PERSONALIZING CRISES

The cold war is now a decade behind us.[1] The demise of the Soviet Union has led to a fundamental shift in the imagery of foreign policy. The world is no longer opposing monolithic blocks. Instead there is a growing recognition that the players are individual states, as are their political systems and their leaders. Threats to U.S. security no longer fit under a single ideological label but instead come from varied individual sources. Indeed decision makers increasingly perceive threats as generated at the subnational level, often assigning menace to individual leaders rather than the state.

Recent crises emphasize these trends. U.S. presidents have been quick to vilify recalcitrant foreign leaders, frequently comparing Saddam Hussein and Slobodan Milosevic to Hitler. Despite the demonization of foreign leaders, the United States claims to be friends of their people. Yet, while the United States maintains the position that its acts are directed against the regime and leadership in Iraq and Yugoslavia, it is the ordinary citizens in these countries that suffer the worst deprivation as a result of U.S. policy. As such, these types of policies, which I shall refer to as leader-specific policies, have been the subject of much criticism. However, these criticisms are unwarranted. I argue that these policies maximize the leverage of U.S. foreign policy and increase the

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probability of achieving a successful outcome. The failure of these policies in recent crises results from poor implementation, not an underlying flaw in their design.

Leader-specific policies add an extra feature to a traditional threat. The punishment aspect of the policy is targeted against the specific leader or his regime. Hence, rather than simply threaten the use of force or the imposition of sanctions, leader-specific policies keep these punishments in place for as long as the miscreant foreign leader remains in power. Yet the target of these policies is the foreign leadership, not the nation itself. Sanctions are not maintained as a draconian form of punishment; rather, their removal is made contingent on the replacement of the recalcitrant regime. Pariah states are reinstated when the regime changes. New regimes are not held accountable for the sins of their predecessors. As a straightforward illustration, few believe that U.S. economic sanctions and U.S. enforcement of no-fly zones against Iraq will continue much beyond the removal of Saddam Hussein. The United States' response to the Yugoslav regime of Slobodan Milosevic following the 1999 conflict in Kosovo exhibits a similar pattern. NATO's Supreme Allied commander in Europe, General Wesley Clark, stated, "It is a real political problem for the people of Yugoslavia because I think world leaders have made very clear that they don't see Yugoslavia really being readmitted into the European Community of nations or receiving the kinds of reconstruction that it really needs while he [Milosevic] is still in place as the president."[2] The conditional nature of Western foreign policy is growing. Foreign leaders who cross the United States find themselves demonized and their nation ostracized from the international community.

The United States has shown itself prepared to blackball intransigent foreign leaders. While claiming "we have no quarrel with the people of Yugoslavia, . . . our actions are directed against the repressive policy of the Yugoslav leadership" (President Clinton, 24 March 1999), the destructive use of air power to cripple the economic and military capacity of the Yugoslav state clearly harmed its people. Although these

ordinary Serbs were its victims, NATO policy was not directed or targeted against them: Milosevic was the target. This targeting of foreign policy against specific leaders rather than the nation they represent as a whole gives extra bite to foreign policy.

Leader-specific policies derive efficacy through two mechanisms. First, the contingent nature of leader-specific policies encourages the citizens to depose their miscreant leader, which provides a domestic resolution to U.S. foreign policy problems. Banishment from the international community imposes costs on the citizenry. Yet the contingent nature of the sanctions means that the citizens can rapidly normalize relations and be readmitted to the international community by deposing the incumbent regime. Hence, leader-specific foreign policies spur domestic change abroad. Second, leader-specific policies make opposing U.S. interests less attractive to foreign leaders. By crossing swords with the United States they risk alienation from the international community. Not only is isolation by itself undesirable, but it undermines a recalcitrant leader's grip on power. This strikes at a despot's most vital criterion, survival in office. A clearly articulated leader-specific policy, by endangering a foreign leader's tenure, encourages foreign leaders to comply with U.S. wishes. The issue under dispute does not affect the efficacy of these types of policies. Whether the United States wants to encourage a foreign leader to vacate occupied territory, cease ethnic cleansing, end state-sponsored terrorism, help with the war on drugs, or terminate a nuclear weapons program, a clearly articulated leader-specific policy increases compliance.

