



Robert and John F. Kennedy in 1962 during the Cuban missile crisis.

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POLITICS AND CHOICE

The challenging subject of politics and choice underscores the intimate connection among values, facts, and judgment in the political arena. In this chapter, we examine five dramatic cases that illustrate the dimensions of choice in politics. These cases involve five crucial historical choices: (1) Socrates's choice not to flee Athens to avoid an unjust punishment, (2) James Madison's choice of a new political theory to guide in the creation of the American Constitution of 1787 and the federal republic it undergirds, (3) the choice of the citizens (and key leaders) of Germany to support Adolf Hitler in 1932 and 1933, (4) President John F. Kennedy's choice of a blockade to counter the Soviet Union's placement of offensive nuclear weapons in Cuba in the fall of 1962, and (5) President George W. Bush's choice to invade Iraq in 2003.

FIVE IMPORTANT THEMES

The cases presented in this chapter illustrate that choice in politics can be tragic, creative, perilous, and thoughtful. These examples enable us to see that it is not easy to choose what is right, to break through to a new political understanding, to bear the burden of freedom, or to select the least perilous alternative. As you read, ask yourself what you would have done in each situation.

Of course, these five cases are not exhaustive. The range of critical choices faced by American leaders are too numerous to list. However, a few might include Thomas Jefferson's decision to purchase the Louisiana Territory from France in 1803, Abraham Lincoln's decision to write and deliver the Emancipation Proclamation in 1863, the Allied decision to undertake the D-Day invasion of Europe in 1944, Harry Truman's

Chapter Learning Objectives

After studying this chapter, you will be able to do the following:

1. Identify five key themes in politics.
2. Discuss the theme of political obligation and the moral life.
3. Discuss Madison's struggle for a creative breakthrough resolving the tension between liberty and authority in political life.
4. Discuss the burden of freedom in political life.
5. Discuss the perils of choice in the nuclear age.
6. Recognize the value of accurate information and reasonable assumptions in political decision-making.

decision to drop the Atomic bombs on Hiroshima and Nagasaki, Japan, in 1945, George W. Bush's decision to invade Afghanistan in order to go after al-Qaida and the Taliban in the aftermath of the 9/11 attacks, and Barack Obama's decision to send Seal Team Six into Pakistan to capture or kill Osama Bin Laden. The case studies presented here invite special attention because they foster critical thinking about five important and perennial themes in politics.

The first case delves into the theme of political obligation. Why should we obey those who demand our allegiance in politics, particularly those who constitute our government? The second case explores the theme of creativity in politics. Is it possible, in theory and practice, to achieve a new ethical, empirical, and prudential understanding of politics? More specifically, can we devise new ways to reconcile liberty and authority?

The third case explores the theme of the responsible exercise of freedom. Can citizens respond sensibly to social, economic, and political crises? Are we strong enough to bear the burden of freedom? Are we mature enough to exercise freedom responsibly, or do we, under adverse conditions, abandon freedom for authoritarian rule?

The fourth case probes the theme of **power politics**. How do we work out sane, sound strategies and tactics in a nuclear age? Can we avert situations that call for agonizing choices that might lead to nuclear war? In times of crisis, can we choose courses of action that preserve our vital interests in peace, national security, and freedom?

The fifth case illustrates the way sound political judgment relies upon accurate information and reasonable assumptions in political decision-making. All students of politics must critically consider what is actually happening in the world and from those considerations derive sound assumptions with which to drive policy decisions. Furthermore, rarely are political decisions made on the basis of incomplete information. Politics by its nature deals to a certain degree with the unknown. But a healthy political world has leaders capable of using limited knowledge to make thoughtful decisions. Indeed, this is the basis of sound judgment.

Elaborating the Theme

Each case in this chapter develops one of these key themes, themes that recur throughout this book. Socrates, father of political philosophy in the West, initiates the critical examination of **political obligation**, a concept that explores why people obey or disobey those who demand their political allegiance, such as a government, a law, or a state. His views present a counterargument to those advanced by Henry David Thoreau in Chapter 1. It is a debate that persists today whenever a government's legitimacy is called into question—by American students who protested the Vietnam War, resisted the draft, or left their country in the late 1960s and early 1970s; by Polish members of Solidarity who protested or resisted martial law in their country or fled to avoid tyranny in 1982; by South Africans who opposed apartheid from 1948 to 1989; by Chinese students in Tiananmen Square who demonstrated for democratic reform in 1989; and by protesting Iranians who forced partial vote recounts in their country after accusations of fraud and corruption in the 2009 presidential election. More recently, in 2011, the Egyptian government of Hosni Mubarak was toppled by widespread popular

demonstrations and in that same year, citizens of Deraa, Syria began demonstrating against the Assad government demanding the release of political prisoners. Soon, the protests spread throughout the country, and Syria was plunged into civil war. And in early 2018, Iranians once again took the streets challenging their government over the issues of food and fuel prices and corruption. To explore the question of political obligation is to ask what makes a government legitimate—that is, what makes government lawful and entitled to obedience and respect?

Similarly, James Madison, father of the US Constitution, merits our study. He is one of America's most important political theorists—one who was willing to undertake an experiment in constitution-making that remains unfinished even today. He is a rare example of someone who thought at a very high level of political theory, put his thoughts into practice by helping to write the Constitution, and then served in the very real world of day-to-day politics as the United States' fourth president. His ideas help us to understand the formation of the American federal republic, which is the oldest constitutional democracy in the world. A study of Madison's guiding theory illustrates **political creativity**—the achievement in both theory and practice of a more fruitful, ethical, empirical, and prudential understanding of politics—at its best. The task of reconciling liberty and authority remains. It is a problem common to all nations, whether rich or poor; developing or developed; liberal democracy, democratic socialist state, or communist state.

We focus on the fateful choices German citizens made in 1932 and 1933 for several important reasons. Historically, we want to know more about the circumstances that permitted Hitler to attain power and to use that power to unleash World War II and its dreadful consequences. Who voted for Hitler and why? More generally, we want to know what produces **responsible citizenship**, which entails the sensible response of citizens to social, economic, and political tasks and problems. Can people really govern themselves successfully, particularly under adverse conditions? This question can be asked about authoritarian regimes on the left or the right, or about nations emerging from authoritarian rule (such as the republics of the former Soviet Union and the Eastern European nations now freed of communist domination as well as Spain, and Chile, which have thrown off right-wing dictatorships). This question can also be asked about the struggling developing nations of the world and even about supposedly mature democratic regimes in times of crisis.

The Cuban missile crisis merits attention because it brilliantly illuminates key aspects of power politics, or the political pattern of acquisition, preservation, and balancing of power characteristic of the competitive-conflictive behavior of the United States and the Soviet Union. In a world of nuclear weapons, it is important to understand how in 1962 the leaders of the two military superpowers—the United States and the Soviet Union—responded to political crisis. When political actions reached the stage of big-power confrontation in the nuclear age, the fate of the entire globe was at stake.

Finally, the 2003 decision by President George W. Bush to invade Iraq illustrates the dangers of making critical decisions on the basis of inaccurate information and faulty assumptions. Political actors can make decisions that from their perspective are wise and morally correct. But regardless of how “right” the decision may be, if the empirical basis upon which it is made is incorrect, the decision runs the risk of failure. Put simply, there is no substitute for accurate information and sound assumptions.

Values, Facts, and Judgment

By exploring these cases and the choices they involved, we discover the intimate relationship of values, facts, and judgment. For example, Socrates's choice is incomprehensible if we do not understand the high value he placed on his birth, education, and citizenship in the Greek polis (city-state). Of course, the unacceptable consequences of escape and life in exile also influenced his decision.

The second case shows that Madison's dedication to republican values of popular rule and basic rights, as well as to effective governance, clarified his quest for a breakthrough to our modern federal republic. Madison's was a **creative breakthrough**, which we define as a significantly fruitful resolution of a problem that conventional wisdom deems insoluble. His understanding of the accepted "facts"—that liberty is possible only in a small state or that a large country cannot be governed on republican principles—did not prevent him from challenging them and articulating a new empirical theory that enabled Americans to reconcile liberty and authority.

The third case depicts how adverse circumstances led Germans to seek political change to give meaning to values such as order, strength, prestige, and prosperity. Many Germans supported Hitler because they sympathized with Nazi promises to help Germany overcome economic depression, avoid the alleged communist menace, and recover from defeat in World War I.

President Kennedy's choice also illustrates the close connection among values, facts, and judgment. His choice in the Cuban missile crisis was dictated by the value of national security; at the same time, it was made agonizing by the danger of nuclear catastrophe if the Soviet Union refused to back down. Key facts—especially the military estimate that a "surgical" air strike could not guarantee the destruction of all Soviet missiles—led him to endorse a blockade, which permitted a firm response and gave the Soviet Union time to reconsider its bold gamble yet held open more militant options if the Soviet Union refused to withdraw its offensive weapons.

Finally, the decision made by President Bush to send thousands of men and women to war in Iraq was one of two military reactions to the 9/11 attacks, the first being the invasion of Afghanistan. As in the case of the Cuban missile crisis, the value of national security seemed to be at stake. America had been directly attacked. But was it a sound decision? Were the empirical facts upon which it was based and rationalized accurate? Without accurate information, the ability to make sound political judgments is severely limited. All of these cases illustrate the intimate connection among values, facts, and judgment.

