

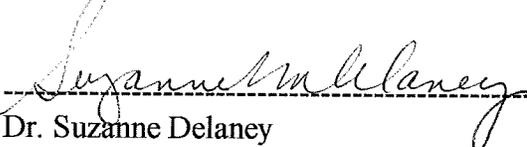
THE USE OF PROSPECT THEORY IN EVALUATING THE POLITICAL DECISION
MAKING PROCESS DURING INTERNATIONAL CONFLICTS:
SIX-DAY WAR OF 1967 AND SYRIA CRISIS OF 2013

By

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A Thesis Submitted to The Honors College
In Partial Fulfillment of the Bachelors degree
With Honors in
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An Abstract of

The Use of Prospect Theory in Evaluating the Political Decision Making Process
During International Conflicts: Six-Day War of 1967 and Syria Crisis of 2013

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The decision-making of political leaders during international conflicts is often suboptimal. Decision science can be used to assess, analyze, and predict sub-optimal decision-making behaviors and can be used to ameliorate such errors or remove the preconditions likely to cause such errors. By applying psychological concepts from the decisional sciences to the Six-Day War of 1967 and the Syria Crisis of 2013, I will extrapolate which strategic approaches and influential factors inhere or contribute to the most optimal outcomes. This analysis will be limited to the evaluation and comparison of the political leaders of the former Soviet Union and the United States. It will include the following concepts: prospect theory, overconfidence bias, feedback loops, time pressure, and commitment and consistency effect. I conclude that risk averse behavior results in greater success, and that escalation can be controlled by careful information gathering and the implementation of cybernetic regulation. The effectiveness of military deterrence is discussed.

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The Use of Prospect Theory in Evaluating the Political Decision Making Process During
International Conflicts: Six-Day War of 1967 and Syria Crisis of 2013

The cornerstones of prospect theory can be implemented to analyze the decision-making processes of international political leaders during developing military conflicts with other countries in a way that can predict which party will realize the most gains and explain which approaches help achieve the most optimal outcome, and which factors have the greatest contribution to success.

Two political conflicts will be evaluated in this essay: the Six-Day War of 1967 and the Syria Crisis of 2013. The first has previously been referenced by several academics (Levy, 1992b; Berejikian, 2002; Tversky & Kahneman, 1974) in regards to prospect theory, specifically, I will consider the work of Audrey McInerney in her 1992 report titled *Prospect Theory and Soviet Policy Towards Syria, 1966-1967*. The latter event will be a new application of prospect theory, and due to its recent and pervasive nature, it will offer insights into the modern international political situation, specifically the actions of essential leaders. In both cases, the evaluation will focus on decision makers in the former Soviet Union and the United States. Historians and political analysts have primarily utilized the tools offered by psychological analysis in their evaluations of risk and conflict escalation in already resolved events: the Suez canal crisis, the Iranian hostage situation, the Bay of Pigs invasion, the Cuban missile crisis, and the Munich crisis (Berejikian, 2002; O'Neill, 2001; Farnham, 1992). By applying prospect theory to a more contemporary situation, I strive to illustrate how certain practices lead to better outcomes, and how these can be leveraged to create more effective international policies.

In short, prospect theory is the tendency of decision makers to weigh losses more than equivalent gains; overestimate the influence of a large detriment when compared to a smaller one, while underestimating the influence of the same detriment when coupled with other large detriments; and the preference for a risk of losing 50% of 10,000 over a certain loss of 4000, contradicted by a preference inversion in the domain of gains. The aforementioned studies of prospect theory regarding international relations illustrate its prevalence in the decision making of political leaders. These tendencies also cause gamblers to risk their livelihoods, friends to quarrel over property, and most relevant here, countries to initiate conflicts that are costly and often futile in accomplishing goals.

Conflict is defined by Merriam Webster's dictionary as "a difference that prevents agreement" or a "struggle for power or property" ("Conflict", 2013). Politics can be defined as "a process of conflict resolution in which support is mobilized and maintained for collective action" (Dickerson & Flanagan, 2009). In the realm of international relations, political conflict is the point in diplomatic negotiating where two parties' disagreement becomes stagnant and starts to escalate towards violence and military intervention.

In this analysis, I hope to use the expectedness of prospect theory to identify key factors that lead to escalation. From this, I will extrapolate which approaches result in the most optimal outcomes. The aim is to allow for superior strategic development, based on the premise that if conflict is predictable, perhaps it can become solvable.

Background Information

Before showing how prospect theory can be applied to determine the outcomes of international conflict, it is important to define the concepts that are the foundations of the theory: loss aversion, framing, reference points, and the endowment effect. In addition, the following

psychological concepts will be discussed: deterrence theory, feedback loops, the effects of time pressure, commitment and consistency bias, and overconfidence in actions and information.

These concepts will comprise the decision-making environment.

Prospect Theory

Loss aversion. Prospect theory is a psychologically based behavioral economic theory that investigates how players make decisions in conditions of uncertainty and risk. In short, it asserts that actors experience loss aversion, which is a tendency to weigh losses greater than equivalent gains (Kahneman et al, 1991; Jervis, 1992, Levy, 1992a; Tversky & Kahneman, 1992; Levy, 1996). Specifically, losses are rated as 2:1 less acceptable than gains (Tversky & Kahneman, 1991). Thus an actor would perceive a loss of \$100 to create displeasure equivalent to the pleasure derived from a \$200 gain. Losses are also attributed to causing riskier actions in players (Jervis, 1992) In a “loss frame,” actors tend to chose a riskier option to recoup losses when compared to the amount they would risk to extend an equivalent gain (Kahneman and Tversky, 1979). Contrarily, a “gains frame” promotes risk aversion, which manifests as a preference for a more secure, less uncertain option (Moaz, 1990; Kahneman & Tversky, 1979; Peterson & Lawson, 1989; Berejikian, 2002). Given a choice between losing \$3000 for certain, or a choice to take an 80% chance of losing \$4000 with a 20% chance of losing nothing, 92% of participants choose the gamble. Inversely, given the choice between winning \$3000 certainly, or an 80% chance at winning \$4000 coupled with a 20% chance of winning nothing, 80% of participants choose the certain payout (Levy, 1992a). The level of certainty in a choice is explained by the certainty effect, which shows that a higher level of certainty for a given option results in an exacerbation of loss aversion (Tversky & Kahneman, 1981; Jervis, 1992; Kahneman & Tversky, 1979; Farnham, 1992). The pseudocertainty effect materializes when an actor

experiences the certainty effect based on a false evaluation of the level of probability (Tversky & Kahneman, 1981; Farnham, 1992). People will underweight options that are probable over certain outcomes, even if marginal change is the same (Levy, 1992a; Berejikian, 2002; Jervis, 1992). For example, people place a higher value on a safety feature that decreases the likelihood of a car accident from 10% to 0%, rather than one that reduces the probability from 30% to 20%, even though both features improve safety by 10% (Kahneman & Tversky, 1979). Conversely, losses with low probabilities are overestimated, and moderate to high probabilities are underweighted (Tversky & Kahneman, 1981; 1991). An example of this would be people reacting more strongly to an increase in the national terror level from 0% to 10% than from 60% to 70%. Once again, the difference is 10%, but once the initial increase is made, subsequent marginal increases become less important. Furthermore, the magnitude of a loss is not as significant as the mere fact that it is going to occur, especially if the loss is certain (Levy, 1992b; Jervis, 1992). Thus, once an actor enters a loss or gains frame, the degree of the potential loss or gain becomes increasingly less important, creating an S-shaped curve (Tversky & Kahneman, 1991; Berejikian, 2002). If a choice is given between an option of a 25% chance to lose \$400 with a 75% chance to lose \$50, or another option of a 100% loss of \$100, the majority of participants would choose the riskier choice.

Framing. Another key aspect of prospect theory is the concept of framing. Framing is the way in which a problem is stated or presented (Boettcher, 2004). In prospect theory, the “losses frame,” and the “gains frame” are representative of risk acceptant or risk averse behavior, respectively. The implication is that the mere presentation of a decision could push an actor into one of the following frames, affecting their decision-making behavior (Tversky & Kahneman, 1981; Moaz, 1991; Boettcher, 2004; Berejikian, 2002; Farnham, 1992). The classic prospect

theory study on this gives participants a choice between two programs to fight an outbreak of disease expected to kill 600 people. The first group, in the “survival frame,” is asked to choose option A and save 200 people, or option B, which has a 1/3 probability of saving all 600 people and a 2/3 probability that none are saved. The second group, in the “mortality frame,” is offered option A, where 400 people die, or option B, which has 1/3 probability that none die, and 2/3 probability that all 600 die. Although the number of live patients at the end of each option is identical, in the “survival frame,” 72% of participants pick option A, which is more certain. In the “mortality frame,” 78% of actors choose risky option B (Levy, 1992a). The “survival frame” equates to a gains frame and risk averse, whereas the “mortality frame” represents losses and risk acceptance. Overall, actors are naturally risk averse in a stable environment, and risk acceptant behavior comes as a surprise to players in a natural state (Peterson & Lawson, 2001; Jervis, 1992).

Reference Points. The determination of whether a result is a loss or gain is its relation to a reference point, or the status quo of an actor (Kahneman et al, 1991). Current positional assets or recent change in wealth determine a reference point; whereas expected utility uses net wealth or gains over time (Jervis, 1992; Kahneman & Tversky, 1979; Berejikian, 2002; O’Neill, 2001). This can also be referred to as the status quo, or the expected level of acceptance in a situation. Definition of the status quo can differ among parties, and often can be an aspirational, which defines the acceptable level at something more than where is currently is (Jervis, 1992; Berejikian, 2002). This can cause two parties to have conflicting reference points in the same situation, which could result in both being in a frame of losses and risky behavior. For example, if country A and country B are disputing a territory, which A currently possesses, B will have an aspirational reference point of obtaining the land, whereas A’s status quo will also be owning the

territory. Both will take riskier actions to avoid losing something they defined as in their status quo. Renormalization, or the act of adjusting one's reference point to new developments, also contributes to differences between status quos (Jervis, 1992). The instant endowment effect causes players tend to renormalize to gains instantaneously, whereas they tend to be reluctant to accept losses as the status quo (Jervis, 1992; Levy, 1996; Levy, 1992b). Following the above example about a territorial dispute, if country B seizes the land, they will quickly renormalize to this gain, whereas country A will not reassess from the old status quo, and would view any action as an effort to recoup their loss. Once again, both countries have included the territory in their reference point. Those who do not adjust their reference point to new information are more likely to place bets and take actions that they would normally find unacceptable (Tversky & Kahneman, 1981; 1991; Levy, 1996). This can be described by the gambler's fallacy (Clotfelter and Cook, 1993). After the initial loss, a player is placed into a risk acceptant frame, and will continue to play and place riskier bets in an attempt to recoup previous losses. A positive feedback loop develops as the gambler bets more and more money. Lacking any effort to reframe, the behavior would hypothetically continue forever.

