

**Complexities of War: Influence of the Individual**

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### **Abstract**

The United States and the Islamic Republic of Iran have faced tension for decades as a result of political differences, economic injustices or socio-cultural disparities. Due to increasing tensions between two powerful nations, the looming prospect of a war is realized, and there seems to be no end to the accumulating conflict. By undertaking an examination of the cognitive theory of international relations, the likelihood of war between these two nations is analyzed. The cognitive theory discusses the influence of a nation's leader's early behavior, temperament, and personality on their foreign policy decisions, and how their belief system dictates their actions in office. Rather than focusing on the larger symptoms of war, like security or resources, a deeper understanding of the core individual is examined, and how this individual shapes the course of history with the influence of their own experiences and characteristics. Case studies of powerful leaders like Saddam Hussein, George W. Bush, and Donald Trump are evaluated; their behaviors in office and likelihood to declare war are determined from an evaluation of early childhood, personality, and temperament. By providing insight into previous historical leaders involved in war, the possibility of the American president declaring war in the future is speculated upon.

### **Complexities of War: Influence of the Individual**

The foundation of international relations is to analyze the interconnectedness of nations and their politics, law, and economy on a global scale. Whether it be changes of policy or economic developments, the goal of international relations is to examine the elaborateness of global leaders and their ascendancy in the creation of a powerful nation-state. More specifically, the leaders of the United States of America and the Islamic Republic of Iran are individuals who both seek to establish their own nation's hegemony geopolitically. As tensions rise between these two powerful nations, the decisions made of respective countries are influenced by a leader's specific personality and their individual perception of reality that is naturally conditioned by emotional affixations and major life events. The cognitive theory of international relations analyzes how the choices made by modern leaders like Donald Trump, George W. Bush, and Saddam Hussein are influenced by decades of social, political and military conflict that are approached from different perspectives with separate preconceptions and priorities. Patterns of decision-making stem from individual priorities of establishing dominance and can help to define the complexity of the conflict between the United States of America and the Islamic Republic of Iran. The ever increasing tension between two powerful nations alludes to the question of the possibility of a future nuclear war outbreak, one of which is not inevitable, but may be escalated by irrational modern day decisions and the strong personalities and dispositions of current leaders that undeniably propel nations towards war and conflict. The conversation lies in the discussion of a potential war between the U.S. and Iran as an evaluation of the behavior, temperament and other individualistic qualities of leaders who shape policy and perception unconsciously through an accumulated personality of experiences and knowledge.

## **Historical Context and Evaluation**

### ***Saddam Hussein***

In August 1990, the first major foreign crisis for the United States emerged after the end of the Cold War when Saddam Hussein, the dictator of Iraq, invaded the nearby tiny country of Kuwait. His Iraqi army was extremely well equipped standing at the fourth largest army in the world - this was no ordinary act of aggression. If Saddam Hussein was to possess control over Kuwait, this would immediately threaten neighbor Saudi Arabia. Both countries as major oil suppliers to the United States would be in control of Saddam's rule and Iraq would control one-fifth of the world's major oil supply. President George H.W. Bush determined this would not stand, and launched the United States into a defense of Saudi Arabia in a deployment known as Operation Desert Shield. Over 500,000 American troops were in Saudi Arabia if Iraq were to strike again. The United States then issued an ultimatum to Saddam Hussein: leave Kuwait by January 15, 1991 or face attack by multinational force backed by the UN council. With no response by January 15, American troops invaded through Kuwait and into Southern Iraq, escalating the conflict from Desert Shield to Desert Storm. (Operation Desert Storm, 2008) Following the Iraqi invasion and occupation of Kuwait, American intentions were not ambiguous. The U.S. threatened to destroy Saddam's military with evidence of a massive American military build up. Why Saddam did not immediately retreat from this imminent threat, one must consider his psychobiography-based political personality profile that predicted Saddam's likely course of action and behavior. A map analysis of Saddam Hussein's political personality and behavior demonstrates a figure that highlights Saddam's background as one of a "deeply traumatized individual". During Saddam's mother's pregnancy with Saddam, his father died of cancer at the fourth month and first born son died in surgery at the eighth month. Saddam's mother was deeply depressed and attempted suicide and abortion. After Saddam was born she gave him to her brother Khairallah who raised Saddam for two and a half

