and failure. In the "yes/maybe" pattern, the optimal program emerged as the implementation process ended, but in the "maybe/maybe" pattern, Kennedy usually overshot the optimal program, adopting instead the least effective plan as the implementation process ended.

IV. The presumed role of Kennedy's personality in four crisis decisions

A. THE ABROGATION SYNDROME43

1. Decisional phase

What support exists in the literature on the Kennedy administration for the proposition that when faced with the deceptive abrogation of a policy bargain, John Kennedy experienced an emotional crisis which he resolved by adopting the first rationalized policy alternative he thought would be capable of restoring the status quo? This is really another way of asking how Kennedy's personality affected the two decisions examined. No final answer will ever be possible for this question, but an analysis of the decisions in terms of the model reveals some interesting possibilities. Specifically, there is strong evidence to support the contention that Kennedy thought he had reached bargains, that he experienced the policy stimuli resonantly, that he thought he had been deceived, that

43A fifth decision (postponement of nuclear testing) was also examined, but space limitations require its exclusion here. In many ways, this decision fits the abrogation syndrome more closely than the two reported. The bargain was explicit, deception was clearly involved, Kennedy was angry and disappointed, and made an instantaneous decision to postpone the American resumption in order to encourage the Soviet Union not to finish the test series. He justified his decision in terms of preventing a testing race that could upset the nuclear balance of power. His choice eventually mushroomed over a long period of time into the strategy of gambling the American testing option at Geneva in order to give the Soviets an incentive to sign a test ban treaty. The high state of technical knowledge in the field of nuclear weaponry and Kennedy's operational regulations (especially his persistent questioning of the experts) were primary factors in the evolution of the Geneva scenario. Schlesinger, Jr., 451-95.
his decisions were taken hastily and with virtually no consultation, and that he
was able to find adequate sources of rationalization for his value choices in his
own ontological belief system. Moreover, it is difficult to account for his behaviour
in other ways, such as prior policy commitments. Table I summarizes the
essential facts about these two decisions.

TABLE I

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Decision</th>
<th>Stimulus condition</th>
<th>Bargain</th>
<th>Value choice</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Steel* April 10–13, 1962</td>
<td>$6 per ton implicit: recission</td>
<td>violation of wage settlement</td>
<td>rescission of price increase</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Missile† October 16–28, 1962</td>
<td>discovery of IRBM sites and crated missiles</td>
<td>no change in distribution of nuclear weapons</td>
<td>remove missiles</td>
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a. The bargains. While the evidence is far from ironclad, there are strong indica-
tions that Kennedy either reached (or thought he had reached) an implicit
bargain with the steel industry, namely that if the administration could hold
the wage demands of the Steelworkers' Union under 3 per cent, the industry
would reciprocate by foregoing an increase in steel prices. According to Grant
McConnell (who has done the only case study of the decision), "An implicit
term of the pact... was that no steel price increase would be forthcoming.
The labor settlement had been moderate, more so than any in recent history
[2%]; it was 'noninflationary' in the administration's view and agreeable to the
industry..."44 Schlesinger, Jr., and Sorensen both conceptualize the event in
terms of the violation of a difficulty won bargain.

There exists no straightforward historical evidence to support the view that
Kennedy and Khrushchev reached anything resembling a bargain concerning
the deployment of nuclear missiles. However, Kennedy's surprise when informed
of the missiles and the astonishment in Moscow over the belligerent American
response are convincing bits of evidence that indicate a belief in a bargain, but
a misunderstanding of its terms. In other words, these behaviours suggest that
both Kennedy and Khrushchev thought they had achieved an understanding
which could be generalized to cover the subject of arms deployment. How could
such misconceptions have been communicated?

