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Personality and US Presidential Choices: A Study of the Protracted Afghanistan War

Thesis Presented by

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The Degree of Doctor of Philosophy in the School of Social and Political Science

The University of Edinburgh

Presented in 2023
Acknowledgements

To me, this thesis is a piece of hard work. I overcame several difficulties and suffered from health challenges during these years. Now I am happy to present it here.

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Abstract

The 20-year-long US war in Afghanistan, which started in 2001 and ended in 2021, resulted in significant civilian casualties, US military deaths and financial costs. This protracted war raised the question of why the war endured for so long despite such terrible costs. In order to answer this question, this thesis explores the causal relationship between the personalities and leadership styles of US presidents George Walker Bush and Barack Obama and their decision-making relating to US continuation of this war. Bush’s and Obama’s personalities and leadership styles are examined using Leadership Trait Analysis (LTA). Further personality-based expectations relating to the two presidents’ policy orientations and decision-making are developed based on their scores on the seven LTA traits. These expectations are examined in two case studies of five major occasions for decision and two subsequent policy changes relating to the Afghanistan war.

The findings confirm that Bush’s and Obama’s personalities help understand and explain their continuation of the Afghanistan war. First, their war orientations are consistent with the expectations based on their distrust of others. Another trait, in-group bias, also helps explain their continuation of this war. Second, the different ways in which the two presidents managed their decision-making processes and shaped the policy outcomes are mainly consistent with the expectations based on their personalities. Third, leaders’ openness to divergent voices in decision-making is based more on their conceptual complexity and can be influenced by their task focus and inexperience in different ways.

Findings from this thesis contribute to the existing scholarship on the post-9/11 US foreign policy in Afghanistan, especially US continuation of the US-Afghanistan war. Furthermore, this thesis makes two main theoretical contributions to LTA theory. First, it explores and identifies the causal relationship between leaders’ distrust of others and their continuation of the war. Second, it examines and identifies factors (leaders’ task focus and
inexperience) that influence the effects of leaders’ conceptual complexity on their openness to divergent opinions in decision-making.
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<td>Belief in One’s Ability to Control Events</td>
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<td>CC</td>
<td>Conceptual Complexity</td>
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<td>CIA</td>
<td>Central Intelligence Agency</td>
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<td>COIN</td>
<td>Counterinsurgency</td>
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<td>CT</td>
<td>Counterterrorism</td>
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<td>DIS</td>
<td>Distrust of Others</td>
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<td>DOD</td>
<td>Department of Defense</td>
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<td>DOS</td>
<td>Department of State</td>
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<td>IGB</td>
<td>In-group Bias</td>
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<td>ISAF</td>
<td>International Security Assistance Force</td>
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<td>LTA</td>
<td>Leadership Trait Analysis</td>
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<td>NATO</td>
<td>North Atlantic Treaty Organization</td>
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<td>OEF</td>
<td>Operation Enduring Freedom</td>
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<td>SEAL</td>
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<td>TASK</td>
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Introduction

The Long Afghanistan War: Huge Costs with Limited Progress

‘After 20 years of war in Afghanistan, I refused to send another generation of America’s sons and daughters to fight a war that should have ended long ago’ (Biden, 2021, para.67). On 31 August 2021, US President Joe Biden declared the end of the longest war in US history: the war in Afghanistan.

On 11 September 2001, terrorist attacks on the US Pentagon and the World Trade Center caused 2,977 deaths (Jackson, 2021). US President George W. Bush was briefed by the Director of the Central Intelligence Agency (CIA), George Tenet, that it was Al-Qaeda terrorists who had carried out the attacks. Later, Tenet confirmed with Bush that Osama bin Laden, the founder of Al-Qaeda, was responsible for the attacks and was hiding in Afghanistan (Woodward, 2003; Tenet, 2008; Bush, 2011). Bush delivered an ultimatum to Afghanistan’s ruling Taliban regime, asking them to break with Al-Qaeda and hand over Al-Qaeda terrorists. Ultimately, the Taliban did not meet these demands (Woodward, 2003; Tenet, 2008; Bush, 2011).

President Bush ordered US strikes in Afghanistan on 7 October 2001. This order marked the beginning of the US-Afghanistan war. After the collapse of the Taliban regime, US troops in that region continued with military operations ‘against the remnants of al Qaeda and the Taliban’ (Bush, 2011, p. 207). President Barack Obama inherited the Afghanistan war from Bush. He made two troop surge decisions and began to gradually withdraw troops from Afghanistan from 2011 (Gates, 2014). However, his withdrawal plan was delayed three times in 2015 and 2016 (Culter, 2017a; 2017b; Malkasian, 2021). President Donald Trump held peace talks with the Taliban in 2019, and both
sides reached an agreement (Malkasian, 2021). Finally, President Joe Biden declared the end of the Afghanistan war on 31 August 2021 (Biden, 2021).

This long war resulted in terrible human and economic costs. Until December 2020, the total US expenditure in Afghanistan reached 824.9 billion dollars (SIGAR, 2021a). Twenty years after 11 September 2001, a total 2,465 US military personnel had died in this war (Statista Research Department, 2022). From 2009 to 2020, the total number of civilians injured and killed in Afghanistan was 110,893 (UNAMA, 2021).

Figures 1 and 2 below present the US troop numbers in Afghanistan from 2002 to 2020 and the number of US military deaths during each year of the war. The number of US troops gradually increased from 2001 to 2011 and peaked in 2011 at around 100,000. Although the number of US troops gradually decreased after 2011, until the end of Obama’s presidency (December 2016), there were still 9,800 troops in Afghanistan. In 2020, there were still 7,000 US troops there. The number of deaths of US military personnel gradually increased along with the number of US troops in Afghanistan. From 2001 to 2016, the total number of deaths of US military personnel in Afghanistan was 2,388 and 2,465 in 2021. In addition, BBC News (2021) reported that around 20,660 US soldiers had been injured in military operations in Afghanistan.

Figure 1. US Troop levels in in Afghanistan, 2002 – 2021

Adapted from: Belasco (2009, p. 9); CRS (2021, pp. 7–8); SIGAR (2021b, p. 17)
Figure 2. Number of Deaths of US Military Personnel in Afghanistan, 2001 – 2021

![Graph showing US Military Deaths from 2001 to 2021](image)

Data Source: Statista Research Department (2022)

Figure 3 below presents the number of civilians killed and injured in Afghanistan since 2009. This number increased from 2009 and was consistently higher than 10,000 from 2014 to 2019. Until the end of 2020, the total number of civilians killed and injured in Afghanistan was around 111,000.

Figure 3. Number of Civilians Killed and Injured in Afghanistan, 2009 – 2020

![Bar chart showing civilians killed and injured from 2009 to 2020](image)

Source: UNAMA (2021, p. 12)
In addition to the military operations in Afghanistan were the financial cost of the operations and civilian reconstruction. As presented in Figure 4 below, from 2002 to 2020, every year the US spent at least 10 billion dollars in Afghanistan. Between 2011 and 2012, the total cost of the war and reconstruction was more than 110 billion dollars a year. Most of this cost was spent on US military operations in Afghanistan.

Figure 4. US Spending in Afghanistan, 2002 – 2021 (Quarter 1, $ Billions)

Adapted from: SIGAR (2021a, p. 34)

Furthermore, in addition to the human and economic costs, domestic support for the Afghanistan war gradually decreased. Figures 5 and 6 below present Americans’ and US partisans’ views on the Afghanistan war from 2001 to 2021, with more and more people believing that US military involvement in Afghanistan was a mistake.
Figure 5. US Domestic Views on the Afghanistan War, 2001 – 2021

Source: Brenan (2021)

Figure 6. US Partisans’ Views on the Afghanistan War, 2001 – 2021

Source: Brenan (2021)
On the 20th anniversary of the 9/11 attacks, journalists and the news media asked why the US had remained in Afghanistan for so long at such great costs (ABC News, 2021). The 20-year-long war accomplished some of its goals, such as the success of capturing and killing Osama bin Laden, the man who was believed by the US to be responsible for the 9/11 attacks (Panetta and Newton, 2014; Brennan, 2020), but also showed limited progress. Cordesman (2021) stated that US military aid focused on the tactical defeat of the Taliban and marginal terrorist threats but paid less attention to the growth of the Taliban and their influence in rural districts, leaving the opportunity for the Taliban to seize control of more districts. Twenty years after the 9/11 attacks, Afghan forces still relied heavily on US combat support and the Afghan government was still incapable of creating a self-sustaining and stable state.

With slow progress in the Afghanistan war, increasing costs and negative feedback (as shown in Figures 1 to 6 above), it was rational for US presidents to decide to withdraw troops from Afghanistan and to end the war as early as they could to reduce losses. The former Deputy Secretary of State, Richard Armitage, thought that the year 2002 was the first opportunity for the US to leave Afghanistan (NPR, 2021). In 2009, there were more Democrats calling for US troop withdrawal from that state (Solomon, 2009). Therefore, ending the war and leaving Afghanistan seemed a rational option for President Bush and President Obama. However, the war lasted for two decades. Each president had different foreign policies relating to the Afghanistan war, but why did they (except Biden) all choose to continue with military operations there? Based on their choices, this thesis raises a puzzle: why did the war go on for so long despite such terrible costs?

It is important to resolve this puzzle because, as presented above, this was a 20-year-long war which resulted in huge costs. Cordesman (2021, p. 4) asked whether the strategic cost of this war ‘at any given point was worth prolonging it’. Those opposed to the war criticised the failure of US strategy in Afghanistan and found that the continuation of US military operations there was counterproductive (for example, Cortright, 2011). On the other hand, the presidents and their supporters wanted to defend the decisions relating to the
war continuation, arguing that they were not wasting US resources. Therefore, it is necessary to ascertain the reasons for the continuation of the Afghanistan war and whether it was rational for it to continue with its escalating human and economic costs.

There is not as much literature on the persistence of the Afghanistan war compared to studies on the Vietnam war, but there is much criticism of the enduring military operations in Afghanistan. As reviewed in Chapter II, there are two main groups of studies on the persistence of the war. One group justified the necessity to continue war in Afghanistan by focusing on homeland defence and national security concerns (for example, de Tray, 2018; Miller, 2021). The other group focused on US geopolitical strategy in Asia and its counterbalance with the two other great powers: Russia and China (for example, Chotaev, 2013; Prifti, 2017; Rahman, 2019). In addition, Malkasian (2021) provided another explanation for the persistence of the Afghanistan war by combining terrorism threats and domestic politics.

In the studies mentioned above, some authors argue that the withdrawal of US troops from Afghanistan before it was stabilised would give terrorists more chances to attack the US (for example, Dobbins et al., 2019; Miller, 2021) while others argue that terrorists could no longer use Afghanistan as a safe haven to carry out future attacks on the US (for example, Glaser and Mueller, 2019). These studies reveal a mismatch between two different results (high and low) of assessments of the threats in Afghanistan. However, as warned by Cordesman (2021), there was no practical way to assess the real threats to the US from terrorism with the resurgence of the Taliban forces. Therefore, the uncertainty in and debates on the objective assessments of the threats from Afghanistan leave more space for the presidents’ subjective interpretations of the potential threats from Afghanistan to play a more important role in their decision-making.

For the other two types of explanations, some studies criticised the rationale of using military forces instead of diplomatic and economic methods in geopolitical competition (for example, Prifti, 2017). Furthermore, Bush and
Obama faced different types of domestic political pressures across their first and second terms in office, and they continued US military operations in Afghanistan in different ways. Meanwhile, they demonstrated different understandings of this war and set different goals. Therefore, an additional justification for the presidents’ personal choices of why and how to use military force is needed to fully understand the puzzle: why did post-9/11 US military operations in Afghanistan last for so long despite huge human and economic costs?

This thesis focuses on the role played by US presidents’ personalities in the Afghanistan war, answering this question in the study of leaders and international relations. This chapter has reviewed the background of the war, discussed the terrible costs and briefly revealed existing scholarship on this question. The following sections proceed as follows: first, it discusses justification for a personality approach; the overall research question and aims. Second, it justifies the specific personality approach used in this research. Third, it discusses the research design. Fourth, it discusses the findings and contributions. Finally, it presents a preview of this thesis.

Subjectivity, Research Question and Aims

All the existing explanations for the persistence of the Afghanistan war mentioned above seem to lack discussion on the role of individual subjectivity in US foreign policy decision-making relating to Bush’s and Obama’s continuation of the Afghanistan war. But does subjectivity matter in foreign policy decision-making within the institutional context, and how?

Foreign policy analysis and psychological studies on leaders have found that individual personality characteristics are important in terms of leaders’ political views and how they behave (Kaarbo and Hermann, 1998; Mondak, 2010; Barber, 2017; Hermann, 2018). Personalities influence leaders’ views of situations, information-processing styles, interpersonal interactions, management of decision-making processes, and preferred ways to deal with
conflicts, finally shaping a nation’s policies and affecting governmental actions (Birt, 1993; Kille, 2006; Dyson, 2006; 2009; 2014; Cottam, Mastors and Preston, 2010).

In war studies, some personal motives (Winter, 1973; 2002; 2004; 2018) and traits (Dyson, 2006; Schafer and Crichlow, 2010; Keller and Foster, 2012; Foster and Keller, 2014) are found to be strong indicators of leaders’ proclivities to war, and some other traits are found to be helpful in explaining how leaders manage their decision-making processes to shape the final policy outcomes (for example, Preston, 2001; Dyson, 2006). Furthermore, in crisis situations, personalities can be overwhelmingly important in terms of leaders’ perceptions of other countries as an enemy and their decisions to go to war or not (Post, 1991; Birt, 1993; Cottam, Mastors and Preston, 2010). Therefore, individual subjectivity plays an important role in influencing leaders’ decision-making relating to war through their perceptions, propensity to use military force and decision-making styles. In other words, the microfoundations of these decisions in the war and crisis had come through the minds of the people that were making that.

Realists may argue that leaders are settled within the context of institutions and international structure, and thus states are the subjects of political analysis. International behaviours of states are explained by national interests at the state level (Waltz, 1959; Morgenthau, 2006). However, it is the decision-makers that make governmental decisions. ‘All that occurs between nations and across nations is grounded in human decision makers acting singly or in groups’ (Hudson, 2005, p. 1, original emphasis). It is true that leaders are affected by the political environment but how they respond to environmental stimuli is dependent on how they view them (Greenstein, 1992). In other words, in social science, leaders respond to objective situational signals and also make decisions regarding their subjective interpretation of what the situation means to them (Merton, 1968).

Studies on another long US war after the 9/11 attacks, the Iraq war, found that the personalities and leadership styles of US and UK leaders are helpful
in explaining their decision-making styles and preferences on policy options (Dyson, 2006; 2014; Preston, 2011). Meanwhile, the distinctive differences between the personalities of US President Bush and the Secretary of Defense, Donald Rumsfeld, help explain the divergences between their decision-making styles and the different Iraq strategies they preferred (Dyson, 2014). These findings suggest that personality is one of the approaches that is helpful in understanding and explaining leaders’ decisions in the war. Here the issue of subjectivity is also important for analysing leaders' decision-making relating to the Afghanistan war. Hermann (2012) compared the different norms used by UK Prime Minister Tony Blair and US President Bush for their military reactions to the 9/11 attacks. Bush defined it as an attack against US national security while Blair defined it as a crime against civilisation. Hermann asked why these two leaders framed the 9/11 attacks differently and how this difference explains the differences in their subsequent policies, leaving space for further subjective studies.

There is some work that does look at the leadership styles and personalities of US presidents in the Afghanistan war, providing valuable findings on the importance of presidential leadership styles and personalities in decision-making relating to this war (reviewed in Chapter II). However, these studies only focused on some of the major decisions made during the war, neither systematically measuring the personality characteristics of Bush and Obama nor exploring how personality could help explain why and how they prolonged the Afghanistan war. In the end, the puzzle from this thesis does remain. Furthermore, empirical records (for example, Woodward, 2003; 2010; Bush, 2011; Obama, 2020) suggest that the two presidents continued the Afghanistan war in very different ways. Given that the two US presidents had a lot of power and their personalities were important in this case, it is necessary to conduct a holistic analysis of the causal relationships between their personalities and their continuation of the Afghanistan war through the subjective point of view.

This thesis chooses a personality approach named Leadership Trait Analysis (LTA) to analyse why the US presidents continued with military
operations in Afghanistan and how they shaped their decision-making processes. LTA is a content analysis of verbal records, and distinguishes seven traits according to specific rules. These traits are: 1) Belief in one’s ability to control events; 2) Need for power; 3) Self-confidence; 4) Conceptual complexity; 5) Task focus; 6) In-group bias; and 7) Distrust of others (Hermann, 2005a). Based on existing scholarship, LTA explores the causal relationships between specific personality characteristics and individual leadership styles and decision-making.

The overall research question of this thesis is: How do the LTA-based personalities and leadership styles of US presidents Bush and Obama help explain the costly endurance of the post-9/11 war in Afghanistan?

Following this research question, the aim of this thesis is to identify the role of US presidents’ personalities in their foreign policies towards the continuation of the Afghanistan war through LTA. In order to achieve this main research aim, this thesis has several sub-aims:

1. Assess US presidents’ personalities through LTA;
2. Develop personality-based expectations relating to their behaviours in the management of their decision-making processes and their policy orientations relating to the Afghanistan war;
3. Examine the consistency between these expectations and presidents’ management of their decision-making processes and their policy orientations regarding empirical records;
4. Analyse any links between specific personality traits and presidents’ inclination towards the continuation of the Afghanistan war; and
5. Discuss and analyse any additional influence on the effects of LTA traits on the presidents’ decision-making.

Empirical records suggest that, even though Bush and Obama both chose to continue the Afghanistan war, the ways they chose to do this were
different. Bush kept a small military presence in Afghanistan from 2002 to 2005. Until 2006, facing the deteriorating situation there, he ordered policy reviews and shifted his policy by sending more troops (Bush, 2011). Obama conducted a long policy review before sending 30,000 troops into Afghanistan and also set a timeline for withdrawal, avoiding making any open-ended commitment (Woodward, 2010; Clinton, 2014). Later, after the death of Osama bin Laden, he gradually reduced the number of US troops in Afghanistan; the troops retained there still carrying out military operations. During 2015 and 2016, facing the deteriorating security situation in Afghanistan, Obama delayed the pace of withdrawal, leaving more US troops (9,800 in 2016) there than he had planned (Malkasian, 2021).

Generally, both Bush and Obama continued the war. However, there were differences in their attitudes and strategies towards it. This thesis focuses on tracing how the differences in the presidents’ personalities could have resulted in significant differences in their management of the decision-making processes and the reasons for their determination to continue the war. The final section of this chapter explains what each of the following chapters does in terms of the overall research question and the sub-aims.

**Personality Approach: Leadership Trait Analysis (LTA)**

The previous section has justified the mechanism through which individual personality characteristics affect foreign policy decision-making. This section places an emphasis on the conditions under which the influence of personality is likely to be maximised and whether the case of the Afghanistan war meets these conditions or not.

Powerful people have always played a prominent role in international relations, for example, the significant influence of Joseph Stalin, Franklin D. Roosevelt and Winston Churchill and their leadership during World War II are frequently discussed in political studies (Salter, 1947; Neustadt, 1990; Birt, 1993; Barber, 2017). When studying powerful individuals in the political
domain, personality is one of the crucial elements that influences leaders’ political behaviours and governmental actions. Henry Kissinger, the former US Secretary of State, once told reporters, ‘As a professor, I tended to think of history as run by impersonal forces. But when you see it in practice, you see the difference personalities make’ (quoted in Isaacson, 1993, p. 13).

While some studies support individual role and power in international politics, others contend that personality and individuals matter very little. Keller (2020) summarised that the context is critical to assess individual influences on politics and international relations. Many written works have examined the conditions under which individual personalities are likely to be important, especially in foreign policy. For instance, Byman and Pollack (2001) explained that personalities have added significance in international relations ‘when power is concentrated in the hands of a leader, when institutions are in conflict, or in times of great change’ (p. 109).

Within the literature on leaders’ personalities and foreign policy, Greenstein (1967; 1987), Hermann and Hagan (1998), Hermann (2001) and Ansell, Boin and ‘t Hart (2014) all outlined conditions under which leaders’ personalities are likely to be important in foreign policy decision-making. Generally, these conditions involve situations where leaders concentrate power and authority, or situations where particular aspects of leaders’ personalities such as ‘interest, expertise, and techniques for managing information and resolving disagreements’ move them forward to control what happens (Hermann, 2001, p. 59). Based on Greenstein’s (1987) and Byman and Pollack’s (2001) works, Winter (2013) discussed when these conditions are likely to meet: when leaders organise their advisory system and decision-making process after assuming power; during crises; and when leaders have to respond to threats.

The case of the US war in Afghanistan meets the conditions under which leaders’ personalities are likely to matter most. Within the US government, the President is vested with supreme authority. After the 9/11 attacks, presidential
authority within the military domain was further strengthened by the document named *Public Law 107 – 40 – SEPT.18, 2001* (GPO, 2001):

The President is authorized to use all necessary and appropriate force against those nations, organizations, or persons he determines planned, authorized, committed, or aided the terrorist attack that occurred on September 11, 2001, or harbored such organizations or persons, in order to prevent any future acts of international terrorism against the United States by such nations, organizations, or persons.

With their power to use military force and their role as decision-maker, US presidents Bush (2001 – 2009) and Obama (2009 – 2017) were the empirically prime leaders of US foreign policy in Afghanistan and thus the role of their personalities in their foreign policy decision-making processes warrants in-depth analysis.

As mentioned above, this thesis chooses LTA to analyse why US presidents continued with military operations in Afghanistan and how they managed their decision-making processes. Details of each LTA personality trait and further combinations of these traits are reviewed in Chapter III. The LTA approach has been applied to examine individual differences of more than 122 global political leaders (for example, Hermann, 2005a; Dyson, 2014), and a set of studies has applied this approach to study leaders and their decision-making (for example, Keller, 2005a; 2005b; Dyson, 2006; 2007; 2014; Kesgin, 2012; 2013).

In addition to LTA, there are two other frequently used content analysis systems to assess individual differences: Motive Theory (Winter, 1987; 2005a); and Operational Code Analysis (George, 1969; Walker, 1977; Walker, Schafer and Young, 2005). These are only two examples of these personality approaches. Winter (2013) divided elites’ personalities into four elements: social context; cognitions; traits; and motives. While the other two all involve one of the four elements, LTA covers cognitions, traits and motives and
provides ‘the most complete personality assessments and the most accurate predictions from personality to political behavior’ (Winter, 2013, p. 447). Furthermore, four of the seven LTA traits are found to be indicative of propensities to use military force (discussed in Chapter III). For these two reasons, this research uses Hermann’s LTA theory to comprehensively assess the two presidents’ personalities and personality-based presidential leadership styles. Meanwhile, LTA has its strengths and weaknesses, which are discussed in Chapter III.

Early literature on LTA traits found some trait-related propensities for the correlation between personality characteristics and single decisions (Hermann, 1980a). Later, more LTA studies conducted case studies and identified the causal mechanisms through which personality traits translate into the decision-making process and produce specific decisions (for example, Preston, 2001; 2011; Kille, 2006; Dyson, 2006; 2014). Yet, there is no further examination of any stable link between any LTA trait and leaders’ inclinations towards the continuation of the war. Bringing in LTA to the study of the persistence of the Afghanistan war, this thesis develops it by extending the causal relationship between specific LTA traits and war persistence.

It is important to recognise that leaders make decisions in specific political contexts, and it is helpful to study leaders’ personalities with attention paid to the contextual conditions. Hermann’s (2005a) definition of leadership style involves the way in which leaders interact with others around them. Some LTA researchers investigated how leaders with different personalities respond to contextual constraints and manage their advisory groups in different ways (for example, Preston and ‘t Hart, 1999; Keller; 2005a, 2005b; Shannon and Keller, 2007). The LTA research programme further asks questions about the consistency of leadership style effects on governmental decision-making across different domains or under the influence of various types of feedback (Hermann et al., 2001).

Furthermore, there is much remaining to be explored about what kind of contextual factors or other factors could influence the effect of leaders’
personalities on their decision-making, and how. Records of Bush’s and Obama’s Afghanistan war decision-making show that both presidents had demonstrated different leadership styles towards divergent opinions in their decision-making processes. In some decisions, they were open to listening to dissenting voices but, in others, they marginalised dissenting voices. In addition to focusing on the widely studied seven LTA traits and their effects on presidential decision-making, this thesis pays attention to the influence of two LTA traits on the effect of one’s conceptual complexity: task focus and the need for power. This thesis also focuses on additional influence (public opinion and inexperience in foreign policy) on the effect of conceptual complexity on Bush’s and Obama’s openness to their advisory systems. These are discussed in detail in Chapter III. In this way, this thesis enriches the existing LTA literature by adding new findings on the interactions among leaders’ experiences in specific domains, personality traits and the political context.

In short, this thesis brings in LTA to answer the overall research question. The significance of such an answer has been demonstrated in three ways. First, the Afghanistan war was a really long war with terrible costs. An earlier troop withdrawal from Afghanistan could have decreased the costs of blood, lives and dollars. It is important to learn about why it lasted for so long, identifying the core interests of US strategy towards Afghanistan compared to such great costs. When considering wider literature and approaches, US policies in Afghanistan and lessons learned from this war could be applied to broader and future US or non-US geopolitical strategies, defence policies and security policies under similar conditions.

Second, looking at the role of personality is important because these leaders had a lot of power and the other personality-related explanations do not really resolve the puzzle previously raised. While the war was often called ‘Bush’s war’ or ‘Obama’s war’, there is no explanation for why and how the presidents continued the war with their failing policies or why and how they continued it but reshaped their policies through their subjective views. This thesis focuses on the link between individual personalities and the continuation of the Afghanistan war. In addition, because this war was often criticised as a
policy that was failing, with existing scholarship on how individual personalities relate to the quality of decision-making (for example, Schafer and Crichlow, 2010; Brummer, 2016), it is also useful to look at the effects of personality characteristics on different aspects of Bush’s and Obama’s decision-making processes and policy options.

Third, bringing in LTA to answer this question is important because it offers a comprehensive analysis of the causal relationships between specific personalities and policy outcomes. Meanwhile, this thesis enriches the existing LTA literature by tracing how leaders’ personality influenced continuation of the Afghanistan war and exploring how their personalities interacted with the complex political context.

Research Design and Methodology

As already noted, this thesis adopts LTA to assess Bush’s and Obama’s personality characteristics. The verbal material collected for this content analysis was mainly collected from Public Papers of the Presidents of the United States: George W. Bush and Public Papers of the Presidents of the United States: Barack H. Obama (GPO, 2012; 2021a). This online official collection includes US presidential writings, press conferences, addresses and remarks (with interviews covered). Each record from this resource was checked with tape recordings for accuracy (GPO, 2021b).

To increase the validity of this thesis, different types of verbal records were collected and processed through the LTA coding scheme introduced in Chapter IV. Trait scores derived from these records are compared for trait stability across different topics, temporal effect and types of material used. Based on the selected trait scores derived from these records and existing scholarship on LTA (in Chapter III), expectations relating to Bush’s and Obama’s war orientations and their management of the decision-making process are developed in Chapter V and further examined in Chapter VI and Chapter VII.
The Afghanistan case is more likely a single case with several occasions for decision. Both presidents made more than one important decision during this war. For each of these decisions, personality-based expectations regarding Bush’s and Obama’s potential behaviours are compared to empirical records relating to their performance during their decision-making processes to examine how consistently LTA expectations are with the presidents’ practical behaviours.

Evidence was collected from autobiographies written by the president or governmental staff members who had direct access to the president or were one of the participants in the decision-making process relating to the Afghanistan war; journalists’ records, reports and interviews; governmental reports; and academic studies. This thesis collected evidence from various perspectives to avoid authors’ bias from these materials. These case studies enable this research to answer the overall research question and to explore the theoretical ideas about LTA traits and war continuation, further investigating interactions between specific LTA traits and between individual personalities and specific contextual factors.

Findings and Contributions

The primary finding of this thesis is that Bush’s and Obama’s war orientations during each major stage of the Afghanistan war are consistent with the expectations of their distrust of others (also combined with their in-group bias). This finding suggests that distrust of others is helpful in understanding and explaining their continuation of the Afghanistan war.

This finding contributes to the existing scholarship on post-9/11 US foreign policy in Afghanistan in two ways. First, the presidents’ personality characteristics provide a new perspective to investigate the war persistence based on the decision-makers’ subjective interpretation of the threats from Afghanistan and their choices to retain US military occupation there. Second,
this finding can be incorporated into the current two major types of accounts for the continuance of the Afghanistan war.

As stated earlier, there is a gap between some objective assessments of low threats in Afghanistan (for example, Cortright, 2011; Glaser and Mueller, 2019) and the empirical continuation of the war. A subjective interpretation of the potential threats in Afghanistan can fill this gap and justify the necessity for the continuation of military operations in Afghanistan because of decision-makers’ perceptions of high threats in that region, even though the objective analysis shows relatively low threats. For geopolitical studies, a personality-based indication of individual willingness to use military force may help improve the understanding of why the US presidents insisted on maintaining a US military presence in Afghanistan, even though this was criticised as being less effective than diplomatic and economic methods to counterbalance other great powers (see for example, Prifti, 2017). These contributions suggest a micro-level perspective to study international conflicts: based on individual personality and choices to answer questions of why wars occur and continue.

This finding also makes a theoretical contribution to LTA studies. Distrust of others has long been studied relating to leaders’ war orientation. This finding contributes to the growing literature on war and distrust of others by connecting leaders’ distrust of others to their war continuation and extending the existing LTA literature through looking at the broader picture of leadership style, personality effects and war persistence. This finding provides insight into analyses of other protracted war cases (for example, the Vietnam war). Furthermore, it has an important implication for analyses of the persistence of other foreign policies relating to military issues (such as defence and security policies) even if things go wrong. It also provides an interpretation of subjective choices to continue the same policy for so long when the decision-makers have alternatives.

The second major finding comes from the case studies, indicating how individual differences, agent-structure relations and the decision-making contexts matter. It is found that leaders’ openness to divergent voices in their
decision-making is mainly dependent on their conceptual complexity. Meanwhile, it is also found that other factors, such as low or high task focus and inexperience in the specific policy domain can influence the effect of conceptual complexity on one’s decision-making through different mechanisms. At least one part of the findings in this thesis indicates how the agent-structure relations could matter in different contexts.

This finding makes a theoretical contribution to LTA theory by exploring potential factors that may influence the personality effects on decision-making, enriching the broader picture of the interactions between leadership styles and the political context. In addition, this finding seeks to address the conflict between Saunders’ (2017) and Preston’s (2012) statements relating to leaders’ inexperience and their openness to divergent voices, supporting the effectiveness of using the LTA approach to measure leadership styles and to analyse personality effects on foreign policy decision-making. These findings have an implication for future research that focuses on deeper analyses of the mechanisms behind these variables and their correlations.

In addition to these two main findings, there are two other interesting findings from the two case studies. First, most of the LTA-based expectations are supported by empirical evidence. These expectations are developed based on LTA trait scores derived from spontaneous material. In addition, the findings show that Bush’s and Obama’s trait scores show stability across time.

Therefore, findings from this thesis reaffirm the effectiveness of the LTA approach in analysing presidential leadership styles and foreign policy decision-making and support the use of spontaneous material in LTA coding.

Second, findings from the case studies suggest that some LTA traits (such as belief in one’s ability to control events, distrust of others, and conceptual complexity) can be incorporated to better explain Bush’s and Obama’s policy choices and their decision-making.
Although they are only preliminary examinations, these findings encourage various combinations of LTA traits in more case studies for a deeper understanding of leaders' choices and decision-making.

A Preview of this Thesis

This thesis has eight chapters. Chapter II critically reviews the current literature on post-9/11 US foreign policy in Afghanistan. It mainly reviews two types of analyses relating to why the US could not totally withdraw from Afghanistan: homeland defence against further terrorist attacks on the US homeland; and the geopolitical concern of counterbalancing other great powers’ influence in Afghanistan. In addition, it reviews Malkasian’s (2021) work on this long war. Malkasian (2021) provided a detailed explanation of the war by incorporating domestic politics and the concerns over national security.

Chapter II also highlights a mismatch between current findings about the necessity to continue the Afghanistan war and the objective threat assessments or the recommended geopolitical disputes solutions. It also reviews the limited personality-related studies on Bush’s and Obama’s decision-making relating to Afghanistan. Although these studies provide valuable insights into some of the major decisions made during this war, the puzzle relating to war endurance remains unresolved, suggesting the lack of a subjective interpretation of the progress of the war, the situation in Afghanistan and the necessity to continue with military operations there.

Chapter III serves as the theoretical backbone of this thesis. The chapter first reviews the strengths and weaknesses of LTA with comparisons to other individual-level approaches. It then presents and discusses the LTA findings on two levels: every single trait; and three types of trait combinations. Then, it discusses the differences between Saunders’ (2017) and Preston’s (2012) works and findings relating to leaders’ experience and their openness to divergent opinions, with an emphasis on the differences in their assessments of leaders’ experiences. Furthermore, it discusses other factors (related to
personality, agent-structure or the political context) that may influence the
effects of Bush’s and Obama’s conceptual complexity on their openness
towards divergent opinions. Finally, it discusses the theoretical contributions,
focusing on using LTA personality characteristics to help explain leaders’ war
orientations and their continuation of a lengthy policy.

Chapter IV describes the research design and justifies the methodical
options chosen for this research. It first discusses the validity issues of LTA
and reports the data collected for the LTA coding, including sources, types of
verbal materials, numbers of verbal records collected for each time period and
total word counts. Details of the sources of data collected are presented in
Appendix 1: Sources. It then justifies the reasons for choosing to conduct case
studies to provide in-depth analyses of the role of Bush’s and Obama’s
personalities in their decision-making relating to the continuation of the
Afghanistan war. Furthermore, it justifies the types of documents collected for
the case studies and how they are used.

Chapter V presents the trait scores derived from the foreign policy-related
spontaneous verbal material, making comparisons to a reference group and
discussing the stability of trait scores across different time periods and topics.
Based on the trait scores and results from the comparisons with the reference
group, this chapter finds that Bush’s and Obama’s trait scores show stability
across time. Expectations are then developed based on these trait scores.
Meanwhile, Bush’s and Obama’s trait scores derived from spontaneous and
scripted materials show significant differences. Details of the variances of trait
scores are presented in Appendix 2: Further Comparisons of Different Groups
of Trait Scores. This chapter achieves the first and second sub-aims of this
thesis: to assess Bush’s and Obama’s personalities through LTA and to
develop behavioural expectations relating to their decision-making relating to
the Afghanistan war based on their personalities.

Chapter VI and Chapter VII conduct two case studies to demonstrate how
LTA personalities influenced Bush’s and Obama’s decision-making. The two
chapters examine how the two presidents led and shaped their decision-
making processes and outcomes. Meanwhile, the case studies focus on examining how consistent is the two presidents’ management of their decision-making processes with the expectations made in Chapter V. Due to the limited access to case study material (discussed in Chapter IV, Chapter VI, Chapter VII and Chapter VIII), not all expectations are examined with enough empirical records. These two case studies find that Bush’s and Obama’s policy orientations and behaviours in their management of the decision-making processes relating to the Afghanistan war are consistent with most of the expectations made based on their LTA traits.

It is also found that Bush’s and Obama’s distrust of others is the main personality characteristic to understand their continued war orientation. Meanwhile, their in-group bias may be incorporated with their distrust of others to help understand the continuation of the Afghanistan war. Other traits help explain their management of the decision-making process, including their responses to challenges, control over and involvement in the decision-making process, openness to information, complex cognitive thinking, focus on problems or group relationships, and willingness to cooperate with like-minded others.

The two case studies also explore the interaction between different personality traits and between personality traits and contextual factors, focusing on Bush’s and Obama’s openness to dissenting voices in their decision-making relating to remaining in or leaving Afghanistan. These two chapters find that leaders’ openness to divergent opinions is mainly based on their conceptual complexity. When Bush performed as a conceptually complexity leader, his openness to divergent voices was likely to be also influenced by his personal involvement (related to his low task focus). In his second major decision, Bush performed as a leader with low conceptual complexity. He was closed to divergent voices and this was influenced by his reliance on trusted subordinates (related to his inexperience). In addition, it finds that, although Obama has a consistently high conceptual complexity, his high task focus could reduce his openness towards dissenting voices when he had made up his mind.
As for the influence of one’s need for power and public opinion on leaders’ openness to divergent voices in decision-making, not enough evidence was found about whether these factors really influenced their openness towards divergent voices or not. Details of these policy orientations and behaviours are analysed in Chapter VI and Chapter VII. These two chapters achieve the other three sub-aims of this thesis: to examine the LTA-based expectations; to examine which personality trait is correlated to war persistence; and to investigate any additional influence on the impact of conceptual complexity on leaders’ openness to divergent voices in their decision-making.

At the end of this thesis, the Conclusion chapter first briefly reviews this thesis, reviewing the puzzle, research question and the thesis structure. Second, it makes a further comparison of Bush’s and Obama’s performance in their decision-making with links to differences in their personalities. It then summarises the findings from the previous chapters, discussing how these findings contribute to the existing literature on LTA theory and post-9/11 US foreign policy in Afghanistan, and the implications of the findings. Finally, it discusses the limitations of this thesis and directions for future research.
Chapter II The Protracted Afghanistan War, Concerns and Continuation

Introduction

As stated in the introductory chapter, given the premise that the Afghanistan war cost so much and did not meet all the established goals, the motivating puzzle of this research is: why did US presidents Bush and Obama choose to continue the Afghanistan war? Why did they not simply leave Afghanistan with the objectives achieved? Although there is much criticism of the length, cost, slow progression, and strategic failures of this war (for example, Paris, 2013; Cancian, 2019; Cordesman, 2021; Moldovan, 2021), there is not a lot of research that directly addresses the question on its persistence. Many studies analysed why the US intervened in Afghanistan (for example, McCartney, 2004; Dueck, 2010; Daalder and Destler, 2011) but they did not answer why the US repeatedly chose to stay there for twenty years when they could have chosen to leave.

This chapter discusses research that has addressed the above questions. It focuses on the three main explanations in the research: concerns about homeland defence; geopolitical interests; and domestic politics, discussing the strengths and weaknesses of each answer.

This chapter proceeds as follows: first, it discusses research that focuses on concerns about US homeland defence against terrorist threats to understand the continuation of the Afghanistan war. Second, it discusses research that focuses on US geopolitical interests in Afghanistan and the surrounding regions, and continued US military engagement in Afghanistan. The first section and the discussion of power competition are consistent with realism. Third, it discusses research that focuses on concerns about domestic politics and how this explained the endurance of the US-Afghanistan war. It focuses on a single study of the endurance of the Afghanistan war from the domestic political perspective. This section refers to scholarship on the
Vietnam war to justify why research about domestic politics is worthy analysis of US foreign policy. The reason is that there are some similarities between this war and the Vietnam war: both are long US wars with huge costs. Decision-making relating to the Vietnam war was heavily influenced by domestic debate. Therefore, domestic politics may be an important reason for the persistence of the Afghanistan war, and this single piece of work deserves more discussion. Each of these studies is critiqued to show individual strengths and weaknesses. A final section discusses the main questions that are not answered by these studies and discusses how an alternative explanation based on individual approaches and political psychology could answer these questions and help explain the endurance of the Afghanistan war.

**Homeland Defence**

General national security explanations for US policies always involve a realist perspective. Classical realists put the US in the context of international power distribution and analyse US policies through the lens of how it responds to events taking place in the international system (Quinn, 2014). ‘A realistic policy is one that is focused on the defence of core American security concerns and the protection of American society from radical disruption arising from events overseas’ (Quinn, 2014, p. 6).

This realistic logic relating to national security and policies is identified in studies of the protracted Afghanistan war. One of the four justifications for the enduring American and international obligation to Afghanistan, summarised by Miller (2021), was that the US and the international community were responsible for protecting their own citizens by winning this war. The concern behind this justification was that Al-Qaida and ISIS terrorists, after US military departure from Afghanistan before it was stabilised, would return to Afghanistan (see also Miller, 2013). Similar concern was stated by Dobbins *et al.* (2019) to explain why Obama altered his decision which was made in 2014 to postpone the pace of full withdrawal from Afghanistan. They argue that there were a set of possible consequences from an early US military departure with
Afghanistan unsettled. These consequences mainly related to the worsening situation in Afghanistan but the final one related to US homeland defence. The authors argue that, without the US suppressing terrorist groups in Afghanistan, these terrorists would have more chances and resources to organise terrorist attacks against the US. Such a security concern was one of the two reasons found by Rahman (2019) for the long-term US military presence in Afghanistan.

Schmunk (2006) argues that the international community had to stay in Afghanistan for a long period of time, otherwise any withdrawal would result in a breakdown of the fragile achievements made there. Preventing Afghanistan from failing again was to prevent this state from being a safe haven for terrorists to prepare their attacks on the Western. A similar concern was expressed by Dobbins (2007) in his testimony presented before the Senate Foreign Relations Committee. He argues that US and NATO military presence in Afghanistan could be indefinite as long as the insurgent groups were able to continue their operations in Pakistan and still posed threats to the Karzai government in Afghanistan.

Another similar opinion was expressed by de Tray (2018) in his reflection on the failed counterinsurgency operations in Afghanistan. He argues that the only possible rationale for the international community (especially the US) maintaining an extraordinary military presence in Afghanistan and other assistance was the threat to global security. He also argues that stability in Afghanistan with security and governance components was an important premise for these international intervention forces to leave that country, being consistent with Schmunk’s (2006) opinion. The security component involved US and international troops, their military operations and their training of the Afghan forces.

However, there is more criticism than support for the necessity for an enduring US military occupation in Afghanistan based on concerns about US homeland defence. This criticism focuses on two issues: the real threats posed by the Taliban and terrorist groups and the effectiveness of US military presence in the stabilisation of Afghanistan. Stiglitz and Bilmes (2012) argue
that Al-Qaida terrorists had fled into other states and therefore a global perspective of security concerns was needed rather than focusing on securing Afghanistan. In other words, the situation in Afghanistan no longer posed a high threat to US homeland security and therefore greater US efforts to secure that territory would not produce greater security for the US. This argument is supported by the Afghanistan Study Group (2010) and Cortright (2011) in that Al-Qaida terrorists had spread globally but the remaining members on the Afghanistan-Pakistan border could no longer pose a high threat to the US, as had been the case prior to the 9/11 attacks. Connah (2021) clearly summarised that the risk of further terror attacks could no longer justify US presence in Afghanistan because terrorist organisations were not restricted to operating only in Afghanistan.

From another perspective, Glaser and Mueller (2019) rejected the safe haven argument, referring to the 9/11 attacks. They pointed out that preparation and implementation of the 9/11 attacks were not just carried out in Afghanistan but also included Germany, Malaysia and the US, with reliance on technological communication overseas. Therefore, terrorists may not need to return to Afghanistan for a safe haven for preparing or carrying out attacks. In addition, Innocent and Carpenter (2009) argue that the US did not need a long-term military presence in Afghanistan to prevent that state from becoming a safe haven for terrorists. They also argue that US security would not be endangered even if the US could not neutralise Al Qaida terrorist threat in Afghanistan.

Critics also questioned the necessity to defeat the Taliban in Afghanistan. Harrison (2009) argues that the Taliban groups focused on driving foreign troops out of Afghanistan. Indeed, the Taliban groups did not pose any direct threat to the US. Following this opinion, Cortright (2011) further argues that the Taliban groups did not commit or wage war against the West. In their analysis, Walt (2009), Glaser and Mueller (2019) and Mueller (2021) rejected the statement that the US remained in Afghanistan because, if the Taliban came back to control that country, they would allow Al-Qaida to return to Afghanistan to re-establish their base and prepare for attacks on the US. Instead, they
argue that the Taliban was different from terrorist organisations and unlikely to allow an active terrorist group to stay in Afghanistan. In addition, Mueller (2021) argues that the Al-Qaida remnants may no longer want to re-establish their bases in Afghanistan.

However, Cordesman (2021) put forward a more cautious opinion, noting that the UN and some other sources had identified increasing links between the Taliban and Al-Qaida, commenting that there was no practical way to assess the real threats posed to the US with the resurgence of the Taliban forces in Afghanistan. He also argues that there was the possibility that the Taliban would tolerate terrorist activities depending on its leaders. Kagan (2012) argues that the Taliban was unlikely to break ties with the Al-Qaida and even unable to drive Al-Qaida members out of Afghanistan. These different opinions leave a question about the real international terrorism threats to the US with the rise of the Taliban forces in Afghanistan.

With regard to the presence of US military forces in Afghanistan, security conditions and the stabilisation progress in that country, Cortright (2011) summarised empirical studies and reports on the situation in Afghanistan, concluding that the presence of US military forces in Afghanistan was the primary reason for armed resistance and insurgency, thereby resulting in increased local violence and deteriorating security in Afghanistan rather than improvement in construction and stabilisation.

Support for this finding can be found in Edward’s (2017) analysis of suicide bombings in Afghanistan. It was found that US occupation and the way in which it carried out the war is one of the reasons for motivating the suicide bombers. Other opinions criticising the long-term presence of US and international forces in Afghanistan were stated by Hornberger (2009), Imran (2019) and Rubin (2013). Connah (2021, p. 82) criticised and summarised the situation in Afghanistan in one sentence: ‘The War on Terror, as a military operation, has itself become a hazardous problem that has prolonged Western intervention in Afghanistan’. Reviewing US homeland defence, Reveron and Gvosdev (2018) commented that the Afghanistan war did not produce the
expected results and degraded American security rather than improve it. All these critics rejected the rationale for an enduring US military occupation to improve the security and stability in Afghanistan in order to protect US homeland security, arguing that US occupation in Afghanistan could only play an opposing role in the reconstruction in Afghanistan.

This section has reviewed arguments for continued US military operations in Afghanistan based on concerns about US homeland defence. The overall argument is that a stabilised Afghanistan with terrorist threats eliminated was necessary for protecting US homeland from further attacks. To achieve this goal, the US needed to remain in Afghanistan until the country was self-sustainable. This is a strong, rational logic for understanding the endurance of and military motivation for the Afghanistan war. However, there is more criticism of this argument from two perspectives. First, terrorist threats had been global and Afghanistan posed a lower threat than before and when compared to other regions. Meanwhile, after regaining authority in Afghanistan, the Taliban would not allow Al-Qaeda back to that country and posed no more threat to the US. Second, the presence of US military forces in Afghanistan did not improve stability in that country but only made it deteriorate.

The divisions between these two viewpoints indicate the problems relating to threat assessments and strategic evaluations of the Afghanistan war progression and the security conditions in that country. First, realist explanations and studies always focus on an objective assessment. However, as Cordesman (2021) noted, there is no practical way to assess the threats posed by international terrorism with the resurgence of the Taliban. The same difficulty may apply to the assessment of threats posed by terrorist groups in Afghanistan and around the world, leaving more freedom to decision-makers to decide whether the threats from these regions and groups were high or not.

Second, even though there was an objective report of these threats, the decision-making was still influenced by a decision-maker’s subjective interpretation of the security situation in Afghanistan. For example, Dunn (2008, p. 79) stated: “‘Reality’ is unknowable outside human perception … the ‘true’
essence of the object is always unknowable to us’. Therefore, however minimal the threats presented in an objective report appeared, the final decision relating to US homeland defence against terrorist attacks was made based on US presidents’ perceptions of how serious the threats from Afghanistan were.

In this section, although studies and debates reflect a realist logic and analysed the situation on a national or governmental basis, some authors (Dobbins et al., 2019) had already analysed individual policies and decisions. Subjective influence also exists in the evaluation of war costs and benefits. While some studies (Cortright, 2011; Connah, 2021) criticised that US military operations in Afghanistan impeded its stabilisation progress, the presidents might have a different point of view with their evaluation of war costs and benefits, therefore believing that the war had made satisfactory progress or that there were reasons for continued US military operations in Afghanistan even it had negative effects on other issues. Therefore, these realist explanations lack a subjective interpretation of the Afghanistan situation to complement their justification for the link between terrorist threat and US military occupation.

Geopolitical Interests

Focusing on the geopolitical values of countries and history, Jones (2012, p. 215) put forward the idea of a ‘Long War’, linking US wars in the Middle East and the Persian Gulf in the past three decades to the regional order and political economy related to oil production in these regions. In Jones’ argument, US oil policy did not focus on seizing the oil but on stabilising regional order and protecting the oil and oil producers. It further aimed to ensure a stable oil business and a friendly relationship between the US and the oil producers. All these were of significant importance to US national security and political economy. Jones suggests that the US wars in the Middle East and the Persian Gulf from the 1990s until the Iraq war should not be viewed as a series of wars but should be treated as a single war led by this oil policy. Following Jones’
logic, Walker (2019) attempted to interpret the US invasion of Afghanistan and its objective of defeating the Taliban as part of a larger geopolitical strategy, arguing that the US war in Afghanistan continuously sought broader interests in the whole region.