Whereas at the military level, U.S. intervention in the recent Kosovo crisis achieved its goals, taken as a whole U.S. policy in Kosovo has been an abject failure. On a humanitarian level, the United States has failed to prevent gross violations of human rights, and the economic repercussions on the region will persist for years. True success in Kosovo would have been achieved by convincing Milosevic to stop ethnic cleansing and respect his earlier agreements for a peaceful resolution before the large-scale use of force. Although leader-specific policies

potentially gave the United States the leverage to achieve these goals, U.S. policy in Kosovo failed. Leader-specific policies improve compliance because they threaten the domestic survival of recalcitrant leaders. The Clinton administration's policy is clearly contingent in nature and targeted against Milosevic. Yet it failed to discourage Milosevic's actions because the contingent nature of the policy was not revealed until after the event. For leader-specific policies to be effective they need to be explicit. They cannot be expected deter a foreign leader if the leader does not know about the threat. The use of leader-specific policies after the fact only eliminates any chance of restoring relations with Yugoslavia and condemns ordinary Yugoslav citizens to economic misery.

Leader-specific policies improve the prospects of compliance, but foreign leaders need to know the consequences of transgression. This requires a bold declaration of intent. The U.S. administration needs to commit itself to a policy early in the crisis. Such a policy recommendation calls for strong leadership. It precludes the president the luxury of meandering along following public opinion. Hence a strong Reagan-type leadership is more amenable to adopting leader-specific policies than the leadership style of Clinton, which tends to wait to gauge public sentiment before initiating policy. Yet such policies work for all leaders. Clinton was at his most effective in Haiti, where his unambiguous and regime-targeted statement of intent brought compliance from the ruling military junta. His firm early commitment to intervention if the junta did not stand down led to the restoration of the democratically elected Haitian leader, Aristide, and avoided any direct military confrontation. Without such an overt threat targeted against the Haitian military, Clinton was unlikely to have succeeded on an issue that subsequently garnered little public support.

Although I champion leader-specific policies that necessarily call for defined commitments, I am not advocating that the United States take a more interventionist path or pursue more ambitious foreign policy goals. As Defense Secretary William Cohen stated in terms of the United States' decision not to lead a humanitarian effort in East Timor:

"We have to be selective where we commit our forces and, under the circumstances, this is not an area that we are prepared to commit forces. . . . As I have indicated before, the United States cannot be—and should not be—viewed as the policeman of the world."[3] When vital U.S. interests are not at stake, the United States should not commit itself. Yet should the administration deem intervention in the U.S. national interest, then the United States should leverage its policies to maximize their probability of success. Leader-specific policies provide this leverage.

The successful implementation of leader-specific policies requires two factors. First, sanctions or other punishments applied by the United States need to be targeted toward the recalcitrant regime, not the nation as a whole. De facto, U.S. policy is already increasingly moving in this direction. Second, the contingent nature of these policies needs to be stated explicitly and publicly early in the crisis. In the fallout following the Kosovo conflict, President Clinton's numerous statements echoed those of General Clark cited above. The United States will not normalize relations with Yugoslavia or provide aid for reconstruction as long as the indicted war criminal Milosevic remains in power. Unfortunately, such explicit statements on the consequences of a continued policy of ethnic cleansing would have been far more timely and useful during the Rambouillet conference in first quarter of 1999 than after the cessation of the NATO air campaign. It was at that point that U.S. threats had the greatest chance of success.

Before exhorting the virtues of explicit leader-specific foreign policies, several issues require examination. First, I explore the mechanisms through which these policies work. Second, I characterize the advantages of these policies by showing that they have greater chance of eventual success. Third, I examine the implementation of such policies. The key is to make policy contingent on the leader and state so explicitly. Although it is easy to recommend policy formulas, unless politically feasible even the ideal policy is doomed to failure. Leader-specific threats require a bold declaration of U.S. intent. Hence, strong leadership

furthers such policies. Yet leader-specific policies do not require additional risk. I only advocate these policies in instances where the administration deems U.S. interests to be at stake. As I shall show, in such circumstances a bold strategy targeted against the recalcitrant regime offers the best chance of success.