During the Vienna Conference, Kennedy argued vigorously that the best way
to avoid nuclear war short of disarmament was for the two superpowers to
reduce the number of points of conflict capable of escalating to a nuclear show-
down. Since both powers had vital interests in Europe, Kennedy suggested
general disengagement elsewhere, especially in Southeast Asia where both
powers were steadily becoming more deeply involved in the Laotian war. Kennedy reasoned that reduction of points of conflict to areas of vital national

interest would evoke the balance of power, and inject a new rationality into Soviet/American relations. Although unstated, Kennedy clearly included Cuba in his disengagement plea.

Three things could have encouraged Kennedy to believe that Khrushchev had tentatively accepted the balance of power thesis. First, the agreement to disengage in Southeast Asia by co-operating with the United States in achieving a Laotian settlement. Second, adoption of Kennedy's proposal for a moratorium on atmospheric nuclear tests. Kennedy could easily have construed this agreement as evidence of a desire on Khrushchev's part to stabilize the deployment of nuclear weapons. Third, Khrushchev's sudden adoption of the balance of power language on the final day of the conference.

Khrushchev, on the other hand, could easily have concluded that the balance of power was an invitation to deploy missiles outside Soviet territory, especially in view of the fact that the West had been altering the deployment of its nuclear deterrent for years. To emphasize his belief that great powers miscalculate, Kennedy told Khrushchev that the Bay of Pigs invasion had been a "mistake." In the context of the disengagement plea, his candor could have been interpreted as a private renunciation of American influence over Cuba, which was almost like saying: "You cannot place missiles in East Germany because we both have vital interests there, but if you really want to compensate for our changes in missile deployment, Cuba is your spot." Kennedy's conception of the balance of power almost required these kinds of adjustments. Seen from this perspective, the thesis that an implicit but imperfectly understood bargain was the basis for the behaviour of both leaders becomes reasonably attractive. The proposition is obviously open to empirical falsification.

b. Resonance. The best (perhaps the only) surface indicator of "resonance" is an emotive response. Kennedy's immediate reaction to each stimulus in the abrogation syndrome was unbridled anger. What bothered him most deeply was the fact that he had achieved the bargains personally; the fact they were broken without warning added the element of deception. Kennedy had originally become involved in the Steel negotiations with the tacit approval of steel industry executives, and remained involved, either directly or indirectly, through Arthur Goldberg until a settlement had been reached. The industry was playing a double game by silently exploiting Kennedy to achieve wage restraint and avoid a costly strike. Kennedy's explicit assumption was that in return for wage restraint, the industry would give price restraint. If both wages and prices could be kept within the new wage/price guidelines, it would be a victory for this new strategy of government intervention to control inflation at the source. He felt exceptionally deceived when he discovered the financial justification for the increase had been prepared while the bargain was being struck.

If Kennedy believed the Vienna agreements on Laos and nuclear testing extended implicitly to the subject of weapons deployment, the personal element was also present in the Cuban missile crisis. Kennedy was especially offended by what he believed were false assurances from Khrushchev that the Soviet Union would introduce only "defensive" weapons to protect Cuba from an American invasion. The difficulty this time could have been semantic; Kennedy might have
confused the technical with the theoretical meanings of "defensive" and "offensive." Kennedy was clearly using the technical meaning, which distinguishes surface-to-air missiles (defensive weapons) from ICBMs and IRBMs (offensive weapons). However, every nuclear power considers its own long-range missiles as a deterrent or "defence" against attack, and Khrushchev could have been using this more theoretical meaning. In any case, the fact that Kennedy failed to ask Khrushchev for semantic clarification before acting reinforces the proposition that the initial stimulus in this decision was personally "resonant."