This argument is partly supported by Fouskas (2003), who also agreed that the Afghanistan war was based on pre-existing schemes relating to oil and gas resources and routes in the greater Middle East including ‘Central Asia and the Pakistan-Afghanistan zone, the Caspian and the Caucasus’ (p. 20). However, Fouskas put forward a more aggressive argument that the aim of the US was to control the oil and gas pipeline project. Similarly, Gokay (2022, p. 6) commented that oil and gas were ‘not the direct causes’ of this war but ‘occupied a certain place among long-term US policy motivations’. Both Fouskas (2003) and Gokay (2022) connected the long US military presence in Afghanistan to the construction of pipelines from Turkmenistan (a Central Asian state with large oil and gas reserves) to Afghanistan. Following this opinion, Blum (2013) put an emphasis on another point, arguing that developing pipelines through Afghanistan could bypass Iran and Russia. This opinion is supported by Imran (2019), who also summarised that one of the reasons for the endurance of US military occupation in Afghanistan was energy security. In addition to the pipelines, Imran added Afghan mineral resources to US energy and economic interests. These rationales relating to the Afghanistan war demonstrated a complex vision of US strategy and provided a new way of examining and analysing whether it was worth staying in Afghanistan with the high costs of military expenditure.

These studies added the Afghanistan war to the US framework of a longer and broader regional war. Therefore, the continuation of the Afghanistan war was interpreted as being part of an ongoing process of protecting US interests in the Middle East, the Persian Gulf and South and Central Asia, and the endurance of this protection related to circumstances relating to oil and gas production changes in these regions. Focusing on the broader region, US evaluations of gains and costs in the Afghanistan war not only focused on the outcome of the invasion in that country but also examined US relationships
with other states in these regions and the economic profits related to US oil and gas policies.

Gokay (2022) emphasised US economic interests in the Afghanistan war. Then, one issue that these studies did not justify was whether the costs were worth risking. The importance of Afghanistan in US geopolitical strategy in the Middle East and the Persian Gulf was limited compared to Iraq. Afghanistan, different from Iraq, is not one of the Middle East regions and only shares a border with Iran, a country that is located in the Middle East. In this sense, Afghanistan seemed to have lower US geostrategic value than Iraq in that region. Comparing the energy resources in Central Asia and the Gulf, Iran and Iraq have significantly more oil reserves than Turkmenistan and Iran has more gas reserves than Turkmenistan (Cordesman, 2010). Therefore, it seems that Iraq and Iran were more important in US geopolitical strategy in these regions. Engdahl (2004) commented that the costs of military control over oil resources in Iraq and the Persian Gulf were worth risking compared to the profits. However, the Afghanistan war lasted longer than the Iraq war, which may lead to a question of whether the high costs during the Afghanistan war were worth risking. Cordesman (2021) even commented that while some regional experts argued for a strong US presence in Afghanistan to win the economic and political profits, the costs and benefits were estimated positively, without considering the regional political and security issues.

In addition, Cordesman (2010) claimed that the minerals and energy resources in Afghanistan had limited value for the US economy. He also warned that Afghanistan and Pakistan were not vital to US strategic interests so, if the costs and risks remained high to achieve US goals in these countries, it was better to leave rather than to be entrapped there.

John Mearsheimer’s (2001a) offensive realism emphasises the relative power struggle among states and states’ proneness to maximising their own hegemonic power while containing the emergence of other hegemonic powers in the international system. This logic applies to analyses of the endurance of US military occupation with regard to its geopolitical interests in Afghanistan:
competition with other powers for influence on this region. Turning our attention away from the oil and gas pipelines through Afghanistan, there are more studies focusing on Afghanistan’s geostrategic location in South and Central Asia with shared borders with countries such as China, Iran, Pakistan, Tajikistan and Turkmenistan. Prifti (2017) used offensive realism and summarised that US foreign policy in the Middle East from Truman to Obama continued maintaining the role of the US as the only regional hegemon, preventing other rising powers from threatening the US leading role. He also found that the Afghanistan war was part of US geostrategic interests, mainly in cooperation with Iran, based on their shared interest to remove the Taliban and empower their influence in Afghanistan. An empowered Iran helped keep the balance of power in that region, serving US geostrategic interests.

In addition to regional cooperation with Iran, the US competed with more countries for its hegemonic influence. Rahman (2019) also used offensive realism and described the competition among regional powers, finding that the US aimed to prevent China and India from becoming new regional hegemons in South Asia. To achieve its goal, the US attempted to reduce the Chinese role in Afghanistan by encouraging Indian engagement and keeping US military presence in Afghanistan. Meanwhile, to avoid empowering India, the US provided long-term military and economic support to Pakistan in order to counterbalance India. This argument was supported by Imran (2019), arguing that the US remained in Afghanistan with the aim to counterbalance China by maintaining ‘a strategic military presence along with China’s backyard’ (p. 59).

Fouskas (2003) and Chotaev (2013) added another player to this great power competition: Russia. Fouskas (2003) analysed the aims of the US war in Afghanistan, arguing that the geographical positions of China and Russia relating to the Eurasian oil and gas pipelines were obstacles to achieving US hegemony over this region and thus the US aimed to gradually encircle the two states. In Chotaev’s (2013) work, he found that US intervention in Afghanistan expanded its military influence in Central Asia in a very short period of time, resulting in success in US geopolitical competition with other regional powers. This raised concerns from Russia and China, who sought to
intensify their relationships with Central Asian countries to counterbalance the US. He also found that, in this context, the US also intensified its cooperation with Central Asian states to counterbalance China and Russia, leading to an intensified geopolitical power competition. Naz and Jaspal (2018) concurred with this finding and argue that both Russia and the West would continue their engagement in stabilising Afghanistan for their strategic interests, counterbalancing each other. Goodson (2015) made a more explicit argument relating to the increasing regional competition between the US and these countries, arguing that Afghanistan was surrounded by countries with nuclear power and that this upset the US. In addition, Watts and Mann (2015) provided a different understanding of the stalemate in Afghanistan. In their analysis, the prolong conflict between the Afghan government and anti-government forces sustains the local government’s reliance on US military support. This reliance provides bases for US counterterrorism operations in South and Central Asia.

These analyses focusing on the great power competition between the US, China, India, Pakistan and Russia have two strengths relating to justifying the continuation of US military presence in that region. First, it shows a more comprehensive understanding of Afghanistan’s role in the world. Cronin (2013) argues that Afghanistan had only little strategic value for the US in terms of the negative impact of its destabilisation on US security. On the other hand, these studies examined Afghanistan’s place on a larger map in Southern and Central Asia, linking this region to the bordering countries. Second, compared to its geostrategic value in the Middle East, Afghanistan’s geostrategic value in Southern and Central Asia was more evident. It shares borders with India, Pakistan and China and is also close to Russia.

However, these studies did not justify why the US chose to keep a military presence in Afghanistan for geopolitical concerns. A group of studies have identified the negative influence of the long-lasting US military presence in Afghanistan on the situation there and US relationships with other countries. Naz and Jaspal’s (2018) found that the continued US military presence in Afghanistan upset China through the feeling that the US was building up
military bases in Afghanistan to encircle China. In addition, they and Imran (2019) also found that US military presence in Afghanistan also raised opposition from Iran. Similarly, Mearsheimer (2001b) criticised the way in which the US conducted war in Afghanistan because this would upset China and Iran with concerns about a long-lasting presence of US military force near their borders. The Afghanistan war was found to disrupt the balance between India and Pakistan (Gokay, 2004). And the rivalry between these two countries was found to have had a negative impact on the promotion of stability in Afghanistan (Jain, 2007). In addition, Mudiam (2007) found that the US military presence in Afghanistan raised concerns from India and Iran. Indeed, Jain (2007) and Rubin (2021) summarised that the long-term US military presence upset most of the countries of the Greater Middle East and Afghanistan’s neighbours.

It seems that the US maintained its military presence in Afghanistan for geopolitical competition with other powers and regional stability. Ranneberger (2021) provided one explanation that the presence of a small amount of US hard power in Afghanistan reassured other Central Asia countries that the US was committed to promoting stability in Afghanistan. However, this explanation did not work for the endurance and increase of US troop numbers in previous years. Indeed, the endurance of US military occupation intensified the geopolitical competition, which increased the instability in Afghanistan.

From another perspective, studies do not support the efficiency of a military strategy for this geopolitical competition. Proctor (2020) criticised the inability of the US to fight low-intensity conflicts in Afghanistan effectively, resulting in a decrease in its global influence compared to other international political powers. Referring to the Cold War, Prifti (2017, p. 201) reviewed US competition with China and Russia, suggesting that there was no need for the US to ‘convert its economic power into additional military strength’ to counterbalance China and Russia. Instead, economic attacks worked better to weaken Russia and China’s military strength and kept the US as the only regional hegemon and aspiring global superpower. Cordesman and Lin (2015) warned that the US could benefit more from cooperation with these states and
leaving other external powers in Afghanistan with checks and balances among them. Therefore, while the objective determinism to counterbalance other emerging powers was clear, the reason for the US to use military force in Afghanistan was unclear. It may be questioned whether the US administration had considered the rationale for continuing military occupation and had sought alternative strategies.

**Domestic Politics**

Although the Afghanistan war was part of US foreign policy, it was still influenced by domestic political concerns. As stated in the introduction section, there are some similarities between the Afghanistan war and the Vietnam war. Research has found strong explanations for how concerns about domestic politics (electoral support and partisan support) had affected US presidents’ (Kennedy, Johnson and Nixon) decision-making relating to the escalation and duration of the Vietnam war (Johns, 2010). These findings suggest that domestic politics is a valuable perspective for analysing and understanding foreign policy decision-making relating to the endurance of the Afghanistan war.

During the Vietnam war, Johns (2010) highlighted President Johnson’s unwillingness to consider withdrawal in order to avoid being regarded as having lost the war and thus losing domestic support. Similarly, O'Hanlon (2010) analysed that due to his promise during the presidential campaign, Obama was unlikely to prematurely accelerate US troop withdrawal from Afghanistan, which could result in being seen as leading a defeated war. On the other hand, Gartner and Blanken (2012) referred to a poll in November 2010 and argue that US domestic approval for leaving Afghanistan exceeded 50 per cent, and this increasing public opposition to war and military casualties would become a source of domestic constraints on future US military operations in Afghanistan. Similarly, Cancian (2019) collected polling data and noticed that the domestic approval for US military actions in Afghanistan had been below 50 per cent since late 2008.
On the other hand, Malkasian (2021) found that, in the US, different from other war examples that would be influenced by domestic pressure to withdraw troops from the wars earlier, there was little popular opposition to remain in Afghanistan. Kreps (2010) found that low public support from August 2006 to December 2009 for the Afghanistan war in NATO member states (except the US) did not pressure leaders from the states to withdraw their troops from Afghanistan. In these states, elites from different major political parties did not advocate the withdrawal of troops from Afghanistan. Therefore, this elite consensus limited the influence of public opinion on foreign policy decision-making because leaders and their electoral alternatives shared similar positions on this issue. Meanwhile, Kreps (2010) acknowledged that public support in the US for the Afghanistan war was always higher than that in these non-US states (except for the quarter from November 2006 to January 2007). These contrasting opinions identify an important problem in the studies of domestic politics relating to the continuation of the Afghanistan war: how did presidents collect, interpret and respond to information about public opinions?

Malkasian (2020, p. 88) put forward a question: ‘Given the high costs and slim benefits of the war, why hasn’t the United States simply left Afghanistan?’ and answered it by himself: ‘The answer is the combination of terrorism and U.S. electoral politics’. He found that, although Afghanistan demonstrated very limited geostrategic value and the risk of another terrorist attack was unknown, the presidents could not afford the loss of voters’ support if they underestimated the threats.

Later, Malkasian (2021, pp. 458–459) expanded on his answer by combining terrorism and domestic politics, with concerns for humanitarian assistance and military generals’ reluctance to end the US military presence in Afghanistan. After the 9/11 attacks, the fear of another attack was widespread throughout the nation. Even though the threat receded during Obama’s presidency, he could not afford the political consequences of another attack due to his underestimation of terrorist threats. Meanwhile, Obama faced the difficulty that, if the situation in Afghanistan worsened after US withdrawal, the president would be criticised for his failed decision which was opposed to
military generals’ unwillingness to leave. In addition, Malkasian noted that Bush and Obama (not Trump) all knew that they would lose support from important political figures and groups if specific humanitarian issues in Afghanistan were left unimproved or worsened. Malkasian (p. 459) summarised that ‘Leaving was more politically dangerous than staying’.

On the other hand, Biden faced fewer constraints due to the current complex and competitive global political environment with power competition among powerful nations and the coronavirus pandemic, and that, twenty years after the 9/11 attacks, the shadow of that tragedy and terrorism was waning (Malkasian, 2021).

Malkasian’s (2020; 2021) works are a good example of exploring and connecting domestic politics to the continuation of the Afghanistan war, demonstrating the comprehensive decision-making context faced by the presidents. However, this is only a single study of the protracted Afghanistan war from the domestic political perspective. Comparing the pressures faced by Bush and Obama, Obama faced fewer threats about subsequent attacks and pressure from these threats but faced more pressure from military generals’ unwillingness to leave Afghanistan. Comparing Bush’s and Obama’s policies during their first terms in office, although both continued the war, Bush kept the troop number in Afghanistan at a low level. Obama was forced to send more troops and set a date to withdraw US troops from that country. Meanwhile, during their second terms in office, Bush and Obama were no longer pressured by electoral issues and they may have faced similar pressure from the deteriorating situation in Afghanistan. Comparing their policies, although both continued the war, Bush increased troop deployment in Afghanistan during the final years of his presidency while Obama gradually decreased it.

These differences suggest that the two presidents faced different kinds of domestic pressure during their first terms in office. Being pressured by domestic politics, they had more than one option relating to the level of US engagement in the Afghanistan war. From another perspective, they faced similar pressures in their second terms in office, mainly due to the deteriorating
security situation in Afghanistan and concerns about US homeland defence. Even though pressured by similar domestic pressures, the presidents would make different choices. In addition, they demonstrated different understandings of the war and set different goals (for example, Bush, 2011; Obama, 2020). Only focusing on domestic pressures did not fully account for why and how they continued this war. Further analyses, either agreeing or disagreeing with Malkasian’s summary, need to engage with this work to explore more variances in the presidents' responses towards domestic political pressure and constraints and their policy orientations.

Missing Piece: Subjective Interpretation and Motivation

The previous three sections have reviewed scholarship on the enduring US military occupation in Afghanistan based on three reasons: homeland defence, geopolitical interests and domestic politics. This section critiques these studies by demonstrating the differences between objective and subjective arguments in war studies.

Most of the studies reviewed in the sections on homeland defence and geopolitical power competition were made on a realist basis. In other words, these studies presented deterministic outcomes based on objective assessments of threats. Once the objective assessments were made, the outcome was determined: the US had to remain in Afghanistan if objective threats were detected. On the other hand, this thesis focuses on subjectivity and choices. A war or intervention could be an agent's choice rather than anything inevitable. Even though both US presidents chose to continue the war, their reasons why and the approaches they adopted could be different, resulting in the different emphases they placed on their decisions and policies.

Studies reviewed in these two sections did not need to focus on subjective influence. However, in each section, objectivity and determinism arguments did not provide a convincing explanation for war persistence and progress. There is a debate on the objective threats in Afghanistan, and therefore
subjective interpretation played a more important role in deciding whether to continue the war or not. Indeed, leaders’ personalities are found to influence their perceptions, decision-making styles and their preferred ways to deal with conflicts (Preston, 2001; Dyson, 2006; Schafer and Crichlow, 2010; Keller and Foster, 2012; Foster and Keller, 2014). How leaders think and their final decisions become more important in crisis situations (Post, 1991; Birt, 1993; Cottam, Mastors and Preston, 2010). In the geopolitical section, studies did not justify the rationale for choosing to use military force while political and economic options were more effective. What is missing is an explanation for why the presidents chose to take military action instead of other options. Indeed, individual personality is found to be a strong indicator of their war orientation (for example, Winter, 1987; 2002; 2004; 2018; Keller and Foster, 2012). In other words, personality plays an important role in leaders’ personal choices of war or conflicts. These realist and non-psychological explanations for the persistence of the Afghanistan war did not effectively address the subjective choice made by agents to continue the Afghanistan war.

The section on domestic politics discussed more presidents’ concerns about domestic support for or opposition to withdrawing US troops from Afghanistan. What was needed was the individual variances in the presidents’ responses towards domestic political pressures and their decision-making processes because Bush and Obama faced different difficulties and their policies were different. Assuming a homogenisation of leadership styles did not fully account for Bush’s and Obama’s use of military force and their continuation of the Afghanistan war.

In addition, the situation, as discussed in the introductory chapter, maximised the influence of the US president as playing the leading role in decision-making relating to the Afghanistan war. What these explanations lack relates to the subjective interpretation of the threats in Afghanistan, their motivation for continuing the war, and more variances in their decision-making processes and foreign policy outcomes.
There are some studies that look at US foreign policy in Afghanistan using leadership styles and personalities. For example, Greenstein (2003; 2007), Moens (2004), and Pfiffner (2009) all analysed Bush’s decision to launch war against Afghanistan through his leadership style or personality characteristics. Wayne (2011a; 2011b) analysed Obama’s decision to send 30,000 additional troops into Afghanistan through his presidential leadership style and some personality characteristics. In addition, Marsh (2014) analysed Obama’s decision to send 30,000 more troops into Afghanistan through the bureaucratic politics model, finding that his decision was a compromise pressured by the military leaders and others who advocated a troop surge. This is not a personality-based analysis but it analysed Obama’s decision-making within political institutions and depicted him as a constraint respecer.

These studies, as a part of the existing literature on US foreign policy in post-9/11 Afghanistan, provided valuable insights into how individual personality and leadership style mattered in leading the decision-making process relating to the US war in Afghanistan. However, these studies only looked at a single decision relating to this war and did not ask any questions about its endurance. Therefore, the puzzle relating to why the US continued its military operations in Afghanistan for so long despite terrible costs remains unresolved. Meanwhile, these studies did not systematically assess or analyse the US presidents’ personalities. They mainly discussed these two presidents’ cognitive styles and their control over the decision-making processes. However, there is more to be discussed regarding how the two presidents managed their decision-making processes and shaped the final outcomes.

As discussed in this section, the missing analysis in the existing literature on the persistence of the Afghanistan war is the subjectivity within these decision-making processes. A personality approach could look at how the two presidents dealt with political constraints and why they wanted to take military action in Afghanistan, especially how their perceptions of threats from Afghanistan affected their willingness to use military force there.
Drawing from valuable findings from these existing studies on personalities and leadership styles, this thesis takes an individual-focused and political psychological approach to explain the continuation of the Afghanistan war and differences in policies adopted by different administrations with attention paid to subjective motivation and perception. Similar to these studies, this thesis also places an emphasis on Bush’s and Obama’s personalities and leadership styles. However, it goes further by looking at all the major decisions relating to the continuation of the Afghanistan war, seeking a consistent personality-based explanation for the persistence of the long war. Furthermore, it goes beyond the existing literature by applying LTA theory to conduct comprehensive and systematic analyses of the two presidents’ personalities and how their personalities affected their decision-making relating to the war. Dyson (2014) and Preston (2011) applied LTA theory to explain Bush’s decision-making relating to the Iraq war and presented substantial findings on how his personality influenced his decision-making processes and how differences in leaders’ personalities helped explain the differences in their decision-making behaviours. Their works, although they did not examine all seven LTA traits, strongly supported the effectiveness of the LTA approach in analysing presidential leadership styles and foreign policy decision-making in war studies.

In order to answer the questions arising from studies reviewed in this chapter, the individual approach should focus on the subjective interpretation of the threats in Afghanistan, evaluation of war costs and benefits, motivation for using military force and responses to domestic political pressures. Such an individual approach, with its analysis of the presidents’ subjective interpretation of the security situation in Afghanistan and their motivation for continuing this war, contributes to the existing scholarship on post-9/11 US foreign policy in Afghanistan, especially US continuation of the war, in two ways. First, it fills in the gap between objective assessment and subjective interpretation of the security situation in Afghanistan and individual choice relating to the Afghanistan war, thus complementing the existing realist explanations. Second, it expands the personality and psychological studies on US foreign policy by
investigating the consistent personality influence on several major decisions to continue US military operations in Afghanistan and providing a new perspective to understand the presidents’ decisions on prolonging the war.

**Conclusion**

This chapter reviewed studies on the long-term US military operations in Afghanistan from three perspectives: homeland defence, geopolitical interests and domestic politics. Each has its strengths and weaknesses.

In terms of the studies on US homeland defence, they presented a realist logic relating to continuing US military operations in Afghanistan to protect the US from any further attacks. However, there is a debate on the objective threats from terrorists and the Taliban in Afghanistan, thus resulting in a weaker justification for the necessity to remain in that country. Studies that focused on US geopolitical interests in Afghanistan presented the geopolitical and geostrategic values of Afghanistan on a broader map. However, the question that remained related to the rationale for using military force when there were better options. Finally, studies focused on the domestic political concerns demonstrated the complexity of the political decision-making context for the president and how domestic factors influenced foreign policy decisions. What is not explained is the variances in presidents’ decision-making processes and their policy orientations. Acknowledging the complexity of the decision-making context, individual differences played an important role in shaping and leading the decision-making processes and outcomes.

Finally, this chapter suggested an individual-focused political psychological approach to investigate subjective influences on agents’ choices on the war and the decision-making process, including their motivation for using military force, responses to domestic pressure and their aim to continue the Afghanistan war. This individual approach could help understand the protracted Afghanistan war from the view of the decision-makers and complement existing explanations relating to US continuation of the war. The
next chapter unpacks the theoretical approach adopted by this thesis, a personality assessment called Leadership Trait Analysis (LTA), and how this approach answers the remaining questions.
Chapter III LTA Theoretical Framework

Introduction

The previous chapter explored the existing scholarly literature around the endurance of US military occupation in Afghanistan, including concerns about homeland defence, geopolitical interests and domestic politics. While in many ways this thesis builds on strengths within this literature, as a whole the literature does not fully address the subjectivity issues relating to the persistence of the Afghanistan war. As assessments of the objective threats in Afghanistan and the necessity to stay there were debatable, the presidents had the choice to leave that country. Meanwhile, they had other choices rather than a single military option for US geopolitical competition in Afghanistan with other emerging powers. In addition, the presidents faced different domestic pressures during their presidencies and made different policies relating to how to continue their war in Afghanistan.

Subjectivity matters in these decisions because individual personalities are strongly correlated to their choices of war (Winter, 1987; 2002; 2004; 2018; Dyson, 2006; Keller and Foster, 2012). Meanwhile, personalities are important in shaping leaders’ perceptions, their information-processing style, their management of the advisory system and their preferred way to deal with problems, finally influencing policy outcomes and governmental actions (Preston, 2001; Dyson, 2006; Kille, 2006; Cottam, Mastors and Preston, 2010). These individual choices that were not explained by the existing literature on post-9/11 US foreign policy in Afghanistan were the important reasons for the endurance of the Afghanistan war.

This chapter adopts an approach from political psychology: Leadership Trait Analysis (LTA) (Hermann, 1980a; 2005a). As stated in the introductory chapter, the puzzle of this thesis is: given the premise that the war cost so much and did not match all the established goals, why did Presidents Bush and Obama choose to continue the war rather than simply leave Afghanistan.
with the objectives achieved? LTA has its own strengths compared to other approaches for this thesis. This theory helps resolve the puzzle by identifying Bush’s and Obama’s personal war orientations and developing expectations about how they shaped their decision-making processes and outcomes, which are reviewed in the following sections.

Using LTA to resolve the puzzle can complement objective realist explanations and enrich subjective explanations for the endurance of this war on the basis of individual characteristics, subjective interpretation and choices relating to the war’s progression, and personality-led decision-making processes. However, LTA also has conceptual weaknesses compared to other approaches in the arena of political psychology.

This chapter critically reviews the LTA approach, focusing on its conceptual framework and existing findings of LTA studies on leaders’ policy orientations and their decision-making. LTA distinguish seven traits: belief in one’s ability to control events (BACE), need for power (PWR), self-confidence (SC), conceptual complexity (CC), task focus (TASK), in-group bias (IGB), and distrust of others (DIS). Meanwhile, the LTA findings from foreign policy decision-making reviewed in this chapter are divided into two levels: findings relating to every single trait and findings relating to various trait combinations. These two-level findings are the bases for the personality-based expectations of Bush’s and Obama’s individual preferences on policy options and their management of the decision-making processes in Chapter V.

This chapter proceeds as follows: first, it provides a brief overview of LTA, introducing what it is, why it is relevant to this thesis, and its strengths and weaknesses. Second, it discusses the conceptual framework of LTA based on the definition of every single trait and findings from existing LTA studies, emphasising trait effects on personal policy orientations and leaders’ behaviours in leading and shaping the decision-making process. For some subsections, references are made to other general experimental studies in social psychology. Each subsection is concluded with how these findings relate to this project. Third, it expands to studies that use various combinations
of LTA traits and their findings. Fourth, it discusses findings and divergent views among studies on leaders’ experiences, personality traits and information collection styles in decision-making. Based on these disputes, this thesis discusses two kinds of proposition to explore the interaction among leaders’ experience, personality characteristics and one contextual factor: public opinion, discussing how such an interaction could affect leaders’ tolerance of divergent voices in their decision-making.

A final section discusses the theoretical contributions of this thesis. This thesis analyses a set of decisions to stay in Afghanistan, extending the existing LTA literature by looking at the broader picture of leadership style, personality analysis and war persistence. It also explores the relationship between specific personality characteristics and subjective choices to continue to engage in the same policies for so long when they had alternatives. In addition, it contributes to these disputes by exploring the interactions among experience, personality characteristics and the political context.

**Leadership Trait Analysis (LTA): An Overview**

A major problem for modern leadership studies is that scholars cannot bring state leaders into a laboratory experiment or invite them to undertake in-depth clinical questionnaires. Therefore, a pragmatic necessity for scholars to study high-level political figures and their personalities is a feasible and effective method to analyse leaders ‘at-a-distance’ (Schafer, 2014). A set of studies (see Suedfeld and Tetlock, 1977; Walker, 1977; Hermann, 1980a; 1980b; 2005a; Winter, 1980; 2002) used leaders’ public verbal statements to analyse their personalities and further predict their policy orientations and decision-making styles. These approaches have become increasingly important in the fields of political psychology and foreign policy analysis on leadership.

One of the most prominent approaches is the Leadership Trait Analysis (LTA) developed by Hermann (1980a; 1980b; 2005a). Hermann’s LTA assessment is designed to analyse personal characteristics and their effects
on foreign policy decision-making. Like other at-a-distance approaches, LTA also acknowledges that personality characteristics matter in understanding leaders’ specific beliefs and decision-making behaviours and notices the difficulty of lacking direct access to these political leaders. To solve this problem, LTA examines leaders’ verbal records. The theoretical argument behind this approach is that what these leaders say (the way in which they use words and the frequency of specific words or expressions used) is indicative of their personality traits. More specifically, LTA assesses leadership style from three perspectives: leaders’ responses to political constraints, openness to information and motivation for seeking positions, aiming to detect specific leadership styles based on leaders’ sensitivity to the political context, their concerns over controlling the political world and their task motivation (Hermann, 2005a). In this way, LTA uses a content analysis of one’s verbal records and distinguishes seven traits according to specific rules. These traits are listed at the beginning of this chapter.

Based on the work of 45 heads of state, their personality characters and their foreign policy behaviours from 1959 to 1968, Hermann (1980a) explored many facets of how leaders lead and shape foreign policy, providing a solid basis for further studies using LTA. Later, Hermann (2005a) enriched her records, and the profiles contained 122 political leaders (including 87 heads of state). A slight change in LTA framework is that, in Hermann’s (1980b) earlier work, there was another trait: the need for affiliation.

This approach has been widely used to study leaders from western and non-western states (for example, Hermann, 1980a; 1980b; Dille and Young, 2000; Preston, 2001; Dyson and Billordo, 2004; Dyson, 2006; 2009; 2014; Shannon and Keller, 2007; Yang, 2010; Kesgin, 2012; 2019a; 2019b; 2020) and international organisations (Kille and Scully, 2003; Kille, 2006; Hermann and Sakiev, 2011; Hermann and Pagé, 2016). These studies and their findings have supported the validity of LTA and have provided a huge body of empirical findings relating to the links between LTA traits and their effects on leaders’ foreign policy orientation and how they lead and shape foreign policy decision-making processes.
Among various political psychological approaches, there are three other approaches frequently used in political studies: Operational Code Analysis (George, 1969; Walker, 1977; Walker, Schafer and Young, 2005), Integrative Complexity (Suedfeld and Tetlock, 1977) and Motive Theory (Winter, 2002; 2005a; 2013; 2018). Compared to these approaches, LTA has one advantage. LTA combines beliefs (belief in one’s ability to control events and in-group bias), motives (need for power and task focus), cognitive style (conceptual complexity and self-confidence) and interpersonal style (distrust of others) (Hermann, 1980a). Operation Code Analysis focuses on beliefs, and Motive Theory focuses on power, achievement, or affiliation motivations. Integrative Complexity focuses on cognitive complexity across different situations but does not measure individual differences. Therefore, LTA is relatively more comprehensive compared to the other three approaches and thus assesses more variances relating to how leaders lead and shape their foreign policy, including the styles and contents.

Furthermore, LTA has another two advantages for this study. First, leaders make decisions in natural settings which involve various types of agents, institutions and contextual factors. This means that the decision-making context is complex and unique, and studies on individual foreign policy decision-making should place leaders in their proper context to avoid overlooking the nuances in the real political world. Therefore, studies need to pay attention to how leaders interact with their decision-making context. Some specific leaders’ behavioural propensities based on LTA characteristics are indicative of leaders’ agent-structure interactions, for example, leaders’ responses to constraints in their environments (the belief in one’s ability to control events and need for power). In addition, these approaches that focus on different types of personality explore the causal mechanism behind the ‘processes operating inside the individual and connecting environment and outcomes’ (Walker and Post, 2005, p. 63).

Second, more than half of the seven traits have been found to be related to war predisposition (Hermann, 1980a; Winter, 2002; Dyson, 2006). This means that LTA assessments of Bush’s and Obama’s personalities can
provide a relatively comprehensive understanding of their personal war orientations by identifying the different personality characteristics that influenced them to continue the war. In other words, their personal motives for continuing the Afghanistan war may be complex and can be detected through the LTA lens.

LTA also has weaknesses. Although it covers a lot of basic personality elements, it does not include emotions and feelings, which are also frequently assessed in personality assessments (Winter, 2005b; Post, 2008). LTA is not required to cover all the psychological issues. However, in cases of war and peace, decision-makers’ emotions and feelings, such as fear and stress, could affect their perceptions and choices (Murray, 1933; Winter, 2018), thus affecting the rationale of individual decision-making. In the US-Afghanistan war, this emotional influence may have been important. Greentree (2021, p. 12) analysed the long Afghanistan war and found that ‘Behind affirmations of national interest and rational calculus, fear and passion drove the US response to 9/11’. Therefore, although LTA analysis is still helpful in understanding Bush’s and Obama’s war decisions, it could be stronger if it also explores the interaction between some specific emotional feelings and their war orientations.

In addition, there are some overlaps between LTA and the other three approaches as well as differences in their assessments. LTA shares some beliefs assessed by Operational Code Analysis, but does not discuss the pessimism and optimism derived from leaders’ beliefs about the permanence and sources of conflicts (Hermann, 2005a; Walker, Schafer and Young, 2005). And it remains unclear how these differences would influence leaders’ thinking and their decision-making. Integrative Complexity believes that cognitive complexity changes across different situations (Suedfeld, Guttieri and Tetlock, 2005), while, in LTA, this is a relatively stable characteristic (some LTA studies have found changes in this trait across time, see Dille, 2000; Dille and Young, 2000). LTA shares the three motives assessed in Motive Theory: power, achievement and affiliation. However, LTA discusses achievement and affiliation motives under one personality trait: task focus (Hermann, 2005a; Winter, 2005a). These differences do not suggest which approach is the best.
Each of these approaches has its own strengths. Studies choose different approaches on the basis of their research aims and emphases.

Other critiques of LTA include issues about its validity, reliability and stability, involving the various types of verbal materials used for coding. Discussion and debate on the validity and reliability issues relating to content analysis and the use of spontaneous and scripted verbal materials are detailed in the next chapter as methodological concerns about LTA and justification for the selection and use of specific types of verbal records.

Concerning stability issues, a number of LTA studies investigated the stability of personality attributes when focusing on different topics and issues (for example, Shannon and Keller, 2007; Dyson, 2014; Dyson and Raleigh, 2014), domestic and foreign audiences (or private and public presentations) (for example, Dyson and Raleigh, 2014; Kesgin, 2019a), and different time frames (for example, Dille, 2000; Dille, and Young, 2000; Hermann and Sakiev, 2011; Kesgin, 2019b; Dinler and Balci, 2021). These studies constructed personality profiles of western and non-western leaders and examined the stability of these leaders' personalities based on diverse verbal materials with different contextual factors. It was found that some leaders showed consistently stable personality attributes facing different topics, audiences or during different time periods while others did not. Instability was found in some other leaders’ personality trait scores derived from diverse verbal materials. This instability itself may be a personality trait, indicating individual sensitivity to one or more than one contextual cues (Hermann, 2005a).

LTA: The Conceptual Framework

Belief in One’s Ability to Control Events (BACE)

Belief in one’s ability to control events (or internal-external control), as its name suggests, indicates one’s perception of the degree of control he or she has over what happens in the world. In other words, it reflects one’s confidence in personal capability to control the situation (Hermann, 1980b; 2005a). Leaders
who score high on this trait are confident that they can, at least to some extent, have control over what happens in the world, while leaders who score low on this trait see more obstacles in the real world and limited personal influence on the situation (Hermann, 2005a).

One's belief in the ability to control events has long been looked at in terms of policy orientations. In Hermann’s (1980a) study of 45 heads of state, leaders with high in-group bias, high belief in their ability to control events, high need for power, low conceptual complexity and high distrust of others were found to show an independent orientation to foreign affairs. Dyson (2006; 2014; 2016) analysed UK Prime Minister Tony Blair's personality and the Iraq decision, US President George W. Bush’s personality and the Iraq decision and UK leaders Gordon Brown’s and Alistair Darling’s personalities and their decisions relating to the great financial crisis. These four leaders were all found to have high scores on their belief in their ability to control events and showed a proactive orientation to respond quickly to influence the situation and an interventionist orientation to take part in the events to control the situation. Another example of this positive relationship between the belief in one’s ability to control events and these two policy orientations is UN Secretary-General Kofi Annan in UN intervention strategies (Kille, 2006). A different instance is UN Secretary-General, Kurt Waldheim, who did not have a strong belief in his ability to control events and showed a reactive attitude by waiting for member states to handle international affairs first (Kille, 2006).

The belief in one’s ability to control events is also found to be related to another important policy orientation: risk-taking. In his studies of US and UK leaders, Dyson (2014; 2016) found a positive correlation between leaders’ scores on their belief in their ability to control events and their propensity for risk-taking. This correlation was also identified in Görener and Ucal's (2011) analysis of Turkish leader Recep Tayyip Erdoğan and his risk-taking orientation in the Cyprus issue. Van Esch and Swinkel (2015) examined the personalities of six Europe political leaders and how they made sense of the euro crisis. Their findings provide more details to understand the causal relationship between this trait and leaders’ propensity for risk-taking. Three of
the six cases suggested that leaders with a higher belief in their ability to control events had a lower sense of threat. Meanwhile, five of the six cases suggested that leaders with a higher belief in their ability to control events had a lower sense of uncertainty. Keller and Foster (2012) developed a ‘first image’ theory, which assesses leaders’ locus of control and inclinations to take risky diversionary strategies. The diversionary strategy means that leaders would use force abroad to generate domestic support and mitigate the negative impact of domestic critiques of scandals or policy failures. The locus of control is assessed based on two LTA traits: belief in one’s ability to control events and self-confidence. A higher locus of control (a high belief in one’s ability to control events and high self-confidence) is positively related to one’s willingness to use risky diversionary strategies.

Other studies and analyses paid attention to how leaders’ belief in their ability to control events affects their decision-making processes. Hermann (2005a) has expected that leaders who score high on this trait would want to control the decision-making and implementation process. This expectation is supported by Kok and Verbeek (2020) in their study of Pierre Werner with his control over Luxembourg’s ministries of foreign minister, prime minister and treasurer.

Two widely examined and compared issues relating to leaders’ scores on this trait are their confidence in their decisions and willingness to compromise with others. Hermann (2005a) expected leaders who score high on this trait to be confident in their decisions and less willing to compromise with others because they know what should be done and firmly believe that they can influence the world. Dyson (2014) compared Bush’s (high belief) and US Secretary of Defense Donald Rumsfeld’s (low belief) leadership in the Iraq war and found that Bush showed more confidence in the surge decision while Rumsfeld did not believe that it would work.

As for leaders’ willingness to compromise with others, Dyson (2006; 2016) found in case studies mentioned above and Kille (2006) found in the analysis of UN Secretary-General Dag Hammarskjöld that leaders’ who scored high on
this trait were likely to discount barriers to actions and regard them as surmountable. Further, Görener and Ucal (2011) examined the records of Turkish leader Erdoğan with his high score on the belief in his ability to control events and found his willingness to challenge constraints decisively and forcefully. This finding is consistent with Shannon and Keller’s (2007) conclusion after examining several US leaders and their inclination to norm violation in the Iraq case. They found that leaders who scored high on this trait were more likely to violate international norms that prevent them from controlling the situation.

Finally, a future direction for exploring the causal relationship between leaders’ belief in their ability to control events and their decision-making styles is to look at their information collection. Davis and Phares (1967) conducted an experiment on internal and external subjects and found that internals (high belief in one’s ability to control events) more actively sought information in an ambiguous situation than externals (low belief in one’s ability to control events). However, this is not fully examined in LTA studies. Preston’s (1997) analysis of US President Harry S. Truman in the Korean cases noticed that he had an external locus of control. However, there was more than one indication for Truman’s closed information processing and Preston did not demonstrate if Truman’s external locus had an independent impact on his information processing.

Given the overall research question of this thesis: How do the LTA-based personalities and leadership styles of US presidents Bush and Obama help explain the costly endurance of the post-9/11 war in Afghanistan? Scores on Bush’s and Obama’s belief in their ability to control events are expected to be indicative of their war orientations in the Afghanistan case and the ways they preferred to carry out military operations, including their preferences on independent or cooperative, proactive or reactive policies and their willingness to take risks.
**Need for Power (PWR)**

One’s need for power indicates a concern for obtaining and keeping one’s power and influencing others and other groups (Winter, 1973; Hermann, 2005a). High scores on this trait indicate one’s desire to control and influence the environment. In other words, a high need for power emphasises the position of leading and being in charge in policy-making while a lower score indicates less need for being in charge (Hermann, 2005a).

Leaders’ need for power has long been studied in terms of its strong relationship with leaders’ war orientations. Winter (1973; 1980; 1987; 1993; 2002; 2004; 2007; 2018) has applied Motive Theory to studies of different leaders’ motive imagery and the war records of their states. His studies involved heads of state from the US, the Soviet Union, Great Britain, Germany, Iraq and Southern African states. The war records included both interstate wars and the US Civil War. He found that leaders’ high power motive was strongly related to war entry. This relationship was consistent across different kinds of crises, state leaders and verbal texts scored. Later, Richardson and Winter (2021) examined US senators’ power motive and their votes for war, finding a similar positive relationship between the high power motive and senators’ votes for war. McClelland (1975) examined US history from 1780 to 1970 and found that this country was most likely to go to war when the power motivation was high and higher than the affiliation motivation.

Although these studies all used Motive Theory, not LTA, their findings still apply to LTA studies because Winter’s power motive is characterised as one’s need for power in LTA, and his affiliation versus achievement motives are coded as low or high task orientation in LTA (Hermann, 2005a; Kaarbo, 2018). Additional support for this relationship could be found in two laboratory studies conducted by Terhune (1968) and Langner and Winter (2001). In addition to the war orientation, Hermann (1980a) found another policy orientation that leaders’ need for power was positively related to governmental orientation to independent actions. This means that, the higher a leader’s need for power,
the more likely the government would take independent actions in foreign affairs.

Leaders' need for power is also found to be indicative of their skills in controlling the decision-making process and achieving personal goals. Dyson's (2006) study of Tony Blair's personality and the Iraq decision found that this UK Prime Minister successfully manipulated the situation to achieve his goal with his high need for power, which is consistent with Hermann's expectation (2005a) that high power-motivated leaders are good at sizing up the situation and take effective tactics to achieve their goals. Blair was found to dominate and tightly control the policy-making process with his unitary commands. The Iraq decision was made within a small, informal group with hand-picked and like-minded advisers. He imposed his views on others rather than seek consensus, and avoided formal debates and discussions with other bureaucratic institutions. Similar findings were found by Dyson (2016) in his analysis of UK leader, Gordon Brown’s decision-making in the case of the financial crisis. Outside the UK, Kille (2006) found a similar pattern in UN Secretary-General Hammarskjöld’s foreign policy decision-making style with his high need for power. On the other hand, US presidents with a low need for power were found to demonstrate a less centralised and more collegial decision-making style, encouraging subordinates’ engagement in their decision-making processes (Preston, 2001; 2012).

In addition to their control over the decision-making process, leaders’ power motive also reveals their negotiation skills and willingness to continue pursuing the goals until the last moment, as was expected by Hermann (2005a). This expectation is partly supported by Mastors’ (2000) analysis of Gerry Adams, a leader of the Provisional Irish Republican Army. During the Northern Ireland peace process, Adams was found to persistently try to talk with the leader of the Ulster Unionist Party until his request was refused firmly. Meanwhile, Winter (2002), based on Greenstein’s (2000) work, found that US presidents with a high power motive tended to be skilful in public communication but did not demonstrate a strategic cognitive style.
Experimental studies paid attention to the quality of decision-making. An experiment conducted by Fodor and Smith (1982) found that groups with low power-motivated leaders, compared to groups with high power-motivated leaders, showed better quality of group decision-making with more factual information discussed, more proposals considered and a higher degree of moral concern in the decision-making process.

Beyond decision-making skills and qualities, two studies explored the relationship between leaders’ need for power and their willingness to violate normative constraints. Shannon and Keller (2007) found that leaders with a high need for power were more likely to see the bargain situation in a zero-sum approach and to violate normative constraints in their pursuit of self-interests. Görener and Ucal (2011) extended this correlation between power motivation and response to normative constraints to one’s attitude towards political constraints. In their study, the Turkish leader Erdoğan’s need for power increased in his second term. Along with the increase in his power motive, Erdoğan showed an inclination to remove domestic checks on his authority with impulsive and aggressive performance in media presentation, controlling military power and coercing the judiciary.

Given the overall research question of this thesis, in the case studies of Bush’s and Obama’s foreign policies in Afghanistan, scores on their need for power are expected to be indicative of their war orientations. This trait is helpful in explaining Bush’s and Obama’s different levels of control over the decision-making processes, how they managed their advisory systems, and more importantly, how they responded to normative constraints (if any) on their continuation of the Afghanistan war (combined with their scores on their belief in their ability to control events).

*Self-Confidence (SC)*

The trait self-confidence (or self-esteem) reveals one’s perception of self-importance in relation to the environment. It indicates leaders’ self-evaluation
of their ability to cope adequately with the contextual factors. Indeed, this is an individual perception of self-worth that is established based on self-other comparisons (Mossman and Ziller, 1968; Ziller et al., 1969; Hermann, 1980b; 2005a). Self-confidence is a component of the self-system which is involved in mediating the stimuli from the environment, and this trait is involved in maintaining the self-system under conditions of strain. Leaders with high self-confidence are more satisfied with who they are and are more immune to contextual stimuli, while leaders with low self-confidence are more attentive to and adaptive to contextual information (Ziller et al., 1969; Hermann, 2005a).

Self-confidence, as a cognitive personality characteristic, was found to have an implication for leaders’ risk-taking orientation. Van Esch and Swinkels (2015) analysed six European states’ leaders and their personalities in the case of the euro crisis, finding that, in three of the six cases, leaders with higher self-confidence showed lower threat perception. Therefore, self-confidence is negatively related to threat perception and finally may lead to a risk-taking orientation in picking policy options. A similar result was found by Schaninger (1976) in an experiment with 60 undergraduate students, finding a negative relationship between one’s perceived risks and self-esteem and risk-taking.

As a cognitive characteristic, leaders’ self-confidence is found to be related to their information collection in decision-making. Preston (1997) examined US President Truman’s personality and leadership styles with two Korean cases. He found that Truman’s low self-confidence, incorporated with his limited expertise in foreign policy, led to a reliance on input from his advisors, along with the delegation of policy formulation. His delegation is consistent with Hermann’s (2005a) expectations of weaker self-confident leaders’ compensation for their feelings of inadequacy to cope adequately with the factors in the political context.

On the other hand, Çuhadar et al. (2017a) studied two Turkish leaders and their foreign policies towards Iraq in 1990-1991 and 2003, finding more details about their leadership styles. They profiled Turkish leaders: Turgut Özal with high self-confidence, and Erdoğan with a medium level of self-confidence
in a context with similar structural constraints. It was found that Özal’s high self-confidence enabled him to challenge domestic constraints on his authority and use his influence directly or indirectly to pursue his preferred outcome in the 1991 Iraq case. He believed that cooperation with the US to drive Iraq out of Kuwait was the right option. Özal prompted his decision by side-lining those with different voices in the decision-making process and excluding people in his way to the desired policy outcome, even though the policy outcome was pursued by sacrificing domestic political relations. Meanwhile, he took several actions to keep his leading role in the negotiations with the US.

While Özal showed an example of self-confident leaders who are satisfied with who they are and immune to information input, challenging structural constraints, Erdoğan, with his relatively lower self-confidence than Özal, showed a different leadership style in the 2003 Iraq case. Erdoğan was more reactive to the situation and did not show an authoritative leadership style. Instead, he delegated the decision-making process and negotiations to other members of his party. Even though later he took charge of the decision-making process and performed as more strong-minded, he was still open to the advice from other policy-making members.

Self-confidence has also been looked at in terms of leaders’ behaviour propensities. Hermann (2005a) expected that leaders with high self-confidence would keep consistent in their behaviour due to their well-developed self-image while leaders with low self-confidence are inconsistent in their behaviours. However, there are no LTA findings relating to this statement. In studies of social psychology, Mossman and Ziller (1968) found that people with high self-confidence were more consistent with their social behaviour and more frequently participated in group discussions than those with low self-confidence. Ziller et al. (1969) summarised that high self-esteem was related to higher levels of social participation and consistency of social behaviour.

Beyond findings about policy orientations and decision-making styles, Brummer (2016) explored the causal mechanism between leaders’ self-
confidence and fiascos in their policies. He found that leaders with a significantly high level of self-confidence were more likely to lead low-quality decision-making processes, resulting in major policy fiascos.

As discussed in this subsection, self-confidence is not directly related to Bush’s and Obama’s war orientation and their continuation of the Afghanistan war. This trait is an important indicator of leaders’ openness towards incoming information and contextual stimuli. Therefore, it is expected that Bush’s and Obama’s scores on this trait (combined with their scores on conceptual complexity, discussed in the next subsection) would help explain their information collection and openness to dissenting voices in their decision-making processes and final decision outcomes.

**Conceptual Complexity (CC)**

Conceptual complexity (or cognitive complexity) reveals one’s ability to perceive differentiated aspects of the environment. It is a trait of assessing one’s ability to describe or discuss the things, issues and people in the political context from multiple perspectives. Leaders with low conceptual complexity tend to classify objects and subjects into dichotomous categories and perceive fewer ambiguities in the environment. On the other hand, leaders with high conceptual complexity perceive the real world with more ambiguities and grey shades and are therefore more reactive to the contextual stimuli (Hermann, 1980b; 2005a).

