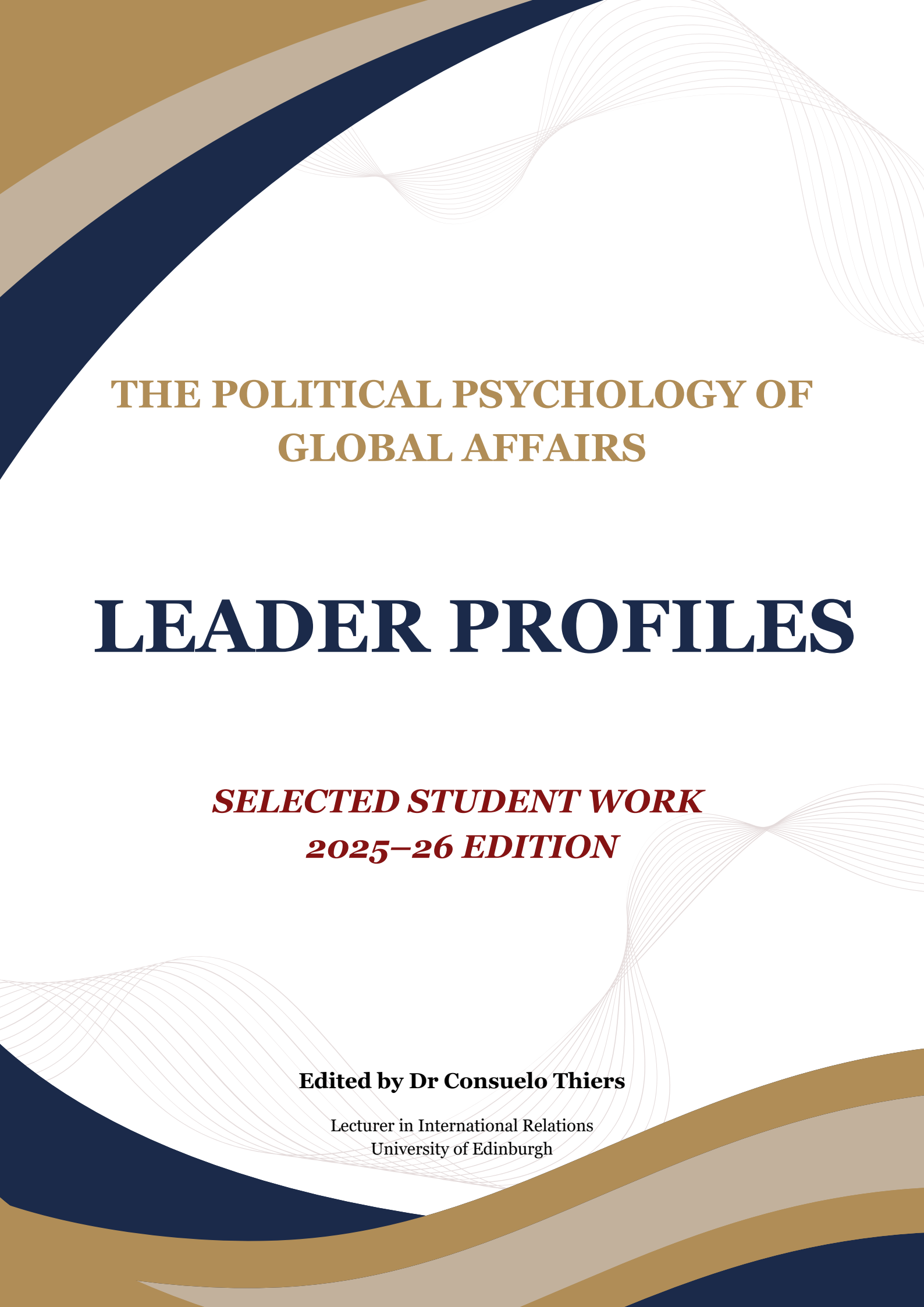




**THE POLITICAL PSYCHOLOGY OF
GLOBAL AFFAIRS**

LEADER PROFILES

***SELECTED STUDENT WORK
2025–26 EDITION***

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Introduction

This past semester, I designed and taught a new course, *The Political Psychology of Global Affairs*, for students in their final two years of undergraduate study at the University of Edinburgh. It is one of the few courses of its kind at the undergraduate level in the UK. The course looked at how psychological factors, including beliefs, personality, emotions and group dynamics, shape foreign policy decision-making; students explored both the individual psychology of leaders and the collective psychology of groups and nations, and applied these ideas to real cases.

Why does studying leaders' psychology matter now? Amid rising geopolitical tensions and the resurgence of personalist rule, leaders increasingly shape global politics and challenge the established international order. The assumption that leaders are interchangeable and that states behave as rational, unitary actors no longer holds. Populist figures who govern through direct appeal to "the people" rather than institutional process, and leaders who concentrate decision-making in their own hands and sideline traditional checks and balances, both point to the same conclusion: individual psychology is now central to understanding international relations.

As part of the course, students completed a leader profile assignment. Each student selected one political leader and one of two established profiling frameworks: Leadership Trait Analysis, which assesses personality characteristics such as need for power or belief in one's ability to control events, or Operational Code Analysis, which examines a leader's philosophical and instrumental beliefs about politics and conflict. Students applied their chosen

framework systematically to verbal material (speeches, interviews, press conferences), then used their findings to explain a specific foreign policy decision by that leader, while critically reflecting on what the profile could and could not account for.

Both frameworks belong to a family of methods known as at-a-distance profiling. They exist because most political leaders cannot be interviewed or tested directly by researchers; instead, these techniques extract psychological indicators from a leader's own words, coding language for markers of personality traits or belief patterns, and comparing the results against normed benchmarks drawn from other political leaders.

The profiles that follow represent some of the best work produced by students who were new to the method. They are shared here with their permission. I have not edited their content; only the formatting has been standardised so the profiles appear consistently throughout. It was a brilliant course to teach, and I want to take the opportunity to thank my students again for their hard work and participation.

I will let their work speak for itself.

Dr Consuelo Thiers

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Table of Contents

Introduction	1
Table of Contents	3
Ulf Kristersson	6
Introduction	6
Methodology.....	6
Results	7
Profile	8
Application to NATO Accession	10
Conclusion	11
References.....	11
Donald Trump	14
Introduction	14
Methodology.....	14
Results	15
Profile	16
Decision to Capture Venezuela’s President Nicolás Maduro	18
Conclusion	19
References.....	20
Boris Johnson.....	22
Introduction	22
Methodology.....	22
Results	23
Profile	23
Initial response to Russia’s invasion of Ukraine	25
Conclusion	26
References.....	27
Emmanuel Macron	29
Introduction	29
Methodology.....	29
Results	30
Profile	30
Response to the War in Ukraine	32

Conclusion	34
References.....	34
<i>Barack Obama</i>	37
Introduction.....	37
Methodology.....	37
Results	38
Profile	38
Operation Neptune Spear	40
Conclusion	42
References.....	42
<i>Helmut Kohl</i>	44
Introduction.....	44
Methodology.....	45
Results	45
Profile	46
Behaviour during German reunification	47
Conclusion	49
References.....	49
<i>Donald Trump</i>	51
Introduction.....	51
Methodology.....	51
Results	52
Profile	53
Decision to Launch Strikes on Iran.....	54
Conclusion	56
References.....	56
<i>Margaret Thatcher</i>	59
Introduction.....	59
Methodology.....	59
Results	60
Profile	60
Decision to Retake the Falklands.....	62
Conclusion	64

References.....	65
<i>Tony Blair</i>.....	67
Introduction.....	67
Methodology.....	68
Results	68
Profile	69
Decision to Support the 2003 Invasion of Iraq	71
Conclusion	72
References.....	72
<i>Further readings</i>	74
<i>Photo Credits</i>	85

Ulf Kristersson

Profiled by Aurora Bortolin



Introduction

I analyse Swedish Prime Minister (PM) Kristersson's psychological beliefs to evaluate if they explain Sweden's accession into NATO in March 2024, using the Operational Code Analysis (OCA) developed by Walker, Schafer and Young (1998), whose ability to analyse both philosophical and instrumental beliefs is well suited to studying leaders' decision making during changes in a country's long-standing foreign policy (FP).

The Swedish case is worthy of research because it ended 200 years of military non-alignment, proving a major FP rupture. While realists frame Russian expansionism as a sufficient explanation (Aggestam and Hyde-Price, 2025), I argue it provided only a trigger. Indeed, Ireland and Austria, similarly non-aligned and threatened, did not join NATO (Robinson, 2025 and McNamara, 2023), making Sweden's leadership worth investigating. Kristersson's beliefs about the nature of politics, and which strategies are most suited, meaningfully to explain Sweden's accession to NATO.

Methodology

For the OCA, I used Kristersson's speeches and press conferences appearances where he talked about NATO in the period surrounding accession. These were accessed

through the official Government Offices of Sweden website (2026) and recordings of press transcribed by YouTube Transcript (2025). The speeches were in English, avoiding potential translation limitations, such as verb frequency, that could hinder OCA coding (Brummer et al., 2020). They delivered 11 speeches totaling 12027 words, ensuring appropriate validity. I analysed them with Profiler Plus (Levine and Young, 2014), as computer-assisted analysis reduces researchers' effects. I benchmark Kristersson's scores against a norming group of world leaders, allowing comparison against a broad cross-national sample; given the absence of a Scandinavian-specific norming group. Although Kristersson was not PM when Sweden requested to join NATO in May 2022, he took office in October 2022 and was crucial in leading negotiations for 18 months, including facing Turkey's pushback, his beliefs and strategies essential to maintaining momentum until accession in March 2024.

Results

Operational Code	Kristersson's Scores	World Leaders Mean	Standard Deviation	Z-score	Category
P-1	0.58	0.35	0.12	1.87	very high
P-2	0.34	0.16	0.09	2.02	very high
P-3	0.15	0.12	0.03	1.10	high
P-4	0.38	0.20	0.08	2.32	very high
P-5	0.94	0.98	0.01	-2.94	very low
I-1	0.67	0.53	0.17	0.82	lean high
I-2	0.31	0.24	0.10	0.73	lean high
I-3	0.27	0.24	0.10	0.25	average
I-4a	0.33	0.46	0.16	-0.84	lean low
I-4b	0.45	0.56	0.14	-0.77	lean low
I-5 Appeal	0.59	0.54	0.11	0.47	average
I-5 Promise	0.08	0.04	0.03	1.23	high
I-5 Reward	0.17	0.18	0.07	-0.19	average
I-5 Oppose	0.07	0.11	0.05	-0.81	lean low
I-5 Threaten	0.04	0.02	0.03	0.60	lean high
I-5 Punish	0.06	0.10	0.04	-0.91	lean low