SOCRATES AND THE MORAL LIFE: POLITICAL OBLIGATION IN ANCIENT ATHENS

The story of Socrates's life and teachings comes to us primarily in the writings of Plato, Socrates's devoted student. Here we focus on the very end of the great teacher's life.

Socrates's Choice

Socrates has been accused of corrupting the youth of Athens and of not believing in the gods. He vigorously denies both charges. He maintains that he is being falsely accused because of his relentless probing of ignorance and pretension among people of repute—particularly rhetoricians, poets, and artisans. This mission, ordained by God, has gotten him into trouble because those who pretend to be wise do not like having their folly exposed.

Socrates sees himself as a “gadfly,” “arousing,” “persuading,” “reproaching,” “exhorting ... to ... virtue.” He has tried to teach his students to put “virtue and wisdom” before their “private interests.” He cannot hold his tongue because “this would be a disobedience to a divine command.” And he cannot abandon his mission out of fear of death “or any other fear.” He cannot give up teaching about the care of the soul. He has never yielded to injustice in either public or private life. His “only fear was the fear of doing an unrighteous or unholy thing.” He has taught virtue for its own sake, not for the sake of money. He believes in a higher divinity: “Men of Athens, I honor and love you; but I shall obey God rather than you, and while I have life and strength I shall never cease from the practice and teaching of philosophy.”¹

When he is condemned to die by drinking hemlock, a poison, Socrates refuses to bargain for his life by asking for exile, a stiff fine, or imprisonment. He proposes as his proper punishment that which is his due—his maintenance at public expense! Why should he plead for his life when he cannot be sure that life is better than death? Imprisonment, as a punishment, is intolerable because it is a kind of slavery. He cannot pay a stiff fine because he has no money. Exile, too, is unthinkable: “What a life should I lead at my age, wandering from city to city, living in ever-changing exile, and always being driven out!” On the urging of his friends, he proposes a minuscule fine as punishment.

Socrates does not regret his defense—his “apology.” He departs “condemned ... to suffer the penalty of death.” However, Socrates firmly believes those who have condemned him to death will suffer more—“condemned by the truth to suffer the penalty of villainy and wrong.”

Crito, one of Socrates's disciples, comes to him in jail with a proposal to bribe the guards and permit him to escape. Crito does not want to lose a dear friend, nor does he want people to think that he did not do enough to save his mentor's life. Appreciative of Socrates's sensibilities, he argues that Socrates should not play into the hands of his enemies. Crito points out that people will respect and love Socrates in exile; that he should not betray his own children, who need him for their education; and that escape will not be disgraceful. Crito knows that he has to make a strong argument to convince Socrates, for at his trial Socrates had already given signs that he would accept his punishment. Socrates had argued that he must always do what is right, that he cannot do anything “common or mean” in his hour of danger; that he would find exile unacceptable and unrewarding, particularly if he could not carry on his mission of critical inquiry; that his death was a meaningful choice; and that his oracle had opposed neither his behavior at the trial nor the verdict of his death.

Socrates responds to Crito's entreaty by arguing the key question: “The only question ... is ... whether we shall do rightly either in escaping or in suffering others to aid in our escape.” He cannot intentionally injure others; he cannot “render evil for evil to any one, whatever evil [he] may have suffered.” In escaping, would he desert the just principles by which he has lived?



Socrates was executed in 399 BC by the Athenian authorities because of his incessant criticisms of Athenian democracy. Despite being condemned to death, he was unwilling to abandon his city or his friends. Socrates was willing to die for his beliefs, and thus, he offers an example of a man of principle and civic loyalty. Jacques-Louis David, *The Death of Socrates*, 1787.

fulfillment in citizenship. By his life, growth, and fulfillment in the political community, he has undertaken a contractual agreement that he cannot now violate by escaping. He cannot disobey his parents, “the authors of his education,” nor can he disavow his own agreement to obey the commands of the polis—especially when he has not been able to convince the political community that its commands are wrong. He must choose death over banishment; he could not be a “miserable slave,” “running away and turning [his] back upon the compacts and agreements [he] made as a citizen.” Having been born and having lived and enjoyed citizenship in the political community, Socrates cannot now repudiate that community.

Moreover, Socrates’s escape would harm his friends and children and bring him no peace in exile. His friends would lose their property and citizenship and be driven into exile as well. Other good cities would view Socrates as an “enemy,” a “subverter of the laws.” And he would find no happiness in fleeing from “well-ordered cities and virtuous men.” If he lived in disordered cities, could he, having turned his back on his own principles, talk of “virtue and justice and institutions and laws being the best things among men”? Would he deprive his children of Athenian citizenship?

And so, Socrates concludes the argument he has made for law-abiding Athenians and against his escape. Law-abiding Athenians will say the following:

Now you depart in innocence, a sufferer and not a doer of evil; a victim, not of the laws, but of men. But if you go forth, returning evil for evil, and injury for injury, breaking the covenants and agreements which you have made with us, and wronging those whom you ought least to wrong, that is to say, yourself, your friends, your country, and us, we shall be angry with you while you live, and our brothers, the laws in the world below, will receive you as an enemy; for they will know that you have done your best to destroy us.

Socrates’s choice not to escape illuminates the problem of political obligation and this key question: Why should we obey the political community that makes claims on our allegiance? Socrates’s answer is that because of the contribution that the political community makes to our life, growth, and fulfillment, we are required to obey its laws. He argues that if we cannot persuade the political community that its laws are wrong, we are obligated to obey them.

Questioning Socrates's Choice

Socrates's view, of course, is only one view of political obligation. Thoreau's position, discussed in Chapter 1, represents another view. Thoreau argued that we have no obligation to obey a government that violates a higher law and engages in outrageously immoral action such as aggressive war or human slavery.

The American revolutionaries of 1776 articulated yet another position on political obligation. They held that when a government violates the trust that brought it into being; when it persistently violates the right to life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness; and when it is not responsive to redress of grievances, the people have a right to revolt and overthrow such a government and establish a new one, based on their consent and dedicated to the protection of their rights. This position rests upon the premise that we owe obedience only to governments of our own making that protect our basic rights and, pursuant to our will, advance life, growth, and fulfillment.

Critical minds will raise questions for Socrates (held to be one of the wisest, most just, and best of human beings), for Thoreau (as we saw in Chapter 1), and even for the authors of the American Declaration of Independence. For example, do we uncritically accept Socrates's statement that "whether in battle or in a court of law" we "must do" as our country orders? Do we accept that "punishment is to be endured in silence"? Even in battle, following orders is no legitimate excuse for violating international law or for committing war crimes, genocide, or other crimes against humanity. Moreover, is there no obligation to speak out against unjust punishment? Some would argue (as did Martin Luther King Jr. and many others—including Socrates—in a long tradition of obedience to a higher law) that to endure injustice in silence is to perpetuate injustice.

Even the theory of political obligation enshrined in the Declaration of Independence has its difficulties. We know that Thomas Jefferson intentionally left certain phrases in the Declaration vague so that people could read into what they believed. How do we more precisely define those "unalienable rights" to life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness that are to be protected by a government? What conditions justify our conclusion that government is destroying those rights? How do we understand the "consent of the governed" from which "just powers" derive?

African Americans were denied liberty, often life, and certainly the pursuit of happiness when they were enslaved in the United States and then treated as second-class citizens after emancipation. Even today, they are not treated with genuine equality in all respects. The recent rise of the Black Lives Matter (BLM) movement has both led to, and reflected, a much needed national discussion about racism and the more fundamental question of just who counts as we in "we the people". In 2019, *The New York Times* began the 1619 Project, a long form journalistic effort to document the lasting effects of slavery throughout all of American history. These efforts generated a wide variety of intense responses—ranging from a full endorsement, to tentative support, to scholarly counter criticism to vitriolic hatred.

Women in the United States have also been fighting a long battle for genuine equality. Given this record of unequal treatment, do African Americans and women have the same obligation to obey the government as others? How was this question changed, if at all, in the wake of the election of Barack Obama? What about other mistreated minorities? In the wake of 9/11, many Muslim Americans have felt the sting of

discrimination as the United States confronts terrorism that now springs from a small subset of Islam. If we extend our democratic theory of obligation—that is, obedience

in return for fulfillment of basic rights—to include the right to education, a job, or adequate health care and housing, then the uneducated, the unemployed, the sick, and the homeless may have less of an obligation to obey the government than the educated, wealthy, and well housed. This theory of obligation certainly provides food for thought.

These critical inquiries are disquieting, but they make us see that our judgment about obligation cannot be separated from our evaluation of whether a government is legitimate, whether it honors our rights, and whether it is truly based on the consent of the governed. Depending on their values and their assessment of the facts, different observers may reach different conclusions about political obligation. The young Americans who refused to fight in Vietnam had a different sense of obligation than those who did. African Americans who refused to accept racial segregation in buses, restaurants, movie theaters, and schools had a different sense of obligation than did those who went along with “separate but equal” legislation.