Endowment Effect. The endowment effect explains another facet of prospect theory. It states that people demand more to surrender an object that they have physical possession of than they would give up to acquire such an item, even if the ownership is for a short amount of time (Kahneman et al, 1991; Shafir, 1992; Levy, 1996). Endowment does not increase the value or attractiveness of a good, it merely is the value derived from avoiding the pain of losing it (Berejikian, 2002; Kahneman & Tversky, 1991). The more resources and time spent in acquiring a good, the greater the endowment effect is, due to cognitive dissonance in trying to justify these expenditures (Levy, 1996; Jervis, 1992). In wartime conflict, the more soldiers wounded or

killed, the amount of munitions used, and the strategic time allocated to acquiring a territory, the more a unit will continue to commit resources to that keep that territory. Specifically, more resources than would be necessary to acquire a different, yet equal property. This effect is also only present with the physical acquisition of a good, not a token (Kahneman et al, 1991; Tversky & Kahneman, 1991) or the right to receive a good in the future (Levy, 1996). This manifests itself in decision-making, as realized losses are perceived as more important than forgone future gains (Kahneman et al, 1991; Tversky & Kahneman, 1991). People are more likely to accept an outcome that is framed as an expected payment (Jervis, 1992) or the decrease of a discount, perceived as a reduction of gain, than a surcharge, which is perceived as a loss (Kahneman et al, 1991). For example, patrons at a gas station would prefer to see a 10 cent discount for using cash when paying, rather than suffer a 10 cent surcharge for using a credit card. When extrapolating this idea past physical goods, it is easier to prevent future actions by an opponent than it is to mandate a reversal of past actions (Levy, 1992b; 1996), or the cessation of an action that has already started. This is a logical assumption in that one cannot alter actions that have already occurred.

Other Concepts

Now that I have enumerated definitions and examples of prospect theory, I will touch on other forces that influence the actions of a international decision maker: feedback loops, the constructs of deterrence theory, the effects of time pressure, the commitment and consistency bias, and overconfidence of an individual. These will be important to reference while evaluating the actions of international leaders. As case studies have shown that cognitive biases are likely to materialize in clusters (Stein, 1988).

Feedback Loops. Systems theory is an approach that allows one to combine and integrate relationships between many factors in a complex way (Johnson et al, 1964). All learning in a system is depends on feedback (Sterman, 2006). Feedback is the data received in response to some initial action. A feedback loop occurs when the results of an action encourage or dissuade the continuation or cessation of the original act, respectively. When a feedback loop is positive, it is self-reinforcing and leads to a gradual escalation of the original pattern. When a loop is negative, it is self-correcting, and the initial action gets terminated upon receipt of the feedback (Sterman, 2006). Both types of feedback are essential, as positive feedback allows for progress to be made smoothly, and negative feedback allows for an assessment of this progress (Pigolotti et al, 2007; Sterman, 2006; Coleman et al, n.d.). Negative feedback loops are the basis of cybernetic control, or self-regulation (Edwards, 1992; Johnson et al, 1964). Furthermore all biases are more extreme in systems that are uncertain, complex, and infrequent, and that offer little or vague levels of feedback (Barber and Odean, 2001; Simon and Houghton, 2003; Mahajan, 1992; Sterman, 2002; Tversky & Kahneman, 1991). These are all adjectives that can be expected in international conflicts, making feedback an essential tool in predicting behaviors and outcomes.

Deterrence Theory. Deterrence theory is a military application of the hypotheses of game theory (Berejikian, 2002). Game theory is an interaction between two players who have the ability to cooperate or defect in order to gain a certain level of advantage, depending on how the other reacts. In deterrence, strategy 1 is identified as maintaining the status quo with cooperation, and strategy 2 is to ignore the status quo and take military action. If both parties choose strategy 1, the status quo will continue stably along its current trajectory. If either party defects to strategy 2, deterrence fails, and some sort of conflict begins. If both parties defect, the result is most

certainly escalation towards war. Conflict is more likely when both states believe they are protecting the status quo (Jervis, 1992; Levy, 1992b). Both parties will continuously defect, creating a positive feedback loop unless a new development allows them to reassess, creating negative feedback. The aim of successful deterrence is to leverage the threat of military action, as a response to any actions deemed unacceptable; in order to encourage cessation of any such undesired policy (Jervis, 1992). The inherent paradox in this approach lies in the undermining of the credibility of a threat of violence because the threat would harm the party leveraging the threat. This means in theory, each party should be racing to defect; however deterrence is a legitimate military tactic that often yields acceptable agreements between parties (Berejikian, 2002). Credibility of threat also affects the success of deterrence: if the opposing party doesn't perceive the threat as genuine, regardless of whether their evaluation is accurate, there is no incentive to cooperate (Berejikian, 2002). Deterrence theory is an established method of bargaining between states involved in political conflicts.

Time Pressure Effects. In decision-making, the amount of time allowed for a decision affects the outcome. Increased time pressure increases perceived stress and actors tend to focus on only few major variables. Stress can be caused by a disjoint between the perception of one's current state, and one's ultimate desired state (Edwards, 1992). The result is myopic thinking, which can lead to a suboptimal decision and failure to explore all alternatives (Kowalski & Vaught, 2007). Deadlines imposed on a decision can make actors more anxious and energetic (Maule, Hockey, & Bdzola, 2000). As less time is permitted, decision makers must exert a greater effort in order to find a solution before the deadline. People prefer to have a brief overview of all alternatives rather than in depth information about some of them. This can lead to an oversight of important information when comparing two options.

Commitment and Consistency Bias. Commitment and consistency is a bias in social psychology that highlights the tendency of actors to stick to previously stated intentions (Cialdini, 2000). Consistency is generally regarded as a positive character trait reflecting honesty, rationality, and stability (Tversky & Kahneman, 1981). On the contrary, inconsistency is viewed as deceitful, undisciplined, and erratic. For example, asking a stranger to watch your belongings when absent makes them more likely to catch a thief than if they had not been asked. Commitment is intensified when formalized by a written or oral agreement, and further solidified when the contract is made public. Together, actors regard upholding their promises in a way that aligns with pre-existing values, actions, and attitudes (Boettcher, 2004). Given that the statements of politicians are very public and highly criticized by pundits, the commitment and consistency bias is strongly present in international relations.

Overconfidence. An individual bias in negotiations is the overconfidence of actors. Overconfidence is the perception of one's ability to predict outcomes and make judgments as superior to reality (Stein, 1988; Mahajan, 1992). Miscalibration is the overconfidence in the accuracy of one's information (Barber and Odean, 2001; Biais et al, 2005). This overestimation can be applied to other activities such as: accurately predicting one's probability of success (Neale and Bazerman, 1985; Johnson et al, 2006), or accuracy and sureness of predictions (Simon and Houghton, 2003; Mahajan, 1992). Overconfidence generally leads to less frequent resolutions with less successful outcomes, as overconfident actors are prone to riskier actions (Neale and Bazerman, 1985). In conjunction, but contrary to this, negotiators will underestimate the actions, decisions, and information of their opponents to their own detriment, and ignore counterintelligence that provides an accurate portrayal, (Neale and Bazerman, 1985; Mahajan, 1992; Stein, 1988; Tversky & Kahneman, 1974) leading to unexpected consequences. In war

and international conflicts, overconfidence can be a significant cause (Johnson et al, 2006), as any rational state would not purposefully get involved in any conflict where they were not confident of success; leaders understand the implications of risky behavior, yet still choose to execute them (O'Neill, 2001; Berejikian, 2002). In economics, overconfidence can be easily identified in the prediction of the stock market. Analysts and brokers tend to be overconfident in their ability to predict the market, and overconfident investors trade more excessively and hold riskier portfolios, which can lead to faulty investments and greater losses (Barber & Odean, 2001; Thaler et al, 1997).

Situational Considerations. Some considerations are necessary when applying psychological concepts to historical events. First, identifying the frame and reference point of an international leader is not straightforward (Boettcher, 2004; O'Neill, 2001; Levy, 1996). It is necessary to make basic assumptions based on public statements, past actions, strategies used, and reactions to results and outcomes. Next, international negotiations often lack a quantitative metric upon which to base success, thus it may be necessary to use a comparative approach to risk attitude (O'Neill, 2001). Also, as wartime conflicts involved potential loss of human life, we can note the hedonic tone approach, which reveals that certain problems, specifically those involving risking human lives, will result in stronger risk acceptant behavior (Boettcher, 2004). As loss aversion is stronger in cases of physical safety than mere economic gain (Tversky & Kahneman, 1991). Political leaders often experience an increase in public support when a decision in favor of military action regards avoiding loss, as opposed to making further gains (Berejikian, 2002; Jervis, 1992). This reflects the public's aversion to loss. Although other specifics will emerge in the course of analysis, these are particularly important to consider.

Case of Six-Day War

By first using an established and resolved political situation, I will mimic previous analysis of how prospect theory can be used to understand and evaluate behavior. In this case, I will outline the important facts and events of the conflict; identify the objectives and involvement of key participants; evaluate the political environment; address the crucial point of shift, along with strategic approaches used; and finally appraise the eventual outcome and its ramifications. I will utilize analysis offered by Audrey McInerney in her 1992 report, wherein she analyzes Soviet action in 1966 and 1967 in regards to Syria and other Arab nations. I will agree with her assertion that Soviet action was risk acceptant, and will further the analysis of this event by including the decision making process of the United States.

