

The Utility of Poliheuristic Theory for Predicting Leaders' Policies: President Carter & the Iran Hostage Crisis

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Abstract: Since the terrorist attacks against the World Trade Center and Pentagon on September 11, 2001, an entire policy community in the U.S. is dedicated to the difficult aim of gathering intelligence in order to predict the behavior of international actors. Estimating national leaders' policies during times of crisis is a primary focus of analysts, but the task is difficult due to the wide range of potential policies. The poliheuristic theory appears to hold the potential to improve the precision with which analysts forecast leaders' decisions. The theory's identification of a noncompensatory decision rule enables the dismissal of many possible alternatives that fail to satisfy the leader's domestic political criteria, reducing the uncertainty associated with predicting potential decisions. This paper contends that the poliheuristic theory is a useful approach for analysts trying to forecast leaders' decisions. As an example of the theory's utility, this study examines President Carter's policy vis-à-vis the Iranian hostage crisis. The theory's two-stage, decision-making process accurately reflects the manner in which the Carter administration arrived at its decision. Carter dismissed policies that potentially harmed the noncompensatory decision dimension—reelection. His final decision then derived from remaining alternatives that maximized net benefits for both military and strategic concerns. After comparing the theory with compensatory approaches to decision making, a general model for predicting leaders' policies, informed by poliheuristic theory, is examined.

Keywords: Poliheuristic theory, International crises, Leader decision-making, Policy prediction

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I. INTRODUCTION

In an increasingly dangerous world, predicting policies by national leaders during crises is a central concern of policy analysts. Since the terrorist attacks against the World Trade Center and Pentagon on September 11, 2001, the Bush administration has developed a new, preemptive foreign policy strategy for dealing with terrorism (e.g., Bush, 2002). An entire policy community in the United States is dedicated to the difficult aim of gathering intelligence in order to forecast the behavior of international actors. When policy makers "get it right," they are able to formulate an appropriate response—or, preemptive action—capable of preventing such unfortunate events as the transfer of weapons of mass destruction or international conflict. However, as recent events suggest, predicting the actions of international actors can be a complicated task. The key to developing an effective and appropriate preemption requires the mitigation of uncertainty, which is inherent in forecasting an individual's behavior (see e.g., Bueno de Mesquita, 1984).

During the course of an international crisis, leaders may choose from a broad set of options. National leaders may employ nonforce options such as verbal denunciations, threats, or economic sanctions. On the other hand, leaders can select from a range of military force alternatives that vary categorically according to the modal manner in which force is employed. For example, a leader may respond to a crisis by signaling to an adversary with a show of force, an alert, or a mobilization. Leaders may also choose to employ covert operations, air strikes, or attacking with ground forces. Narrow conceptualizations of leader decisions (e.g., use force/do not use force), typically explained by decision-making theories, are useful for making generalizations across a diverse set of cases. But such conceptions of leader decisions are clearly limited in their ability to suggest an effective and appropriate preemptive action.

With such a potentially large set of alternatives available to leaders, how can policy makers accurately forecast which alternative is likely to be selected? As a number of recent studies applying the poliheuristic theory of foreign policy decision making show (e.g., Mintz, Geva, Redd, and Carnes, 1997; DeRouen, 2013; Redd, 2013; Sathasivam, 2015), leaders—regardless of their nationality or ideological position—appear to simplify decision making by employing a noncompensatory decision rule (e.g., Mintz, 1993, 1995). According to the noncompensatory principle, leaders reject policy options that fail to satisfy criteria on a key decision dimension. Because leaders are reluctant to select alternatives that may endanger their political fortunes (e.g., Mintz, 1993, 1995), this key dimension is typically domestic politics. Specifically, if a policy option (e.g., use of

force, sanctions, or “do nothing”) is unacceptable on the key dimension, then a high score on another important policy dimension (e.g., economic prosperity, military success, or strategic concerns) cannot compensate for it and the alternative is eliminated. With the knowledge of a leader’s domestic political criteria as well as the set of feasible alternatives, policy analysts can apply the poliheuristic theory to ongoing foreign policy events in order to forecast the leader’s choice. Such an approach may serve to assist policy makers in formulating appropriate responses, reducing uncertainty in an ever-changing world.

As an example of the utility of the poliheuristic theory as a tool for policy makers, this paper examines President Carter’s decision to implement the Iran hostage rescue mission. While this analysis offers an explanation and “postdiction” (rather than prediction) of Carter’s decision, it is an excellent case for demonstrating the process by which policy analysts can employ the poliheuristic theory as a forecasting method. The theory’s two-stage decision-making process accurately reflects the manner in which the Carter administration came to its decision concerning the hostage situation. I argue that the president rejected alternatives that were not expected to result in the immediate and safe release of the hostages in the first stage of the decision-making process. Then, the president chose among the remaining alternatives on the basis of maximizing net benefits on the military and strategic dimensions.