c. Haste and consultation. The term "consultation" refers here to a situation in which a decision-maker asks another person what response should be made to a given stimulus. Although consultation varied in both cases, there appears to have been a constant relationship between the speed with which decisions were taken and the amount of consultation sought. The quicker the decision, the lower the amount of consultation. In the missile crisis, Kennedy’s decision to force removal of the missiles appears to have been taken in less than half an hour, and by all accounts just minutes after "he was convinced that it (the photographic evidence) was conclusive." Moreover, he took the decision in the presence of only one person, McGeorge Bundy. There is not the slightest indication in either Schlesinger, Jr., or Sorensen that he asked Bundy for an opinion. The record indicates that the rescission option in the steel crisis was chosen less than an hour after Roger Blough delivered the humiliating fait accompli. Minimum consultation also characterized the decision, although Kennedy did ask those present: "What can we do about it?" But after just observing his display of anger, few members of his staff could have misunderstood his question as a plea for advice concerning alternative value responses rather than assistance in devising a method of forcing the steel industry to back down. Moreover, there is nothing in either Sorensen or Schlesinger, Jr., to indicate that any of his advisers suggested that he do nothing, or respond in any other way.

d. Rationalizations. In both cases, the explicit rationalizations evoked by Kennedy to justify his decisions reflected an ontological belief in the value of balance, especially the balance of power. In the steel crisis, Kennedy later expressed concern for the consequence of doing nothing on the prestige of the presidency. If he failed to confront the steel industry, the existing balance between organized centres of power within the American political system would have been altered permanently and negatively. In the missile crisis, Kennedy

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45Schlesinger, Jr., *A Thousand Days*, 801. Schlesinger’s view is supported by that of an “insider” (Hugh Sidey), who reports that Kennedy not only reacted hastily in the choice of a value alternative, but also opted immediately for the use of armed force before consulting his military advisors. The implication is that the surgical strike scenario originated with Kennedy rather than some of his “hawkish” and impulsive advisors, as Sorensen and Schlesinger suggest. When McGeorge Bundy “told Kennedy that there was unmistakable evidence of nuclear offensive weapons in Cuba, the Celt in J.F.K. stirred first. After a few choice expletives, he, like Bundy, with vision narrowed by shock and danger, declared that armed forces would have to strike Cuba to remove the threat. From that perilous summit of passion there was a long slope of restraint and deliberation that led to the remarkable solution,” (Italics mine). Hugh Sidey, “The Presidency: A Classic Use of the Great Office,” *Life*, 65 (Nov. 22, 1968), 4.
dismissed all other rationalizations for the decision introduced by subordinates to further justify or challenge the wisdom of his value choice. Some of his military advisers, for example, argued initially for a diplomatic response on grounds that the deployment of missiles to Cuba did not change the fact that all Soviet missiles, no matter where they were stationed, were still under Soviet control, and were therefore under the discipline of Soviet deterrent policy. It would make no practical difference to the outcome where incoming missiles originated if the Soviet Union decided to attack the United States. His reaction was the same to each objection: the missiles had to be removed because of their negative effect on the "global political balance." Kennedy treated domestic political rationalizations in precisely the same manner.

e. Alternative explanations. The only convincing alternative explanation is that Kennedy was merely living up to prior policy commitments. In the steel case, the administration had not committed itself to any course of action publicly. One could argue, however, that Kennedy assaulted "big steel" in order to pacify "big labor." While Kennedy apologized profusely to David McDonald for the betrayal, there is no evidence in McConnell, Sorensen, or Schlesinger, Jr., to support the idea that his response was oriented toward maintaining the allegiance of organized labour to the Democratic party. This aim could have been achieved by a more ritualistic and less risky response. However, there is an argument for the commitment variable in the missile crisis. Sorensen openly attributes Kennedy's response to the fulfilment of prior public warnings to the Soviet Union that "offensive weapons" would not be tolerated on Cuban soil. The administration was aware of the arms build-up on the island and became very worried by the discovery that the Soviets had installed surface-to-air missiles (SAMs). When queried, Khrushchev admitted their presence, and explained they had only "defensive" purposes. Only one member of the administration conversant with the problem (John McCone) even entertained the possibility that their real purpose was the protection of IRBMs. According to both Sorensen and Schlesinger, Jr., the possibility of "offensive" weapons being introduced in Cuba never entered Kennedy's mind. This implies that the warnings must have been routine, which was in fact the case. The sentence containing the prohibition against "offensive" weapons was inserted in the warning of September 4 as an after-thought, and on the advice of Robert Kennedy. Kennedy could still have taken this "afterthought" as a policy commitment, but this would not explain why he chose to confront the Soviet leadership in a way that could only have ended in nuclear war if neither party had backed down.