Overview of Events

The Six-Day War, also known as the June War or Third Arab-Israeli War, occurred from June 5th to 10th, 1967. This Middle Eastern conflict was an affront within the Cold War standoff between the Soviets and Americans. It resulted in the Israeli control over the Sinai Peninsula, Gaza Strip, West Bank, Old City [East] Jerusalem, and Golan Heights. The major parties involved were Israel, Syria, Egypt, the United States, and the USSR (McInerney, 1992; Office of the Historian, 2013; Etheredge (Ed.), 2009).

The rise of tensions in the region was incited by increased violent activities by Palestinian guerrilla groups in Syria, Lebanon, and Jordan, which invited reciprocal actions from Israeli forces, including a November 1966 Israeli strike on the Jordanian West Bank village of Al-Samu (Etheredge (Ed.), 2009). Hostility further intensified following actions April 7th, 1967, when a land based incident lead the Israeli Air Force to strike down six Syrian fighter jets over Mount Hermon on the Golan Heights (Office of the Historian, 2013; Etheredge (Ed.), 2009); this

prompted Egyptian President Gamal Abdel Nasser to pledge his assistance to Syria in any future conflicts. On May 13th, Soviet intelligence reports indicated high Israeli troop concentrations on the Syrian border and implied an imminent military campaign against Syria. These reports were later shown to be inaccurate, but succeeded in raising tensions in Syria and Egypt (McInerney, 1992; Office of the Historian, 2013; Etheredge (Ed.), 2009).

Nasser had been criticized by allies for failing to provide aid to Syria and Jordan in their affronts with Israel. Fueled by this, Nasser mobilized troops on May 14th, and requested a removal of United Nations Emergency Forces (UNEF) from the Sinai Peninsula on May 17th. On May 21st, UNEF has been removed, and Nasser occupied Sharm el-Sheik, and closed to Gulf of Aqaba to Israeli shipping, immobilizing the southern Israeli port city of Elat. American President Lyndon B. Johnson publically stated on May 23rd that Nasser did not have the right to impede shipping rights of any nation in the Gulf of Aqaba, and that he condemned any aggression in the region in preference for diplomatic negotiations. On May 30th, President Hussein bin Talal of Jordan arrived in Cairo to sign the Mutual Defense Pact with Egypt, which put Jordanian troops under Nasser's control; Iraq also pledged their support.

On June 5th, Israel responded to the deployment of Arab forces with an air assault that decommissioned much of Egypt's air force, in addition to severely damaging Jordanian and Syrian air power, which shifted the conflict to the ground, and left Arab forces vulnerable to further aerial attacks. During the period of the 5th to the 10th, Israeli defense forces battled Egyptian forces in Sinai and Gaza, Jordanian military in East Jerusalem and the West Bank, and Syrian armies on Golan Heights. On June 10th, members of the UN Security Council agreed upon a cease-fire, and the violent conflict ended. By this time, Israel had seized Golan Heights from Syria, the Gaza Strip and Sinai Peninsula from Egypt, and the West Bank from Jordan, in

addition to maintaining sole control of Jerusalem. This was a decisive victory for Israel over its hostile Arab neighbors, which also resulted in hundreds of thousands of refugees, and left more than one million Palestinians in areas now under Israeli control (Etheredge (Ed.), 2009).

The United States and Soviet Union did not directly intervene in the conflict, but both made public statements and had private correspondences with their respective allies urged them to stop the fighting, and cooperated in the UN Security Council to negotiate a cease-fire agreement. After the war, the status of the newly occupied Israeli territories was the main source of unrest, as the previous owners desired their old territories, especially Palestine who maintained their historical claim in the region. President Johnson opposed a naturalization of these territories into Israel; however, he strongly emphasized that the relinquishing of these regions should be contingent on a peace settlement that acknowledged Israel's right to exist. In November of 1967, UN Security Council Resolution 242 applied this concept of 'land for peace,' which continued to be a doctrine in future negotiations with Israel (Office of the Historian, 2013). Following the cease-fire and return of seized territory, the Six Day War had a negative impact on the relationships between Soviets and their Arab allies, as well as the Soviet position in the Cold War, both concerns that the USSR had to remedy.

Analysis Using Prospect Theory

In order to apply prospect theory to decision making during this conflict, it is necessary to isolate the decisions made by Soviet and American leadership first by identifying their objectives and involvement including: reference point, frames, and risk levels. Following, I will consider the key players and the political environment, including the national doctrine, point of shift in preference, and the decision-making tactics employed. Finally, I will determine the outcomes and their implications for each party.

Union of Soviet Socialist Republics.

Objectives and involvement. The leadership of the USSR at this time was Premier Alexei Kosygin and General Secretary Leonid Brezhnev. The level of Soviet involvement was high, as they were the major ally of Syria, Egypt, and several other Arab states. The Soviet's had identified the neo-Baath regime in Syria as a sympathetic power, who shared the ideologies of socialism, Marxism, as well as a tolerance for the Russian communist government (McInerney, 1992). Rebels within the Syrian borders were threatening to overthrow this regime, and the new forces would be sympathetic to Western interests. The Soviet's saw the threat to the current regime in Syria as a threat to their goals, and identified it as imminent and certain. The ultimate Soviet goal in this Middle East was to enhance their own prestige, while decreasing Western influence, and to help create an anti-Western coalition among the Arab states. Such an alliance would give the Soviets a significant gain in power in their power struggle in the Cold War.

Before this conflict, the Soviet status quo was a supportive regime in Syria and little interference by the US in the region. In fact, Syria was sympathetic to the Soviets, but split among the issues; the party all agreed to ally with the Soviets against the US and Western power, but some wished to remain neutral in the Sino-Soviet split, as to avoid inciting hostility from China (McInerney, 1992). In regards to this status quo, Soviet leadership viewed rising turmoil in Syria as a certain threat, which put them in the frame of protecting against a loss. The USSR also felt the endowment effect over their alliance in Syria. They would exert more resources to retain Syria as an ally than create a new ally in Jordan, or another country. Their evaluation of an overthrow of the neo-Baath regime as certain was a result of overestimation in the predictability of events in a dynamic region. The Soviet's identified a loss, and then misidentified the magnitude of that loss due to perceived probability. Overconfidence of information is evident, as

the Soviet's did not take time to accurately assess the correctness of their analysis of probability, which led to risk acceptant behavior.

The breakdown of possible outcomes according to the Soviet's stemmed from three options: risk of inaction, risk of regional war, and ultimate risk of a conflict with the US. The risk faced from inaction in Syria would be a conflict between Syria and rebels in Israel that would lead to the demise of the neo-Baath regime, and loss of influence in the region for Soviets. The risk of a regional war was a loss for Egypt and Syria that resulted in both their governments falling, and Western influence taking hold. Finally, the ultimate risk in a conflict in the region would be US involvement that would lead to an obligation for Soviet involvement, and a physical culmination of the Cold War.

After assessing the likelihood of these risks, and perceiving the threat to their status quo, the Soviet leadership was in a losses frame, and risk acceptant. The certainty (or pseudocertainty perhaps, more accurately) effect caused them to overestimate the risk of inaction, which would be the negative consequences of not intervening in Syria, while simultaneously underestimating the potential of a regional war, or an extension to US involvement. Although the neo-Baath had only maintained power for about a year, the instantaneous endowment effect over gains had led Soviets to renormalize to this ally, and continue to include a sympathetic Syria in their status quo. Thus making them more inclined to take action to protect their "possession" and avoid a loss.

Decision-making tactics. All of these factors lead to the Soviet dispersal of inaccurate information regarding the intention of Israeli troops on the Syrian border on May 13th. The Soviets hoped to use a war scare, which was a risky move because it is difficult to predict how others will react with their own levels of risk, threat, and certainty. The aim was to activate the Syrian-Egyptian Defense Treaty, which they had criticized Egypt for failing to adhere to; they

also hoped that by creating a common enemy in Israel, they could promote unity among the other Arab states. Despite planning a war scare, the Soviets ultimately hoped to avoid any actual conflict in the region. Their motivation to act stemmed from a perceived future challenge to the status quo, rather than any incurred losses (Berejikian, 2002). The USSR was focused on their own goals and self-interests, not regarding or properly evaluating outside information about the states of other parties involved, which led them to make a choice with unintended consequences.

Miscalibration of information was evident in assessing the motivation for Israeli troop placement. In fact, the Soviet ambassador in Egypt cautioned that he couldn't discern if the troops were provocative, or precautionary against a potential Syrian attack (McInerney, 1992). In addition, President Nasser had already taken the first step towards a conflict, which, as outlined by prospect theory, would make it harder to retract this action, as the plan had already been set into motion. This is an example of the commitment and consistency bias, as leaders tend to avoid backing down for a plan that has already been put into action, which would be perceived as inconsistent with their prior intent, thus Nasser was now worried about maintaining his reputation.

Point of shift. The instance of shift in preference of Soviet action materialized on May 18th. Key indicators of this were the UNEF being removed from Sinai, and concurrently, the KGB chief was fired. The Soviets also started to shy away from encouraging Egypt and other Arab nations towards military action. They appealed to Egypt by highlighting the objectives they had achieved as being sufficient: a reduction of troops on Syrian border, the withdrawal of UN troops in Sinai, and Egyptian control of the Gulf of Aqaba. The Soviets said they wouldn't offer aid to Egypt because it was time for compromise (McInerney, 1992). This was an attempt at creating feedback to cease undesirable action by Egypt. This point of reassessment for Soviet

had several potential causes. They realized their intelligence about the intent of Israeli troops was faulty, and also possibly discovered what the CIA had, an appraisal that indicated Israel had enough resources to win a war in the region (Robarge, 2007). They recalculated their initial risk of war to adapt to current circumstances, and found it to be more likely and imminent, which was a more unbiased evaluation, when compared to the overconfident initial assessment, which underestimated this risk. The Soviet's began to acknowledge the positions of other players, and how their actions have escalated and become riskier. The dismissal of the intelligence chief reveals the conflicting internal strategies in the USSR, and that they realized a mistake had been made, and someone was to blame. The reevaluation of information was a cybernetic control, stopping the previous Soviet train of action. The Soviet's had to reframe their position: returning to the previous status quo would now be considered a gain, or aspirational reference point, when compared to the current reference point: loss of a war in the region, resulting in Arab resentment of territory lost to Israel and lack of Soviet support. A reassessment of information and a new frame caused preference reversal. The previous status quo was now considered a gain. And still, the ultimate risk of US involvement loomed, and open conflict in the region increased its probability.