Conceptual complexity has long been looked at in terms of leaders’ cognitive style and openness to new and dissenting information. Low conceptual complexity leaders, such as UK Prime Minister Blair, showed a black-and-white cognitive schema in his Iraq decisions by defining the Saddam Hussein regime as ‘evil’. Firmly holding this belief, he was closed to new information and opposing viewpoints in the discussion, discounting any alternatives to his course of action and ignoring information inconsistent with his existing perceptions. He made the Iraq decision in a decisive style with
without deliberations (Dyson, 2006). Other typical examples of low conceptual complexity leaders are UK Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher in several foreign policies (Dyson, 2009), Turkish leader Erdoğan in shaping relationships with Israel (Görener and Ucal, 2011), US President George W. Bush in his Iraq decision (Dyson, 2014) and UK Prime Minister Gordon Brown in the financial crisis (Dyson, 2016). In addition, Glad (1983) found that US President Ronald Reagan, with his low conceptual complexity, did not have an accurate understanding of the variances in America’s wars and the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics. Meanwhile, Reagan also had difficulty accepting the reality that disconfirmed his existing beliefs.

Conceptually complex leaders, such as US Secretary of Defense Donald Rumsfeld, found by Dyson (2014), showed a different decision-making style from those mentioned above. Rumsfeld was found to vacillate in the Iraq decision. Different from Bush’s instinctive and non-reflective decision-making based on his clear-cut principles, Rumsfeld perceived the environment with nuances, focusing on those unknowable and unpredictable. Another example is the former UK Chancellor of the Exchequer Alistair Darling during the financial crisis of 2007-8. Different from Brown, Darling trusted the experts’ opinions, sought a nuanced recovery policy and was more cautious of the situation for economic recovery (Dyson, 2016). Turkish leader, Özal, with his high conceptual complexity, was found to be consistently seeking first-hand information (Çuhadar et al., 2017a).

Conceptual complexity has also been related to how leaders like to receive information. Hermann and Preston (1994) discussed leaders’ preferred information-processing style with their conceptual complexity. Conceptually complex leaders would like to be the hub of information collection, receiving and categorising information by themselves. Leaders with low conceptual complexity would prefer to wait for filtered and distilled information and be presented with final options with potential consequences. Kaarbo (1997) compared German and British leaders with different levels of conceptual complexity, finding that these leaders differed in their sources and methods of information collection. Leaders with low conceptual complexity independently
collected information from selected staff while leaders with high conceptual complexity preferred to read more details.

Conceptual complexity has also been looked at in terms of assessing the cognitive styles of the so-called ‘hawks’ and ‘doves’. Kesgin (2020) analysed hawks and doves in Israeli leaders after the Cold War and found that hawks had lower conceptual complexity than doves. Hawks viewed peoples and ideas in simpler terms and were reluctant to change their beliefs, while doves perceived more complexities.

Beyond leaders' cognitive styles and their preferences for information collection, conceptual complexity is also used to analyse leaders’ responses to external stimuli. Yang (2010) found that conceptual complexity incorporated with external stimuli to change leaders’ foreign policy orientation. Yang compared US Presidents Bill Clinton’s (high conceptual complexity) and George W. Bush’s (low conceptual complexity) policy changes in US-China policy. Clinton was more likely to change his foreign policy than Bush and Bush required more dramatic external stimuli to think about changing his foreign policy.

Finally, looking at the relationship between leaders’ conceptual complexity, their policy expertise and the usage of analogy in foreign policy decision-making context, Dyson and Preston (2006) examined four US presidents and found that leaders with high conceptual complexity used more sophisticated analogies than leaders with low conceptual complexity, who used simpler analogies. Low conceptual complexity leaders saw limited relevance between the events of other generations and cultures and the current situation. Therefore, these leaders drew analogies from their own background while high conceptual complexity leaders drew analogies from broader sources.

All the research discussed has no implication for leaders’ war orientation. However, Bush’s and Obama’s conceptual complexity means a lot for this thesis. Their scores on conceptual complexity are an important indicator of their openness to information (combined with their scores on self-confidence),
deliberations in decision-making, and two more important issues, their openness to dissenting voices and reflective thinking to change foreign policy. These aspects of decision-making processes are important in Bush’s and Obama’s key decisions discussed in Chapter VI and Chapter VII.

Task Focus (TASK)

Leaders are recognised to have two functions in a group: leading and moving the group to achieve a task; and building and maintaining group morale and relationships. The task focus is a trait that reveals the relative emphasis one puts on completing a task versus maintaining group relationships (Fiedler, 1967; Hermann, 2005a). Leaders with high task focus show more concern about moving forward to achieve a goal or solve a problem while leaders with low task focus pay more attention to group members’ feelings and thoughts. Leaders who score at the medium level can be flexible to either focus on tasks or group relationships (Bass, 1960; Hermann, 2005a).

Different levels of task focus are found to show implications for conflictual or cooperative orientation. Winter et al. (1991) examined the motives and beliefs of George H.W. Bush and Mikhail Gorbachev by using four approaches, including LTA. They found that both showed a cooperative view (with high achievement and affiliation motives). Bush was willing to seek broader consensus with his relatively low task focus while Gorbachev focused on development with his moderate task focus. On the other hand, Thiers and Wehner (2022) examined the personality traits of two populist leaders, Hugo Chávez and Donald Trump, finding that their focus on maintaining group relationships based on their low task focus was the key driver behind their less cooperative and conflictual behaviours in foreign policy. As reviewed in the previous subsection on leaders’ need for power, affiliation and achievement motivations are coded as low and high task focus in LTA (Hermann, 2005a). In social psychological studies, Terhune (1968) found that people with high achievement motivation were the most cooperative and people with high
affiliation motivation were conflictual (based on their defensiveness) in examinations of their predispositions for cooperation or conflict.

Studies have explored task-oriented leaders’ and group-oriented leaders’ interpersonal styles. Task-oriented leaders are expected to focus on moving the group forward and are less sensitive to group members’ feelings (Hermann, 2005a). Kille (2006) found that UN Secretary-General Hammarskjöld had a high task focus and devoted all his energy to what he was doing but paid less attention to building up personal relations. Kaarbo (1997) assessed the leadership styles of most post-war British prime ministers and German chancellors based on five elements summarised by Hermann and Preston (1994). One of them was motivation for leading assessed by their task orientation. She found that task-oriented leaders focused more on policy goals and task accomplishment but were relatively less interested in government and party organisation, such as Konrad Adenauer and Margaret Thatcher. On the other hand, group-oriented leaders were found to value group and interpersonal relations, such as Kurt Georg Kiesinger and John Major (see also Kaarbo and Hermann, 1998; Kaarbo, 2001).

Group-oriented leaders are also found to be more sensitive to group maintenance. Görener and Ucal (2011) found that the Turkish leader Erdoğan, who was low task-oriented, showed attentiveness to the expectations of his supporters. He put an emphasis on fulfilling supporters’ demands and was protective of his faithful followers. Similarly, Kille (2006) found that UN Secretary-General Kurt Waldheim was a group-oriented leader and he took other actors’ wishes into account for carrying out the operations of the United Nations.

For leaders whose scores on task focus are at the medium level, their interpersonal styles are dependent on the requests from the specific context. Taysi and Preston (2001) found that the Iran leader, Mohammad Khatami, was a typical example of a leader who has a medium level task focus. In non-crisis situations, Khatami focused on the feelings and demands of the Iranian people.
In crisis situations, Khatami focused on solving problems and could severely chastise his constituents if needed.

Task focus has implications for Bush’s and Obama’s management of their decision-making processes. This trait is expected to be indicative of the emphasis they placed on maintaining group relationships or achieving tasks during their decision-making processes relating to the Afghanistan war.

*In-group Bias (IGB)*

The trait in-group bias was named ‘nationalism’ in an earlier description (Hermann, 1980a). In-group bias implies ‘a view of the world in which one’s own group (social, political, ethic, etc.) hold center stage’, being superior to other groups (Hermann, 2005a, p. 201). This trait has strong emotional attachments to one’s own group, perceiving it as the best and others as hostile. Therefore, there is an emphasis on maintaining group identity and status facing the threats perceived (Druckman, 1968; LeVine and Campbell, 1972; Hermann, 2005a). Leaders with high in-group bias and low in-group bias are both interested in maintaining group identity and status. Leaders high in in-group bias tend to see the world in we/them categories and see others as challenging their group status. Leaders low in in-group bias show more rationalised thinking and categorise people based on the situation (Hermann, 2005a).

Leaders’ in-group bias has been found to be indicative of aggressive behaviours due to the perceived threats to the in-group and perceived opportunities to eliminate threats from the out-group. Keller (2005a; 2005b) and Keller and Foster (2016) combined this trait with the other three LTA traits to categorise leaders as constraint challengers or constraint respecters, finding that constraint challengers (with high scores on in-group bias, distrust of others, task focus and need for power) were more aggressive. On the other hand, Turkish leader Erdoğan, with low in-group bias, was found to be more cooperative in foreign affairs, being more peaceful and less confrontational.
with like-minded others in cases of the Iran nuclear programme and Turkey’s relationship with Syria (Görener and Ucal, 2011). In social psychological studies, Druckman (1994) argues that nationalism reflects one’s feelings towards their own nations and other nations, emphasising the sense of loyalty, which can promote hostile reactions to other groups. Schrock-Jacobson (2012) systematically examined the relationship between different types of nationalism and interstate war orientations, finding that nationalism promotes conflicts.

Studies on this trait paid much attention to leaders’ commitments to their groups. Gerry Adams, a party leader in Northern Ireland, as previously mentioned, was a nationalist and sought interests for the party he represented during negotiations for the Northern Ireland conflict (Mastors, 2000). Kesgin (2012) found that Turkish leader Tansu Çiller had a high in-group bias and perceived Turkey as the central state in the world, believing that Turkish culture and status had the greatest significance. Her foreign policy was led by the emphasis on protecting Turkey from external threats. Another Turkish leader, Erdoğan, was found to have a low score on nationalism. He showed limited special sense to Turkey but emphasised Islamic religious beliefs. In addition, Erdoğan was found to personalise Turkish policies with his emotional attachments rather than interest-based principles (Görener and Ucal, 2011). Evidence for the causal relationship between leaders’ scores on their in-group bias and commitments to their groups was also found in the comparison of Luxembourg’s leaders, Joseph Bech (high in-group bias) and Werner (low in-group bias) in Luxembourg foreign policy (Kok and Verbeek, 2020).

In addition to studies on heads of state, Kille and Scully (2003) and Kille (2006) found that UN Secretary-General Waldheim, with a low sense of in-group bias, did not have a strong commitment to the role and importance of the UN in the international system. On the other hand, Secretary-General Hammarskjöld had a high in-group bias and thought highly of the importance of the UN position and principles in maintaining the order of the multilateral world. He also valued the interests of the UN as higher than those of the individual states.
In addition to leaders’ personal interest in foreign policy and commitment to their groups, Shannon and Keller (2007) found that leaders with high in-group bias were more likely to violate norms, arguing that it was due to their willingness to guard group sovereignty and interests.

Given the overall research question of this thesis, Bush’s and Obama’s scores on their in-group bias are expected to be indicative of their willingness to continue the Afghanistan war, whether they had a strong commitment to their groups and their willingness to violate norms. This trait is also expected to help explain Bush’s and Obama’s cooperative orientations with other states.

*Distrust of Others (DIS)*

Distrust of others reveals one’s negative feelings (doubts and wariness) about others, perceiving others as insincere and being suspicious of their actions and motives (Stuart and Starr, 1981; Hermann, 2005a). Leaders with high distrust of others are vigilant about the motives and behaviours of others, perceiving them as doing nothing right. These leaders also see the world with more threats. Leaders with low distrust of others see the world and others from a more pragmatic perspective and based on the situation (Hermann, 2005a).

Leaders’ distrust of others is found to be closely related to their war orientation. Tucker (1965, p. 577) has proposed that this trait is a ‘warfare personality’. Schafer and Crichlow (2010) assessed the quality of group decision-making and leaders’ personalities, finding that leaders’ distrust of others had an implication for their decision outcomes. A higher score on one’s distrust of others was correlated with a higher level of international conflict. Similarly, Kesgin (2020) compared the personality profiles of hawkish and dovish Israel leaders. He found that hawkish leaders, who were more aggressive in foreign policy, had higher levels of distrust of others than dovish leaders. Keller and Foster (2016, see also Foster and Keller, 2014) found that high distrust of others was one of the personality indicators of leaders who are more likely to engage in diversionary strategies. An example of such a leader
is US president Trump and his approach towards China (Turner and Kaarbo, 2021).

The same correlation between leaders’ high distrust of others and their aggressive policy orientation is also detected in specific case studies. Görener and Ucal (2011) found that Turkish leader Erdoğan had a high distrust of others and this led to his aggressive policy towards Israel, which he did not perceive as reliable. In addition, Hermann (1980a) found that a higher level of leaders’ distrust of others implied an orientation to governmental independent actions and was significantly negatively related to governmental commitments that could divert a government’s resources from the preparation for future acts.

Distrust of others is also found to indicate leaders’ orientation towards norm violation. Shannon and Keller (2007) found that officials in Bush’s administration with high distrust of others supported the unilateral attacks on Iraq without UN authorisation. They found that this trait is strongly correlated to leaders’ willingness to violate norms that constrain their power to eliminate threats.

One’s distrust of others is expected to be the most important personality characteristic in the following case studies. It is expected that this trait helps explain the two presidents’ continuation of the Afghanistan war. In addition, as criticised in Chapter II, realist explanations for the endurance of US military occupation in Afghanistan did not clearly justify the objective assessments of threat levels there. Therefore, it is also expected that the case studies could demonstrate Bush’s and Obama’s subjective assessments of threats from Afghanistan on the basis of their different levels of distrust of others.

LTA Trait Combinations

In addition to studying the effects of single traits on leaders’ preferred policy orientations and how they shape their decision-making processes, Hermann (2005a) also discussed the compound effects of trait combinations on leaders’ interaction with the context. In her LTA framework, Hermann constructed three
types of trait combinations: responses to constraints, openness to information and motivation towards the world. This section only discusses Hermann’s three types of trait combinations. Other types of trait combinations in LTA studies are reviewed in the previous section.

Responses to Constraints

Leaders’ belief in their ability to control events and need for power create a composite of four types of responses to constraints. Leaders who have high scores on both traits are expected to skilfully challenge constraints in both direct and indirect ways while leaders who have low scores on both traits are expected to be constraints respecters (Hermann, 2005a). Typical examples were found in Hermann and Pagé’s (2016) profiles of 96 CEOs from humanitarian and development non-governmental organizations (NGOs). They found that leaders in charge of humanitarian NGOs had more high scores on both traits and were more likely to challenge the constraints in their way of controlling the situation and influencing the outcome. Meanwhile, a majority of these leaders were not inclined to cooperate with international organisations unless they were pushed to do so. On the other hand, leaders in development NGOs had more low scores on both traits. They respected constraints and were interested in cooperating with various types of collaborators to achieve goals.

Other examples of these constraint challengers are the UN Secretary-General Hammarskjöld (Kille, 2006), UK Prime Ministers Blair in the Iraq decision (Dyson, 2007) and Thatcher (Kaarbo and Hermann, 1998), German leader Adenauer (Kaarbo and Hermann, 1998), and Iranian leader Ayatollah Khamenei (Taysi and Preston, 2001). Other examples of constraint respecters are UK leaders Harold Wilson in the Vietnam case (a low need for power and a medium level belief in his ability to control events) (Dyson, 2007), Major (Kaarbo and Hermann, 1998), and German leader Helmut Kohl (Kaarbo and Hermann, 1998).
For leaders who have a high score on one of the two traits and a low score on the other, Hermann (2005a) suggests that they are also constraint challengers. She argues that leaders with a low belief in their ability to control events and a high need for power are constraint challengers who prefer to act in an indirect fashion. Taysi and Preston (2001) found that Iranian leader Khatami had a high power need and a medium level belief in his ability to control events in his first year in office. He was cautious in his attempts to reform and change policy. He avoided extreme reform efforts and direct conflict with opponents and sought opportunities. Indian Prime Minister Atal Bihari Vajpayee was found to show a similar pattern (Kesgin and Wehner, 2022). For leaders with a high belief in their ability to control events and a low need for power, Hermann (2005a) argues that these leaders are likely to challenge constraints in a direct fashion and are less successful in doing so.

Chapter II made a critique of the explanation for the endurance of US military occupation in Afghanistan on the basis of domestic politics, arguing that this explanation did not discuss the different domestic pressures faced by Bush and Obama, their different responses to these pressures and their various policies relating to US continuation of the Afghanistan war. It is expected that the combination of individual belief in one’s ability to control events and need for power helps understand Bush’s and Obama’s attitudes towards constraints, with an emphasis on explaining how Obama failed to challenge constraints on his decision in 2009 but succeeded in 2011 and thus helps explain why Obama escalated the Afghanistan war in 2009 even he did not want to.

Openness to Information

Although both leaders’ self-confidence and conceptual complexity have implications for their sensitivity to external stimuli and information, Hermann (2005a) combined these two traits to assess whether leaders are open or closed to contextual information. Hermann (2005a) argues that leaders whose scores on self-confidence are higher than the scores on conceptual complexity,
or their scores on both traits are low, are inclined to be closed to information, being less sensitive and responsive to contextual stimuli. When leaders have low scores on both traits, they are inclined to a particular position that seems likely to get success, being closed to information and reflecting the views of those surrounding them.

A typical example of a leader who is closed to information is Turkish leader Erdoğan (low scores on both traits) with his reactions to the decline of the Turkish economy in the global crisis. Erdoğan had no patience to wait for the situation to unfold and did not pay attention to discrepant information, confidently claiming that Turkey had passed this crisis when its GDP was still declining. During the election year of 2007, when his score on conceptual complexity increased and his score on self-confidence dropped, Erdoğan showed a strategic leadership style by being sensitive to the context when making decisions (Görener and Ucal, 2011).

Other examples of leaders who are closed to information are Iranian leader Khamenei with high self-confidence and low conceptual complexity (Taysi and Preston, 2001), and Luxembourg leader Gaston Thorn with low conceptual complexity and a medium level of self-confidence (Kok and Verbeek, 2020). An additional finding from Schafer and Crichlow (2010) is that, when leaders’ scores on self-confidence were higher than their scores on conceptual complexity, there were lower levels of conflict in the decision outcomes.

For leaders whose scores on conceptual complexity are higher than their scores on self-confidence or whose scores on both traits are high, Hermann (2005a) argues that these leaders are inclined to be open to information, being strategic and responsive to contextual stimuli. When leaders have high scores on both traits, they are clear about what they want to do and willing to check the environment to see what option is feasible. A typical example of a leader who is open to information and sensitive to the political context is Iranian leader Mohammad Khatami with high scores on both traits. He showed great sensitivity to domestic and foreign contexts, being chameleon-like and flexible.
in adjusting his speech facing different types of audiences (Taysi and Preston, 2001). Other examples of leaders who are open to information are UN Secretary-General Hammarskjöld (Kille, 2006) and Luxembourg leader Werner (Kok and Verbeek, 2020), who all have high scores on both traits.

As discussed in previous subsections on self-confidence and conceptual complexity, this combination is helpful in revealing leaders’ openness to information in their decision-making processes in the case studies in Chapter VI and Chapter VII.

*Motivation towards the World*

Hermann (2005a) suggests that leaders’ task focus implies their motivation in seeking office (problem-oriented or relationship-oriented), and the combination of their in-group bias and distrust of others indicates leaders’ motivation towards the world (threat and problem-oriented or opportunity and relationship-oriented). She argues that leaders with high scores on in-group bias and distrust of others or leaders with high scores on the in-group bias but low scores on distrust of others focus on eliminating threats and solving problems. Leaders with low scores on both traits are driven by opportunities and seek to form cooperative relationships. Leaders with low scores on the in-group bias but high scores on distrust of others still focus on opportunities and relationships but keep vigilant about the environment.

Several Turkish leaders offered examples of leaders with different types of motivations. Tansu Çiller is a typical example of a leader who focuses on eliminating threats. With high scores on both traits, she took a tough policy discourse and wanted a strong move in the case of the Kardak crisis with Greece. In another case, she took a hawkish policy by ordering cross-border operations against the Kurdistan Workers’ Party in northern Iraq (Kesgin, 2012; 2013). Another example is Turkish Prime Minister Necmettin Erbakan. Other Turkish Prime Ministers, Erdoğan, Abdullah Gül, Mesut Yılmaz, and Bülent Ecevit, are examples of leaders who focus on opportunities and relationships.
With low scores on both traits, these leaders were more motivated by seeking opportunities. The Turkish Prime Minister, Süleyman Demirel, is another example of a leader with a low distrust of others and a high in-group bias, focusing on eliminating threats and solving problems (Kesgin, 2013).

This combination is another indication of leaders’ war orientation based on their assessments of high or low levels of threats in Afghanistan. This view of threats, as discussed in Chapter II, can fill in the blank of the unclear and less practical objective assessment of threats in Afghanistan by justifying the subjective assessments of the security situation in that country. Thus the personality-based explanation complements the realist logic of continuing US military occupation in Afghanistan to protect US homeland security. It is expected that Bush’s and Obama’s views of threats from Afghanistan were consistent with their willingness or unwillingness to stay in that country.

**Arguments in this Thesis**

In order to study leadership styles and how leaders affect decision-making processes and outcomes, one cannot put leaders in a vacuum. Instead, studies on leadership and decision-making have always paid attention to the political context and individual background (Alker, 1972; Winter, 2013; Kaarbo, 2021). In LTA studies, Hermann et al. (2001, p. 120) ask: ‘does leadership style differ by domain, type of problem, degree of expertise; is there a consistency in the effects of leadership style on governments’ behavior or do different types of feedback heighten or diminish a particular effect?’

Individual experience/expertise in the policy arena is an important element to understand leaders’ decision-making styles in several ways (Hermann and Kaarbo, 2020). In LTA, individual experience and learning during the time in office have been found to have several implications for leadership and decision-making styles. Leaders’ experience could affect their self-other comparisons (Hermann, 2005a) and perceptions of the difficulty in controlling the political world (Hermann, 1980a), and how they use analogies
(Dyson and Preston, 2006), participate in and control the decision-making processes, manage their advisory systems, deal with expert advice, and interpret information and contextual cues (Preston, 2000; 2001; 2011; 2012), hence influencing the effects of conceptual complexity, self-confidence, need for power and belief in one’s ability to control events on individual policy orientation and management of the decision-making process. Generally, experience takes a more important role in shaping leaders’ policy options than personal preference (Hermann, 1980a; Hermann and Ozkececi-Taner, 2011). Therefore, experience may also have an influence on the effects of the other three LTA traits: task focus, distrust of others, and in-group bias.

In his works, Preston (2000; 2001; 2011; 2012) focused on the interaction between individual experience and two LTA traits: one’s need for power and conceptual complexity. Preston (2000; 2001, see also Preston and ‘t Hart, 1997) argued that, based on his archival research, these three variables are particularly important in assessing presidential leadership style. Following Preston and his substantial archive research, this thesis pays additional attention to Bush’s and Obama’s need for power, conceptual complexity and inexperience/experience in the foreign policy domain. As mentioned in the introductory chapter, sometimes Bush and Obama shared different opinions with their advisors and they dealt with dissenting voices differently, leading to their different ways of continuing the Afghanistan war. This thesis focuses on decision-makers’ openness to opinions that are divergent from their preferred options, exploring the interaction between decision-makers’ experiences and personality characteristics and how this interaction affects their tolerance of dissenting voices. The following two subsections first discuss two different findings from prior research on this issue and then make two propositions to explore personality and contextual variables that affect leaders’ openness to opinions that are divergent from their preferred options.
Different Findings in Prior Research

Preston and ‘t Hart (1999) incorporated presidents’ prior policy experience or expertise with two psychological variables: one’s need for power and cognitive complexity. They argue that leaders’ past experiences have an impact on their involvement in policy-making, reliance on the advisory system and willingness to collect information in bureaucratic politics. They divided each of these variables into two categories: high and low. Later, Preston (2001; 2011) applied this two-dimensional leadership analysis to several US presidents during wartime with in-depth case studies to understand how they operated their advisory system and led the decision-making process and how these affected their decision-making processes and outcomes. A brief description of these 8 (2×2×2) types of leadership styles is presented in Tables 1 and 2 below.

Preston (2000; 2001; 2011; 2012) summarised leaders’ tolerance of divergent opinions as one aspect of their broad information collection and willingness to think about problems from multiple perspectives on the basis of high conceptual complexity. Based on leaders’ openness and acceptance of divergent voices, Preston presented four types of leaders’ openness to divergent opinions. In his framework, he described leaders with limited prior policy experience and high conceptual complexity as Observers and leaders with high prior experience and high conceptual complexity as Navigators. Observers and Navigators conduct broad information searches and collect multiple and competing policy views with a deliberative decision style. They search for both supportive and critical feedback.

The difference between these two types of leaders is that, due to their lack of expertise, Observers rely on expert advisers for the interpretation of information while Navigators do not. Navigators are more likely to rely on their own views facing opposition from experts. Therefore, both types of leaders are open to diverse advice but experts have more influence on inexperienced leaders (such as Bill Clinton in the foreign policy arena). However, Preston also noted that Navigators and Observers, based on their high conceptual complexity, are willing to reconsider their policies and decisions facing new
evidence. Leaders with low conceptual complexity place less emphasis on searching for information and competing views. *Sentinels* (high experience) rely on their own judgments facing competing views from expert advisers. *Mavericks* (low experience) are more receptive to experts’ advice than *Sentinels*. However, *Mavericks*’ relatively closed information-processing system decreases the possibility of seeking out competing views, such as Truman in relation to his foreign policy.
Table 1. Presidential Need for Control and Interest in Involvement in the Policy-Making Process

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Need for Power</th>
<th>Prior Policy Experience/Expertise</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>High</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Director:</strong></td>
<td>Activist, centralised decision-making style; Direct control and involvement in policy-making; Focus on own policy views and guidelines; Less reliance on expert advisors.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td><strong>Magistrate:</strong> Relegative, centralised decision-making style; Direct control over but limited involvement in policy-making; Rely on expert advisors; Set guidelines but delegate policy formation and implementation to subordinates.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Low</td>
<td><strong>Administrator:</strong> Activist, less centralised and more collegial decision-making style; Less direct control over policy-making; Enhance subordinates' participation; Focus on own policy views and guidelines; Less reliance on expert advisors but is willing to compromise with experts' views.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td><strong>Delegator:</strong> Relegative, less centralised and more collegial decision-making style; Little or no direct control over policy-making; Delegate policy formation and implementation to subordinates; Rely on expert advisors.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

(Adapted from Preston, 2001, pp. 15–19)
Table 2. Presidential Sensitivity to Context

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Conceptual Complexity</th>
<th>Prior Policy Experience/Expertise</th>
<th>High</th>
<th>Low</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>High</td>
<td><strong>Navigator:</strong></td>
<td>Sensitive presidential style and high interest in policy arena;</td>
<td>Less sensitive presidential style and low interest in policy arena;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Broad, active information search, open to competing opinions;</td>
<td>Broad information search, open to competing opinions;</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>High self-monitor;</td>
<td>High self-monitor;</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Deliberative, indecisive and reflective decision styles;</td>
<td>Deliberative, indecisive and reflective decision styles;</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Rely on own instincts.</td>
<td>Rely on expert advice.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Low</td>
<td><strong>Sentinel:</strong></td>
<td>Sensitive presidential style and high interest in policy arena;</td>
<td>Less sensitive, independent-minded presidential style and low interest in policy arena;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Limited information search;</td>
<td>Low need for information;</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Emphasise information relevant to leaders’ experience and interests;</td>
<td>Heavy reliance on expert advice;</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>High self-monitor;</td>
<td>Low self-monitor;</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Personally guide policy with one’s own views and experiences;</td>
<td>Decisive, less deliberative decision styles driven by personal views and principles.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Decisive, less deliberative decision styles.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

(Adapted from Preston, 2001, pp. 20–27)
However, Saunders’ (2017) comparison of George W. Bush’s (Bush Junior) and George H.W. Bush’s (Bush Senior) different responses towards divergent opinions from Colin Powell showed a different finding from Preston’s conclusions. Saunders examined decision-making biases based on the interaction between leaders’ experience and their advisory system. She focused on the match/mismatch in experience between leaders and advisors. One of her findings is that inexperienced leaders are more likely to marginalise potentially divergent viewpoints from their experienced subordinates and thus the decision-making lacks diversity. Saunders argues that inexperienced leaders are more cautious of divergent opinions presented by experienced advisors because disagreement with these advisers brings the greater political risk of confirming the impression that these leaders are inexperienced. In addition, she argues that inexperienced leaders prefer proposals with more certainty and thus look for more homogeneous advice. She found empirical support from Bush Junior’s Iraq decisions in 2003 and Bush Senior’s Gulf war decisions in 1991. In the first case, the inexperienced president marginalised Powell from the decision-making. In the second case, Powell’s dissatisfaction and dissenting views relating to the decision-making were heard and considered.

However, it should be acknowledged that Saunders only depicted a potential tendency; not an absolute presidential decision-making style. And in the second case, Bush Senior took notice of the military’s concerns about mission creep. However, Saunders also noticed that Bush Senior was worried about the ending even before the beginning of the war. Therefore, it was unclear whether the experienced president accepted the military’s divergent opinions or if he had the same idea. At least it is pertinent to conclude that, compared to Bush Junior, Powell’s dissenting voice was heard by Bush Senior who was more experienced in foreign policy than his son.

Saunders’ and Preston’s findings have some commonalities. However, their findings demonstrate an evident difference in predicting how a conceptually complex leader who lacks experience in a specific policy arena (in this thesis, foreign policy) would respond to divergent views. Saunders does
not discuss whether an inexperienced leader is conceptually complex or not. The mismatch between leaders and their subordinates and the fear of political critiques are the main reason that drives them to marginalise divergent views and avoid diversity in decision-making. For Preston, inexperience only leads to leaders’ reliance on experts’ advice or interpretation of the information. It is leaders’ degree of conceptual complexity that affects their tolerance of divergent viewpoints.

Using Saunders’ (2017) and Preston’s (2001; 2012) findings to develop expectations about how an inexperienced leader who has a high conceptual complexity and is not familiar with foreign policy would react to divergent opinions from an experienced advisor in the decision-making process, there is a contradiction between the two expectations developed based on their findings. Based on Saunders’ findings, this leader is likely to marginalise divergent opinions from his experienced advisors, but, based on Preston’s findings, this leader is likely to be willing to listen to and think about different voices from his experienced advisor. This contradiction leads to a conundrum in developing expectations about and understanding different leaders’ dealing with divergent advice and their management of the multiple advocacies in decision-making and the related policy outcome. Meanwhile, it raises questions about the consistency between the LTA theoretical-based and the practical leadership style’s effects on decision-making.

This is not to say that either of the statements is wrong. Both Saunders’ and Preston’s studies and findings have solid empirical support. Further study on this conflict may find additional empirical support for either of the two statements or look for any other variable that mediates the effects of inexperience and conceptual complexity on leaders’ tolerance of divergent advice and information in their decision-making.

One of the aims of this thesis is to examine this conflict between Saunders’ and Preston’s statements by analysing US Presidents Bush’s and Obama’s decision-making relating to the Afghanistan war. Empirical records discussed in Chapter VI and Chapter VII (for example, Woodward, 2003; Sharifullah,
2019) suggest that there were situations where Bush (in his initial war decision) and Obama (in his surge decision) were open to dissenting voices in their decision-making processes. In other decisions, they emphasised personal preferred options and side-lined the dissenting voices from experienced advisors, making decisions relatively quickly compared to decisions made with deliberate discussions. These decisions were Bush’s and Obama’s choices to continue or escalate the Afghanistan war or to try to leave that country. Therefore, understanding their different responses towards dissenting voices in the decision-making process is helpful in explaining why and how they (actively or passively) continued or tried to end this lengthy war.

There are differences in Saunders’ (2017) and Preston’s (2001) definitions and assessments of leaders’ experience. Preston focused on leaders’ job experience and specific knowledge, while Saunders focused on the mismatch in experience between leaders and their subordinates. In this thesis, this difference in their definitions does not have any significant influence on the studies of Bush and Obama. Both Bush and Obama were novices in the foreign policy arena when they were elected and their subordinates were experienced (such as Colin Powell, Condoleezza Rice, Robert Gates and Hillary Clinton). Saunders (2017) has detected Bush’s unwillingness to consider divergent voices in his Iraq decision (in 2003) and Preston (2012) described Bush as a Maverick (low conceptual complexity) in the foreign policy arena. Meanwhile, Preston described Obama as an Observer (high conceptual complexity) in making foreign policy decisions. In addition, Preston (2001) discussed that leaders’ experience in previously unfamiliar policy arenas is likely to increase over time. An example is Bill Clinton’s high degree of involvement in the Kosovo case (1998) compared to his limited involvement in the Bosnia case (1993 to 1995) (but he demonstrated a consistent foreign policy style). Therefore, Bush and Obama were likely to gain experience in the foreign policy arena and demonstrate differences in their engagement in decision-making over time.
Propositions

In order to fully examine how the interaction between individual experience in the foreign policy arena and personality characteristics affects one’s openness to divergent voices, this subsection puts forward two kinds of proposition. First is the compound effect of different LTA traits and individual experience on leaders’ tolerance of divergent voices. In LTA, there are two other traits that are found to be related to leaders’ tolerance of conflict and disagreement in their decision-making: one’s task focus and need for power.

Leaders who focus on group relationships will be unwilling to tolerate conflict and disagreement that harms group harmony. Goal-oriented leaders are open to disagreement and conflict among advisers for task achievements and solutions (Hermann and Preston, 1994; Kaarbo, 1997; 2001). On the other hand, task-oriented leaders push followers to work out solutions and implement the decisions made and group-oriented leaders ensure members that their views are sought and valued (Hermann, 2005a). Therefore, this thesis argues that leaders’ group orientation plays a role in balancing group harmony. Leaders encourage group members to express their competing views but avoid conflicts that would harm their group’s harmony. On the other hand, leaders who are goal-oriented are open to divergent voices but, when they make up their minds, they may not welcome any dissenting voices.

Leaders’ need for power and inexperience in foreign policy may also affect their openness to divergent voices. Inexperienced leaders with low or high scores on their need for power, require limited involvement in the policy-making process, delegate the formulation of decisions to subordinates and rely on expert advisors (Preston, 2000; 2001; 2012). Saunders (2017) has a similar finding with this power delegation. Experienced leaders with low scores on their need for power set specific policy guidelines but exert less control over the advisory group and enhance their subordinates’ participation (Preston, 2001; Hermann, 2005a). In addition, these leaders are willing to compromise with experts’ opinions to seek a consensus (Preston, 2000; 2001).
In this way, for leaders with either low scores on their need for power or limited expertise in foreign policy, the input from their subordinates becomes more important in the decision-making process. In all these cases, whether a leader is tolerant of divergent voices depends on how his subordinates organise the decision-making process, how they present opinions to the leader and how critical of these opinions the leader can be. This proposition is consistent with Saunders’ (2017) finding that inexperienced leaders are less effective in monitoring their experienced advisers and may lead to advisers’ biased or reduced information-gathering. Therefore, if a leader is presented with diverse opinions and options from his subordinates, he can listen to and choose to accept or reject opinions that are divergent from his preferred options. If a leader is only presented with limited options without any reports of debate or disagreement among group members, he has no access to divergent voices.

The second proposition is that one contextual factor may influence leaders’ tolerance of divergent voices: public opinion. Public opinion is ‘those opinions held by private persons which governments find it prudent to heed’ (Key, 1961, p. 14). Whether public opinion can influence presidents’ decisions or not remains debatable (for example, Page and Shapiro, 1983; Holsti, 2004; Higgs, 2008; Milner and Tingley, 2015). This thesis only discusses some potential mechanisms for presidents’ dealing with public views. Foreign policy issues have been increasingly related to presidential elections and voting. Presidents may make policies with concerns about electoral success, thus paying attention to public views on salient issues (McCormick, 2014). Therefore, Bush and Obama may have had to bring public views into their decision-making because of re-election concerns, paying attention to divergent opinions supported by the public.

From another perspective, Foyle (1997, p. 145, original emphasis) discussed the conditions under which leaders pay attention to public opinion and the ways in which public opinions may affect how leaders make decisions. Foyle discussed two types of decision makers’ beliefs about public opinion: normative beliefs and practical beliefs. Normative beliefs represent the
decision-maker’s assessment of ‘the desirability of input from public opinion affecting foreign policy choices’. Practical beliefs demonstrate the decision-maker’s ‘assessment of the necessity of public support of a foreign policy for it to be successful’.

The combination of these two beliefs indicates four kinds of decision-makers’ belief systems of public opinion in foreign policy decision-making. Leaders who believe that public opinion’s input into policy-making is desirable and public support for a successful foreign policy is necessary would extensively use public opinion in their policy formulation. Leaders who do not believe in the necessity of public support for policy success but believe in the desirability of public opinion’s input into policy formulation would use public opinion to cut down their policy choices. Leaders who only believe that public support is necessary for a successful policy would attempt to shape public opinion to generate support for the policy chosen. On the other hand, these leaders’ policy options would be limited by public opinion if they fail to lead the public. Finally, leaders who neither believe in the desirability of public opinion’s input into policy formulation nor think that public support is necessary for their policy success are likely to ignore public opinion in their foreign policy decision-making. Therefore, if Bush and Obama held at least one of these two beliefs (normative and practical) about public opinion, they were likely to react to public opinion in their decision-making even though what the public supported was against their preferred policies.

In addition, if public opinion on a particular foreign policy issue reaches a high consensus (above 60 per cent) level, it could have an impact on the decision-making process even if it is against strong bureaucratic interests. When public opinion on a specific foreign policy issue reaches a nearly unanimous (above 80 per cent) level, it could dominate the entire political system and lead to a virtually automatic decision (Graham, 1994). Therefore, if public support for a particular option relating to US policy in Afghanistan was high, Bush and Obama were likely to think about that option in their decision-making. However, public opinion may also be interpreted as contextual constraints on leaders’ policy-making. In this situation, whether public opinion
can affect their decision-making is dependent on whether these leaders are constraint challengers or respecters.

Theoretical Contribution

This thesis makes contributions to the LTA studies in two ways. First, for the research question, this thesis provides a personality-based understanding of war persistence. Focusing on the Afghanistan case, some of the war-related personality traits may help explain Bush’s and Obama’s war decisions even though the costs were high. As discussed in this chapter, four of the seven LTA (belief in one’s ability to control events, need for power, in-group bias and distrust of others) personality traits are indicative of Bush’s and Obama’s proclivities for the initiation and continuation of the US war in Afghanistan. These personality-based expectations relating to Bush’s and Obama’s war orientations are examined in Chapter VI and Chapter VII, highlighting the causal relationships between specific LTA traits and Bush’s and Obama’s continuation of the war.

Two of these four traits (one’s need for power and distrust of others) have long been studied in connection with leaders’ war orientation and state-level conflict behaviour (Schafer, 2014). Furthermore, leaders’ distrust of others is the most important LTA trait relating to war outcomes (Schafer and Crichlow, 2010). For the other two traits, LTA studies reviewed in this chapter also provide solid support for further studies to explore how these traits help explain why wars occur and continue based on leaders’ policy choices. This thesis reaffirms existing literature on the causal relationships between leaders’ specific LTA personality characteristics and their high propensity to attack one another. Furthermore, focusing on a set of US decisions to stay in Afghanistan across 16 years, this thesis extends the existing LTA literature by looking at the broader picture of leadership style, personality analysis and war persistence. The relationship between leaders’ specific LTA personality traits and their continuation of the war provides insight into analyses of other protracted war cases.
This causal relationship between leaders’ specific LTA traits and their continuation of the war also has an important implication for analyses of the persistence of other types of foreign policy (such as defence policy, conflict solution and security policy) even when things go wrong and for interpreting subjective choices to continue the same policy for so long when the decision-makers have alternatives. Compared to other institutional or state-level studies in international relations, this analysis provides a different answer to questions such as why wars start and continue.

Second, this thesis explores the interactions among decision-makers’ experiences, personality characteristics and the political context. Although this thesis does not develop any new framework, it is an inductive analysis which openly looks at the connections between LTA and leaders’ experience and the decision-making context. This thesis examines three groups of factors (task focus, inexperience and need for power, and public opinion) that are likely to influence the impact of leaders’ conceptual complexity on their openness to divergent voices in the decision-making process, enriching the broader picture of the interaction between leadership styles and the political context. Two case studies are conducted (in Chapter VI and Chapter VII) to explore the key drivers behind Bush’s and Obama’s tolerance or intolerance of divergent opinions from their experienced advisors, exploring how personality and contextual factors matter in shaping agent-structure relations between inexperienced leaders and their experienced advisors and how this agent-structure could affect the decision-making process.

Future research can conduct a deeper analysis of the mechanisms behind these variables and their correlations. In addition, this thesis seeks to address the conflict between Saunders’ (2017) and Preston’s (2012) statements and findings, supporting the validity of LTA findings on leadership styles and personality effects on leading and shaping foreign policy decision-making.

In addition, in comparisons of Bush’s and Obama’s trait score stability across different types of verbal records, this project compares differences
between Bush’s and Obama’s trait scores derived from spontaneous and scripted verbal materials. Any significant differences in these trait scores may indicate that Bush and Obama exhibit distinct personality characteristics, and these major differences in the two presidents’ personalities are expected to help explain their different decision-making styles relating to US foreign policy in Afghanistan. Case studies are conducted to investigate the consistency between LTA-based expectations and Bush’s and Obama’s policy orientation and management of decision-making, exploring how differences in leaders’ personalities affect their empirical decision-making. This thesis adds two more personality profiles to the existing LTA literature, examining trait stability across various contexts and supporting the notion that personality matters in foreign policy.

**Conclusion**

This chapter has reviewed the theoretical part of Hermann’s (1980a; 1980b; 2005a) Leadership Trait Analysis (LTA). There are seven traits in LTA: belief in one’s ability to control events, need for power, self-confidence, conceptual complexity, task focus, in-group bias and distrust of others. Every trait has implications for leaders’ policy orientation (except conceptual complexity) and how they manage the decision-making process. Meanwhile, there are three trait combinations in LTA: responses to constraints (belief in one’s ability to control events and need for power), openness to information (self-confidence and conceptual complexity) and motivation towards the world (in-group bias and distrust of others). These combinations also have implications for leaders’ management of their decision-making processes. These findings discussed in this chapter are the basis for expectations about Presidents Bush’s and Obama’s potential policy options and their decision-making behaviours relating to the Afghanistan policy processes and outcomes.

In addition, there are divergent findings and arguments about how leaders’ experience/inexperience and conceptual complexity affect their willingness to listen to and accept divergent opinions in decision-making. This thesis adds
three groups of factors (one’s task focus, one’s need for power and inexperience in foreign policy, and public opinion) to explore how personality characteristics, contextual factors and individual experience/inexperience interact and affect decision-makers’ openness towards divergent opinions in their policy discussion.

This thesis contributes to LTA theory in two ways. First, it explores the causal relationships between specific LTA personality characteristics and decision-makers’ subjective choices to continue the same policy even if they have alternatives. Second, it looks into potential factors that may influence personality effects on the decision-making process.

The next chapter discusses the methodological part of LTA and the research design of this thesis. The methodology chapter explains the choices made relating to how to profile Presidents Bush’s and Obama’s personalities based on their verbal records, reports the types and amount of verbal material collected for the LTA coding and finally explains how case studies in this thesis are conducted.
Chapter IV Methodology and Research Design

Introduction

Previous chapters discussed the puzzle: why did the US war in Afghanistan persist for so long despite huge human and economic costs? After reviewing the scholarship on this issue, this thesis adopts Leadership Trait Analysis to analyse the role of US presidents Bush’s and Obama’s personalities in their decision-making relating to the continuation of the Afghanistan war. The theoretical part of LTA has been reviewed in Chapter III. This chapter focuses on the methodological part of LTA and the whole research design of this thesis. LTA uses content analysis to obtain scores of leaders' personality traits and to develop personality-based expectations relating to their decision-making behaviours and policy orientations. In order to resolve the puzzle, this thesis conducts two case studies to examine the consistency between LTA expectations and presidents’ management of their decision-making processes and their policy orientations relating to the Afghanistan war.

This chapter proceeds as follows. First, it briefly reviews the history of at-a-distance profiling. Second, it justifies the strengths of quantitative content analysis, including reliability and validity issues. Third, it justifies the selection of the specific type of verbal records used in this thesis, followed by a report on the basic information relating to the amount and word count of spontaneous and scripted verbal materials collected for the content analysis. Fourth, it introduces the coding scheme of LTA and presents the coding dictionary. More details about the trait scores derived from different types of verbal material are presented in Chapter V. Fifth, it justifies the methodological benefits of the case study approach adopted by this thesis, followed by discussions about some method choices, the types of case study material collected and how to analyse the material to answer the overall research question.
Quantitative Content Analysis and LTA

Because psychological surveys and direct observation are hardly possible to apply to political leaders, psychologists developed at-a-distance scientific measurements of personality variables to replace any direct contact with leaders (Winter, 2005b; Schafer, 2014; Hermann, 2018; Schafer and Lambert, 2022). The idea of at-a-distance measurements, according to Schafer (2014), is not new and can be traced back to traditional experimental and clinical behavioural studies. The difference is that these studies could control experimental settings but at-a-distance measurements of political leaders cannot. Schafer (2014) argues that at-a-distance measurements have the advantage of being conducted in natural settings rather than in an artificially controlled environment. Furthermore, at-a-distance analyses have two other advantages due to their reliance on data and evidence in the public domain: avoiding ethical considerations and being able to analyse leaders of the past and present (Winter, 2005b).

Language has long been at the centre of political studies (Grimmer and Stewart, 2013), as well as leaders’ verbal behaviour in current research using quantitative at-a-distance measurements (Schafer, 2014). The basic assumption is that leaders’ verbal behaviour could reveal some of their psychological components (Hermann, 2005a; Schafer and Lambert, 2022). In other words, what leaders say and the way in which they say it (such as frequent usage or specific combinations of certain words, phrases or themes, and/or particular word expressions) could reveal how they think (Dyson, 2008; Hermann, 2008; 2018; Schafer, 2014). Four early-developed and widely-applied content analysis research programmes have been introduced in Chapter III. They are: Operational Code Analysis (George, 1969; Walker, 1977); Motive Theory (Winter, 1973; 1987), LTA (Hermann, 1980a; 2005a) and Integrative Complexity (Suedfeld and Tetlock, 1977). The final one, integrative complexity, does not measure individual differences, instead, it focuses on the stability of individual integrative complexity across different situations.
Academic works discuss four advantages of using quantitative content analysis in studies of political psychology. First, verbal behaviour is one type of behaviour. It is observable and reflects differences in individual behavioural patterns and, therefore reveals some psychological components of the subject (Schafer, 2014). Second, political figures make various forms of public discourse and their verbal behaviour, such as speeches and interviews, are widely accessible. Media records allow for substantive content analysis with a large quantity of leaders’ verbal records (Winter, 2005b; Dyson, 2008; Schafer, 2014; Hermann, 2018; Thies, 2018). Third, taking words or phrases as the unit of analysis, verbal behaviour is analysable and allows for systematic content analysis (Schafer, 2014). Fourth, automated content analysis with computer-assisted software saves time and minimises manual errors, allowing for more substantive content analyses with extensive datasets (Hermann, 2008; 2018; Schafer, 2014). All these advantages work for this research to conduct a substantive and systematic analysis of US presidents Bush’s and Obama’s personalities without their participation.

Both qualitative and quantitative analyses are widely applied to studies of political leaders. However, their emphases are different. Qualitative approaches focus on a small number of individuals at a time and place an emphasis on in-depth analyses of an individual’s psychology while quantitative approaches focus on a few specific psychological variables across many individuals and place an emphasis on comparisons based on statistical models (Schafer, 2014). It should be noted that qualitative and quantitative approaches are not incompatible. Many LTA studies reviewed in Chapter III examined LTA expectations in single or comparative case studies for an in-depth analysis of the role of individual personality in leading and shaping leaders’ decision-making processes and outcomes. This thesis also combines LTA analysis with the case study approach.

Quantitative content analysis has to address two issues: reliability and validity. Reliability issues relate to whether someone else following the same coding rules and procedures can replicate the same results (Hermann, 2008; Neuendorf, 2017). An automated coding system minimises subjective bias and
errors and therefore, increases the reliability of content analysis, making it easier for new coders to conduct content analysis and produce the same results by using the same data (Walker, 2000; Hermann, 2008; 2018).