In order to develop the theory of leader-specific policies, it is useful to consider the facts of the Kosovo conflict. By the beginning of 1999 it was clear that neither the Yugoslav government nor the rebel fighters of the Kovoso Liberation Army (KLA) intended to honor their earlier commitments to end ethnic violence in Kosovo. However, following a series of talks culminating in a conference at Rambouillet, France, the KLA reluctantly agreed to a cessation of violence. However, the Yugoslav government obstinately refused to end its policy of ethnic cleansing. The United States and other Western nations, under the guise of NATO, threatened the use of force to coerce the Yugoslav government to change its policy. Slobodan Milosevic's government refused to yield. On 23 March NATO secretary-general Javier Solana directed the NATO Supreme commander, General Wesley Clark, "to initiate air operations in the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia." The air campaign that followed lasted several months and crippled the economy and infrastructure of Yugoslavia. During the conflict Milosevic was increasingly demonized by the West, culminating in his indictment as a war criminal.

Although this brief account of the conflict misses much of the detail, it portrays the inherent political situation. The United States and its NATO allies wanted the Yugoslavs to stop their policy of the ethnic cleansing of ethnic Albanians and threatened the use of force. Slobodan Milosevic refused to concede, and it took seventy-nine days of bombing before the Yugoslav parliament accepted the West's demands. In their rawest form, U.S. threats failed, and the actual use of force was needed to induce the Serbs to stop their operations in Kosovo. However, such a characterization misses the extent to which the Yugoslav president, Slobodan Milosevic, increasingly became the object of NATO aggres-

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sion. Indeed in his 10 June address to the nation, President Clinton empathized with the Serbian people, "I know that you, too, have suffered in Mr. Milosevic's wars."

Although the conflict is over, ethnic violence remains a common occurrence and Yugoslavia remains devastated from the air campaign. Despite dissent and protests following the war, opponents have failed to remove Milosevic, and President Clinton has made it clear that as long as his regime remains in power the United States will not provide any reconstruction aid to Serbia. The future looks bleak for the average Yugoslav citizen.

U.S. and NATO threats were insufficient to deter Milosevic. The result was a costly prolonged use of force, which has exacerbated the economic problems of the Balkans rather than resolved any of the underlying problems. It is hard to claim success. U.S. policy over Kosovo contained elements of the leader-specific policies advocated in this essay. Unfortunately, their piecemeal application rather than a strong explicit declaration of intent diminished their efficacy.

It is always difficult to speculate about what might have been; however, the thought experiment serves a useful purpose. The risk to Milosevic of continued cleansing operations in Kosovo was that the NATO threat was for real. Of course the threat was real, and *ex post* it is hard to believe Milosevic made the correct choice. Yet such a judgment is made with the benefit of hindsight. It is harder to say that *ex ante* Milosevic chose wrongly. He could not be certain that NATO threats were credible, and even if he were, today he still remains the president of Yugoslavia. In order to increase compliance with NATO demands, the West needed to make its threats more costly to him personally. Without any need to increase the intensity of the military operation, leader-specific threats provide this leverage. Instead of a simple threat to use military force to protect ethnic Albanians, NATO should have explicitly included the promise that even after the cessation of force it would continue to ostracize Yugoslavia, impose sanctions, and deny aid while Milosevic remained in power. This is after all the policy

eventually implemented. The inclusion of these latter terms magnifies the risk Milosevic faces from his intransigence. He knows that as soon as conflict is initiated he condemns his country to isolation. Although he is personally unlikely to suffer the economic repercussions of quarantine, they endanger the survival of his regime.

Had the contingent nature of NATO's threat been explicit from the beginning of the crisis, then Yugoslav citizens would have known the consequences of retaining Milosevic. As long as he remains in power, their isolation continues. This provides an additional impetus to remove him. A threat aimed specifically at Milosevic weakens his grip on power, imperiling his regime through dual mechanisms. First, as long as Milosevic remains it harms the interests of his citizens. This gives them an increased desire to remove him. Second, it also provides a focal point to rally opposition to his regime. Collective action problems make protests difficult in autocratic states. Each individual is reluctant to take to the streets unless he or she is certain that everyone else will also be there. The lone protester has little hope of success and exposes herself to retribution from the state. Protests either fizzle out quickly, or they gain sufficient momentum that the regime collapses. Deposing an autocrat is as much a problem of coordination as it is a problem of desire. An explicit NATO threat might have provided a sufficient rallying point to tip the scales against Milosevic. Indeed it might be fair to speculate that, had the citizens of Iraq realized the economic consequences of retaining Saddam Hussein as leader following the gulf war, they might have joined Kurdish uprisings rather than supporting their suppression. Their failure to remove Saddam Hussein at his most vulnerable moment, immediately after the gulf war, has consigned the average Iraqi to economic misery. Even many of the regime's supporters must now question the wisdom of their loyalty following nearly a decade of economic isolation.