2. Implementation stage
John Kennedy typically responded dispassionately to the problem of devising action programs. Even though the burden of implementation was borne by his staff, identifiable, motivational and cognitive traits affected their behaviour directly or indirectly. The direct effects were motivational and ontological. Specifically I refer to the single criterion for participation in the decisional process created by Kennedy's succorance need and his obsession for competence: demonstrable expertise. In general, the implementation groups brought together
in crisis situations were superior to any the White House has ever known. The indirect effects were largely cognitive, involving the manner in which his operational regulators structured and expectations of his advisers: Kennedy's pessimism about the probability of failure sharpened their sense of professional craftsmanship and dedication to sound judgment; his sense of caution produced a reluctance to act prematurely which usually gave them more time to work; his natural scepticism encouraged them to thoroughly question every conclusion and item of information encountered.

a. Missile crisis. Pessimism, caution, and scepticism were writ large in the evolution of the blockade scenario. Kennedy recognized immediately the potential for disaster in a mistaken response, and wanted as much time as possible to formulate a program. He quickly adopted the judgment put forward during the initial briefing session of ExCom that the Soviet leadership would be most responsive to pressure before the missiles became operational. By subtracting the time necessary to execute a program, Kennedy derived a surprisingly long policy formation period: five days. He later admitted that shorter time period (24 hours) would "probably" have produced an imprudent choice. Kennedy's pessimism concerning the probability of success was repeatedly injected into meetings of ExCom through warnings that all available alternatives had serious disadvantages and that any one of them could escalate to nuclear war.

Scepticism took the form of brusque debate supported by careful analysis. Kennedy believed so completely in the creativity of this kind of process that he withdrew from the working sessions of ExCom in order to avoid stifling conflict. In the initial sessions, it became apparent that only two of the six alternatives advanced originally had any hope of success: the surgical strike to destroy the bases and the naval blockade. Initial analysis focused on the surgical strike, but as debate continued the disadvantages began to accumulate. The air strike would kill Russians and could provoke a Soviet response in Berlin. In any case, the Soviets could rebuild the bases immediately after a strike. Then the sites would have to be secured through an invasion. But an invasion would bring American and Soviet forces into direct conflict, in Cuba instead of Berlin. Air strategy required a surprise, but this would certainly be viewed as "sneak" attack, an event that would rally world opinion against the United States.

As the surgical strike became less and less attractive, ExCom began to examine the blockade alternative more intensively. If presented as a "quarantine" on the shipment of missiles and nuclear weapons to Cuba, it would appear both legal and responsible. With flexible interception points and options to escalate, it could be introduced as part of a diplomatic initiative which demonstrated both the capacity and the willingness to undertake military action. It would give the Soviet Union time change policy and mobilize support for the change within the Soviet leadership community. If it failed, a surgical strike and an invasion could be initiated. What was most important, it gave everyone options short of war and plenty of time to choose. When presented with both plans on Saturday afternoon (October 20), Kennedy quickly adopted the blockade scenario, and began allocating tasks to bring it into effect. In retrospect, the decision was a masterpiece of political engineering which permitted a neatly packaged perform-
b. **Steel crisis.** Kennedy had less than forty-eight hours to prevent the spread of the price increase to other companies. This time limit considerably reduced the influence of his sense of caution, but pessimism and scepticism played a prominent role in the development of the divide-and-conquer scenario. The reason for the shortened decisional period was the speed with which collusive pricing had spread in the past. First, a major producer would announce the increase; then, the other major companies would follow the leader; finally, smaller companies, lacking options, would fall in line. The whole industry could act in two days.