Table 1: Kristersson's OCA results

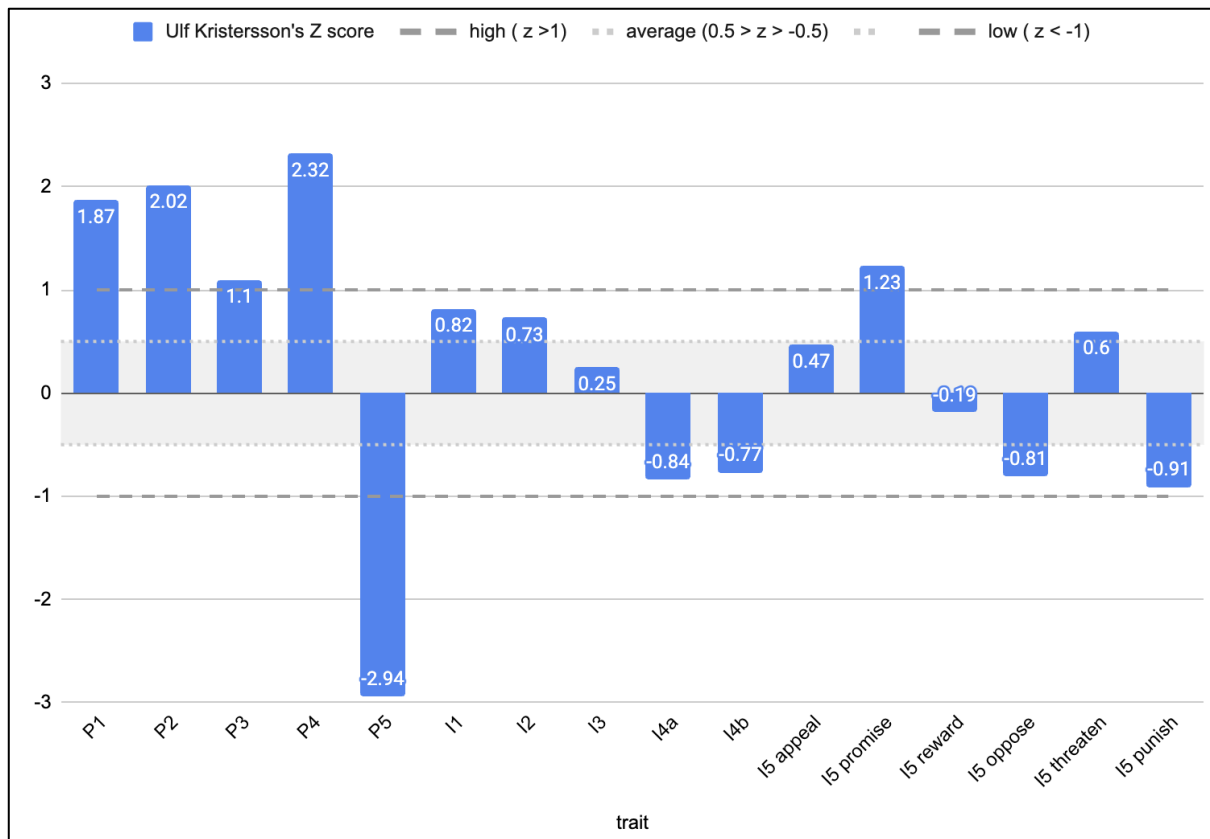


Figure 1: Kristersson's Z scores visualised with references to low, average and high values

Profile

Kristersson's profile is striking for his extreme scoring in the Philosophical beliefs (P), revealing his worldview to be optimistic, friendly and high-control. He sees others as friendly (P1), with a general expectation of cooperative potential, rather than seeing politics as inherently hostile. He is very optimistic about the realisation of his political values (P2), believing that his liberal goals are achievable, consistent with a leader who sees NATO as a tool to secure those values rather than pursuing independent rearmament. He sees the political universe as highly predictable (P3), confident that political trajectories can be foreseen. This is compatible with a leader who can calculate the long-term strategic logic of NATO membership.

Relatedly, he has a very high sense of personal political control (P4), believing that his own agency can shape outcomes, which is extremely relevant to understanding how he pursued a politically complex accession process, including negotiating Turkish veto. This is the second most striking aspect of his profile and helps to explain his determination throughout the negotiations. He assigns almost no role to chance (P5),

consistent with his belief in the predictability of politics (P3) and his personal agency (P4). This is the single most extreme score in his profile, reflecting his belief in a controllable model of politics, leading him to plan ahead rather than reacting to events as they happened. This explains why he sought NATO membership as a preemptive strategy rather than after a potential invasion, therefore using his agency (P4) to control Sweden's destiny (P2/5).

Stemming from his belief that other actors are friendly (P1) he leans towards cooperative strategies over conflictual ones (I1) and believes in their utility (I2), meaning that not only has cooperative orientations but that actively believes that cooperation works, consistent with pursuing a multilateral alliance such as NATO. He has an average acceptance of risk (I3), which explains why he pursued NATO membership as a pragmatic tool to increase security rather than the more risky unilateral-rearmament. He scores relatively low in tactical diversity (I4a-b), favouring a consistent tactical repertoire, rather than oscillating between cooperation and conflictual approaches. This is coherent with his high sense of personal political control (P4) and belief in cooperative strategies (I1), explaining his commitment to cooperative tactics when dealing with the Turkish veto (Hussaini, 2024).

The stand out instrumental finding is his extraordinarily high belief in the utility of promise as a power instrument (I5 promise), which corroborates his choice to maintain the promise of NATO membership made by a previous PM, as well as his belief in NATO membership as a system of mutual promises, like Article 5 promising mutual defensive assistance. Consistent with his belief in cooperation (I1-2), Kristersson demonstrates low belief in coercive power instruments like punishments or opposition (I5oppose, I5punish). Conversely, he demonstrates an above average belief in the use of threats (I5threaten), which is in tension with his belief in others as friendly (P1). This could be explained by the fact that he is speaking as an official figure reacting to Russian threats, however it would be beneficial to carry out further studies to identify whether his high I5threaten score is an outlier due to the particular situation or a constant feature of his instrumental beliefs.

Kristersson's profile is coherent: his philosophical optimism and control-orientation (P-scores) is aligned with a preference for cooperative, consistent and promise-driven

tools (I-scores), with philosophical and instrumental beliefs reinforcing one another. Stand-out findings include his P5 score, denoting a very high level of certainty and rejection of chance, logically matched with a very high sense of personal political control (P4). Instrumentally, his belief in promise as a political tool (I5promise) is noteworthy and coherent with his optimistic profile.

Application to NATO Accession

High P1 and P2 scores explain Kristersson's decision to pursue collective security rather than independent rearmament, reflecting his belief that allies can be trusted and that cooperation is productive. Another leader with low scores, who saw the world as shaped by hostile, zero-sum relations, might have pursued independent rearmament rather than multilateral commitment. Kristersson's determination and leadership during the 18-month accession negotiation is explained by his P4 and P5 scores, reflecting high perceived control and rejection of chance. He believed in his ability to shape events when dealing with Turkish demands while maintaining his country's values. A leader with low perceived control might have abandoned the process, however, his high P4 gave him the self-belief to continue negotiating to overcome those obstacles, which he did.

I4a/b explains why, once Kristersson committed to the cooperative NATO pathway, he did not switch strategies under Russian and internal pressures. This tactical consistency, whereby Kristersson favours collaborative tactics (I1-2) and is inflexible in changing them (I4a-b), explains why Sweden did not revert to non-alignment when faced with Turkish veto.

I5-promise, a standout feature of his profile, corroborates the reasoning behind his preference for NATO membership. NATO is a system of security based on mutual promise, therefore a leader who places very high value on the power of promise is naturally drawn to institutions built on Article 5's guarantees. It also explains his choice to deal with the Turkish veto by maintaining the promises made by his predecessor in the realm of counter-terrorism (Forsberg and Christiansson, 2025). Finally, his preference for cooperative strategies, and belief that these work (I1 and I2), underscore his focus on advancing Sweden's membership, because NATO is precisely the cooperative and multilateral solution that a profile like his would favour.

Conversely, someone scoring low on those factors would favour dealing with Russia's threats with a punitive rhetoric or unilateral rearmament.

As with any psychological profile, it cannot fully explain Sweden's decision, Russia's invasion of Ukraine was undeniably the trigger that created the opportunity for a change in Sweden's FP, particularly by shifting public opinion. However the psychological profile allows us to understand the form in which Sweden reacted to these threats. Other factors have shaped this event, such as changes in domestic support for NATO. However leadership matters greatly when understanding the sustained effort it took to actualise this 200-year FP reversal in less than two years.

Conclusion

Kristersson presents a highly coherent OCA profile: his philosophical beliefs of optimism, control-orientation and cooperation align with his instrumental beliefs in consistent cooperation and promise-driven tools. This is significant as it provides an explanatory logic for why and how Sweden changed its FP to join NATO, meaning multilaterally, cooperatively and based on mutual promise. Indeed, Sweden joined NATO so efficiently because of who Kristersson is as a political actor.

OCA is well suited because this FP decision is fundamentally strategic and rhetorical in nature, therefore understanding the instrumental beliefs (strategy), and the philosophical beliefs (rhetorics), is fundamental to reach a complete picture. While some methodological issues could hinder this profile, such as reliance on public speeches which might not reflect private beliefs, the profile's coherence and explanatory power supports the use of psychological analysis to reach a more nuanced analysis of Sweden's FP change. This profile extends our understanding because in cases of significant FP fracture leaders' beliefs are central to the path a country takes.

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Donald Trump

Profiled by Maryse Bots



Introduction

This study will use Hermann's (2003) Leadership Trait Analysis (LTA) to explain President Trump's decision to capture Venezuelan President Maduro in January 2026. A LTA of this decision is significant as this constituted a highly unorthodox intervention that challenged long-established international norms. By applying LTA, I conclude that Trump exhibits a charismatic leadership style, through personality traits characterised by opportunistic policy-making and the challenging of norms. Trump's traits primarily align with the populist political-strategic approach (PSA), which contends that leaders express a political strategy to connect with 'the people' to achieve and maintain political power. This will serve as the overarching framework through which Trump's charismatic leadership style, and his decision to capture Maduro, is explained as to demonstrate how Trump attaches political strategy to his populist foreign policy agenda.

Methodology

I used the first four spontaneous sources after the capture of Maduro for the analysis, spanning from 3 January 2026 until 22 January 2026. It is vital to note that the interviews used were conducted by right-leaning news organisations, which may introduce framing bias. This is mitigated by LTA's focus on spontaneous material and

the use of multiple sources. The LTA was conducted through the programme ProfilerPlus (Levine and Young, 2014) and analysed 13181 words. The verbal material was retrieved from the RollCall website and disfluencies were removed to improve reliability. I employed the sample of 43 US leaders as the norming group to establish comparisons between Trump and previous US Presidents.

Results

Trait	Trump's Scores	US Leaders Mean (N=43)	Standard Deviation	Z-score	Category
Belief in Ability to Control Events (BACE)	0.4116	0.272872542	0.072341756	1.917667827	High
Need for Power (PWR)	0.3115	0.276296727	0.033236511	1.059174743	High
Conceptual Complexity (CC)	0.6253	0.587181806	0.037625977	1.01308184	High
Self-Confidence (SC)	0.3979	0.351492313	0.085670005	0.5417028632	Average
Task Focus (TASK)	0.4549	0.624090781	0.079552643	-2.126777623	Low
Distrust of Others (DIS)	0.4553	0.20378528	0.072280374	3.47970972	High
In-Group Bias (IGB)	0.1285	0.144784797	0.023968332	-0.6794297158	Lean low

Table. 1: Trump's LTA Scores

Trait	Political-Strategic approach	Ideational approach	LTA Results	Which approach	Associated traits
Belief in Ability to Control Events (BACE)	High	Low	High	Political Strategic	Ambitions to control events and personalise decision-making
Need for Power (PWR)	High	Low	High	Political Strategic	Insatiable, individual, and Machiavellian quest for power
Conceptual Complexity (CC)	High	Low	High	Political Strategic	Flexible programmatic stances and search for instant political gains

Self-Confidence (SC)	High	High	Average	Neither	-
Task Focus (TASK)	Low	High	Low	Political Strategic	External search for approval and pliable mobilisation of support
Distrust of Others (DIS)	High	High	High	Political Strategic AND Ideational	Fear of crumbling mass support and backlashes from potent opponents AND sensations of 'elite' conspiracies against 'the will of the people'
In-Group Bias (IGB)	High	High	Lean low	Neither	-

Table 2: LTA profile and theoretical alignment with ideational and political strategic concepts of populism (Fouquet and Brummer, 2022, p.13)

Profile

This section analyses the results through the framework of the three questions Hermann (2003, p.5) lays out, which conclusively construct a charismatic leadership profile. This leadership profile focuses on achieving goals by engaging others and persuading them to act, through the challenging of constraints, openness to information, and relationship-focused attitude (Hermann, 2003, p.9).

How does the leader react to political constraints?