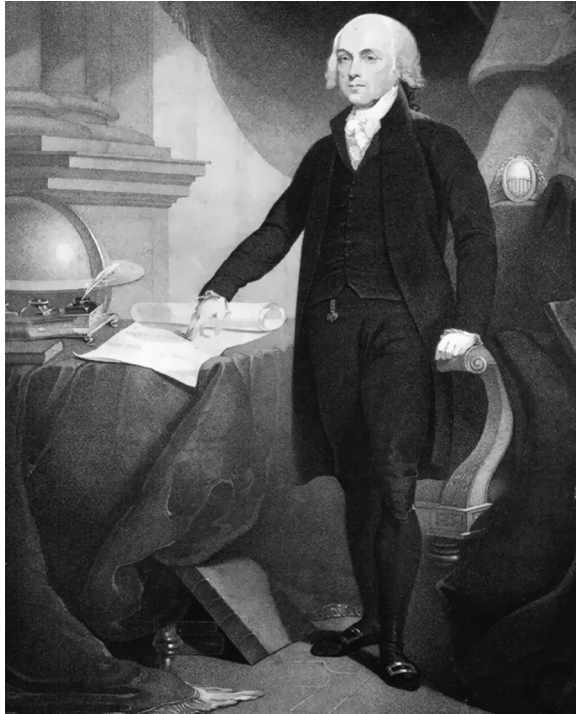
Clearly, an individual’s respect for his or her political community—and responsibility to

the government—can be interpreted in different ways, and these interpretations are closely related to how the interpreter balances values, ascertains circumstances, and weighs alternatives. James Madison and the constitutional reformers of 1787, for example, felt obligated to disobey the instructions from their states to simply amend the flawed Articles of Confederation that had governed the nation since 1781. In the very interest of improving the young republican union, they drafted a constitution with striking new powers. They undertook what some people consider to be a contradiction in terms—a “peaceful revolution.”

MADISON, THE NEW REPUBLIC, AND FEDERAL THEORY: THE STRUGGLE FOR A CREATIVE BREAKTHROUGH IN MODERN POLITICS

James Madison’s choice in 1787 was not as simple as Socrates’s. Madison’s choice represents a theoretical and practical response to a more complicated problem. Between

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James Madison, one of the authors of the US Constitution and the fourth president of the United States, was famous for his ability to rethink how republican governments work. Before Madison, it was believed that republics could exist only in small political communities—geographically large and culturally diverse republics like the current United States were inconceivable.

1776 and 1783, the Americans had fought a revolution to achieve independence as a new nation. But could the new nation hold together? Could the Articles of Confederation, adopted in 1781, cope with four major difficulties that plagued the infant republic: disunion, large size, **faction**, and the antirepublican danger?² Would it be enough to patch the Articles of Confederation? Or was a more fundamental change required? And how far should radical reform go?³

The Problem: Reconciling Liberty and Authority

These questions led Madison to formulate his key problem as follows: How can we reconcile liberty and authority in a large state? This problem would dominate Madison's thinking throughout his life. It certainly dominated his thoughts and actions in 1787 and 1788 as he battled to draft and win support for a new Constitution. It also influenced key decisions he made in the 1790s in his fight against rich, powerful forces that were unsympathetic to popular interests and to a more generous protection of democratic rights. And, finally, it dominated Madison's thinking and writing in the late 1820s and mid-1830s as he fought the growing forces of nullification and secession. These forces held that a state could nullify an act of the national government and could even secede from the Union that was the United States. (As we will see, these battles in the 1790s and later throw considerable light on the meaning of political obligation.)

Madison's values and the facts of American geography significantly shaped his problem. Madison was strongly committed to popular government and human freedom in a new and large American nation that required power and authority for survival. Madison's problem was most troublesome because the conventional wisdom of his day declared that it was impossible to reconcile liberty and authority in a large state. Large states, such as the United States, must be ruled by monarchs who would necessarily limit personal freedom.

According to conventional wisdom, republican government (based on self-government and liberty) was possible only in a small political community—for example, a city-state such as Athens, Florence, Venice, or Geneva. A large state could be governed only by a monarch or a despot—rulers incompatible with self-government and liberty. How, then, were Americans to deal with this dilemma? Could American republicans have the best of two seemingly contradictory worlds? Could they have self-government and liberty in a republic and also enjoy legitimate power, order, and security in a country as large as the United States?

Other politicians had refused to face up to the problem because they believed it to be insoluble. Patrick Henry and the other Anti-Federalists, who were opposed to the new Constitution of 1787, argued that republican government is possible only in a small political community—this is what traditional political theory had taught for centuries. They did not lift their sights beyond the loose political alliance of the Articles of Confederation. They rejected the desirability of a greatly strengthened central government. On the other side of the political spectrum, men like Alexander Hamilton, who supported the movement for a new and stronger Constitution, initially maintained that only an empire or a strong central government based on the British

model could hold together a political community as large as the new American nation. Confederations, they insisted, were notoriously weak, unstable, and detrimental to the interests of justice. Thus, while Henry and his friends argued that great strength in a central government jeopardized republican self-government and republican liberty, Hamilton and his friends held that in the small political community, faction, or a self-interested subgroup, prevailed and jeopardized both the public good and a strong national union.

Neither Henry nor Hamilton challenged the accepted political science of his day or perceived that the traditional understanding of how to reconcile liberty and authority (in the large expanse of the new United States) had to be reexamined. Only Madison challenged the conventional wisdom and was bold enough to look at the problem in a new light and to ask if a new political theory—that of a federal republic—suggested a way out.

Madison's Solution

Madison's theory of the **extensive republic**, the term he used to describe a federal republic governing a large territory, constituted a creative breakthrough in political thought because he proposed that Americans could work out a new synthesis. They could have liberty, self-government, and justice at the local level of state government and also have a powerful central government able to protect the common interests of the whole Union—but only by adopting the model of the new Constitution of 1787. This new federal model allowed the states to control their local affairs while giving the new central government authority in matters concerning all members of the Union. For good measure, the new federal republic operated to control the effects of faction. The Constitution created a central authority—the new federal government—that rested more legitimately on popular consent and the Union's component states yet possessed greater strength than any confederation in history.

The features of the American federal republic are well known today, but in 1787, they constituted a creative breakthrough in governmental theory and practice. The federal republic had such unique features as the division and sharing of powers among Congress, the president, and the Supreme Court; constitutional limitations on national and state governments; a national government with significant powers operating directly on the people; and a strong chief executive. The breakthroughs, moreover, occurred on three fronts.

Ethically, Madison's theory (particularly as fully developed in the 1790s) included broadened concepts of liberty, self-government, pluralist democracy, and the good political life. More specifically, Madison advocated modern principles of religious liberty; freedom of speech, press, and assembly, and other constitutional protections of liberty; an explicit acceptance of interests, parties, and public opinion in the process of self-government; and a more enlightened idea of popular rule, governmental power, and national union.

Empirically, Madison's theory of the extensive republic was designed to explain how Americans could enjoy the best (and escape the worst) of two worlds: how they could enjoy liberty without fear of anarchy and the adverse effects of faction, and how they

could enjoy authority without fear of tyranny and the adverse effects of an overly powerful central government. The existence of many different interests in the geographically large political community—farmers, merchants, bankers, and workers—would make it difficult for any one interest to achieve power and work against the public interest. Thus, the negative aspects of factions would be limited and the public good could be achieved.

The large republic would necessitate representation, which would filter the possible evil effects of faction. People would not determine policy in one great mass meeting (where they might easily be inflamed by demagogues). Rather, they would select leaders to represent them. Presumably, these leaders would be chosen because of their virtue, character, and intelligence, and they would, in turn, meet with other comparably chosen representatives to make law. This process would make it difficult for factional interests—interests opposed to the public good—to prevail.

Constitutional limitations on power and the separation of powers were “auxiliary precautions” that would help reconcile liberty and authority in the new republic. Congress would have broad, but not unlimited, powers to tax and spend, to regulate interstate commerce, and to attend to other designated objectives. But a wide range of powers would remain with the states. Moreover, the power given to the central government would not be concentrated in one organ or person; rather, it would be divided among Congress, the president, and the Supreme Court.

In addition, as Madison was to emphasize in the 1790s (in his battle against the alleged plutocratic, antirepublican policies of the Hamiltonian-led Federalist Party), a loyal republican and constitutional opposition party would guard against tyranny at the center. Several factors would protect against the evils of monarchy, plutocracy, and tyranny in the central government and against antirepublicanism and anarchy in the component states: (1) the constitutional operation of majority rule; (2) a sound public opinion, based upon a free press; (3) a healthy two-party system; (4) the federal judiciary; and (5) wise statesmanship that could distinguish between usurpation, abuse, and unwise use of constitutional power. Given the assumptions of this theory, the central government could safely exercise generous and necessary republican power.