Validity issues relate to the accuracy and usefulness of the content analysis and the profiling of leadership styles. Hermann (2008) discussed four types of validity issues: content, predictive, concurrent, and construct validity. Content validity asks whether the results are consistent with other information about the research subject. Predictive validity asks about the ability of using the results derived from content analysis to forecast what leaders do. Concurrent validity focuses on the usefulness of the results to differentiate leaders with certain patterns of styles. Construct validity examines the logic and theory behind the at-a-distance measurement of leadership style. Numerous studies have ascertained these validity issues of content analysis by analysing leaders’ personalities, examining the results within case studies, using the results to forecast future events, and comparing the results and forecasts with studies and forecasts from other sources or using different techniques (see Hermann, 2005a; 2008; 2018; Winter, 2013; Schafer, 2014). Finally, in LTA research, validity issues also involve the type of verbal records used for coding, which is discussed below.

Selection and Collection of Verbal Records

There are two types of personal verbal statements: spontaneous (such as interviews) and scripted (such as speeches). One argument is that scripted statements may be a less valid indicator of leaders’ personality due to the influence of ‘ghost writers’, while an opposing argument is that these prepared scripts can be reflective of what leaders think and leaders can edit these speeches (Rosati, 1988; Crichlow, 1998; Hermann, 1980b; 2005a; 2008; Dyson, 2008). In addition to this authorship issue, there is another validity issue relating to data collection: impression management, which means that leaders’ public statements may be prepared for public impression management and thus do not represent leaders’ private views (Schafer, 2000; Dyson and
Raleigh, 2014). Two other validity issues are role effects (Çuhadar et al., 2017b) and the translation of non-English language (Brummer et al., 2020; Rabini et al., 2020), which are not related to this thesis.

In addition, leaders’ trait scores derived from their public statements may show a pattern of change across different types of audiences, topics and dates (if any specific events happen or long tenure in office), indicating individual sensitivity to context-specific factors. Some LTA studies examined western and non-western leaders’ public verbal records with different topics (general or specific issues) or audiences (domestic/international, private/public). Their findings suggest that some leaders, such as Thatcher (Dyson, 2009) and several leaders in the Bush administration (Shannon and Keller, 2007), showed relatively stable LTA traits across different topics or audiences while others, such as Clinton (Hermann, 2005b), Erdoğan (Kesgin, 2019a), Hussein (Dyson and Raleigh, 2014; Hermann, 2005c), and some Soviet Politburo members (Hermann, 1980b), showed relatively significant variances in some of their LTA trait scores across different topics or audiences (although some of these findings also detected general stability of LTA traits).

Other studies have paid attention to the temporal consistency of leadership traits by focusing on time periods across different cases or under high pressure. Rasler, Thompson and Chester (1980) applied the LTA approach to 10 leaders and found inconsistency in trait scores across time, asking questions about the reliability issue and noting issues of source bias and political circumstances. Hermann (1980c) defended the validity of her approach with some methodical and analytical discussions, further suggesting studies to look into the types of contextual clues that may affect personality characteristics and the types of characteristics that are most likely to be influenced by contextual factors. Their debate raised the long-term investigation of the stability of personality across different situations.

Several studies have examined the temporal consistency of leaders’ personality characteristics. They found that while some leaders showed relatively stable personality traits across different cases and time periods,
others showed more variances in some of their personality trait scores. Those who showed stable personality traits were George H.W. Bush in US arms control talks with the Soviets (Dille, 2000), US President Jimmy Carter during his presidency (Dille and Young, 2000) and Israel leader Ariel Sharon in different periods before and after he became prime minister, except the scores on his need for power (Kesgin, 2019b). Other studies detected the general stability of traits but also identified significant changes in some personality traits across time. These included French leaders Charles de Gaulle during and after World War II, Jacques Chirac during the pre- and post-Iraq war periods (Dyson and Billordo, 2004), Erdoğan’s personality profiles across 2007, 2008 and 2009 (Görener and Ucal, 2011), Reagan in different stages of US arms control talks with the Soviets (Dille, 2000), Clinton during his presidency (Dille and Young, 2000; Hermann, 2005b) and Hussein during different periods when Iraq was in war (Hermann, 2005c).

Some studies have noticed the changes in personality traits when the date of certain events is nearing. Hermann and Sakiev (2011) examined the personality characteristics of leaders from terrorist organizations, al-Qaida Central and al-Qaida in the Arabian Peninsula, finding significant variances in these leaders’ scores on the belief in their ability to control events and responsiveness to the context when the time for action was approaching. Kesgin (2019b) compared Sharon’s personality profiles before and after his announcement of the plan to withdraw from the Gaza Strip. He found temporarily higher scores on Sharon’s conceptual complexity and distrust of others. Kesgin argues that these changes were temporary, aiming to help the decision-maker to pursue a radically difficult decision.

Finally, Dinler and Balci (2021) examined Iranian President Hassan Rouhani’s personality traits during two periods: from the date he came into office to April 2015 with the success of the Nuclear Deal and from April 2015 to May 2018 when Trump announced US disengagement from the deal. They found a significant increase in Rouhani’s self-confidence, arguing that success may increase leaders’ self-confidence.
In short, all the findings and discussions above suggest that leaders’ sensitivity to various contextual cues and the stability of their LTA trait scores across different topics, audiences, time periods and contextual events are different. For a specific leader, what traits of individual personality would change due to what kinds of contextual cues and what these changes would be like are not sure and need to be examined in detail. Instability in trait scores does not necessarily mean no influence and instability itself may be a personality trait, indicating leaders’ adaption to specific contextual stimuli (Hermann, 2005a). Indeed, these variances detected in the studies above are helpful in understanding these leaders’ decision-making styles in specific cases.

Stable LTA traits make it easier to predict leaders’ policy orientations, beliefs, perceptions and behaviours relating to their decision-making processes. Meanwhile, variances in trait scores suggest that some leaders are more responding to the political context and contextual cues, holding specific beliefs or policy orientations or behaving differently from what is expected based on their general personality profiles. As Walker (2000) noted, a single cross-situational personality profile may not work sufficiently to assess a leader in a particular situation. These findings and debates suggest the necessity to consider the potential influence of sources, types, topics, audiences and time frames on the assessment of leaders’ personality characteristics. For leaders who are sensitive to contextual cues, contextualising their personality profiles is helpful to identify their particular motives, cognition or interpersonal styles in specific arenas and develop clearer and more precise propositions of these personality characteristics in specific case studies (Hermann, 2008). Therefore, to obtain an explicit and useful personality profile of a leader, studies need to pay attention to the potential contextual influence discussed above. It is useful to disaggregate personality profiles into different levels of analyses based on these cues and conditions.

The vast majority of LTA studies (reviewed in Chapter III) used spontaneous statements that Hermann (2005a; 2008) argues are given by leaders themselves, minimising the potential ‘speechwriter effect’. Regarding
the ‘impression management’ issue, this thesis collected a large number of words to swamp out this effect (Thiers and Wehner, 2022). In order to address the audience effect, this thesis collected Bush’s and Obama’s verbal statements towards different types of audiences (both domestic and international).

In order to minimise the potential influence of substantive topics on the assessment of leaders’ personalities, this thesis, referring to a number of LTA studies with case analyses (for example, Dyson, 2006; 2009; 2014; Kesgin and Wehner, 2022), collected and coded spontaneous verbal records focusing on general foreign policy issues (including Afghanistan), and develops personality-based expectations based on scores derived from these records.

There are two reasons why this thesis does not use trait scores derived from verbal records relating to the specific domain of Afghanistan. First, the number of collected verbal records focusing on Afghanistan is fewer than the number of collected verbal records focusing on general foreign policy issues, and the word count of collected verbal records focusing on Afghanistan is fewer than the word count of collected verbal records focusing on general foreign policy issues (as presented in Tables 5 and 6 below). Regarding the ‘impression management’ issue, verbal records relating to the general foreign policy topic are a better option. Second, in some verbal records, Bush and Obama discussed Afghanistan along with other foreign policy issues. To only collect verbal context relating to Afghanistan from these records, the researcher excerpted sections on the Afghanistan topic from the original verbal records. Although the author referred to the subject index in the Public Papers of the Presidents of the United States (GPO, 2012; 2021a) to cut down the verbal records, it is better to use verbal records relating to general foreign policy issues to minimise the researcher’s subjective bias during data collection.

As for the temporal consistency, as discussed above, it is useful to disaggregate personality profiles according to different time frames for more explicit and precise assessments of personalities and leadership styles. A
number of LTA studies (for example, Mastors, 2000; Dyson, 2006; 2014; Çuhadar et al., 2017a) combined content analysis and case studies to use this personality assessment to analyse a specific decision made by a leader. These studies focused on the time frames of data collection. They collected a leader’s dated verbal records running up to and during the decision-making process, avoiding using verbal records dated after the declaration of the decision to analyse this leader’s personality. And they were unwilling to use personality characteristics measured at a single point to create the overall personality profile, aiming to increase the validity of their studies (Dyson and Billordo, 2004; van Esch and Swinkels, 2015). Following previous discussions and these studies, instead of constructing single LTA profiles of Bush and Obama, this thesis conducts longitudinal profiles by collecting verbal records created in specific time frames: from the start of the discussion relating to a specific Afghanistan decision to the declaration of that decision. However, not all of these decisions or orders had clear dates, so, for those decisions that were not dated clearly, this thesis collected verbal records on a yearly basis. This thesis does not investigate audience effects on leaders’ decision-making and therefore the data was aggregated across audiences to address any potential audience effects.

According to existing reviews (for example, Woodward, 2003; 2010; Coll, 2018; Sharifullah, 2019) of the war progression, this research divided the Afghanistan war during Bush’s and Obama’s presidencies into five sections: initiating war in 2001 (from 11 September 2001 to 7 October 2001); the ‘light footprint’ of US military presence from 2002 to 2008 (from 4 October 2001 to 2008, during which a light footprint strategy was prepared and implemented); the first year of Obama’s presidency with two critical strategy reviews and two surge decisions (from January 2009 to 1 December 2009); the operation to capture bin Laden (from 10 September 2010 to 1 May 2011) and the decision to withdraw and further delays (from 20 January 2011 to the end of Obama’s presidency).

There were two long periods of time. This research does not make a holistic analysis to account for presidential decision-making across such long
periods of time. Instead, it breaks down each long period into a key decision with attention paid to policy reviews and shifts in subsequent years: Bush’s decision-making relating to the light footprint strategy from 4 October 2001 to 17 April 2002, with additional attention paid to the increase in his reviews and strategy policy shifts from 2006 to 2008 and Obama’s decision-making relating to the troop withdrawal from 20 Jan 2011 to 22 June 2011, with additional attention paid to his decisions on delays in the timeline of US troop withdrawal between 2014 and 2016. The collection of their verbal records and further case studies followed these time frames.

Following all these concerns discussed above, the verbal records collected for constructing Bush’s and Obama’s personality profiles in the subsequent case studies are presented in Tables 3 and 4 below. In addition, some studies (for example, Shannon and Keller, 2007) support the effectiveness of using scripted material to develop personality profiles. In order to examine the potential variances in Bush’s and Obama’s personality assessments due to authorship, topics and temporal effects, this thesis also compares their trait scores derived from scripted and spontaneous verbal records relating to general foreign policy issues (including Afghanistan) and only relating to the specific domain of Afghanistan issues on a yearly basis.

Like many other LTA studies, this thesis followed Hermann’s (2005a) guidelines. Hermann’s work collected at least 50 interview responses. Each response should be no less than 100 words long. There is no exact standard for a sufficient amount of verbal content collection. This thesis collected as many interview responses as possible and each of them was at least 100 words long. In addition to word count, Hermann (2005a; 2008) focused on collecting the full text of verbal records instead of the edited records.

All the verbal statements were collected from Public Papers of the Presidents of the United States: George W. Bush and Public Papers of the Presidents of the United States: Barack H. Obama (GPO, 2012; 2021a). This online official collection includes: US presidential writings, press conferences, addresses and remarks (with interviews covered). Each record from this
resource was checked with tape recordings for accuracy (GPO, 2021b). Other resources include: *The White House: President George W. Bush* and *The White House: President Barack Obama* (The White House, 2009; 2017) and *The American Presidency Project* (Wolley and Peters, 2022): a free online database of presidential documents. These resources were used to check if there were any pieces of presidential statements not recorded by the governmental office.

In order to search for speeches and responses that focus upon general foreign policy issues and the specific Afghanistan issues from the *Public Papers of the Presidents*, this thesis referred to the subject index to minimise personal subjective influence on judgement and selection processes. For other online resources, this thesis referred to the index of topics or checked keywords in the titles/themes of the documents. After selecting the verbal records, it was necessary to delete all irrelevant statements made by someone else before coding and these deleted statements were not counted. Below is an example cited from the record of President Obama’s news conference on 28 May 2011 (GPO, 2021a, pp. 620–621) with a single-line strikethrough added on all the irrelevant statements:

Q. Thank you, Mr. Prime Minister, can you tell me … And, Mr. President …?

Prime Minister Tusk. Well, these were … aspects of security.

President Obama. Just a point about security. … Were you talking about cautionary notes and any reflections I have about what’s taking place back home? So I want to make sure I answer your question.

Tables 3 and 4 below present the number of collected spontaneous verbal records relating to general foreign policy issues and the word count of these spontaneous verbal records collected for Bush and Obama during each decision-making stage. As presented in these tables, the collected verbal records from 11 September 2001 to 7 October 2001 and from 20 January 2011
to 22 June 2011 totalled less than 50 in number but these are appropriate numbers because these time periods are relatively short compared to other time periods in these two tables. Furthermore, the word count indicates that there are sufficient verbal statements collected for the LTA coding.

Table 3. Spontaneous Verbal Records (Foreign Policy) Collected for Bush

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Time Frame</th>
<th>Number of Collected Verbal Records</th>
<th>Word Count</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>11/09/2001 – 07/10/2001</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>6437</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>04/10/2001 – 17/04/2002</td>
<td>102</td>
<td>24528</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2006</td>
<td>79</td>
<td>35013</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2007</td>
<td>80</td>
<td>35509</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2008</td>
<td>57</td>
<td>18014</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 4. Spontaneous Verbal Records (Foreign Policy) Collected for Obama

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Time Frame</th>
<th>Number of Collected Verbal Records</th>
<th>Word Count</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>01/01/2009 – 01/12/2009</td>
<td>54</td>
<td>18661</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10/09/2010 – 01/05/2011</td>
<td>63</td>
<td>27280</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>20/01/2011 – 22/06/2011</td>
<td>33</td>
<td>14731</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2014</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>30179</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2015</td>
<td>53</td>
<td>38822</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2016</td>
<td>51</td>
<td>32644</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Tables 5 and 6 below present the numbers of collected spontaneous and scripted verbal records relating to the specific Afghanistan issue and more general foreign policy (including Afghanistan) issues. These tables also present the word count of each type of verbal record collected on a yearly basis. It is clear that, each year, the number of the collected verbal records relating to the Afghanistan topic and the word count of these verbal records are far fewer than the number and word count of the verbal records relating to general
foreign policy issues. For more details about the verbal records collected, see Appendix 1: Sources. Meanwhile, as highlighted in Appendix 2: Further Comparisons of Different Groups of Trait Scores, trait scores derived from the Afghanistan records should be discussed carefully and may not be an ideal option to use for case studies. Recognising that trait scores derived from these records and the scripted material do not feature in the expository analysis, this thesis reports these results in order to compare trait stability across different contextual factors to justify the use of spontaneous verbal records (relating to general foreign policy) collected according to specific time frames.

Table 5. Verbal Records Collected during Bush’s Presidency

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>No.*</th>
<th>Word Count</th>
<th>No.</th>
<th>Word Count</th>
<th>No.</th>
<th>Word Count</th>
<th>No.</th>
<th>Word Count</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2001</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>7745</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>20638</td>
<td>71</td>
<td>18336</td>
<td>41</td>
<td>31678</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2002</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>1695</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>5991</td>
<td>117</td>
<td>27231</td>
<td>67</td>
<td>60001</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2003</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>253</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>1636</td>
<td>64</td>
<td>16290</td>
<td>68</td>
<td>55328</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2004</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>1884</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>12966</td>
<td>79</td>
<td>35013</td>
<td>94</td>
<td>77542</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2005</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>1016</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>2724</td>
<td>73</td>
<td>22682</td>
<td>86</td>
<td>72056</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2006</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>974</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>12966</td>
<td>79</td>
<td>35013</td>
<td>94</td>
<td>77542</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2007</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>1957</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>7848</td>
<td>80</td>
<td>35509</td>
<td>82</td>
<td>69576</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2008</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>4912</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>12323</td>
<td>57</td>
<td>18014</td>
<td>108</td>
<td>96338</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

No.*: Number of Collected Verbal Records.

Table 6. Verbal Records Collected during Obama’s Presidency

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>No.*</th>
<th>Word Count</th>
<th>No.</th>
<th>Word Count</th>
<th>No.</th>
<th>Word Count</th>
<th>No.</th>
<th>Word Count</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2009</td>
<td>31</td>
<td>9939</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>12794</td>
<td>55</td>
<td>19183</td>
<td>82</td>
<td>92874</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2010</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>10441</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>12139</td>
<td>73</td>
<td>33780</td>
<td>68</td>
<td>78484</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2011</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>1604</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>9779</td>
<td>69</td>
<td>30323</td>
<td>70</td>
<td>64061</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2012</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>2937</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>7191</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>20195</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>40283</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2013</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>2258</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>5123</td>
<td>51</td>
<td>28519</td>
<td>59</td>
<td>69023</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2014</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>632</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>6875</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>30179</td>
<td>69</td>
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<tr>
<td>2015</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>2112</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>3658</td>
<td>53</td>
<td>38822</td>
<td>63</td>
<td>64024</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2016</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>1377</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>3506</td>
<td>51</td>
<td>32644</td>
<td>51</td>
<td>59065</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

No.*: Number of Collected Verbal Records.
LTA Coding Scheme

The verbal material collected was processed through the LTA coding scheme. LTA coding focuses on the frequency of certain words in a sample text. It is assumed that the ‘more frequently leaders use certain words or phrases in their interview response, the more silent such content is to them’ (Hermann, 2008, p. 156). The conceptualisation and findings relating to each trait have been reviewed in Chapter III. Table 7 below is a summary of Hermann’s (2005a, pp. 188–203) LTA coding scheme, including a quick review of the conceptualisation of each trait, a dictionary of the specific type of words coded for each trait and how the coding operates. For each trait, the overall score is the average score across the total number of interview responses examined. All coding was carried out using Profiler Plus (version 7.3.11 64-bit), an automated content analysis software engine developed by Social Science Automation Inc. (Social Science Automation, 2023).
Table 7. LTA Coding Scheme

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Trait</th>
<th>Description</th>
<th>Coding</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Belief in One’s Ability to Control Events (BACE)</td>
<td>Leaders’ view of the degree of their control over the political world</td>
<td>Percentage of verbs that indicate action or planning for action from the leader or leader’s group</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Need for Power (PWR)</td>
<td>One’s concern for developing, maintaining and restoring power</td>
<td>Percentage of verbs that indicate forceful actions or actions that regulate others’ behaviour or concern with fame and reputation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Self-Confidence (SC)</td>
<td>Image of personal ability to manage the environment</td>
<td>Percentage of pronouns (‘my’, ‘myself’, ‘I’, ‘me’ and ‘mine’) that reflect a leader’s beliefs that the speaker instigates an activity, is an authority figure or the recipient of positive responses</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Conceptual Complexity (CC)</td>
<td>Ability to see various dimensions of the political world</td>
<td>Percentage of words indicate high and low complexity that suggest high complexity</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Task Focus (TASK)</td>
<td>Emphasis on problem solving vs group relationships</td>
<td>Percentage of words indicate task orientation and group orientation that suggest a task orientation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>In-Group Bias (IGB)</td>
<td>Belief that one’s own group is at the centre of the political world</td>
<td>Percentage of references to the speaker’s group that are favourable, indicating strength, or the need to maintain group identity</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Distrust of Others (DIS)</td>
<td>Doubts, suspicions and wariness about others</td>
<td>Percentage of nouns that indicate suspicions or misgiving of others’ and other groups’ intention to harm the speaker’s group</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
The results derived from various types of verbal material are presented in the next chapter. In order to make a better differentiation between leaders’ trait scores, a standard practice in LTA research is to create a norming group (the comparison group with means and standard deviations) first and then compare leaders’ trait scores to the mean scores of the norming group (for more examples, see LTA studies reviewed in Chapter III).

A reference group presents the average level of trait scores among leaders in this group. By using these average scores and standard deviations, one can compare a leader’s personality scores to the average scores of a group of leaders and decide the level (high, moderate, or low) of a specific trait score. For example, comparing Bush’s trait scores to the mean scores of the norming group, when the overall score of Bush’s conceptual complexity is higher than the average score of the reference group by one standard deviation or more, his conceptual complexity is higher than the average level of the norming group. On the other hand, if his score of conceptual complexity is lower than the average score by one standard deviation or more, then his conceptual complexity is at a lower level. When his score is neither higher nor lower than the average score by one standard deviation, it is at the moderate level compared to the norming group.

This research creates a norming group based on the profiles of US presidents after World War II (a total of eleven presidents from Truman to Trump, excluding Bush and Obama). Using this particular norming group could create more precise personality portraits of Bush and Obama by comparing their personality trait scores to the mean scores of leaders who were in the same social and political context, minimising differences in leaders’ personalities caused by different cultural, historical and social backgrounds. Data for this norming group was cited from the Psychological Characteristics of Leaders (PsyCL) dataset (Schafer and Lambert, 2022). This dataset includes the overall LTA-based personality scores of global leaders (including US presidents) or more disaggregated LTA trait scores of these leaders on yearly, quarterly and monthly bases. The average scores of the overall personality scores of these eleven US presidents assessed through LTA
across all topics were calculated to create the norming group used in this thesis. Based on these trait scores and comparisons, the next chapter also develops expectations relating to Bush’s and Obama’s policy orientation and their management of decision-making relating to Afghanistan.

**Case Study Approach and Design**

A case study is an in-depth, holistic analysis of a research programme in the real-life context from multiple perspectives and with ample evidence (Simons, 2009; Yin, 2013). This approach is extensively used in political studies. Case studies are the preferred strategy to answer ‘how’ and ‘why’ research questions which are more explanatory than descriptive, especially when studying contemporary events that the investigator cannot control or a complex phenomenon within the real-life context (Kaarbo and Beasley, 1999; Yin, 2013).

The overall research question of this thesis is: How do the LTA-based personalities and leadership styles of US presidents Bush and Obama help explain the costly endurance of the post-911 war in Afghanistan? Focusing on this research question, a case study is the most appropriate option to use to answer this question because it has two advantages. First and foremost, a case study is good for exploring the interactions among key factors and for underlying the process of changes (Simons, 2009), thereby demonstrating the causality between the independent variables and the case (the phenomenon to be explained) (Kaarbo and Beasley, 1999). For this thesis, this approach is appropriate for exploring the causal nexus between presidents’ personality scores and their Afghanistan decisions, tracing the processes of how their personality characteristics and trait scores linked to their decisions and foreign policy outcomes, and underling how the differences in their personalities led to variances in their decision-making styles and the final policy outcomes.

Second, this thesis studies US presidents, the Afghanistan war and their decision-making relating to this war. The flexibility of using a case study allows this thesis to not be constrained by time and resources (Simons, 2009).
However, it is also acknowledged that case studies have two limitations: generalisability and subjectivity. The findings from specific case studies may not be able to generalise or relate to other studies, which remains a central methodological challenge in this approach (Potter, 2010; Yin, 2013). In addition, a case study, like other qualitative methods, may also be criticised for subjective bias from both the participants and the researchers, which is inevitable (Simons, 2020). This issue is addressed in the subsection on evidence collection and analysis below.

**Types of Case Studies**

This thesis used theory to explore and explain cases. In other words, the focus is on interpreting the case through theoretical foundations (Kaarbo and Beasley, 1999). This is what most of the LTA studies reviewed in Chapter III chose to do. The two case studies are designed based on the overall research aim: exploring the role of US presidents’ personalities in their foreign policies towards the continuation of the Afghanistan war through LTA. This thesis applies LTA theory to direct the case examination and interpret Bush’s and Obama’s decisions on Afghanistan; both processes and outcomes.

Kaarbo and Beasley (1999) discussed different types of case studies and noted that, when focusing on using theory to explore a case, there may be some feedback on the theory from the case. This feedback is indicative of the effectiveness of the theory adopted while the focus is still on the case. For the purpose of this thesis, the main focus is on case examination through LTA theory but additional attention is paid to the feedback on the effectiveness of the LTA personality approach from the cases. Therefore, this research focuses on using LTA theory to explore and interpret Bush’s and Obama’s decisions on Afghanistan with additional attention paid to feedback from the cases to explore LTA theory.

There are two stages of analysis for the two case studies. The first stage is to make two single within-case analyses. Within-case analysis usually
combines process-tracing. This is a typical qualitative method in the arena of international relations. This method is appropriate to explore the cause-and-effect mechanisms based on a continuous explanation of a case with various pieces of evidence (George and Bennett, 2005; Checkel, 2008). It could be more persuasive if engaged with the diversity of alternative explanations (Bennett and Elman, 2006). Therefore, this method is useful to explore the causal nexus between Bush’s and Obama’s personality traits and their decision-making processes and outcomes relating to the Afghanistan war.

The second stage is to make a cross-case analysis by comparing the differences and similarities between Bush’s and Obama’s personalities and their decision-making. Comparative case analyses are good for systematic examination of theories and hypotheses (Kaarbo and Beasley, 1999) and also good for drawing abstractions across cases (Merriam and Tisdell, 2015). This thesis also carries out a comparative analysis of these two cases to explore the differences between Bush’s and Obama’s personalities and their effects on their decision-making. Meanwhile, this comparative analysis also explores similarities between the two presidents’ personalities and how these similarities help explain their continuation of the Afghanistan war.

Evidence Collection and Analysis

Yin (2013, p. 80) listed six major sources of evidence used in a case study: documentation, archival records, interviews, direct observations, participant-observation and physical artifacts (see also Simons, 2009; 2020). Recognising that the presidents were inaccessible for this research, documentation and archival records are the two sources appropriate for this thesis. They are helpful for constructing explicit data collection because they provide broad coverage of the case studied and report exact details of the case (Yin, 2013). Focusing on these two categories, the documents and archival records available and appropriate for this research include: journalistic accounts and interviews; memoirs by major insiders in the government; anecdotes;
biographical information; and other material that provides this research with information relating to the research question (Renshon, 2005).

Critically evaluating the materials mentioned above, individuals may record their experiences with personal bias or subjective influence. Renshon (2005, p. 117) warned that, while these documents are still indicative of the writer’s or speaker’s experience, one should be careful to use these documents and ‘identify the extent to which they are representative’. Yin (2013) also warned of authors’ bias in their reports and the bias of researchers in their selection and collection of evidence, suggesting collecting multiple sources of evidence and corroborating information from various sources (see also Beach and Pedersen, 2019).

To address these concerns, during the data collection stage, this thesis collected all kinds of related documents and records within the public domain to provide precise evidence for each decision studied. These documents and records include: autobiographies written by the president, NSC members or White House staff members who had direct access to the president; journalistic records, articles and interviews; governmental reports; and academic work. It is acknowledged that sources and access to case material are limited. Some details of the decision-making relating to the Afghanistan war and some governmental records are still classified. The focus here is on quantity and perspective: to collect as much evidence as possible to corroborate each piece of information with others and to collect evidence from multiple perspectives, reporting records from authors in different fields (such as academic, governmental and journalistic).

It needs time to wait for some of these records to be declassified. Meanwhile, this thesis does not have direct access to interview the president or other NSC members. More archive work and interviews would provide a more detailed picture of the decision-making process. As stated in Chapter VI and Chapter VII, some of the personality-based expectations are not examined with enough evidence. As discussed in the final chapter, this is a limitation that could be improved with more declassified documents and records in the future.
As stated in the introductory chapter, this thesis focuses on US military operations in Afghanistan and carries out two case studies: Bush’s Afghanistan war and Obama’s Afghanistan war. This thesis collected evidence relating to Bush’s and Obama’s decision-making processes and outcomes. During their 16-year war, there were some important occasions for decision that indicated different stages of the war. These major occasions for decision are reviewed in the previous subsection on selecting and collecting verbal documents.

As discussed in Chapter III, one contextual factor, public opinion, may have affected the presidents’ decision-making. The concept of public opinion is abstract and there are different types of public opinion relating to different policies. After World War II, US public opinion was mainly demonstrated by polls (conducted by Gallup and other polling organisations) relating to the role of the US in world affairs (Holsti, 2004). To uncover evidence relating to this factor and how it affected the decision-making mentioned above, this thesis collected poll statistics about public opinion relating to Americans’ willingness to stay in Afghanistan, their wariness of the Afghanistan war and their support for presidents during this war. This thesis also collected documents and records that are indicative of the decision-making process, aiming to find out whether the presidents had ever considered this contextual factor in their decision-making.

Finally, evidence collected is analysed through a pattern-matching mode, of which the logic is to compare the empirical evidence to the theoretical propositions. ‘If the patterns coincide, the results can help a case study strengthen its internal validity’ (Yin, 2013, p. 106, original emphasis). The evidence collected is categorised and regrouped on a thematic basis to examine if it is consistent with the corresponding LTA propositions. If the patterns match, the LTA-assessed personalities are helpful for understanding Bush’s and Obama’s policy orientations, their management of the decision-making process, and foreign policy outcomes. If not, the results provide inferences to investigate any external influence on personality effects and leaders’ decision-making processes and outcomes. To improve the quality of
the analysis, the two case studies incorporate as much collected evidence as possible as well as existing alternative explanations (Yin, 2013), aiming to provide a holistic and critical analysis of these important decisions relating to Bush’s and Obama’s military policies in Afghanistan.

**Conclusion**

This chapter has justified all the methodological choices made in this thesis. Starting from a brief review of the history of at-a-distance profiling, it then discussed the strengths of quantitative content analysis used in LTA research with a focus on ascertaining its validity and reliability. Then, guided by the research question and other LTA studies, it justified the selection and collection of verbal records used for LTA coding. This research uses LTA trait scores derived from spontaneous verbal records relating to general foreign policy issues (including Afghanistan) to develop expectations relating to Bush’s and Obama’s policy orientations and their management of the decision-making processes and outcomes. There were also specific time frames applied to collect these records. In addition, this thesis also examines the potential effects of authorship, topic and time on Bush’s and Obama’s LTA personality assessments. Finally, this section reported the types and amount of materials collected and introduced the LTA coding dictionary.

For the purpose of this research, LTA expectations are examined in two case studies. The second section of this chapter discussed the strengths and weaknesses of the case study approach adopted in this research, justifying choices made on the types of case studies and sources of evidence and how the collected evidence is analysed, with additional attention paid in order to minimise subjective bias in data collection and to improve the quality of case analyses. Due to the use of at-a-distance profiling and the methodological choice of using documents and archival records, there are no foreseeable ethical risks for the two presidents and other participants who were involved in their decision-making processes and this research.
For all subsequent chapters, all of the research changes from theoretical into empirical analysis. The next chapter presents details about trait scores derived from various verbal records that are different in type, topic and date, conducting further analyses of Bush’s and Obama’s personalities and developing expectations about their decision-making styles based on these scores.
Chapter V Results and Analysis

Introduction

The previous methodology chapter discussed the research design, explaining and justifying all the methodological choices made in this research. It also reported the basic information about the amount and word count of spontaneous and scripted verbal materials collected for the content analysis. This chapter follows the steps described in the research design, using the automated content analysis software engine 'Profiler Plus' to code these verbal records and produce profiles of US Presidents Bush’s and Obama’s personalities. Based on the statistical data produced from their verbal records, this research further discusses what kinds of behaviour and performance are expected in their decision-making relating to the US war in Afghanistan.

This chapter proceeds as follows. First, it reports Bush’s and Obama’s trait scores derived from the spontaneous verbal records (general foreign policy issues including Afghanistan, specific time periods), produces a norming group of eleven post-World War II US presidents and compares Bush’s and Obama’s personalities with this comparison group. It is found that Bush has consistently high scores on his distrust of others and Obama has consistently high scores on his belief in his ability to control events, self-confidence, and conceptual complexity. Furthermore, it briefly reports the comparisons of Bush’s and Obama’s trait scores derived from different topics and types of verbal records to discuss the stability issues relating to different variables mentioned in Chapter IV. The main finding is that trait scores derived from spontaneous and scripted materials show significant differences. For Bush, major differences exist in his scores on conceptual complexity and in-group bias. For Obama, major differences exist in his scores on self-confidence, in-group bias and task focus. More details are presented in the following section and Appendix 2: Further Comparisons of Different Groups of Trait Scores.
Second, it uses these two groups of trait scores as the personality portraits of Bush and Obama. It compares the personality portraits of the two leaders, conducting t-tests of statistical significance between their trait scores. Significant differences are found in Bush’s and Obama’s trait scores on their belief in their ability to control events, self-confidence, task focus and distrust of others. Finally, it discusses the expected personality-based behaviours and performance in the US-Afghanistan case.

These reports and discussions achieve the first and second sub-aims of this thesis: to assess US presidents Bush’s and Obama’s personalities through LTA, and to develop personality-based expectations relating to their behaviours in the management of their decision-making processes and their policy orientations relating to the Afghanistan war. These expectations are examined in the two case studies to answer the overall research question: How do the LTA-based personalities and leadership styles of US presidents Bush and Obama help explain the costly endurance of the post-9/11 war in Afghanistan? All these are discussed in detail in the following sections.

Trait Scores

As discussed in Chapter IV, this thesis uses trait scores derived from Bush’s and Obama’s spontaneous verbal records relating to general foreign policy (including Afghanistan) issues as their personality portraits. These trait scores are presented in Tables 8 and 9 below. Meanwhile, this thesis collected verbal records dated during specific time periods: from the start of the discussion relating to a specific Afghanistan decision to the declaration of this specific decision. For example, after the 9/11 attacks, Bush and his advisors discussed what type of military actions to take and he declared his decision on 7 October 2001. To analyse Bush’s personality and leadership style during this period, this thesis collected his verbal material dated from 11 September 2001 to 7 October 2001. Details about this collection of verbal records have been discussed and presented in Chapter IV.
As outlined in the previous chapter, to make a better differentiation between Bush’s and Obama’s trait scores, this thesis has created a norming group based on the profiles of US Presidents after World War II (a total of eleven presidents from Truman to Trump, excluding Bush and Obama). Data of this norming group was cited from the PsyCL dataset (Schafer and Lambert, 2022), which includes US presidents and their personalities assessed through LTA across all topics.

Tables 8 and 9 below present all these trait scores, mean scores and standard deviations. These two tables show whether Bush’s and Obama’s trait scores are one standard deviation below or above the mean scores of the comparison group of leaders. When a score is higher than the average score by one standard deviation or more, then this score is at a high level compared to the average score of the comparison group. Conversely, when a score is lower than the average score by one standard deviation or more, then this score is at a low level compared to the average score of the comparison group. When a score is close to being high or low, it is noted as leaning towards being high or low. Scores that are higher than the average score by half or more than half of one standard deviation but are still below the high level lean towards being high. Scores that are lower than the average score by half or more than half of one standard deviation but are still above the low level lean towards being low. For more examples, please see Hermann’s (2005b; 2005c) reports on Bill Clinton’s and Saddam Hussein’s personalities.

These measurements and standards are applied to all the comparisons of trait scores made in this chapter. In subsequent discussions of trait scores compared to different high and low levels, this chapter also provides some specific numbers for traits that indicate a distinct belief, motivation or cognitive style and numbers that indicate high and low levels for each LTA personality trait.
Table 8. Bush’s Personality Traits and the Comparison Group (Spontaneous, Foreign Policy, Specific Time Periods)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Time Period</th>
<th>BACE</th>
<th>PWR</th>
<th>SC</th>
<th>CC</th>
<th>TASK</th>
<th>IGB</th>
<th>DIS</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>11 September 2001 – 7 October 2001</td>
<td>0.36</td>
<td>0.28</td>
<td>0.42</td>
<td>0.59</td>
<td>0.54</td>
<td>0.14</td>
<td>0.39*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>leans high</td>
<td>moderate</td>
<td>moderate</td>
<td>moderate</td>
<td>leans low</td>
<td>leans low</td>
<td>high</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4 October 2001 – 17 April 2002</td>
<td>0.36</td>
<td>0.29</td>
<td>0.42</td>
<td>0.57</td>
<td>0.55</td>
<td>0.11*</td>
<td>0.23*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>leans high</td>
<td>moderate</td>
<td>moderate</td>
<td>moderate</td>
<td></td>
<td>low</td>
<td>high</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2006</td>
<td>0.31*</td>
<td>0.26</td>
<td>0.45</td>
<td>0.64</td>
<td>0.57</td>
<td>0.12</td>
<td>0.22*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>low</td>
<td>moderate</td>
<td>high</td>
<td>moderate</td>
<td></td>
<td>low</td>
<td>high</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2007</td>
<td>0.29*</td>
<td>0.25</td>
<td>0.40</td>
<td>0.62</td>
<td>0.57</td>
<td>0.13</td>
<td>0.20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>low</td>
<td>leans low</td>
<td>high</td>
<td>moderate</td>
<td></td>
<td>low</td>
<td>high</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2008</td>
<td>0.31*</td>
<td>0.19*</td>
<td>0.41</td>
<td>0.63</td>
<td>0.56</td>
<td>0.15</td>
<td>0.16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>low</td>
<td>low</td>
<td>leans low</td>
<td>high</td>
<td>moderate</td>
<td></td>
<td>leans high</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11 Post-WWII US Presidents</td>
<td>0.35</td>
<td>0.27</td>
<td>0.44</td>
<td>0.57</td>
<td>0.56</td>
<td>0.15</td>
<td>0.13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Standard Deviation</td>
<td>0.02</td>
<td>0.03</td>
<td>0.06</td>
<td>0.05</td>
<td>0.04</td>
<td>0.02</td>
<td>0.04</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*: At least two standard deviations above or below the mean score;

BACE = Belief in One’s Ability to Control Events; PWR = Need for Power; SC = Self-Confidence; CC = Conceptual Complexity; TASK = Task Focus; IGB = In-Group Bias; DIS = Distrust of Others; These abbreviations are applied to all the tables in this thesis.

The version of the soft engine ‘Profiler Plus’ is 7.3.11 64-bit.
Table 9. Obama’s Personality Traits and the Comparison Group (Spontaneous, Foreign Policy, Specific Time Periods)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>BACE</th>
<th>PWR</th>
<th>SC</th>
<th>CC</th>
<th>TASK</th>
<th>IGB</th>
<th>DIS</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1 January 2009 – 1 December 2009</td>
<td>0.38</td>
<td>0.24</td>
<td>0.59*</td>
<td>0.62</td>
<td>0.63</td>
<td>0.12</td>
<td>0.14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>high</td>
<td>low</td>
<td>high</td>
<td>high</td>
<td>high</td>
<td>low</td>
<td>moderate</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10 September 2010 – 1 May 2011</td>
<td>0.37</td>
<td>0.24</td>
<td>0.63*</td>
<td>0.62</td>
<td>0.57</td>
<td>0.16</td>
<td>0.12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>high</td>
<td>low</td>
<td>high</td>
<td>high</td>
<td>moderate</td>
<td>leans high</td>
<td>moderate</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>20 January 2011 – 22 June 2011</td>
<td>0.38</td>
<td>0.28</td>
<td>0.63*</td>
<td>0.61</td>
<td>0.62</td>
<td>0.16</td>
<td>0.11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>high</td>
<td>moderate</td>
<td>high</td>
<td>leans high</td>
<td>high</td>
<td>leans high</td>
<td>leans low</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2014</td>
<td>0.40*</td>
<td>0.31</td>
<td>0.61*</td>
<td>0.64</td>
<td>0.65*</td>
<td>0.13</td>
<td>0.13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>high</td>
<td>high</td>
<td>high</td>
<td>high</td>
<td>high</td>
<td>low</td>
<td>moderate</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2015</td>
<td>0.39*</td>
<td>0.27</td>
<td>0.57*</td>
<td>0.64</td>
<td>0.62</td>
<td>0.17</td>
<td>0.21*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>high</td>
<td>moderate</td>
<td>high</td>
<td>high</td>
<td>high</td>
<td>high</td>
<td>high</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2016</td>
<td>0.40*</td>
<td>0.27</td>
<td>0.53</td>
<td>0.67*</td>
<td>0.66*</td>
<td>0.14</td>
<td>0.16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>high</td>
<td>moderate</td>
<td>high</td>
<td>high</td>
<td>high</td>
<td>leans low</td>
<td>leans high</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11 Post-WWII US Presidents</td>
<td>0.35</td>
<td>0.27</td>
<td>0.44</td>
<td>0.57</td>
<td>0.56</td>
<td>0.15</td>
<td>0.13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Standard Deviation</td>
<td>0.02</td>
<td>0.03</td>
<td>0.06</td>
<td>0.05</td>
<td>0.04</td>
<td>0.02</td>
<td>0.04</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*: At least two standard deviations above or below the mean score.
As presented in Table 8, Bush’s personality trait scores are derived from foreign policy-related spontaneous verbal records collected in five specific time periods. Most of Bush’s scores on his distrust of others are above the high level (0.17). Most of his scores on this trait are higher than the average score (0.13) by more than one standard deviation except in 2008 (0.16). His scores on task focus are mainly at the moderate level (0.56). The only exception is that, from 11 September 2001 to 7 October 2001, his score on this trait (0.54) leans towards being low (0.52). He exhibits a low in-group bias between 2002 and 2007. In 2008, his score on this trait is at the moderate level (0.15) and in 2001, his score (0.14) leans towards being low (0.13).

Bush’s scores on conceptual complexity are at the moderate level during two periods: from 11 September 2001 to 7 October 2001 and from 4 October 2001 to 17 April 2002. Between 2006 and 2008, he scores higher on conceptual complexity than the sample of leaders by at least one standard deviation (higher than 0.62). Conversely, he scores higher on belief in his ability to control events than the average level (0.35) of the comparison group during the first two time periods. However, between 2006 and 2008, his scores on this trait are significantly lower than the average score by two or three standard deviations (0.31 and 0.29). From 4 October 2001 to 17 April 2002, his power motivation (0.29) is relatively high. In 2007, his power motivation (0.25) is relatively low. In 2008, Bush’s score on his need for power (0.19) is significantly lower than the average score (0.27) by more than two standard deviations. The other two scores on his need for power are at the moderate level. His scores on self-confidence are at the moderate level (0.44) except between 2007 and 2008, leaning towards being low (0.38).

As presented in Table 9, Obama’s personality trait scores are derived from foreign policy-related spontaneous collected from six specific time periods. Obama has consistently high scores on his belief in his ability to control events (0.37), self-confidence (0.50), conceptual complexity (0.62, except one, which leans towards being high, 0.61) and task focus (0.60, except from 10 September 2010 to 1 May 2011, at the moderate level, 0.57).
Obama shows more differences from the sample of leaders in his scores on the other three traits. Scores on his need for power are at the low level (0.24) during two periods: from 1 January 2009 to 1 December 2009 and from 10 September 2010 to 1 May 2011. In 2014, his score is high. In the other three periods, his scores are at the moderate level (0.27). Three of Obama's scores on his in-group bias are at the low level (0.13) (from 1 January 2009 to 1 December 2009, and 2014) or lean towards being low (0.14, in 2016). And the one in 2015 is at the high level (0.17). In the other two periods: from 10 September 2010 to 1 May 2011, and from 20 January 2011 to 22 June 2011, the scores on in-group bias lean towards being high (0.16). Obama's scores on distrust of others are at the moderate level in three periods: from 1 January 2009 to 1 December 2009, from 10 September 2010 to 1 May 2011 and 2014. In 2015, he shows a significantly high distrust of others (0.21) and in 2016, he shows a relatively high distrust of others (0.16). From 20 January 2011 to 22 June 2011, data coded suggests that he has a relatively low distrust of others (0.11).

This thesis divided the columns in Tables 8 and 9 (all use foreign policy-related spontaneous verbal records collected during specific time periods) into four groups based on Bush’s and Obama’s first and second terms in office, and used F-tests to examine the variances of trait stability across time. The results show that the variances between Bush’s and Obama’s scores during their first and second terms in office are equal except for Bush’s scores on his belief in his ability to control events and self-confidence. Therefore, although some significant changes are found in some of Bush’s and Obama’s personality trait scores, overall, their personality scores are stable across time.

With concerns about validity issues, this thesis collected scripted and spontaneous materials relating to general foreign policy issues (including Afghanistan) and the specific Afghanistan topic. Therefore, four groups of verbal records were collected for each president. Trait scores derived from these four groups of verbal records are compared. The primary finding is that trait scores derived from spontaneous and scripted materials relating to Bush’s foreign policy show significant differences in his in-group bias, task focus,
conceptual complexity and distrust of others. Trait scores derived from these two types of material relating to Obama’s foreign policy show the most significant differences in his self-confidence, distrust of others and task focus. Trait scores derived from spontaneous material present more temporal stability.

Trait scores derived from different verbal materials relating to Afghanistan also show significant differences but this may also be related to the limited number of verbal records collected. Finally, comparing trait scores derived from verbal records collected on a yearly basis with those derived from verbal records dated during specific time periods, significant differences are only found in scores on Bush’s belief in his ability to control events and Obama’s distrust of others and power motivation. More details are presented in Appendix 2. In addition, in Appendix 2, trait scores derived from spontaneous foreign-policy-related material are compared to existing findings on the personality of Bush and Obama, finding both support and differences from other work (Greenstein, 2009; 2011; Preston, 2011; Winter, 2011; Dyson, 2014). Based on these findings, this thesis uses spontaneous material relating to general foreign policy issues (including Afghanistan) and dated during specific periods of Bush’s and Obama’s decision-making relating to the Afghanistan war.

Comparisons and Expectations

After comparing trait scores from these two tables with the average scores of the norming group, this section compares Bush’s and Obama’s personality trait scores through t-tests. Then this section makes further personality-based expectations for their preferences on shaping and leading decision-making on the US-Afghanistan war.

Comparing the columns in Tables 8 and 9 (all used foreign policy-related spontaneous verbal records collected in specific time periods), it is evident that there are differences between Bush’s and Obama’s personalities but are these differences significant or not? To answer this question, this thesis conducted
two-tailed t-tests on each of the seven traits to examine whether the differences in these trait scores for Bush and Obama are significant. Table 18 below reports the t-scores and p values of these t-tests. The scores contained in Table 18 indicate that there are significant statistical differences between four of the seven personality traits of the two individual presidents: belief in one’s ability to control events, self-confidence, task focus (p < 0.05) and distrust of others (p < 0.1). Bush scores significantly higher than Obama on distrust of others but lower on the other three traits. Therefore, in Bush’s and Obama’s decision-making relating to the US-Afghanistan war, it is expected to see differences in their behaviours based on these significant differences in their individual characteristics.

Table 18. T-Test Results of Comparisons of Bush’s and Obama’s Personalities

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Trait</th>
<th>t-score</th>
<th>p Value</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>BACE</td>
<td>-4.021</td>
<td>0.010***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PWR</td>
<td>-0.801</td>
<td>0.444</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SC</td>
<td>-9.484</td>
<td>0.000***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CC</td>
<td>-1.529</td>
<td>0.161</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TASK</td>
<td>-5.006</td>
<td>0.002***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>IGB</td>
<td>-1.801</td>
<td>0.105</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>DIS</td>
<td>2.381</td>
<td>0.063*</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*: p ≤ 0.1; **: p ≤ 0.05; ***: p ≤ 0.01

What are the implications of Bush’s and Obama’s personalities on their policy orientations and management of decision-making relating to the US-Afghanistan war? And are these similarities and differences in their personality characteristics accountable for the similarities and differences in their engagement in decision-making and policy implementation processes? To answer the two questions, it is useful to develop some personality-based expectations regarding Bush’s and Obama’s preferences on policy options and
actions they are likely to take to lead the decision-making process in the direction they want in the Afghanistan case. All these expectations are developed based on LTA studies and findings reviewed and discussed in Chapter III. By examining these expectations in the two case studies on the Afghanistan war, this research can find out more about how and the extent to which Bush’s and Obama’s personalities affected and led to their continuation of the Afghanistan war.

There is more than one way to describe leaders’ LTA-based personalities and leadership styles. This thesis develops expectations based on single individual characteristics and three dimensions of leadership styles discussed in LTA: leaders’ responses to political constraints (belief in one’s ability to control events and need for power), openness to information (self-confidence and conceptual complexity), and motivation for actions (task focus, in-group bias and distrust of others) (Hermann, 2005a). The second and third subsections in Chapter III discussed all these single traits or trait combinations. Based on all these studies and findings reviewed, this subsection summarises all LTA-based expectations relating to Bush’s and Obama’s decision-making relating to the Afghanistan war in Tables 19 to 25 below.