Hermann (2003, p.11) contends that a high BACE and PWR alludes to a leader who challenges constraints. A high BACE score speaks to a leader who is sure they can influence the world and often leads to a pursuance of an active foreign policy agenda (Shannon and Keller, 2007, p.85). Trump's high PWR score indicates a leader who has a zero-sum approach to bargaining situations (Shannon and Keller, 2007, p.84). This trait is associated with more autocratic decision-making and suppression of dissent (Fodor and Smith, 1982, p.183). These scores are vital to understand Trump's assertive

and aggressive foreign policy agenda, in which international normative constraints are consistently challenged (Shannon and Keller, 2007, p.85).

How open are leaders to incoming information?

Trump's CC is higher than his SC, which suggests that Trump is open to information. Policy analysts have described Trump's fluctuation and erraticism of his foreign policy behaviour as explaining his level of openness (Thiers and Wehner, 2022, p.8). Fouquet and Brummer (2022, p.19) further contend that while certain politicised issues trigger ideational discourse with Trump, his high CC score suggests that he is not constrained to preconceived concepts. Furthermore, the analysed content occurred after the capturing of Maduro, in which a wider-scale war was avoided, and White (2022, p.32) concludes that CC is higher in situations where war was avoided. While his SC score falls above the mean of US leaders, Trump's average SC score is the most surprising result, as it is inconsistent with previous LTA research conducted on Trump, such as Thiers and Wehner (2022, p.6). This reflects the analysed content, where Trump shifts credit to the US military, limiting expressions of self-importance. Together, these scores describe Trump as open to incoming information and erratic in his foreign policy behaviour, however these scores are skewed due to the context of the content analysed.

What are the leaders' reasons for seeking their positions?

As Trump scored high on DIS but low on IGB, his results indicate he perceives the world as conflict-prone, however due to the constraints of other countries, can be flexible in his response (Hermann, 2003, p.28). Therefore, his focus is being vigilant while benefiting from opportunities and building relationships. His high DIS score signals willingness to act forcefully, even pre-emptively, to manage perceived challenges. The dual classification of DIS as aligning with both the PSA and ideational approach (IA) further exemplifies this. The fear of crumbling mass support and narrative of elite conspiracy against the people simultaneously manifests in the Maduro narrative, as both an ideological and opportunistic approach.

While his low IGB initially seems unexpected, Fouquet and Brummer (2022, p.21) contend that the PSA explains this. Populist leaders' situational mobilisation of a broad domestic in-group against convenient external scapegoats is too opportunistic to reflect genuine IGB. Notably, the two traits which do not align with the PSA (IGB and SC, as proven in Table 2) provide the least explanatory power for this decision, reinforcing the argument that Trump's foreign policy behaviour is driven by political strategy. Trump's low TASK speaks to his tendency to maintain his followers, particularly in foreign policy issues, which explains why they seem less cooperative, and even erratic and utilitarian at times (Thiers and Wehner, 2022, p.5). Therefore, when a low TASK, IGB and high DIS scores are evaluated together, it can be deduced that these leaders are sensitive about maintaining the loyalty of their followers and keeping their morale high (Kutlu, et al., 2021). In conclusion, Hermann (2003, p.9) concludes that if a leader challenges constraints, is open to information, and is relationship-focused, that they align with the charismatic leadership style.

Decision to Capture Venezuela's President Nicolás Maduro

Trump's charismatic leadership style explains the decision to capture Maduro in a multitude of ways. Firstly, Trump's high BACE but low TASK closely embodies a prototypical PSA populist profile. These traits provide the micro-foundations for Trump's tendency to make uncontrolled decisions and violate long-established rules and norms (Weyland and Madrid, 2019, p.13). Trump's high DIS score also indicates this, as he is more willing to violate norms that restrain his ability to pre-emptively deal with threats, specifically norms limiting the use of military force (Shannon and Keller, 2007, p.84), exemplified by Maduro's capture which significantly breached international law.

The PSA further explains Trump's decision to capture Maduro, as it associates a high CC with 'flexible programmatic stances and the search for instant political gains,' explaining the shift across the speech between a range of topics. This is amplified by Trump's high PWR score, which elucidates why negotiation was rejected. His low IGB is further reflective of the populist utilisation of Venezuelan drug trafficking as a superficial external scapegoat to galvanise his domestic audience. Therefore, Trump's decision to kidnap Maduro reflects a charismatic leadership style that challenges international norms while pursuing relationships primarily beneficial to the US. The

profile reveals a vital aspect, which would have been overlooked by a rational actor model analysis, as a high CC is a key characteristic for opportunistic leaders on the constant lookout for political gains (Hermann et al., 2001). Thus, he prioritises the maximisation of domestic political impact, in line with a charismatic leadership style.

The LTA does not address why Trump captured Maduro over other left-wing authoritarian leaders. The domestic structural factors ameliorate this gap, as Trump repeatedly highlighted resource extraction as one of the key drivers of his decision to oust Maduro (Rogero, 2026). While his opportunistic leadership style partially explains this, the economic factors cannot be accounted for. Furthermore, the influence of advisers, specifically the Secretary of State's reported long-term objective to topple Maduro (Bazail-Eimil and Toosi, 2025), remains outside the profile's explanatory reach. Furthermore, the two traits which are neither PSA nor IA (IGB and SC) are the least explanatory for this specific decision, as Trump's moderate SC score is explained contextually and the low IGB cannot be adequately explained by either theoretical approach. Therefore, future LTA analyses of Trump's foreign policy decisions would benefit from developing a framework that accounts for traits which fall outside the existing ideational-political strategic binary, which does not account for the complexity introduced when a populist leader operates at the level of a major power.

Conclusion

In conclusion, Trump's charismatic leadership style, through the lens of the PSA, demonstrates that his foreign policy is characterised by opportunism and the challenging of international norms. The capture of Maduro exemplified this through the violation of international law and the construction of a discourse which sought to maximise Trump's domestic political influence instead of advancing his foreign policy doctrine. The PSA is central to this, as Trump mobilised the capture of Maduro as a political instrument, rather than acting from genuine ideological alignment, by constructing Venezuela as an external scapegoat to consolidate domestic support. This is in line with the political-strategic populist's tendency to pursue flexible programmatic stances in search of instant political gains. The LTA provides significant explanatory power as to why Trump chose this specific course of action, however

cannot account for structural factors, highlighting that the LTA operates alongside other structural factors.

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Boris Johnson

Profiled by Shannon Cassidy



Introduction

This leadership profile will analyse Boris Johnson's initial UK response to Russia's escalation and invasion of Ukraine between 22 February and 9 March 2022. I use Leadership Trait Analysis to examine how Johnson's personality profile offers an explanation for the style and pace of that response. This analytical framework is appropriate here because it focuses on stable traits that shape how leaders respond to constraints, process information, and approach political action, making it valid to apply to a fast-moving foreign policy crisis. This case is interesting because Johnson's response was immediate, forceful, and highly visible to the public, making it a strong case to test whether his profile can explain how he approached the crisis as a leader.

Methodology

The dataset consisted of six English language transcripts by Boris Johnson, dated from 3 October 2021 to 22 February 2022, and totalling 18,397 words. This includes two broadcast interviews, two parliamentary post statement Q&A exchanges, one NATO press conference, and one PMQs exchange. In the post statement Q&A exchanges, I excluded the opening statements to ensure there was no prepared speech in the cleaned dataset. These sources were selected because they provide valid material for LTA, as they consist of Johnson's speech in spontaneous verbal responses. They also

provide a reliable basis for LTA profiling by analysing responses across different formats and topics. A UK leaders norming group was used because it is the most appropriate comparison group for interpreting the scores of a British Prime Minister. One limitation is that all six texts come from public settings, which may capture a more tactical style of language than what could appear in private settings.

Results

Trait	Johnson's Scores	UK Leaders Mean	Standard Deviation	Z-score	Category
Distrust of Others (DIS)	0.1266	0.140793374	0.045049315	-0.31506304	Average
Task Focus (TASK)	0.5545	0.66417899	0.033888425	-3.23647352	Low
Belief in Ability to Control Events (BACE)	0.4301	0.335001852	0.029555984	3.21755987	High
In-Group Bias (IGB)	0.1141	0.105861234	0.017639929	0.46705211	Average
Self-Confidence (SC)	0.431	0.400728672	0.05727641	0.52851301	Lean high
Conceptual Complexity (CC)	0.4973	0.587292358	0.031572022	-2.8503831	Low
Need for Power (PWR)	0.254	0.233061867	0.024319968	0.8609441	Lean high

Profile

Johnson's profile presents a leader who tries to shape outcomes and who approaches decisions with clear confidence in his own ability to influence what happens. His exceptionally high score on belief in his ability to control events, alongside his lean high need for power, makes control a defining feature of his leadership style. In Hermann's (2003, pp. 164-168) framework, that combination is associated with leaders who challenge constraints, take charge of their environment, and push for outcomes they believe can be secured through their own intervention rather than cautious adjustment or extended negotiation.

The second defining pattern is the relationship between Johnson's lean high self-confidence and low conceptual complexity. Hermann (2003, pp. 170-171) argues that when self-confidence exceeds conceptual complexity, leaders process events through a more fixed perception of the situation, rely more heavily on their own judgement, and structure decision-making in ways that maintain their control over it. This is consistent with Johnson's low task focus, which suggests that once he had formed a clear view of a situation, his leadership style was less likely to centre on working through policy problems in a detailed way and more likely to centre on building momentum, and maintaining support and loyalty (Hermann, 2003, pp. 175-176). This combination is important because it shows how control, confidence, and low conceptual complexity could shape his behaviour in office. This suggests that Johnson was likely to approach difficult decisions by simplifying the situation into a clearer judgement and then backing his own capacity to act on it.

Johnson's average scores for distrust and in-group bias make his profile more specific by showing that his assertiveness is not primarily rooted in suspicion or defensive group thinking. In Hermann's (2003, pp. 177-178) framework, these two traits indicate whether a leader tends to be motivated through threat and group protection or through the possibility for cooperation and relationship building. Johnson's scores are close to the UK mean, which suggests that neither tendency is unusually strong in his case. This matters because it narrows the logic of his profile, if distrust or in-group bias were high, it would point more strongly to a style driven by fear of outsiders, clearer we and them divisions, and a greater tendency to approach politics as a zero-sum struggle. This means Johnson is less likely to approach other actors as inherently threatening and more likely to see them as figures who can be managed or persuaded towards his preferred course of action.

These results are most useful when presented as a guide to Johnson's likely decision-making processes under pressure. High control beliefs and strong self-confidence suggest that he would be inclined to maintain authority over the direction of a decision rather than allow the process to remain open or dispersed across others. Low conceptual complexity then matters because it implies that competing interpretations were less likely to be considered for long once he had settled on his own view of a situation. Rather than sustaining ambiguity for long, Johnson was more likely to

convert uncertainty into a firmer political judgement that could then be pursued with confidence. That pattern also helps explain why Johnson was likely to privilege speed and direction over prolonged reconsideration once he had settled on a preferred course of action.

In terms of decision-making, the profile suggests a process in which authority stayed close to the leader, alternative interpretations lost influence relatively quickly, and commitment became more fixed at an early stage. Brummer's (2016, pp.711-714) analysis is useful here because it links stronger self-confidence and weaker information processing to poorer foreign policy judgement, making Johnson's results analytically relevant beyond description of personality and into crisis decision-making.

Initial response to Russia's invasion of Ukraine

The foreign policy decision examined here is Johnson's initial UK response to Russia's escalation against Ukraine between 22 February and 9 March. In this short period, Britain's response moved from warnings and deterrence to much more extreme policies regarding sanctions, military support, and diplomatic coordination. On 22 February, Johnson treated Russia's recognition of Donetsk and Luhansk as a renewed invasion, announcing the first sanctions. These sanctions froze the assets of five Russian banks and three oligarchs, while also making clear that if Russia escalated further, sanctions would continue (UK Government, 2022a).