The poliheuristic theory contributes to policy making by offering a framework that policy makers can utilize to forecast the likely decisions of international leaders. The theory’s identification of a noncompensatory decision rule facilitates the elimination of many possible alternatives that fail to satisfy the leader’s domestic political criteria, reducing the uncertainty associated with forecasting potential decisions. Policy makers can, then, prepare better-informed contingencies based on these remaining alternatives.

II. THE IRAN HOSTAGE RESCUE MISSION

Although I contend that the poliheuristic theory is useful for *predicting* the behavior of *all* international leaders, I use a U.S. case, the Iran hostage rescue mission, with the benefit of hindsight as an example. I have chosen this case for a number of reasons. First, the rescue mission is a novel case in that it contains a number of obvious paradoxes. The government of a superpower appeared incapable of extricating itself from an increasingly humiliating situation and eventually implemented a rescue operation that has since been disparaged as a mission that was doomed to failure from the start (e.g., Salinger, 1981). Moreover, President Carter, a dedicated humanitarian who appeared to be genuinely concerned with the lives and safety of the hostages, willingly accepted the risks associated with the rescue operation (Carter, 1982; Turner, 1986:129). Second, as a superpower with forward-deployed naval forces and military installations, the United States is (and was during the hostage crisis of 1979–1980) capable of projecting military force virtually anywhere on the globe. Such capabilities necessarily increase the number of possible alternatives from which the leader of the United States can select a response, which suggests that a case involving the United States in the poliheuristic frame-work is a more difficult test than one that involves a country with minor capabilities. Finally, even with the benefit of hindsight, Carter’s decision to implement a small rescue operation remains puzzling. A number of previous studies suggest that Carter’s decision to send a small rescue force would have been difficult to forecast in real time (e.g., Smith, 1984; McDermott, 1992; Houghton, 1996). But, as I will demonstrate below, sufficient information was available prior to Carter’s decision to predict the decision. If the poliheuristic theory can offer a compelling explanation and postdiction of Carter’s decision as it has done in a number of other cases using a variety of methodological approaches (e.g., Mintz et al., 1997; DeRouen, 2013; Redd, 2013; Sathasivam, 2015), such an analysis necessarily adds to the robustness of the theory and demonstrates its potential as a forecasting tool.

The Carter administration arrived at its ultimate decision on April 15, 1980, 5 months after the beginning of the crisis (Salinger, 1981). On April 24, 1980, eight helicopters flew over the Iranian desert en route to a refueling rendezvous point. Their mission was to rescue 53 U.S. hostages in Tehran who had been held since the previous November. This response, rather than utilizing overwhelming force, was intended to take the Iranian revolutionaries by surprise. The plan called for the helicopters to deliver 97 men, code-named “Delta,” and their equipment to a hideout outside of Tehran. Then, the force would be picked up in a fleet of trucks driven by Iranian exiles to a location near the embassy. Next, the force was to storm the embassy, rescuing the hostages. Finally, the hostages and their rescuers would make their way by helicopter and truck to Manzariyeh airstrip where they were to board U.S. military aircraft for a flight to Germany via Egypt. While the CIA and military planners predicted that the proposed plan would, at best, result in a loss of at least 60 percent of the hostages (Salinger, 1981:238), Carter gave the go-ahead because, in his words, “[w]e could no longer afford to depend on diplomacy” (Carter, 1982:506). In the end, bad weather, mechanical failure, and little margin for error resulted in the abortion of the rescue mission. During the withdrawal from the initial rendezvous point, a helicopter collided with a C-130, killing eight men. What was supposed to be a daring rescue became an embarrassing fiasco. As the leader of a superpower, Carter had a number of available options. Why did the Carter administration select an alternative that has come to be regarded as a risky adventure? Given

Carter's deep emotional commitment to preserving human life (Turner, 1986:129; see e.g., Carter, 1982), why was he willing to risk more than half of the lives of the hostages?

III. THE POLIHEURISTIC THEORY OF DECISION MAKING

A useful approach for reducing the complexity associated with forecasting leaders' decisions such as that surrounding Carter's decision is the poliheuristic theory of foreign policy decision-making (Mintz et al., 1997; Mintz, 2014). The theory postulates a two-stage decision-making process. In the first stage, leaders employ a noncompensatory decision-making strategy, which reduces the menu of alternatives through the elimination of options that are unacceptable on a critical decision-making dimension (Mintz, 2014). A high score on a less critical dimension cannot compensate for a low score on the key dimension. In the second stage, leaders choose among the remaining alternatives by using analytic decision rules (see Mintz, 2014).

Unlike other decision-making approaches (e.g., Steinbruner, 1974; Bueno de Mesquita and Lalman, 1992), the poliheuristic theory identifies a key dimension that must be satisfied in order for an alternative to be accepted. Alternatives are not evaluated simultaneously. Instead, leaders reduce the set of alternatives in the first stage by rejecting those options that fail to breach a minimum threshold on the key decision dimension. Because leaders are often self-interested politicians who seek to ensure their domestic political survival, Mintz (2014) suggests that this key dimension is typically domestic politics, the sine qua non of decision making. For example, if a given alternative threatens the electoral prospects of a democratic leader or the regime survival of a nondemocratic leader, that alternative is rejected. A high score on other dimensions cannot compensate for a low score on the domestic political dimension.