years. Saddam's mother remarried and his stepfather was extremely physically and psychologically abusive to Saddam. At age 8, Saddam returned back to his uncle Khairallah who overwhelmed young Saddam with dreams of glory and power and of fantasies of being a great hero of the Arab world. The notion that Saddam would retreat from Kuwait was not intuitively obvious as reversals for him only occurred when he could do so without losing power. Saddam's dramatic invasion drew much attention multinationally and contributed to his ultimate dream of being an important world leader, aspirations that followed him since childhood. With his narcissistic type personality, reversing himself "without opening old psychological wounds" was difficult unless there was an easy victory and withdrawal.

#### Examples of Political Personality Types

Prototype	Saddam Hussein	Menachem Begin	Josef Stalin
Mechanism	Narcissistic	Obsessive-Compulsive	Paranoid
Ego defenses	Grandiose self, sense of superiority, and denial.	Abhorrence of emotionality that implies lack of control.	Suspiciousness and mistrust
Externalization	Projects arrogance and grandiose self-image. hypervigilance.	Projects fixation with rules, order, efficiency, isolates, rigid, sublimates, intellectualizes.	Projects hostility and stubborn
Mediation of self-other relations	Hunger for reassurance and vulnerability to criticism, lacks empathy. Exploitative, sense of entitlement.	Preoccupied with relative status, is oppositional or domineering. Formal, over moralistic, micro-manages, does not delegate.	Fear of closeness, projection, search for enemies and distrusts all.
Object appraisal	Dogmatic certainty and manipulation of information.	Attention to detail and insistence on rational information processing. Less aware of big picture.	

Decision-making orientation	Risk-averse and dominated by centrality of self. Identifies self-interest with country.	Risk-averse and perfectionistic with decisions avoided, deferred, protracted, and based on expertise.	Risk-averse and worst-case thinking based on competitive advisors.
Leadership style	Search for glory and recognition	Driven, deliberate, myopic, dominated by shoulds, not wants, and search for certainty	Strongly prefers use of force over persuasion.

Saddam Hussein's personality is diagnosed as "malignant narcissism: a narcissist with a paranoid outlook, absence of conscience, and a willingness to use whatever aggression is required to accomplish his goals." He was out of touch with political reality - his advisors would tell him what he wanted to hear rather than what he needed to hear. His constant need for reassurance compelled his advisors to lie to him in fear of their lives, rather than for the benefit of Iraq and its policies. Due to his extreme narcissism and inability to listen to what was necessary to avoid further conflict with the United States, he propelled Iraq towards war. Saddam did not withdraw from Kuwait initially, ignorantly believing that the U.S. was still suffering from Vietnam syndrome despite overwhelming evidence of U.S. military power. As a more independent leader, he is aggressive, limiting, and lacks an interdisciplinary approach towards foreign affairs. Seeking to preserve the state's individual identity, he unconsciously superimposed his sense of self over that of the state, yet still believing his policies were for the good of the state. (U.S. Air Force...n.d.) Saddam's individual perception of reality and hunger for power and domination caused him to turn a blind eye to the capabilities of the United States. The complete profile of Saddam, from early emotional attachments to habitual conditioning of glory and recognition as he grew up, drove his narcissistic operational reality, in turn, leading to further aggression between

powerful nations such as Iraq and the United States that have the capacity and possibility to catalyze war.