Prudentially, Madison’s theory constituted sound political judgment on a number of crucial matters not only in 1787 but in the 1790s and later in the 1820s and 1830s. In 1787, Madison saw the need to strengthen the powers of the central government. He wisely insisted on a new federal system that would do a better job of reconciling liberty and authority. The new federal government would be necessarily strong but it would be designed in such a way as to make it unlikely that power was tyrannical. He refused to listen to naysayers who denied the possibility of republican government in an extensive country. And he was willing to settle for a central government that was not as strong as he had wanted because he perceived that the Constitution of 1787 was at least a major step in the right direction. Guided by his political theory, Madison articulated key features of the new federal republic in Philadelphia in 1787 and defended the Constitution effectively in the *Federalist* and at the Virginia Ratifying Convention. After the adoption of the Constitution in 1789, he authored the Bill of Rights and supported other key legislation to shore up the Constitution. In the 1790s, he led a constitutional opposition

party when he became unhappy with the Alien and Sedition Acts and other Federalist legislation. Finally, at the end of his long life, he defended the Union against the advocates of nullification and secession.

Madison took issue with the Sedition Act because it labeled as seditious (stirring up discontent, resistance, or rebellion against the government in power) any hard-hitting criticism, in speech or publication, of the government. For Madison, such criticism was essential to republican government—government based on popular consent and the protection of basic rights. Indeed, Madison maintained criticism was an obligation of good citizenship.

Nullification and secession were different matters. The Union would be destroyed if single states could nullify national legislation or withdraw from the Union at will. Either action would mean the end of republican government. Nullification and secession could only lead to tyranny and anarchy. Such actions would defeat the creative endeavor to reconcile liberty and authority in a large political community. States had an obligation to abide by majority rule in the national government and to use the US Constitution to seek necessary changes.

Continuing Efforts to Reconcile Liberty and Authority

Madison's republican and federal theory of 1787 constituted a generally successful guide to prudent action throughout his lifetime. His theory demonstrated that Americans could wisely reconcile liberty and authority in a large state. When Americans deviated from this theory, they encountered grave difficulties. The most serious was the American Civil War—civil war being perhaps the worst difficulty that can occur within a political community. Madison's theory illustrates great creativity in politics; the American Civil War represents the failure of politics as a civilizing activity.

The search for new approaches to such persistent problems as the reconciliation of liberty and authority continues, and it occurs all over the globe. This search is apparent in the countries that made up the former Soviet Union. Comparable efforts to reconcile liberty and authority are going on in other central and Eastern European countries as they painfully attempt to achieve constitutional democracy.

Many developing countries in Asia, Africa, and Latin America also struggle to reconcile liberty and authority, often under adverse circumstances. Such struggles can be seen in Cambodia (Kampuchea), the Democratic Republic of the Congo, El Salvador, Indonesia, Lebanon, Liberia, Nicaragua, the Philippines, Russia, Sierra Leone, and South Africa. Many of these countries have suffered the agonies of civil war or acute internal discord.

Will troubled countries be successful in their efforts to reconcile liberty and authority? Can they achieve breakthroughs in politics comparable to Madison's? Such breakthroughs are rare, but the Madisonian example does hold out hope for such countries, and it may stimulate political scientists in their search for creative breakthroughs in politics.

We now turn to another case, which illuminates the burden of choice under adverse circumstances. If Socrates's decision illustrates the tragedy of choice and Madison's

illustrates the creative opportunity of choice, then the decision of German citizens in 1932 and 1933 highlights the burden and disastrous consequences of choice.

THE GERMAN CITIZEN AND THE NAZI REGIME: CAN MODERN CITIZENS BEAR THE BURDEN OF FREEDOM?

Freedom is defined as power over one's own destiny. Interpreted negatively, it represents the absence of restraints; interpreted positively, it represents the ability to fulfill peaceful and creative potentialities. The use of the words negative and positive in regard to freedom is not meant as implying an ethical judgment. **Negative freedom**, for instance, does not mean freedom is bad; rather, it means that we are most free when there is nothing restraining us from acting. In this case, the restraining force is usually seen as the government. But it could be other large powerful institutions. Negative freedom can simply mean that the government is not doing much to oppose what you want to do. **Positive freedom** means that you are capable of acting on your potential and government might have a role to play in helping you act on that potential. For example, let's say you appear to be fairly intelligent but you just don't want to learn. You want to sit on the ground all day and watch the clouds. Are you truly free? To those who are most concerned with negative freedom, yes, you are free if there is nothing stopping you from doing just that. For those who ascribe to a positive theory of freedom, you have not developed your potential, and you have no way of judging what more you could achieve in life. You don't know enough to know if your choice to watch the clouds is a good one. For those who think about the idea of freedom, this distinction between negative and positive freedom is an important philosophical question that often leads to debates about what role government should have in fostering free society.

Choice presupposes freedom. And freedom, to be most defensible, requires responsible judgment. But during times of stress, responsible judgment is not always easy. Does the average citizen, especially under difficult circumstances, have the common sense, virtue, wisdom, and strength to choose responsibly? Can we trust the people to make the right choices?

Plato, Socrates's greatest pupil, was skeptical. After all, the people had condemned his beloved teacher to death. Aristotle, Plato's greatest pupil, was also suspicious of Greek democracy, which he understood as rule by the people in their own selfish interest. He argued that only in a polity (which we translate as a constitutional democracy) would popular rule be safe. A polity, he maintained, would be most secure when it rested upon a strong, virtuous, well-educated, prosperous middle class. But what happens when such a middle class does not exist?

Suspicion of the people has endured. In the nineteenth century, the French diplomat, political scientist, and historian, Alexis de Tocqueville, saw democracy as providential and inevitable. The United States, he felt, illustrated the future. Yet, he worried about democratic despotism. Given a favorable Old World inheritance, a



AP Photo

The political and economic chaos of the 1920s and 1930s made some people believe that individual freedom of expression was dangerous. Adolf Hitler's appeal was based in part on the rejection of intellectual freedom and cultural diversity. Here members of the Nazi youth are shown burning books in Salzburg, Austria, on April 30, 1938.

by a long tradition of British liberty and by Britain's relative stability and prosperity in the nineteenth century. But, again, how would democracy work in the absence of favorable circumstances?

In the case at hand—Germany in 1932 and 1933—we will focus primarily on the voters who chose the Nazi Party and Adolf Hitler. What circumstances led to their choice? How many, in fact, supported the Nazis and why? We will also ask what other choices—by leaders, voters, and even anti-Nazi forces—contributed to Hitler's triumph. Our treatment will again underscore the interrelationship of values, facts, and judgment.

The Situation in Germany

First, we must examine the adverse circumstances that existed in Germany at the time. From 1919 to 1932, Germany struggled to make democracy work under the least favorable conditions. In Germany, unlike in Great Britain or the United States, constitutional democracy had not put down firm roots before World War I. The new German republic—known as the Weimar Republic because its constitution had been proclaimed in the city of Weimar in 1919—was ushered into the world under severe difficulties. Germany had lost World War I (1914–1918), during which 1,744,000 of its soldiers had been killed and 225,000 of its civilians had died. Economic distress was rampant. The Weimar Republic struggled in the early and mid-1920s to cope with postwar reparations, inflation, and depression. Its modest successes after 1925 were seriously jeopardized by the Great Depression, which began in Germany in 1928. Bad times affected almost every segment of German society: industry, small business, labor, agriculture, and civil service. In a nation of 60 million, 6–8 million were unemployed. Farmers revolted; small business owners and craftspeople feared destruction.

favorable New World environment, and creative statesmanship (illustrated, for example, in the work of people such as Madison and other founders), the United States might make democracy work. But what of countries that lacked these favorable conditions?

John Stuart Mill, in nineteenth-century Great Britain, also worried about the tyranny of the majority. However, he maintained that a sound constitutional, representative government—with excellent political and intellectual leadership—could preserve liberty. His fundamental confidence, despite misgivings, was reinforced

From the beginning, the Weimar Republic lacked broad support. Nationalists, National Socialists (Nazis), and reactionary liberals attacked from the right. Communists attacked from the left. The attacks intensified in the early 1930s, and the center (the Weimar coalition of the Social Democrats, which was a center-left party, the Catholic Center Party, and the Democratic Party) did not hold together. The Democratic Party disintegrated. The Catholic Center Party governed ineffectively in the crucial years from 1930 to 1932. And as one historian noted, the Social Democrats and Communists “devoted far more energy to fighting each other than to the struggle against the growing threat of National Socialism.”⁴ The Nazis played on the fear of communism and falsely accused the Social Democrats of being responsible for the defeat of 1918, the Treaty of Versailles, inflation, and other German ills. The Nazis condemned the ineffectiveness of the center parties.

Hitler shrewdly took advantage of Germany’s disarray to encourage the German people to escape from responsible freedom to a regime of miracle, mystery, and authority. He promised miraculous results that would endure for 1,000 years. The German people had only to follow his authority to see the payoff in jobs for unemployed workers, profits for suffering industrialists, self-respect for an alienated middle class, and power and prestige for a defeated army. The people were not, however, to inquire closely into the mystery whereby the Nazis would accomplish the miracle of the thousand-year Reich.