After the full-scale invasion began on 24 February, Johnson presented Britain's goal as ensuring that Putin's aggression failed while expanding sanctions and support for Ukraine (UK Government, 2022b). By early March, the response had developed into a broader strategy of sustained humanitarian, economic, and defensive support, coordinated with allies and directed towards helping Ukraine resist over time (UK Government, 2022c).

Johnson's profile is most useful for explaining the quick approach of Britain's initial response to the invasion. His very high belief in his ability to control events, together with lean high need for power, is consistent with a leader who would not be content

with a cautious approach but would instead seek to shape the direction of the crisis through sanctions, military backing, and creating alliances. As Hermann (2003, pp. 164-168) argues, that combination is associated with leaders who challenge constraints and actively push for outcomes through their own intervention. Johnson's lean high self-confidence and low conceptual complexity add to this pattern as they suggest a leader who was likely to reach a firm view of Putin's intentions quickly and then act with confidence on that judgement (Hermann, 2003, pp. 170-171). His low task focus also fits the public presentation of the decision, because the emphasis was less on technical policy detail and more on unity, resolve, support, and maintaining momentum behind his course of action (Hermann, 2003, pp. 175-176).

At the same time, the profile does not fully explain Britain's response on its own. Johnson's traits help explain the speed and forceful framing of the response, but they do not explain why Britain responded at all or why the response combined sanctions, military assistance, humanitarian support, and close coordination with allies in the way it did. The scale of the invasion and urgency of the crisis both mattered. Martill (2024, pp. 1177-1178) argued that the war exposed the limits of Britain's post-Brexit position by leaving it outside an important forum for European decision-making, which led the UK to stay influential through external leadership and coordinated coalition-building. That context helps explain why Johnson's control oriented and highly self-confident style translated onto visible leadership and public commitment. The profile therefore works best as an explanation for why Britain's response was so quick and assertive, rather than for the broader strategic and institutional conditions that made such a response likely in the first place.

Conclusion

This profile reveals Johnson as a leader defined above all by control, confidence, and a strong tendency to push his own judgement into action. High belief in his ability to control events, stronger self-confidence, and low conceptual complexity suggest a decision-making style that was assertive, leader driven, and likely to settle quickly on a firm interpretation of events. Applied to Ukraine, the profile is most useful for explaining the speed, forceful framing, and public direction of Britain's initial response. It is most valuable because it shows how Johnson was likely to respond and

handle the pressure once a crisis emerged. However, the method still has limits, as it cannot fully explain why Britain responded in the way it did without considering their post-Brexit position, the scale of the invasion, and allied coordination.

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Emmanuel Macron

Profiled by Albane Choeur



Introduction

This paper analyses the leadership profile of French President Emmanuel Macron to understand his response to Russia's invasion of Ukraine in 2022, which consisted of supporting Ukraine while maintaining dialogue with Russia. It examines to what extent Macron's leadership traits explain his strategy using the Leadership Trait Analysis (LTA) framework, as it links leadership traits to decision-making style (Hermann 2003), thereby providing insights into Macron's choice of strategy. This case is analytically interesting because Macron's response has been criticised by other actors (Robinet 2022), appearing contradictory at first glance, but revealing a deeper coherence through LTA.

Methodology

The analysis relies on a corpus of five interviews and five press conferences by Macron, covering the 2017-2026 period, totalling 19,959 words, analysed using ProfilerPlus. The dataset captures temporal and contextual variations, as it includes one public statement per year across his two mandates, and addresses domestic and foreign policy issues. Five documents were translated into English using ChatGPT. The LTA scores were interpreted using the world leaders norming group, given the focus on a

head of states, therefore allowing a meaningful comparison across similar political actors. However, interviews and press conferences are addressed to a specific audience (international actors, citizens, etc.), which may influence how the leader expresses himself, consequently affecting the scores (Hermann 2003). Lastly, translated material may alter the original linguistic nuances, impacting scores, and the limited number of documents may not fully capture Macron's entire leadership behaviour.

Results

Using the LTA framework, this section identifies Macron's personality traits compared to a norming group of world leaders, and builds his leadership profile by analysing the results of the following table.

Trait	Macron's Scores	World Leaders Mean	Standard Deviation	Z-score	Category
Distrust of Others (DIS)	0,116	0,185638448	0,070680686	-0,985254274	Low
Task Focus (TASK)	0,6807	0,636175684	0,073399104	0,606605716	Lean high
Belief in the Ability to Control Events (BACE)	0,3507	0,325103185	0,066508356	0,384866151	Average
In-Group Bias (IGB)	0,1176	0,14405735	0,038786559	-0,682126765	Lean low
Self-Confidence (SC)	0,4374	0,339404616	0,098222743	0,997685271	High
Conceptual Complexity (CC)	0,5772	0,569509526	0,049775614	0,154502846	Average
Need for Power (PWR)	0,2733	0,281546779	0,043693124	-0,188743176	Average

Table 1. LTA scores for Macron derived from ProfilerPlus

Profile

The seven traits presented in the table allow us to assess Macron's reaction to constraints, openness to incoming information, and his motivation for action: problem-solving or relationship (Hermann 2003).

Firstly, the two traits capturing the respect or the challenge of political constraints are belief that one can control events (BACE), defined as the degree of control over situations the leader perceives to have, and the need for maintaining, establishing, or restoring power (PWR) (Hermann 2003). Macron scores average on both, and as Hermann (2003) suggests, this indicates an ability to both challenge and respect constraints depending on the situation, adapting his behavior to the specific context. This adaptation is illustrated by Macron's Africa policy, combining an effort to broaden France's engagement with the continent, beyond Francophone Africa, while maintaining a traditional policy regarding the latter, such as continuing the military presence in the Sahel (Duclos 2021). It reflects a pragmatic balance between operating within existing constraints and reshaping them.

Secondly, according to Hermann (2003), conceptual complexity (CC) (the extent to which leaders recognise and consider multiple perspectives when evaluating an issue) and self-confidence (SC), jointly determine a leader's openness to "input from others in the decision-making process and from the political environment" (Hermann 2003, 167). In this regard, Macron's CC is higher than his SC score, which suggests that he is open to incoming information. While he possesses confidence in his leadership, he is relatively receptive to alternative viewpoints and new evidence rather than relying exclusively on his own judgment (Hermann 2003).

Thus, his profile points to a leader receptive to contextual information and willing to consider different perspectives. As Cole (2026, 77) notes, "Emmanuel Macron listens, but he always takes the main decisions alone". Indeed, this is reflected in his response to the U.S. withdrawal from the Paris Agreement, through the "Make Our Planet Great Again" initiative, which promoted international cooperation while simultaneously advancing his vision of climate leadership as a global responsibility (Abrams 2017).

Finally, to evaluate whether a leader's motivation for seeking office is driven by problem-solving or relationship, three traits must be considered: the emphasis placed on task completion or group cohesion (TASK), in-group bias (IGB) capturing the tendency to view one's own group as central, and distrust of others (DIS) (Hermann 2003). Macron's task focus score leans high, which, according to Hermann (2003), characterises leaders primarily motivated by problem-solving rather than maintaining

group spirit (Cole 2026; Drake 2020). However, as Macron's score is not extreme, he cannot be considered purely task driven. Moreover, DIS and IGB, allow us to determine if a leader perceives the world in terms of threats or as an opportunity for cooperation (Hermann 2003).

Macron's low levels of DIS and relatively low IGB signals that he does not view the international environment as inherently hostile. Instead, his perception of others is likely to be shaped by context and remains flexible. He is also more likely to favour dialogue and diplomatic gestures to manage tensions, which aligns with accounts emphasising his active engagement on the international stage (Drake 2020). Therefore, we can conclude that Macron's motivation appears to be mainly driven by problem-solving, while his approach to the world remains cooperative.

Overall, the absence of extreme scores suggests a balanced leadership style. A distinctive feature of Macron's profile is the combination of high SC and low DIS, indicating an assertive yet diplomatically engaged leader relatively open to the world, reflecting his decision-making style. Drawing on Hermann (2003) his decision-making style appears context-dependent, while his level of openness to incoming information points to a structured and controlled process, and his motivational profile implies a non-confrontational approach.

Response to the War in Ukraine

Following Russia's invasion of Ukraine in 2022, Macron adopted a strategy associating financial, military and diplomatic support for Ukraine, while continuing dialogue with Moscow (Olearchyk and Abboud 2022). He framed this approach as necessary to preserve the possibility of a future diplomatic "exit ramp" (Olearchyk and Abboud 2022). However, this dual strategy raised concerns among allies, especially when he declared that Russia should not be "humiliated", prompting criticism from Ukraine and EU partners (Robinet 2022; Ricard 2022; Gnesotto 2023).

This decision can partly be understood through Macron's leadership profile. His strategy reflects his average scores on BACE and PWR, corresponding to a context-dependent response (Hermann 2003). This explains why he both respects constraints

such as alignment with European and NATO partners, while challenging them through a strategy criticised by allies (Varma 2022).

Second, Macron's desire to maintain frequent communication with Putin and other leaders (Robinet 2022) indicates openness to different perspectives, consistent with his CC score. Although he actively sought dialogue and considered multiple viewpoints, he ultimately maintained his chosen course of action. Indeed, despite scepticism from Ukraine's partners and the EU (Robinet 2022), he continued diplomatic efforts with Russia, including repeated calls and attempts to revive the Normandy format, "a diplomatic grouping that includes representatives from France, Germany, Russia, and Ukraine" (Robinet 2022).

Finally, Macron's motivational profile clarifies his decision. His willingness to manage the crisis through mediation (Olearchyk and Abboud 2022) reflects his relatively high TASK score, demonstrating a primarily problem-solving orientation (Hermann 2003). Moreover, his reliance on diplomatic initiatives (calls, meetings, negotiations (Robinet 2022)), aligns with his low level of DIS and IGB indicating that his approach to world affairs is cooperative and dialogue-oriented (Hermann 2003).

Applying the leadership profile reveals insights that might otherwise be overlooked. It explains the apparent contradiction in Macron's strategy, and why it was considered controversial by some actors. Macron's pragmatic, confident, cooperative and problem-solving orientation, helps explain his decision. In contrast, actors perceiving Russia as an immediate threat (Robinet 2022), are likely to appear more confrontational, thereby deeming Macron's strategy inappropriate.

However, Macron's leadership profile cannot fully account for his decision. Europe's dependence on Russian energy constrained decision-making and may have encouraged maintaining diplomatic channels (Yi, Withitwinyuchon, and Somboon 2024). Furthermore, the urgency of the crisis led Macron to intensify contacts with Moscow in an effort to prevent the war (Robinet 2022). Finally, his balanced strategy can also be explained by the proximity of the April 2022 presidential election, encouraging him to position himself as a European leader, while pressures from NATO and the EU required alignment with his allies (Robinet 2022). Therefore, while

Macron's profile helps understand key aspects of his response, it must be considered within these broader political constraints.

Conclusion

Macron's leadership profile reveals a confident and pragmatic leader who adapts to situations, remains relatively open to information, and is primarily motivated by problem-solving. His decision-making reflects an adaptation to constraints while remaining open to alternative perspectives, alongside a cooperative and non-hostile view of the international environment. This can produce strategies that appear contradictory but remain coherent with his personality traits, as illustrated by Macron's handling of the Ukrainian war. The LTA framework is thus useful for understanding his decision by linking his traits to his behaviour. However, it cannot fully explain his strategy because it focuses on Macron's personality and may overlook factors such as institutional constraints or urgency.