### ***George W. Bush***

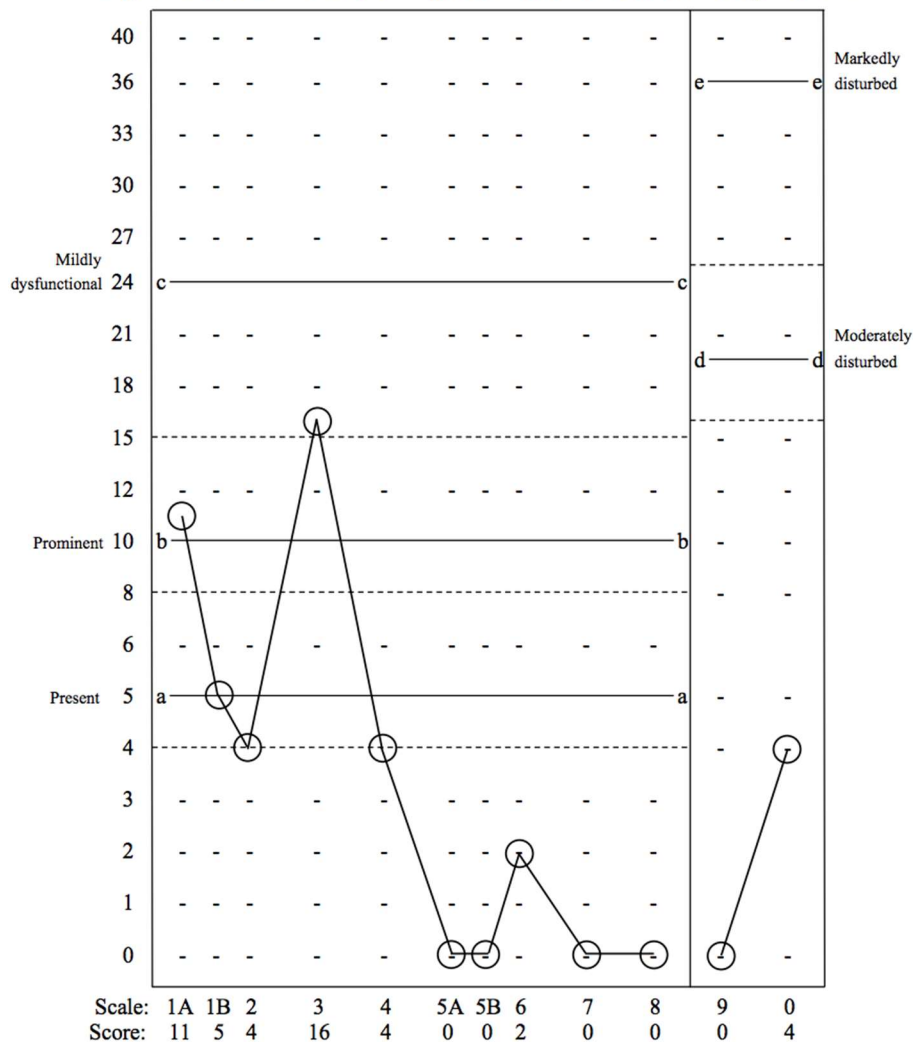
On September 11, 2001, militants associated with Islamic extremist group al-Qaeda hijacked four airplanes and initiated suicide attacks in the United States. Two of the terrorist planes were flown into the twin towers of the World Trade Center in New York City, a third plane destroyed the Pentagon outside Washington D.C, and a fourth plane crashed into a Pennsylvanian field. The death toll rose to almost 3,000 during the 9/11 terrorist attacks, and pushed the George W. Bush administration to combat terrorism through major U.S. initiatives. (9/11 Attacks) The Bush administration response then commenced a bombing campaign and invasion of Afghanistan, capitalizing on the need to kill Osama bin Laden and prevent his terrorist organization from launching more attacks on America soil. To analyze why George W. Bush pushed for war in Afghanistan, a deeper evaluation of his political personality is necessary. In an investigative psychodiagnostic case study of George W. Bush, a Million-based personality profile of Bush was conducted that help to explore the relationship between Bush's prevailing personality patterns and his political performance as president of the United States. Below are the statistical results of the study, which are further elaborated on.