Leader-specific policies improve the prospects of malefactors being deposed domestically. This risk to tenure in office helps prevent foreign leaders from opposing U.S. interests in the first place. The contingent

nature of leader-specific policies makes leaders reluctant to incur the United States' rancor. Herein lies the true value of leader-specific policies: they help prevent conflict from occurring in the first place. Despite the military successes of the air campaign over Kosovo, avoiding the conflict in the first place would have been a far greater success. Of course there is no guarantee that an explicit declaration by the United States that it intended to pursue the leader-specific policies it eventually carried out would have deterred Milosevic, but it would certainly have improved the odds. Leader-specific policies work because the contingent nature of punishments encourages citizens to depose miscreant leaders. This magnifies the physical threat the United States exerts by directing it at what despots care most about: survival. The greater the United States' threat, the greater its power to deter. The advantages of leader-specific policies are not special to the case of Kosovo. Indeed, they provide a general mechanism to reduce conflict and enhance cooperation between states.

Robert Axelrod, a political scientist from the University of Michigan, conceptualized cooperation between nations as a prisoners' dilemma.[4] When questioned separately both prisoners individually have incentives to accept the district attorney's offer. Yet both prisoners are better off if neither confesses. This incentive structure is prevalent in international relations. For example, two rivals are both better off if they both agree to cut their military expenditures. They both maintain a similar security level while spending less. Unfortunately, each side has an incentive to exploit the other's cooperation. This incentive, coupled with the fear of exploitation, prevents cooperation, keeping arms levels high. Although both sides would prefer to agree to cut their arms levels, they can not credibly agree to do so. The result is the inefficient outcome of both sides maintaining large arsenals.

The classic solution to this problem is to consider long-run strategies. If nations condition their current behavior on previous behavior, cooperating only if their rival has cooperated in the past, then long-run cooperation can be sustained providing nations are sufficiently patient.

Once nations use these punishment strategies—punishing or refusing to cooperate with nations that have cheated in the past—then nations can still exploit their rival in the short term but only at the expense of forgoing the long-run advantages of cooperation.

In the context of Axelrod's game the dynamics of leader-specific policies enhance the incentives for cooperation. In his standard formulation, nations refuse to cooperate with states that have cheated in the past. Leaders can choose exploitative policies, but they do so at the expense of future cooperation. In contrast, leader-specific policies withhold cooperation only as long as the offending leader remains in power. Grudges are held against individuals, not nations. Of course, if leaders remain in perpetuity, then the policies are equivalent, with relations between states permanently soured. Yet in the leader-specific scenario cooperation is revitalized with the demise of the miscreant leader. Therefore citizens can restore cooperation by deposing the leader who violated international norms of conduct. It is this induced incentive to remove malefactors that redirects punishment against leaders. Desiring to keep their jobs, leaders are more cautious to avoid international sanctions when the sanctions are leader specific in nature. Since leader-specific policies increase the costs to leaders of violating agreements or international norms of behavior, nations can cooperate at higher levels.

The harsher the punishment that nations can impose, the easier it is to maintain cooperation. A conventional threat imposes costs on the Yugoslav state and reduces the benefits of future cooperation for all. A leader-specific policy focuses these costs on the leadership by raising the incentive for the people to depose their leader. With the contingent nature of U.S. threats known, by violating the demands of the international community, Milosevic is not only giving up the benefits of future cooperation, but he is also jeopardizing his leadership. Indeed as Micheal Roth of Human Rights Watch stated, "We hope that the indictment of Milosevic [as a war criminal] will help de-legitimize him in the eyes of his people and thus hasten the day when people decide to choose a new leader."[5] Unfortunately, the magnification of the deterrent

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effect only applies if the leader-specific nature is known. Without this knowledge the citizens lack the motivation and organizational focus to depose Milosevic.