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Verbal material processed with ProfilerPlus for LTA		
Date	Type of document	Link
18 April 2021	Interview	https://www.cbsnews.com/news/transcript-french-president-emmanuel-macron-on-face-the-nation-april-18-2021/
5 December 2022	Interview	https://www.rev.com/transcripts/emmanuel-macron-the-60-minutes-interview-transcript
21 September 2025	Interview	https://www.cbsnews.com/news/french-president-emmanuel-macron-face-the-nation-transcript-09-21-2025/
21 July 2020	Interview	https://www.elysee.fr/front/pdf/elysee-module-15828-en.pdf
19 September 2019	Interview	https://time.com/5680174/france-emmanuel-macron-transcript-interview/
19 March 2026	Press Conference	https://www.vie-publique.fr/discours/302514-emmanuel-macron-19032026-union-europeenne
26 September 2024	Press Conference	https://www.vie-publique.fr/discours/295851-emmanuel-macron-26092024-france-canada
15 November 2023	Press Conference	https://www.vie-publique.fr/discours/291872-emmanuel-macron-15112023-france-suisse-situation-proche-orient
29 May 2017	Press Conference	https://www.vie-publique.fr/discours/203301-conference-de-presse-conjointe-de-mm-emmanuel-macron-president-de-la-r
30 September 2018	Press Conference	https://www.vie-publique.fr/discours/206809-conference-de-presse-de-m-emmanuel-macron-president-de-la-republique

Barack Obama

Profiled by Jasmine Kindness



Introduction

This study utilises Leadership Trait Analysis (Hermann, 2003) to profile Barack Obama's personality traits. The resultant profile is then interpreted and used to analyse his decision to authorise Operation Neptune Spear, an operation ultimately resulting in the death of Osama bin Laden on May 2nd 2011. This foreign policy decision is an interesting case to examine due to its high stakes, geopolitical risk, and the uncertainty of its foundational intelligence. In applying LTA, this study examines the role of Obama's personality traits in shaping his decision-making approach and considers the extent to which his leadership style explains the decision to authorise the operation. LTA is particularly suited to this study as it provides a framework for linking patterns in a leader's language to their decision-making tendencies and leadership characteristics.

Methodology

This study's analysis is based on a corpus of Obama's solo and joint press conferences from the 2011 period, prior to and following the decision to authorise Operation Neptune Spear. Following from the assumption within LTA regarding the relative stability of leadership traits, these conferences provide a substantial representative sample of spontaneous material covering a variety of topics. Proximity to the decision

also reduces the influence of distinct contextual factors like early campaign rhetoric or retrospective justification. A norming group of US presidents was chosen in order to facilitate comparison across leaders operating within similar contextual and institutional constraints. Limitations of this approach include reliance on public, potentially pre-prepared, communication, as well as reduced generalisability of results due to the US-specific context.

Results

Trait	Obama's Scores	US Leaders Mean	Standard Deviation	Z-score	Category
Distrust of Others (DIS)	0.15	0.20	0.07	-0.74	Moderately low
Task Focus (TASK)	0.66	0.62	0.08	0.47	Average
Belief in Ability to Control Events (BACE)	0.41	0.27	0.07	1.89	High
In-Group Bias (IGB)	0.13	0.14	0.02	-0.74	Moderately low
Self-Confidence (SC)	0.59	0.35	0.09	2.76	Very high
Conceptual Complexity (CC)	0.61	0.59	0.04	0.67	Moderately high
Need for Power (PWR)	0.28	0.28	0.03	0.03	Average

Profile

The most prominent feature of the LTA profile above is Obama's very high self-confidence ($z = 2.76$), which indicates a strong reliance on his ability to make situational judgements. Leaders with high self-confidence scores tend to believe themselves capable of evaluating and making decisions with limited external influence. However, in LTA, self-confidence is best interpreted in relation to conceptual complexity, as one's openness to information is determined by the interaction between these traits.

Obama scores moderately high on conceptual complexity ($z = 0.67$), which suggests a leader able to integrate and evaluate multiple perspectives in decision-making. Such leaders seek to avoid over-simplifying decisions, assess nuanced information and consider alternative opinions. In conjunction with high self-confidence, these traits manifest in a leadership style that is self-assured but flexible, remaining open to alternative perspectives. Therefore, decision-making processes typically involve input from a wide range of actors and are characterised by comparatively extended deliberation.

This is consistent with accounts of Obama's deliberative and consultative leadership, whereby decision-making is informed by extensive information gathering and consideration of alternatives (McMahon, 2024b:23-24). He is also described as favouring reason and constructive debate in shaping outcomes, aligned with the traits previously discussed (Pederson, 2012; McMahon, 2024b:21-23). Although criticised for being slow to make decisions (Goodman, 2011), this profile reflects an approach shaped by both analytical depth and decisive confidence.

Another trait Obama scores highly on is belief in one's ability to control events ($z = 1.89$), which describes the extent to which leaders believe outcomes are influenced by their own actions. Such leaders are typically proactive in policy-making processes, believing outcomes to be contingent on their participation. They also seek to retain control over tasks in order to ensure desired outcomes. While leaders scoring highly in this dimension may also reflect a reduced openness to compromise, Obama's leadership style has been described as pragmatic and adaptable (McMahon, 2024b:24), indicating that this tendency may be moderated by other traits.

In contrast, Obama exhibits moderately low scores for distrust and in-group bias ($z = -0.74$). Leaders with low in-group bias are less prone to rigid 'us' and 'them' categorisations, instead differentiating actors based on contextual assessments. Similarly, while remaining alert to the motives of others, leaders with low distrust tend to make judgments about whether to trust others based on combined historical and situational factors, rather than fixed expectations. Combined, low distrust and in-group bias suggest leaders who are able to evaluate conflicts within their broader

context, reacting on the basis of situational judgements rather than preconceived adversarial assumptions or images.

Alongside the more distinctive traits, Obama displays average scores for task focus ($z = 0.47$) and need for power ($z = 0.03$). An average level of task orientation indicates a balanced approach to problem-solving demands and relational considerations without a strong emphasis on either dimension. Similarly, an average need for power suggests that pursuit of personal influence is not a defining feature of Obama's profile. These traits serve to reinforce Obama's reasoned and pragmatic leadership style (Pederson, 2012:48-49; Ward Holder, 2012:64), further indicating that his behaviour is not shaped by strong motivational extremes.

Overall, Barack Obama's LTA profile reflects a leadership style characterised by high self-confidence combined with moderate conceptual complexity, manifesting in an assured and analytically-informed decision-making approach. While strong self-confidence and belief in ability to control events suggest decisive leadership and relatively autonomous judgement, this is tempered by high conceptual complexity, specifically the ability to engage with alternative perspectives and manage uncertainty. In addition, low distrust and in-group bias indicate an openness to cooperation with others, while average need for power and task focus reflect problem-solving rooted in balanced motivations. As a whole, the profile indicates that Obama is a deliberative and pragmatic leader, combining self-assured judgement with intellectual rigour to make informed, context-sensitive decisions.

Operation Neptune Spear

Central to the decision-making process was the ongoing evaluation of operational and political risk, specifically the reliability of the intelligence, likelihood of success on part of SEAL Team Six and the consequences of action or failure for national security (Hickok, 2014). Obama considered several approaches, including a drone strike, bombing the compound and a US or joint special forces operation, before ultimately favouring a helicopter assault (Hickok, 2014). The narrowing of these options demonstrates a deliberative process aligned with moderately high conceptual complexity, whereby options were systematically assessed in accordance with available intelligence. Despite initial inclination toward the use of explosives to

eliminate the possibility of escape, the preference for a special forces operation illustrates a shift toward a more precise intervention as the situation evolved.

Obama's willingness to assume responsibility for the decision to ultimately authorise the operation despite the risk and uncertainty involved is evidence of his high self-confidence. Although there was no definitive intelligence confirming bin Laden's presence in the Abbottabad compound (Hickok, 2014), Obama's leadership style is characterised by the assurance to take decisive action even under ambiguous conditions. This is further reinforced by his moderately high belief in ability to control events, suggesting valorisation of executive action in shaping outcomes, as evidenced by his decision to authorise the raid in spite of the risks.

The decision was further shaped through sustained consultation within the National Security Council, who presented both supporting and oppositional viewpoints, with the Secretary of Defence (Hickok, 2014) and Vice President Biden cautioning against authorising the raid. Obama's exposure to dissenting viewpoints, as well as his later crediting of Biden for improving his thinking on the matter (McMahon, 2024a:318), illustrate that his final decision was shaped through ongoing debate and alternative risk evaluation, aligned with a leadership profile featuring both openness to information and responsive flexibility. However, the eventual authorisation of the operation suggests that, while receptive to opposition, Obama ultimately retained decisive authority to act following a suitable risk assessment.

Obama's leadership profile further helps explain the cognitive structuring of risk within his decision-making. The combination of his low distrust and in-group bias indicates that he did not rely on adversarial assumptions when evaluating risk in relation to Pakistan and other international actors. Risk assessment was context-specific and enabled by his degree of conceptual complexity, therefore cognisant of multiple dimensions, including intelligence ambiguity, operational feasibility and wider strategic consequences.

However, this decision cannot be explained by Obama's leadership profile alone. Long-standing commitments to locate bin Laden alongside broader counterterrorism objectives contributed to situational pressure on Obama to deliver on his campaign

promises (McMahon, 2024a:317). This pressure was further exacerbated by the shadow of previous failures during the Carter and Bush administrations (McMahon, 2024a). The policy options available to the president were also subject to institutional constraints, in the form of Security Council dynamics, CIA intelligence assessments and special forces operational capacity. Therefore, while Obama's cognitive profile was central to the decision-making process in his evaluation of intelligence and policy options, the final decision to authorise the operation was also heavily conditioned by urgent strategic and symbolic imperatives.

Conclusion

Leadership Trait Analysis aids in explaining Obama's decision to authorise Operation Neptune Spear through a profile characterised by high self-confidence, moderate conceptual complexity and intellectual rigour, which resulted in reasoned but decisive authority to act under ambiguous conditions. However, while this profile identifies key tendencies that shape Obama's deliberative and pragmatic decision-making approach, the outcome in this specific case was also driven by wider contextual pressures. As such, Obama's cognitive profile is reflected in his approach, but cannot account for the decision outcome on its own.

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Helmut Kohl

Profiled by Carmen Linares Menchon



Introduction

Helmut Kohl served as Chancellor of West Germany from 1982 to 1998 and played a central role in German reunification (1989-1990). This rapid and largely diplomatic process culminated in the Ten-Point Plan (November 1989) and the Two Plus Four Treaty (September 1990), which secured international approval for unification. As a defining moment in the end of the Cold War, reunification raises questions about the role of leadership in shaping outcomes.

This essay applies Operational Code Analysis (OCA) to examine how Kohl's beliefs influenced his foreign policy decisions during this period. Given the need to navigate complex relations with leaders such as Mikhail Gorbachev, Margaret Thatcher and George H. W. Bush, OCA is particularly suited to capturing how his worldview shaped strategic choices such as the Ten-Point Plan. The relevance of the case is that reunification was neither inevitable nor universally supported (Mueller, 2015), making Kohl's interpretation of events and his ability to act under uncertainty analytically significant. Furthermore, this analysis does not claim to account for every bilateral relationship or negotiation that shaped the reunification process, but focuses on how Kohl's belief system informed his broader strategic approach.

Methodology

Using Operational Code Analysis, I analyse a sample of verbal material produced by Helmut Kohl, totalling 10,215 words and 286 coded verbs. The dataset consists of seven sources: four speeches, one interview with The Times, one phone conversation, and one international meeting transcript, detailed in the Annex. All materials relate to Kohl's views on German reunification and European relations and are drawn from 1985-1990. This timeframe captures his belief system in the years leading up to and including reunification, allowing for an assessment of how these beliefs informed his decision-making. The norming group used for comparison is world leaders, providing a broad baseline against which Kohl's beliefs can be evaluated.

A key limitation concerns the size and composition of the dataset. The sample is relatively small due to the difficulty of identifying sources that meet the criteria and are available in English. As Kohl's native language was German, reliance on translated material reduces both quality and quantity (Brummer & Young, 2020). However, the available data remains sufficient for a meaningful analysis and support the study's key findings.