**Table 4**  
*MIDC Scale Scores for George W. Bush*

Scale	Personality pattern	Raw	RT%
1A	Dominant (Controlling)	11	26.2
1B	Dauntless (Dissenting)	5	11.9
2	Ambitious (Asserting)	4	9.5
3	Outgoing (Outgoing)	16	38.1
4	Accommodating (Agreeing)	4	9.5
5A	Aggrieved (Yielding)	0	0.0
5B	Contentious (Complaining)	0	0.0
6	Conscientious (Conforming)	2	4.8
7	Reticent (Hesitating)	0	0.0
8	Retiring (Retiring)	0	0.0
	Subtotal for basic personality scales	42	100.0
9	Distrusting	0	0.0
0	Erratic	4	8.7
	Full-scale total	46	108.7



**Figure 1. Millon Inventory of Diagnostic Criteria: Profile for George W. Bush**



For Scales 1–8, scores of 5 through 9 signify the presence (gradation a) of the personality pattern in question; scores of 10 through 23 indicate a prominent (gradation b) variant; and scores of 24 or higher indicate an exaggerated, mildly dysfunctional (gradation c) variation of the pattern. For Scales 9 and 0, scores of 20 through 35 indicate a moderately disturbed syndrome and scores of 34 through 45 a markedly disturbed syndrome.

From the MIDC scale graduation criteria, Bush was classified as an Outgoing/gregarious and Dominant/controlling personality, with subsidiary features of the Dauntless/adventurous pattern.

Millon’s description of the outgoing personality is one that is desperate for attention and approval; they

are sensitive to the needs and wants of others if it helps them get the attention they seek. This can be proven through Bush's childhood; his three year old sister passed away when he was seven and as he grew up he took upon the burden of the rest of the family and developed a joking, bantering style personality in determination to lift his parents from grief. If not for this, Bush may not have developed such extrovertedness and need to please others which later helped to shape his policies in office. His desperation for fulfilling the needs of others, like the American population, may contribute to his final declaration of war on the Middle East and the commencement for the killing of Osama Bin Laden despite factual evidence of Bin Laden's involvement with the terrorist attacks. The American population's generalization of Bin Laden as the ultimate terrorist may have influenced Bush and his administration to target Bin Laden. Additionally, as Millon's description of the dominant personality states, dominant people are driven to prove their worthiness. They are driven to excel and extremely competitive, seeking supervisory or leadership positions to ensure the completion of a job. This dominant personality has been conditioned throughout Bush's childhood, as he was expected to always live up to the legacy of his father and grandfather. His younger brother Jeb was successful at a much younger age than Bush, further driving Bush's desire to prove his worthiness in the family. The tensions between Bush's father and the firstborn son added to Bush's competitive nature to be the leader of his siblings and uphold natural responsibilities of being the eldest son. The ideology of being a powerful leader, risk-taker, and charismatic thinker followed Bush into his presidency, and can define Bush's unconscious imposition of self over state by declaring war to prove to America and the rest of the world how capable of a leader he is. With a psychoanalysis of Bush's personality, his declaration of war can be explained by an understanding of his childhood and the household in which he was raised. His dominant, outgoing, controlling personality drove his thirst for approval from the watchful world, his country, and those around him, in a frenzy to prove his capabilities of president and move forward with

the ‘necessary’ response of waging a war on terrorism. With high levels of extroversion and low levels of openness, Bush was predisposed to making bold decisions and achieving big rewards with the assurance that his decisions could not be wrong. The decision of invading Iraq was the *kind* of decision he was likely to make. A psychological affirmation of his lifelong desire - to defend his family and pride, and to be the hero of his own story, liberating himself from oppressive forces to restore peace and freedom. (Immelman, 2002)