The timing of this reassessment was too late to stop the actions of other players, as the Soviets neglected to take into account the Israeli framing of the situation. Closing the Tiran Straits was a *casus belli*, or a sufficient reason to incite war, for Israeli, who felt inclined to responsive action. The shipping blockade pushed Israel into a losses frame, where they felt compelled to take riskier action to protect their interests.

Political environment. The Soviet doctrine of “correlation of forces” dictated their action (or inaction) at this point. Throughout the Cold War, Soviet strategy stipulated that when the

power or odds shift out of their favor in a given entanglement, they would accept a tactical retreat in order to avoid a confrontation with the US (McInerney, 1992). This policy is a type of negative feedback loop, as it requires a reassessment that can result in a cessation of the current action. This doctrine also stipulates that their default plan is to be risk averse, making their risky action seem even more extreme. They also experienced value separation, which is the practice of pursuing two irreconcilable values, especially regarding different immediate tasks (McInerney, 1992). Essentially, this is a party wanting to obtain one result, while acting in a manner that holds an opposing intent. Throughout this conflict, the Soviet's held a goal of creating Arab unity through a common military enemy, without inciting real military action, and creating a war scare without the consequent war.

The original Soviet evaluation of the situation was marred by overconfidence, and identified a status quo of a sympathetic regime in Syria and unified Arab states. When this position was threatened, the Soviets were pushed into a losses frame, in which they were risk acceptant in trying to maintain their identified status quo. Even though a war in the Middle East was contrary to their interests in the region, the certainty effect of diminishing probability, and overconfidence in ability to accurate judgment likelihoods lead Soviets to gamble a large, undesirable loss of war to avoid a smaller "certain" loss of Syrian regime change.

United States.

Objectives and involvement. The United States saw a lesser involvement in this war than the Soviets. President Johnson was in power at this time. The main reason for US involvement was to support their ally, Israel, and to monitor and stifle any escalation that may lead to Soviet involvement. Both super powers wished to avoid facing the other directly in this conflict. The US was aware that Israel was surrounded by hostile nations in the Middle East, thus vulnerable

to constant attacks and violence of Palestinian revolts and uprisings, who also historically claimed the territory that Israel was located on as their own. Strategic vulnerability tends to increase threat perception (Stein, 1988). The US had pledged support and aid to Israel, and their goals in the region included promoting peace among nations and preventing further support for the Soviet block. The status quo for the US would be an autonomous Israel and Arab states that remained neutral, or uninvolved, in the Cold War. Obviously, the US would also oppose the formation any anti-Western Arab coalition.

The US was sympathetic to the rebel forces in Syria, and supported an overthrow of the neo-Baath regime. Israel claimed to be working on behalf of the US and Britain, who “are interested in the overthrow of the present government in Syria” (McInerney, 1992, p. 273). President Johnson publically expressed his support for Israel and condemned the blockade established by Egypt. He expressed that Nasser did not have the right to interfere with the commerce of any nation in the Gulf of Aqaba. Despite supporting the rebels, they accounted for the current neo-Baath regime when evaluating the status quo, thus any regime change would be a positive gain. Israel, though under threat, had an established land and the Arab states had not formed a coalition, and were generally uninterested in becoming involved in the Cold War out of self-preservation. As the US did not view any imminent threat to security of their status quo, they were in a gains frame, and therefore risk averse.

Political environment. The US was perceived by the international community to support any Israeli military action, yet ultimately wanted to avoid such action, as the Vietnam War was a large present military commitment. The American public also was hesitant to extend the Cold War to another affront, making the president even more cautious, as he wanted to maintain his own public support and reputation, both are viewed as assets to Johnson and his administration.

Leaders are also more likely to garner political support for military action if they can portray a frame of loss avoidance to the public (Berejikian, 2002). President Johnson failed to frame the conflict in this manner, as his approach was set in the gains frame, not in recouping losses. The endowment effect did not play a large factor, as the US did not fear loss of Israeli territory or support to other Arab persuasions, in addition, they were not attempting to expend excess resources to gain territory or influence in the region either.

Decision making tactics. Before taking decisive action, Johnson sourced his administration for information about the capabilities of countries in the region. This strategy prevents miscalibration, or a positive feedback loop that may have been caused by less thorough research. CIA intelligence revealed that Israel could defend itself against a multilateral Arab attack, or successfully defend on three fronts, while performing an attack on the fourth (Robarge, 2007). Thus the US viewed an Israeli loss as very improbable and uncertain, containing any potential bias from certainty, or pseudocertainty, that may create an unwarranted risk acceptant attitude. When in the domain of losses, a decision maker would risk military action with a low probability for success, even when diplomacy could produce a better chance of a less undesirable outcome (Berejikian, 2002; O'Neill, 2001). Overconfidence in one's ability to predict success can also lead a country to enter a war at which they are at a disadvantage. Logically, no rational state would enter a conflict in which their own success was not predicted. An exception to this would be a country that undergoes an targeted attack from an enemy, such as the Japanese targeting Pearl Harbor in World War II. Being in the domain of gains, President Johnson recognized the potential for success of diplomacy, and refrained from unwarranted military action. In the natural state of risk aversion, a negotiated agreement is expected to be mutually preferred by all parties (Fearon, 1995: cited in O'Neill, 2001). After sufficient information

gathering, analysis of the situation, and an evaluation of possible plans of actions, the US concluded that the calculated risk of entering the conflict was higher than the potential harm to Israel from inaction.

The US did, in a manner, apply deterrence theory to this conflict. Although Johnson clearly preferred diplomacy as a resolution, he cautioned that the US would respond to any aggression in the region (Office of the Historian, 2013). By using a military threat, Johnson hoped to deter military action by Egypt and Syria and encourage cooperation and diplomacy to find a solution. However, this is an example of the failure of deterrence theory since Egypt did not view the threat as credible, and likely evaluated it including the assumption of Soviet support if such a response were to materialize. The Egyptian expectation of Soviet backing gave them overconfidence in their ability to return any such action by the US, and led Egypt to disregard the US threats. Additionally, Egypt likely realized the US hesitancy to openly get involved in the conflict, which embodied the paradox of deterrence theory, that follow through on the threat by the US would cost them more than the potential benefit of Egyptian compliance.

The US also took the time to gather and properly consider information regarding the situation rather than being overconfident in their initial observations, or facts provided by other parties, specifically pleas and requests from Israel for increased aid, based on their claims of their own tactical disadvantage. A CIA report revealed the Soviet intentions in the region: avoiding military involvement, forcing a decline in acceptance of the US in the region by pushing for a materialization of a US-Israeli alliance, which would antagonize America to other Arab nations, and a Soviet incapability to openly aid Arabs, for fear of entanglement with US (Robarge, 2007). Any Soviet military involvement in the region would have been enough of a threat for Johnson that it likely would have incited a preference reversal into a loss frame,

begetting the risky action of retaliation. However, since the CIA evaluated that this threat was not likely, this shift was prevented. This appraisal appeased US uncertainties about Soviet intentions, and coupled with their knowledge of sufficient Israeli military capabilities for defense, Johnson saw little to no reason to risk US military action in this conflict.

Point of shift. On June 10th, Johnson received a message on the Cold War “hot line” from Soviet Premier Alexei Kosygin, which included a threat of military force if Israel didn’t cease its advance across Golan Heights into Syria. This was a Soviet application of deterrence theory. Mr. Johnson evaluated the threat as credible based on his knowledge of Soviet military and nuclear capabilities, and opted to cooperate with the premier’s demand, so he mobilized the Sixth Fleet to the eastern Mediterranean, which appeased Soviet tensions (Robarge, 2007). In this case, neither side defected, thus forging a path for diplomacy, which guided all parties towards cooperation. A cease-fire was agreed upon later this day, which realized the American goal of a cessation of violence in the region. By assessing the military capabilities of Israel and the USSR, the US was able to weigh political gains and judged military action as counterproductive to their goals in the region. Overall, the US stayed in a gains frame, which caused them to make risk averse decisions, and to take all measures to ensure quality and accuracy of information, which lead to rational decision-making. With no imminent threat to territory or security, Johnson was able to avoid mishap due to biases such as overconfidence, rapid renormalization, or endowment.

Outcomes and Implications

Several key considerations emerged in this analysis. First, due to commitment and consistency bias affecting international leaders, and the prospect theory assertion that it is more costly to stop ongoing action than prevent future action, it follows that these leaders, in an effort to portray a decisive and strong front, require a much larger threat or other negative feedback

development to stop plans they have already begun to execute. In using threats to beget diplomacy, the credibility and believability of potential loss to the threatened party is key to effective deterrence. Repeatedly, mis-information, overconfidence in information, or lack of sufficient data, generally leads to unintended consequences and realized losses. On the other hand, effective information gathering and evaluation can easily prevent these negative consequences. Despite all states and political leaders being ultimately self-serving, they must carefully consider the position, goals, and capabilities of their opponents when trying to predict outcomes and develop a military strategy.

Such an analysis allows us to see how a losses frame, such as that of the Soviet Union, can result in suboptimal and rash choices that lead to unintended consequences, as it essentially reduces systematic thinking and analysis. Whereas a gains frame, such as that of the United States, allows for rational and logical information gathering and decision making, which results in a more acceptable outcome and fewer wasted resources, as well as preventing a loss of reputation from ill-advised choices.

Case of 2013 Syrian Crisis

This contemporary situation provides a highly relevant and applicable platform for applying prospect theory. For accuracy of analysis and to specify the relevant scope of this still progressing conflict, I will limit this evaluation to the events of late August, September, and October of 2013, including the ultimate decision to indefinitely delay military intervention. Although further developments may change the course of this conflict, the initial decision making time frame will be the focus of this analysis. I will first outline the major events of the conflicts, and then identify the key players and their objectives. Next, I will discuss the surrounding political environment and pinpoint the point of preference change. Lastly, I will

outline the decision-making tactics employed, followed by an analysis of the final outcome and any possible ramifications. The aim will be to use prospect theory in a contemporary setting to offer insight into current political leaders and their decision making practices, thus providing a way to predict and prevent unnecessary conflicts in the future.