Results

Operational Code	Kohl's Scores	World Leaders Mean	Standard Deviation	Z-score	Category
I-1	0.72090	0.53307	0.16782	1.11923	high
I-2	0.34880	0.23894	0.09709	1.13158	high
I-3	0.35782	0.24471	0.10177	1.11133	high
I-4a	0.28000	0.46492	0.16125	-1.14676	low
I-4b	0.30000	0.55742	0.14025	-1.83549	low
I-5 Appeal	0.65000	0.54038	0.10588	1.03525	high
I-5 Promise	0.07000	0.04384	0.02940	0.88979	lean high

I-5 Reward	0.14000	0.18231	0.06538	-0.64713	lean low
I-5 Oppose	0.13000	0.10864	0.04761	0.44857	average
I-5 Threaten	0.00000	0.02492	0.02528	-0.98546	lean low
I-5 Punish	0.01000	0.09990	0.04385	-2.05017	low
P-1	0.56000	0.34664	0.12466	1.71153	high
P-2	0.25830	0.16076	0.08888	1.09752	high
P-3	0.19606	0.12035	0.02690	2.81445	high
P-4	0.43000	0.19884	0.07816	2.95751	high
P-5	0.92000	0.97580	0.01216	-4.58736	low

All definitions and result interpretations follow Walker et al. (2003)

Profile

The results reveal a very coherent belief profile. Regarding philosophical beliefs, Kohl views the political universe as very friendly (P-1), scoring almost two standard deviations above the world leader average, and is also highly optimistic about realising his fundamental political values (P-2). This optimism extends to his view of the future: he believed political outcomes were highly predictable (P-3) and that he had substantial personal control over them (P-4), consistent with a leader who attributes a minimal role to chance (P-5).

The scores for Kohl's instrumental beliefs show that his strategic approach to goals is through cooperation rather than conflict (I-1), as well as high levels of cooperative tactics (I-2). He is also shown to be more risk-acceptant than the average world leader (I-3), and he has a low shift propensity, both for word and deed, and conflictual and cooperative tactics (I-4a, I-4b). Lastly, the utility of means indices reflect a frequent use of appeal(I-5ap) and promise tactics(I-5pr), though to a lesser degree. On the other hand, the use of rewards(I-5re) is low, and even lower for punishment(I-5pu), while

his reliance on opposing tactics is average (I-5op). His use of threats is the lowest of all (I-5th), scoring almost two standard deviations below the average world leader.

Several patterns and notable findings emerge from these results, a clear one being the internal coherence of the profile, as Kohl is presented as a leader whose philosophical and instrumental beliefs are aligned. He views the world as friendly and optimistic and therefore relies on cooperation tactics. The high scores in P-3 and P-4 are analytically significant, as Kohl believed the political future was highly predictable and that he had substantial control over it. Combined with his significantly below-average P-5 score, these results form a pattern: a leader who believed chance plays a far smaller role than most, reflecting a deep self-confidence in his ability to shape political outcomes, consistent with his very optimistic worldview.

A further notable finding is his high risk-acceptance score (I-3), which sits somewhat in tension with the image of Kohl as a cautious, consensus-seeking leader. But when we consider that Kohl's bold moves, such as the Ten-Point Plan, were always framed within a cooperative logic, this tension is resolved, with him using risk as a tool of diplomacy. Finally, the near-zero threat score (I-5th) and very low punishment score (I-5pu) define his decision-making style as one of persuasion and reassurance rather than coercion, which directly shaped how he managed the concerns of Gorbachev during the reunification process.

Kohl's low shift propensity, together with his reliance on appeal and promise tactics, portray a leader who maintained a consistent diplomatic register based on cooperation, which directly shaped the steady, reassurance-based negotiating style he employed throughout the process. Lastly, Kohl's dismissal of chance is evident in practice, as key events such as the opening of the Wall and instability in East Germany (Larres, 2015) were not interpreted as unpredictable disruptions, but as opportunities to be seized through decisive political action.

Behaviour during German reunification

The operational code profile provides strong insights into Helmut Kohl's conduct during German reunification by linking his beliefs to his strategic choices. His highly cooperative worldview and strong preference for diplomatic strategies help explain

why reunification was pursued through negotiation rather than coercion, despite the potential for conflict. Rather than interpreting the situation as zero-sum, Kohl approached opposing actors, such as Gorbachev, as partners who could be persuaded through reassurance and engagement, consistent with his instrumental beliefs.

His belief in his ability to shape political outcomes, combined with a very low attribution to chance, is consistent with his decision to actively drive the process rather than wait for events to unfold. This is most clearly reflected in the Ten-Point Plan of November 1989, which was already oriented toward reunification (Hertle, 2015). Kohl advanced this initiative unilaterally as soon as he perceived a potential opening with the Soviet Union. His high belief in the importance of timing further explains the speed of his actions, as he moved early to set the agenda before opposition could consolidate, while his relatively high risk-acceptance enabled him to take bold steps within a cooperative framework.

An alternative explanation to the reunification process emphasises the role of the Soviet Union. As Wolfgang Mueller argues, reunification was dependent on Soviet acceptance, as it retained the capacity to block, delay, or permit the process. In this sense, the Soviet Union acted as a structural gatekeeper, and reunification only became politically feasible once Gorbachev chose to allow it. However, this explanation is insufficient on its own, as Soviet policy during this period was inconsistent, with Gorbachev shifting his views constantly (Mueller, 2015), creating uncertainty rather than determining a specific outcome. While structural conditions defined the boundaries, OCA explains why reunification unfolded so rapidly and on terms favourable to Germany, a question structural accounts cannot answer. Kohl's belief system helps explain how he interpreted the situation and acted upon it by accelerating the process and acting cooperatively.

This interpretation of Kohl's profile is further reinforced by existing research. Malici (2006), analysing German leaders in a different foreign policy context in the post War era, similarly finds that Kohl exhibited a cooperative worldview, strong optimism and belief in control over outcomes. The convergence between these findings and those presented here suggests that Kohl's beliefs could be stable features, as they are similar

throughout different time frames and events. This consistency and stability of leader beliefs might be an interesting idea to explore in further research.

Conclusion

This analysis shows that Operational Code Analysis is a useful tool for understanding foreign policy decision-making. In the case of Helmut Kohl, it helps explain how his consistent cooperative outlook, optimism, and belief in his ability to shape events influenced the way he approached German reunification. These traits explain why he acted quickly but still relied heavily on diplomacy rather than confrontation.

At the same time, OCA does not tell the whole story. It helps us understand how Kohl acted, but not why reunification became possible in the first place. Structural factors like the role of the Soviet Union were clearly necessary. What OCA reveals, which structural accounts overlook, is not simply that reunification occurred, but how Kohl interpreted uncertainty as opportunity and translated it into strategic action based on cooperation.

Finally, the consistency between these findings and existing research suggests the possibility that Kohl's approach to reunification was not simply shaped by circumstance but reflected a broader pattern in how he understood and acted in international politics.

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Type	Date	Original Language	Topic	Reference
Speech/meeting	27-nov-85	English	Germany and European integration	Margaret Thatcher Foundation. (1985, November 27). <i>Document 106183</i>
Telephone convers	10-nov-89	English	Current situation in Berlin	Wilson Center Digital Archive. (1989, November 10). <i>Memorandum of telephone conversation: Helmut Kohl</i> .
Speech	10-nov-89	German (source found was already translated to English)	The Berlin Wall and German unity	The Berlin Wall. (1989, November 10). <i>Helmut Kohl at Schöneberg Town Hall</i> [Video].
Speech	22-nov-89	German (source found was already translated to English)	Fall of Berlin Wall	European Parliament. (1989, November 22). <i>Helmut Kohl beszéde a berlini falról</i> [Video]. Multimedia Centre of the European
Speech	28-nov-89	German (source found was already translated to English)	Ten-Point Plan	Wilson Center Digital Archive. (1989, November 28). <i>Helmut Kohl's Ten-Point Plan for German unity</i> .
Meeting	25-feb-90	English	Two Plus Four	National Archives and Records Administration. (1990, February 25.). Record ID 428080545.
Interview	June 1990	English	"Driving toward unity", reunification	TIME. (1990, June). Interview with Helmut Kohl: "Driving toward unity"

Donald Trump

Profiled by Jasper Lippett



Introduction

This essay utilises the Leadership Trait Analysis (LTA) framework to construct a psychological profile of US President Donald Trump and subsequently applies this profile to his decision to engage in military action against Iran in February 2026. This essay justifies using the LTA framework to study this case for two reasons. Firstly, the decision to commence strikes against Iran was declared unilaterally by the executive branch without congressional approval (Gringlas, 2026). This indicates Trump's personality played a larger role in the decision to conduct these strikes than is usual in American politics, presenting an analytically interesting case. Secondly, prior studies apply the LTA framework to Trump's first term (Thiers & Wehner, 2022; White, 2022; Özdamar et al., 2023). Therefore, this profile tests the LTA assumption that traits generally remain stable over time.

Methodology

ProfilerPlus was used to conduct this LTA (Levine and Young, 2014), utilising 36,394 words of spontaneous spoken material in English from interviews. Interviews were selected as this is when a leader is most likely displaying their natural personality (Hermann, 2003, pg. 158). The material spans from April 25th, 2025, to March 3rd,

2026. The material was limited to Trump's second term to contrast profiles constructed using material from his first.

Furthermore, this study uses a norming group of world leaders as a comparison to Trump's LTA scores. This norming group was selected, rather than a norming group of US presidents, because while the latter features leaders operating in similar institutional and cultural contexts, it is a smaller sample size. Moreover, the focus of this study is personality tendencies themselves rather than a comparison of tendencies within the institutional constraints of the executive branch. Consequently, world leaders are a superior norming group since they provide a larger sample size of personality profiles to compare Trump's with. However, while interviews are spontaneous material, their spontaneity may vary contextually. Most of the dataset is derived from pre-planned interviews, where preparation may limit the true spontaneity of the material. This can be considered a limitation of the dataset.

Results

Trait	Trump's Scores	World Leaders Mean	Standard Deviation	Z-score	Category
Distrust of Others (DIS)	0.4134	0.185638448	0.0706806686	3.222402	High
Task Focus (TASK)	0.4575	0.636175684	0.073399104	-2.4343	Low
Belief in Ability to Control Events (BACE)	0.3772	0.325103185	0.066508356	0.783312	Leans High
In-Group Bias (IGB)	0.0992	0.14405735	0.038786559	-1.15652	Low
Self-Confidence (SC)	0.438	0.339404616	0.098222743	1.003794	High
Conceptual Complexity (CC)	0.612	0.569509526	0.049775614	0.85364	Leans High
Need for Power (PWR)	0.2828	0.281546779	0.043693124	0.028682	Average

Table. 1: Trump's LTA Scores

Profile

The Z-Scores in Table 1 indicate how far Trump's score for each trait diverges from the world leader mean. Z-Scores between -0.1 and 0.1 indicate Trump's score is average, scores higher/lower than 1 and -1 indicate his score is high or low, respectively. Z-Scores between -1 and -0.1 and 0.1 and 1 indicate Trump's score "leans" low or high, respectively. Trump scores highly on distrust, suggesting he is mistrustful of others' intentions compared to most world leaders. Generally, this indicates a leader may be more likely to engage in conflict-inducing behaviour with other actors or challenge international norms (Kesgin, 2020, pg. 112; Shannon & Keller, 2007, pg. 80).

Trump scores low on task orientation, suggesting he is more concerned with group maintenance (maintaining morale and loyalty of constituents) than achieving policy outcomes compared to most world leaders (Hermann, 2003, p. 175-176). Trump's high conceptual complexity in relation to his self-confidence suggests he is a pragmatic leader who is open to new information (Hermann, 2003, pp. 171-172). Trump's low in-group bias implies he is not constrained by a fixed interpretation of group identity, and is able to pragmatically define the in- and out-group depending on the situation (Hermann, 2003, pg. 179).