With the time limit clearly in mind, Kennedy convened a meeting of relevant staff members within an hour of US Steel's decision. The first alternative suggested was the threat of anti-trust suit, but sharp questioning revealed a number of flaws. First, it would take longer than two days to formulate the basis for court action. Second, a suit against US Steel would probably not affect the decisions of the other producers. Third, such threats had failed in the past.

The next suggestion was the divide-and-conquer program. Since the large companies acted as a bloc, the only hope lay in encouraging the smaller companies to defy the increase, something that could conceivably be accomplished by threatening to divert contracts to companies that refused to increase prices. Faced with the possibility of losing the 10 per cent of the market controlled by government purchases, the large companies might be induced to rethink their positions.

The realization that failure would mean humiliation encouraged Kennedy to probe for additional avenues of pressures. Public pressure on the steel industry would be useful; interpersonal pressure would be equally necessary with the smaller companies; the threat of anti-trust action offered an additional source of leverage. In a very short period of time, Kennedy had come up with a plan which required the simultaneous deployment of a number of resources along a number of different avenues. His sense of pessimism undoubtedly contributed to adoption of this "shotgun" approach. If one program failed, then perhaps another would succeed. Or perhaps all would succeed in small ways, and in the end the small gains would accumulate in victory, which is precisely what happened.

B. **THE "NO HOPE" SYNDROME**

1. **Decisional phase**

The Bay of Pigs and Meredith cases were peculiar decisions because the responsibility for choice and action were distributed between different centres of power. The Eisenhower administration had already agreed to underwrite an invasion of Cuba, to be carried out with American support by an exile brigade training in Guatemala.\(^{46}\) A federal circuit court had overruled a district court decision which supported the refusal of officials to register James Meredith at

\(^{46}\text{Sorensen, Kennedy, 295.}\)
the University of Mississippi. There is ample evidence to suggest that Kennedy wanted to avoid dealing with either decision because each implied such obvious risks of failure. My conclusion is that Kennedy accepted the decisions reluctantly because of the presence of competing pressures. In the Meredith case, he could not deny the traditional role of the president as an administrative officer of the federal courts. In the Bay of Pigs, he seems to have experienced difficulty separating the administrative and political functions of the presidency, which would have been understandable in view of the fact that the Bay of Pigs was his first important presidential decision. In effect, he felt bound by the Eisenhower commitment, even though he feared the consequences of attempting to carry it through. He accepted both decisions as given because he felt he had no choice, and on the rather egoistic assumption that he was competent enough to process them with limited cost.

2. Implementation phase.
In the abrogation syndrome, Kennedy's operational regulators (scepticism, caution, pessimism) dampened exceptionally intense stimuli to manageable proportions during the implementation stage, with the result that the consideration of alternative actions ended at the point the optimal scenario had been achieved. In other words, the operational regulators persistently challenged the assumptions and consequences of each alternative until a more modest, but well-adapted program had been drafted. In the "no hope" set, the same regulators began dampening a set of stimuli that had already been weakened, with the result that the implementation stage ended long after the optimal scenario had been questioned out of existence. The action alternatives finally chosen were too marginal in conception to have succeeded even under the most favorable conditions.

a. The Bay of Pigs (January 28–April 17, 1961). The original plan advanced by the CIA on January 28 called for an open invasion of Cuba by an exile brigade with American air and logistical support, and if necessary, the commitment of American troops once a beachhead had been achieved. Kennedy was sceptical, and asked the Defense Department to evaluate the plan on the explicit assumption that there would be no overt military participation by the United States. The Joint Chiefs of Staff reported that the plan "stood a 'fair' chance of success" without military intervention, if the invasion force could hang on long enough to stimulate an anti-Castro uprising among the Cuban people. Between January 28 and the next meeting on March 11, Kennedy was confronted with the problem of disposing of the brigade and with the assessment by the CIA that after June 1 Castro would be strong enough to resist an invasion. The only inexpensive way of disposing of the brigade, Kennedy agreed, was to return them to Cuba. The question was "how?"