As justified in Chapter IV, this thesis analyses some major occasions for decision relating to Bush’s and Obama’s continuation of the Afghanistan war and subsequent policy reviews and changes. Therefore, the expectations are developed separately for each decision-making or policy review stage identified in Chapter IV.

Moreover, as discussed in Chapter III, leaders’ experience/inexperience in a specific policy arena (in this thesis, the foreign policy arena) is important in both mediating the role of their personalities in their decision-making and mediating their personality influence on their reliance on expert advice and their control over the policy formulation and implementation processes. Therefore, the potential impact of leaders’ experience or lack of experience on their decision-making is incorporated into these LTA-based expectations. Because Saunders' (2017) and Preston’s (2001; 2012) findings about leaders’
openness to divergent voices are different, this chapter develops expectations based on Preston’s findings. This thesis then compares these expectations to empirical records and Saunders’ arguments.

The two propositions about leaders’ openness to divergent opinions in their decision-making are made in Chapter III. Leaders’ task focus may influence their openness to divergent opinions. Leaders with a low power motivation are likely to delegate policy formulation and implementation processes to subordinates. Whether they can hear divergent voices in their decision-making is influenced by whether their subordinates provided these leaders with diverse opinions or just a few policy options. This may also happen to leaders who delegate policy formulation to subordinates due to inexperience in foreign policy. Another non-LTA external factor, public opinion, may influence leaders’ openness to divergent voices if leaders are concerned about re-election. However, leaders may also treat strong public opinion as contextual constraints. These propositions and discussions are all incorporated in these personality-based expectations below.

Finally, a question should be asked about the assessments of leaders’ increased experience during their presidency. Bush and Obama were novices in foreign policy when they were elected. In their analyses of the Iraq decision (2003), both Saunders (2017) and Preston (2011) described Bush as inexperienced compared to his experienced advisors. Following these statements, this thesis also defines Bush as inexperienced from 11 September 2001 to 17 April 2002. However, it is recognised that the president was likely to gain experience in the foreign policy arena with his involvement in many foreign policy issues. Therefore, it is expected that, during the final three years of his presidency (2006 to 2008), Bush became an experienced decision-maker in the foreign policy arena.

The same logic is applied to Obama’s presidency. It is expected that he was inexperienced in foreign policy decision-making in 2009, but he became experienced during his second term in office, in this case study, from 2014 to 2016. Sharifullah (2019) described Obama as more experienced in June 2011
and that he had a better understanding of the Afghanistan war with three-years’ experience as president. However, it is difficult to evaluate whether (and it seems less likely) he was experienced enough compared to his experienced advisors or whether he gained enough foreign policy experience according to Preston’s criteria. Following the example of Bush in 2003, this thesis describes Obama as inexperienced in 2011 but, compared to the decision-making in 2009, he is expected to show less reliance on expert advice.
Table 19. LTA-Based Expectations of Bush’s Decision-Making relating to the Afghanistan War (11 September 2001 – 7 October 2001)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Trait</th>
<th>Expectations</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>BACE &amp; PWR</td>
<td><strong>High BACE &amp; Moderate PWR, Inexperienced</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Proactive, independent, interventionist and risk-taking policy orientation;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Exert control over the decision-making, but delegate policy formulation and implementation;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Reliance on expert advice;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Challenge constraints in direct or indirect ways (thus may not be adaptive to strong public opinion).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SC &amp; CC</td>
<td><strong>Moderate SC &amp; Moderate CC, Inexperienced</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Openness to information;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Advisers selected based on loyalty and ideological fit over expertise or based on expertise and diverse viewpoints;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Flexible in showing complex or simple cognitive styles;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Flexible in looking for alternative options and dissenting opinions or not;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Flexible in being reflective on prior policies and strong public opinions or not;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Rely on and are receptive to expert advice but also dependent on their information collection;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Information collection may be influenced by the other traits: encouraging group members to express their views (low TASK) and subordinates may or may not present the decision-maker with diverse opinions (delegation of policy formulation and implementation due to moderate PWR and inexperience).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TASK</td>
<td><strong>Low TASK</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Seek group consensus and value subordinates’ opinions;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Avoid conflicts and disagreements within the group;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Pay attention to group members’ demands.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>IGB &amp; DIS</td>
<td><strong>Low IGB &amp; High DIS</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Conflictual orientation driven by high DIS but is also willing to cooperate with like-minded others;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Limited commitments to one’s group;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Norm violation which is driven by high DIS.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table 20. LTA-Based Expectations of Bush’s Decision-Making relating to the Afghanistan War (4 October 2001 – 17 April 2002)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>BACE &amp; PWR</th>
<th>high BACE &amp; high PWR, inexperienced</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Proactive, independent, interventionist and risk-taking policy orientation;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Centralised decision-making with inner circle;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Exert direct control over the decision-making, set guidelines but delegate policy formulation and implementation to subordinates;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Reliance on expert advice;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Skilfully challenge constraints in direct or indirect ways (thus may not be adaptive to strong public opinion).</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>SC &amp; CC</th>
<th>moderate SC &amp; moderate CC, inexperienced</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Openness to information;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Advisers selected based on loyalty and ideological fit over expertise or based on expertise and diverse viewpoints;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Flexible in showing complex or simple cognitive styles;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Flexible in looking for alternative options and dissenting opinions or not;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Flexible in being reflective on prior policies and strong public opinions or not;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Rely on and are receptive to expert advice but also dependent on their information collection;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Information collection may be influenced by the advisory structure: subordinates may or may not present the decision-maker with diverse opinions (delegation of policy formulation and implementation due to inexperience)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>TASK</th>
<th>moderate TASK</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Flexible to be task-oriented or group-oriented;</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>IGB &amp; DIS</th>
<th>low IGB &amp; high DIS</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Conflicual orientation driven by high DIS but is also willing to cooperate with like-minded others;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Limited commitments to one’s group;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Norm violation which is driven by high DIS.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>BACE &amp; PWR</th>
<th>low BACE &amp; moderate (in 2006) or low PWR (in 2007 &amp; 2008), experienced</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Reactive, dependent and less risk-taking policy orientation;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Flexible in showing a war orientation or not (in 2006); Less likely to show a war orientation in 2007 and 2008;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Less centralised, more collegial decision-making style and delegation of policy formulation and implementation processes to subordinates;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Rely more on own policy views and experience than expert advice;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Constraints respecter (thus is likely to be adaptive to strong public opinion).</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>SC &amp; CC</th>
<th>moderate (in 2006) or low (in 2007 &amp; 2008) SC &amp; high CC, experienced</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Broad information search;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Select advisors based on expertise and diverse viewpoints;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Open to listening to divergent voices but rely on personal viewpoints;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Complex cognitive style;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Reflective on prior policies and strong public opinions;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Willing to change foreign policies;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Information collection may be influenced by the advisory structure: subordinates may or may not present the decision-maker with diverse opinions (delegation of policy formulation and implementation due to low PWR)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>TASK</th>
<th>moderate TASK</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Flexible to be task-oriented or group-oriented;</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>IGB &amp; DIS</th>
<th>low IGB (except in 2008, moderate) &amp; high DIS</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Conflictual orientation which is driven by high DIS but is also willing to cooperate with like-minded others;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Relatively limited commitments to one’s group;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Norm violation which is driven by high DIS.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table 22. LTA-Based Expectations of Obama’s Decision-Making relating to the Afghanistan War (1 January 2009 – 1 December 2009)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>BACE &amp; PWR</th>
<th>high BACE &amp; low PWR, inexperienced</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Proactive, independent, interventionist and risk-taking policy orientation;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Exert little control over the decision-making and delegate policy formulation and implementation;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Reliance on expert advice;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Challenge constraints in direct ways but less successful (thus may have to be adaptive to strong public opinion).</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>SC &amp; CC</th>
<th>high SC &amp; high CC, inexperienced</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Broad information search;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Select advisors based on expertise and diverse viewpoints;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Open to and accept dissenting voices;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Complex cognitive style;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Reflective on prior policies and strong public opinions</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Willing to change foreign policies;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Information collection may be influenced by the advisory structure: subordinates may or may not present the decision-maker with diverse opinions (delegation of policy formulation and implementation due to low PWR and inexperience)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>TASK</th>
<th>high TASK</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Focus on task accomplishment but pay less attention to building up group relations;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Tolerant of conflicts and disagreements but once decisions are made, the decision-maker is closed to dissenting voices;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Push followers to implement the decision made.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>IGB &amp; DIS</th>
<th>low IGB &amp; moderate DIS</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>cooperative orientation but keep vigilant about potential threats;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Relatively limited commitments to one’s group;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Norm violation (driven by high levels of distrustfulness).</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table 23. LTA-Based Expectations of Obama’s Decision-Making relating to the Afghanistan War (10 September 2010 – 1 May 2011)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>BACE &amp; PWR</th>
<th>high BACE &amp; low PWR, inexperienced</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Proactive, independent, interventionist and risk-taking policy orientation;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Exert little control over the decision-making and delegate policy formulation and implementation;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Reliance on expert advice;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Challenge constraints in direct ways but less successful (thus may have to be adaptive to public opinion).</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>SC &amp; CC</th>
<th>high SC &amp; high CC, inexperienced</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Broad information search;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Select advisors based on expertise and diverse viewpoints;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Open to and accept dissenting voices;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Complex cognitive style;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Reflective on prior policies and strong public opinions</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Willing to change foreign policies;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Information collection may be influenced by the advisory structure: subordinates may or may not present the decision-maker with diverse opinions (delegation of policy formulation and implementation due to low PWR and inexperience)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>TASK</th>
<th>moderate TASK</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Flexible to be task-oriented or group-oriented;</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>IGB &amp; DIS</th>
<th>high IGB &amp; moderate DIS</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Conflictual orientation and focus on eliminating threats;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Strong commitments to one’s group;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Norm violation (driven by high in-group bias).</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table 24. LTA-Based Expectations of Obama’s Decision-Making relating to the Afghanistan War (20 January 2011 – 22 June 2011)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>BACE &amp; PWR</th>
<th>high BACE &amp; moderate PWR, inexperienced (but was more experienced than he was in 2009)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Proactive, independent, interventionist and risk-taking policy orientation;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Exert control over the decision-making but may delegate policy formulation and implementation;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Flexible in imposing personal views on the group or seeking group consensus;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>More reliance on own policy views and less reliance on expert views;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Challenge constraints in direct or indirect ways (thus may not be adaptive to strong public opinion).</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>SC &amp; CC</th>
<th>high SC &amp; high CC, inexperienced</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Broad information search;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Select advisors based on expertise and diverse viewpoints;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Open to and accept dissenting voices;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Complex cognitive style;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Reflective on prior policies and strong public opinions</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Willing to change foreign policies;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Information collection may be influenced by the advisory structure: subordinates may or may not present the decision-maker with diverse opinions (delegation of policy formulation and implementation due to moderate PWR and inexperience)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>TASK</th>
<th>high TASK</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Focus on task accomplishment but pay less attention to building up group relations;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Tolerant of conflicts and disagreements but once decisions are made, the decision-maker is closed to dissenting voices;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Push followers to implement the decision made.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>IGB &amp; DIS</th>
<th>high IGB &amp; low DIS</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Conflictual orientation and focus on eliminating threats;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>low level of mistrustfulness of others, depending on the context;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Strong commitments to one’s group;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Norm violation (driven by high in-group bias).</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table 25. LTA-Based Expectations of Obama’s Decision-Making relating to the Afghanistan War (2014 – 2016)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>BACE &amp; PWR</th>
<th>high BACE &amp; high (in 2014) or moderate PWR (in 2015 &amp; 2016), experienced</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>proactive, independent, interventionist, risk-taking and war orientation;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Control over the decision-making and implementation processes (in 2015 &amp; 2016, less direct control);</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Rely on and advocate for own policy views;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Skillfully challenge constraints in both direct and indirect ways (thus may not be adaptive to strong public opinion).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SC &amp; CC</td>
<td>high SC &amp; high CC, experienced</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Broad information search;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Select advisors based on expertise and diverse viewpoints;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Open to listening to expert advisers but rely on personal views;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Complex cognitive style;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Reflective on prior policies and strong public opinions;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Willing to change foreign policies;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TASK</td>
<td>high TASK</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Focus on task accomplishment but pay less attention to building up group relations;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Tolerant of conflicts and disagreements but once decisions are made, the decision-maker is closed to dissenting voices;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Push followers to implement the decision made.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Conflictual orientation in 2015 and 2016;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Strong commitments to one’s group in 2015 but limited commitments in 2014 &amp; 2016;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>More likely to violate norms in 2015 &amp; 2016 than in 2014.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Conclusion

This chapter reported and discussed the statistical data produced from the automatic coding, and created profiles of US Presidents Bush’s and Obama’s LTA-based personalities.

The chapter first reported the trait scores derived from spontaneous verbal materials relating to foreign policy topics during specific time periods (Tables 8 and 9), creating a norming group of eleven post-World War II US presidents and comparing trait scores to the average scores of this norming group. Bush has consistently high scores on distrust of others, low scores on in-group bias (except in 2008) and moderate scores on task focus (except from 11 September 2011 to 7 October 2001). Scores on other traits show some differences across time. Obama has consistently high scores on his belief in his ability to control events, self-confidence, conceptual complexity and task focus (except from 10 September 2010 to 1 May 2011). Scores on other traits show some differences across time. Overall, these trait scores show stability across time.

Meanwhile, this thesis compared eight groups of trait scores derived from different types of verbal records and topics on a yearly basis. The findings suggest that Bush’s trait scores derived from scripted and spontaneous verbal materials show major significant differences in his conceptual complexity and in-group bias. Obama’s trait scores derived from scripted and spontaneous verbal materials show major significant differences in his self-confidence, task focus and in-group bias. These differences reinforced the necessity to be careful and critical when selecting the verbal material for content analysis in LTA to create better personality portraits of leaders and to effectively help explain leaders’ decision-making styles. More details are presented in Appendix 2.

In addition, the comparison of the two presidents’ trait scores has significant differences in four of the seven traits: belief in one’s ability to control events, self-confidence, task focus and distrust of others. Attention is paid to these traits in the following case studies with expectations made in this chapter.
All the traits scores in Tables 8 and 9 and differences in these personality traits are helpful in answering the research question by identifying Bush's and Obama's motivations for continuing the US war in Afghanistan and the different ways in which they made decisions relating to the war.

Finally, this chapter developed expectations relating to Bush's and Obama's decision-making relating to their continuation of the Afghanistan war based on these trait scores. The trait scores and expectations regarding personality influence on decision-making achieved the first and second sub-aims of this thesis: to assess US presidents Bush's and Obama's personalities through LTA, and to develop personality-based expectations relating to their behaviours in the management of their decision-making processes and their policy orientations relating to the Afghanistan war. These expectations are examined in the next two chapters with attention paid to Bush's and Obama's willingness to continue the Afghanistan war and how they managed the decision-making process to achieve their goals.
Chapter VI Bush’s Afghanistan War

Introduction

Previous chapters reviewed the existing studies of the persistence of the US war in Afghanistan, set up the theoretical framework and developed expectations relating to Presidents Bush’s and Obama’s preferences on policy options and their management of decision-making on the Afghanistan war based on their personalities analysed through LTA.

This and the following chapters bring these personality-based expectations into the case studies of Bush’s and Obama’s decision-making on the Afghanistan war to answer the research question: How do the LTA-based personalities and leadership styles of Bush and Obama help explain the costly endurance of the post-911 war in Afghanistan?

This chapter focuses on President Bush and his decision-making relating to the start and continuation of the Afghanistan war. During his presidential campaign and his first eight months in office, Bush identified domestic issues as the highest priority on his list (Dueck, 2010). However, the 9/11 attacks added counterterrorism as Bush’s major concern and transformed him into a ‘war president’ (Moens, 2004, p. 123). From then on, foreign policy, especially the ‘Global War on Terrorism’ attracted considerable attention from Bush and his cabinet members throughout his eight years in the White House. Soon after the 9/11 attacks, Bush made the decision to wage war on terrorism in Afghanistan. After the initial victory of toppling the Taliban regime, he decided to maintain a small military presence there to continue counterterrorism operations (Woodward, 2003; Bush, 2011).

This chapter has two sections: the initial war decision in 2001 and the ‘light footprint’ of military presence from 2002 to 2008. The first decision to wage war does not relate to the continuation of the Afghanistan war. Therefore, it does not directly answer the research question. However, in order to conduct a holistic analysis of why US presidents Bush and Obama continued the
Afghanistan war, it is important to begin with why this war started. The second section of this chapter breaks the multi-year policy into several decisions, focusing on the decision declared in 2002 to maintain a small military presence in Afghanistan and subsequent decisions to review and change this policy during the final years of Bush’s presidency.

At the beginning of each section, there is a brief introduction of the decision to be analysed, including when the president made this decision and what the decision was. Then, the personality-based expectations made in the previous chapter are examined with empirical records and secondary analyses. It aims to provide a consistent and convincing explanation relating to how Bush, as a powerful individual actor in US foreign policy, shaped his decision-making and continued this war. The findings suggest that his personality traits are helpful in understanding his war orientation and how he managed the decision-making process.

Bush’s initiation into and continuation of the Afghanistan war are consistent with the expectations about his conflictual orientation based on his consistently high scores on distrust of others and relatively low scores on his in-group bias. His choice of a preventive war is consistent with the expectations of his proactive orientation based on his high belief in his ability to control events. This choice was also made based on the high threats from Afghanistan perceived by the president. And his vigilance of threats from Afghanistan is consistent with the expectations about his high scores on distrust of others. His other traits help explain his management of the decision-making process. In addition, his openness to divergent voices related to his conceptual complexity but was also affected by his low task focus, inexperience, personal preferences and whether his trusted expert advisors presented him with diverse opinions.
The Initial War Decision in 2001

On 11 September 2001, four US planes were hijacked by 19 Al-Qaida terrorists, who then attacked the Pentagon in Washington DC and the World Trade Center in New York. Some 3,000 people were killed in the attacks. On the afternoon of that day, the Director of the Central Intelligence Agency (CIA), George Tenet, briefed Bush that it was Al-Qaida terrorists who had carried out the attacks (Tenet, 2008). On 7 October 2001, US President Bush declared a ‘war on terror’, marking Afghanistan as the first battlefront and listing the Taliban regime and Al-Qaida in that region as the targets during the first wave of the war, named Operational Enduring Freedom (OEF) (Woodward, 2003; Mann, 2015).

As presented in Chapter V, from the day of the terrorist attacks to his declaration of war in Afghanistan, Bush’s scores on his need for power, self-confidence and conceptual complexity are at the average level compared with other post-World War II US presidents. Meanwhile, his scores on his task focus and in-group bias lean towards low while the score on his belief in his ability to control events leans towards high. Only his distrust of others is significantly higher than the average.

Belief in One’s Ability to Control Events and Need for Power

As discussed in Chapter V, with his high score on the belief in his ability to control events, Bush is expected to demonstrate a proactive, independent, interventionist and risk-taking orientation. His score on the need for power is at the moderate level and he is inexperienced in foreign policy. Based on all these three factors, it is expected that Bush would exert control over the decision-making but would delegate policy formulation and implementation to subordinates. He is likely to challenge constraints in direct or indirect ways.

The Bush Doctrine was declared in the 2002 National Security Strategy (NSS) where Bush emphasised ‘proactive counterproliferation efforts’ to ‘deter and defend against the threat before it is unleashed’ (The White House, 2002,
This pre-emption doctrine was clearly exemplified in Bush’s Iraq war, while it was first manifested and applied in his responses to the 9/11 attacks. On 20 September 2001, Bush (2001a) committed to strengthening US intelligence to detect the terrorists before they strike. Later, on 7 October, he ordered US strikes in Afghanistan to ‘disrupt the use of Afghanistan as a terrorist base of operations and to attack the military capability of the Taliban regime’ (Bush, 2001b, p. 1201). Bush’s response was interpreted by scholars as ‘a model of proactive military action (pre-emptive self-defence), arguing that the only way to defeat terrorism is to destroy it in the den’ (Ralph, 2013; Shad and Iqbal, 2021, p. 25). The word ‘pre-emptive’, also interpreted as ‘preventive’ in his grand strategy on Afghanistan and Iraq (Leffler, 2011), corresponds to his proactive policy orientation: a willingness to act before threats fully materialise (Daalder and Lindsay, 2003a; Heclo, 2003; Barnes, 2006).

For Bush (2011, p. 129), the logic was ‘to bring the terrorists to justice so they would not strike again’. His war orientation relied on his optimism about the US military capacity to shape the world. This war on terrorism (with Afghanistan on the frontline), reviewed by Lindsay (2011), was based on five assumptions. The first assumption was related to US global military dominance and its great capacity to fight overseas with Bush’s belief that ‘We need to fight it overseas by bringing the war to the bad guys’ (Woodward, 2003, p. 281). Based on his high belief in his ability to control events, Bush is expected to demonstrate a proactive, independent, interventionist and risk-taking orientation. This preventive war doctrine is a typical example of his proactive and interventionist policy orientation.

The term ‘self-defence’ indicates Bush’s sensitive threat perceptions towards the enemy, which was related to his significantly high distrust of others in the world, in this decision, especially Al-Qaida terrorists in Afghanistan. This is discussed in a later subsection. Indeed, the effects of his high belief in his ability to control events and high distrust of others on Bush’s decision to wage a preventive war could not be separated. John E. McLaughlin, deputy director of the CIA, recalled that the 9/11 attacks ‘fundamentally changed the way the president looked at the world’ and ‘I’m convinced he wakes up every morning
thinking about how to prevent anything like that from happening again’ (Kessler, 2003, p. 235). This suggests that Bush’s motivation for a preventive war was rooted in his alertness to any further attacks on US soil.

During the initial aftermath of 9/11, there was limited opposition to or constraints on the US war in Afghanistan. Furthermore, the Bush administration received support from about 30 countries to create a military coalition (History, 2019). Bush accepted political assistance but was more dependent on US military force (Bush, 2011; Mann, 2015). Indeed, Bush was willing to create coalitions with other states but was only willing to seek a ‘coalition of the willing’ (Auerswald and Saideman, 2014, p. 51; Mann, 2015, p. 62). He agreed with his Secretary of Defense, Donald Rumsfeld, and Vice President Dick Cheney that ‘the mission should determine the coalition. The coalition ought not determine the mission’ (Rumsfeld, 2001, para.2; 2011; Barnes, 2006, p. 51; Cheney and Cheney, 2011).

For Bush, the core principle was to preserve the freedom for the US to decide what actions to take. He made clear his unwillingness to be dictated to by others on what the US could do, even though this meant that the US had to carry out operations on its own (Daalder and Lindsay, 2003b; Lansford, 2004). His unilateral inclination and unwillingness to compromise may have been based on his confidence in US capacity: ‘At some point, we may be the only ones left. That’s okay with me. We are America’ (Woodward, 2003, p. 81; DeYoung, 2006). Bush’s independent military policy orientation is consistent with the expectation made on his high belief in his ability to control events. This independent orientation was rooted in his unwillingness to compromise, being consistent with the expectation that Bush is a constraints challenger based on his high score on the belief in his ability to control events and a moderate score on his need for power.

It is also expected that a high belief in his ability to control events would lead to a risk-orientation with any threats underestimated. However, there are no sufficient empirical records suggesting such an inclination during Bush’s initial responses to the terrorist attacks, leaving this expectation unexamined.
Bush’s need for power is at the average level. But his high belief in his ability to control events also indicates an inclination to control the decision-making (see Chapter III). As discussed in Chapter III and Chapter V, this thesis incorporated leaders’ experience or inexperience in the foreign policy arena in these LTA-based expectations. As a novice in foreign policy without a high power motivation, Bush is expected to centralise decision-making in inner circles, exert control over the decision-making process, set general policy guidelines but delegate policy formulation to subordinates and rely on the experts around him (Preston, 2012).

As expected, Bush soon demonstrated tight control over decision-making relating to responses to 9/11. On 12 September, Cheney suggested chairing a war cabinet for the president and reporting to him with options to help streamline the decision-making process, but Bush rejected this, determined to chair the National Security Meeting (NSC) himself: ‘I’m going to do that, run the meetings. This was a commander in chief function – it could not be delegated. ‘He also wanted to send the signal that it was he who was calling the shots, that he had the team in harness’ (Woodward, 2003, p. 38). With this intention, Bush created a war cabinet relating to responses to the 9/11 attacks; the members of which included principals and some other key advisers (such as the White House Chief of Staff, Andrew Card) appointed or nominated by him (Woodward, 2003). Moens (2004, p. 133) analysed that ‘The biggest change in Bush’s decision-making scheme was that he now took the helm of the key National Security Council meetings’. This was true because, since he had been elected, the president had asked National Security Advisor (NSA), Rice, to chair the NSC meetings and report to him until 9/11 (Suskind, 2004). After the attacks, the president went back to lead the NSC meetings and discussions with an active engagement, imposing personal views and guidance on the team, demonstrating his confidence and authority (Rumsfeld, 2011) and impressing his subordinates that he was focused, directed and in control (Feith, 2008; Tenet, 2008; Rice, 2011), which was a totally different perspective to his Iraq war (see Saunders, 2017).
In preparing for the war and developing a detailed war plan, Bush only set general policy guidelines, delegating policy formulation to subordinates. As commander-in-chief, the president only gave orders and guidelines and then waited for options. A typical example of this commander-in-chief style is his development of the practical military option. Being sceptical that Clinton’s option of only relying on airpower was insufficient, Bush gave the order to not repeat Clinton’s policy and left it to the Pentagon to figure out a plan (Feith, 2008; Myers and McConnell, 2009; Mann, 2015; Smith, 2017).

On 12 September, Bush asked Defense Secretary Rumsfeld what his department could do immediately. Rumsfeld answered: ‘Very little, effectively’ but the president was impatient, asking them to get moving (Woodward, 2003, p. 43; Smith, 2017, p. 234). Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, General Hugh Shelton, briefed Bush that there was no plan prepared, only pre-existing options of using cruise missiles. Bush rejected this as inadequate and told him to ‘take all constraints off your planning’ and ‘wanted to hit hard’ (Feith, 2008, p. 15; Barry, 2020). Finally, on 15 September, Shelton presented Bush with three options: to strike Al-Qaida’s camps in Afghanistan with cruise missiles (Clinton’s option); to use missiles and bombers; and a full invasion with cruise missiles, bombers and troops on the ground. Bush picked the third option (Cheney and Cheney, 2011; Rumsfeld, 2011; Mann, 2015). These records suggest that Bush exerted limited direct involvement in this decision-making process. He set the guideline but ordered his subordinates to develop a plan. He asked for progress but did not engage in the policy formulation process. Bush’s tight control over and limited involvement in this decision-making is consistent with the expectation relating to his moderate need for power and inexperience in foreign policy.

Journalists’ records and academic studies (for example, Greenstein, 2003; Kessler, 2004; Mayer, 2004) called this leadership style a CEO style, referring to Bush’s personal MBA background. Miller (2009) described Bush’s leadership style as falling between Richard Nixon and Ronald Reagan. Bush sought to control the big issues but failed to follow Nixon’s style to control details, and Bush demonstrated more oversight and guidance than Reagan to
ensure that he knew what was being done. Unger (2007) found a memo from a former Pentagon official recalling that Bush would allow others to create key policy options without his guidance and then choose, as the decider, while the Vice President managed to select the key issues for Bush. Bush’s management in developing the Afghan plan did not fit this description. Bush set the guidance for the military options and picked what he wanted. It was the same with the US-Pakistan issue: Bush did not engage in talks with Pakistani leaders but first gave the order to make Pakistan choose to either side with the US or the Taliban (Woodward, 2003; Feith, 2008; Rashid, 2009). In short, Bush set the basic course, let his subordinates fill in the details and finally got what he wanted. His behaviours are consistent with the expectation made about his decision-making style based on his moderate power motivation and inexperience in foreign policy.

Members of the war cabinet were all experienced in foreign policy except the president himself. With Bush’s CEO management style and his inexperience in foreign policy, he relied on these experts to formulate options for him, and listened to their advice as he had promised in his presidential campaign (Mann, 2004); some examples of which are shown above. Among these experts, Cheney’s role attracted most of the attention. As Vice President, he was more powerful than his predecessors and became deeply engaged in the NSC meetings held after the 9/11 attacks (Hult, 2003; Lechelt, 2004; Rothkopf, 2005). Meanwhile, Rice was a relatively weak NSA, who could not counterbalance the power and influence of the Vice President and Secretary of Defense (Melanson, 2015), with Cheney being described as Bush’s real NSA (Risen, 2007). This suggests that Cheney was an influential figure in Bush’s Afghanistan war. Studies (for example, Saunders, 2017) confirmed Cheney’s great influence on leading and shaping Bush’s Iraq war. However, this thesis argues that Cheney’s role in Bush’s initial military decisions on waging the Afghanistan war was not as influential as in Iraq.

Bush’s important military decisions during the aftermath of the 9/11 attacks included his inclination for preventive and unilateral action, coalition-building with Pakistan, and the use of bombing with ground troops. Among
these decisions, the US-Pakistan issue was related to Bush’s in-group bias (as discussed in a later subsection). The contact with Pakistani leaders was delegated to the State Department. And the war option was developed by the Defense Department and the CIA. These two decisions were not guided by the Vice President.

As previously discussed, Bush’s unilateral inclination and pre-emption doctrine were consistent with Cheney’s opinion. Warshaw (2009) stated that the Bush Doctrine reflected the influence of Cheney and his Defense Department colleagues because the pre-emption doctrine was driven by them.

Therefore, compared with others (like Powell) in the decisions discussed above, Cheney had an additional influence on the Bush Doctrine. It may be inferred that, Cheney’s influence on Bush’s war options and coalition building relating to the Afghanistan war was not as influential as in other cases. This did not mean that Cheney did not have an important role in Bush’s Afghanistan war. On the contrary, he was important to the surveillance programme (Mann, 2015), detainee issues (Warshaw, 2009) and the creation of the Homeland Security Office (Chen, 2019).

What remains unexamined about Bush’s need for power is its correlation with Bush’s war orientation. High power motive is correlated to leaders’ war orientation (Winter, 2002; 2004; 2007; 2010). However, Bush’s score on this trait is at the moderate level. Although Bacevich (2009) argues that Bush relied on the global war on terrorism to concentrate greater power in his hands, this thesis did not find any empirical evidence suggesting that Bush launched the Afghanistan war due to his concern for maintaining power.

**Self-Confidence and Conceptual Complexity**

As discussed in Chapter III and Chapter V, both self-confidence and conceptual complexity are important indicators of leaders’ openness to information in the decision-making process. Bush’s scores on these two traits are at the average level but his score on conceptual complexity is higher than
his score on self-confidence. Therefore, he is expected to be open to information (see Thiers and Wehner, 2022).

In addition, Bush is expected to be flexible in demonstrating a complex or simple cognitive style, looking for alternative options and dissenting voices or not, and selecting advisers based on loyalty and ideological fit over expertise or based on diverse viewpoints. Meanwhile, as a novice in foreign policy, he is expected to rely on and be receptive to expert advice. However, his openness to expert advice is dependent on his information collection. His information collection may also be influenced by his encouragement of group members to express their views (low score on task focus) and whether his subordinates may or may not present him with diverse opinions (delegation of policy formulation and implementation processes due to his moderate power motivation and inexperience in foreign policy). Therefore, it is expected that Bush is receptive to expert advice and conducts a broad information search but whether he could receive diverse opinions is dependent on his interaction with his subordinates. Meanwhile, he is flexible towards demonstrating a simple or complex cognitive style.

Hybel (2014) explained that Bush’s Afghan and Iraq war decisions applied the same non-compensatory model with no effort paid to seek alternatives. However, Hybel did not grasp the full picture of Bush’s decision-making on waging war in Afghanistan. In fact, this thesis finds that Bush showed the qualities of a leader who is low in conceptual complexity during the immediate aftermath of the terrorist attacks (consistent with Hybel’s conclusion) and the qualities of a leader who is high in conceptual complexity in the following days for discussing the detailed options.

During the immediate aftermath of the attacks, Bush made two quick but important decisions without broad information searches and deliberations. Soon after being informed of the second plane crash, Bush judged that ‘They had declared war on us’ and ‘I made up my mind at that moment that we were going to war’. During the rest of the time on the plane, he informed Cheney and other staff of this decision (Frum, 2003; Woodward, 2003, p. 15; Rove,

Bush’s reaction was thought to be far from being well-considered and rational. Hassan (2013) commented that this decision was not well-considered because Bush did not consider any other interpretation of the events (for example, crimes) and did not think about an alternative response. Hassan argues that Bush’s first speech was not a war speech and therefore left room for him to consider an alternative response. Moens (2004, p. 129) described this decision as ‘a big conclusion’ with ‘the small fragments of information’ received at that moment and that Bush ‘made his first key decision based more on instinct and moral clarity than on anything else’. Similarly, Hybel (2014) ascribed this decisive war decision to the emotional feelings of revenge across the nation. Bush’s decision-making without broad information searches and deliberations is consistent with the expectations relating to leaders who are low in conceptual complexity.

Critically, Bush did not have very much time to make his decision. The domestic context expected a quick answer to avoid another attack (Zelikow, 2011). Studies (Albright, 2003; Singh, 2003; Pfiffner, 2005; Robbins, 2007) argue that the decision on a military response was reasonable and that other US presidents would also have chosen the military option. However, they acknowledged that there would be differences in the detail regarding how leaders responded to the perpetrators and the grand strategy such as developing the new doctrine, post-war reconstruction and even the war in Iraq.

Following this initial war decision, David Frum, Bush’s speech writer and special assistant, observed another quick decision made by the president: to target not only the terrorists for this attack but also governments that helped or sponsored them (Frum, 2003): ‘We will make no distinction between the terrorists who committed these acts and those who harbor them’ (Bush, 2001c, p. 1100). This statement was written by Bush himself minutes before his national address, and later became a part of the Bush Doctrine (Smith, 2017).
This statement may have shown a ‘black-and-white’ cognitive style, which is consistent with the expectation relating to a low conceptual complexity leader. Another example of Bush’s low conceptual complexity decision-making style was his famous statement that every nation had to choose that ‘Either you are with us, or you are with the terrorists’ (Bush, 2001a, p. 1142). This statement was a typical example of a dichotomous view and left no neutrality for other nations or organisations. Based on this statement, Waldman (2013) and Berggren and Rae (2006, p. 625) commented on Bush’s post-9/11 worldview as ‘naïve and simplistic’ through his ‘Manichean, black and white, good versus evil’ style: a binary vision. In addition to this binary vision, the usage of the strong word ‘evil’ may also indicate a facet of the low conceptual complexity. Obama avoided using such a word in his speeches.

What remains debatable is whether Bush sought advice from principal members of his administration (except Rice) for this statement on the evening of 11 September 2001. Rice (2011) remembered that she contacted Cheney, Rumsfeld and Powell, and Senior Advisor to the President Karl Rove (2010) summarised it as the product of a day of telephone contact with key advisers. However, in his study of Bush, Smith (2017) referred to Woodward’s (2003) records, arguing that the time left for Rice’s contact was insufficient and thought that this was another instinct-driven decision.

Whether Cheney and other principals knew it or not, empirical records did not suggest that there were sufficient debate and discussion on this Bush Doctrine before it was declared, indicating that this was a quick decision made by a small circle of people without enough debate. Sharifullah (2019, p. 17) summarised that Bush’s decision-making on the day of the attacks resulted in four major US foreign policy decisions (‘the announcement of the US being at war with terrorism, the Bush Doctrine of no distinction, preventive self-defence, and take the war overseas to the enemy’) without broad information searches and deliberations, and these decisions and principles guided his administration’s wars in Afghanistan and Iraq. These limited information searches and discussions are consistent with the expectation relating to a low
conceptual complexity leader. In addition, this statement was also related to Bush’s high distrust of others, which is discussed in a later subsection.

On the other hand, Bush was open to information (as expected) and frequently engaged in decision-making. From the day of the attacks up until 7 October, NSC meetings were held almost every day (Woodward, 2003; Moens, 2004). After 9/11, Bush expanded his daily briefings to cover more information about international affairs and terrorism (Priess, 2017). Pfiffner (2003; 2009) commented that the decision on the military option, as discussed in the previous subsection relating to Bush’s need for power, was an example of his consideration for alternatives before making a decision. Another example of Bush’s strong involvement in deliberations and searches for alternatives, as reviewed below, is his decision relating to the first target in this war.

Empirical records showed three rounds of debate on this issue. On 12, 13 and 15 September, Rumsfeld and his deputy, Paul Wolfowitz, put forward the idea to go against Iraq, together with Al-Qaida in Afghanistan, believing in Saddam Hussein’s connection to terrorism and arguing that it would be easier to find targets in Iraq than to find Osama bin Laden in Afghanistan. Powell consistently rejected this by stating that the focus should be on Afghanistan. Bush first agreed with Powell to ‘Start with bin Laden, which Americans expect’. Bush left open the chance that, if they succeeded, then they could move forward (Woodward, 2003, p. 43; 2006; Clarke, 2004; Mann, 2004; 2015; Feith, 2008; Bergen, 2011). On the evening of 12 September, Bush repeatedly checked with Clarke to find out if there was any link to Iraq (Clarke, 2004; Bergen, 2011). On 13 September, Bush asked if the US could attack Afghanistan and Iraq at the same time. General Shelton replied yes (Feith, 2008).

During the NSC meeting held on 15 September, the Iraq topic was debated during the morning session. Powell insisted on focusing on Afghanistan; otherwise, they would lose support from the coalition (Mann, 2004; 2015). Bush expressed his unwillingness to be dictated to by others (DeYoung, 2006). Tenet thought that they ought to focus on Al-Qaida, as
agreed by Andrew Card. Cheney supported Rumsfeld on 12 September but agreed that Iraq was a distraction from Afghanistan. Rumsfeld abstained (Woodward, 2003; Cheney and Cheney, 2011; Mann, 2015). Rice was asked by Bush to give her opinion privately (Rice, 2011).

The NSC meeting on 15 September was a long one. Bush listened to the debate during the morning and then, during the coffee time, heard Wolfowitz’s opinions about attacking Iraq (with Cheney and his chief of staff Lewis Libby) and appeared to register interest. Rice thought that the morning session had lacked focus and, during the noon break, urged principals to bring discipline to the afternoon session (Woodward, 2003; Rice, 2011). At the end of the meeting, Bush privately asked Shelton if he had made a mistake by only focusing on Afghanistan and setting Saddam aside. Shelton reassured him that there was no strong evidence to link Iraq to the 9/11 attacks and that attacking Iraq now was not a good choice (Gordon and Trainor, 2006). After the meeting, Bush heard Rice’s opinion: she also wanted to focus on Afghanistan (Rice, 2011). Finally, Bush decided to put Saddam aside. On 16 September, Bush told Rice to focus on Afghanistan first but prepare for Iraq if the country was found to be linked to the 9/11 attacks (Kean et al., 2004).

This long and fruitful debate revealed some interesting issues relating to Bush’s decision-making. First, this strong, deliberated debate within the Bush administration was acknowledged by Greenstein (2002; 2003; 2007) as a signpost of Bush’s conceptual complexity. He compared Bush’s performance before and after the 9/11 attacks, detecting Bush’s improved mastery of policy and owning this improvement to his improved cognitive style and increased openness to deliberations, appraising that Bush was not dominated by emotions. Even though the president himself admitted that ‘I’m a gut player’ (Woodward, 2003, p. 137), in this decision, he was not. However, ‘t Hart, Tindall and Brown (2009, p. 483) ascribed this deliberate decision-making process to his advisors’ contributions. They criticised the exploration of possible links with Iraq as a distraction from the focus and commented that the efforts of Powell and other advisors provided Bush ‘with enough good information and robust debate that his sense making was rapid and effective’. 

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From another perspective, reviewing Bush’s decision-making in the initial aftermath of 9/11, Moens (2004; 2013) emphasised the role and capacity of Bush, linking the effectiveness of Bush’s decision-making to his personal conceptual complexity. Moens (2004, p. 209) described the study of Bush’s leadership style as a ‘study in contrast’. He analysed that Bush’s initial war decision was gut-driven and not deliberative but, after the war decision, he became deliberative about details in the military plan. ‘The decision concerning OEF seemed well coordinated, but perhaps it was because of Bush’s own intense involvement’ (Moens, 2013, p. 80). He also found that, only when Bush personally engaged and led an open decision-making process, were the negative impacts of the bureaucratic tensions and conflicts within his administration mediated. ‘Bush’s own strong instincts confronted with strong divergent advice produced at least four good decisions before the 2003 decision to invade Iraq: … Operation Enduring Freedom …’ (Moens, 2013, p.88). Therefore, the effectiveness of Bush’s decision-making was based on his openness to information and the effectiveness of his advisors to bring him useful information, being consistent with the expectations that Bush was open to information with his high conceptual complexity, low task focus and reliance on experts’ advice due to his inexperience.

Meanwhile, as Rice said, there were other financial and law enforcement actions being implemented and displaying progress so the president did not feel the need to rush to make the military decision (McManus, 2001). This was in total contrast to the day of the attacks, and the president had enough time to carefully think about his options. In this sense, Bush’s decision on the first target of this war was less influenced by the sense of urgency from the political context.

Second, Bush’s attitude towards attacking Iraq is worth studying. Although Bush rejected Rumsfeld’s idea during the first round of debates, he soon ascertained again whether Iraq was related to the attacks (Woodward, 2003; Clarke, 2004). Clearly, Bush never gave up and was not satisfied with progress regarding identifying Iraq’s link with the 9/11 attacks (Suskind, 2007).
He had merely removed Iraq out of the list of first targets. This underlined Bush’s open approach towards divergent and dissenting voices in his decision-making on first-round targets. Bush (2011) explained his leadership style as welcoming rigorous debate because these divergent views were helpful for him to clarify his options. However, Badie’s (2010) analysis of Bush’s Iraq decisions and the group think found a poor information search process and less rational decision-making, leaving more issues to be debated about Bush’s leadership and decision-making styles. Nonetheless, in practice relating to the Afghanistan case, Bush did not discard the rejections from (mainly) Powell and other advisers, but he also did not simply accept all the opinions. For example, Powell’s insistence on maintaining coalition support was not the reason accepted by Bush to set Iraq aside. The inexperienced president directly rejected his experienced advisor’s advice. He would not let others dictate US actions and was willing to take unilateral action (Woodward, 2003).

Bush’s acceptance and rejection of expert advice are interesting in relation to Saunders’ (2017) and Preston’s (2001; 2012) findings. First, Bush’s reflective thinking and openness to divergent voices are inconsistent with Saunders’ (2017) finding relating to inexperienced leaders’ marginalisation of disagreements among experienced advisors. In this decision, Bush was willing to listen to and think about divergent voices (maybe too many advisors had the same divergent voice). Meanwhile, he was willing to reject opinions he disagreed with. Second, being consistent with Preston’s argument that inexperienced leaders with high conceptual complexity welcome and are receptive to expert advice, Bush’s second sought for Iraq’s link with the 9/11 attacks and his rejection of Powell’s opinion indicate that this young and inexperienced president may exhibit critical thinking and would not easily accept any divergent voices.

Third, Cheney and Rice may have had limited additional influence on Bush’s decision-making in this decision compared to other NSC members. As discussed in this subsection, neither Cheney nor any others participated in Bush’s decision-making on waging the Afghanistan war. Furthermore,
Cheney’s engagement in Bush’s decision on embracing states that sponsored terrorists remained limited and debatable. When deciding war targets, Bush listened to everyone’s opinions. Although Bush’s ultimate decision to focus on Afghanistan first was consistent with Cheney’s view, it was also consistent with Powell’s and others’ arguments. All these, again, suggest that, during the initial decision-making process on the key issues in Afghanistan, Cheney was not as influential as some analysts expected.

Rice was trusted by Bush and spoke to him as the final one to present an opinion to the president on 15 September. It remains unclear whether Rice’s influence on Bush’s ultimate decision was greater than others. Pfiffner (2003) and Pika and Maltese (2006) all held the view that the president, with assistance from Rice, effectively used disagreement within his war cabinet to make his own decisions. Empirical records do not reveal any of Rice’s individual reports to Bush about the administration’s division on this topic and Rice’s (2011) last voice only demonstrated her support for focusing on Afghanistan and the concerns of Central Asian leaders. A similar opinion was also expressed by some others (like Powell). The only thing she did was to urge the discussions to be more structured during the afternoon session, when Bush heard everyone’s final statement (Woodward, 2003). According to Burke (2005a; 2005b; 2009), Rice had some success in brokering activities in improving deliberations after the 9/11 attacks. In this decision-making, her efforts may have led to a more comprehensive analysis for the president and provided him with clearer opinions regarding decision-making on the war target but this did not affect his openness towards dissenting voices.

Critically, although this decision-making included discussions about alternatives for military options and debates on the war target, it did not contain any discussion about the post-war plan, which was always criticised for the lack of strategic thinking about Afghanistan’s future (for example, Keane, 2016; Lebovic, 2019).
Task Focus

Bush’s task focus is near the low level, indicating an inclination towards interpersonal relations with attentiveness to group maintenance during the decision-making process. Evidence for this expectation was incorporated in the previous subsection, demonstrating that Bush’s intense personal involvement in the decision-making process and debate relating to the main targets during the first stage of OEF weakened bureaucratic infighting and enabled strong divergent voices to be heard and considered (Moens, 2013).

Another example of Bush’s group orientation is how he dealt with the conflict between two groups: military leaders (for example, Rumsfeld and Wolfowitz), who wanted to list Iraq as one of the main targets during the first stage of OEF; and other NSC members (for example, Powell and Rice), who insisted on only focusing on Afghanistan first. Bush encouraged everyone to express their opinions during the final meeting before he made his decision. Finally, he achieved group consensus to focus on Afghanistan, which was consistent with what was agreed by the majority of the NSC members. Meanwhile, Rumsfeld and Wolfowitz were not thwarted. They were told to slowly prepare plans for Iraq (Rumsfeld, 2011). At that time, neither a single person nor any side was disappointed by this decision. Rumsfeld (2011, p. 319) once commented on Bush’s style as being ‘firm without being unfriendly’.

In-group Bias and Distrust of Others

As discussed in Chapter V, with the score on his in-group bias near a low level and the score on his distrust of others at a high level, Bush is expected to reflect a conflictual orientation but be willing to cooperate with like-minded others (based on findings from Görener and Ucal, 2011), show limited commitment to one’s group and be willing to violate norms.

It is always difficult to identify leaders’ groups because LTA codes in-group bias by using words such as ‘we’ and ‘our’ (the coding scheme has been reviewed in Chapter V). These words do not indicate what leaders’ groups are.
One piece of evidence is that Bush emphasised his presidential duties (for example, Bush, 2001d; 2011; Frum, 2003; Heclo, 2003; Woodward, 2003; 2006; Ross, 2008). However, this statement is not completely convincing. Based on this statement and his role as president, it may be inferred that Bush’s primary group identification in his responses to the 9/11 attacks was the US nation.

Before 9/11, the US had broken its relationship with Pakistan over the issue of nuclear weapons. After 9/11, Pakistan’s strategic geographic location – sharing a border with Afghanistan and therefore being able to provide the US with military bases to carry out operations in Afghanistan – became important to the US (Jones, 2009). The US provided Pakistani President Musharraf with two options: either to side with the US or to share the same fate as the Taliban. In response to Pakistan’s cooperation, the US lifted its economic sanctions and provided economic aid (Steinberg, 2002; Zakheim, 2011; Williams, 2012). As expected, Bush demonstrated a flexible view relating to categorising enemies and friends. As Deputy Secretary of State Richard Armitage told Pakistani General Ahmad: ‘History starts today’ (Mann, 2004, p. 299; Jones, 2009, p. 87; Rashid, 2009). This shift in Bush’s attitude towards Pakistan, as Litwak (2012, see also Powaski, 2019) analysed, was due to the practical reason that US counterterrorism interests were higher than the non-proliferation concern over the Pakistani nuclear weapons programme. Bush’s attitude is consistent with the expectation that he is likely to cooperate with other like-minded others regarding his low in-group bias.

Other examples of Bush’s flexible attitude towards cooperating with like-minded others were Russia and China. Both Russia and China provided support for the US in different ways, and US relationships with these countries softened (Steinberg, 2002; Wilkinson, 2003). These shifts in US attitude and strategic focus towards Pakistan, Russia and China reaffirm Bush’s flexible view towards categorising other countries and his willingness to seek cooperation. Daalder and Lindsay (2003a) agreed that these shifts suggest a fundamental change in Bush’s primary foreign policy interests and US strategic alignments with other great powers. These shifts indicate a pragmatic US
president, who defined friends and enemies based on pragmatic needs, which, as stated by Dunn (2005), shows a classic realist view of transitioning the enemy’s enemy into my friends. Therefore, old adversaries of the US can be its new allies during this war on terror.