Overview of Events

The conflict in Syria was driven by events on 21 August 2013, when claims of a chemical attack occurring in a suburb of Damascus surfaced (Packer, 2013; Holmes, 2013; “Syria in Context,” 2013; Chappell, 2013c). The attack was believed to have killed around 1400 Syrian citizens. German intelligence claimed on September 9th that Syrian President Bashar Assad did not directly order the attack (Memmott, 2013), whereas many other EU officials implicated Assad, but withheld formal accusations contingent on information from a UN analysis of the site. On the same day, United States Secretary of State John Kerry asserted that chemical weapons in Syria are under control of three people: Mr. Assad, his brother Commander Maher Assad, and an undisclosed third general within the regime (Mohammed & Osborn, 2013), which implies that only the executive members of the regime had power to authorize such an attack. Assad publically denied any use of chemical weapons until 10th September (Chappell 2013c, McCallister, 2013). Russian officials also asserted that the poison gas “was used not by the Syrian army, but by opposition forces” (Packer, 2013).

Following the initial attack, United States President Barack Obama publically stated that Syria would face “international consequences” for using chemical weapons, crossing a “red line” regarding use of large scale weapons that Obama indoctrinated about a year prior (Spetalnick & Mason, 2013). Obama created a proposal that included “tailored, limited” missile strikes against strategic targets in Syria (Mason, Rampton, & Felsenthal, 2013). Although he acknowledged an

effort to avoid “any open-ended conflict in Syria,” he pressed that use of chemical agents necessitates accountability (Spetalnick & Mason, 2013). Obama pushed to garner support for this plan from Congress and the international community (Memmott, 2013), asserting that air strikes are necessary to respond to the use of chemical weapons, as US national interests could be at risk if the weapons were to fall into the “wrong hands,” such as the Lebanese Hezbollah (McCallister, 2013; Mason, Rampton, & Felsenthal, 2013). Other hostile nations such as Lebanon, North Korea, and Iran would monitor the US actions in this conflict to evaluate how the United States handles such a threat, as they may face similar responses (Chappell, 2013a).

Although Obama fully backed military strikes, he also agreed to gain approval from Congress prior to any definitive action in adherence to Constitutional norms, and support from the legislative branch would strengthen public and international support for his plan (Horsley, 2013; Davidson, 2013). Obama and his cabinet pushed for approval of the strikes, but prior to Congressional votes on 9th September, according to the Associated Press, House members were opposed to, or leaning against, the action by a 6:1 margin, while nearly half the House and a third of the Senate remained undecided (McCallister, 2013). Obama’s opposition from Congress was solidified by the united disapproval of two opposing extremes, Representatives Michelle Bachmann (R- Minn.) and Barbara Lee (D- Calif.). By 11 September, Senate had postponed their vote, and the House had yet to announce a date to vote. However, some, such as Senator John McCain (R- Ariz.), advocated for decisive action by Obama on the issue (Heavey & Holland, 2013; Davidson, 2013). Representative Peter King (R- NY) cautioned that Syrian movements could threaten US interests such as Jordan and Israel (Chappell, 2013a). Obama later conceded that he was “not confident” that he had the necessary support to move forward (Heavey & Holland, 2013).

Internationally, the Obama camp gained support from the French following Secretary Kerry's visit to Paris in early September (Chappell, 2013a). British Deputy Prime Minister Nick Clegg supported Obama's threat of military action, while respecting his decision to uphold the laws of democracy by awaiting Congressional approval, as it reflects the ideals being pursued abroad. He affirmed, "Being thoughtful and wary about taking military action is a perfectly healthy thing in a democracy... I don't think we should ever take military action lightly" (Clegg, 2013). Iranian President Hassan Rouhani also condemned the use of chemical weapons in Syria, and although he never commented directly on Obama's plan of air strikes, he affirmed that a peaceful solution to nuclear weapons concerns in the Middle East is of the utmost importance (Chappell, 2013e). Mr. Rouhani's position was influenced by Saddam Hussein's use of chemical weapons against Iran during the First Persian Gulf War, or Iran-Iraq war of 1980-19800, which has established a deep seeded moral outrage of Iranians against poison gas (Packer, 2013). Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu agreed with Obama during a meeting at the end of September that eradicating chemical weapons in Syria is essential for maintaining stability in the region (Chappell, 2013e). Other Arab states, NATO, and Turkey all expressed their condemnation of the actions of Assad (Spetalnick & Mason, 2013). Conflicting pressures created a complex decision-making environment for Obama.

The Russian Federation stated from the beginning an opposition to Obama's push for military action. During a New York meeting of the UN Security Council on 28th August, the five veto-holding members: Britain, France, United States, China, and Russia, were appealed to by Britain and the US to authorize military action against Assad and his regime with the aim of protecting Syrian civilians. No decision was reached at the time, but China and Russia expressed an intention to block any such authorization (Spetalnick & Mason, 2013). The US Ambassador

to the UN, Samantha Power, claimed that the Security Council was “paralyzed” by Russia’s refusal to allow action in the matter, which stifles any aid that the Council would have been able to offer the US in reaching a resolution (Chappell, 2013a). Russian opinion was even sought by some American leaders, such as Senator Tom Udall (D- New Mex.), who, on 8th September, acknowledged that Russia yet been given a proper opportunity to vote or definitely take a position (Chappell, 2013a). After the first Security Council meeting, the US and its allies clarified that a UN veto would not definitively prevent any military action, if the need were vital (Spetalnick & Mason, 2013). However, the lack of support did delay any immediate action.

A UN investigation released on 15 September entitled “Report on the Alleged Use of Chemical Weapons in the Ghouta Area of Damascus on 21 August 2013” confirmed the use of sarin nerve gas, a chemical agent, which is 26 times as deadly as cyanide. The inquiry also analyzed the specifics of ballistics, angles of trajectory, compass bearings, and artillery ranges, which revealed that the warheads were launched from a government stronghold near Damascus, an area occupied by Assad’s loyalist forces (Packer, 2013). This investigation definitively illustrated that chemical weapons were deployed against Syrian civilians, resulting in many casualties, including numerous children, and that the Assad regime was the source, although it does not give evidence regarding what leader authorized the attack. This was contrary to the earlier claims by German intelligence and Russian officials (Memmott, 2013; Packer, 2013). Assad denied authorizing the attack, but accepted “some of the responsibility,” but also warned that any US military action would motivate retaliation (Chappell, 2013a).

The critical moment in this situation occurred on 9th September in London, England. During a press conference, United States Secretary of State John Kerry, in response to an inquiry about possible action President Assad could take to avoid a military strike, stated:

“ Sure, he could turn over every single bit of his chemical weapons to the international community in the next week- turn it over, all of it, without delay and allow the full and total accounting [of it], but he isn’t about to do it and it can’t be done” (Mohammed & Osborn, 2013).

Despite the State Department’s assertion that Kerry was simply making a “rhetorical argument,” which implied his dismissal of any such action being feasible, Russian leaders capitalized on this declaration. Later that same day, they proposed that Syria could realistically avoid a military attack by the US if President Bashar Assad relinquished his chemical weapons to international mediators (Peralta, 2013; Memmott, 2013). Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov met with Syrian Foreign Minister Walid al-Moualem on 9th September in Moscow to urge the US to pursue a peaceful resolution, such as this, in lieu of military action (Mohammed & Osborn, 2013).

The American legislative branch, as well as many international players, embraced the Russian proposal for Syria’s turnover of the weapons. The mantra “give diplomacy a chance” resonated among leaders hesitant of military involvement (James, 2013). Senator Tom Udall (D-New Mex.) embodied this sentiment, when he emphasized that “we haven’t exhausted all of our political, economic, and diplomatic alternatives,” and criticized “moving much too rapidly down the warpath, and not trying to find a political solution through the international community” (Chappell, 2013a). This proposition offered an “escape route” that avoided the immediate, polarizing, and irreversible action of a military strike. However, this attitude also stalled any efforts by the Obama cabinet in pushing for authorization by Congress as policymakers latched onto the new alternative, which was less controversial, as well as requiring fewer resources and a lesser commitment (James, 2013).

The political situation in Syria was complicated by the ongoing and violent civil war. Rebel groups had been vying to overthrow President Assad's regime since 2011. The military regime had shot, bombed, and committed human rights violations, such as torture and rape, against its own citizens in startling numbers. More than 100,000 had died thus far in the ongoing 2-year conflict, and millions more (including around 1 million children) had fled their homes, becoming refugees in Turkey, Lebanon, Jordan, Iraq, and other neighboring countries, where they faced uncertain and difficult living conditions. The violence in Syria threatened to permeate its borders, expanding into other countries and increasing the instability in an already volatile region. The Shia backed government combated a majority Sunni population, and this hostile religious divide had already prompted bombings in Lebanon and Iraq. The extreme Lebanese Hezbollah backed the government, while radical Sunnis in the region aided the rebel opposition forces. Extremist jihadist groups had capitalized on the confusion in the country by seizing territory for their own operations, further heightening the level of violence and instability. Russia remained one of the Assad regime's most influential allies, and posed as an obstacle for Western intervention throughout the conflict ("Syria in Context," 2013).

Expressing the distrust within Syria, the Rebel Syrian National Coalition opposed the agreement, claiming it was a "cheap trick" by the Assad camp to gain time for continued aggression against Syrians (Heavey & Holland, 2013). Obama had to seriously consider this issue, as a lack of commitment to aid, such as humanitarian aid or other necessary supplies, could have diminished any favor previously established that he could leverage if he needed to negotiate with rebel forces in the future (Packer, 2013). The presence of Islamist radicals among the rebels had dissuaded direct Western aid (Spetalnick & Mason, 2013), yet Senator McCain (R- Ariz.) cautioned that: "There is nothing more that will drive Syrians into the hands of

extremist than to feel they have been abandoned by the West” (Heavey & Holland, 2013). The dilemma was to identify a way to provide aid for moderate rebels without being compromised by extremists, or further endangering civilians (Packer, 2013). However, some Syrians viewed the potential for future foreign backing as incentive to take action in supporting the rebel cause, and were left feeling forsaken by lack of action in the international community (Holmes, 2013).

Chemical weapons only accounted for around 2% of the death toll in the civil war. The scope of casualties in this war can be illustrated by a comparison of the 1400 person casualty count on 21st August, to the following three weeks, during which time, more than 3000 citizens were killed by traditional bombs and artillery (Holmes, 2013). Furthering the arguments of the rebel forces, opposition to the plan to foster cooperation with Assad claimed that it would legitimize his power and regime. Though, examples such as Slobodan Milosevic of Serbia and Muammar Gaddafi of Libya specify instances when diplomacy backed by military threat resulted in the decreased power of a tyrant rather than an increase in credibility or international acceptance (Packer, 2013).