### ***Donald Trump***

One week after the inauguration of President Donald Trump, he issued an executive order banning nationals from seven countries, Iraq, Syria, Iran, Libya, Somalia, Sudan, and Yemen, from entering the United States for at least 90 days. Trump claims his motives behind this executive order was “to protect the Nation from terrorist activities”, clearly focusing on the Muslim world. Trump’s history includes a long-standing pattern of equating Muslim people as Muslim terrorists, while also unable to isolate non-Muslim radical extremists. The claimed focus was on terrorism, but even with the president’s own perception of the claim, the ban was questioning. “He ignored the country that produced the vast majority of the 9/11 hijackers. Fifteen of the 19 hijackers on September 11, 2001, were Saudi Arabians, yet Saudi Arabia was not on Trump’s list.” Between 1975 and 2015, there are zero people from these seven countries that Trump banned that are involved in terrorist attacks on U.S. soil. It is ironic that Trump’s argument is to prevent future terrorism by banning these countries, yet there has been no evidence of terrorism in four decades by these very countries. (Giorgis, 2019) Perhaps Trump’s motives are more so characterized by his individual trait of apparent narcissism and hunger to be the defining race and country. To sum up Trump’s personality, Harvard professor Howard Gardner responds as “remarkably narcissistic”. Renowned psychoanalytic theorist Heinz Kohut argues that narcissism stems from a deficiency in early-life mirroring: Parents who fail to reflect a young child’s love, leaving the

child in a desperate attempt for validation and affirmation from others. A narcissistic personality can additionally mask an underlying insecurity. Donald Trump's parents were loving towards him and all his siblings, so in his particular case, he simply cannot get enough glorification. The consistent parental praise and encouraging motivation reinforced a blanket of security over Trump, adding to his dynamic personality of ambition and greed.

However, his parents did instill within him a sense of danger and a need for toughness, a motto: "The world cannot be trusted." Trump's father Fred was a landlord, and would occasionally bring young Donald along with him while collecting small rent. On one trip, Donald asked his father why he would stand to the side of the door after ringing a tenant's doorbell. Fred tells Donald that it is because sometimes they shoot right through the door. Although an exaggeration, this statement was reflective of Fred's worldview, and the mentality he enrooted in his son. He would command his sons to be mentally, physically, and emotionally tough against competitors, because in a world of business, one must be vigilant in order to survive. His lessons of toughness conditioned Donald's hot temperament today, training him to be aggressive. Donald was also sent to military school at 13 years old, where lessons of discipline and strong work ethic were reinforced. Military school also taught him how to deal with aggressive men, like his intimidating baseball coach; these lessons would be further applied to his policies as president in the future. Trump can also be recognized by his consistent, inflammatory language. There is good reason to fear his provocative language towards America's enemies. A psychologist named David Winter at the University of Michigan analyzed U.S. presidential inaugural addresses and "found that those presidents who laced their speeches with power-oriented, aggressive imagery were more likely than those who didn't to lead the country into war." (McAdams, 2018)

Trump's characterization of his own life story and attitudes towards America's enemies is certainly aggressive, and his extrovertedness and narcissism indicates he is willing to take big risks -

ones that will be memorable in history books. His agitational language may create nationalistic anger among his supporters, and cause them to target enemy nations that Trump focuses upon. Like all humans, presidents create in their minds narrative identities to further explain how they are the person they are today. An unconscious process, the “selective reinterpretation” of the past, and fantasies of the future build a certain life story. Prior research demonstrates the “sense of coherence, purpose, and continuity over time” that a life story provides, and can additionally help establish views of national identity and progress. A deeper interpretation of the Muslim travel ban may reveal that Trump’s nationalistic identity consumes him, and he displaces his sense of self over that of the state. His conditioned aggression and toughness from childhood guides his actions, as well as the destiny of the state and other countries. Tensions between Iran and the United States may be escalated by Trump’s pugnacious personality and inability to be a participatory leader. He has only known what it is like to be number one, and his temperament and behavior will allow him to stay there. If there is a war on Iran, it will be influenced by Trump’s isolationist viewpoints, lifelong greedy and prideful personality, and need for glorification.