At the next meeting on March 11 Kennedy authorized the creation of an

47 Schlesinger, Jr., A Thousand Days, 940–1.
48 Sorensen, Kennedy, 483, for the costs of the Meredith case, and Schlesinger, Jr., A Thousand Days, 238–9, for the costs of the Bay of Pigs.
49 Sorensen, Kennedy, 294–309; Schlesinger, Jr., A Thousand Days, 233–86.
invasion scenario, with three stipulations: first, no American military assistance; second, a clandestine infiltration rather than an overt invasion; third, flexibility sufficient to terminate the landings twenty-four hours before they were to begin. The CIA came up with the necessary plan, but before approving it in early April, Kennedy asked his "brokers" in the CIA whether or not the brigade would go ahead with a clandestine operation on the understanding that there would be no overt American military assistance. The answer communicated back was "yes," although, for some reason, the brigade leaders believed the landings would fail without some military support and the exile leadership apparently believed that military assistance would be forthcoming if the invasion ran into overwhelming difficulties. Either the exile leadership dismissed Kennedy's limitation for political rhetoric or Kennedy's "brokers" deliberately falsified this information on the assumption that Kennedy would send military assistance if confronted by the possibility of failure at the beaches.

The record clearly demonstrates that Kennedy was operating on a number of mistaken factual assumptions: first, there was no escape route to carry the brigade to safety if the landing failed; second, the Cuban underground was too disorganized and weak to stimulate an uprising; third, Castro was exceptionally popular and could have dealt effectively with a much larger invasion. I think Kennedy may have accepted these myths at face value because they confirmed the value of the more modest scenario his operational regulators had already produced. In other words, he had found serious flaws in the original program, and assumed that the new program lacked flaws because it made up for the shortcomings of the old program.

Moreover, Kennedy seems to have had real difficulty mobilizing his own interest in the decision, possibly because he had not been responsible for its initiation. Had the invasion been his idea, his staff would have been more devoted to preventing him from making a mistake, which means they would have had a thorough, intimate, and broad knowledge of the feasibility of the invasion and would have felt confident enough to challenge the expert judgment of the military and intelligence communities. Kennedy was himself awed by the apparent skill and expertise of the CIA and the Joint Chiefs, and assumed (mistakenly) that the expertise of one would regulate and test the expertise of the other. In fact, both groups were committed to the program, and made similar errors in judgment.

Perhaps most important, his lack of interest and his instinct for caution led him to reduce the cost of the invasion to every conceivable value that could have been risked. Had the program been evaluated in terms of firm policy preferences, a predominant value would have been recognized, and other values could have been sacrificed as costs, a strategy that would have produced a clearly defined objective supported by a carefully calculated (and essentially positive) program of implementation. The strategy of reducing or eliminating important facets of the scenario in order to minimize the danger to a variety of values predestined the invasion to failure. The problem was that Kennedy had not been in the White House long enough to work through a set of policy objectives to find priorities.
b. Meredith case (September 28–31, 1962) Caution and scepticism contributed directly to the riot and bloodshed that Kennedy wanted so much to avoid. Caution produced a reluctance to act decisively and to assume full responsibility for registering Meredith. Governor Ross Barnett had already been cited for civil contempt for turning Meredith away, and by Friday, September 28, it became clear that some display of force would be necessary to gain Meredith’s admission. The question was “how much?” Kennedy hoped to use the threat of military intervention to encourage Barnett to protect Meredith when he arrived on campus. Kennedy and Barnett finally reached an agreement on Saturday in which Barnett would assume direct responsibility for maintaining order on the Oxford campus, and in return Kennedy agreed to register Meredith at the State Capitol in Jackson. This would have allowed Barnett to save face by claiming that he was actually trying to prevent Meredith’s registration again, but had been outwitted by Kennedy. Three hours after the agreement had been reached, Barnett inexplicably cancelled the arrangement. Kennedy responded by federalizing the Mississippi National Guard, ordering federal troops to stand by in Memphis, and arranging for broadcast time on national television early Sunday evening (7:30 PM) to explain his decision to enrol Meredith on Monday morning.