Bush’s low in-group bias is also expected to demonstrate fewer strong emotional attachments to the nation and lead to low commitment towards the nation. However, soon after the 9/11 attacks, Bush framed the conflict between the terrorist and the US within the fundamental characteristics of US values, casting the war as ‘good versus evil’ and the terrorists’ attacks on US ‘freedom’ (Bush, 2001c, 2001e; McCartney, 2004; Winkler, 2006; Denton, 2012). In addition, Bush committed to protecting the nation and punishing the terrorists. This strong emotional attachment and commitment were contrary to these expectations. The reason was that even leaders with low IGB are still patriots (Hermann, 2005a). Therefore, it was appropriate to argue that, when the US was attacked, Bush wanted to reassure and protect the nation.

Although Bush showed a low in-group bias, McCartney (2004) stated that, Bush promised the American people more: to punish the terrorist network that was responsible for this attack, and to eradicate terrorism and its sponsors. This is explained in Dueck’s (2010, p. 265) assessment of Bush as an ‘instinctive American nationalist’ in foreign policy, expanding this quality to the neoconservative belief of American precedence and an assertive foreign policy approach, interpreting the war decision based on Bush’s hard-line American nationalism. Therefore, in his war decision, Bush’s belief in his ability to control events and in-group bias may have had some interactions and moved him forward.

Bush’s significantly high distrust of others provides strong motivation for his war orientation through his high and sensitive threat perceptions of not only the Al-Qaida terrorists but also the Taliban regime who governed the Afghani state. Leaders who have high distrust of others are vigilant about others’ motives and actions, particularly those others who are viewed as enemies and competitors (Hermann, 2005a). Bush was vigilant against terrorist threats to
the US. When he was told that there had been a second plane crash into the World Trade Center, he thought that ‘they had declared war on us’ (Woodward, 2003, p. 15). In his first remark after the attacks, before the CIA briefed him that Al-Qaida had carried out the attacks, he had already declared this event a terrorist attack (Bush, 2001f). Recognising that this was a terrorist threat to US homeland security, the Bush administration was worried about a second attack. Bush listed the prevention of further attacks and helping the injured as the first priority and also justified his war decision to protect US national security (Bush, 2001c; 2011; Feith, 2008; Myers and McConnell, 2009). Daalder and Destler (2011) argue that such a state of paranoia helped understand Bush’s insistence on defending US military actions as preventive operations against further terrorist attacks.

To protect the US and its people, ‘removing al Qaeda’s safe haven in Afghanistan was essential’ (Bush, 2011, p. 184). During the first NSC meeting after the attacks, he told the war cabinet: ‘We’re going to destroy them [the perpetrators] and their resources’ (Rumsfeld, 2011, p. 343). On 7 October, Bush (2001b) declared his war decision and defended the righteousness of this war by stating that ‘the only way to defeat terrorism as a threat to our way of life is to stop it, eliminate it, and destroy it where it grows’ (Bush, 2001a, p. 1142).

‘We were acting out of necessity and self-defense, not revenge’ (Bush, 2011, p. 184). This concept of ‘self-defense’ was at the core of the Bush Doctrine (The White House, 2002; Winkler, 2006). As discussed at the beginning of this section, because of Bush’s high belief in his ability to control events, this concept of ‘self-defense’ was achieved by using ‘preventive’ intervention (Thies, 2004; Rumsfeld; 2011). Leffler (2011, p. 34) described this strategy as ‘anticipatory self-defense’ and interpreted it as ‘preventive warfare’. Bush’s strong vigilance of terrorism was identified by Daalder and Lindsay (2003a) in their review of the first 30 months of Bush’s term in office. They summarised that President Bush chose to interpret the 9/11 attacks to reaffirm rather than change some of his beliefs, including that the world was dangerous, terrorists’ harmful operations could only be stopped by resolute determination
The link between Bush’s vigilance of terrorist threats to the US and his war orientation is consistent with the expectation made based on his high distrust of others and also fits with the notion of him as a ‘neoconservative’ leader – a term frequently used to describe him – who prefers assertive foreign policy options (Dueck, 2010). With his vigilance of another terrorist attack on the US homeland, Bush’s high distrust of others aligned with his high belief in his ability to control events and affected his war decision by emphasising the necessity to eliminate threats and caused him to act in a preventive way.

Recognising that the enemy was the Al-Qaida terrorist organisation, a non-state actor that was different from US enemies during World War II and was hiding in Taliban-governed Afghanistan, Bush (2001c, p. 1100; 2001g, p. 1100) reminded the American people that this was ‘a different enemy’ and decided to ‘make no distinction between the terrorists who committed these acts and those who harbor them’. This expansion of targets was best interpreted by several studies that noticed the changes in Bush’s beliefs before and after the 9/11 attacks. Ralph (2009) noticed that, before 9/11, the Taliban and Taliban-governed Afghanistan were not perceived as threats to US national interests, while, after 9/11, Pressman (2009) interpreted that Bush saw terrorism as a total threat, noticing the nexus between terror and states that support it. This change in Bush’s belief was consistent with Robison’s (2006) finding that Bush perceived much more hostilities from the world after 9/11. Leffler (2005; 2011) further concluded that the 9/11 attacks altered US threat perception by highlighting the threats from non-state actors and radical Islamism and reminding the US of its vulnerability, ascribing Bush’s reliance on military force to the function of his threat perception. The changes in Bush’s attitudes towards the Taliban before and after the 9/11 attacks show that after the 9/11 attacks, Bush was also vigilant about the Taliban in Afghanistan, being suspicious of its support for the al-Qaida terrorists. Based on this threat perception, Bush’s expansion of the targets is also consistent with the expectation relating to his high distrust of others.
In short, two traits—in-group bias and distrust of others—help explain Bush’s war orientation and all his seven LTA traits, either independently or cooperatively, influenced his unilateral orientation, his CEO style of management of decision-making, searching for information and alternatives, his openness to divergent voices, coalition-building and dichotomous views of the US and its enemies. In addition to these LTA traits, Bush’s inexperience also influenced his delegation of policy formulation and implementation processes to subordinates as well as his reliance on expert advice. As a novice in foreign policy, Bush was open to hearing and accepting divergent opinions but could also reject them. Finally, no empirical records were found to indicate any strong public opinions considered by Bush during his decision-making. Therefore, whether and how public opinions affect his decision-making remains unclear.


US military operations in Afghanistan cooperated with the local Northern Alliance and moved quickly to occupy two main Afghanistan cities: Kabul (on 13 November 2001) and Kandahar (on 7 December 2001). Bin Laden fled into the mountains of Tora Bora. During the Bonn conference in December 2001, Hamid Karzai was installed as the head of the interim government in Afghanistan and international forces promised to support the democratic and civilian reconstruction in Afghanistan. In 2002, the US government announced that its military force would be remaining in Afghanistan to find Al-Qaida and Taliban remnants and promised to help train the local Afghan National Army (ANA) to stabilise the country, leaving the UN to lead the reconstruction programme. During the subsequent years, insurgency in Afghanistan grew. From 2006, Bush began to order strategic reviews and tried to shift US policy in that region from counterterrorism to counterinsurgency (Bush, 2011).

As presented in Chapter V, from 4 October 2001 (when Bush asked who would run post-Taliban Afghanistan) up until 17 April 2002 (when Bush declared a Marshall Plan in Afghanistan), Bush’s scores on his self-confidence,
conceptual complexity and task focus are at the average level compared with other post-World War II US presidents. Meanwhile, his score on his power motivation is at the average level but leaning towards high. The score on his in-group bias is at a low level. Scores on his distrust of others and belief in his ability to control events are at a high level. During subsequent years, there are some fluctuations in the levels of these trait scores, except for his task focus and distrust of others. From 2006 to 2008, scores on his belief in his ability to control events are at a low level. His scores on power motivation decline from a moderate level to a low level. His scores on self-confidence decline from a moderate level to a low level. His scores on in-group bias increase from a low to a moderate level. His conceptual complexity is at a high level. These are discussed in detail in the following subsections.

Belief in One’s Ability to Control Events and Need for Power

As discussed in Chapter V, with his high belief in his ability to control events and high power motive, Bush is expected to reflect an interventionist, proactive, risk-taking and independent policy orientation. He is likely to centralise decision-making and challenge constraints. Due to his inexperience in foreign policy, he will delegate policy formulation and implementation processes to subordinates and rely on expert advice.

From 2006 to 2008, with lower scores on these two traits, he is expected to show a reactive, dependent and risk-averse policy orientation. Meanwhile, he is expected to show a less centralised decision-making style with the delegation of policy formulation and implementation to subordinates. He is expected to be a constraints respecter. Because he became experienced as a president, he is expected to rely more on his own policy views.

After the collapse of the Taliban regime, the remnants of Al-Qaida and Taliban members were the core of US strategy in Afghanistan. The US military continued capturing these Al-Qaida and Taliban members to prevent them from regrouping and reasserting control over the Afghanistan region (Lansford,
2003; Rumsfeld, 2011; Perry and Kassing, 2015). As Bush (2001h, pp. 1493–1494) stated on 7 December 2001: ‘We’re a long way from finished in Afghanistan. Much difficult and dangerous work is yet to come. Many terrorists are still hiding in heavily fortified bunkers in very rugged territory. ... we’re going to find them. And piece by piece, we’ll tear their terrorist network apart’. His motivation for the continuation of this war was his strong vigilance of terrorism and terrorists and his confidence in US capacity, ‘For all the reasons, we’re fighting to win. And win we will’ (Bush, 2001h, pp. 1493).

Continued counterterrorism operations by the US were independent of NATO’s efforts in peace-keeping operations in Afghanistan (Dubik, 2020). The reason behind these independent counterterrorism operations was rooted in the division between how the US and European states perceived their mission in Afghanistan. While NATO allies focused on peacekeeping and reconstruction, the US focused on hunting terrorists. Comparing these two operations, when the missions of reconstruction and democratisation and counterterrorism in Afghanistan collided, the US gave priority to its counterterrorism (Gilbert, 2004; Hassan, 2013). These proactive, interventionist and independent policy orientations are consistent with the expectation regarding his high belief in his ability to control events. The focus on counterterrorism was never changed (The White House, 2006) even though he scores low on belief in his ability to control events during subsequent years. This may be explained by Bush’s consistently high distrust of others during his presidency, which motivated him to carry on seeking out terrorists before they could strike the US again. Therefore, throughout Bush’s presidency, his high distrust of others associated with his belief in his ability to control events motivated this preventive war towards terrorist threats from Afghanistan.

Kreps (2008) found that confidence in the efficiency of the Special Operation Forces (SOF) recommended by senior military leaders led to reliance on small numbers of SOF units and reduced the need for troops and alliances. However, this confidence was related to another aspect of Bush’s high belief in his ability to control events: an overestimation of US military capacity and an underestimation of the barriers. One reason for the light
footprint strategy taken by the US was the belief that a small number of ground troops with airpower (with the assistance of the Northern Alliance) was sufficient for counterterrorism operations (Rashid, 2010). During autumn 2002, there were 5,000 International Security Assistance Force (ISAF) troops led by NATO. A further 8,000 US troops were commanded by General Tommy Franks for training Afghan security forces and conducting counterterrorism operations (Bush, 2011). The president recalled that ‘At the time, thirteen thousand troops seemed like the right amount. … I agreed with our military leaders that we did not need a larger presence’ and ‘This strategy worked well at first. But in retrospect, our rapid success with low troop levels created false comfort, … It would take several years for these shortcomings to become clear’ (Bush, 2011, p. 207). Bush’s optimistic assumption, although finally proved to be wrong, at that time worked as a strong explanation to support his decision on an independent operation implemented by a small number of US troops in Afghanistan to fulfil the responsibility of eliminating terrorists and helping train local armies.

While Bush and his military leaders believed that a small number of US troops with technological assistance and airpower could achieve their goals, the situation in Afghanistan indicated that the stability phase of the war (started in 2002) presented more challenges than the combat phase and underlined US inability to accomplish its stabilisation goals in a quick manner (McNerney 2005). Bacevich (2009) criticised the overestimation of US military efficacy and urged for recognition that the US military was limited and that a more pragmatic military theory was needed. This overconfidence, as found by Rapport (2012; 2015), was also related to Bush’s cognitive constraints.

In addition to the overestimation of US military capacity, Bush’s belief that the Taliban was weak shows his underestimation of his adversaries. For Bush (2011, p. 207), at that time, the US had ‘routed the Taliban with far fewer, and it seemed that the enemy was on the run’. However, Kolenda (2021, p. 47) reviewed mistakes made in decision-making relating to the Afghanistan war and criticised the mismatch ‘between a decisive victory outcome and the minimalist ways and means devoted to it’. He stated that the US administration
needed to deny the Taliban’s resurgence but the US government simply believed that the Taliban had been overthrown.

On the other hand, during Bush’s second term in office, when facing the deteriorating security situation in Afghanistan, his administration was willing for the NATO-led ISAF to become involved in more combat activities (Dempsey and Cloud, 2005; Roberts, 2009; Sanger, 2010). As discussed in Chapter V, with Bush’s decreased belief in his ability to control events, it is expected that during the final years of his presidency, Bush is likely to show a dependent and risk-averse policy orientation. This shift of US policy orientation from unilateral to cooperative operations is consistent with this expectation. Instead of focusing on either unilateralism or multilateralism, Mastanduno (2008) stated that the Bush administration had a pragmatic view of mixing both approaches to pursue US interests. This shift of US policy orientation implies a more pragmatic and modest assessment of US capacity in dealing with the worsening situation in Afghanistan, indicating the president’s less strong belief in his ability to control the situation.

Bush’s score on his need for power leans towards high from 4 October 2001 until 17 April 2002. As a novice in foreign policy (and with his belief in his ability to control events), he is expected to centralise decision-making in inner circles, exert direct control over the decision-making process, set general policy guidelines, delegate policy formulation to subordinates and rely on the experts around him. In the following years, he scores low or moderate on this trait, and he became experienced in foreign policy, indicating less centralised decision-making with enhanced roles for subordinates and continued power delegation and less reliance on expert advisors.

Bush continued making decisions within the NSC group. Similar to his approach during the initial decision-making stage after the attacks, Bush set a broad course first. There were two goals: to capture Al-Qaida and the remaining Taliban and to help set up a new Afghan government to prevent that state from becoming a haven for terrorists (Feith, 2008; Malkasian, 2021). Although Bush admitted that, after 9/11, he thought of Afghanistan as the
ultimate nation-building mission (Bush, 2011), he repeatedly expressed his reluctance to take on nation-building duties and preferred to pass this burden on to the UN. Secretary of State Powell agreed that the UN should take on that responsibility (Woodward, 2003; Moens, 2004; Rashid, 2009). Obviously, Vice President Cheney and the Secretary of Defense Rumsfeld shared the same opinion with the president (Moens, 2004; Rumsfeld, 2011). When asked about the US role in post-Taliban Afghanistan, Rumsfeld replied: ‘I don’t think [it] leaves us with a responsibility to try to figure out what kind of government that country ought to have’ (Woodward, 2003, p. 220).

As expected based on his high power motivation but limited experience, Bush delegated policy formulation to his subordinates. He relied heavily on the Pentagon leaders and delegated significant authority and freedom to them to develop a detailed plan. During the morning after the 9/11 attacks, even before the first NSC meeting, Bush told Rumsfeld: ‘The ball will be in your court and Dick Myer’s [Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff] court’ (Woodward, 2003, p. 19; 2006, p. 77; Rumsfeld, 2011, p. 342). Rumsfeld and General Tommy Franks shared the same opinion relating to the minimal size of the US military’s presence in Afghanistan (Franks and Malcolm, 2005). Rumsfeld assured Bush and the other NSC members to keep a small number of US troops in Afghanistan with a reliance on the SOF (Malkasian, 2021). The then Under Secretary of Defense, Dov Zakheim (2011), recalled a meeting held by the president in January 2002. Bush gathered some Republican leaders and White House officials and expressed his support for Rumsfeld’s primary agenda and agreed that ‘We need to allow the Secretary of Defense to make tough decisions, to step on toes. We need to empower SecDef so he can address decisions like base closure’ (Zakheim, 2011, pp. 128–129).

However, the problem was that Bush was too reliant on Rumsfeld and delegated too much power to him. In NSC meetings, the Defense Department had the power to disregard any doubts and opposite views from the civilian department (Keane, 2016). Rumsfeld took the commanding role in the bureaucracy with military goals ranked as primacy in foreign affairs (Gallagher, 2019). The weakness of the Defense Department's (DoD) dominance in
conducting foreign policy, criticised by Pavilonis (2010), was that the DoD took almost full responsibility for conducting the OEF with limited input from other agencies. And the only focus on the aerial campaign indicated the lack of a clear stabilisation mission.

Rashid (2009) observed that not only the DoS and USAID were excluded from policymaking; Rumsfeld turned a deaf ear to media and public calls for the expansion of ISAF operations outside Kabul. Therefore, although Bush had a high power motivation, his inexperience led him to delegate power and policy implementation to his trusted subordinate, Rumsfeld, who played a significant role in this decision, even ignored the president's control over and involvement in this decision and the president had difficulty controlling his Secretary of Defense. On 17 April 2002, Bush announced a Marshall Plan for Afghanistan. He promised to devote all necessary resources to the rebuilding of Afghanistan (Bush, 2002). Bush’s speech involved the mention of a nation-building project. However, this plan was never fully developed and carried out. Rumsfeld blocked the idea and Bush said nothing more (Rohde and Sanger, 2007; Rashid, 2009). In another instance in 2004, the Bush administration noticed that the narcotics problem in Afghanistan was worsening and decided to make some changes. However, Rumsfeld simply ignored Bush’s decisions and the NSA Rice was either unwilling or unable to contain Rumsfeld (Risen, 2007). The above suggests a powerful Rumsfeld, who only focused on achieving his goals in Afghanistan and simply rejected all voices/ideas he disagreed with. In this way, Rumsfeld’s unwillingness to engage in nation-building remained unchallenged and removed two opportunities to improve the situation.

In short, Rumsfeld played an essential role in limiting the US military presence and missions in post-Taliban Afghanistan and removed the development and implementation of a Marshall Plan, which may have brought about different outcomes in Afghanistan. However, it was Bush’s overreliance on military leaders and delegation of too much authority to the Pentagon (especially Rumsfeld) during this time that empowered Rumsfeld.
The combination of Bush’s belief in his ability to control events and need for power across time is interesting. It shows that Bush was a constraints challenger when he decided to maintain a small military presence in Afghanistan but, in subsequent years, with a decrease in scores on both traits, he became a constraints respecter, more willing to compromise and shift his strategy. However, there are no sufficient records of any challenges faced by the president, especially during the initial aftermath of the campaign, leaving this expectation unexamined.

Self-Confidence and Conceptual Complexity

Bush’s scores on self-confidence and conceptual complexity are at an average level during his decision-making on the light footprint. During subsequent years, he scores low on self-confidence but high on conceptual complexity. As discussed in Chapter V, both traits are indications of leaders’ openness to information. As his score on conceptual complexity is higher than the score on self-confidence, during the decision-making period, Bush is expected to be open to information but can be both reflective and open to divergent information or show a simple thinking style, and is closed to diverse information input. His openness to divergent opinions, discussed in Chapter III, may also be influenced by his delegation of policy formulation to subordinates and public opinion. Therefore, during the decision-making period, Bush’s information collection is expected to depend on whether his subordinates presented him with diverse opinions. In subsequent years, he is expected to be open to information, demonstrating a complex and reflective thinking style and less reliance on expert advice.

Although Bush’s scores on these two traits are at an average level, he performed as a typically less reflective leader with decisions not being well-considered. First, the time spent on the post-conflict Afghanistan decision was insufficient. On 4 October 2001, he asked: ‘Who will run the country?’ and no one could answer this question. Rice thought that it was a critical question about US future strategic direction (Woodward, 2003, p. 195). On 15 October
Bush said: ‘There’s been too much discussion of post-conflict Afghanistan. ..., we’ve got time’ (Woodward, 2003, p. 241). In less than two weeks, the president showed his lack of interest in post-conflict Afghanistan.

Second, while Bush thought that they had enough discussion, he paid far from enough attention to what would happen after enemies in Afghanistan were defeated. In other words, Bush and his administration lacked a strategic and comprehensive post-Taliban plan, one issue related to policy outcome. Recalling US efforts in Afghanistan, Zakheim (2011) was critical that US policymakers focused on short-term policies without considering the long-term consequences of these policies or were not prepared to deal with them (see also Rose, 2010). This lack of a comprehensive post-war strategy was widely criticised in academic studies (see Pavilonis, 2010; Bird and Marshall, 2011; Caldwell, 2011; Gallagher, 2019; Kolenda, 2021).

With regard to the administration’s aversion to nation-building, James Dobbins, US special envoy to Afghanistan and experienced expert on nation-building, was frustrated that no one in government understood the complexity of nation-building (Sanger, 2010). It was not until his second term that Bush and his top aides recognised the necessity for reconstruction for maintaining military progress and only then did the administration begin to seriously think about building the government’s capacity (Sanger, 2010). However, this was what officials from the State Department had argued several years earlier (Rohde and Sanger, 2007; Jones, 2008; Zakheim, 2011).

On the issue of counterterrorism, in 2003, Rumsfeld flew to Afghanistan and ordered the US military commander General Dan McNeill to hunt down terrorists and build up a local army but gave no written campaign plan or specific guidance about the size and shape of the local army (Coll, 2018). Considering alternative options, no evidence suggests that Bush’s administration had ever seriously sought or considered an alternative option such as negotiation with the Taliban (Kolenda, 2021; Malkasian, 2021). One reason for this attitude is related to Bush’s low conceptual complexity. The Bush administration treated the Taliban and Al Qaida as one terrorist group
and negotiation was never considered (Kolenda, 2021; Whitlock, 2021). However, Kolenda (2021) argues that a negotiation outcome may help the Bush administration avoid their entrapment in Afghanistan for years long. Different from Bush, with his high conceptual complexity, Obama showed a different attitude towards the Taliban, which is discussed in Chapter VII.

Third, looking at the reasons for overconfidence in decision-making, Rapport’s (2012; 2015) analyses of Bush during the stability phase of the Iraq war found an explanation based on construal level theory (a psychological theory which reveals the way people deal with challenges of evaluating distant actions and events). Bush relied more on currently held beliefs, overemphasised the desirability rather than the feasibility of the suggested plan and was unreceptive to information which was inconsistent with his beliefs. Such cognitive biases were also found by Kolenda (2021) and Malkasian (2021) in Bush’s overestimation of the Afghan government’s efficacy and underestimation of the Taliban’s speed of resurgence. Rothstein and Arquilla (2012, p. 3) criticised the wishful thinking during the early years of the war, which assessed ‘good prospects for success’ due to the desire for construction progress in building a secure and democratic Afghanistan. Applying this cognitive bias to the statements of Bush and his top aides, it was understandable that, until 2005, when the situation in Afghanistan was deteriorating, these policymakers continued to believe that the Afghan project was in good shape with emphasis on the progress made (Woodward, 2006; Bush, 2011; Rice, 2011).

From another perspective, Kolenda (2021) summarised the NSC’s less objective assessment as confirmation bias, which means the selection and interpretation of information in a way to confirm pre-existing beliefs rather than change them (Kahneman, 2012). Both cognitive and confirmation bias referred to Bush’s limited information search and failure to see nuances, which were related to his low conceptual complexity during that period, resulting in biased thinking and evaluation.
Fourth, Bush’s decision-making on the light footprint lacked a deliberate discussion with dissenting voices being heard and considered. Powell did not advocate for protracted US engagement in Afghanistan reconstruction and was willing to have the UN take the burden. What was different was that Powell wanted the US to play a larger role than Rumsfeld wanted. Rumsfeld wanted to minimise the US presence in Afghanistan with only counterterrorism missions being undertaken while Powell advocated for the US to join in ISAF missions outside Kabul (Woodward, 2003; Rashid, 2009).

An NSC meeting was held in February 2002 to discuss the expansion of the ISAF outside Kabul. Powell was not the only person who wanted a larger US role and an expanded ISAF mission scope in Afghanistan. Afghan interim leader Karzai, the UN Secretary-General Annan, and Richard Haass, the former staff at the State Department, all called for this. Dobbins had mentioned 25,000 troops in Afghanistan being a sufficient force but received no reply from Rumsfeld (Rohde and Sanger, 2007; Dobbins et al., 2008; Jones, 2008; Rashid, 2009; Bergen, 2011). On the other hand, Rumsfeld was opposed to additional forces or any peacekeeping role. In addition, he opposed to any expansion of the ISAF mission outside Kabul. In the end, every principal member of the NSC agreed that Afghanistan’s warlords were likely to restart fighting if left alone. But Rumsfeld firmly opposed the role of US troops as peacekeepers and the expansion of the peacekeeping mission outside Kabul. Powell had to concede and Rice agreed. Powell’s deputy, Richard Armitage, thought that Rumsfeld ‘simply steamrollered the decision through’. Consequently, in 2002, there were 8,000 US troops in Afghanistan with counterterrorism missions and 5,000 ISAF troops operated inside Kabul with peacekeeping missions (Rohde and Sanger, 2007; Dobbins et al., 2008; Jones, 2009, p. 115; Rashid, 2009; Hybel, 2014; Barry, 2020; Whitlock, 2021). In empirical records of stabilisation operations after World War II, this light footprint strategy used the lowest level of troops (Jones, 2009; Perry and Kassing, 2015).

Richard Haass, former director of policy planning at the State Department, recalled: ‘The president, the vice president, the secretary of defense, the
national security staff, all of them were skeptical of an ambitious project in Afghanistan, I didn’t see support’ (Rohde and Sanger, 2007, para.37). The question is whether Bush had given careful consideration to the State Department’s recommendations. The February meeting was held by Rice without Bush’s attendance. As Dobbins (2017) recalled, from December 2001 until April 2002, there were only two White House-chaired interagency meetings about Afghanistan. One was the NSC meeting held in February and the other discussed Iran. Zakheim (2011) mentioned another meeting held by the president in January 2002 with several White House officials attending, including Cheney, Rice, and Rove, but no Powell. In that meeting, Bush expressed his support for Rumsfeld’s plan with limited nation-building or no large US presence in Afghanistan. Whether intended or not, it seems that Bush missed the opportunity to hear Powell’s opinion.

Woodward (2003) observed that Powell debated with Rumsfeld more sharply when Bush was absent. Greenstein (2003, p. 16) also found that ‘When subordinates advance policies by making end runs on their colleagues, the advice a president gets tends to be a function of his advisors’ bureaucratic skills rather than the intrinsic merit of their recommendation’. And as discussed in the previous subsection, Rumsfeld was too empowered and he could ignore different voices in this decision-making. Therefore, Bush needed someone else to report divergent opinions to him, i.e. NSA Rice.

The role and efficacy of Rice as an NSA remain debatable among academic studies. Hult (2003) analysed Rice’s role as a coordinator to present diverse information and options for the president rather than to dominate the process. Pika and Maltese (2006) also thought highly of Rice for her efforts in managing and mediating the administration deliberations, especially the opposing views between Rumsfeld and Powell on Afghanistan issues. However, Caldwell (2011) and Evan (2002) commented that Rice’s role was weak and she failed to counterbalance the overly strong Rumsfeld, letting him undercut the State Department’s plan for a larger US military presence in Afghanistan to keep the peace (see also Gallagher, 2019). In an interview, the former NSA Samuel Berger summarised the NSA’s work as seeking a
consensus among the Secretary of Defense, the Secretary of State and others. Only when there was no consensus achieved would it be better to provide the president with two competing opinions (Destler, 2012). Linking this statement to the NSC debate in February 2002, Rice’s failure to counterbalance Rumsfeld left her with no alternatives to report to Bush.

Focusing on Rice’s personal willingness to discuss a larger US military role in Afghanistan, Evan (2002) noted that Rice also did not support the US military for a peace-keeping mission in Afghanistan. This was recorded by Rohde and Sanger (2007), finding that Rice held a middle position between Rumsfeld and Powell. From another perspective, Daalder and Destler (2011, p. 311) described Rice’s job as concentrating on Bush’s instincts and bringing them into shaping policy:

After 9/11, Bush was increasingly certain about what he wanted to do, and how. And Rice’s job was to get it done. In the process, the NSC adviser decided not to put Bush’s instincts and desires to the analytical test – not to probe his assumptions, look for alternative course of action, or even to examine the likely consequence. She asked: What does the president want? How can it be done? She did not ask: What if the president is wrong? How else can we achieve his objectives? Who among those who disagree should he hear out?

Therefore, Rice’s role was more like an enabler helping Bush achieve his goal rather than helping him be reflective on decision-making. In this decision-making, both Bush and Rice were not interested in a larger US military presence in Afghanistan and there was no empirical evidence that Bush had carefully considered or even heard the State Department’s full opinion. It seems that one of the most important decisions at this stage was made without the president, and Bush was shielded from dissenting voices against limited US engagement in Afghanistan.

In this decision, Bush was closed to divergent opinions from some of his advisors, which seems to be consistent with Saunders’ (2017) findings.
Meanwhile, his behaviour and leadership style relating to low conceptual complexity seem to also be consistent with Preston’s (2012) argument. However, there is more than one reason for why he was closed to divergent opinions. Preston argues that, while inexperienced leaders rely on expert advice, this may be affected by the way they collect information. In this decision, Bush’s inexperience played an important role in affecting his information collection through his delegation of policy formulation to subordinates and reliance on expert advice.

In short, with his low conceptual complexity, power delegation to subordinates and reliance on expert advice, the quality of Bush’s information input and his openness to divergent voices relied heavily on his trusted principals: namely Rumsfeld and Rice. However, these people (including the president himself) were not in favour of a larger military presence. Bush overly empowered Rumsfeld so that he could reject State Department’s proposals, and Rice’s capacity to deal with Rumsfeld was ineffective, thereby distancing Bush from knowing more about the State Department’s proposition. Finally, there was no empirical evidence that Bush had thought about public opinion. Compared to his decision-making on the targets of the first stage of this war, his personal engagement was also important. His intense involvement could weaken bureaucratic conflict and enable him to hear more opinions. However, he did not show any active information collection during this decision-making process. His different behaviours during these two decision-making processes are consistent with the expectations relating to high and low conceptual complexity. His limited personal involvement in this decision-making may also be related to his task focus. With a low score on task focus, he had everyone’s opinion expressed and heard. But in this decision, he did not demonstrate a group orientation.

Fifth, Bush did not demonstrate reflective thinking and flexibility in policy change until the final years of his presidency. In fact, until mid-2005, Bush held an optimistic view about ongoing progress in Afghanistan without any reflection and policy change (Bush, 2011). Cordesman and Lin (2015) commented that the Bush administration underestimated how quickly the Taliban and other
insurgent forces regrouped in Pakistan and denied the increasing risks in Afghanistan from 2004 to 2005. This may be explained by their cognitive bias discussed above.

From late 2006, Bush performed more reflectively on his Afghan policies. In 2006, he approved a strategic review of Afghanistan. Although this review did not suggest any policy shift, it asked for more resources (Bergen, 2011; Ballard, Lamm and Wood, 2012; Coll, 2018). From summer 2008, the White House and military staff began to conduct three reviews of the Afghanistan policy (Schmitt and Shanker, 2008; Whitlock, 2021). In September 2008, months before the end of his presidency, Bush ordered a review similar to the one for the Iraq surge, and this was his ‘last and most ambitious’ strategy review on this war (Schmitt and Shanker, 2008; Coll, 2018, p. 333; Malkasian, 2021). This review suggests a policy shift from counterterrorism to counterinsurgency (Cheney and Cheney, 2011; Gates, 2014; Coll, 2018). Bush approved but it was too late because his term in office was coming to an end.

In addition to the strategic review, at the end of 2006, Bush ordered an increase in troop numbers from 21,000 to 31,000 from 2006 to 2008. In January 2008, Bush sent 3,200 marines into the war (Cheney and Cheney, 2011; Gates, 2014; Whitlock, 2021). In September 2008, Bush declared to withdraw 8,000 troops from Iraq in subsequent months. In addition, a marine battalion and an army combat brigade would be sent to Afghanistan (CBC News, 2008). From 2006, he was more reflective in his policy with an increase in the number of reviews conducted, and was more flexible in shifting policy relating to troop surge and policy change. Bush’s reflective thinking and willingness to change foreign policy are consistent with the expectations regarding his high conceptual complexity during the final years of his presidency.
**Task Focus**

Bush scores moderate on task focus, indicating a balance between focusing on problem-solving and group relationship maintenance. Unfortunately, empirical records do not reflect any emphasis Bush put on task achievement or group relationships during his decision-making on the light footprint and the subsequent years. Therefore, this expectation remains unexamined.

**In-Group Bias and Distrust of Others**

As discussed in Chapter V, with a low score on his in-group bias and a high score on his distrust of others, Bush is expected to show a conflictual orientation but is willing to cooperate with like-minded others. Also, he is expected to show limited commitment to his group. He is also likely to violate norms.

In his memoir, Bush (2011) showed a reliance on his personal relationship with Musharraf. Bush thought of Pakistan as the US’s major non-NATO ally. He also tried to find a solution to the conflict between Musharraf and Afghanistan President Karzai through personal relationships and conversation. When Bush decided to press Pakistan for more progress on dealing with the extremists, he had a direct conversation with Musharraf and received Musharraf’s commitment. In addition, Sharifullah (2019) summarised an overall friendly attitude within the Bush administration towards Musharraf before 2006.

However, this new relationship was criticised as being too reliant on Bush’s personal relationship with and trust of Pakistani President Musharraf (Weinbaum, 2012). Journalists observed a different Pakistan to Bush’s view and found more accounts for the US-Pakistan relationship from the inside officials. Sanger (2010) observed that Musharraf played a ‘double game’ with the US: receiving US economic aid and promising to fight with the Taliban but actually made limited efforts to capture the insurgents. Top officials interviewed confirmed that they were aware of Pakistan’s double game, but at that time
they believed that they could ‘bring Pakistan in’, which was one of the biggest misjudgements made. Whitlock (2021) found from an interview that U.S. officials thought that Bush relied too much on personal trust in Musharraf. The president was also said to disregard the persistent evidence of the Pakistani military’s support for the Taliban.

Zakheim (2011) provided another account that, with concerns about the Taliban’s comeback, the US would not want to risk frustrating the Pakistanis by scrutinising their claims (until 2007). Chandrasekaran (2012) also observed Bush’s unwillingness to upset Pakistani leaders in 2005. However, it remains unclear whether this was due to Bush’s personal relationship with Pakistani leaders or his unwillingness to lose a partner in dealing with the Taliban. Therefore, Bush’s overreliance on his personal relationship with Musharraf may partly be consistent with what is expected from his low in-group bias, depending on whether he thought Musharraf was a like-minded friend or whether he was unwilling to upset Musharraf. In addition, Waldman (2013) connected this relationship between the US and Pakistani military to Bush’s Manichaean style, which was related to his low conceptual complexity. One may argue that this relationship changed later with Bush’s order to strike in Pakistan without any permission from the Pakistan government. This transition is related to his high distrust of others, as discussed below.

Bush’s low in-group bias indicates relatively low nationalism, and it is expected that he would show limited commitment to his group. Bush (2001h, p. 1493) again justified this war as protecting the US: ‘We’re fighting to protect ourselves and our children from violence and fear. We’re fighting for the security of our people and the success of liberty’. During his final year in office, Bush (2008a; 2008b), with a moderate level of in-group bias, repeated his statement of military deployment to protect the US. Although his in-group bias is consistently below the high level, he consistently justified US involvement in this long Afghanistan war by protecting the US under threats, which is related to his high distrust of others.
Bush’s consistently high distrust of others during his presidency helps explain his continuation of the Afghanistan war based on his strong vigilance of the Al-Qaida terrorists and the resurgent Taliban groups. Van Evera (2006) was concerned that, although initial success in Afghanistan ousted the Taliban regime and destroyed Al-Qaida’s bases in that region, the remaining members of Al-Qaida and its allies decentralised and still raised US concerns regarding its national security. This concern was supported by the main US military operation in Afghanistan, which remained narrowly focused against the Al-Qaida and the Taliban remnants (Dubik, 2020).

Hook (2012) and Lansford (2003) found that the new Afghan government was unable to sustain itself in a context of threats and uncertainties with pressure from the Taliban remnants who were preparing to return. All these concerns were also shared by Bush. Bush saw the Afghanistan state as displaying potential threats: ‘The events of September 11, 2001, taught us that weak states, like Afghanistan, can pose as great a danger to our national interests as strong states. … Yet poverty, weak institutions, and corruption can make weak states vulnerable to terrorist networks and drug cartels within their borders’ (The White House, 2002, p. IV). Therefore, ‘As we pursue the terrorists in Afghanistan, we will continue to work with international organizations … to provide the humanitarian, political, economic, and security assistance necessary to rebuild Afghanistan so that it will never again … provide a haven for terrorists’ (The White House, 2002, p. 7). In addition, his focus on hunting bin Laden never waned. Sanger (2010) interviewed intelligence officials and found that Bush, during the final two years of his presidency, met with the CIA director every week to ask about bin Laden.

Looking back at the initial period after 9/11, Bush emphasised the primary focus of rooting out terror however long it took (Woodward, 2003). Zelikow (2011) referenced this answer and commented that Bush never really moved away from this focus from that time to the end of his presidency. In his 2009 farewell address, the president recalled that, after 9/11, ‘Every morning, I received a briefing on the threats to our Nation. I vowed to do everything in my power to keep us safe. … America has gone more than 7 years without another
terrorist attack on our soil’ (Bush, 2009, pp. 1577–1578). Throughout his presidency, Bush’s high distrust of others helps understand his focus on the terrorist threats from Afghanistan. And he doggedly continued his military operations in that region.

In addition, Bush’s norm violation to order US attacks carried out in Pakistan is consistent with the expectation regarding his high distrust of others. Such attacks would be criticised as violating the Pakistani sovereign. Bush justified his orders because of the increasing Taliban attacks in Afghanistan and the threats of letting extremists regain control over that region (Bush, 2011). This norm violation driven by the urgency to eliminate threats is consistent with the findings from Shannon and Keller (2007). Bush’s low in-group bias and high distrust of others indicate an opportunist style with vigilance relating to potential threats. However, there was no empirical evidence for this expectation except for the continued partnership between the US and Pakistan.

In short, from October 2001 to the end of 2008, Bush’s distrust of others and in-group bias help explain the continuation of US military operations in Afghanistan. He did not plan to maintain a long-lasting US military presence in Afghanistan. His original plan was to maintain a small number of troops for counterterrorism operations. However, his optimistic assumption and less reflective decision-making style led him to misinterpret the situation in Afghanistan. While the situation was worsening, he could not abandon Afghanistan due to the concern about potential terrorist threats. His belief in his ability to control events, need for power, self-confidence and conceptual complexity help explain his transition from a unilateral orientation to a multilateral orientation, overconfidence in the capacity of a small-size troop operation in Afghanistan, less reflective and deliberative decision-making (with his inexperience) relating to the light footprint strategy and policy reviews and shifts during the final years of his presidency. His in-group bias may help understand his reliance on his personal relationship with the Pakistani leader. His task focus does not show any distinct performance.
Conclusion

This chapter analysed Bush’s initial war decision in 2001, the decision on the ‘light footprint’ of military presence made in early 2002 and the policy reviews and shifts between 2006 and 2008. Although the first decision to wage war in Afghanistan is not about war continuation, it is important to explore where this war started to understand why it continued for so long. The second section of this chapter broke down the multi-year policy into several decisions, focusing on the decision declared in 2002 to maintain a small military presence in Afghanistan and subsequent decisions to review and change this policy during the final years of Bush’s presidency. Empirical records and secondary analyses were examined with LTA-based expectations about Bush’s war orientation and how he led and shaped his decision-making process. This chapter answers the overall research question: How do Bush’s LTA-based personality and leadership style help explain the costly endurance of the post-9/11 war in Afghanistan?

The findings suggest that Bush’s consistently high distrust of others is the main reason for him continuing the Afghanistan war. Based on his vigilance of terrorism, the weak Afghan state and potential terrorist attacks on the US if these terrorists returned to Afghanistan, his in-group bias (although not high) incorporated his high distrust of others and helps explain the continuation of this war. Furthermore, his distrust of others combined with his belief in his ability to control events also helps explain his inclination for a preventive war in Afghanistan.

Meanwhile, other traits help explain his delegation of policy formulation, his openness to deliberations in decision-making and his categorisations of friends and enemies. These are more detailed accounts of Bush’s leadership style and how he developed his Afghanistan plan, including the type of action, targets, war aims and alliance building. There are some interesting combinations of trait effects (belief in his ability to control events and in-group bias, task focus and conceptual complexity, and belief in his ability to control events and distrust of others) detected. Although not all the LTA expectations
are examined with sufficient evidence, a majority of the expectations are supported by empirical records, indicating an effective LTA-based explanation for Bush’s inclination to continue the war and how he made these decisions.

The findings show more support for Preston’s (2001; 2012) arguments that inexperienced leaders with high conceptual complexity are open to divergent voices than Saunders’ (2017) argument that inexperienced leaders tend to marginalise divergent voices from experienced advisors. Bush’s openness to dissenting opinions and direct objection to Powell’s statement demonstrated a leadership style different from Saunders’ findings. His scores on conceptual complexity in two decisions are at the average level compared to other post-World War II US presidents. However, during the first decision-making process, his behaviour is consistent with expectations based on high conceptual complexity. In addition, findings in this chapter suggest a complex interaction between Bush’s conceptual complexity and his low task focus.

During the second decision-making process, Bush’s openness to dissenting voices was more likely to have been influenced by other factors. In addition, his power delegation to and reliance on expert advisors due to inexperience, and the effectiveness of his trusted subordinates, consistent with his low conceptual complexity, led to his failure to hear and discuss dissenting opinions. All these factors had a compound effect on Bush’s tolerance of divergent voices from experienced advisors. Bush’s performance is consistent with Preston’s (2012) and Saunders’ (2017) findings and is also consistent with the second proposition made in Chapter III. Meanwhile, there was no strong evidence to examine whether public opinion has influenced his tolerance of divergent voices. His quick decision-making after the 9/11 attacks was also found to have been influenced by contextual urgency.

Finally, this chapter provides a personality-based explanation for Bush’s continuation of the Afghanistan war. His subjective interpretation of high threats from Afghanistan is the reason for the continuation of this war. Because this chapter focuses on Bush’s subjective interpretation of potential threats, it complements existing realist explanations (such as Miller, 2021) of objective
assessments of threats to US national security and the necessity for the continuation of the Afghanistan war. Meanwhile, geopolitical analyses found that the great power competition between the US, Russia and China justified the necessity for a long-term US military presence in Afghanistan to counterbalance the influence of the others (Chotaev, 2013; Prifti, 2017). There is no sufficient evidence from this case study to support this argument. Instead, Bush stated that 9/11 fundamentally changed the context of global relationships and resulted in setting up a cooperative agenda with the other main powers (The White House, 2002). In addition, his personality and findings in this chapter neither support nor reject Malkasian’s (2021) finding that domestic fear of terrorist attacks continued the war.

The next chapter examines the LTA-based explanations of Obama’s Afghanistan war decision-making process, focusing on his personality-driven war orientation and his tolerance of dissenting voices from experienced advisors with attention paid to other contextual or personality factors.
Chapter VII Obama’s Afghanistan War

Introduction

The previous chapter reviewed and analysed US President Bush’s decision-making relating to starting and continuing US military operations in Afghanistan from 2001 to 2008 with regards to his personality and presidential leadership. The findings suggest that his personality traits are helpful in understanding his orientation towards the Afghanistan war and how he made his decisions.

This chapter continues examining the influence of personality on an individual’s management of decision-making by turning to Bush’s successor, Barack Obama, and his military policies in the Afghanistan war. Since becoming a presidential candidate, Obama had firmly opposed the Iraq war and promised to focus on Afghanistan (Obama, 2007). After being elected, the US war in Afghanistan transformed from Bush’s war into Obama’s war. Obama had committed to ending the long-lasting Afghanistan war (Culter, 2017b). However, until the end of his two-term presidency, the US war in Afghanistan continued and the responsibility to lead this war was passed on to Donald Trump. Compared to Bush’s Afghanistan strategy, Obama’s strategy narrowed US goals in Afghanistan and added more troops to continue targeting terrorists. In addition, Obama succeeded in killing the Al-Qaeda leader, Osama bin Laden, who was believed by the US to be responsible for the 9/11 attacks. After this, Obama decided to gradually withdraw US military forces from Afghanistan. Although he reduced the military presence there, the war was not finished and a certain amount of US troops remained there with continuing counterterrorism missions.

This chapter has three sections. First, it reviews and examines Obama’s first year in office when he made two surge decisions and two policy reviews relating to the Afghanistan war. It then focuses on the decision on the special operation of capturing Osama bin Laden in 2011. Although this operation was carried out in Pakistan, not Afghanistan, it was connected to the original
mission to attack those terrorists who were believed to be responsible for the 9/11 attacks (see Chapter VI). Furthermore, the success of this operation provided the US with an opportunity to leave Afghanistan (see the discussion in subsections). Finally, it reviews and examines Obama’s decisions relating to withdrawing US military forces from and continuing military operations in Afghanistan from 2011 to 2016. In each of these sections, LTA-based expectations relating to Obama’s war orientation and his management of his decision-making process are examined with empirical records and secondary analyses, answering the overall research question: How do Obama’s LTA-based personality and leadership style help explain the costly endurance of the post-911 war in Afghanistan?

The findings suggest that his personality traits are helpful in understanding his war orientation and how he managed the decision-making process. Among these traits, his high distrust of others and in-group bias are helpful in understanding his continuation of the war. The combination of his belief in his ability to control events and his distrust of others help us understand why he, following Bush, also defined the Afghanistan war as a preventive war. His other traits help explain more details in his decision-making process and his preferred strategy in Afghanistan. In addition, even though he has a high conceptual complexity, his tolerance of divergent voices could be influenced by his high task focus and may also be influenced by public opinion.

**Troop Surge and Strategy Review in 2009**

President Obama made two surge decisions and ordered two policy reviews during his first year in office. His first decision on military deployment into Afghanistan related to the pending troop request by the US Commander in Afghanistan, General David D. McKiernan (Woodward, 2010; Mann, 2012). This request was submitted in 2008 and the Bush administration passed it on to the Obama team (Bush, 2011; Gates, 2014). On 17 February 2009, Obama approved deploying 17,000 additional US troops to Afghanistan (Barnes and Miller, 2009). During the first days of his presidency, Obama ordered an expert
in counterterrorism, an experienced former CIA analyst, Bruce Riedel, to lead an interagency review of US strategy in Afghanistan and Pakistan (Woodward, 2010; Sanger, 2013). In March 2009, the review reported that the two distinct issues should be combined as a single regional challenge, named Af-Pak, and emphasised the importance of building a stable Afghanistan. In response, Obama ordered another 4,000 military trainers to be sent into Afghanistan to help build up Afghan local forces (Mann, 2012; Clinton, 2014).

In June 2009, the newly appointed commander, General Stanley McChrystal, was given sixty days to conduct a top-to-bottom review of the Afghanistan strategy. At the end of August, McChrystal requested another 40,000 US troops to conduct full counterinsurgency in Afghanistan. This request resulted in a very long debate and a second round of strategic review in the White House. Finally, on 1 December 2009, Obama announced the deployment of 30,000 additional troops into Afghanistan (McChrystal, 2013; Barry, 2020; Obama, 2020).

As presented in Chapter V, during his first year in office (from 20 January 2009 to 1 December 2009), Obama scores high on belief in his ability to control events, self-confidence, conceptual complexity, and task focus. Meanwhile, he scores low on his need for power and in-group bias. His score on distrust of others is at an average level compared with other post-World War II US presidents.