### **Theoretical Construct**

To further evaluate relations between the United States and the Islamic Republic of Iran, it is necessary to analyze the major theories of international relations that explain world events and relations between states. These theories are broken down into levels of analysis: individual level, state level, and system level. Of relevance to this paper, the individual level of analysis is focused upon, specifically on the role of individual people on the broader global spectrum. Individuals are the ones who make decisions within nations states, and therefore consist of the people who make and conduct foreign policy. As emphasized previously by the case studies of individual leaders like Saddam Hussein, George W. Bush, and Donald Trump, their willingness or ability to engage in combat can be defined by their specific personality

characteristics that guide their political actions. The cognitive theory of international relations explains that “a leader’s specific personality guides not only his or her own actions but the destiny of the state and its relations with other countries.” As Harold Lasswell suggests, “unconsciously, leaders actually superimpose their own sense of self over that of the state...the line separating the leader from the state becomes blurred, with the personality of the leader - complete with flaws and insecurities - shaping the policy and perceptions of the state.” Cognitive theorists view a leader’s perception of other states as essential to foreign policy. Misinterpretations can often lead to disputes or war, and these misinterpretations of leaders can affect the foreign policy of states within the international system. Cognitive theorists argue that the acknowledgement of a leader’s perception of policy is conditioned by their own personality. Operational reality is a term of cognitive theory that “refers to the picture of the environment held by an individual (usually a leader) as it is modified by his or her personality, perceptions, and misperceptions.” We as humans live within our own operational realities, but one leader’s view of reality can drastically alter policies or decisions that influence the lives of millions and define the course of history. A leader’s personality describes how a leader makes and implements decisions, and assesses consequences and outcomes in a global context. (Genest, 2004)

Skeptics of the cognitive theory may argue that the focus of the individual is limiting in scope and the narrowness of the theory is difficult to apply to an entire system of international relations. The principles of cognitive theory may lead to the assumption that all war and conflict is determined by misunderstandings between individual leaders, while actually wars are the result of fundamental complicative issues like national security or resource competition. It is true that war may be a result of global issues, but the handling of these issues is largely dictated by what the country’s leader is capable of. This leader grew up with a certain belief system, and their actions are dictated by their values. Saddam Hussein views reality as one where he must obtain the glory as a dominant world leader,

influencing his decision to continue war between the Middle East and U.S. If not for his aggressive personality, he may actually have responded to U.S. negotiations and ceased war. The entire world is comprised of individuals who are all part of nation-states, who are all part of the entire international system. Individuals have the ability to influence other individuals. As humans, we dictated through history our own course of living. *We* prioritized the need for national security and resource competition. Yes, these are issues of the larger geopolitical system. But these issues were prioritized by the individual, who seek to ensure the survival of other individuals. All living humans were nurtured by someone else, and their whole life is a complexity of things they are taught. From these emotional attachments and vivid experiences, a human creates their own life course and then influences other individuals. Regarding war, the symptom is the struggle for resources and power. We go to war to treat these symptoms by obtaining maximum resources and power. However, instead of arguing over the accumulation of resources, or imposing sanctions to limit other country's power, or creating policies that accelerate our own power, the actual root of war, starting from the individual leader, must be addressed. What characteristics of a country's leader dictate their foreign policy? How did the belief systems of George W. Bush influence his decision to invade the Middle East? Rather than focusing on the superficial symptoms of war, we must understand the source of war, and the personality, characteristics, and beliefs of individual leaders that are behind every decision, action, and policy.

### **Conclusion**

By interpreting the deeper personality of Donald Trump, it can be understood that if he were to declare on Iran, his decisions will be largely influenced by the way he was raised and the accumulation of his character. His ultimate goal may be of national security or resource collection, but his narcissistic personality is the underlying factor that drives his wish to be number one. Security and resources may be for the United States' interest, but they also fuel his own interests of egoism and pride. Trump as an

individual has characteristics that will compel him towards the war out of personal gain, as the war on Iran is not inevitable, and it never will be. As proven by the case studies of Saddam Hussein and George W. Bush, foreign policies are heavily influenced by a leader's learned temperament, mostly influenced by their family life and the personality they have shaped over decades. Any mighty leader must have underlying motives for declaring war, Saddam and his fiend for recognition, and Bush and his craving for approval. Both leaders may have also wanted something else, Saddam for resources and Bush for national security, but the ultimate declaration of war stems internally. As the United States and Iran continue to battle over resources, the important focus is on the individual and the individual's role in the entire system. Each decision made is an individual's decision, who consults with other individuals, who all ultimately decide the course of action. If war were to ever occur, an individual's disposition and personality will unconsciously affect their foreign policy.



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