In the second stage, a choice is selected from the remaining alternatives based on its ability to maximize expected benefits on other relevant dimensions (Mintz et al., 1997). In other words, decision makers choose from the remaining options based on an alternative's ability to maximize expected net benefits. These remaining dimensions are nontrivial (e.g., Mintz, Geva, and DeRouen, 1994) and previous studies applying the poliheuristic theory (e.g., Mintz, 1993; Redd, 2013; DeRouen, 2015) propose that decision makers evaluate the remaining alternatives on military and strategic dimensions. For example, an alternative may maximize expected benefits on the military dimension when the alternative can be implemented with relatively low costs, or when the alternative has the greatest probability of success. Similarly, an alternative may maximize expected benefits on the strategic dimension when the alternative does not threaten to undermine alliance arrangements, enable the enlargement of an adversary's influence, or compromise the nation's international credibility.

The two-stage, multi-dimensional decision-making strategy posited by the poliheuristic theory does not privilege process validity over outcome validity, or vice versa (see Mintz, 2014). Indeed, it mirrors the manner in which decisions are often made (e.g., Mintz et al., 1997). Additionally, the theory has exceptional predictive power (e.g., DeRouen, 2013; Redd, 2013; Sathasivam, 2015). In the following section, I identify the set of alternatives available to the Carter administration and detail the process by which Carter arrived at the decision to implement the small rescue mission.

IV. CARTER'S DECISION

In order to apply the poliheuristic theory, it is necessary to identify the alternatives and decision dimensions relevant to the crisis. The alternatives are then weighed, first, against the key dimensions and, then, against the remaining dimensions. In addition to his immediate course of action (e.g., diplomatic efforts and financial pressure), Carter also considered several military force alternatives. He evaluated each alternative according to its ability to satisfy the primary criterion on the domestic political dimension, the safe and immediate return of the hostages, ruling out those that were not expected to fulfill that requirement. Then, Carter compared the surviving alternatives on the basis of each option's ability to minimize costs on the military and strategic dimensions. The small rescue mission was selected because it had the best chance of effecting an immediate and safe release of the hostages without jeopardizing the U.S.'s national interests in the region.

The Alternatives

On November 4, 1979, 9 months following the overthrow of the Shah of Iran, 63 employees of the United States government were taken hostage by student protestors at the American embassy in Tehran. Almost immediately, the Carter administration responded to the crisis by working for the release of the hostages on three fronts: diplomatic, economic, and military. On the diplomatic front, international pressure was buttressed by negotiations, conducted through a variety of mediators. Among these, Yasser Arafat and the Algerian government maintained close contact with the nascent Iranian regime and succeeded in organizing the release of 13 black and female hostages within 3 weeks of the embassy takeover (McFadden, Treaster, and Carroll, 1981). These negotiations took place within the context of a U.S.-led international consensus condemning the hostage takers as well as the Iranian regime, whose leader, Ayatollah Khomeini, expressed support for the student revolutionaries (Smith, 1985). On December 4, 1979, a unanimous resolution demanding the release of the hostages

was passed by the United Nations. A month later, U.N. Secretary-General Kurt Waldheim visited Iran in an effort to coax the student revolutionaries to let the hostages go.

On the economic front, the Carter administration began to consider freezing all of Iran's assets, both in the U.S. and abroad (Carter, 1982:462). Some 12 billion dollars in Iranian funds were frozen and U.S. purchases of Iranian oil were terminated in mid-November of 1979 (Carter, 1982:464–465). Secretary of State Cyrus Vance worked with U.S. allies and other industrialized nations to implement economic sanctions against Iran (McFadden et al., 1981). Ironically, these nations would not be persuaded to participate in a sanctions regime against Iran until 2 days before the hostage rescue mission (Smith, 1985).

On the military front, President Carter initially appeared to rule out the use of force as a viable alternative. In December of 1979, Carter sought to assure the American public that the safe return of the hostages was his ultimate objective: "I am not going to take any military action that would cause bloodshed or arouse the unstable captors of our hostages to attack or punish them" (McFadden et al., 1981:197). While such statements provoked criticism from groups favoring a punitive military response (e.g., Heritage Foundation, 1980), the White House leaked ambiguous reports suggesting that force was, indeed, an option (Smith, 1984).

News reports of Carter administration officials' statements during the crisis suggest that several military alternatives were under consideration. Among these, a possible rescue mission was prominently mentioned in several news stories and op-ed pieces (e.g., Burt, 1979; Safire, 1979; Hoffman, 1980). Other options that were reported included the possibility of seizing something of value to the Iranians, such as Kharg Island, and offering to return it in exchange for the hostages (e.g., Hoffman, 1980). The White House also weighed the potential consequences of mining or blockading Iranian ports (Middleton, 1979; Safire, 1979). Another alternative reportedly discussed by the Carter administration was the bombing of targets inside Iran in order to compel the captors to release the hostages (e.g., Burt, 1979; Gwertzman, 1979).