How many Germans actively supported the Nazis? And how did this support contribute to Hitler’s ascent to power? In 1928, only 2.6 percent of the total vote went to the Nazi Party. This figure rose to 18.3 percent in 1930 and to a high of 37.3 percent in the first 1932 election. In the second 1932 election, which was the last free election under the Weimar Republic, the Nazi vote actually fell to 33.1 percent. However, because the left was split (the left-of-center Social Democrats receiving 20.4 percent and the Communists 16.9 percent of the vote), the Nazis emerged with the single largest party vote. The Catholic Center Party had maintained its percentage (16.2), but the other middle-class parties had disintegrated. Even after January 30, 1933, when Hitler was appointed chancellor, the Nazi vote in the spring 1933 election came to 43.9 percent, not a clear majority.⁵

Hitler’s appeal was reflected in the first presidential election held in March of 1932, when he polled 11,339,446 votes, or 30.1 percent. Paul von Hindenburg, Germany’s leading general in World War I, received 18,657,497 votes, or 49.6 percent. The Communist Party candidate, Ernst Thaelmann, received 13.2 percent, and Theodore Duestenberg, a right-wing candidate, 6.8 percent. On the second ballot in April, the candidates received the following percentage of votes: Hindenburg, 53.0; Hitler, 36.8; and Thaelmann, 10.2.⁶

The rise of the Nazis led President Hindenburg, at the urging of right-wing, conservative advisers—especially his former chancellor, Franz von Papen—to offer Hitler the chancellorship. (The chancellor in Weimar Germany was the equivalent of the British prime minister.) Hindenburg and Papen believed that a cabinet of conservatives would be able to control the policies that Hitler would sell to the country through his party and its propaganda machine. This decision proved to be a fateful mistake.

But how had Nazi strength increased to the point that President Hindenburg and his advisers felt it necessary to bring Hitler in as chancellor? Why did people vote for the

Nazis? The choice of Hitler was catastrophic; it doomed German democracy, brought on World War II, made the Holocaust possible, and split Germany into two parts from 1945 to 1990.

“The ideal-typical Nazi voter,” wrote Seymour Martin Lipset in *Political Man*, “was a middle-class, self-employed Protestant who lived either on a farm or in a small community, and who had previously voted for a centrist or regionalist political party strongly opposed to the power and influence of big business and big labor.”⁷ Obviously, those who voted for the Nazis had other common characteristics as well. The Nazis drew some support from every large group of voters. They had success with the middle-class unemployed and with conservative and nationalist voters on Germany’s eastern borders. The Nazis also received above-average support from male voters and from younger voters. In general, however, according to Lipset, Nazi votes came “disproportionately from the ranks of the center and liberal parties rather than from the conservatives.”

The Nazis were weakest among laborers, residents of big cities, Catholics, women, and older voters. Lipset noted, “With the exception of a few isolated individuals, German big business gave Nazism little financial support or other encouragement until it had risen to the status of a major party. ... On the whole, however, this group remained loyal to the conservative parties, and many gave no money to the Nazis until after the party won power.”⁸

So the heart of Nazi strength was the middle class: small businessmen, small farmers, the self-employed, white-collar workers, civil servants, and inhabitants of small towns. These voters were hostile to big industry, big cities, big unions, and big banks, as well as to the Versailles treaty, Communists, and Jews. Nazi supporters felt threatened by a loss of their status, by liberal values, and by economic depression.⁹ They were threatened by key developments of modern society. As David Schoenbaum has noted in *Hitler’s Social Revolution*, the Nazis drew on a longing for security, a common hostility to the existing order, and a universal desire for change.¹⁰

It is extremely important to emphasize that the middle class was not alone in its inability to bear the burden of responsible choice. Choices made by other segments of the German population also paved the way for Hitler. For example, there was the conservatives’ disastrous decision to persuade Hindenburg to offer Hitler the chancellorship, as well as the poor policy choices of the Catholic Center Party and its leader, Heinrich Brüning, chancellor from 1930 to 1932. Brüning’s deflationary policies (designed to decrease the amount of money in circulation, with a resultant increase in the value of money and a fall in prices) were very unpopular. Many scholars believe that his attempts to govern by decree undermined German democracy. In addition, the Social Democrats were unable to devise a strategy to stop Hitler. German Communists made fateful choices to work against the Social Democrats and thus divided working-class support for the Weimar Republic. Moreover, some army generals (Erich Ludendorff was the most notorious) supported the Nazis early on; others, closing their eyes to Nazi domestic politics and dreaming of the rebirth of German military power, gave their allegiance to Hitler after he became chancellor and then president. Industrialists, fearful of bolshevism and disorder and longing for profits and prosperity through armament sales, also decided, early or late, to support the Nazis. Thus, in one way or another, many Germans proved unable to exercise freedom responsibly.

Lessons of the Nazi Experience

The Nazi experience illuminates the problem of political obligation and the failure of creativity in politics as well as the difficulty of bearing the burden of freedom under adverse conditions. Too few people in Germany were dedicated strongly enough to the Weimar Republic and to democratic values. The Nazi right and the Communist left clearly sought the demise of liberal democracy in Germany. The parties committed to the Weimar Republic—especially the Social Democrats and the Catholic Center—were uncreative and ineffective. Unquestionably, unsettled social and economic conditions led to the poor political decisions that jeopardized German democracy. The Communists hoped that they would come to power with the collapse of the Weimar Republic. The Nazis used the fear of communism to rally support for their cause. Democratic forces were unable to unite effectively and rally the majority of Germans to their side.

The Nazi experience raises the following question: Which values, which circumstances, and which leadership judgments make the responsible exercise of freedom possible—and probable? This question is particularly troubling in many developing nations, especially the younger countries of Asia and Africa. People there may despair of finding democratic solutions for internal strife, poverty, unemployment, and loss of international respect, and may look for authoritarian rulers and solutions. They, too, may seek escape to a regime of “miracle, mystery, and authority.”

Comparable difficulties also face many Latin American countries. These nations have longer histories of independence but often lack the social, economic, and political conditions that make for successful democratic and constitutional government. The record of the new regimes in Eastern Europe and the former Soviet Union is a mixed one. Some, like Poland and the Czech Republic, appear to be making successful transitions to democracy, while Russia’s and Hungary’s democratic record is less clear. Even where some form of democracy is evident, it is often associated with a very illiberal version of democracy. Thus, leaders like Viktor Oban, in Hungary, claim to speak for the people and may very well support democratic processes. But the commitment to rights and respecting individual freedom is weakened. There are similar concerns in Poland. Is it possible for such countries to create conditions of peace, human rights, prosperity, and self-esteem that will ease the burden of freedom and facilitate democratic, constitutional, and humane governance?

We now turn to critical decision-making in another period of crisis.

JOHN F. KENNEDY AND THE CUBAN MISSILE CRISIS: THE PERILS OF CHOICE IN THE NUCLEAR AGE

On Tuesday, October 16, 1962, at 8:45 a.m., McGeorge Bundy, the special assistant for national security affairs, informed President John F. Kennedy, “Mr. President, there is now hard photographic evidence ... that the Russians have offensive missiles in Cuba.”¹¹ This disturbing news presented Kennedy with the most difficult choice of his presidency.

He convened a small group of top-level advisers to help him decide on an appropriate response. The news was especially troubling because the Soviet Union had previously stated that it would not place offensive nuclear weapons in Cuba and that any weapons supplied to Cuba were defensive. Despite Soviet insistence, there had been rumors and charges that the Soviets were “up to something” unusual in Cuba. And in late August, the Central Intelligence Agency had reported that “something new and different” was under way. What did those late-summer Soviet shipments to Cuba indicate?

Although in early September the president did not have hard evidence of offensive weapons in Cuba, he had warned that the “gravest issues would arise” if such evidence were found. At his September 13 press conference, he had declared that new Soviet shipments to Cuba did not constitute a serious threat, but he warned that if Cuba were to “become an offensive military base of significant capacity for the Soviet Union, then this country will do whatever must be done to protect its own security and that of its allies.” With evidence of the missiles’ arrival, Kennedy felt betrayed. He felt as if his efforts to work toward a more peaceful world had been compromised.

Considering the Alternatives

The Executive Committee of the National Security Council—or ExCom, as the president’s group of advisers came to be known—met at 11:45 that Tuesday morning to consider a response. They explored six major alternatives. The United States could (1) do nothing, (2) engage in diplomacy, (3) secretly approach Cuban leader Fidel Castro, (4) blockade Cuba, (5) launch a surgical air attack, or (6) invade Cuba. ExCom operated with the knowledge that the Soviet missiles would be on their launch pads and ready for firing within ten days.

“On the first Tuesday morning the choice for a moment seemed to lie between the air strike or acquiescence—and the president had made clear that acquiescence was impossible,” historian Arthur M. Schlesinger observed. The argument for doing nothing was based on the view that the Soviets’ ability to strike the United States from Cuba made little difference, given America’s vulnerability to missiles already stationed in the Soviet Union. Doing nothing would prevent escalation and avert the danger of overreaction and an eventual nuclear catastrophe. Playing it cool would deprive Nikita Khrushchev, the Soviet leader, of any political advantage from his bold stroke.

Opponents of this alternative raised a number of serious objections. Doing nothing would permit the Soviet Union to double its missile capability, to outflank the United States’ early warning system, and to reverse the strategic balance by installing yet more missiles on a base ninety miles from the American coast. Politically, the “do nothing” option would undermine US credibility and resolve in the eyes of the world by making the United States appear weak.

Diplomatic approaches—through the United Nations, through the Organization of American States, or directly or indirectly to Khrushchev—required time, and the United States did not have much time. The Soviets could stall or veto action in the United Nations. While diplomats talked, the missiles would become operational. Approaches to

Khrushchev might lead to an unsatisfactory deal in the midst of a threatening crisis. A secret overture to Castro ignored the vital fact that the missiles belonged to the Soviet Union and that the key decision to withdraw them was the Soviets' alone.