On Sunday morning, Barnett phoned Robert Kennedy with a new proposal which involved a staged capitulation by Mississippi forces to federal forces, an idea that RFK immediately rejected as both “foolish” and “dangerous.” Alarmed by the Attorney General’s disclosure that the president would reveal Barnett’s prior duplicity in his television address later that night, Barnett urged that Meredith be registered that afternoon while the campus still was deserted. He would “pretend ignorance and then protest vehemently from his office in Jackson the following morning.” In return, Barnett promised to use state police to ensure Meredith’s safety, thus eliminating the need for federal troops. The bargain seemed to be a perfect solution for both Kennedy and Barnett.

Then Kennedy committed what must be classified as a serious tactical blunder: he postponed his television address until 10:00 PM. His action was presumably a test of Barnett’s sincerity, although there is strong evidence that Kennedy wanted more time to rewrite a section of the speech to “make it clear that the government was merely carrying out the orders of the court in a case it had not brought and was not forcing down the throats of Mississippians on its own initiative.” Barnett responded to the delay with an inflammatory statement accusing Kennedy of sneaking Meredith on campus without his knowledge, informed the White House that “no further forces would be required,” and then abruptly withdrew the state police. Hearing that the state police had withdrawn, the mob gathered in front of the Administration Building attacked the federal marshals protecting Meredith, and in the ensuing violence two people were killed and hundreds injured.

Barnett encouraged the conditions for the riot in retaliation for the postponement, which he must have interpreted as evidence that Kennedy was going to exploit the presence of the state police to ensure Meredith’s safe arrival on campus, and then expose Barnett’s duplicity later in order to rationalize his own

50 Sorensen, Kennedy, 483–8; Schlesinger, Jr., A Thousand Days, 940–9.
51 Sorensen, Kennedy, 484.
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decisive action in delivering Meredith to the campus earlier than originally scheduled. Not only was Kennedy's postponement a primary factor in triggering the riot, but it compressed events in a way that neutralized his capacity to react to the riot immediately. The riot began shortly before the speech, which meant that Kennedy was unable to respond to it until his speech was over. As a result, the Army arrived too late to prevent the bloodshed, and through a lack of careful briefing in divisional strength instead of numbers appropriate to the situation.

V. Conclusions

This study suggests a number of hypotheses about the relationship between crisis decision-making and personality. First, decisional stimuli are apt to contain personally resonant properties that are capable of arousing personal emotional conflict; this would be especially true of crisis situations. Second, where emotional conflict is evoked the decisional process of an executive system can easily be subordinated to the psychotherapeutic experiences of an executive. Third, a single response pattern of a personality may produce variable (perhaps even contradictory) outcomes as stimulus conditions change. Fourth, small changes in the configuration of decisional stimuli can produce large differences in policy outcomes. Although the psychodynamic model employed to analyse Kennedy's decisions lacks verification, it suggests nevertheless a number of new ways of looking at familiar events. Kennedy's value choice in the Cuban missile crisis, for example, was conceived as an attempt to restore his self-esteem rather than to correct an implausible disequilibrium in the nuclear balance of power. His operational regulators were seen as sources of success in the missile and steel decisions but as sources of failure in the Bay of Pigs and Meredith cases. Viewed in this light, the Kennedy decisions demonstrate how thin the margin between success and failure can be in a crisis situation and how much the final outcome may depend on psychotherapy. They also indicate how innocently irrational forces can be introduced into decisional situations.