The alternatives that the Carter administration considered can be summarized as follows:

- (1) continue current course of action, for example, diplomatic efforts, negotiations, financial pressure;
- (2) implement broad economic sanctions;
- (3) rescue hostages with small task force;
- (4) rescue hostages with large attack force;
- (5) seize a "bargaining chip," for example, Kharg Island;
- (6) commence compellent bombings;
- (7) conduct punitive air strikes;
- (8) mine/blockade Iranian ports

While an exhaustive set of all possible alternatives available to the president at that time was probably much larger than the eight items above, this is a good representation of the choice set that could have been constructed, given the information available during the crisis. Moreover, this choice set includes more of the specific options considered by the Carter administration than those discussed in previous studies of Carter's decision (e.g., Smith, 1984; McDermott, 1992; Houghton, 1996), making this a more realistic menu of alternatives. Having identified the choice set under consideration during the crisis, I now turn to the domestic political imperatives Carter faced and discuss why some of the above alternatives were unable to satisfy his criteria.

The Domestic Political Dimension

The domestic political dimension is the initial dimension on which leaders assess broad categories of choices and eliminate those that fail to breach a predetermined threshold. On this dimension, the Carter administration received a number of signals from the American public concerning its evaluation of the president as well as how it believed that the crisis should be handled. Initially, Carter received one of the most dramatic boosts in presidential popularity since FDR following Pearl Harbor (Callaghan and Virtanen, 1993). Within a month of the hostage taking, Carter's approval rating jumped from 32 to 58 percent. This initial boost is attributed to the "rally-'round-the-flag" phenomenon (e.g., Mueller, 1973) in which a president enjoys a substantial boost in popularity during an intense international crisis "regardless of the wisdom of the policies he pursues" (Polsby, 1964:25). However, as a number of scholars assert, the rally effect is typically short-lived (e.g., Mueller, 1970, 1973). As the crisis dragged on and approached the 1-year mark, presidential approval dropped below pre-crisis levels to 29 percent (Sigelman and Conover, 1981). Similarly, the public's evaluation of the president's handling of the crisis reached a peak of 69 percent in December 1979 only to plummet to 36 percent in late October 1980 (Sigelman and Conover, 1981).

What is important to note here is where Carter stood with the public in the first quarter of 1980, the time period for which he had the most recent poll results prior to his decision to proceed with the rescue mission. In March 1980, presidential approval is recorded as 55 percent, while the percentage of those

approving of Carter's handling of the crisis stood at 47 percent. More importantly, polls enabled the public to transmit its views concerning what should be done. Prior to the rescue mission, the proportion of persons polled who felt that the U.S. should use force against Iran in order to free the hostages hovered around 10 percent. But the proportion of those that wanted the president to take military action in the event the hostages were harmed held steady from 40 to 45 percent.

Another consideration that loomed large on the domestic political dimension was the upcoming Democratic convention. As Mintz (2014) observes, the long shadow of elections tends to play a prominent role in presidential decision making. Early in the 1980 presidential race, Carter focused his energies on the hostage crisis and let his vice president, Walter Mondale, fulfill most of his campaign duties. Members of the Carter administration became increasingly frustrated with the slide in approval ratings and claimed to feel pressured by the public for "more direct action against Iran" (Brzezinski, 1983:490). They also blamed the hostage crisis for Carter's loss to Senator Kennedy in the New York primary (Salinger, 1981). Mondale is reported to have described the campaign situation coupled with the ongoing crisis as becoming "intolerably humiliating" (Brzezinski, 1983:493). According to Salinger (1981:235), "Jimmy Carter was now in the midst of a fight for his political life, and it looked as if he was losing. A military operation that freed the hostages would dramatically alter the odds."

Clearly, Carter's domestic political fortunes appeared to hinge on whether the hostages were safely returned to freedom. Indeed, Carter was largely responsible for emphasizing this aim (e.g., Safire, 1979; Spencer 1988). For this reason, the decision rule used by Carter for choosing among the alternatives on the domestic political dimension can be captured by the following question: *Is the alternative expected to result in the immediate and safe release of the hostages?* The diplomatic alternatives that had already been implemented held little promise of satisfying this criterion. Given Iran's shrinking economy in the wake of a revolution (e.g., Cowan, 1979), economic sanctions were also unlikely to bring about the desired outcome.

Among the military options, several did not satisfy the president's decision rule because they were either not expected to produce immediate results, or they endangered the lives of the hostages. For example, a punitive strike may have provoked Iranian retaliation such as killing several hostages. Such efforts as compellent bombings, mining the harbors, or seizing territory aimed at coercing the revolutionaries to release the hostages were not expected to produce immediate results and may have also brought about retaliatory action.