Of course it is impossible to state that a well-specified leader-specific threat would have worked, but it is more likely to have done so. Even if the policy had failed it did not call for a military or political response that is significantly different from that imposed anyway. A further advantage of leader-specific policies is that they provide an explicit mechanism to wipe the slate clean and normalize relations. When the recalcitrant leader is removed cooperation between states is restored. Such clear-cut conditions for the normalization of relations prevent festering and acrimonious relations persisting between nations. A comparison of the fate of Germany following the two world wars serves as illustration. Following World War I, the Allies imposed draconian punishments on Germany. It was territorially diminished, its armed forces were restricted, and it was forced to pay harsh reparations. Given the state of the economy following more than four years of war, these reparations were crippling. It has been argued that the failure of the West to effectively reintegrate Germany as an equal member in the international community led to the rise of authoritarianism and eventually to World War II. Following World War II events took a very different course. The Nazis were perceived as the guilty party rather than the German nation as a whole. With the defeat of Hitler's regime, the West made every effort to revitalize Germany and to restore it to its current position in the international community. The ability to consign past violations to history and start again with a clean slate rejuvenates cooperation.

The case for leader-specific policies should by now be clear. When threats are made contingent on the malefactor remaining in office, then miscreant leaders are more likely to be overthrown. This in turn makes leaders more likely to comply with demands in the first place. A final benefit is a mechanism to end a legacy of bad relations. Adding a leader-specific component to foreign policy magnifies the effectiveness of threats and enhances cooperation. Yet the efficacy of a policy prescrip-

tion does not matter if it can not be implemented. Next I examine the political feasibility of leader-specific policies.

To a large extent the United States is already conditioning its policies against individual leaders, and the demonization of recalcitrant foreign leaders is increasingly prevalent. Indeed there is little reason for these policies not to dominate since the physical acts required to implement them vary little from those of conventional policies. The United States has already shown itself prepared to implement these required actions.

The missing element in U.S. policy is a bold declaration of its policy stance. Leader-specific policies work by increasing the cost foreign leaders face from violating U.S. interests. Yet increasing the size of the threat is useful only if the other side knows about it. Stanley Kubrick emphasized this point in his apocalyptic film *Dr. Strangelove*. In the movie, the Russians invent a Doomsday machine, which, once turned on, will annihilate the world if a nuclear weapon is ever used. The Doomsday machine's deterrent property is intended to make nuclear war impossible. Yet, as Dr. Strangelove points out, it is "essential" to tell the other side of this threat.

Just like the Doomsday machine, leader-specific policies work best when their existence is known. However, here the analogy ends. Unlike the Doomsday machine, leader-specific policies can be used selectively. I advocate leader-specific policies only in those cases where the administration deems sufficient U.S. interest that it would intervene anyway. Leader-specific policies provide a tool to enhance the effectiveness of U.S. policy in a wide variety of foreign policy scenarios. Yet simply because a tool is available does not mean it should always be used. Rather, leader-specific policies are a means to maximize U.S. leverage when U.S. interests are served by intervention.

In his book on public opinion and foreign policy, Douglas Foyle argues that leaders' belief systems affect their reliance on public opinion when deciding whether to use force.[6] He characterizes leaders by whether or not they follow public opinion in forming decisions and

whether or not leaders feel they need to generate public support to enact their policies. For instance he labels Clinton as a delegate, both following the lead of public opinion and feeling the need to garner public support to enact his policies. On the other extreme, he labels Reagan a guardian, neither feeling obliged to follow public opinion nor needing the reassurance of public support before embarking on a chosen policy. The strong leadership style of Reagan is clearly more conducive to implementing leader-specific policies. However, all leaders can exploit the benefits of a bold decisive policy.