Obama maintained that eventually Assad must be removed from governmental power in Syria, and that “the notion that Syria can return to a pre war status quo is a fantasy.” However, he acknowledged that state institutions must remain intact, to ensure what little stability can be salvaged from the conflict for the people of Syria (Cassidy, 2013). Fawaz Gerges of the London School of Economics affirmed that diplomatic negotiations would be the first step in easing Assad out of power, without jeopardizing such establishments (Holmes, 2013). The efforts to eliminate chemical weapons represented a first step towards peace talks to ultimately resolve the civil war (Chappell, 2013b). Any solution to the war would have to appease many conflicting

interest groups: Sunnis, Alawis, Christians, and Kurds in the region would all have to relinquish the idea of complete rule in order to garner peace (Packer, 2013).

On 11th September, the five veto-wielding powers of the UN Security Council reconvened in New York to discuss specifics of the Russian proposal. Britain, France, and the United States had collaborated prior to this summit in order to align Western goals. The draft presented by French diplomats included an ultimatum: Syria must turnover their chemical arsenal, or face punitive measures, allowed by the UN Chapter VII resolution. Russia's Ambassador, backed by the Chinese, continued to veto proposals that included such sanctions against Assad (Charbonneau & Nichols, 2013). This conference and initial proposition generated a starting point for crafting the final agreement.

Secretary of State John Kerry and Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov collaborated for three days, from 11th September to the 14th, in neutral Geneva to draft an agreement on the turnover and disarmament of Syria's chemical arsenal. The first milestone of the plan required a detailed report of Syria's chemical capabilities within a week. A contingency plan involving sanctions against Assad was also included in the event of non-compliance (US Dept of State, 2013; Chappell, 2013b; Adams, 2013b). The "Framework for Elimination of Syrian Chemical Weapons," released by the US Department of State on 14th September is the official agreement drafted between leaders of the Security Council and Syria. The Syrian Arab Republic was required to join the global Chemical Weapons Convention (CWC), and adhere to their guidelines regarding the development and possession of chemical agents. The UN Security Council and the Executive Council of the Organization for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons (OPCW) were to act as the international powers monitoring the process. Syria was required to give

unobstructed admittance to all sites for OPCW, UN, and related personnel in the carrying out of this plan (US Dept of State, 2013).

The primary listing, to provided by Syria within the first week, was to be comprehensive in scope, and catalog the following:

- The designations, categories, and magnitudes of its chemical weapons instruments
- The varieties of weaponries as well as their positions and methods of storage
- The locations and capabilities of fabrication plants and research and development facilities.

All of the declared sites, 45 as appraised by the US (Adams, 2013b), must be submitted for inspections by OPCW investigators before November 2013, and this was also the deadline for the destruction of production, mixing, and filling equipment. The OPCW would supervise the removal and destruction of all munitions, which should be taken outside of Syrian borders whenever safely and realistically possible. This process was to completely eliminate all equipment and artillery by June 2014. The restricted materials included: delivery systems, unweaponized chemical agents, precursor chemicals, and any resources related to further research and development (US Dept of State, 2013).

The most contentious part of this agreement was the inclusion of permission to act under Chapter VII of the UN Charter, which permits the use of force to ensure adequate fulfillment. Part of the agreement stipulated the execution of systematic reviews on the progress and level of compliance. Evidence of noncompliance, such as an unauthorized transfer or any level of use, was subject to retaliation by force (US Dept of State, 2013). The US agreed to drop any immediate push for military use, yet Obama emphasized that “any agreement needs to be verifiable and enforceable” (Adams, 2013a). US officials also stated that Obama would reserve

the right to act independently of UN approval. The president expressed his support of the plan, but stressed that he would not hesitate to take action in the event of noncompliance. The Pentagon further confirmed these claims by verifying that the US military was still in place to strike. Russia countered that the inclusion of Chapter VII was a “last ditch” option, and appealed that any alleged violations should be properly evaluated in the UN Security Council prior to action. This framework had the support of China, France, Britain (the three remaining veto-holding members), other UN members, and NATO. The Free Syrian Army, in opposition to anything that could legitimize Assad, rejected the agreement and vowed to continue to fight (Adams, 2013b).

As of 21st September 2013, Syria produced documents outlining their chemical arsenal, which adhered to the first deadline in the agreement. Although this was a promising step, the UN Weapons Inspector, among other critics, cautioned that some deadlines were “unrealistic” or overly ambitious, as estimates of the quantity of weapons to be accounted for included close to 1000 tons of nerve gas (Chappell, 2013d). Furthermore, the environment of continuing civil war violence and conflict in Syria created a safety concern for inspectors and other personnel, which would hinder the process and prevent its rapid and complete execution (Chappell, 2013c; Adams, 2013b).

Analysis Using Prospect Theory

In evaluating the decision-making processes of leaders of the United States and Russia, I will outline their objectives and overall involvement including status quo and risk frame; the political environment present; the decision-making tactics employed; and the final outcomes and their implications.

Russia.

Involvement and objectives. First, I will analyze the intentions and actions of the leadership of the Russian Federation. At this time, key decision makers in Russia were President Vladimir Putin, and Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov. Their involvement in this conflict can be explained as the global power representing the protection of Syrian interests, specifically those of President Bashar Assad. This positions Russia as the influence countering Western actions, particularly by their place on the UN Security Council. Russia's leadership aimed to maintain the governance by ally President Assad's regime in Syria. They were also interested in preventing another outbreak of violence in a region that had started to plateau in terms of escalating conflict and avoiding a new conflict so close to their border that may require their own military involvement. Their reference point was having Assad in power in Syria, US intervention in the Middle East limited to their involvement in Afghanistan, Iraq, and Israel, and Russia being viewed as relatively uninvolved in the region. These interests put Russia in a reasonably risk averse frame of relative gains. The civil war had not escalated significantly, thus the risk of Assad's regime losing power had not increased, the US lacked support for their increased involvement, and the Russian reputation had been more determined by actions elsewhere in the world. Their risk averse actions included stalling tactics to prevent military action and an eagerness to use diplomacy instead.

From the start of the conflict, Russian leaders deflected allegations that Assad was responsible for the chemical attacks. By shifting blame to rebel forces, they were able to uphold their values in supporting Assad and the actions of his army by vilifying the opposition. In political situations, players are more likely to reframe actions to align with previously held values (Boettcher, 2004). This was an effort to protect their reputational asset of having powerful allies. They were overconfident in their ability to judge who was the party responsible for the

chemical attacks, which further caused them to discount the assessments of others, and cling tighter to their own evaluation (Barber & Odean, 2001). This created a positive feedback loop, which was broken by the UN report, which contradicted Russia's claims and damaged their reputation. Ultimately, attempts to counter UN conclusions about the source of the attack were futile, which increased Western skepticism about Russian intentions. This later made Western powers more committed to the inclusion of Chapter VII measures.

Political environment. Russia viewed US military action as non-imminent, which reduced the immediate threat to their interests. Russia, rather accurately, concluded that Obama's lack of support would delay airstrikes, which made the threat less immediate, and thus less certain. This lack of certainty prevented Russian leaders from panicking or feeling time pressure, and entering a losses frame. Their confidence in and commitment to finding a non-violent diplomatic solution offered a logical solution to any rash military action, which aligns with Russian military doctrine. Currently, it outlines a preference for preventing military conflicts, employing strategic deterrence, eliminating threats to peace, and suppressing acts of aggression (Russian Federation, 2010). The Russian doctrine justifies military action, but principally in cases of defense or protection of itself or allies. It also specifically enumerates deterrence as an acceptable method of conflict resolution. The endowment effect does take some part in Russian actions, as they are accustomed to having a close ally, both ideologically and geographically, in Syria strategically located in the critical region of the Middle East. This alliance had existed for several decades, thus Russia valued it more than it would value creating a new alliance, and would be willing to commit more resources to maintain this association.

Russia identified that Obama's push for military action was due to extreme pressures from varying influencers to react decisively to the use of chemical weapons use in Syria, as

immediate action is preferred when responding (Levy, 1992b). By assessing the situational factors and the environment surrounding Obama's agenda, and taking time to negate myopic thinking under pressure, leaders were able to create an alternative that was acceptable to both parties.

Decision-making tactics. Until formulating their proposition, Russian diplomats used stalling tactics such as blocking UN decisions and publically garnering international support for a diplomatic resolution. These strategies worked to counter the bias associated with decision making under time pressure, characterized by the tendency to make hasty and suboptimal decisions when given insufficient time to make a choice. In terms of forgone gains and perceived losses, Russia had not realized any actual losses thus far in the conflict, yet a possible loss loomed far in the future. Their status quo remained intact, and the potential risk was at least non-immediate. Although the mere existence of a perceived loss is more important than the weight, it may not be sufficient to incite a losses frame. Additionally, actual, incurred losses weigh more than hypothetical future losses, so Russia had a low level of perceived likelihood of loss. Russian leaders also capitalized on the idea that it is easier to prevent future action than revoke past actions. They realized that any military action by the United States would provoke a response from Syria, which would ignite the commitment and consistency effect for Obama, who would be obligated to continue to protect American interests. This could quickly escalate, which would necessitate Russian backing in Syria, an involvement they hoped to avoid. As more parties got involved, and the conflict intensified, a positive feedback loop would form, and an even greater outside force would be necessary to diffuse the situation. By averting the initial action, it would be much easier to negotiate and prevent escalation.