Belief in One’s Ability to Control Events and Need for Power

As discussed in Chapter V, with a high score on belief in his ability to control events and a low score on his need for power, Obama is expected to reflect an interventionist, proactive, independent and risk-taking orientation. With his inexperience, he is also expected to exert little control over the decision-making process and delegate policy formulation and implementation processes to subordinates. And he is expected to challenge constraints in direct ways.
Obama demonstrated the same interventionist and proactive orientation to prevent terrorism from regrouping and reorganising in Afghanistan as Bush. Riedel’s report set out the defeat of Al-Qaida as the primary goal of US policy. A prior condition for achieving this goal was to prevent terrorists from returning to Afghanistan from their sanctuaries in Pakistan (Chandrasekaran, 2012). On 27 March 2009, Obama explained to the US nation that his new strategies for Afghanistan and Pakistan had ‘a clear and focused goal to disrupt, dismantle, and defeat Al Qaida in Pakistan and Afghanistan and to prevent their return to either country in the future’ (Obama, 2009a, p. 366). Again, on 1 December 2009, he defended his decision to send additional troops to Afghanistan, emphasising that US ‘security is at stake in Afghanistan and Pakistan’ and restating the overall goal to ‘disrupt, dismantle, and defeat Al Qaida in Afghanistan and Pakistan and to prevent its capacity to threaten America and our allies in the future’ (Obama, 2009b, pp. 1749–1750). This preventive orientation, which relied on his belief in US capacity, led to a surge decision and increased US troop levels in Afghanistan to about 100,000 personnel. Recalling his decision to send 30,000 troops into Afghanistan, Obama (2011a, p. 694) explained that ‘I knew that we had the finest fight forces in the world … they would be able to accomplish that mission’.

Comparing Bush’s and Obama’s approaches to Afghanistan, although Obama did not mention or inherit Bush’s pre-emption doctrine, he chose the same approach as Bush: to continue with military operations in Afghanistan to prevent terrorists from attacking the US again. Daniel Bolger (2015), a US Army general who had commanded posts in Afghanistan, reviewed Obama’s statement as embracing ‘the long-announced Bush mission of unscrewing Afghanistan enough to prevent any al-Qaida comeback, and maybe even doing likewise in Pakistan’ (p. 298). Obama’s language of ‘disrupt, dismantle and defeat’, reviewed in Crenshaw’s (2011, p. 248) study of his counterterrorism policy, was reminiscent of Bush’s ‘defeat, deny, diminish, and defend’. McQuaid et al. (2019) characterised this preventive war as a continuity from President Bush. This interventionist and proactive policy orientation is consistent with the expectation regarding his high belief in his
ability to control events. Like Bush, Obama’s choice of preventive military operations related to his strong vigilance of the situation in Afghanistan, linking to the concept of ‘self-defence’ (Schaller, 2015). This is discussed shortly in the subsection on his distrust of others.

However, different from Bush’s unilateral approach to Afghanistan, Obama demonstrated a multilateral stance, which was also the strategy that Bush’s administration shifted to during his second term. In his speech, Obama (2009c) linked the threat of Al-Qaida to global security, defining it as an international challenge. By arguing that the Al-Qaida threats were an international challenge rather than an American problem, he emphasised assembling international support (Obama, 2009a; 2009b) rather than operating alone. Crenshaw (2011) summarised the Obama administration’s emphasis on ‘engagement, not unilateralism, and cooperation, not pre-emption’ (p. 248). Perhaps this can be explained by his pragmatism and realism that viewed ‘international politics as an expensive business that the United States was not obliged to fund’ (Lynch, 2019, p. 168) and his belief that US security depended on strengthened cooperation with alliances and international institutions (Obama, 2020).

With a high belief in his ability to control events, Obama is expected to prefer risky options. However, during the first year of his presidency, there were no sufficient empirical records to support this expectation. On the other hand, Powaski (2019) connected Obama’s time-consuming decision-making relating to sending 30,000 troops to Afghanistan to his risk aversion. This inconsistency between the trait-based expectation and Obama’s practical decision-making is explained by a careful decision-making style in a later subsection on his high conceptual complexity.

With his low need for power and his inexperience in foreign policy, Obama is expected to demonstrate a less centralised decision-making process with little involvement, delegating policy formulation to enhanced subordinates, and relying on expert advisors. However, empirical records reveal a quite different picture.
During his two surge decisions, Obama personally chaired National Security Council (NSC) meetings and was at the centre of the decision-making process. The first troop surge decision was made quickly without enough debate (Woodward, 2010). During the first NSC meeting after his inauguration, facing the request from the then ISAF Commander in Afghanistan, General Dave McKiernan, for another 30,000 troops, Obama asked for an alternative option with a reduced number. During the second NSC meeting, he had to pick from revised options presented by his National Security Adviser (NSA), James Jones, and asked for everyone’s opinion (Woodward, 2010; Obama, 2020). His performance was more like a high power-motivated president who set guidelines and made the final decision and then ordered the revisions to be debated and resolved during deputy meetings (Woodward, 2010; Obama, 2020).

During his second decision-making process relating to the surge of troops, along with the second round of strategic review, he engaged more by not only asking for options and questions but also becoming personally involved in creating a new option (Woodward, 2010; Obama, 2020). US Ambassador to the UN, Susan Rice (2019), even commented that, in any event, Obama’s performance was not like a hands-off leader. His engagement was more than typical presidential involvement in decision-making and far from the expectation developed regarding his low power motivation. This was confirmed by Laïdi (2012) that Obama kept in charge of this decision-making, including the process and the final decision.

Only during the first round of strategic review did Obama order Riedel to lead the review, ask him to conduct a strategic review of Afghanistan and Pakistan and wait for his report without personal involvement. Riedel briefed him with the newly articulated principal goal ‘to disrupt, dismantle, and defeat al-Qaeda in Pakistan and Afghanistan and to prevent their return to either country in the future’ and recommended strengthening the Karzai government’s political and military power (Obama, 2020, p. 320). These recommendations were all accepted by Obama and embraced in his strategy for Afghanistan declared on 27 March 2009 (Obama, 2009a). Only during this
first strategic review did Obama perform as a low power-motivated leader with limited involvement and control over the decision-making process, delegating policy formulation to subordinates and relying on expert advice.

Further proof of a high power-motivated president is Obama’s balance of civilian and military voices in his team. He had hawkish leaders in his team but also installed a larger NSC that allowed non-statutory members to attend NSC meetings. Compared to Bush’s NSC members, Obama added the representative of the United States of America to the United Nations, the assistant to the President and the Deputy NSA (Obama, 2009d). During Obama’s administration, conflict and division existed between military leaders (backed by Secretary of State Hillary Clinton) and White House staff (backed by Vice President Joe Biden) (Woodward, 2010; Singh, 2012a; Clinton, 2014; Rhodes, 2018; Obama, 2020). Because the military side was united and did not serve Obama well with the alternative options he wanted, his installation of the NSC not only allowed him to hear more different voices but also gave rise to conflict inside the team. Lynch (2019) noticed Obama’s determination to weaken those voices advocating war but also to keep their voices heard.

The inconsistency between Obama’s performance to maintain strong leadership and his low power motivation can be explained by two reasons. First, his high conceptual complexity indicates his need for information and therefore increased his involvement in the decision-making process. This was confirmed by Pfiffner’s (2011a) finding that Obama did not appoint any honest broker but centralised policy-making in the White House based on multiple advocacy. And another trait, high task focus, indicates Obama’s emphasis on seeking solutions rather than maintaining group relationships. This is discussed in later subsections. Second, as noted above, the military leaders did not provide him with alternatives, so the president had to do more for himself. Hoffman and Crowther (2015) and Hoffman (2016) also criticised the military leaders’ performance and criticised that they limited alternative options. In addition, Lamb and Franco (2015) also criticised the inability of the NSC process to reconcile the competing views. Therefore the president was compelled to engage more than usual in order for him to craft his own options.
However strong the presidential leadership Obama wanted to establish, as an inexperienced decision-maker in foreign policy, he faced obstacles inside and outside the White House to achieving a satisfying result in his second decision on the surge. Given his high belief in his ability to control events and low power motivation, he is expected to directly challenge constraints on his decision-making but is less successful due to his lack of skills.

During this long decision-making process on the troop surge, Obama wanted to have comprehensive discussions on the details of McChrystal’s proposal before making a decision. Therefore, he instructed Jones and his deputy, Tom Donilon, to coordinate NSC meetings ‘away from congressional politics and media grousing’ (Obama, 2020, p. 433). However, news was leaked from the military side. McChrystal’s report was leaked to the Washington Post and military leaders expressed their support for a full counterinsurgency (COIN) strategy before the media and Congress. Following the news leakage and comments, some Republicans called for the fulfilment of McChrystal’s request (Woodward, 2010; Bolger, 2015; Rhodes, 2018; Obama, 2020). Obama was annoyed that the military leaders were publicly lobbying for his decision. He called Secretary of Defense, Robert Gates, and Joint Chief of Staff, Mike Mullen, to make it clear that he did not want to be ‘boxed in’, and received their promise of no further leaks. However, during the later stage of the decision-making process, there were further news leaks (Woodward, 2010; Obama, 2020). This perhaps indicates a president who was unwilling to be boxed in but failed to prevent news leaks from the military leaders.

In another instance, Obama had to choose from a military-backed COIN strategy with 40,000 troops and a counterterrorism (CT) strategy with 20,000 troops backed by Biden and White House staff. Finally, Obama accepted Gates’ proposal to send 30,000 troops to Afghanistan, with narrowed goals. In addition, he promised a strategy review after one year and set a timeline for withdrawal to avoid an open-ended commitment (Woodward, 2010; Obama,
His final decision was more like a compromise than challenging the pressure from the military leaders (Marsh, 2014).

This did not mean that he did nothing to constrain the Pentagon’s ambitious plan. He minimised the troop size, narrowed the goals and set a date for withdrawal. However, although this was not the fully-approved request from the military, they achieved most of what they wanted (Woodward, 2010; Marsh, 2014). This suggests relatively stronger military power than civilian power inside Obama’s team, and underscores a typical example of a less skilful constraint challenger. Linking this situation to Bush’s legacy, Rashid (2012, p. 91) pointed out that 9/11 had empowered the military leaders and ‘Obama’s cold sense of reality could not flee itself from the Pentagon’s way of thinking or doing’.

**Self-Confidence and Conceptual Complexity**

As discussed in Chapter V, with high scores on his self-confidence and conceptual complexity, Obama is expected to conduct a broad information search, be willing to seek alternatives and be open to dissenting voices. Also because of his inexperience in foreign policy, he is further expected to be open to information input and rely on expert advice. His openness to divergent opinions may also be influenced by strong public opinion and his high task focus.

The first round of decisions on the troop surge and strategic review were made quickly without enough debate and discussion, according to Woodward’s (2010) and Obama’s (2020) records (see also Hoffman and Crowther, 2015). This may be because of the urgency of the decisions. The military urged a troop surge in Afghanistan; otherwise, the situation would become disastrous and would affect the election there (Woodward, 2010). Hybel (2014) also found that the conditions in Afghanistan were so serious and urgent that they forced the president to make a decision quickly without the thorough analysis he had wanted. With regard to Riedel’s report, it was
approaching the NATO Summit in April 2009, and the president needed to announce his new strategy in Afghanistan. Even though he knew there were blanks and unanswered questions, he had no more time to discuss them (Obama, 2020). The urgency and importance of a new strategy are confirmed by Ballard, Lamm and Wood’s (2012, p. 228) analysis that Obama faced a short deadline to give ‘a significant “deliverable” – a signature, program, policy, or international agreement worthy of the office of the president’ in his first major international forum. Therefore, the contextual urgency compelled quick decisions on these two issues.

The second round of decision-making relating to the troop surge, along with the second strategic review, was debated and discussed more thoroughly, fitting all the expectations based on his high conceptual complexity. First, Obama refused to make a quick decision. Instead, he personally chaired ten NSC meetings within three months from September 2009 to November 2009, to systemically and methodologically review US strategy in Afghanistan (Woodward, 2010; Sanger, 2013; Obama, 2020). This long review, recalled by Clinton (2014, p. 130), ‘looked at challenge from every conceivable angle’. Obama had a clear plan for this review: ‘We’re going to begin with interests, and then figure out what it is we want to accomplish, how we’re going to do it and eventually get to resources. We don’t want to talk about troops initially’ (Woodward, 2010, p. 169).

During the ten-session discussion, Obama performed logically and analytically by gradually shaping and narrowing the goals and creating an acceptable option, consistently insisting on attaining an achievable goal and developing an exit strategy even though he was criticised as ‘dithering’ (Center For Security Policy, 2009; Woodward, 2010). All of the above was consistent with what he insisted on during the first NSC meeting, and this consistency in his behaviour fits with the expectations based on his high conceptual complexity, indicating his complex cognitive style. He explained that ‘If we were focused and if we were clear in terms of what we were going to try to accomplish, I knew that we could get it down’ (Obama, 2011a, p. 694).
Second, Obama analysed the surge issue from various perspectives and noticed nuances in its goals and targets. Inside his team, there was a debate between the military leaders (along with Clinton and the CIA director, Leon Panetta) and Biden (with some White House staff). The debate centred on the number of troops and their role; in other words, the aims of the war, which was important to the decision on how to deal with the Taliban (Saunders, 2011; Coll, 2018). Obama clearly recognised that the Taliban and Al-Qaida were an alliance but the Taliban was not a terrorist group, and that the US could not defeat the Taliban, so he emphasised an achievable goal (Woodward, 2010; Bergen, 2011; Hybel, 2014; Rhodes, 2018). In October 2009, military leaders redefined the goal as not to destroy the Taliban but to deny them access to key Afghan cities, to disrupt them outside and to degrade their forces (Woodward, 2010; Singh, 2012b; Kaplan, 2013; Sanger, 2013). Comparing Obama’s goal to Bush’s, Fitzgerald and Ryan (2014) appraised the clearer definition made by Obama as a contrast to the muddled thinking of Bush.

Obama was also keen to be clear about what could be achieved by the troop surge. Indeed, he wanted to limit US commitment to Afghanistan and transfer the responsibility of stabilising Afghanistan to the Afghan government so that the US could refocus on its domestic issues (Kolenda, 2021). In October 2009, he stressed the importance of an exit strategy, indicating that the US was not to have an endless war and pressing the Afghan forces to prepare to take responsibility for the safety of their homeland (Woodward, 2010; Clinton, 2014; Obama, 2020). However, the military leaders did not present him with a clear exit strategy and, finally, he alone had to set the date for withdrawal based on the timeframe suggested by Gates. He set July 2011 as the start of the withdrawal and asked for everyone’s agreement (Woodward, 2010; Rashid, 2012; Obama, 2020).

Third, Obama was keen on alternatives. During the first NSC meeting on this issue, Obama made it clear that he was not satisfied with the 40,000-troop option and asked for continual updates on analysis and alternatives (Woodward, 2010). On 9 October 2009, McChrystal presented three options regarding troop numbers: 85,000, 40,000 and 10,000 (Woodward, 2010;
Rashid, 2012). In fact, this only presented Obama with one option because 80,000 was too many to be accepted and 10,000 was not enough (Woodward, 2010; Panetta and Newton, 2014). The second time, Mullen presented him with four options but the president complained that only two of them were pragmatic (Woodward, 2010). It was clear that the military leaders were focused on providing 40,000 troops for COIN and had therefore presented him with very limited policy options. However, Obama did not concede. He turned to Gates for alternatives (Woodward, 2010; Gates, 2014). Meanwhile, Biden and deputy Joint Chief of Staff, James Cartwright, presented him with another option of 20,000 with a more limited mission on CT-plus (Woodward, 2010; Perry, 2017; Obama, 2020). Finally, Gates presented Obama with the option of 30,000. This option was accepted. Obama’s complex cognitive style and search for diverse opinions in the second and third points are consistent with the expectations based on his high conceptual complexity.

Fourth, Obama demonstrated broad information searches and tolerance of dissenting or divergent voices. The president and the military leaders did not always share the same objectives. Early in February 2009, the military leaders promised that they would not ask for more troops for one year (Fox News, 2017). However, only half a year later, they eschewed their words. It may be explained that the situation in Afghanistan was deteriorating, so the military leaders had to request more troops. During the second round of decision-making, division clearly existed in the military’s recommendation for a fully-resourced COIN and an extended US military presence in Afghanistan while Obama wanted to limit US missions in that region and develop an exit strategy (Lynch, 2019).

Although Obama wanted to focus on defeating Al-Qaida, he was still open to hearing the military’s recommendations and opinions about a large COIN mission and having their recommendations debated and explained (Chandrasekaran, 2012). During the decision-making process, Obama remained open to hearing from leaders who supported either the COIN or CT strategy and was active in asking for more information and details. He was willing to have assumptions to be challenged and comprehensively debated.
Before making the decision, he asked everyone’s opinion (Woodward, 2010; Rhodes, 2018; Obama, 2020; Malkasian, 2021). His tolerance of divergent voices fits the expectation of his high conceptual complexity and is inconsistent with Saunders’ (2017) assumption that inexperienced leaders would marginalise divergent voices from experienced advisors in order to avoid disagreement. He was open to these divergent voices and was willing to reject military proposals when he felt that they did not offer him real choices. However, it should also be noted that Obama faced great pressure from the political context (as discussed in the previous subsection) and could not afford to ignore advice from the military (relating to his high belief in his ability to control events and low need for power).

To expand his information collection, Obama made two key appointments: retired Lieutenant General Karl Eikenberry, a military commander in Afghanistan who warned that Bush was ignoring the Taliban’s resurgence, to serve as US ambassador; and Richard Holbrooke, to serve as the State Department’s special representative for Afghanistan and Pakistan (Sanger, 2013). Sanger (2013) observed that Obama was confident that this group would become more focused on core American goals and could establish accomplishments that Bush did not. In addition to these two appointments, Obama turned to an expert outside the White House for his advice: Powell (Woodward, 2010).

Obama’s comprehensive review and decision-making style relating to his second surge decision impressed Gates (2014) with his deliberativeness and analytical skills, which were also widely acknowledged by other studies. These studies found that this instance reflected his analytical skills, unwillingness to rush to a decision, openness to information, inclusive political vision to hear from opponents and elaborate decision-making process with alternatives and deliberativeness (Greenstein, 2009; 2011; Pfiffner, 2011a; 2011b; Wayne, 2011a; 2011b; 2012; Rudalevige, 2012; Hybel, 2014). All these findings fit with the expectations about his high conceptual complexity.
In addition, Obama also had concerns about public opinion. Early in March 2009, the president noticed that ‘I have two years with the public on this. They’ll stand by us for two years. That’s my window’ (Woodward, 2010, p. 110). A Gallup report in November 2009 indicated an increase in public support for increasing the number of US troops in Afghanistan. In the US, support for increasing troop numbers (47%) was higher than support for decreasing troop numbers (39%). However, public support was divided on the number of the surge of troops. Only 37% supported the 40,000 option (Newport, 2009). The decision relating to the troop surge was also related to Obama’s campaign promise (Obama, 2007). Waldman (2013) interviewed several US officials. Many interviewees thought that reputational considerations and the 2012 presidential election played important roles in shaping Obama’s troop surge decision. They ascribed the final surge decision to campaign commitments for domestic support (see also Korb and Rothman, 2011).

In addition, Waldman (2013) also noticed Obama’s understanding of the declining domestic support for the war and the two-year-long time period, linking this to Obama’s pre-announcement of troop withdrawal. Similarly, Cavanna (2015) ascribed Obama’s time limit to declining public support for the war and the surge decision to public perceptions of the president (to avoid being seen as a weak president). Reviewing Obama’s decision with regard to public opinion, consistency is found between the final decision and the domestic support for the Afghanistan war. Although he did not want to expand this war, Obama had to listen to military officials’ plans and added more troops to Afghanistan which is consistent with the opinions of the majority of US citizens. Meanwhile, domestic support for a 40,000 troops surge was not higher than the domestic opposition to this war. Therefore, Obama may have had to think about the troop surge with concerns about domestic support and election but had more space to reject the 40,000 option. In addition, his pre-announcement of troop withdrawal is consistent with his understanding of the overall decline of domestic support for the Afghanistan war.

However, Wayne (2011a) interpreted that the poll indicated that domestic support for increasing troop numbers in this war was less than 50% and
Democrats’ support for increasing troop numbers was even low. He concluded that Obama’s final decision was neither driven by nor inconsistent with public opinion. Instead, Wayne ascribed Obama’s motivation towards this decision to his vigilance of threats from Afghanistan, which is discussed in the subsequent subsection on his distrust of others. However, there was no more empirical evidence to connect Obama’s decision-making with concerns about public support for increasing US troop numbers in Afghanistan and how he interpreted the poll data. Therefore, it is pertinent to say that strong public support for escalating the Afghanistan war may be one of the reasons for Obama’s final decision.

In short, Obama’s openness and acceptance of divergent opinions from the military leaders is consistent with the expectations based on his high conceptual complexity. His openness is also consistent with Preston’s (2001; 2012) argument. However, it is clear that Obama demonstrated a critical thinking style and did not accept every plan from the military leaders. Meanwhile, there were great pressures (from the military leaders and public opinion), and Obama was a constraint respecter. Further questions may ask whether Obama’s high conceptual complexity or the immense pressures he faced affected his acceptance of the divergent opinions and his decision-making process.

Critically, Obama’s strategic review and decision-making still had some shortcomings. He wanted to transfer responsibility to the Afghan government. Kolenda (2021) criticised that the NSC discussion was limited to the scale and timeline of the surge but did not examine the feasibility of transition (see also Hoffman, 2016). Similarly, Fitzgerald and Ryan (2014) commented that Obama did not provide a clear definition of the methods the US would use to achieve its goal, linking them more to American identity. Even though he had a complex thinking style, the president was a novice in foreign policy, and the long debate with the military leaders took up too much time to figure out a surge option with narrowed goals and left less time to discuss the feasibility and details of its implementation.
**Task Focus**

As discussed in Chapter V, with his high task focus, Obama is expected to be goal-oriented rather than group-oriented during his decision-making, focusing on task accomplishment and being tolerant of conflict.

As discussed in the subsection on his conceptual complexity, Obama personally chaired ten NSC meetings to logically and analytically establish an achievable goal and to develop an acceptable option even though he was criticised for this time-consuming decision-making (Center For Security Policy, 2009; Sanger, 2013; Obama, 2020). His insistence and focus on an acceptable and achievable plan were consistent with the expectation based on his high task focus. Meanwhile, the relationship between White House staff and military leaders worsened during this decision-making process (Gates, 2014; Rhodes, 2018). However, there was not enough evidence to identify any of Obama’s attempts to improve this relationship, suggesting that he was less likely to be a group-oriented leader in this case.

Meanwhile, as discussed in the previous section, Obama was willing to hear military leaders’ arguments and opinions about a large COIN mission even though he wanted to focus on defeating Al-Qaida (Chandrasekaran, 2012). This openness to dissenting voices was also consistent with the expectation based on his high task focus.

**In-Group Bias and Distrust of Others**

As discussed in Chapter V, with his low in-group bias and moderate distrust of others, Obama is expected to demonstrate limited commitment to his group, reflect a cooperative orientation and keep vigilant about potential threats. As explained in Chapter VI, it is difficult to identify Obama’s group. Similar to Bush, one piece of evidence is that Obama emphasised his duty as the president. ‘As President, my greatest responsibility is to protect the American people’ (Obama, 2009a, p. 366; 2009e). This statement suggests that Obama may have a group identification of the US nation, but this is not completely
convincing. Following this statement, it may be inferred that one of his group identification was the US nation.

Two examples support the expectations regarding his low in-group bias. One is his orientation to reconcile with the Taliban. Although the Taliban were still the target, he was willing to ‘support efforts by the Afghan Government to open the door to those Taliban who abandon violence and respect the human rights of their fellow citizens’ (Obama, 2009b, p. 1750). This division of the Taliban group, along with his high conceptual complexity, demonstrated Obama’s nuanced view of the role of the Taliban and their relationship with Al-Qaida. Teitler (2018, p. 211) thought that ‘Washington’s talks with various elements of the Taliban leadership’ indicate its recognition of ‘the difference between a national, indigenous movement and a transnational militant one’, and reconciliation with some groups within the Taliban paved the way for Washington to leave Afghanistan. In this way, Obama’s in-group bias and his high conceptual complexity help in understanding his categorisation of the Taliban and his willingness to cooperate with some of them.

The other example, as mentioned in the subsection on Obama’s belief in his ability to control events, was him being welcome to multilateral cooperation in stabilising Afghanistan. Different from Bush, who worried that coalition efforts would slow down US progress, as well as being unwilling to be led by other states, Obama was more confident that support from the US and international coalitions would accelerate the transition of handing responsibility to the Afghans (Obama, 2009b). This example is consistent with the expectation made about his cooperative orientation.

Based on this group identification, what is inconsistent with this expectation is that Obama made a strong commitment to protect the US and the Americans (Obama, 2009a; 2009b; 2009c; 2009e). The reason is that leaders with low in-group bias still want to protect their group, in this case, maybe the nation, so it is understandable that Obama promised to protect Americans facing terrorist threats from the deteriorating situation in
Afghanistan (DiMaggio, 2015). In this sense, he was not the traditional dovishness as expected (Goldsmith and Waxman, 2016).

This propensity for protection is related to Obama’s perceived threats from Afghanistan. With his moderate distrust of others, he is expected to perceive threats from Afghanistan based on the nature of the situation in that region. In practice, Obama demonstrated strong vigilance of both Afghanistan and Pakistan: ‘Another urgent threat to global security is the deteriorating situation in Afghanistan and Pakistan’ (Obama, 2009c, p. 10). ‘If the Afghan Government falls to the Taliban or allows Al Qaida to go unchallenged, that country will again be a base for terrorists who want to kill as many of our people as they possibly can’ and ‘The single greatest threat to that future comes from Al Qaida and their extremist allies, and that is why we must stand together’ (Obama, 2009a, pp. 366–367). Therefore, ‘Our overarching goal remains the same: to disrupt, dismantle, and defeat Al Qaida in Afghanistan and Pakistan and to prevent its capacity to threaten America and our allies in the future’ (Obama, 2009b, p. 1750). In this way, Obama’s war orientation is consistent with the expectation based on his distrust of Afghanistan and Pakistan. Comparing Bush’s and Obama’s strategies, Schaller (2015) found that although Obama did not make any explicit reference to Bush’s statement of pre-emption and proactive self-defence, his strategy still focused on the use of force to eliminate threats.

Different from Bush’s early years in office, since Obama took office, he expressed his distrust of the Pakistani government. His strong vigilance of Pakistan justified his acceptance of Riedel’s report that Al-Qaida remained a threat and that Pakistan was a problem needing to be focused on (Woodward, 2010; Ballard, Lamm and Wood, 2012). Meanwhile, his vigilance of the deteriorating situation in Afghanistan justified the necessity to continue with military operations in Afghanistan. Although there was intense debate about the scale and time of troop deployment to Afghanistan, there was a consensus that the US needed to focus on the leadership of Al-Qaida and could not just leave Afghanistan (Woodward, 2010; Obama, 2020). Obama’s distrust of others led to his continuation of military operations in Afghanistan to deal with
the terrorist resurgence there and cooperatively combined his belief in his ability to control events to continue with military operations to prevent further terrorist attacks on the US.

In short, during his first year in office, Obama’s distrust of others, in-group bias, and belief in his ability to control events all help explain his two decisions on troop surge to continue the preventive war. His belief in his ability to control events, power motivation, self-confidence, conceptual complexity and task focus are helpful in understanding his narrowed goal in Afghanistan, personal control over and engagement in the decision-making process, his search for information and alternatives, his tolerance of dissenting voices and how he made the second surge decision as a compromise. In addition, his belief in ability to control events, conceptual complexity and in-group bias account for him being welcome to multilateral cooperation and open to negotiation with the Taliban. Finally, although he had to escalate the war, he set a date for withdrawal, preparing to leave Afghanistan.

**Osama bin Laden Raid in 2011**

Obama’s decision to order a team of US Navy Sea, Air, and Land (SEAL) Teams to carry out a raid at a compound in Abbottabad, Pakistan, to either capture or kill Osama bin Laden is one of the most important episodes of his presidency. Before analysing the significant manifestation of his personality in leading and shaping this decision, it is necessary to explain why this decision was part of his Afghanistan war, although it did not take place in Afghanistan.

The decision had special significance relating to the US war in Afghanistan. First, the target, Osama bin Laden, had been believed by the US to be responsible for the 9/11 attacks and the death of approximately 3,000 people. In other words, in US perception, Osama bin Laden was responsible for the Afghanistan war. The operation to capture bin Laden, thus, is tied to the original aims of this long war. Second, ‘the death of the founder and leader of al Qaeda was a symbolic victory for the U.S. “war on terror”’ (Reardon, 2012,
Therefore, killing bin Laden resulted in a turning point in the Afghanistan war and provided strong support for Obama’s troop withdrawal decision (Barry, 2020). In other words, the success of this operation provides the US with an opportunity to leave Afghanistan. Although US military forces remained there until the end of Obama’s presidency, this decision on the Osama bin Laden raid was an important part of his Afghanistan war.

In August 2010, the CIA identified a compound in Pakistan that was possibly connected to bin Laden. In September 2010, the CIA director, Leon Panetta, briefed Obama for the first time about their suspicions. From then on, intelligence was collected to identify if it was bin Laden, and options were prepared to carry out a special operation to capture or kill him. Finally, a raid was ordered by Obama. On 1 May 2011, a team of US SEALs killed bin Laden in that compound (Panetta and Newton, 2014).

As presented in Chapter V, during his decision-making relating to the raid (from 10 September 2010 to 1 May 2011), Obama scores high on belief in his ability to control events, self-confidence, conceptual complexity and in-group bias. Meanwhile, his scores on distrust of others and task focus are at an average level compared with other post-World War II US presidents. Only his need for power is at a low level.

Belief in One’s Ability to Control Events and Need for Power

As discussed in Chapter V, with a high score on his belief in his ability to control events and a low score on his need for power, Obama is expected to demonstrate an interventionist, proactive, independent, and risk-taking orientation. He is also expected to exert limited control over the decision-making and delegate policy formulation and implementation. He is likely to challenge constraints in direct ways. As a novice in foreign policy, he is expected to rely on expert advice.

Scholars (Allin, 2011; Williams, 2012; Lynch, 2019; Chollet, 2021; Culter, 2022) and Obama’s subordinates (Clinton, 2014; Gates, 2014; Panetta and
Newton, 2014; Clapper and Brown, 2018; Kerry, 2018) acknowledged this raid as his bold and risky option. Empirical records and analyses confirm that, during the decision-making process, the president was aware of the potential risks of the raid. These risks included: the uncertainty about the identity of the targeted man; the potential failure of the raid and casualties among the SEAL team; the negative influence on Obama’s presidency, especially relating to his re-election; and the risk of a deteriorating US relationship with Pakistan (Mann, 2012; Clinton, 2014; Dixit, 2014; Gates, 2014; Panetta and Newton, 2014; Clapper and Brown, 2018; Lynch, 2019; Brennan, 2020; Obama, 2020). In an interview after the raid, the president recalled that ‘Obviously it entailed enormous risk to the guys that I sent in there. But ultimately I had so much confidence in the capacity of our guys to carry out the mission that I felt that the risks were outweighed by the potential benefit of us finally getting our man’ (CBS News, 2011, para. 8). In this way, his high belief in his ability to control events and confidence in US capacity outweighed other potential risks, leading to a risky option in keeping with the expectation made above.

Obama’s unilateral orientation was clearly shown by his authorisation of the raid to be carried out in Pakistan without informing the Pakistani government. During the decision-making process, the president made it clear not to share intelligence with any other nation, including Pakistan, due to his fear of the information being leaked. This fear took the cooperative options off the table and left only the US to operate independently (Panetta and Newton, 2014). This unilateral action involved intervention in Pakistani sovereignty. Such a unilateral and interventionist orientation is consistent with the expectation of his high belief in his ability to control events. However, this thesis argues that there were more factors behind this. Of course, Obama had confidence in US capability to carry out the operation – otherwise, he would not have ordered it – but this confidence was based on careful and comprehensive discussion of this option. Furthermore, Obama’s decision on a unilateral operation was due to his distrust of the Pakistani government. These are related to his conceptual complexity, in-group bias and distrust of others, discussed in later subsections.
As for his expected proactive orientation, Jackson and McDonald (2014, p. 19) interpreted this operation as Obama’s ‘preventive assassination of terrorist suspects’, referring back to the US doctrine of preventive war.

With his low need for power, Obama is expected to demonstrate a less centralised decision-making process with little involvement, delegating policy formulation to enhanced subordinates, and relying on expert advisors. During the decision-making process, Obama delegated to his subordinates to create attack options, and relied on the head of Joint Special Operations Command, the Defense Department’s Vice Admiral William McRaven, to lead the preparation and implementation of the raid (Panetta and Newton, 2014; Obama, 2020). Here, his power delegation and reliance on professionals fit the expectations of a low power-motivated leader.

However, another instance does not fit these expectations. It was his tight control over his decision-making. To maintain secrecy, only a few people in the White House knew about this decision and therefore members who attended this decision-making meeting were limited. Furthermore, the operation was conducted under the authority of the CIA; not the Pentagon (CBS News, 2011; Panetta and Newton, 2014; Brennan, 2020; Obama, 2020).

Connecting this instance to the special context of this decision, it was understandable that the high demand for confidentiality led to tight control over the decision-making process. Meanwhile, the importance of the decision for the raid and the seriousness of its outcomes resulted in the president having to take full responsibility for the decision, thereby emphasising his role and power even if he was low power-motivated. Rockman, Waltenburg and Campbell (2012, pp. 350–351) comprehensively commented that Obama made this decision by ‘delegation of operations to professionals, and decisiveness from the top’.

Combining his high belief in his ability to control events and low need for power, Obama is expected to directly but less skilfully, challenge constraints. This is consistent with his authorisation of possible conflict with Pakistani troops on the ground if necessary. The location of the target, Abbottabad, was
near a Pakistani military base and, without negotiating with the Pakistani government in advance, the SEAL team would be confronted by Pakistani soldiers. However, Obama firmly rejected McRaven’s recommendation to negotiate with the Pakistani government if the SEAL team was prevented from leaving. He changed the recommended diplomatic solution of ‘talk your way out’ to ‘fight your way out’ by asking the team to prepare to fight for a way out. In addition, he added two helicopters to the operation (Brennan, 2020). Obama’s logic was clear: he was not going to risk leaving the fate of the SEAL team to the Pakistani government (Dixit, 2014; Obama, 2020). Based on this unwillingness to compromise, the president chose to prepare for ground conflict with Pakistani troops.

Self-Confidence and Conceptual Complexity

As discussed in Chapter V, with his high self-confidence and high conceptual complexity, Obama is expected to show openness to information, be open to listening to and relying on expert advice as inexperienced in foreign policy, and demonstrate considerable planning for capturing bin Laden, including a search for alternatives, and be unwilling to rush to a decision and tolerate dissenting voices.

As a senator and presidential candidate, Obama had made it clear that finding bin Laden was his top priority and that ‘he would not hesitate to act’ if he had the chance to ‘strike at bin Laden, even if it offended Pakistan, where it was often assumed bin Laden was hiding’ (Panetta and Newton, 2014, p. 289; Obama, 2020). Early in May 2009, Obama restated his priority to Panetta, urging the CIA to find bin Laden. After hearing Panetta’s briefings, Obama urged identifying the targeted man, and this was one of the two important questions consistently discussed during preparations for the raid (Brennan, 2020). This consistent emphasis on the information search about bin Laden fits the expectation of his consistently high conceptual complexity and high self-confidence.
On 10 September 2010, Panetta and his deputy, Mike Morell, briefed Obama on the suspicious compound in Abbottabad, Pakistan, explaining that they had a potential lead on bin Laden. Obama was aware that anyone could be in that compound and urged the CIA to collect more information about it (Panetta and Newton, 2014; Obama, 2020). From March 2011 to the end of April 2011, five meetings were held to discuss the intelligence and options. Two important questions guided the preparation for this raid: the certainty that the targeted person was bin Laden, and the best option to capture him (Panetta and Newton, 2014; Clapper and Brown, 2018; Brennan, 2020; Obama, 2020). At the end of April 2011, Obama had to make the final decision because the US administration feared that any delay in decision-making could tip off bin Laden or the Pakistanis that Obama had known bin Laden’s location (Clapper and Brown, 2018). All these suggest Obama’s reluctance to rush to a decision.

During these meetings, the intelligence service kept providing updates on information about the man in the compound. Although the CIA gradually increased their belief that there was an important target in the compound, they did not really know who it was (Panetta and Newton, 2014). During the discussion about options, the president was presented with four choices: raid, air drone, bomb or wait for more information. He discussed the merits and disadvantages of each option, asked more detailed questions about the time needed and the outcomes, and heard McRaven’s presentation about how the raid would be carried out (Sanger, 2013; Panetta and Newton, 2014; Clapper and Brown, 2018; Brennan, 2020; Obama, 2020). US Homeland Security Advisor, John Brennan, recalled this decision-making and commented that ‘the president was looking two and three chess moves ahead and wanted to be aware of and prepared for virtually any contingency’ (Brennan, 2020, p. 235). During the final meeting, Obama asked for everyone’s opinion. Defense Secretary Gates advocated a drone strike and Vice President Biden supported waiting for more information. The others all supported a raid. Finally, Obama ordered a raid on 29 April 2011 (Rhodes, 2018; Obama, 2020).

Obama’s decision-making on this raid indicates his considerable planning with a nuanced political vision, openness to information, search for alternatives
and reliance on expert advisors. Only the expectation about his tolerance of dissenting voices was not examined. This was because Obama did not demonstrate a clear preference for the raid option. As mentioned in the subsection on belief in his ability to control events, Obama’s confidence was related to his high conceptual complexity. For Obama himself, although he could not guarantee the outcome of his decision relating to the raid, he was confident in McRaven and the SEALs based on the full preparation (Obama, 2020). This confidence was based on his calculation of the potential outcomes and review of the practices of the SEAL team’s operations. Instead of taking this raid as a risky option, Rockman, Waltenburg and Campbell (2012) thought that the decision to raid was the combination of Obama’s prudence and calculated risks. Overall, this decision was made based on his deliberation and careful assessment of risks with his observation of the SEAL team’s capacity, consistent with the expectations based on high conceptual complexity. Furthermore, these preparations contributed to his confidence in this operation, complementing the expectation based on his high belief in his ability to control events. Therefore, it is pertinent to say that Obama’s confidence in his judgement resulted from his deliberative decision-making process. A similar opinion was expressed by Wayne (2012, p. 66) in the study of Obama’s operating style.

**Task Focus**

Obama’s score on his task focus is at an average level, indicating that he can be either goal-oriented or relationship/consensus-oriented. This trait mainly focuses on the comparison of emphases placed on achieving tasks and maintaining group relationships.

With regard to his decision-making, the discussion in the subsection on conceptual complexity suggests a deliberative and analytical style, suggesting that he may be goal-oriented. However, this deliberative style may be related to his high conceptual complexity and inexperience in foreign policy and special operations. Therefore, he needed advice from experts and a
comprehensive plan with vigorous debate and discussion to carry out a successful special operation. In short, there was not enough evidence to compare whether Obama was goal-oriented or group-oriented in this decision-making.

In-Group Bias and Distrust of Others

As discussed in Chapter V, with his high in-group bias and moderate level of distrust of others, the president is expected to demonstrate a strong commitment to the US, a conflictual orientation, and a willingness to violate norms.

Obama’s justification for the raid on bin Laden is consistent with the expectation based on his high in-group bias. Referring to the suffering resulting from the 9/11 attacks, Obama treated bin Laden as the ‘terrorist who’s responsible for the murder of thousands of innocent men, women, and children’ (Obama, 2011b, p. 480) and ‘His continued freedom was a source of pain for the families of those who’d been lost in the 9/11 attacks and a taunt to American power’ (Obama, 2020, p. 677). By eliminating bin Laden, Obama justified that ‘as a country, we will never tolerate our security being threatened nor stand idly by when our people have been killed. We will be relentless in defense of our citizens and our friends and allies’ (Obama, 2011b, p. 481). In this way, the death of bin Laden was not just a response to Al-Qaida’s 9/11 attacks but also warned other terrorists that the US would not tolerate any threats to its national security. Reardon (2012) also interpreted the success of the operation to capture and kill bin Laden with a symbolic meaning for American persistence.

With a moderate score on his distrust of others, Obama is expected to perceive threats from Afghanistan based on the pragmatic situation in that region. In this case, both Obama and his subordinates demonstrated strong vigilance of bin Laden and his influence on Al-Qaida terrorists. Bin Laden was the one who was believed by the US to be responsible for the 9/11 attacks and
the deaths subsequently caused (Panetta and Newton, 2014; Obama, 2020). Meanwhile, he had a specific symbolic meaning because ‘remnants would cling to Al Qaeda as long as Osama bin Laden is at large’ and he was the ‘ubiquitous face of terrorism’ (Panetta and Newton, 2014, pp. 288–289; Brown, 2015).

In addition, Obama worried that, even though bin Laden was hiding somewhere, he was still effective and continued to plan to attack the US (Obama, 2011b). Therefore, the raid was carried out to ‘hold accountable the person responsible for the 9/11 attacks’ and to ‘further reduce its lethal capabilities and potential to kill more innocents’ (Brennan, 2020, p. 225). However, whether bin Laden still directed the movement of Al Qaida terrorists and posed imminent threats to the US or not was debatable (Guerlain, 2014; Brown, 2015; Schaller, 2015). Therefore, it is pertinent to say that Obama’s subjective impression and suspicions of bin Laden played an important role in shaping part of his justification for this operation.

This strong vigilance of bin Laden not only justified the US raid but also justified its norm violation of Pakistani sovereignty. Obama (2011b) justified this violation from two perspectives. First, the raid was included in his counterterrorism operations on the territory of another state to prevent terrorist attacks. In other words, this operation was conducted following the doctrine of preventive war (Jackson and McDonald, 2014). This notion was articulated in his National Security Strategy (NSS) in 2010 (The White House, 2010). Although he did not inherit Bush’s pre-emption doctrine, the concept of pre-emption existed in his NSS.

Second, he justified this operation from a legal perspective and defended it with the term ‘justice’. However, Berkowitz (2011, p. 351) argues that ‘It is at least arguably correct to say that the assassination of bin Laden was technically legal and justified under international law’ and ‘the assassination of bin Laden would have better served and manifested justice if it were accompanied by a trial’. In addition, Guerlain (2014) expressed a more competing view because bin Laden posed no imminent threats to the US and
there were alternatives to this operation in terms of legal considerations. Part of this debate turned back to the danger brought by bin Laden and again fell back to Obama's subjective perception of threats from this person.

The Obama administration also demonstrated their distrust of the Pakistani government. They agreed not to share intelligence with other countries, including Pakistan (Singh, 2012a; Brown, 2015). The reason was that they reviewed their past cooperation with the Pakistani government and worried that the danger of leaks would jeopardise their chances to snare bin Laden (Dixit, 2014; Gates, 2014; Panetta and Newton, 2014; Clapper and Brown, 2018; Obama, 2020). This distrust of the Pakistani government accounts for Obama's orientation towards taking unilateral action. As observed by Sanger (2013), Obama would be willing to act unilaterally when facing a threat to US security.

Combining his in-group bias and high distrust of others, Obama is expected to focus on eliminating threats with aggressive behaviour. This is consistent with the US intervention in Pakistan to kill bin Laden. Reardon (2012, p. 118) interpreted the success of this raid as showing the world US ‘willingness to defend its national security by unilaterally carrying out the Pakistan operation without the approval of the Pakistan government’.

In short, during the decision-making relating to this raid, Obama’s in-group bias and distrust of others are helpful in explaining his orientation towards ordering the raid. Meanwhile, his in-group bias and distrust of others, along with his belief in his ability to control events, help explain his orientation to act unilaterally. His conceptual complexity also contributes to his confidence in carrying out unilateral operations. His power motivation, self-confidence, and conceptual complexity help explain his deliberative decision-making within a tight circle.
Plans for Troop Withdrawal, Exit and Delay from 2011 to 2016

The death of bin Laden marked a turning point in Obama’s war on Al-Qaeda. With his narrowed goals relating to the war, the president began US retrenchment from this long war. This section discusses why Obama did not end the war by pulling all troops out but chose to gradually reduce US troop numbers in Afghanistan and why he delayed his withdrawal plan.

He ordered a review of the Afghan strategy in December 2010 and, on 20 January 2011, began the review. In June 2011, there were three important meetings on the withdrawal plan (Gates, 2014). On 22 June 2011, Obama announced the withdrawal of the 33,000 surge troops. 10,000 troops would leave Afghanistan before the end of 2011 and all surge troops would leave by the summer of 2012. The remaining forces would gradually leave Afghanistan and this transition process would end by 2014 (Obama, 2011c).

In May 2014, following this withdrawal plan, Obama announced the end of the combat mission and declared his exit plan for the 32,000 remaining US troops in Afghanistan. At the beginning of 2015, there would be 9,800 US service members, and this number will be reduced by half at the end of 2015. By the end of 2016, there would be only a normal embassy presence in Kabul. The remaining US troops would focus on training the Afghan army and continuing counterterrorism operations (Obama, 2014a). With the deteriorating situation in Afghanistan under increased Taliban attack, Obama revised his plan in 2015 and 2016, leaving 8,400 US troops in the region until the end of his presidency (Obama, 2015a; 2015b; 2016).

As presented in Chapter V, from 20 January 2011 to 22 June 2011, Obama scores high on belief in his ability to control events, in-group bias, self-confidence, conceptual complexity and task focus. Meanwhile, he scores low on distrust of others. His score on his need for power is at an average level. During subsequent years from 2014 to 2016, his scores on belief in his ability to control events, self-confidence, conceptual complexity and task focus are consistently high. He scores high on his need for power in 2014. In other years, his scores on his need for power are at an average level. He scores low on in-
group bias in 2014 and 2016. In 2015, he scores high on this trait. His scores on distrust of others are high except in 2014, with a moderate score.

Belief in One’s Ability to Control Events and Need for Power

As discussed in Chapter V, with his consistently high belief in his ability to control events, Obama is expected to demonstrate an interventionist, independent, risk-taking and proactive orientation. His scores on the need for power are mainly at the moderate level. He is expected to exert control over the decision-making process and may delegate policy formulation and implementation processes to subordinates, except in 2014. In 2011, he was still inexperienced in foreign policy, but he is expected to show less reliance on expert advice compared to 2009. He is expected to rely more on his own policy views from 2014. He is also expected to challenge constraints in both direct and indirect ways.

From the beginning of the troop withdrawal operation in 2011 to the announcement of his exit plan in 2014, Obama demonstrated great optimism in both the progress made by US troops and its future. ‘Al Qaida is under more pressure than at any time since 9/11. Together with the Pakistanis, we have taken out more than half of Al Qaida’s leadership’ and ‘even as there will be dark days ahead in Afghanistan, the light of a secure peace could be seen in the distance. These long wars will come to a responsible end’ (Obama, 2011c, pp. 691, 693). Satisfied with the achievements made, he declared that ‘we’re finishing the job we started’ and began to transit security responsibility to the Afghan government (Obama, 2014a, p. 603). Cordesman and Lin (2015) criticised this optimism and underestimation of the risks involved in the US transition plan, arguing that the president and the Secretary of Defense failed to assess the various risks in Afghanistan and Pakistan.

What led Obama to reduce the number of US troops in that region were his belief in limited US responsibility for Afghanistan and his confidence in US military strength to effectively target terrorists without a large presence in the
region. He recognised that ‘Afghanistan will not be a perfect place, and it is not America’s responsibility to make it one’ (Obama, 2014a, p. 605). This reflected his belief that the US had limited national interest in Afghanistan, and is discussed in a later subsection on his in-group bias.

Meanwhile, Obama had great confidence in the withdrawal plan with beliefs in US military capacity: ‘we must be as pragmatic as we are passionate, as strategic as we are resolute. When threatened, we must respond with force. But when that force can be targeted, we need not deploy large armies overseas’ and ‘we are bound together by the creed that is written into our founding documents and a conviction that the United States of America is a country that can achieve whatever it sets out to accomplish. ... Let us responsibly end these wars. ... With confidence in our cause, with faith in our fellow citizens ...’ (Obama, 2011c, pp. 693–694). In 2014, he repeated his confidence in the exit plan: ‘I am confident that if we carry out this approach [transition], we can not only responsibly end our war in Afghanistan and achieve the objectives that took us to war in the first place, we’ll also be able to begin a new chapter in the story of American leadership around the world’ (Obama, 2014a, p. 605). Obama’s confidence in US power and progress led to an optimistic prediction of the future in Afghanistan with a small US presence. Such optimism affected his determination to reduce US troops in Afghanistan with fewer threats being perceived on the battlefield. His confidence may be indicative of his high belief in his ability to control events.

Although a high belief in his ability to control events indicates a unilateral orientation, Obama did more to call for support from international allies and share the burden with other nations (Obama, 2011c; 2014a; 2015b; 2016). This multilateral and cooperative orientation is clearly inconsistent with this expectation. As mentioned above, Obama emphasised pragmatic solutions and believed that the US had limited responsibility for the stabilisation of Afghanistan. Therefore, it is understandable that he wanted to transit responsibility to the Afghan government and share the burden with other states. His plans, although not conforming to the expectation relating to his high belief
in his ability to control events, conform to the expectations relating to his in-
group bias.