Typically Clinton has chosen to wait for public opinion to form before embarking on a course of action. Yet in 1994 he made a definite threat against the Haitian military junta. Specifically, he stated that if it did not stand down then he would authorize the use of force against it. The junta reluctantly acquiesced and departed just prior to Clinton's deadline. Although subsequent developments in Haiti have been less successful, by his bold declaration, Clinton achieved success, forcing the junta to leave without actually having to resort to force. Such a success would have been unlikely had Clinton waited to receive public endorsement of his policy. Even after his Sunday radio appeal for support, the public seemed apathetic to the issue. Herein lies the risk to any bold declaration of policy. Once a commitment is made leaders are trapped by their own word.[7] Politically it is difficult to back out of a threat. Indeed, this is why U.S. threats are credible in the first place. Unfortunately, this potentially leaves politicians vulnerable if such a policy commitment is found to be unpopular. Haiti exemplifies this. After Clinton declared his policy he found little public backing for his stance. If the military junta had not stepped down, Clinton would have been faced with a difficult decision between using force, for which there was no public support, or backing down and losing all future credibility.

Waiting allows leaders to gauge the public's support for intervention. Unfortunately, by this time crises are sufficiently developed, it is often difficult for leaders to back out, and force is often needed when a bold declaration of intent might have discouraged the situation from

escalating in the first place. Waiting runs the risk that by the time support for the use of force develops, force becomes inevitable. Americans remain fearful of another Vietnam and so are wary of commitment. Yet Vietnam is not an example of overly ambitious commitment but rather a failure to communicate the full extent of the United States' interests. Had the full extent of the U.S. commitment to South Vietnam been signaled early in the conflict, parties might have been forced to the negotiating table, dissipating the need for a protracted conflict.

Advantages aside, leaders boldly declaring leader-specific policies risk miscalculating the public's interest and committing themselves to an unpopular policy. Yet the deterrent power of such policies means that on average such policies are more likely to yield successful results than a cautious hedging of bets. On average, U.S. interests are much better served by a strong leader willing to take a bold stance early in crisis events.

With the end of the cold war, the United States now has the luxury of dealing with each nation as a separate identity rather than simply labeling it friend or foe according to which side of the ideological divide it falls. Given this change in perspective, the United States increasingly perceives threats as originating with the responsible individual. It is a natural progression to target policies against the individuals in foreign states who make policy, and increasingly the United States specifies the removal of incumbent foreign leaders as a condition for the removal of sanctions and the restoration of normal relations. This personalizing of crises increases the efficacy of U.S. foreign policy. By targeting threats toward specific foreign leaders, the United States increases its probability of success. Such policies place high costs on recalcitrant foreign leaders who refuse to back down by endangering their survival in office. By making the removal of the miscreant leader a prerequisite for the removal of sanctions and the normalization of relations, leader-specific policies increase the incentives and the focus for the removal of recalcitrant regimes. Therefore, leader-specific policies serve U.S. goals through two mechanisms. First, they deter foreign leaders from acting

against U.S. interests when a leader-specific threat is in place. Second, leader-specific policies encourage citizens to depose foreign leaders should these threats be insufficient.

Unfortunately, the successful enactment of leader-specific policies requires a bold and open declaration of U.S. intent. This element has been missing from U.S. policy, and without it the U.S. administration reduces the effectiveness of its policies. Unless the contingent nature of U.S. threats is known, citizens have fewer incentives to depose recalcitrant leaders; without this challenge to those leaders' grip on power, U.S. threats lack force. I do not advocate a more ambitious or expansive foreign policy. But rather when there exists a clear and present danger to U.S. interests, leader-specific policies offer the best opportunity for success. The effective enactment of these policies requires strong leadership.

Notes

1. This essay draws on joint research with Fiona McGillivray (Yale University), "Trust and Cooperation through Agent Specific Punishments," forthcoming in *International Organizations*.
2. Comment to the BBC World Service, 20 July 1999.
3. Reuters, 8 September 1999.
4. Robert Axelrod, *The Evolution of Cooperation* (New York: Harper Collins, 1984).
5. NBC News, Washington, 11 June 1999.
6. Douglas Foyle, *Counting the Public In: President, Public Opinion, and Foreign Policy* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1999).
7. Graham Allison's analysis of the Cuban missile crisis provides an interesting example of this phenomenon. In September 1962 President Kennedy declared he would never allow "offensive weapons" to be based on Cuba, a declaration he made only after being assured by intelligence that Russia had no plans to station missiles there anyway. When the missiles