Point of shift. The moment of opportunity for Russian leaders to seize upon came with Secretary Kerry's comment in London on 9th September. Even though Kerry's comment was not an official offer, once Russia embraced it, Kerry had to follow through in order to avoid a decline of his reputation. This offhand comment created a perfect opening for Russia to propose a diplomatic solution that best mirrored their own interests. As the presenter of the idea, Russian leaders were also able to boost their reputation, by exhibiting Russia as a peacemaker rather than the dark protector of a vicious tyrant, Assad (Holmes, 2013). President Vladimir Putin further built up the Russian reputation by declaring that Russia and the US agreed on how to eliminate Syrian weapons, in an attempt to decrease skepticism about possibly malicious Russian intentions (Chappell, 2013c). Putin used framing to emphasize where goals of the US and Russia aligned, and minimize areas in which they disagreed. Through these boosts, and the overwhelming support for the proposal that emerged from the US legislature and other foreign parties, Russia gained notoriety and prestige in being the driver towards a peaceful resolution. Although the agreement undermined their faith in Assad by forcing his confession of possessing chemical weapons, and obliging his cooperation in relinquishing them, Russia strongly advocated for this diplomatic proposal. While Russia is committed to their alliance with Syria, they evaluated that Assad valued preventing the airstrikes and maintaining control over losing some credibility. Ultimately, Russia was defending their sole interests, mainly their reluctance to get involved militarily, over those of even close allies, such as Syria. This aligns with the idea that all states are ultimately self-serving. Also, following the gains made by a positive increase in reputation among the international community and near elimination of the threat of military action in Syria, Russia had succeeded in obtaining their goals of relative stability in the region and their own physical non-involvement. Russia became even more risk averse to return to a

reference point that, despite representing a greater political advantage for Assad, included a risk of air strikes in the country, which would lead to escalation.

Russia attempted to continue to represent Syrian political interests by opposing the inclusion of Chapter VII contingencies, which is the UN's embodiment of deterrence theory, in the final agreement. Inclusion of this sanction would have signified the last step in achieving Russian objectives. They countered US claims that a continued threat of action was necessary to ensure compliance; however, in Russia's own military doctrine, deterrence is included as an acceptable strategy for pursuing objectives, making this claim an blatant attempt to simply forge a better deal for Assad. Although the ultimate inclusion of this section did not further Russian interests, it still allowed for the realization of their other goals, and the ultimate agreement was judged to be more important than excluding deterrence.

Through their risk averse mindset and stalling tactics, Russia was able to realize their basic objectives and even make gains in the way of their reputation in this conflict. Their ability to adhere to logical evaluations and maintain persistence towards a singular goal allowed Russia to overcome loss-oriented influences, and pursue a positive outcome. Russia realized some gains from the final agreement, despite some reversal in their relationship with Assad's regime in Syria by forcing his compliance and conceding to the inclusion of a Chapter VII contingency. Lastly, Russia was able to eliminate the possible threat of weapons of mass destruction near their borders, and negate the actions of President Obama by proving his solution to be suboptimal.

United States.

Involvement and objectives. Next, I will apply prospect theory to the actions of the administration in the United States. Key decision makers were President Barack Obama and Secretary of State John Kerry. Strong influencers were members of the House of Representatives

and the Senate, the American public, and other international leaders. The United States was situated at the heart of this conflict, and faced the most direct involvement with Syria. The interests of the US were conflicted between preservation and proaction. The tenants of Morgan and Palmer's two-good theory of international action, which is how a country balances maintaining security domestically and promoting positive goals abroad (Morgan & Palmer, 1997: cited in O'Neill, 2001). These manifested as preserving domestic interests by preventing another confounding involvement in the region, and protecting interests in the Middle East and globally by making decisive action in response to the use of chemical weapons. Objectives included: the cessation of use and destruction of chemical weapons, combined with punitive repercussions for Syria; avoiding open-ended engagement; deterring Russian involvement; protecting US allies and interests in the region; and the eventual replacement of leadership in Syria. The status quo for the Obama administration was comprised of: support from the public and allies, continued dominance over international affairs, particularly in the Middle Eastern region, and it additionally incorporated an aspirational reference point, which would be expressed by a decrease in influence of the Assad regime over Syria and other players in the region. This target placed Obama in a risk acceptant, losses frame immediately, as the current state had been identified as insufficient and demanding improvement. This was exhibited by his immediate preference for military action, which is considered a risky option in international conflicts (Berejikian, 2002; Levy, 1992b).

Political environment. Following the initial surfacing of reports of a chemical attack on 21st August, Obama stressed an intention for imposing consequences on Syria for breaking "international norms on weapons like chemical weapons" (Spetalnick & Mason, 2013). This incident illustrates the effect of hedonic tone on risk acceptance. That is to say that decisions

involving the loss of human life result in more risk acceptant behaviors (Boettcher, 2004). The emotional effects of a humanitarian issue make actors more sensitive to the potential loss. The use of chemical weapons caused Obama to quickly renormalize from a position of avoiding involvement in the Syrian civil war, to an obligation to react to uphold his public doctrine (Horsley, 2013). This rapid renormalization caused the current state to become unsatisfactory, and demanding of attention. Obama felt compelled to act; yet he lacked public support. In a losses frame, political leaders are more likely to garner political advantage if they can present their reasons as an avoidance of loss (Berejikian, 2002). Obama failed to present the crisis as a direct loss for the US, thus avoidance was not a priority for the American public and policy makers. In this case, one could measure the endowment effect by the amount of military resources required. For example, the US had committed substantial resources to their involvements in Iraq and Afghanistan and would fight to protect these investments. In Syria, Obama suggested a low-resource approach of aerial attacks on select few targets. This illustrates Obama's unwillingness to spend excess resources in Syria. Since the endowment effect was minimal, as the US held no physical assets in Syria, Obama was unable to justify his action as one of loss avoidance.

Decision-making tactics. The Obama administration regarded Assad's use of chemical weapons as an intentional infringement of the "red line" that Obama had drawn regarding their deployment. In reality, although the Assad regime was aware of international norms against their use, Syrian forces were simply acting in the volatile environment of a violent civil war, without much concern for other nations, as all nations are predominantly self-serving. This lack of proper analysis of motives caused Obama to react definitively and immediately with a proposition that was risky and likely to incite a reaction from Assad. Obama was also overconfident in the merit

of his plan to use precise military strikes as a method of punishment for Syria. He failed to carefully weigh the effectiveness of this approach. Bombing would not result in the elimination of chemical weapons, as directly striking the weapons may cause them to disperse, inducing further proliferation. The air strikes wouldn't achieve the goal of eradicating the weapons; they could harm more civilians; and they would provoke retaliation by Assad's regime upon Syrian citizens, or the US and its allies (Davidson, 2013). Obama largely overlooked these rational considerations in his push for military action, as a result of overconfidence, which led to myopic solution development. Obama's over-perception of aggression and under-developed analysis due to time pressure were both factors in his creation of sub-optimal plan.

The availability heuristic, in which an actor passes judgment based on prior conceptions or events that are easier to mentally access, or available in recent memory, further affected Obama's evaluation of the situation (Tversky & Kahneman, 1974). In political leaders, this manifests as a superficial learning from recent events, those experienced directly or that one's country was directly involved in, those that had major consequences, or those that occurred during said leaders political development (Stein, 1988; Jervis, 1989). In Obama's situation, the long, complicated, and over-involved conflicts in Iraq and Afghanistan set an easily available precedent of US action in the region. Obama drew upon these examples and defaulted to a plan of military action when in disagreement with a Middle Eastern dictator.

Despite being in a losses frame, Obama did show some indications of cybernetic thinking, or self-regulation in decision-making (Edwards, 1992; Johnson et al, 1964). He utilized the strong cybernetic controls built into American government in the way of checks and balances by seeking Congressional approval before ordering the air strikes. Obama faced a balancing act in his decision: avoiding a perception as a weak or indecisive leader of the free world, and adhering

to his vow to serve the desires of the American people (Elving, 2013). The disapproval by the American people of US military involvement overseas, due to foreign wars in Iraq and Afghanistan (Cassidy, 2013), was an important check on Obama's risk acceptant attitude.

The resistance he faced caused his hesitation throughout the conflict, and further motivated him to seek Congressional approval, as he acknowledged, "I've spent four and a half years working to end wars, not to start them" (Horsely, 2013). Obama faced a risk of losing reputation by not maintaining his commitment to previously stated goals. His recognition of this paradox, the stalling tactics of other actors that reduced time pressure, and his reluctance to order action without Congressional consent, illustrated Obama's slow descent from an extreme risk acceptant attitude. As British Prime Minister Nick Clegg emphasized, it "would weaken the West much more considerably in the long run if we started somehow abandoning the democratic principles which we espouse elsewhere in the world" (Clegg, 2013).

Point of shift. The point of preference reversal for Obama was neither immediate nor definitive following the Kerry comment of 9th September, and the resulting proposal by the Russian leadership. A lack of trust in the motivations and intentions of Russia and Syria caused weariness from other parties, thus the US State Department maintained that a continued, believable threat of military action was essential to ensure compliance (Heavey & Holland, 2013). Obama also upheld that the "big stick" of a US air strike is what had lead to Assad's admission of possession of chemical weapons on 10th September, following his adamant denial prior to this (James, 2013).

Due to this distrust, Obama continued to make his case for air strikes to Congress and the American public, but as aforementioned, various checks had steered him towards a less risk acceptant attitude. The framework drafted by Secretary Kerry and Foreign Minister Lavrov was a

welcome diplomatic solution, though Obama had reservations about accepting it. He was contingent on deterrence theory to ensure its success. Obama insisted that the threat of military action was the driver that paved the way for diplomatic proceedings (Horsely, 2013). This threat is what resulted in Syria's eventual acknowledgement of possessing chemical weapons, and Obama believed that Congressional authorization of a strike would be an "even bigger stick" in guaranteeing compliance (James, 2013). His administration purported that a threat of force was essential, and would continue to be necessary in enforcing the plan (Heavey & Holland, 2013). The drive to include Chapter VII considerations and the implementation of sanctions, heightened by Obama's declaration that he would enact these policies regardless of UN approval if necessary, illustrates his commitment to pursuing deterrence (Adams, 2013b). This argument provided a way for Obama to justify his original proposal, which seemed excessive when compared to the diplomatic agreement.

However, the successful deterrence in Assad's agreement was undermined by the paradox of deterrence theory. Following US agreement to reduce intention of immediate military action, Assad's forces resumed their prior level of violence against the Syrian people, an expression of how once the threat of violence is decreased by diplomatic proceedings; credibility decreases (Berejikian, 2002). Assad and his regime regained confidence, and started to address the opposing forces as "terrorists" by highlighting the involvement of Islamist militants, and preyed on the tentativeness of Western powers to intervene and their uneasiness about extremists. After the proposal, traditional methods of war assaults (excluding chemical weapons) used by the government became heavier, for example, Syrian warplanes resumed their air campaign for the first time since prior to the 21st August incident. The actions of the Syrian government reflected that the fear of US involvement had exponentially decreased (Holmes, 2013). Most of the

distrust of Assad's regime stemmed from actions such as these, which perpetuated the theory that they were exploiting negotiations to defer, hinder, or divert attention in order to transport, deploy, or conceal weapons or evidence (Heavey & Holland, 2013). In order prevent responses such as these, Obama should have aimed for an "intermediate" level of deterrence: one that would inflict losses, but not be extensive enough to incite a losses frame in Syrian leadership (Berejikian, 2002).