Furthermore, Trump's score for belief in ability to control events leans high, but his need for power score is average. This trait combination indicates he is likely to attempt to challenge constraints (Hermann, 2003, pg. 166). A notable feature of this profile is the unusual combination of high distrust and low in-group bias, traits which are often positively correlated (Hermann, 2003, pg. 177). This implies that Trump focuses on taking advantage of opportunities and building relationships, while simultaneously being hyper-vigilant (Hermann, 2003, pg. 177). Therefore, he is likely to be reactive. This is a key feature of his decision-making style, alongside decisiveness, non-deliberation, and personalised nature.

Considering profiles constructed using material from Trump's first term, Thiers & Wehner (2022)'s profile only differs from this one by finding Trump's in-group bias to be average rather than low. This difference may arise from the different norming groups utilised between this study and the authors', though it may be possible that Trump's in-group bias may have declined between his first and second terms. This

study's profile most diverges from White (2022)'s profile, which finds Trump low in conceptual complexity, high in need for power and belief to control events, average in task orientation and self-confidence, and to lean high in in-group bias.

This profile uses fewer words of spontaneous material than the one outlined above, using 6,480 words as opposed to this profile's 36,394 words of spontaneous material (White, 2022, pg. 28). This may explain the divergence between the two profiles. Özdamar et al. (2023)'s profile also uses US presidents as a norming group, but only slightly diverges from this study's, need for power and self-confidence lean high and lean low, respectively. Consequently, Trump's personality traits can be interpreted as stable across his two terms. Interestingly, this suggests Trump's behaviour should be relatively predictable, despite assertions otherwise (Kavalski, 2017; Bahree, 2025).

Decision to Launch Strikes on Iran

This profile may explain Trump's decision to launch strikes on Iran without congressional approval. However, it is important to note that the explanations offered by this LTA profile are probabilistic, not definitive. Firstly, Trump's openness to new information may explain why he was willing to engage in strikes alongside Israel, given the reported contribution of lobbying by the Israeli government to this decision (Swann & Habermann, 2026).

More significantly, Trump's distrust and willingness to challenge constraints may explain why Trump was willing to commence strikes despite their violation of domestic and international norms. The former trait indicates a scepticism within Trump, which directed towards the bureaucracy of the US federal government in a domestic context and on an international level is manifested as hostility towards other actors, in this case Iran. Hence, both Congress and Iran are "targeted" in this decision. Iran is targeted in a more conventional sense, but Congress is nevertheless also violated through the undermining of its role in federal politics. Trump felt comfortable in making this decision despite norms (and indeed US law) because of his belief in his ability to control events. Considered holistically, these elements demonstrate the utility of this profile in explaining this decision. Indeed, applying the profile to this

decision addresses some limitations of alternative explanations behind Trump's decision-making.

For example, it would be reasonable to determine this foreign policy decision as the result of alliance politics given the US-Israeli partnership. Indeed, this is certainly a factor in this decision, but this explanation fails to elucidate why it was done unilaterally, without involving Congress, nor does it explain the timing of the decision. As outlined above, Trump's openness to information, high distrust, and willingness to challenge constraints may explain this.

Furthermore, lawmakers and pundits almost immediately noted the lack of coherent strategy in the decision (Gringlas, 2026). This LTA profile offers a possible explanation for this. Trump's aversion to deliberation – indicated by his low task focus and high self-confidence – may have limited strategic foresight in planning the strikes, or the ability to establish a consensus amongst advisors. These elements would thus contribute to the lack of a coherent strategy offered by the administration in the immediate aftermath of the decision.

However, it is imperative to note that the profile explains Trump's general decision-making style, but cannot definitively explain why this decision, specifically, was made. For example, while Trump is certainly the most significant decision-maker within the US government in this scenario, this profile cannot account for the role of his closest advisors in making this decision (Schafer, 2000, pp. 513-514). It cannot measure the extent to which they encouraged or swayed the President, although Trump's traits imply he is likely to surround himself with yes-men who would not challenge his perspective.

Additionally, Trump's subversion of Congress may have arisen from the operational necessity of conducting decisive strikes on Iran with little forewarning, rather than from his personality traits. Moreover, Trump's low task orientation curiously did not inhibit this decision. This trait implies that Trump is more concerned with maintaining group morale and loyalty of his constituents than with policy outcomes, yet it did not prevent him from commencing military strikes despite his emphasis on "no foreign wars" during his 2024 election campaign (Bazzi, 2026), although as suggested above

it may have shaped the administration's lack of strategic cohesion in making the decision. Perhaps his high self-confidence caused him to misjudge the unpopularity of this decision, particularly following the successful intervention in Venezuela.

Conclusion

Overall, this LTA profile, consistent with ones from Trump's first term, illuminates how his personality is oriented towards relationships with his supporters, alongside an openness to new information and a tendency to challenge constraints. This renders his decision-making style highly personalised, decisive, non-deliberative and reactive.

This profile is largely insightful in explaining the psychological motivation behind Trump's decision to engage in military action against Iran. Multiple features of the psychological profile offer explanations behind aspects of the decision. Indeed, the profile may address the limitations of alternative explanations, such as alliance politics. However, it faces some limitations. Notably, it is unable to account for the role of advisors in influencing Trump's decision-making, or if bypassing Congress was an operational necessity rather than stemming from Trump's psychology. Trump's low task orientation further complicates this, considering the unpopularity of foreign wars with his supporters – though this contradiction may be explained by other traits. Therefore, structural factors and LTA should be considered in conjunction to explain Trump's decision to engage in military action against Iran.

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Margaret Thatcher

Profiled by Charlotte Magill



Introduction

On 2nd April 1982, Argentine forces invaded the Falkland Islands. Within seventy-two hours, Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher secured Cabinet approval to dispatch a naval task force to retake the islands by force, despite opposition within the Foreign Office and significant political and military risk (UK Government, 2013). This case is analytically interesting because dominant accounts present the response as an inevitable product of Thatcher's personality. This essay applies Leadership Trait Analysis (LTA) to assess whether the government's response was shaped by Thatcher's traits or situational pressures, challenging deterministic accounts. Hermann's (2003) LTA, applied via Profiler Plus, is particularly well-suited to this case given the personalised nature of the decision-making process, where individual leadership characteristics can be meaningfully assessed alongside institutional and political constraints.

Methodology

The data comprises six pieces of spontaneous verbal material spaced across Thatcher's premiership (1979-1990), including Prime Minister's Questions exchanges, televised and radio interviews and press conference Q&A sessions. The dataset was retrieved

from the Margaret Thatcher Foundation archive and contains 30,079 words. Results were compared against the norming group of 38 UK leaders, selected to control for shared political-system effects. A key limitation is that PMQs, interviews and press conferences are only semi-spontaneous, since leaders often prepare for anticipated questions, which may limit the spontaneous linguistic patterns LTA is designed to capture.

Results

Trait	Thatcher's Scores	UK Leaders Mean	Standard Deviation	Z-score	Category
Distrust of Others (DIS)	0.115	0.141	0.045	-0.575	Average
Task Focus (TASK)	0.579	0.664	0.034	-2.519	Low
Belief in Ability to Control Events (BACE)	0.390	0.335	0.030	1.857	High
In-Group Bias (IGB)	0.091	0.106	0.018	-0.865	Average
Self-Confidence (SC)	0.505	0.401	0.057	1.826	High
Conceptual Complexity (CC)	0.627	0.587	0.032	1.261	High
Need for Power (PWR)	0.291	0.233	0.024	2.370	High

Profile

The most pronounced finding is Thatcher's high Need for Power score ($Z = +2.370$). This suggests a strong motivational drive in Thatcher to persuade and influence others. This is complemented by a high Belief in her Ability to Control Events, with a score of 0.390 ($Z = +1.857$). The combination of a high PWR and high BACE indicates Thatcher challenged constraints both directly and indirectly, with a strong sense of certainty in the outcomes she desired and how to pursue them. This is compatible with widely held views of her as “an outsider” socially, psychologically and politically, with

a “willingness simply to ignore or circumvent” (p.447) traditional rules of British cabinet procedure (King, 2002).

The Self-Confidence score of $Z = +1.826$ places Thatcher in the high category, indicating she has a secure and stable self-image. Hermann (2003) argues that leaders with high SC scores are resistant to disconfirming information and less likely to seek material that prompts self-questioning. This is supported by qualitative assessments portraying Thatcher as highly self-assured, including her embracing the “Iron Lady” nickname assigned by the Soviet press (Goodlad, 2015).

The results show that Thatcher exhibits high Conceptual Complexity ($Z = +1.261$). In isolation, this suggests she did not interpret political situations in binary terms but instead recognised nuance and ambiguity, indicating a relatively flexible cognitive style capable of considering competing perspectives. This finding is incompatible with Dyson (2009), who, using a conceptual complexity content analysis, characterises Thatcher as displaying “behaviour consistent with a lower complexity cognitive style” (p. 38) than the average post-1945 British Prime Minister. Furthermore, according to Hermann's leadership trait framework, Thatcher's Conceptual Complexity score (0.627) exceeds her Self-Confidence score (0.505), indicating that she was open to information. This suggests that, while she held strong convictions, she remained willing to consider new information and adapt her interpretations when confronted with complex or changing circumstances, rather than filtering information primarily through pre-existing beliefs.

The most unexpected result is the very low Task Focus score ($Z = -2.519$), indicating a motivational orientation toward group maintenance rather than problem-solving (Hermann, 2003). This appears to contradict Thatcher's reputation as a policy-driven leader who pursued privatisation, trade union reform and deregulation with consistency (Evans, 2019). The apparent inconsistency, however, reflects what TASK measures. Hermann's index captures motivation for seeking office through language about constituents and group cohesion, not behavioural decisiveness. A leader whose rhetoric centres on mobilising a public will score low on TASK even when their conduct is goal-directed. The score is therefore consistent with Thatcher's populist communicative style and her tendency to frame policy as moral appeals to a

constituency rather than technical problems. The finding exposes a limit of TASK as a behavioural predictor as it captures rhetorical orientation, which can diverge from observable conduct.

Distrust of Others ($Z = -0.575$) and In-Group Bias ($Z = -0.865$) fall within the average band, though both lean toward the lower end. The moderate Distrust score seems incompatible with Thatcher's reputation for suspicion toward the Foreign Office, trade unions and European partners (Brown, 2008). This indicates that her antagonism was directed at specific actors she identified as opponents of her programme rather than a generalised worldview of a hostile environment. The moderate In-Group Bias score indicates that, while Thatcher identified strongly with Britain, she did not exhibit the behavioural tendencies Hermann (2003) associates with high-IGB leaders, including scapegoating of external enemies. The combined average trait scores offer only a partial view of her broader worldview, indicating a non-extreme profile with targeted rather than generalised combativeness and an assertive rather than exclusionary national identification.

Thatcher's profile aligns most closely with the classification as "directive" (p. 166), a leader who challenges constraints, is open to information, and is focused on maintaining status through actions that enhance the state's reputation (Hermann, 2003).

Decision to Retake the Falklands

The decision to retake the Falklands through military means rather than pursue diplomatic alternatives is well explained by Thatcher's LTA profile, though not fully determined by it. Her high Need for Power and strong Belief in Ability to Control Events are particularly important in explaining why the outcome was military. The dispatch of a naval task force was authorised despite the Secretary of State for Defence advising that retaking the islands was militarily infeasible, a recommendation Thatcher reportedly found "totally unacceptable" (Thatcher, 1993: 179). Rather than deferring to departmental expertise or Cabinet judgement, she dominated decision-making, steering deliberations toward her preferred course. This aligns with King's

(2002) observation of her willingness to “ignore or circumvent” (p.447) established Cabinet procedures.

While her average Distrust score would not necessarily predict a rejection of advice, the targeted nature of her scepticism, directed at the Foreign Office and senior military advisers but not at advocates such as Leach, helps explain why certain viewpoints were dismissed while others were privileged. LTA's aggregate measure cannot capture this directional variation, suggesting individual traits operate differently across institutional contexts.