According to the poliheuristic theory, the president is expected to reject alternatives that fail to satisfy some predetermined decision rule in the first stage of the decision-making process. In the case of the Iran hostage crisis, President Carter rejected the options that were not expected to result in the immediate and safe release of the hostages. This reduced the menu of alternatives from eight to two. Only the alternatives that included a hostage rescue component survived a large rescue mission and a small rescue mission. In order to choose between the remaining two options, Carter weighed their relative costs and benefits on the military and strategic dimensions in the second stage of the decision-making process.

The Military Dimension

While any number of nontrivial dimensions can be considered in the second stage of the decision-making process (Mintz et al., 1994), the Carter administration weighed the implications of the remaining alternatives on the military and strategic dimensions. The remaining alternatives are evaluated in the second stage according to their ability to maximize benefits (minimize costs) simultaneously on the military and strategic dimensions. For the military dimension, remaining alternatives are assessed with respect to such military considerations as capabilities, logistics, and the likelihood of success. In the case of the hostage crisis, the likelihood of success became a salient factor. The Iranians threatened to "destroy" the hostages if any military move against them was made (e.g., Gwertzman, 1979:1). This threat reduced the viability of some military options because the success of the mission had been defined in terms of saving as many hostages as possible (e.g., Burt, 1979). Any large-scale action would require a mobilization of forces that would be detected by the Iranian militants and possibly interpreted as a hostile act against them, compelling the militants to begin killing hostages.

In addition, there was some concern within the administration over the use of overwhelming military force because of the challenges posed by the great distance between the U.S., its overseas bases, or deployed naval forces and the inland location of the hostages (e.g., Hoffman, 1980). As Carter (1982:509) observes: "[t]he biggest problem was how to travel the enormous distance from the sea or other countries to extract the hostages from the center of Tehran." This obstacle elevated the score of a small operation in two respects. First, precisely because the large desert that lay between Tehran and U.S. staging areas served as a formidable impediment, Iranian revolutionaries would be unlikely to suspect a U.S. approach through this route. Second, the fact that the desert was vast and largely uninhabited would enable a small U.S. force to advance through it without detection (Smith, 1985:18). Conversely, a large rescue force would have been more likely to be spotted by radar or civilians as it advanced toward Tehran, risking the lives of the hostages and warning the guards of

impending U.S. action.

A final pair of military concerns is also logistical: nighttime hours and weather (Smith, 1985). By the 1st of May, Persian Gulf nights would be down to 9 hours. Because the mission would rely on the cover of darkness and was projected to take around 8 hours, it had to take place before nighttime hours and it became too short to provide adequate cover. Additionally, temperatures were expected to increase beyond the point at which the aircraft could operate efficiently. For these reasons, a military alternative would have to be implemented before May, reducing the time allowed for the planning and preparation of the deployment of a large force.

The alternative that appears to have maximized net benefits on the military dimension was a small rescue operation. A large rescue mission lacking in stealth and surprise risked the lives of the hostages, which would have resulted in what the Carter administration had come to regard as a foreign policy failure. It might have been detected as it made its way to Tehran, warning the guards and allowing them time to prepare for a battle while killing individual hostages in an effort to stop the U.S. advance. Finally, if military action was to be carried out, it had to be commenced before May, which constrained the planning and preparation time, reducing the feasibility of mobilizing a large force. Therefore, a small hostage rescue mission appears to have been the best alternative according to the military dimension.

The Strategic Dimension

The strategic dimension for the U.S. is largely concerned with the implications of the remaining alternatives for such factors as the global balance of power and grand strategy. In 1979 and 1980, the Cold War between the U.S. and the Soviet Union dominated world affairs. During the Cold War, the U.S. typically challenged Soviet efforts to obtain military or material advantages. Similarly, the U.S. grand strategy of containment sought to prevent the Soviet Union's expansion of political influence. On the strategic dimension, the Carter administration weighed the potential consequences of the remaining alternatives with these factors in mind. A noteworthy international development that occurred during the hostage crisis was the Soviet invasion of Iran's neighbor, Afghanistan, in December 1979. This would have implications for U.S. military action in Iran. If the U.S. failed to achieve its objective in response to the hostage taking, it might signal a lack of resolve to the Soviets, emboldening them to penetrate the Middle East and gain access to the rich oil fields there (e.g., Excerpts from President's Interview, 1980). Such a result might tip the global balance of power in favor of the Soviets. However, a large-scale use of force against Iran held the potential to push the nascent revolutionary regime into the arms of the Soviet Union (e.g., Hoffman, 1980). This result would undermine the grand strategy of containment.

Like the military dimension, the implementation of a small, stealthy mission appeared to minimize the expected costs of a use of force on the strategic dimension. The fact that the administration had failed to act up to now appeared to indicate that the U.S. was weak or unwilling to use force. Carter's critics were skeptical of the president's 1980 State of the Union address concerning Soviet activity in South Asia, the "Carter Doctrine" suggesting that it was a hollow threat (Excerpts from President's Interview, 1980). This state of affairs demanded that the U.S. act decisively and achieve its aims, namely, the rescue of the hostages. But whatever action would be taken could not be forceful and disruptive such that it would invite Soviet interference. When the options are weighed in light of these conditions, a small rescue mission again receives the highest score among the remaining alternatives.