Obama's reservations about a diplomatic agreement result from lack of certainty of verification, and uncertainty exacerbates the losses frame he experienced. Obama would likely risk more resources to gain 100% assurance that they weapons were dismantled. Libya and Iraq represent two cases in which it was impossible to ensure the elimination of all their nuclear arms, and circumstances would only be worsened by the civil war in Syria (Holmes, 2013). However, air strikes would not result in their dismantling either. Syria's obligatory agreement to the Chemical Weapons Convention was an effective way of translating the turnover of weapons by Syria from a loss of property into a payment expected by gaining membership (US Dept of State, 2013). This aspect prevented Syria from entering a losses frame and allowed negotiations to continue.

These factors of prospect theory demonstrate Obama's initial severe risk acceptance due to a frame of perceived losses stemming from an aspirational reference point. Following cybernetic checks from the American people and legislative branch, Obama was able to marginally reduce his level of accepted risk. A dependence on deterrence theory was essential in motivating Obama's actions, and further explained his threats of risky military action. Although the end result was not aligned with Obama's initial proposal, the agreement achieved the goal of working to eliminate chemical weapons, punishing Syria, avoiding a military entanglement,

protecting their allies, and maintaining public support. However, these objectives were realized by Russia's proposition, undermining Obama's strategic influence.

Implications and Outcomes

The issue of time pressure was a major factor in determining the frame and magnitude of attitudes of Russia and the United States. In today's political environment, constant reporting and polling of public perceptions prompts more immediate actions from leaders. Russia's stalling tactics acted in negating the effect of time pressures and prevented immediate action. A longer time lapse before expected action weakens perceived threat, and allows for further information gathering, and development of a higher quality solution. Another factor that helped delay action was Obama's respect for Constitutional processes, which allowed for cybernetic controls on decision-making.

Comparison

I will compare these two conflicts by assessing the influences that national doctrine, deterrence theory, and framing have on the decision making process during these events. Finally, I will show how certain approaches can result in a more desirable outcomes for all parties and the greater realization of goals for certain players.

Doctrine

As evidenced by the focus of my analysis, the former Soviet Union and the United States continue to be driving world powers, even more than two decades after the culmination of the Cold War and the fall of the Berlin Wall. Over the course of around 70 years elapsed between the Six Day War and the Syria conflict, these superpowers have maintained decidedly consistent doctrines in relation to international conflicts in smaller nations, specifically Syria and the Middle East. The Soviet Union maintained a doctrine based on the "correlation of powers,"

which encouraged aggression and proaction until the point when Soviet interests were at a disadvantage. At this point of shift, Soviet leaders would accept a tactical retreat, in order to avoid a violent confrontation with the United States during the passively approached Civil War. Currently, Russian doctrine focuses on reserving military force for defense of itself and its interests, and preventing aggression by other states. These doctrines both show a preference for avoiding direct military conflict, a risk averse approach.

During the Six Day War, the United States upheld a policy of careful observation before decisive action or public declaration. The US also acted as the leader in action for other Western nations. Throughout the Cold War, the US was the prominent actor in Western policy and decision-making. They influenced the direction of international agreements, such as the 'land for peace' policy with Israel. Also, the Vietnam War represented an external foreign involvement that deterred the United States from undertaking another armed conflict. In the 2013 Syria crisis, the international community turned to the United States for an immediate response to the use of chemical weapons in Syria, and Obama provided a plan under the time pressure of this expectation. Countries such as Britain and France expressed their support and reservations about certain policies, but ultimately, the US had the power of decision, a precedent set by President George W. Bush in the second Iraq War. President Obama's immediate declaration of intent to take action was stifled by the American preference for first evaluating other courses of action, and ultimately Russia was responsible for the preferred solution. The US led the negotiation proceedings and forced its agenda of the inclusion of Chapter VII resolutions and the allowed implementation of sanctions in the agreement. Finally, external recent involvement in Iraq and Afghanistan created reluctance to enter a new foreign conflict. These two approaches are very

similar, and one can see how President Johnson and President Obama aimed to uphold the US foreign relations doctrine in their decision-making processes.

Framing

Through these examples, risk aversion emerges as the preferred frame in achieving a more desired outcome for all, and additionally, the risk averse actor tends to realize gains in excess of mere acceptability. In the Six Days War, the United States was able to realize their objectives of avoiding Soviet involvement and returning the region to a relatively stable state. They made gains in the deterioration of relationships between the Soviet Union and their Arab allies, Syria and Egypt. This also prevented the Soviet goal of a united Arab coalition, which would have been an extreme loss for the US. The 'land for peace' policy was a gain for the US, as it provided legitimacy for their ally, Israel. The final outcome of the Syria conflict in 2013 illustrates how Russian risk aversion allowed them to realize gains from their original reference point. The Russian leadership was able to avoid military action in the region, and maintain the power of the Assad regime in Syria, their close ally. They gained a positive reputation with the international community, receiving credit for offering a peaceful solution. This simultaneously harmed the reputation of Obama, by framing his proposition as rash and extreme. Russia was also able to realize, among other things, their shared goal with Western powers of beginning to reduce global weapons of mass destruction. Overall, the country in a gains frame ended up with a more acceptable outcome in terms of realizing objectives and making certain gains.

Despite a lack of quantitative data, relative actions and achievements can be used to judge the reference points, frames, and preferred outcomes of nations. As illustrated by the gap in time between these two engagements, prospect theory is an approach that can be applied to conflicts throughout history. The most imperative step in a prospect theory analysis is the

identification of initial reference points for each party, and whether they may be aspirational, or the current status quo. After this is solidified, the exploration becomes systematic and self-evident.

Deterrence Theory

Another theory that continued to emerge was deterrence theory. Especially in conflicts between the two major world influences, Russia and the United States, deterrence has become the default strategy. In fact, the entire Cold War could be cited as an example of a long-term run of deterrence. Although, since the dissipation of the Soviet Union, Russia has lost some influence and reverted to a more protective policy, the United States retains its military as a primary method of imposing its will around the world. The US holds over 600 declared military bases worldwide and spends more on its military than nearly *all* other countries combined (Cassidy, 2013). Despite the internal focus of the Obama administration, the United States continues to act as the enforcer of international law, particularly in terms of military involvements. This might strengthen any application of deterrence theory by future US leaders. However, it may prevent adequate searching for a diplomatic, or other solution.

Conclusion

The aim of this paper was to use the cornerstones of prospect theory to analyze two international conflicts: the Six Day War of 1967 and the Syria crisis of 2013. Building off a thorough research and explanation of prospect theory and other pertinent influential biases and theories, I was able to carefully analyze the motivations, actions, and outcomes of the former Soviet Union and the United States. Given the similar setting and external environment for each party, I was able to draw a comparison between the two events, and verify that prospect theory is valid for multiple historical contexts. My analysis also confirmed the assertion that a nation that

is in a gains frame, or risk averse, will achieve more optimal outcomes and accomplish their objectives. Whereas risk acceptance results in reduced rational thinking and analysis.

In carrying out an analysis using prospect theory, it is important to note the reference points, capabilities, sources, and credibility of each party. Information gathering about one's own position and that of one's opponent is key, and should be thorough, accurate and unbiased. In addition, it is important to note influences on the individual decision maker. The doctrine and policy of a national regarding foreign relations and military actions drive the actions of leaders, although my analysis revealed that interpretation of such doctrine can vary among leaders of a nation. Thus, it is important to consider the national doctrine, and further assess how the current leader may think to apply it. Public opinion also plays an important role in the actions of politicians, especially in a democracy. A decrease in public support is viewed as a personal loss for the leader, and a loss of power for the party, which makes them more risk acceptant in vying to regain reputation.

Time pressures create an environment of myopic thinking and truncated information searches, which can lead to blunders in assessments of situations. Time constraints are also influential in threat assessment. The more immediate a threat appears, the more certain it becomes to the recipient and vice versa. Immediacy leads to a suboptimal frame of loss. Stalling tactics can be used to combat this, as well as establishing cybernetic controls for self-regulation.

When analyzing the actions of the overall administration of a country, there are three major important resurfacing considerations. Firstly, all countries are ultimately self-serving and self-preserving in their actions and goals, despite outside alliances or previous indications otherwise. Secondly, war is always considered the risky option in a conflict between two states. Defection is recognized in game theory and deterrence as an equivalent to "failure" in the game.

Lastly, reputation is an asset that can be lost or gain, and thus induce loss aversion, causing leaders to feel obligated to carry through with proposed decisions to avoid a perception of weakness.

Finally, I have been able to obtain a reasonable future application of the knowledge gained from this analysis. The US proposed doctrine of 'land for peace' guided negotiations with Israeli and its Arab neighbors for many years following the Six Day War. I purport that now, the insistence of a Chapter VII resolution and sanction allowance in the Syrian agreement by the United States will create a precedent in allowing deterrence in diplomatic solutions to issues centered around weapons of mass destruction. This holds significant implications for current concerns in Iran, Lebanon, and North Korea.

Generally, conflict is caused by positive feedback loops that are internally focused and lacking outside intervention. Several factors can be used to prevent this: third-party checks on the situation and choices (such as the UN), necessary approval before decision making (Congress), and sufficient information gathering and verification (CIA). In addition, performing an analysis using prospect theory of one's opponent and oneself can help reduce negative effects, as becoming aware of a bias reduces its influence.

Overall, this analysis offered valuable insight into the decision-making processes of international leaders. However, like all academic applications, there is room for improvement. Finding a method of quantifying the preferences of nations would result in other interesting ways to evaluate prospect theory. Furthermore, access to classified documents and personal statements from the leaders may prove to give a far more complete view of their changing opinions and perceptions. These developments would aid in the accuracy of evaluations and predictions.

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