So the president was initially drawn to the possibility of a surgical strike, an air attack confined to the missile bases. But was there no choice between bombing and doing nothing? If successful, an air strike would eliminate the threat to the United States. But could it be successful? Military leaders at the Pentagon concluded that a surgical strike would still leave Cuban airfields and Soviet aircraft operational. Moreover, the Pentagon could not guarantee that the US Air Force could destroy all the missiles. A limited strike might expose the United States to nuclear retaliation. It would be prudent, militarily, to opt for a large strike to eliminate all sources of danger. So the surgical strike might have to be replaced by a massive strike; but this could lead to loss of Soviet lives and, perhaps, to Soviet retaliation in the divided city of Berlin or in Turkey, where American strategic forces were deployed. Moreover, could the president of the United States, with the memory of Pearl Harbor still relatively fresh in the American mind, order a surprise attack? Was the elimination of the missiles and of Castro worth the cost of a massive strike?

Kennedy's Latin American advisers warned that a massive strike would kill thousands of innocent Cubans and do great permanent damage to the United States in the eyes of Latin Americans. His European advisers warned that the world would regard a surprise attack as an excessive response. And if the Soviets moved against Berlin, the United States would be blamed and might have to fight under disadvantageous circumstances.

An invasion was also risky because US troops would be confronting about 20,000 Soviet troops in the first direct conflict between the forces of the world's two great superpowers. Would such an invasion guarantee a Soviet move against Berlin? Would it bring the world closer to World War III?

On the next day, Wednesday, Secretary of Defense Robert McNamara argued strongly on behalf of another alternative: a blockade, which would provide a middle course between doing nothing and engaging in a massive attack. The blockade would require Khrushchev to respond to a firm but not excessive step; he could avoid a military clash by keeping his ships away. The blockade would set up a confrontation in an advantageous location—the Caribbean. This alternative kept open other options, such as diplomacy or other military action, and it averted the confrontation that brought one's "adversary to the choice of either a humiliating defeat or a nuclear war," as President Kennedy noted.

But there were objections to the blockade. A blockade was an act of war and might be deemed a violation of the UN charter or of international law. Even more seriously, would the blockade bring enough pressure on Khrushchev to remove the missiles already in Cuba? Would it stop work on the bases? Opponents of the blockade maintained that it would lead to a Soviet counterblockade of Berlin and to confrontation with the Soviet Union: if Soviet ships did not stop, the United States would have to fire the first shot, and this might invite Soviet retaliation.

On Thursday evening, President Kennedy met with ExCom. According to Schlesinger's account, the president was leaning toward the blockade:

He was evidently attracted by the idea of the blockade. It avoided war, preserved flexibility and offered Khrushchev time to reconsider his actions. It could be carried out within the framework of the Organization of American States and the Rio Treaty. Since it could be extended to nonmilitary items as occasion required, it could become an instrument of steadily intensifying pressure. It would avoid the shock effect of a surprise attack, which would hurt us politically through the world and might provoke Moscow to an insensate response against Berlin or the United States itself. If it worked, the Russians could retreat with dignity. If it did not work, the Americans retained the option of military action. In short, the blockade, by enabling us to proceed one step at a time, gave us control over the future. Kennedy accordingly directed that preparations be made to put the weapons blockade into effect on Monday morning.¹²

Making the Choice

The debate between advocates of the blockade and those of the air strike persisted until the formal meeting of the National Security Council on Saturday. After hearing both arguments again, Kennedy endorsed the blockade. But before making his decision final, he wanted one last talk with the Air Force Tactical Air Command to satisfy himself that a surgical strike was not feasible. This meeting was held Sunday morning. The Air Force spokesman told the president that the air strike would have to be massive, and even then it would not guarantee the destruction of all Soviet missiles. The president had been worried that the blockade would not remove the missiles; now it was clear that an air attack could not guarantee that result either.

On Monday, October 22, at 7:30 p.m., President Kennedy addressed the nation (which had known nothing of the crisis that had engaged ExCom since October 16) and set forth his choice. He emphasized that the Soviet missile bases provided the Soviet Union with “a nuclear strike capability against the Western Hemisphere.” Soviet action constituted “a deliberately provocative and unjustified change ... which cannot be accepted by this country, if our courage and our commitments are ever to be trusted again by either friend or foe.” The nuclear threat to Americans had to be eliminated. The president then indicated that he had imposed a “quarantine” on all offensive military equipment under shipment to Cuba. Cuba would be kept under intensive surveillance. The president also declared that any missile launched from Cuba would be regarded as an attack by the Soviet Union on the United States and would elicit immediate retaliatory response upon the Soviet Union. He called for a meeting of the Organization of American States to consider the threat to the security of the American hemisphere and for an emergency meeting of the UN Security Council to consider the threat to world peace. Kennedy also appealed to Khrushchev “to abandon the course of world domination, and to join in an historic effort to end the perilous arms race and to transform the history of man.”

So the basic choice was made. But before the crisis was over, Kennedy would have to make other key choices: to interpret the blockade flexibly (rather than rigidly), to give the Soviets time to respond to a peaceful solution, and to use diplomacy (rather than force) to accomplish his objective of removing the missiles. By Thursday, Adlai Stevenson, the US ambassador to the United Nations, had effectively destroyed the Soviet argument that

the missiles were defensive. Within the Security Council chamber, the following extraordinary exchange took place between Stevenson and Valerian Zorin, the Soviet ambassador to the United Nations:

STEVENSON: “Do you, Ambassador Zorin, deny that the U.S.S.R. has placed and is placing medium- and intermediate-range missiles and sites in Cuba? ... Don’t wait for the translation!”

ZORIN: “I am not in an American courtroom, sir, and I do not wish to answer a question put to me in the manner in which a prosecutor does—”

STEVENSON: “You are in the courtroom of world opinion right now, and you can answer yes or no. You have denied that they exist, and I want to know whether I have understood you correctly.”

ZORIN: “Please continue your statement. ... You will receive your answer in due course.”

STEVENSON: “I am prepared to wait for my answer until hell freezes over, if that is your decision. I am also prepared to present the evidence in this room.”¹³

Stevenson proceeded to present the aerial photographs that revealed Soviet nuclear installations. The Soviets then probed for a deal, and the Americans responded favorably. The Soviets would remove their missiles under UN inspection, and the United States would promise publicly not to invade Cuba. There was also a secret part of the proposal. The United States would agree to remove its Jupiter missiles from Turkey. On Friday, October 26, Khrushchev cabled Kennedy, “If the President and Government of the United States were to give assurances that the United States itself would not participate in an attack on Cuba and would restrain others from this kind of act, if you would recall your fleet, this would immediately change everything.”¹⁴ Kennedy responded by indicating that as soon as work stopped on the missile sites and the offensive weapons were rendered inoperable, a settlement along Khrushchev’s lines was in order. US Attorney General Robert Kennedy, in delivering his brother’s message to the Soviet ambassador to the United States, Anatoly Dobrynin, indicated that unless the United States received assurances within twenty-four hours, it would take military action by Tuesday.



Batmann/Contributor/Getty Images

Before the Security Council, United States representative to the United Nations, Adlai Stevenson, presents aerial photographic evidence of Soviet missile emplacements in Cuba.

Saturday night was a disturbing night for President Kennedy as he waited for Khrushchev's reply. At 9:00 a.m., Sunday, October 28, Khrushchev's response came in. Work would stop on the missile sites: the arms "which you described as offensive" would be crated and returned to the Soviet Union. Negotiations would start at the United Nations.

And so, the two-week crisis—perhaps the closest we have come to World War III—ended. President Kennedy's choices in the Cuban missile crisis underscore the dangers and difficulties of achieving national security in the nuclear age. Presidential choices have become more potent for good or ill. Presidents are forced to recognize that the stakes are higher and that their actions affect the vital interests of not only the United States but all humankind. These same thoughts must have troubled the Soviet leaders. This recognition may explain the relative prudence both superpowers demonstrated in respecting each other's vital interests, in achieving arms reduction and arms control agreements, and in limiting the spread of nuclear weapons. In later chapters, particularly Chapters 12 and 14, we examine how prudent such policies actually are.

THE DECISION TO INVADe IRAQ: THE PERILS OF INACCURATE INFORMATION AND FAULTY ASSUMPTIONS

John Kennedy's decision to use a quarantine to force Soviet missiles from Cuba is widely regarded as a brilliant exercise in decision-making. Throughout those October days of 1962, President Kennedy constantly questioned his advisers—subjecting their ideas and assumptions to a critical inquiry that led him ultimately to pursue the successful blockade of Cuba. But not all decisions are as successful. To illuminate some of the pitfalls of political choice, we turn our attention to a more recent action, the decision by the United States to invade Iraq in 2003.

On March 20, 2003, US Tomahawk missiles and bombs delivered by F-117s began hitting targets in Baghdad, Iraq. Shortly thereafter, a US-dominated military force of roughly 297,000 troops invaded Iraq, and with the seizure of the Tikrit region north of Baghdad on April 15, coalition leaders declared the military invasion complete. Saddam Hussein's regime was at an end. The swiftness of the victory was stunning, but the euphoria it engendered was short lived.