In summary, this poliheuristic analysis of Carter's decision to deploy a small rescue operation closely mirrors the actual manner in which the Carter administration arrived at its final decision. A number of alternatives that failed to satisfy a predetermined decision rule, namely, get the hostages out safely and as soon as possible, were rejected. Diplomatic efforts had failed to yield any meaningful results and further economic pressure was not thought likely to have any immediate impact (Carter, 1982). Moreover, a number of the military options were not expected to deliver the hostages either alive or in a timely manner. This left two alternatives: the large rescue mission and the small rescue mission. These surviving alternatives were compared based on their ability to maximize net benefits on other relevant dimensions. In the end, the small rescue mission had the best chances of minimizing hostage and service member casualties on the military dimension. Additionally, that alternative if successful was believed to be an adequate way to "send a message" to the Soviets concerning U.S. credibility without creating an occasion for an Iran-Soviet alliance of opportunity.

V. DISCUSSION

The above analysis appears to offer a compelling account of the Carter administration's decision to employ a small rescue mission. But two questions must be addressed before we can draw any conclusions concerning the forecasting ability of the poliheuristic theory. First, was the process by which the Carter administration arrived at the decision actually compensatory, rather than noncompensatory as poliheuristic theory suggests? Because the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan during the Iran hostage crisis further threatened the strategic position of the United States, a compensatory model might predict an alternative that signaled U.S.

credibility in the region. Second, was a sufficient amount of information available *prior* to Carter's decision to predict the selection of the small rescue mission alternative? The preceding analysis offers what is referred to as a postdiction. But if enough information concerning Carter's noncompensatory decision criteria and the possible alternatives was available before the decision was made, we can have more confidence in the forecasting ability of the poliheuristic theory.

Was the Decision Compensatory?

Compensatory models include expected utility theory (e.g., Bueno de Mesquita, 1981, 1985) and the cybernetic theory (e.g., Steinbruner, 1974; Ostrom and Job, 1986). These models differ from one another in their assumptions of information processing. The expected utility approach asserts that decision makers choose from an exhaustive set of choices the alternative that is expected to yield the "largest net gain (expected utility)" (Bueno de Mesquita, 1984:228). Cybernetic theory emphasizes the constraints placed on leaders' processing capabilities and suggests that they engage in a limited information search and respond to conditions within different decision environments, choosing the alternative that "satisfices" certain criteria across these environments (Ostrom and Job, 1986). However, according to both approaches, a low score for an alternative on one dimension can be compensated by a high score on another (Mintz, 1993).

During the time of the Iran Hostage Crisis, an alternative that is most likely to enhance U.S. credibility in the region, but least likely to facilitate an Iran–Soviet strategic alliance, was considered the most desirable in terms of the strategic dimension (e.g., Carter, 1982; Brzezinski, 1983). Of course, in order for an alternative to be useful in terms of U.S. credibility, it must also have a high probability of success (Brzezinski, 1983). A failure is unlikely to send the desired message to adversaries. From this, we can infer that alternatives with low probabilities of success on the military dimension also have low scores on the strategic dimension. Moreover, ongoing nonforce alternatives appeared to contribute to the appearance of U.S. weakness (Brzezinski, 1983).

Among the use of force alternatives, a punitive strikes mission appears to best satisfy the strategic criteria. Indeed, Brzezinski (1983), who favored national interests over the lives of the hostages, championed a punitive raid as a way to restore U.S. credibility. This alternative had a high probability of success: long-range bombers could have been deployed from virtually any U.S. airbase to the crisis region, overcoming logistical difficulties (Carter, 1982). Additionally, as a "quick-strike" use of force, it was unlikely to induce the Iranian government to seek Soviet assistance. In terms of the strategic criteria, the punitive strike alternative scores the highest.

The compelling bombing alternative, harbor mining, and seizure of Kharg Island appear to equally satisfy the strategic criteria, but do not score as high as the punitive strikes mission. If successfully implemented, each alternative would have sent a strong message to the Soviets concerning U.S. credibility in the region. However, each alternative appears to create opportunities for Soviet enlargement by forcing the "Iranians into the arms of the Soviets" (Vance, 1983). Each of these alternatives is incremental or sequential in nature; that is, the U.S. acts, waits for a response from the Iranians, and acts again. These alternatives would have placed the onus on Iran, creating an opportunity for the nascent regime to seek Soviet assistance.