Her high self-confidence further reinforces this preference for force over compromise. As Freedman (2004) notes, the decision to deploy a task force constituted “an enormous gamble” (p.13), particularly given logistical uncertainties and Thatcher’s lack of direct military experience. However, rather than acting as a deterrent, this risk appears to have been reframed as manageable. This suggests her traits made high-risk escalation appear manageable and preferable to negotiation.

Thatcher's high Conceptual Complexity, exceeding her Self-Confidence score, indicates genuine openness to competing perspectives rather than interpretive closure, consistent with the decision being informed by substantive military counsel. Her receptiveness to Admiral Sir Henry Leach's view that the islands could be retaken with "as powerful a force as Britain could muster" (p. 27) reflects this openness, as she weighed his expert assessment seriously rather than dismissing it in favour of a position already taken (Freedman, 2004).

Thatcher’s low Task Focus score does not align with the nature of the decision. A more relationship-oriented leader would be expected to prioritise Cabinet cohesion and explore diplomatic de-escalation, particularly given resistance from senior ministers (Fehrs, 2014). Instead, the objective of retaking the islands was defined early and pursued with limited consensus-building (Bruni, 2018). The decision prioritised goal attainment over relational management, suggesting that the Task Focus measure fails to adequately account for situational pressures.

These situational factors are crucial. Thatcher faced significant domestic political pressure, with approval ratings at historic lows prior to the invasion (Ipsos, 2007), likely heightening the perceived need for a decisive response. This connects meaningfully to her relationship-focused motivation identified in the LTA profile: rather than pursuing military action purely to achieve a specific strategic outcome, her low TASK score suggests she may have been driven in part by a need to restore her standing with the domestic public and reassert her authority within her own party, using decisive action to regain approval rather than as a narrowly calculated policy response. Institutional dynamics and the urgency of the crisis further shaped the decision-making environment in ways LTA alone cannot capture. While her leadership profile helps explain her willingness to override constraints and her relationship-driven motivation to act decisively in the public eye, it does not fully account for why military action specifically was chosen over other responses.

Conclusion

The LTA profile offers valuable insight into Thatcher's evangelistic decision-making style, particularly her propensity to challenge constraints, centralise authority and pursue high-risk strategies with confidence. Traits such as her high Need for Power, Belief in Ability to Control Events and Self-Confidence help explain the decision to retake the Falklands, indicating a leader inclined to override opposition and frame uncertainty as manageable. LTA thus moves beyond simplistic portrayals of Thatcher by specifying the psychological mechanisms underpinning her decisiveness.

However, it also challenges accounts that treat the British response as an inevitable outcome of her leadership style. By highlighting trait inconsistencies alongside contextual pressures, this essay shows such interpretations to be overly deterministic. The misalignment between Task Focus and observed behaviour, alongside domestic political pressures, indicates that the decision cannot be reduced to personality alone.

Overall, LTA provides a strong but partial explanation. Overstating personality risks obscuring political constraints in shaping choices. The Falklands case therefore demonstrates both the strengths and limits of LTA, as a useful tool for uncovering

psychological dynamics of leadership, but one that must be integrated with contextual analysis to avoid reductive, leader-centric accounts of foreign policy decisions.

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Tony Blair

Profiled by Manroop Sarai



Introduction

Tony Blair's decision to support the invasion of Iraq is "one of the most controversial and momentous foreign policy decisions of the post-Cold War era" (Featherstone, 2025, p.1). Although there have been various explanations for his decision posited by foreign policy analysis scholars, such as institutional constraints, the role of the US's influence, and intelligence assessments, an increasingly prominent approach highlights the importance of individual leadership and personality (Dyson, 2009, p.26). Hence, this paper uses Leadership Trait Analysis (LTA) to examine how Blair's personality profile influenced his decision to support the invasion. LTA is well suited in this scenario as it is a framework which analyses how leaders approach constraints, respond to pressure and process information. The Iraq War is therefore analytically valuable as it was defined by high uncertainty, domestic opposition and international division about the decision. These conditions make individual traits more decisive in explaining Blair's leadership orientation and therefore his personal persistence in supporting the invasion.

Methodology

This analysis draws on a dataset of around 22,000 words from 8 different interviews conducted throughout the duration of Blair's premiership. The approach taken was to focus on interviews which addressed contentious issues such as the Good Friday Agreement, the Iraq War, and politically salient domestic issues like the NHS and education. The choice to span multiple issue areas allows for a more generalisable assessment of Blair's character, rather than just confining it to one policy area. These interviews were selected as they provide spontaneous content, which aligns with LTA's preference for spontaneity as it is more likely to reveal underlying traits, under adversarial conditions where Blair had to quickly defend his decisions and character. Furthermore, Blair's scores are compared against a norming group of UK political leaders, which enables interpretation in the same political context and shared institutional constraints.

This approach does have its limitations, as the adversarial nature of the interviews may overrepresent Blair's more defensive communication as compared to more routine decision-making, but this is helpful in this context as it mirrors the conditions surrounding the Iraq War, where Blair had to justify intervention repeatedly in the face of considerable scrutiny and argument.

Results

Trait	Blair's Scores	UK Leaders Mean	Standard Deviation	Z-score	Category
Distrust of Others (DIS)	0.2551	0.1408	0.04504	2.537	High
Task Focus (TASK)	0.5907	0.6642	0.03389	-2.168	Low
Belief in Ability to Control Events (BACE)	0.4218	0.3350	0.02956	2.937	High
In-Group Bias (IGB)	0.0763	0.1059	0.01764	-1.676	Low
Self-Confidence (SC)	0.5479	0.4007	0.05728	2.569	High

Conceptual Complexity (CC)	0.5990	0.5873	0.03157	0.3708	Average
Need for Power (PWR)	0.2447	0.2331	0.02432	0.4784	Average

Note: All values rounded to 4 significant figures

Profile

The results of the LTA indicate considerable deviation in Blair's personality profile as compared to other UK leaders. Blair is characterised by a very high belief in his ability to control events and self-confidence, alongside being highly distrustful. These strong traits are accompanied by a very low task focus and in-group bias, as well as average conceptual complexity and need for power. Taken together, these traits suggest a highly confident, active leadership style which is centered around Blair's own personal judgement and perceptions, rather than ideological or group loyalty constraints.

The most defining feature of Blair's personality profile is the combination of his extremely high belief in his ability to control events and his self-confidence. When these traits are considered in conjunction, they indicate a leadership style where Blair could view political outcomes as highly contingent upon his own personal decisions and interventions, instead of decided by external constraints or chance. This is likely due to a strong sense of personal agency, making Blair predisposed to a decisive form of leadership, particularly in high-pressure situations. This style is further reinforced by his high level of distrust, which would make him sceptical of others' intentions, and lead to a reduced willingness to accept divergent opinions at face value. Therefore, his perceptions of political constraints were shaped by these traits, grounding his decisions in his own judgement, supplemented by those close advisers who he trusts. This judgement is consistent with accounts of Blair's premiership which emphasise his belief that issues could be solved through his "own personal engagement" (quoted in Dyson, 2009, p.35), and that he preferred intimate and informal meetings (Dyson, 2009, p.37). This does not mean a wholesale disregard of diverging opinions, just a more selective approach towards them.

Blair's extremely low in-group bias and task focus further contribute to his leadership profile by showing that he is likely not driven by any strong ideological commitment

or group loyalty. Although this may appear initially contradictory with decisive leadership, these scores suggest a certain pragmatism and ability to adapt to situations, justifying policies in terms of outcome instead of principle. Hence, his pragmatism does not undermine the decisiveness but instead operates within a broader framework of a personalised leadership style. The low in-group bias particularly suggests that Blair's reliance on his close circle of advisers was not because of strong partisan loyalty but instead reflects individualised decision making which was fundamentally centered on his own judgement. His decisiveness therefore does not appear to be a result of in-group sentiment, but instead a pursuit of objectives that he personally viewed as important. This reinforces the idea of Blair as a leader whose actions were guided by personal conviction, making him a constraint challenger (Hermann, 1999, p.9).

His average level of conceptual complexity further refines this leadership profile. His score for conceptual complexity in this analysis, although average compared to other UK leaders, falls higher than other LTA analyses conducted on Blair, such as Featherstone's (2025), who defined Blair by his low score on this factor. However, this discrepancy can be explained by dataset differences, as Featherstone more exclusively focused on Iraq based speeches, which tended to be more moralistic and framed in terms of good and evil, but the wide-ranging topics used here required more neutral, nuanced language. This suggests that Blair's conceptual complexity could be context dependent. His engagement with domestic policy demonstrates more capacity for nuance as compared to his rhetoric in international contexts alone. Therefore, his decision making combines pragmatic flexibility with differing levels of complexity depending on the policy area.

Finally, Blair's need for power being average with other UK leaders shows that he is likely not driven by any particular desire for power or dominance. When this average score is considered alongside other more prominent traits, the implication is again that his decisiveness is rooted in his conviction in the correctness of his own judgements, and his self-perceived responsibility to shape outcomes, instead of a wish to accumulate power and strength. This shows a willingness to use his power as prime minister instrumentally, but it is not a significant motivational factor to him.

Decision to Support the 2003 Invasion of Iraq

The decision by Blair to support the 2003 invasion of Iraq provides a critical case for assessing how his personal traits translate into his foreign policy behaviour because he undertook the decision despite considerable domestic opposition. His sustained commitment to intervention indicates that the decision making was influenced by psychological predispositions instead of just responding to concern about public pressure.

The combination of Blair's high belief in his ability to control events and his elevated self-confidence is central to explaining these predispositions. These traits indicate that his leadership style would lead him to interpret international crises as situations where his intervention could actively shape the outcome. In the context of Iraq, this would contribute to Blair's conviction that removing Saddam Hussein would enable the UK and allies to reshape the region and positively stabilise it. His high self-confidence, would make this process more efficient as it would reduce the likelihood of hesitation, making him much more willing to commit to such a controversial and high-risk course of action in the face of such opposition. This self-confidence could also raise the possibility of Blair's overestimation of his ability to manage the post-conflict dynamics, as in the Iraqi context, the outcomes were difficult to predict and control. However, these traits are perceptual filters, not direct causal mechanisms in why he invaded.

These tendencies would be reinforced by Blair's highly distrustful nature, which would allow for a reduced reliance on dissenting viewpoints. Opposing voices both within parliament and within the broader public sphere would likely have been diminished by Blair's distrust and would also serve to strengthen his scepticism towards Iraq's claims about the absence of weapons of mass destruction. These perceptions would make Blair rely more heavily on his own judgement and his small group of trusted advisers in this situation and make him more likely to support intervention even when there was a lot of uncertainty around the idea. This filtering effect is incredibly significant in a crisis like Iraq, where there were competing claims from intelligence and politicians, which heightened the importance of the judgment and perceptual lenses of leaders.

However, Blair's psychological predispositions do not fully account for the decision. External factors were extremely significant in this case, particularly the UK's wish to have a strong relationship with the US, so George Bush's administration's influence would have been highly determinative (Harvey, 2011, p.42). Additionally, intelligence reports indicated the existence of WMD, which shaped the information available to Blair. These structural factors shaped the range of options which Blair had to consider viable, making personality traits shapers of Blair's interpretations, instead of determining the policy outcome alone.

Conclusion

This analysis shows that Tony Blair's leadership style was centralised, driven by conviction and grounded fundamentally in a strong belief in his ability to shape political events and outcomes. His high belief in control, his high self-confidence and strong distrust all indicate a leader inclined towards taking strong decisive action which is reliant on personal judgement instead of external constraints. When applied to the Iraq War, the profile helps to explain why Blair continued on the course of action even in the face of uncertainty and domestic opposition. However, this does highlight the limits of the LTA. Whilst it shows how Blair approached decision making, it alone cannot explain why invasion was the policy outcome, because of how important external factors, particularly Bush's influence, and intelligence assessments were on the outcome. Therefore, LTA is very useful in illuminating leadership style instead of completely explaining outcomes.

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