The first three years of US occupation proved a near disaster. By the end of 2006, Iraq was on the brink of collapse into chaos and civil war. A powerful homegrown insurgency movement, whose primary weapons were roadside and suicide bombs, attacked coalition forces, Iraqi military and police forces, and innocent civilians. Insurgents from outside the country, led by al-Qaida, took advantage of the opportunity to add to the havoc. Within the country, deep-seated distrust and hostility fueled violent conflict between the two largest religious sects—the Sunni, whose Baathist Party had run the country for decades, and the Shiite majority, who under Saddam Hussein had suffered discrimination, persecution, and incredible hardship. As 2006 drew to a close, over 3,000 US troops and over 250 soldiers from other countries in the coalition were dead; thousands more were severely wounded. Iraqi civilian deaths as a result of the war

numbered at least in the tens of thousands, perhaps into the hundreds of thousands.¹⁵ By 2007, conditions were so bad that only a radical shift in strategy, accompanied by a dramatic increase in troop strength (dubbed “the Surge”), could begin to reduce the violence that had characterized the previous three years. And even then, the first year under this revised approach saw the deaths of over 1,000 US soldiers.

Why were the first three to four years of the war such a disaster? The answers to this question stem from the powerful yet misguided preconceptions, faulty assumptions, and questionable intelligence that characterized the initial decision-making process. Those flaws contributed to a war that engendered considerable public frustration and disillusionment within the United States and anger among US allies and throughout the Islamic world. The operation has also been enormously expensive, not only in human lives but in US dollars. Estimates of the total cost of the war vary considerably but range from \$1 trillion to \$3 trillion.

It is worth noting that the final outcome of the war remains unclear. American combat forces have been withdrawn. Iraq still struggles to implement a viable democratic political system. Religious tensions remain high, and Shiite-controlled Iran has become increasingly influential in Iraq’s political fabric. Out of the war’s chaos, the forces of the Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (ISIS) seized significant Iraqi real estate. After several years of brutal fighting, ISIS lost most of the Iraqi territory that it had seized but the cost both in money and lives was high. For these and other reasons, there is little doubt that the decision to invade Iraq is a compelling case study of how faulty judgments and the inability to gather undisputed facts can lead to questionable actions.

Historical Context

Between 1980 and 1988, Iraq engaged in a brutal war with its larger neighbor, Iran, that resulted in a combined death toll in excess of 1 million. During the conflict, the United States lent support to Iraq and its leader, Saddam Hussein, viewing Iran’s recently established Islamic regime a strategic threat to the region. The war ended in a stalemate, and Iraq, having borrowed \$40 billion from Kuwait to finance its military adventure, could not repay the debt. When Kuwait refused to pardon the debt, Iraq, seething with anger, invaded its tiny neighbor on August 2, 1990. This action was widely viewed as a clear-cut case of aggression. US president George H. W. Bush declared the invasion unacceptable and set out to reverse it and punish the regime in Baghdad.

In January 1991, a broad coalition of forces led by the United States invaded Iraq and seized roughly half the country. Although it eventually withdrew from the ground, coalition forces established no-fly zones over the predominantly southern Shiite and northern Kurdish regions of the country. Coalition aircraft patrolled these zones until the 2003 invasion. In addition, from August 1990 until May 2003, international economic sanctions were imposed on Iraq. Nonetheless, Saddam Hussein was able to retain power.

The initial response to the 9/11 attacks on the World Trade Center and the Pentagon was a US-led military operation against Afghanistan. Al-Qaida training camps were destroyed, the Taliban government was routed, and the remnants of both groups were left to seek refuge in the rough border regions bridging Afghanistan and Pakistan.



Key figures in the decision to invade Iraq in 2003 included (from left to right) Vice President Dick Cheney, CIA Director George Tenet, President George W. Bush, and Chief of Staff Andy Card.

region, as evidenced first by Saddam's invasion of Iran in the 1980s and then of Kuwait in 1990. Iraq had breached the conditions of the 1991 cease-fire and repeatedly flouted UN Security Council resolutions. Additionally, the very brutality of the regime warranted its overthrow. At the same time, the establishment of democracy in Iraq had the potential to transform the Middle East. Some proponents even saw a linkage between regime change in Iraq and prospects for peace between Israel and the Palestinians. As compelling as these factors might have been, did they constitute sufficient reason to mount a full-scale invasion and replace a sovereign government? Maybe, and maybe not. Regardless, if there were doubts about the salience of these rationales, there were two additional reasons for invasion that, if true, were in the eyes of many, both Republican and Democrat, more than persuasive. By far, the two most powerful arguments the Bush administration made were that (1) there was a likely link between the regime in Baghdad and al-Qaida and (2) Iraq possessed lethal chemical and biological weapons and was continuing to develop nuclear weapons (collectively known as weapons of mass destruction, or WMDs).

Two additional factors helped to motivate the decision for invasion, both with origins stretching back in time to the early 1990s. First, a significant number of officials in the Bush administration felt very strongly that the United States had erred during the first Gulf War in 1991 in not pressing the operation all the way through to Baghdad and ousting Saddam's regime then and there. In the wake of 9/11, perhaps the job could be finished. Second, in September 2002, exactly one year after the attacks on the World Trade Center and Pentagon, the administration had released a revised *National Security Strategy of the United States*.¹⁶ The heart of the doctrine was a new policy for checking the threat of nuclear war. Instead of emphasizing deterrence, as had been policy during the Cold War, the United States would now rely on preemption—that is, where appropriate the US government would employ its military to eliminate WMD programs in other countries. The genesis of the new policy could be traced as far back as 1992, when a group working for then Secretary of Defense Dick Cheney authored a document known as the *Defense Planning Guidance*,

While that operation proved largely successful, there was disappointment that al-Qaida leader Osama bin Laden had not been captured. It was at this point, winter 2003, that attention quickly turned to Iraq.

Rationales for the 2003 Invasion

The administration of George W. Bush offered a number of rationales for taking action against Iraq and bringing down the regime of Saddam Hussein. Iraq was a destabilizing force in the Persian Gulf

which argued that the United States should be prepared to use force to prevent the spread of nuclear weapons.¹⁷

What Went Wrong?

Good decisions must be made on sound assumptions that in turn are based on accurate information. On both counts, the decision to invade Iraq was sorely lacking. The following are four key assumptions that were made in support of the decision to invade Iraq:

Assumption 1. Iraq has stockpiles of chemical and biological weapons and a fully active program to develop nuclear weapons. This assumption proved to be absolutely false. There is no doubt that Iraq had a WMD program at one time. Chemical weapons had been used in 1988 against the Kurdish village of Halabja in a brutal attack resulting in the deaths of thousands of civilians. But after the 1990 invasion of Iraq by coalition forces, firm evidence of a continuing WMD program became scarce. Some of the UN inspectors who had visited Iraq a number of times between 1999 and 2003 were skeptical of claims that Saddam had WMDs.¹⁸ Regardless, Bush administration officials remained convinced that there were WMDs, and the director of the Central Intelligence Agency, George Tenet, even told President Bush that the case for the existence of WMDs was a “slam dunk.”¹⁹ British intelligence supported the notion of an active program, and Iraqi defectors had repeatedly told the administration of its existence. What happened? Why was this assessment of Iraq’s WMD program so off the mark? Was intelligence manipulated? Was it because our intelligence assets inside Iraq were so limited? Did the administration put too much stock in the word of Iraqi exiles who simply told government officials what they wanted to hear? Was this a case of wishful thinking? Every one of these factors has been offered as an explanation. Space does not allow for a thorough assessment of each here. We will leave it to future historians to sort out exactly what happened. Suffice it to say for present purposes, the assumption that Iraq had WMDs—perhaps the most potent of the arguments given for the decision to invade—proved false.

Assumption 2. The Iraqi government has close ties to al-Qaida. This, too, was a powerful argument in favor of invasion. After all, the president had asserted in the wake of 9/11 that those governments that aided and abetted terrorism would be held accountable. While the validity of this assumption remains debatable, the preponderance of evidence suggests that in fact there were no extensive links between al-Qaida and Saddam Hussein’s regime. The comprehensive *9/11 Commission Report*, published in 2004, offered no evidence of collaborative ties between Iraq and al-Qaida.²⁰ And in 2008, the Institute for Defense Analyses released a study based on 600,000 documents captured in post-Saddam Iraq that drew a similar conclusion: no direct coordination or assistance existed between Saddam’s regime and al-Qaida.²¹ At most, there may have been some fleeting contacts, but those evidently had little bearing on al-Qaida’s terrorist operations.