In terms of strategic criteria, the score of the large rescue mission appears to have been the lowest because of its low probability of success coupled with its potential to create an opportunity for the Iranians to seek Soviet aid. The large rescue mission was likely to be detected in the staging phase, providing the Iranian regime with time to appeal for Soviet help as well as an opportunity to kill hostages in an effort to deter U.S. invaders, turning the operation into no more than a punitive raid (Smith, 1985). In contrast, the small rescue mission had the potential to satisfy at least one of the strategic criteria. Had it been successful, the speedy, small rescue mission would have been unlikely to result in an Iranian–Soviet alliance (Jordan, 1982). However, its low probability of success (Salinger, 1981) contributed to its potential to undermine U.S. credibility. Thus, while the small rescue mission was unlikely to send the desired signal concerning U.S. credibility, it was also unlikely to do any harm in terms of creating an opportunity for Iranian cooperation with the Soviet Union.

Table 1 summarizes the scores of the alternatives on each dimension. The scores range from a minimum of "1" to a maximum of "8." Higher scores on a dimension indicate that an alternative is relatively better able to satisfy that dimension's criteria. On the domestic political dimension, the alternatives are scored from highest to

Table no 1: Scores of alternatives on the relevant dimensions

<i>Dimensions</i>				
<i>Alternatives</i>	<i>Political</i>	<i>Military</i>	<i>Strategic</i>	<i>Total (Average)</i>
Continue current course of action*	1	---	1	2 (1)
Economic sanctions*	2	---	2	4 (2)
Small rescue mission	8	3	4	15 (5)
Large rescue mission	7	4	3	14 (4.66)
Kharg Island seizure	4	5	5	14 (4.66)
Compellent bombings	6	7	7	20 (6.66)
Punitive air strikes	3	8	8	19 (6.33)
Mine/blockade Iranian ports	5	6	6	17 (5.66)

*Alternative carries no military implications in terms of costs or probability of success.

lowest according to their expected ability to result in the immediate and safe release of as many hostages as possible. On the military dimension, they are ranked according to their ability to successfully achieve the military objectives with the lowest costs in terms of lives, planning, and treasure. On the strategic dimension, the alternatives are scored according to their ability to signal U.S. credibility without facilitating Iranian–Soviet cooperation. The fifth column of Table 1 shows the total and average scores for each alternative.

Clearly, Carter’s decision was not compensatory. Several alternatives that were expected to bode well for U.S. strategic interests were rejected because of their inability to satisfy the domestic political imperative of getting the hostages out as soon as possible. Similarly, alternatives that were expected to yield high net benefits on the military dimension were also rejected. Indeed, when the scores are summed across dimensions in accordance with expected utility or cybernetic theory, three of the options receive higher total scores than the small rescue mission. Had Carter used another type of compensatory decision-making strategy such as “majority of confirming dimensions” (MCD), in which the alternative that receives the highest score on the most dimensions is selected (Payne, Bettman, and Johnson, 1993:27; e.g., Russo and Doshier, 1983), the table suggests that the punitive air strikes alternative was the most desirable. Although the compensatory models may have pointed to the implementation of a punitive strikes mission or compellent bombings campaign, these alternatives’ high scores on the military and strategic dimensions were unable to compensate for low scores on the domestic political dimension.

Was Enough Information Available before Carter’s Decision?

Previous studies (e.g., Smith, 1984; McDermott, 1992; Houghton, 1996) attempting to explain Carter’s decision suggest that conducting a real-time forecast of Carter’s decision would have been difficult. But the poliheuristic theory facilitates the analysis of crises in real time by requiring that only a limited amount of information be available. Specifically, policy analysts must acquire information concerning the decision maker’s noncompensatory decision rule as well as the possible alternatives that are under consideration.

The poliheuristic theory asserts that a leader’s noncompensatory decision rule can be located on the domestic political dimension (e.g., Mintz, 2014). Leaders develop a decision rule specific to the crisis at hand, which is typically consistent with their desire to maintain political power. In the case of the Iran Hostage Crisis, it is not dangerous to assume that Carter, a first-term president, desired to win reelection (e.g., Mintz, 2014). A March 28, 1980 Gallup poll indicates that the public regarded the Iran situation as the second most important problem facing the country. Indeed, the hostage crisis was becoming a major issue early in 1980 in the Democratic primary campaign (Transcript of the President’s News Conference on Foreign and Domestic Matters, 1980). Moreover, public approval ratings of Carter’s handling of the crisis began to dive in the first quarter of 1980. But the stated concern of the Carter administration (as well as the concern of the public) for the *safety* of the hostages throughout the crisis led to the development of a narrow decision rule: the safe and immediate release of the hostages (e.g., Burt, 1979; Roberts, 1979; Transcript of President’s Interview on Soviet’s Reply, 1979; United States Department of State, 1980; Transcript of Carter Statement on Iran, 1980). In addition to the president’s own statements during the course of the crisis, enough public information was

available before Carter made his decision to identify the safe and immediate release of the hostages as the president's noncompensatory decision rule (e.g., Burt, 1979; United States Department of State, 1980; Transcript of Carter Statement on Iran, 1980). Using the information available at the time, a policy analyst *could* have identified this criterion as the president's noncompensatory decision rule.