Assumption 3. The military operation will be over quickly, political power will be turned over to the Iraqis, a democracy will be formed, and the bulk of American forces will be able to return home after a relatively short period of time. This assumption was based on what the

administration thought the Iraqi people's reaction would be to the US invasion and its perceptions of the physical conditions within the country. Once Saddam was ousted from power, went this version, the US presence would be welcome, order would be quickly restored, and the governance of Iraq would be turned over to the Iraqis themselves. Instead, the Americans found a depressed population brutalized by decades of Saddam's iron rule and an infrastructure—particularly energy grids, fresh water systems, and oil industry—in various stages of decay. The three major ethnic/religious groups in Iraq—Sunnis, Kurds, and Shiites—deeply distrusted each other as well as the Americans. The Sunnis that had dominated the ruling Baathist Party under Saddam Hussein had treated both the Shiites and the Kurds badly. Vengeance and counter vengeance became the rule. Unbelievably vicious warfare broke out between the two largest religious communities, making assassinations and massacres almost daily occurrences. In addition, the United States had to deal with the lethal campaign of insurgents backed by powerful interests outside the country, one which targeted both Iraqis and Americans. Put simply, the country was spinning violently out of control leaving the US military desperate to achieve some degree of stability. The cautious words of Secretary of State Colin Powell to the president before the invasion now rang more clearly than ever: "You are going to be the proud owner of twenty-five million people. You will own all their hopes, aspirations, and problems. ... It's going to suck the oxygen out of everything."²² The failure of the administration to accurately assess the likely conditions in Iraq after the initial military success contributed to a complete lack of strategic planning for what became a long, violent, and expensive occupation of the country.²³ Furthermore, the challenges of creating a stable democracy where none existed before proved far more daunting than the administration at first believed. The assumption that democracies are easy to create may have been the worst assumption one could possibly make.

Assumption 4. A modest-sized force much smaller than the one used in Desert Storm can swiftly and efficiently carry out the invasion. In his brilliant case study of the Iraqi war decision, Joseph J. Collins of the National Defense University captured the thinking of Secretary of Defense Donald Rumsfeld:

In retrospect, Rumsfeld wanted to conduct a quick, lightning-like operation in Iraq, followed by a swift handover of power to the Iraqis. He did not want a large-scale, ponderous operation like Desert Storm, which he saw as wasteful and outmoded. He also did not want U.S. troops unnecessarily bogged down in an endless postwar peace operation.²⁴

The original Pentagon war plan specified a force of some 140,000 troops, roughly two-thirds the size of the force used in the first Gulf War. This was ultimately increased to a total of 297,000 coalition troops—still 243,000 fewer than in the Desert Storm invasion force of 1990. Rumsfeld was right to a point: His force did prove adequate for a successful lightning-like attack that succeeded in reaching Baghdad in a very short period of time. The problem came in the aftermath of that attack. The force size proved completely inadequate for the job of stabilization. While this fact did not cause the ensuing chaos, it certainly facilitated it. And in the weeks, months, and years that

followed, the United States committed numerous additional grievous policy errors in Iraq, though these errors are rightly connected with the execution of the war rather than with the initial decision to invade.

Clearly, political decision-making based on inaccurate information and faulty assumptions is a recipe for disaster. Unfortunately, the Bush administration's choice to invade Iraq in 2003 provides us with a powerful case study of this political reality.

CONCLUSION

Our brief examination of these five cases makes clear that wise choices in politics rest on sound values, accurate understanding of political phenomena, and astute judgment. These components are very closely connected. The five cases also emphasize the importance of addressing the problem of political obligation, striving for creative political breakthroughs, learning to bear the burden of freedom, responding wisely to the perils of decision-making in the nuclear age, and receiving accurate information and making credible assumptions.

In subsequent chapters, we examine a host of other choices. For instance, in the public policy chapters in Part IV, we illustrate at greater length what contributes to sound judgment. In many instances, the choices to be made are both less momentous and less dramatic than those examined here. Some involve modest personal choices, while others take in a wider range of actors and circumstances. All, however, reveal the intimate connection among values, facts, and judgments.



KEY QUESTIONS RAISED IN THIS CHAPTER

1. What would you do if you had been lawfully sentenced to death on charges you knew were false and were then offered the opportunity to escape?
2. Would you try a new, untested experiment in government in the face of conventional wisdom that suggested your experiment could never work?
3. As a German citizen, would you have supported Adolf Hitler's Nazi Party in 1932 and 1933?
4. As president of the United States, how would you have responded to the news that the Soviet Union had placed offensive nuclear missiles in Cuba?
5. Would you have decided to commit American forces to invade Iraq in response to al-Qaida's attack on the World Trade Center and the Pentagon?
6. How does political choice illustrate the intimate connection among values, facts, and judgment?

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Stone, Deborah. *Policy Paradox: The Art of Political Decision Making*, 3rd ed. New York, NY: W. W. Norton, 2011. Valuable text on the art of decision making with numerous examples of both good and bad decisions.

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Wilson, Emily. *The Death of Socrates*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2007. A thoughtful account of the death of Socrates and how that event has reverberated throughout history.

GLOSSARY TERMS

Creative breakthrough 30

Extensive republic 36

Faction 35

Freedom 39

Negative freedom 39

Political creativity 29

Political obligation 28

Positive freedom 39

Power politics 28

Responsible citizenship 29

NOTES

1. The quotations in this paragraph and the following are from Plato's "Apology," in *The Republic, and Other Works by Plato*, trans. Benjamin Jowett (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, Anchor Books, 1973), 460–484.
2. In Federalist No. 10, Madison defined faction as "a number of citizens, whether amounting to a majority or minority of the whole, who are united and actuated by some common impulse of passion, or of interest, adverse to the rights of other citizens, or to the permanent and aggregate interests of the community." See Alexander Hamilton, John Jay, and James Madison, *The Federalist [1787–1788]* (Cleveland, OH: World, 1961), 57.
3. This section draws freely from Neal Riemer's *James Madison: Creating the American Constitution* (Washington, DC: Congressional Quarterly, 1986). For a fuller exploration of creative breakthroughs, see Riemer, *Creative Breakthroughs in Politics* (Westport, CT: Praeger, 1996).
4. Franz L. Neumann, *Bebemoth* (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 1942), 30.
5. For the electoral statistics, see Seymour Martin Lipset, *Political Man: The Social Bases of Politics* (1960; reprint, Garden City, NY: Doubleday, Anchor Books, 1962), 139; and Jeremy Noakes and Geoffrey Pridham, eds., *Documents of Nazism, 1919–1945* (London: Jonathan Cape, 1974), 126.
6. Neumann, *Bebemoth*, 30.
7. Lipset, *Political Man*, 138–148. See also David Schoenbaum, *Hitler's Social Revolution: Class and Status in Nazi Germany, 1933–1939* (New York, NY: W. W. Norton, 1997); and Noakes and Pridham, *Documents of Nazism*.
8. Seymour Martin Lipset, *Revolution and Counterrevolution* (1968; repr., Garden City, NY: Doubleday, Anchor Books, 1970), 234.
9. *Ibid.*, 234.
10. Schoenbaum, *Hitler's Social Revolution*.
11. Graham T. Allison, *Essence of Decision: Explaining the Cuban Missile Crisis* (Boston, MA: Little, Brown, 1971), 193. See also Graham T. Allison and Philip Zelikow, *The Essence of Decision: Explaining the Cuban Missile Crisis*, 2nd ed. (New York, NY: Longman, 1999). The following presentation draws generously on Allison's study and also on the account by Arthur M. Schlesinger Jr., *A Thousand Days: John F. Kennedy in the White House* (1965; repr., Greenwich, CT: Fawcett Crest, 1967).
12. Schlesinger, *Thousand Days*, 805–806.
13. As it appears in Michael R. Beschloss, *The Crisis Years: Kennedy and Khrushchev, 1960–1963* (New York, NY: HarperCollins, 1991), 505–506.
14. Laurence Chang and Peter Kornbluh, eds., *The Cuban Missile Crisis, 1962: A National Security Archive Documents Reader* (New York, NY: New Press, 1998), 198.
15. Estimates run from a low of roughly 90,000 to a high in excess of 600,000, a figure that appeared in a Johns Hopkins University study in 2006 and reported in the prestigious British medical journal *Lancet*. See Gilbert Burnham et al., "Mortality after the 2003 Invasion of Iraq: A Cross-Sectional Cluster Sample Survey," *Lancet* 368, no. 9545 (October 2006): 1421–1428.
16. Office of the President of the United States, "The National Security Strategy of the United States of America," Washington, DC, September 2002, www.globalsecurity.org/military/library/policy/nation/nss_020920.pdf.
17. Dartmouth College Library, U.S. Government Documents, "Primary Sources Related to the War With Iraq," www.dartmouth.edu/~govdocs/iraq.htm.
18. BBC News, "Blix Skeptical on Iraqi WMD Claim," December 16, 2003, http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/middle_east/3323633.stm.
19. Bob Woodward, *Plan of Attack* (New York, NY: Simon & Schuster, 2004), 249.
20. *The 9/11 Commission Report* (New York, NY: W. W. Norton, 2004), 66.

21. Iraqi Perspectives Project, “Saddam and Terrorism: Emerging Insights from Captured Iraqi Documents,” www.fas.org/irp/epring/irazi/index.html.
22. Woodward, *Plan of Attack*, 150.
23. The lack of foresight and planning for the post-invasion period is brilliantly spelled out in Thomas Ricks, *Fiasco* (New York, NY: Penguin, 2006).
24. Joseph J. Collins, “Choosing War: The Decision to Invade Iraq and Its Aftermath,” National Defense University, Institute for National Strategic Studies, 2008, 7.

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