Concerning the possible alternatives under consideration, news reports during the crisis also suggest that enough information was available prior to Carter's decision for a policy analyst to construct a choice set of the likely actions the president would pursue. A number of pieces appearing in the *New York Times* during the crisis indicate that the alternatives under consideration by the Carter administration included a rescue mission (e.g., Burt, 1979; Hoffman, 1980), seizure of Iranian territory (e.g., Hoffman, 1980), blockade of Iranian ports (e.g., Middleton, 1979), and punitive or compellent bombings (e.g., Burt, 1979; Gwertzman, 1979). In fact, opened pieces seemed to make a habit of compiling choice sets of the likely actions of the president (e.g., Lewis, 1979; Safire, 1979). Clearly, a policy analyst seeking to fore-cast the president's decision could have constructed a choice set consisting of those examined here on the basis of the information available during the crisis.

VI. POLIHEURISTIC POLICY PREDICTION

This analysis demonstrates the poliheuristic theory's ability to explain leader decisions in foreign policy crises. As a number of previous studies imply, Carter's decision to employ a small rescue mission would have been difficult to forecast. Yet this "postdiction" of Carter's decision reveals the accuracy of the poliheuristic

theory. Using the tenets of the poliheuristic theory in a forecasting framework, analysts can reduce the uncertainty of their predictions with limited information.

Although I employ an American case, the ability of the poliheuristic theory to predict (or, postdict) decisions is not limited to U.S. presidents (Mintz, 1995; e.g., Sathasivam, 2015), nor is it limited to democratic leaders (e.g., Astorino-Courtois and Trusty, 2000; Mintz and Mishal, 2016). Indeed, the poliheuristic theory can be utilized to forecast the decisions of virtually any individual (e.g., Mintz et al., 1997), provided that policy makers obtain three pieces of information. The first is the leaders' noncompensatory decision dimension and the criteria used to evaluate alternatives in the first stage. Regardless of the leader's regime type, this is typically the domestic political dimension (e.g., Mintz, 2014). If policy makers possess in-formation concerning the domestic political criteria a leader considers, alternatives that are not expected to satisfy these criteria can be ruled out. For example, in the case of the Iran hostage crisis, it was imperative for the president to satisfy a primary aim, reelection. Polls suggested that in order to win reelection, Carter had to take action that would result in the safe return of the hostages. A similar, a priori analysis of the ability of potential alternatives to satisfy a leader's political imperatives can be employed by policy makers to eliminate a number of options.

Because alternatives that seriously threaten the leader's political support or regime survival can be ruled out, the attainment of the second piece of information policy analysts require is simplified: the set of alternatives under consideration. In addition to the leader's noncompensatory decision criteria, the size of the choice set is directly related to such factors as capabilities, alliances, and the strategic position of the leader's state. Leaders of small and relatively weak states typically have fewer alternatives available. But constructing a realistic choice set from all of the possibilities may prove difficult. One approach is to include actions taken during historical examples of similar crises (e.g., Houghton, 1996).

The third piece of information policy makers require in order to arrive at a final forecast is the expected net benefits of the remaining alternatives on other dimensions, such as the military and strategic dimensions. The surviving alternative that yields the highest score with respect to military and strategic considerations is likely to be the option selected. For example, an alternative is likely to be selected when it is expected to succeed, entails acceptable costs, and is unlikely to result in an erosion of the state's current regional or international strategic position.

As the illustrative case of the Iran hostage decision shows, poliheuristic theory contributes to policy making by permitting forecasters to better take account of the constraints facing international actors. When applied to foreign policy crises, the theory facilitates the elimination of a number of alternatives within a potentially large choice set. Consequently, this enables policy analysts to make better predictions about the likely actions of international actors, which enhances the ability of policy makers to formulate better policy.

VII. CONCLUSION

In a foreign-policy-making climate that favors preemptive action against terrorists and the rogue nations that harbor them (Bush, 2002), policy makers and analysts must make accurate judgments concerning the possible decisions of world leaders. The poliheuristic theory of decision making offers a useful framework for fore-casting leaders' decisions. The two-stage decision-making process posited by the theory often closely parallels the development of actual foreign policy decisions. The theory's compelling accuracy can be applied in

policy making and intelligence analysis in order to forecast leaders' likely decisions during international crises. In order to illustrate the utility of the theory, I analyze Carter's paradoxical decision to implement a small rescue mission. In the case of the Iran hostage crisis, the Carter administration rejected alternatives that were not expected to result in the immediate release of the hostages in the first stage. Among the remaining alternatives, the option that scored the highest on the military and strategic dimensions, the small hostage rescue mission, was selected.

In an era when an administration believes that it has an "urgent duty to prevent the worst from happening" (Bush, 2002), policy makers must accurately forecast likely events in order to avoid miscalculations that could lead to unnecessary bloodshed. The poliheuristic theory appears to hold the potential to improve the precision with which policy makers forecast leaders' decisions. Although leaders may choose from a potentially large set of alternatives, the poliheuristic theory aids in the reduction of likely options and facilitates the arrival of a final prediction. Accurate forecasts about future events will necessarily enhance the efforts of policy makers who can, then, prepare contingencies based on these forecasts.

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