His interventionist and proactive orientation remained in his speeches
and justification for continuing US missions in Afghanistan to train the Afghan
army to protect their nation and to target terrorists, aiming to prevent the state
from becoming a safe haven for terrorists to attack the US again (Obama,
2011c; 2014a; 2015b; 2016). These missions were ordered due to his
awareness of potential threats to the US even though the threats were fewer
than before.

Obama’s scores on his need for power are moderate except in 2014,
which is high. It is expected that with a high belief in his ability to control events
and a moderate level of need for power, he would exert tight control over the
decision-making process. He was inexperienced in 2011 and experienced
after 2014. Therefore, he may delegate policy formulation and implementation
to subordinates in 2011. Meanwhile, there is no single standard to assess
whether he was experienced in foreign policy or not. As he became more
experienced in foreign policy compared to 2009, he is expected to rely less on
expert advisors than he was in 2009.

A typical instance shows his tight control over the decision-making
process: the way in which he gathered opinions and reduced debate. Some of
the discussions between Obama and his Defense Secretary Gates, State
Secretary Clinton and NSA Donilon were held in one-on-one sessions
(Chandrasekaran, 2012). Chandrasekaran (2012) interpreted Obama’s
management to avoid a lengthy and acrimonious debate, as had been the case
in 2009. This time, the NSC principals Gates, Clinton, James Clapper (the
Director of National Intelligence) and Panetta did not have access to the review
process until the meetings in June 2011; only a few weeks before Obama
made and announced his final decision on the withdrawal plan. This, as
observed by Sanger (2013), indicated his determination to have the White
House lead the exit-strategy review process and control the outcome.
Another instance of Obama’s tight control over the decision-making process relates to the options for withdrawal. As expected, he ordered the military leader, David Petraeus, to create options for withdrawal. Being unsatisfied with the options presented during the first meeting, Obama asked Petraeus to adjust the strategy within two days and craft options for a quick withdrawal with a larger number of troops (Broadwell and Loeb, 2012; Chandrasekaran, 2012). In crafting an ideal option, although still allowing Petraeus to prepare them, Obama controlled it based on his own preference and policy judgement. The final decision was made based on his own option and shifted with the opinions from his principals (Chandrasekaran, 2012; Gates, 2014). Therefore, in crafting the option for the withdrawal plan, the president set more specific guidelines and framed issues based more on his policy judgement than that of his expert advisors.

These two examples demonstrated a highly power-motivated leader. This may be because that bin Laden’s death provided him with a political opportunity to start to reduce US troops in Afghanistan, along with his promise to begin troop withdrawal in July 2011 (Arquilla and Rothstein, 2012; Mann, 2012; Coll, 2018). Therefore, it is likely that Obama would take this chance and perform like a high power-motivated leader who exerts tight control over the decision-making process and sets the guidelines. Meanwhile, compared to 2009, he became more experienced in foreign policy. Therefore it is understandable that Obama would engage more in framing issues and rely less on expert advisors due to his increased experience.

Combining his belief in his ability to control events and need for power, Obama is expected to be a direct and less skilful constraints challenger, except during 2014, when he is expected to become more skilful and successful. During this long period, Obama faced limited external pressure relating to troop withdrawal. Gagnon and Hendrickson (2014) argue that Congress played a limited role in his decision to withdraw troops from Afghanistan. Indeed, Obama’s withdrawal decision received support from the Democrats and a majority of the Republicans (CNN, 2011). With regard to public opinion,
American support and confidence in the long Afghanistan war waned yearly. More and more people believed that the war was a mistake (Brenan, 2021).

Therefore, different from the political context in 2009, Obama enjoyed more freedom and support for him to leave Afghanistan. Even though there was another news leak and Petraeus made a different statement in a NATO meeting, stating that the end of 2014 signalled a start of the transition, the president reacted differently from the way he reacted in 2009. He soon restated his intention clearly in an NSC meeting, criticising any misinterpretation of his intention before the media and emphasising his insistence on the time of withdrawal. He stated that he could accelerate the drawdown but would not accept any delay (Gates, 2014). In 2009, facing a news leak, Obama was forced to send more troops into Afghanistan following the military’s opinion. Compared to his performance in 2009, the president responded to the military insubordination more firmly and sharply, being unwilling to change his idea.

**Self-Confidence and Conceptual Complexity**

As discussed in Chapter V, with consistently high self-confidence and conceptual complexity, Obama is expected to conduct a broad information search, be open to listening to divergent voices and show a reflective and complex cognitive style. Because the whole withdrawal project lasted a long time, it is also expected that Obama is flexible in accepting the realities disconfirming his existing beliefs and is likely to change his foreign policy based on the situation in reality. It is also expected that he relied more on his own policy views compared to his reliance on experts’ advice in 2009.

In these decision-making processes relating to the withdrawal of troops and further exit plans, Obama remained open to alternatives but was more prudent with the options presented. During the three NSC meetings in June 2011, he scrutinised all the options and discussed some of them with other members of the NSC. During the first meeting on 15 June 2011, Petraeus presented him with five options. All of them started with a small size troop
withdrawal (2,500 to 5,000) at the end of 2011. It was suggested that the remaining surge troops would not be withdrawn until the end of 2012. Petraeus and his staff wanted to keep the number of withdrawal troops to a minimum (Chandrasekaran, 2012; Mann, 2012; Sanger, 2013). Obama was not satisfied with Petraeus’ options, stating that he favoured a quicker withdrawal of the surge troops and asked Petraeus to assess in two days Biden’s option (withdraw 15,000 by the end of 2011 and the remaining surge troops by April 2012 or July 2012) (Chandrasekaran, 2012; Gates, 2014). Privately, Gates recommended a withdrawal of 5,000 troops between July and December 2011 and another withdrawal of the remaining troops by September 2012, warning that an earlier total withdrawal would result in risks to the surge effort (Gates, 2014).

On June 17 2011, Clinton argued that an earlier total withdrawal in 2012 would signal the US abandoning Afghanistan, and suggested withdrawing 8,000 troops by December 2011 and withdrawing the rest by December 2012. Clinton further argued that the pace of withdrawal should be linked to progress of political negotiations with the Taliban (Gates, 2014). Petraeus revised options and suggested a withdrawal of 10,000 by the end of 2011 and the remaining troops to be withdrawn by November 2012, arguing that an earlier withdrawal could place accomplishment of the campaign plan at risk (Chandrasekaran, 2012). However, Obama was still not satisfied with these options. He wondered about the necessity for another fighting season with the surge forces and wanted all surge forces out by July 2012, which was concurred with by Biden and Donilon (Chandrasekaran, 2012; Gates, 2014).

Finally, on 21 June 2011, Obama put forward his option of withdrawing 10,000 by December 2011 and the remaining surge forces by July 2012. He then heard the opinions from everyone else. Petraeus and Mullen described the risks under that option. Gates crafted a middle ground by withdrawing the remaining forces by September 2012. His option was supported by Clinton, Panetta, Petraeus, Mullen, Donilon and McDonough. Biden, Blinken, Lute, Rhodes and Brennan supported withdrawing all the surge forces by July 2012.
or earlier. Finally, Obama went with Gates’ option (Chandrasekaran, 2012; Mann, 2012; Gates, 2014).

Although during the meetings in June 2011 Obama was open to alternatives, he was only willing to discuss some of them. Clearly, the options suggested by the military leaders aiming to maintain a longer US military presence with a larger troop number were discarded. This links to two other aspects of his conceptual complexity: openness to information and tolerance of dissenting voices. Debate took place in the NSC meetings relating to the withdrawal plan, and, to some extent, it was as if the debate in 2009 was still going on (Gates, 2014). Vice President Biden did not believe that the Afghanistan war could ever succeed, with concerns about the corruption in Afghanistan, the situation in Pakistan and Afghan leaders’ attitudes towards their national army, and urged a quick transition and withdrawal with fewer troops remaining. On the other hand, military leaders emphasised the progress made and advocated that the surge plan was working, wanting to keep as many troops in Afghanistan for as long as they could (Chandrasekaran, 2012; Gates, 2014; Sharifullah, 2019).

Although Obama welcomed challenges to his withdrawal plan (Gates, 2014), any intention from the military to extend the presence of surge troops in Afghanistan was not welcomed. Early on 3 March 2011, facing Petraeus’ interpretation that the withdrawal would start from the end of 2014, Obama restated his focus on beginning the withdrawal from July 2011 and completing it by the end of 2014. He clearly rejected any possibility to delay his plan: ‘We will think through the glidepath [of troop drawdowns], but I will push back very hard if anyone proposes moving the drawdowns to the right [delaying them]. I prefer to move to the left [accelerating them]. I don’t want any recommendations trying to finesse the orders I laid out’ (Gates, 2014, pp. 556–557).

When Petraeus presented him with options for a smaller number of troops to be withdrawn and argued for a longer stay for the campaign plan, Obama showed limited interest to discuss it. None of Petraeus’ options was discussed
nor its feasibility (Chandrasekaran, 2012). Furthermore, Obama questioned his confidence in the three-month longer presence and the necessity for two full fighting seasons before the beginning of the drawdown (Sanger, 2013; Gates, 2014). This created the impression that the president was ‘pushing’ Petraeus (Sanger, 2013). Although military leaders accepted the final decision, they all commented that it was more ‘aggressive’ than the relatively more modest plan they recommended, complaining that the president ignored their advice (Hoft, 2011; Malcolm, 2011; SBS News, 2011).

Different from 2011, the decision made relating to the exit plan in 2014 seemed to have satisfied more sides. In 2014, Obama only wanted to leave a few thousand troops in Afghanistan. Despite his warning of a full withdrawal, General Joseph Dunford presented options to Obama during the spring of 2014 based on the necessity to maintain counterterrorism missions. These options included reducing troop numbers to zero and the general’s recommendation to keep 8,000 to 12,000 in Afghanistan. Meanwhile, Dunford suggested a new strategic concept, only focusing on counterterrorism with a small military force with no notion of a stabilisation project, which was consistent with what Obama wanted. Finally, Obama recognised the necessity to prevent the Afghan government from falling and accepted the essential principles of the recommendation, deciding to leave 9,800 troops through 2015 and drawing down to 5,500 in 2016 (Malkasian, 2021). This exit plan was largely consistent with the request from the military and also consistent with what NATO and other international allies wanted (DeYoung, 2014).

Comparing his decision-making in 2009, 2011 and 2014, Obama’s reluctance to discuss dissenting opinions in 2011 is not what is expected relating to his high conceptual complexity. This is also inconsistent with Preston’s (2001; 2012) argument that an inexperienced and high conceptual complexity leader would be open to hearing divergent voices. Meanwhile, although, in 2011, Obama may still be inexperienced in the foreign policy domain compared to his experienced advisors, he was more experienced in foreign policy than he was in 2009. Therefore, Obama’s rejection of the military’s opinions in 2011 does not fit well with Saunders’ (2017) expectations.
that experienced leaders are more likely to demonstrate an open leadership style but inexperienced leaders are more likely to marginalise divergent voices from their experienced advisors. However, Obama’s openness and flexibility in shifting his withdrawal option fits with Saunders’ and Preston’s (2012) findings and the expectation relating to his high conceptual complexity or increased experience.

Indeed, in 2011, Obama showed a more closed leadership style to disregard some opinions from the military. As discussed in Chapter III, some other reasons may influence the effect of an inexperienced/experienced leader’s conceptual complexity and his tolerance of dissenting voices from experienced advisors: task focus, power delegation and the capacity of his agents, and public opinion. In this case, Obama has a high task focus. He is expected to be open to divergent voices to adopt a better option for leaving Afghanistan. However, after he had made up his mind to gradually leave Afghanistan from the date set in 2009, it is likely that he was less happy to hear divergent voices that would either delay his troop withdrawal decision or expand US military operations in Afghanistan. In this way, it is understandable that Obama was unwilling to discuss the opinions and options that were intended to keep a larger or longer US military presence in Afghanistan.

As for the other two reasons, as discussed in the previous chapter, when the president delegates policy formulation and implementation processes to his subordinates, whether his subordinates present diverse opinions to him is important for his openness to listen to divergent voices. The role of the NSA is also important in NSC meetings and for the president. The NSA’s duty relates to coordination and providing the president with various opinions. In this case, Tom Donilon, although favouring counterterrorism operations and supporting Obama’s option, fulfilled his responsibility to arrange a private session for Gates and Obama to allow the former to present his option and discuss his disagreement with Biden. Gates suggested the withdrawal of 5,000 troops in 2011, having first put forward the idea of withdrawing the remaining troops in September 2012 (Gates, 2014). The date of September 2012 for the second round of surge troop withdrawal was part of the final decision. Furthermore,
Petraeus was not forbidden to express his opinions to the president. It was the president who turned down Petraeus’ opinions. Therefore, Donilon was effective in presenting Obama with the various opinions, and the capacity of the NSA does not account for Obama’s intolerance of dissenting voices.

Finally, the political context was totally different from that in 2009. Unlike in early 2009, there was no urgency for any decision. Meanwhile, support from Congress and the US public for troop withdrawal did not cause any difficulty for Obama to move on with his plan. Journalists and certain studies (Allin, 2011; Cordesman, 2021; Malkasian, 2021; Whitlock, 2021) commented that the death of bin Laden symbolised a turning point in the Afghanistan war, making it easier for a withdrawal. In addition, as discussed in the previous section on Obama’s surge decision, Waldman (2013) noticed that Obama recognised the declining US public support for military presence in Afghanistan and the president estimated that he had two-year-long support for the continuation of this war, linking this estimation to his pre-announcement of the troop withdrawal plan.

Sharifullah (2019, pp. 181–183) linked this success to more complex bureaucratic, domestic and personal factors. He argued that, with the success of the bin Laden raid, Obama was no longer seen as an ‘indecisive’ and ‘back seat’ leader, but was now a ‘national political leader’ (Zeleny and Rutenberg, 2011, paras. 4, 14; Sharifullah, 2019, p. 181). Unlike in 2009, Obama was more experienced, with a greater understanding of Afghanistan, while some of Petraeus’ supporters had not been there in 2011, and public opinion showed more support for leaving Afghanistan. Meanwhile, Petraeus’ influence was weakened by his flawed assumptions about Afghanistan and he was removed to lead the CIA in late 2011. In addition, the NSA and Defense Secretary Gate’s successor, Panetta, all favoured counterterrorism operations. Therefore, Petraeus did not enjoy the bureaucratic advantages he had in 2009. In 2011, domestic concerns about war costs and worldwide terrorist threats (threats in Afghanistan decreased after bin Laden’s death) also pushed Obama to a more aggressive position relating to leaving Afghanistan. Finally, Obama’s personal preference for diplomacy and multilateral cooperation and his narrowed focus
on Afghanistan is consistent with his drawdown decision (Sanger, Schmitt and Shanker, 2011; Chandrasekaran, 2012; Mann, 2012; Sharifullah, 2019).

Some of Sharifullah’s analysis was consistent with Obama’s LTA traits and the contextual factors discussed in this and other subsections. These include decreased public support and increased opposition to the war, Obama’s willingness towards multilateral cooperation and diplomatic solutions (belief in his ability to control events and in-group bias), decreased threats in Afghanistan (distrust of others) and his narrowed goals relating to Afghanistan (in-group bias). Factors relating to bureaucratic and personal influence are not covered by Obama’s LTA traits and describe a more complex political context in which Obama was more influential and did not have to listen to military advice.

Compared to the time spent on making his second surge decision and the decision on the raid, Obama made a relatively quick decision relating to the withdrawal plan and demonstrated a less considerable and comprehensive thinking style. Although he started the strategy review in January 2011, only three decisive meetings were held in June relating to troop numbers and the pace of withdrawal; fewer than the ten meetings in 2009 and the five meetings about the bin Laden raid. As mentioned, Obama’s withdrawal plan involved concerns about: troop numbers and the pace of withdrawal; US post-2014 commissions in Afghanistan and political resolution; and reconciliation with the Taliban (Gates, 2014). However, Kolenda (2019) commented that this review and meetings did not discuss the effectiveness of the overall plan. He interviewed officials in NSC meetings and found that by 2011, there were fewer and fewer meetings relating to Afghanistan. On the other hand, other major international and domestic events were attracting more NSC attention, leaving limited time to discuss the modification of the transition timeline or seek reconciliation. Similarly, Cohn (2016) criticised this withdrawal plan as premature, leaving more opportunities for the Taliban resurgence.

Between 2014 and 2016, the situation in Afghanistan worsened with increasing attacks from some Taliban groups (BBC News, 2019). In November
2014, Obama extended the missions of US troops in Afghanistan, ordering them to assist in the combat mission of the Afghan troops (Mazzetti and Schmitt, 2014). As a response to Afghan President Ashraf Ghani’s request and after consulting expert advisors, in March 2015, Obama decided to keep 9,800 US troops until the end of 2015 (Obama, 2015a; Culter, 2017b; Katzman and Thomas, 2017). As expected, two more detailed instances were found to support Obama’s flexibility in adjusting his foreign policy relating to the dynamic situation in Afghanistan. In October 2015, Obama announced that 5,500 US troops would remain in Afghanistan beyond 2016 (Obama, 2015b). This adjustment considered several factors: the Taliban resurgence and the upsurge of Al-Qaeda and ISIS in Afghanistan (Stapleton, 2016; Culter, 2017a; Whitlock, 2021); the request from military leaders (Culter, 2017a; Sharifullah, 2019); and the request from Afghan President Ashraf Ghani (Obama, 2015b; Martinez, 2015). General John Campbell even presented options, including keeping 8,000 troops or resending 15,000 troops (Burns and Baldor, 2015; Culter, 2017a; Malkasian, 2021). After seeking opinions from military and civilian advisors as well as opinions from NATO allies, Obama decided to keep 5,500 troops until 2017 (Culter, 2017a; 2017b).

Similarly, in 2016, General John Nicholson, in connection with the worsening situation in Afghanistan, asked for permission for more air strikes and proactive actions and received authorisation (Stewart, 2016; Carter, 2019). Furthermore, several military leaders asked for more than 5,500 troops to remain in Afghanistan after 2016. With this request from the Pentagon and his recognition of increasing terrorist threats, finally, Obama announced that 8,400 troops would remain after 2016 (Carter, 2019). Sharifullah (2019) summarised that Obama’s flexible policy adjustments were due to his realisation of his false assumption and new military advice. Malkasian (2021) ascribed Obama’s policy adjustments to terrorism threats and the flexibility he remained in the withdrawal plans for him to adjust policies. These factors all indicate Obama’s flexible thinking style, which is consistent with the expectation of his high conceptual complexity. However, Malkasian also concluded that it was the terrorism threats that entrapped Obama from totally withdrawing from
Afghanistan. This finding is consistent with the expectations discussed in the subsection on distrust of others.

The findings in this case and the case of surge decisions indicate that Obama’s openness to divergent voices is dependent on his conceptual complexity. However, high task focus could influence the effect of conceptual complexity on tolerance of divergent voices. It remains unclear whether inexperience or experience in the specific policy domain and public opinion could influence Obama’s responses to dissenting opinions or not. If taking the divergent opinions as a constraint, then Obama’s responses to divergent voices may also be influenced by his belief in his ability to control events and his need for power. Therefore, it is necessary to pay attention to the interaction between leaders’ personality traits and the complex political context.

Task Focus

With a consistently high task focus, Obama is expected to be goal-oriented. A focus on task achievement indicates a focus on seeking solutions rather than group maintenance in his decision-making process. And once a decision was made, it is expected that Obama would push his followers to implement that decision.

Obama insisted on the withdrawal date announced in 2009. Military leaders and the Secretary of State Clinton did not view July 2011 as ‘set in stone’ and the military leaders thought that they could ‘soften’ the president (GPO, 2009; Kaplan, 2013). Even during the spring of 2011, military leaders still did not believe that the president would quickly withdraw all of the surge troops and tried to delay the withdrawal plan but the president never changed his mind (Sanger, 2013; Fitzgerald and Ryan, 2014; Perry, 2017). Soon after the 2009 surge decision, an official worried that, although the Pentagon had agreed with the withdrawal date, they would not adhere to it. The president replied ‘I’m not going to give them more time’ (Sanger, 2013, p. 53). During NSC meetings about troop numbers and the pace of the withdrawal, Petraeus
argued that a quick withdrawal would invalidate his campaign plan and Obama replied: ‘you shouldn’t have assumed I wouldn’t do what I told the American people I would’ (Chandrasekaran, 2012, p. 215). This reply is consistent with the expectation above.

As reviewed in the subsection on his high conceptual complexity, Obama was closed to any opinion that wanted to delay his withdrawal plan or expand the US mission in Afghanistan. Instead, he focused on moving forward and asked for an appropriate withdrawal plan rather than any divergent voices to slow down the withdrawal pace. During the decision-making process, he cared less about the feelings of the military leaders. His distrust of the military leaders and insistence on leaving Afghanistan annoyed his Defense Secretary Robert Gates (2014, p. 557, original emphasis): ‘The president doesn’t trust his commander, can’t stand Karzai, doesn’t believe in his own strategy, and doesn’t consider the war to be his. For him, it’s all about getting out’. All these fit the expectation of a goal-oriented leader.

In-Group Bias and Distrust of Others

As discussed in Chapter V, with the scores on his in-group bias being high in 2011 and 2015, low in 2012, 2013 and 2014 and moderate in 2016, Obama is expected to demonstrate a strong commitment to his group in the years 2011 and 2015. In other years, he is expected to demonstrate more willingness for multilateral cooperation.

Comparing his speeches about US strategy in Afghanistan in 2011, 2014, 2015 and 2016, there were more commonalities than differences. Obama consistently linked continued US missions in Afghanistan to US national security (Obama, 2011c; 2014a; 2015a; 2016). This focus may suggest that one of his group identification was: the US. However, this single piece of evidence is not convincing enough. Assuming that his group was the US nation, his statements and his inclination to protect the nation from terrorist attacks
are likely to be consistent with the expectation of his in-group bias (whether high or low).

Meanwhile, he consistently narrowed US responsibility in Afghanistan. In these speeches, Obama promised continued US support for the Afghans but limited the US role to support them. On the other hand, he emphasised international cooperation and the Afghan government itself: ‘Our troops are not engaged in major ground combat against the Taliban. Those missions now belong to Afghans, who are fully responsible for securing their country’ (Obama, 2015b, p. 1308) and ‘we must rally international action’ (Obama, 2011c, p. 693). As he stated, 'we must recapture the common purpose that we shared at the beginning of this time of war. For our Nation draws strength from our differences, and when our Union is strong, no hill is too steep, no horizon is beyond our reach. America, it is time to focus on nation-building here at home’ (Obama, 2011c, p. 693). This may be an instance of his strong commitment to his group.

Linking his unwillingness to extend US engagement in Afghanistan and his focus on nation-building at home to his in-group bias and intention to protect national interests, this implies that the reconstruction and stabilisation of Afghanistan were not top priority for US national interests. This inference is supported by Powaski (2019). He saw Obama as a realist who firmly held the belief that Afghanistan was not a vital US interest and that the US was overburdened with idealistic goals in that region. Therefore, the president ordered a withdrawal.

From another perspective, Cordesman and Lin (2015) analysed US strategic investment in Afghanistan and confirmed that the Afghanistan war was not part of US national security priorities, indicating no necessity for a sustained US military presence. Focusing on economic concerns, Chandrasekaran (2012) confirmed in his interviews with White House officials that the military expenditure in Afghanistan was not cost-effective. Rashid (2012) conducted a review of western countries' economic conditions, finding that the global recession began in 2008 and another one coming in 2011 made
these countries no longer able to afford their military operations in Afghanistan, being consistent with Obama’s insistence that now ‘America, it is time to focus on nation-building here at home’ (Obama, 2011c, p. 693). Rashid extended this concern to Obama’s re-election in 2012, arguing that the president had to reassure the public that he could bring the troops home with some achievements. All of the above suggests that Afghanistan was no longer top priority for Obama.

An important point here is that Obama recognised the stability of Afghanistan as one of the US national interests because it could prevent terrorists from using that state as a safe haven to plot further attacks on US soil. However, he did not think that the stability of Afghanistan was vital or core to US national interests. Therefore, he maintained a military presence in Afghanistan but reduced troop numbers and called for multilateral cooperation instead of committing too many responsibilities. His statements mainly fit with the expectations relating to his in-group bias.

Obama’s scores on distrust of others are high in 2015 and 2016, low in 2011, and moderate in 2014. It is expected that the levels of his perceived threat from Afghanistan in 2011 and 2014 would be lower than those in other years. In addition, whatever levels of threat from Afghanistan were perceived, they would lead to his continuation of US military operations in Afghanistan. Overall, he is expected to show a conflictual orientation except in 2014.

Obama’s speeches from 2011 to 2016 indicated different levels of threat perception. On 22 June 2011, he announced his withdrawal plan. While acknowledging that ‘huge challenges remain. This is the beginning — but not the end — of our effort to wind down this war’, he emphasised the achievements and stated that ‘the tide of war is receding’ and ‘even as there will be dark days ahead in Afghanistan, the light of a secure peace can be seen in the distance’ (Obama, 2011c, pp. 692–693). On 25 May 2014, he announced his exit plan by stating that ‘everybody knows Afghanistan still is a very dangerous place. Insurgents still launch cowardly attacks against innocent civilians. But just look at the progress …’ (Obama, 2014b, p. 598).
His statements indicated two signals: terrorist threats still remained in Afghanistan and the US could not simply leave that region. Therefore, the remaining troops needed to continue their security mission: to train the Afghan army and target Al-Qaida (Obama, 2014b); and the threats were not as high as they were before and more positive progress was being made, which justified his decision to reduce US troop numbers.

In 2015 and 2016, when the security situation in Afghanistan was deteriorating, Obama identified more threats in his speeches. In 2015, he announced the plan to slow down the withdrawal and to maintain 9,800 troops, acknowledging that ‘meanwhile, the Taliban has made gains, particularly in rural areas, and can still launch deadly attacks in cities, including Kabul’ and ‘The bottom line is, in key areas of the country, the security situation is still very fragile, and in some places, there is risk of deterioration’. Therefore, he justified his decision by dealing with the increasing threats: ‘But as your Commander in Chief, I believe this mission is vital to our national security interests in preventing terrorist attacks against our citizens and our Nation’ (Obama, 2015b, pp. 1309–1310). In 2016, he repeated the US narrowing its missions in Afghanistan with more details about the Taliban insurgency: ‘Nevertheless, the security situation in Afghanistan remains precarious. Even as they improve, Afghan security forces are still not as strong as they need to be. …, the Taliban remains a threat. They have gained ground in some cases. They’ve continued attacks and suicide bombings, including in Kabul’ (Obama, 2016, p. 948). Based on these deteriorating conditions, the president justified the adjustment to maintain 8,400 troops in Afghanistan until the end of his presidency by supporting Afghans and targeting terrorists (Obama, 2016).

In all these important speeches about US strategy in Afghanistan, Obama’s vigilance of the security situation in Afghanistan reflected in his statements fit the expectations developed relating to his distrust of others. Obama perceived lower levels of threat from Afghanistan in 2011 and 2014 than he perceived in 2015 and 2016. These different levels of threat perceptions clarified the logic behind his decision to reduce and maintain US troops in Afghanistan. Meanwhile, however high or low his threat perceptions
were, as long as he recognised that there were threats in Afghanistan, he chose to continue US training and counterterrorism missions in Afghanistan because if ‘they [the Afghans] were to fail, it would endanger the security of us all’ (Obama, 2015b, p. 1310).

In short, from 2011 until 2016, fear of terrorist attacks on US soil resulted in the continuation of US counterterrorism mission in Afghanistan. In other words, Obama’s distrust of others and in-group bias led to the continuation of US military operations in Afghanistan. Combining these concerns with his belief in his ability to control events, he continued preventive counterterrorism operations in Afghanistan. Meanwhile, his belief in his ability to control events and in-group bias help understand his idea to leave Afghanistan with a small size military presence there. Finally, his need for power, conceptual complexity, task focus and increased experience in foreign policy help understand his management of the decision-making process regarding his ideal withdrawal and exit plans. In addition, his conceptual complexity and distrust of others help understand his flexibility in adjusting the exit plan in 2015 and 2016.

Conclusion

This chapter analysed some major decisions and policy shifts in Obama's presidency during the Afghanistan war: the two surge decisions and strategy reviews in 2009; the special operation to capture Osama bin Laden in 2011; and troop withdrawal, exit and subsequent delay from 2011 to 2016. Empirical records and secondary analyses were examined with LTA-based expectations about Obama’s war orientation and his management relating to his decision-making. This chapter answers the overall research question: How do Obama’s LTA-based personalities and leadership style help explain the costly endurance of the post-911 war in Afghanistan?

The findings relating to these three cases suggest that Obama’s distrust and in-group bias (although not consistently high) are helpful in understanding his continuation of the Afghanistan war. His distrust of others and in-group bias
combined with his belief in his ability to control events led to his continuation of Bush’s preventive war in Afghanistan, albeit with an openness towards multilateral cooperation with other states and political negotiations with the Taliban. Meanwhile, his belief in his ability to control events, in-group bias, distrust of others and conceptual complexity are helpful in understanding his confidence in carrying out the unilateral operation to capture bin Laden. Other traits help explain his control over the decision-making process, his openness towards deliberation and divergent voices and his categorisation of friends and enemies. There are more detailed accounts of Obama’s leadership style and how he crafted tactical options and narrowed US goals and missions in Afghanistan. There are also some interesting combinations of trait effects (such as belief in his ability to control events and conceptual complexity, conceptual complexity and task focus, and conceptual complexity and distrust of others). Although not all the LTA expectations are examined with sufficient evidence, the majority of the expectations is supported by empirical records, indicating an effective LTA-based explanation for Obama’s inclination towards continuation of the Afghanistan war and how he made his decisions.

Meanwhile, the findings do not fully support Saunders’ (2017) findings that inexperienced leaders tend to marginalise divergent voices from experienced advisors to avoid disagreement, and experienced leaders are more open to divergent voices. In the first subsection, Obama’s openness towards dissenting voices and his direct rejection of the limited options presented by the Pentagon reflected a leadership style different from Saunders’ findings and is consistent with the expectation relating to his high conceptual complexity (also consistent with Preston’s findings). During the third stage, as a relatively more experienced leader in foreign policy compared to 2009, Obama was tolerant of divergent voices to shift his withdrawal option, which is consistent with Saunders’ and Preston’s findings and fits with the expectation relating to his high conceptual complexity. However, he was intolerant of divergent voices aiming to delay his withdrawal plan, which is inconsistent with Saunders’ and Preston’s findings and the LTA expectation. This thesis finds that his high task focus helps understand his unwillingness to discuss the
contrasting opinions and public opinion may have influenced his openness towards divergent voices.

Finally, this chapter provides a personality perspective for understanding Obama’s continuation of the Afghanistan war. His subjective interpretation of the threats in Afghanistan and the focus on protecting US national security are the reasons for this. Because this chapter focuses on Obama’s subjective interpretation of potential threats, it complements existing realist explanations of objective assessments of threats to US national security and the necessity for the continuation of the war (see Cortright, 2011; Connah, 2021; Miller, 2021). Meanwhile, geopolitical analyses referred to the great power competition between the US, Russia, China and other states that share borders with Afghanistan to explain the long-lasting US military presence in Afghanistan with the aim to counterbalance the influence of the others (Prifti, 2017; Rahman, 2019). However, this chapter does not find sufficient evidence from the three case studies to support this argument. Instead, Obama’s inclination towards multilateral cooperation (belief in his ability to control events, conceptual complexity, and in-group bias) in Afghanistan does not reflect his worries about the other great power influence in that region.

Malkasian’s (2021) findings are about terrorism threat and domestic political pressure and concerns and their influence on presidents’ continuation of the Afghanistan war. Findings in this thesis about Obama’s decision relating to the troop surge in 2009 and the delay in his withdrawal plan support Malkasian’s argument relating to terrorism threats. In addition, this case study found evidence of domestic pressures from the military leaders and public opinion, however, as acknowledged by Malkasian, the role of public opinion in this decision-making was unclear. Facing pressure from the military leaders, Obama was willing to challenge the constraints but failed to do so. Even facing terrorist threats, Obama showed different policy orientations and decision-making styles in these three cases, ascribing to his personality traits.

The final concluding chapter starts with a brief review of this thesis. It then makes a comparison of Bush’s and Obama’s personality traits and leadership
styles with references to their empirical decision-making relating to the Afghanistan war. The final sections discuss the findings from this thesis and their contributions, implications and limitations.
A Brief Overview

This thesis began with the puzzle of why the US involvement in the post-9/11 war in Afghanistan endured for so long despite its terrible human and economic costs. In order to resolve this puzzle, this thesis focused on analysing the role of Bush’s and Obama’s personalities in their decision-making relating to the continuation of the Afghanistan war.

This thesis adopted an at-a-distance personality approach named Leadership Trait Analysis (LTA) (Hermann, 2005a). The overall research question of this thesis is: How do the LTA-based personalities and leadership styles of US presidents Bush and Obama help explain the costly endurance of the post-9/11 war in Afghanistan?

The introductory chapter briefly reviewed the background of the Afghanistan war and set up the research question. Chapter II critically discussed existing scholarship on post-9/11 US foreign policy in Afghanistan, with emphases placed on alternative explanations for the endurance of the Afghanistan war despite the escalating costs and the existing personality-related studies on US presidents’ decision-making relating to the war. Chapter III critically discussed the theoretical framework of LTA, focusing on existing findings relating to leaders’ war orientation and their management of the decision-making process. This chapter also discussed the conflict between Saunders’ (2017) and Preston’s (2012) findings on leaders’ tolerance of divergent voices in their decision-making with concerns about leaders’ experience in foreign policy in comparison to their advisors. Following this discussion, the chapter also discussed three groups of factors (presidents’ need for power and inexperience in foreign policy, task focus, and public opinion) that may have influenced the effect of their conceptual complexity on their openness towards divergent voices.
Chapter IV discussed the validity issues relating to LTA, and justified the selection of verbal material for data collection and LTA coding. It also reported on the various verbal records collected across different time periods and topics and the total word count. Furthermore, this chapter justified the selection of documents or other types of material used for the case analyses and explained how this thesis conducted them. Chapter V presented Bush’s and Obama’s trait scores derived from their spontaneous verbal records relating to foreign policy issues. Based on the literature on LTA, this chapter then developed expectations relating to Bush’s and Obama’s behaviours relating to the management of their decision-making processes and their preferred policy orientations. Trait scores derived from various types of verbal material and the examination of trait score stability across different time periods and topics are presented in Appendix 2. In addition, this chapter carried out t-tests to examine the significant differences between Bush’s and Obama’s personalities. Chapter VI and Chapter VII compared the LTA-based expectations with empirical records to examine whether the two presidents’ practical behaviours are consistent with the implications of their personalities. The final chapter first summarises the findings, then answers the research question and further discusses the findings, contribution and implications. The final section discusses the limitations of this research and directions for future research.

Comparison and Discussion

Although both Bush and Obama chose to continue the Afghanistan war, the ways they chose to continue it were different. This thesis found that the differences in their personalities help us understand the differences in how they went about continuing the Afghanistan war.

Like those US presidents who continued the Vietnam war, but in very different ways (see Preston, 2001; 2011; 2012; Johns, 2010), on the surface, Bush and Obama did the same thing, but their different presidential styles mattered along the way. Their choices relating to how to continue the Afghanistan war resulted in different strategies applied to the war and the
different levels of military presence maintained in Afghanistan during different stages of the war, influencing the future security situation there.

As presented in Chapter V, two-tailed t-tests were conducted on each of the seven LTA traits to examine whether the differences in the trait scores for Bush and Obama are significant. The results show that there were significant statistical differences between four of the seven personality traits of the two individual presidents: belief in one’s ability to control events, self-confidence, task focus and distrust of others. No significant differences were found in the scores on their power motivation. Some slight differences were found in their scores on conceptual complexity and in-group bias. Relating these trait differences to how Bush and Obama framed their decision-making regarding their continuation of the Afghanistan war helps explain the changes in continuity in Bush’s and Obama’s strategies in Afghanistan, demonstrating their different ways of continuing this war.

Bush’s scores on his distrust of others are consistently higher than Obama’s. This does not mean that Obama ignored the threats from terrorists hiding in Afghanistan or those terrorists who were trying to return there. In Obama’s speeches, he consistently used prevention of terrorist attacks on the US as justification for his continuation of the war. Studies (Reardon, 2012; Stern, 2015; Roberts, 2016; Lynch, 2019) compared Bush’s and Obama’s counterterrorism strategies and found that Bush and Obama shared the core interest of defeating Al-Qaida in Afghanistan. Dueck (2015), based on Goldsmith’s (2012) work, ascribed part of this shared threat perception to the fact that Obama shared the same daily threat reports with Bush. Therefore, the two presidents acknowledged the terrorism threat in Afghanistan and aimed to prevent that state from becoming a safe haven for terrorists again. In this way, distrust of others is the core personality trait that is linked to US continuance of the Afghanistan war. Meanwhile, Obama’s distrust of others in 2011 (leaning towards low) and in 2014 (moderate), indicated relatively lower threat perceptions, which are consistent with his willingness to leave Afghanistan.
Obama’s belief in his ability to control events is consistently higher than Bush’s. A high belief in one’s ability to control events is expected to be linked to unilateral orientation. However, Bush favoured a unilateral approach (during his first term) but Obama consistently favoured a cooperative approach (except for when carrying out the special operation of capturing bin Laden) (Smith, 2012). This difference may be explained by their conceptual complexity and in-group bias. Meanwhile, both Bush and Obama advocated a preventive war in Afghanistan, which McQuaid et al. (2019) and Roberts (2016) characterised as continuity in their counterterrorism strategy. A higher belief in one’s ability to control events also related to Obama’s optimism and risky orientation regarding the operation to capture bin Laden.

Obama’s self-confidence is consistently higher than Bush’s. However, this trait was combined with conceptual complexity to understand leaders’ openness to information. Therefore, there are no findings about the differences in Bush’s and Obama’s decision-making based on their self-confidence.

Obama’s task focus is consistently high compared to the average score of the norming group, and higher than Bush’s. This indicates that Obama was consistently goal-oriented during his decision-making on the Afghanistan war. Bush’s task focus during the initial aftermath of the 9/11 attacks is low, indicating that he was more focused on group relationships during this decision-making. These differences are evident in their decision-making processes and are discussed in previous case studies.

Obama’s conceptual complexity is consistently high, and higher than Bush’s during their first terms in office. This helps explain differences in their decision-making from two perspectives. First, Obama demonstrated a more cautious and pragmatic view in policy-making (Smith, 2012; Moens, 2013; Badie, 2019). Compared to Bush, Obama was more open to multilateral cooperation and more careful about audience costs and risk aversion (Moens, 2013; Brownstein, 2014; Kolenda, 2021). In Afghanistan, these differences helped explain Obama’s avoidance of using binary words ‘good and evil’, his unwillingness to commit too much to the Afghans, his disbelief that the US
could win the war, his call for international cooperation and his flexible adjustment of the withdrawal policy. In addition, Bush’s administration treated the Taliban and Al Qaida as one and refused to negotiate with the Taliban (Kolenda, 2021), while Obama saw more nuances about the Taliban regime and was willing to negotiate with some of them.

Second, Obama’s higher conceptual complexity helps explain his stronger focus on details. Rice (2019) described Obama as a detail-oriented commander-in-chief, and Moens (2013) found that Obama cared more about the differences between options than Bush did. In their decision-making relating to Afghanistan, Obama had more debates on the content of different options than Bush. His high conceptual complexity reflected a relatively deliberative decision-making process. Meanwhile, Bush’s conceptual complexity is at an average level during his first term in office. Bush showed qualities of high conceptual complexity (deliberativeness) in his decision-making relating to the targets of the first round of the war on terror and policy reviews during his final years in office. In other decision-making, he showed qualities of low conceptual complexity (lack of deliberativeness and enough discussion). In addition, they were both similarly reflective of their strategy at the end of their second terms with high conceptual complexity.

Obama’s in-group bias is relatively higher than Bush’s. However, during their first year in office, Bush’s in-group bias (moderate) is higher than Obama’s (low). This difference, along with their conceptual complexity, helps us understand their different attitudes towards the Taliban. Bush made no difference between the Taliban and Al-Qaida, while Obama treated Al-Qaida terrorists as enemies but was willing to negotiate with the Taliban. Meanwhile, Bush’s relatively low in-group bias from 2002 to 2007 may help understand his trust in his personal relationship with Pakistani President Musharraf.

For Bush and Obama, whether their scores on the in-group bias were high or low, they placed national security as the core concern in foreign policy and used this to justify their military strategies in Afghanistan. Meanwhile, Obama did not think that Afghanistan was a top priority of US national security
interest, and therefore committed limited responsibility to the Afghans and wanted to withdraw from the region. During the Afghanistan war, this concern about national security is consistent with Bush’s and Obama’s vigilance of threats from Afghanistan. Therefore, their personality trait – in-group bias – is helpful in understanding their continuation of the Afghanistan war based on their distrust of others.

In the five cases analysed, four of them identified divisions between the presidents and their subordinates. As analysed in Chapter VI, with regard to Bush’s initial war decision, his goal to target Iraq together with Afghanistan was opposite to that of other experienced advisors such as Powell, Tenet, Rice and Cheney. In his subsequent decision-making on US military presence in Afghanistan, the inexperienced president preferred to keep a small number of US troops there. He, either intentionally or unintentionally, marginalised the opposing opinions from Powell and the State Department, without personally engaging in full debate on whether or not to deploy more military resource in Afghanistan. In these two cases, his performance in the first case fits with that of an open-minded leader (high conceptual complexity) who is tolerant of divergent voices. In the second case, he behaved more like a close-minded leader (low conceptual complexity) who discards divergent voices.

Only Bush’s performance in the second case fits Saunders’ (2017) findings that inexperienced leaders are more likely to marginalise divergent voices from their experienced advisors. With regard to Preston’s (2012) findings about leaders’ conceptual complexity and their openness to divergent opinions, Bush’s conceptual complexity is at an average level compared to other post-World War II US presidents. However, as mentioned above, his performance in these two cases demonstrated qualities of high and low conceptual complexity. His behaviours and decision-making styles are all consistent with Preston’s findings. Meanwhile, as discussed in Chapter VI, in his decision-making relating to the target of the war, Bush’s low task focus was related to his personal involvement in his decision-making. This group orientation enabled him to hear divergent opinions from experienced advisors.
In addition, the political context, different from the day of the attacks, left him with enough time to carefully think about these options.

In the second case, Bush had no personal interest in discussing alternatives. Furthermore, there is no record that his National Security Advisor (NSA) Rice reported Powell’s and the State Department’s opinions to him. Meanwhile, the president empowered Rumsfeld, and the then Defense Secretary rejected suggestions from the State Department. Rice was unable to counteract him and left Rumsfeld to force an internal agreement. In addition, Rice did not favour a larger US military role in Afghanistan. Therefore, in the second case, Bush’s lack of interest in discussing divergent opinions and his trusted subordinates’ ineffectiveness to present him with various opinions resulted in his marginalisation of divergent opinions. This result was rooted in his low conceptual complexity, power delegation to subordinates (high need for power but inexperience) and reliance on expert advisors due to his inexperience in foreign policy.

In Obama’s case, divisions existed between the president and the Pentagon. In his surge decisions, the president wanted a smaller number of surge troops with a clear exit strategy while the Pentagon wanted more troops with no exit plan. There followed a lengthy debate to discuss and adjust all the options. In the decision-making process relating to the special operation to capture bin Laden, there was no clear division between Obama and others. In his withdrawal plans, Obama firmly rejected any advice to either delay his withdrawal date or expand US goals in the Afghanistan war, but he welcomed suggestions to challenge his own withdrawal option. His final decision on the withdrawal plan was based on his option and others’ advice.

Obama’s openness to divergent advice on his withdrawal option fits Saunders’ (2017) findings about experienced leaders’ openness to divergent opinions from their experienced advisors. But his firm rejection of the military’s attempt to delay the withdrawal and, earlier in 2009, his openness to the military’s advice, are not consistent with Saunders’ findings. Meanwhile, Obama is expected to show tolerance of dissenting voices based on his
consistently high conceptual complexity. He was closed to the military’s advice regarding delaying the withdrawal plan and this may be explained by his high task focus in that he wanted to focus on seeking a withdrawal option but have no more discussion about delaying the withdrawal. His high task focus in 2009 may also help explain his tolerance of divergent voices and debate for a better military strategy. Furthermore, the political context in 2011 was very different from that in 2009. In 2009, Obama faced great pressure from military leaders, and public opinion also supported increasing the number of US troops in Afghanistan, forcing him to hear the military leaders’ plans. However, in 2011, Obama was more experienced and influential while General Petraeus (the commander in Afghanistan) was less influential. There was neither Congressional nor domestic opposition to Obama’s withdrawal plan. All this led to a stronger president, who did not have to be forced to hear military leaders’ advice.

In short, the findings in this thesis suggest that personalities (one’s need for power, and especially conceptual complexity and task focus) and leaders’ experiences in foreign policy provide a more thorough understanding of their openness towards divergent voices from their experienced advisors. This does not mean that Saunders’ (2017) findings are not credible because some of the case studies in this thesis support her findings. However, there are more personality-based reasons behind the presidents’ tolerance of divergent voices and the mismatch of experience in foreign policy between the presidents and their advisors. Meanwhile, the effectiveness of powerful subordinates can also play an important role in influencing leaders’ information collection and further influence one’s tolerance of divergent voices in decision-making. In addition, public opinion may have an additional influence on leaders’ openness to divergent voices.

Despite Bush’s and Obama’s tolerance of divergent voices, findings in this thesis also suggest that interactions between personality traits are also important in order to understand the presidents’ decision-making relating to Afghanistan. For example, Obama’s risky orientation in carrying out the special operation to capture bin Laden was based on his high confidence in US
capacity (belief in his ability to control events). However, this confidence was due to his careful observation of the US SEAL team’s practice (conceptual complexity). All of this suggests that more attention should be paid to individual personalities and the interactions between personality traits and the complex political context in order to understand leaders’ foreign policy decision-making in different situations.

**Answers to the Research Question**

As outlined in the introductory chapter, the overall research question of this thesis is: How do the LTA-based personalities and leadership styles of US presidents Bush and Obama help explain the costly endurance of the post-911 war in Afghanistan? Based on the findings from this thesis, the answers to this research question are divided into two parts. The first part relates to Bush’s and Obama’s war orientation. Bush’s and Obama’s inclinations towards the continuation of the Afghanistan war are consistent with the expectations developed on their distrust of others. Bush has a consistently high distrust of others. From 2001 to 2008, he consistently expressed his vigilance of the threat from Afghanistan, kept perceiving the Al-Qaida remnants and the Taliban insurgents in Afghanistan as preparing harmful attacks on the US homeland and justified his continuation of the war by protecting the nation from further attacks. His war orientation is therefore consistent with expectations based on his consistently high distrust of others.

Obama’s scores on his distrust of others are at the moderate level in 2009, from 10 September 2010 to 1 May 2011 and in 2014. Meanwhile, he scores low on this trait from 20 January 2011 to 22 June 2011. Finally, he scores high on this trait in 2015 and 2016. In 2009 and from 10 September 2010 to 1 May 2011, although his scores on this trait are at the moderate level, his statements expressed high vigilance of threats from Afghanistan and Osama bin Laden. His high vigilance was consistent with his war orientation. From 20 January 2011 to 22 June 2011 and in 2014, he demonstrated a lower level of vigilance of the threat from Afghanistan. During these two periods, he acknowledged
that threats still existed in Afghanistan but also emphasised signs of progress made. Therefore, during these two periods, he declared his withdrawal plan. Meanwhile, he still ordered the remaining US troops in Afghanistan to continue their military operations. His decisions relating to withdrawing US troops from Afghanistan but continuing military operations in that region are consistent with the expectations based on his lower distrust of others. On the one hand, threats still existed, which led him to continue the military operation to eliminate these threats. On the other hand, these threats were no longer high, so he could gradually reduce US troops there. Finally, in 2015 and 2016, facing increasing Taliban attacks, Obama delayed the pace of withdrawal and continued military operations in Afghanistan, which are consistent with the expectations based on his high distrust of others.

Overall, Bush’s and Obama’s decisions relating to continuing US military operations in Afghanistan with different scales of military troops are consistent with the expectations based on their different levels of distrust of others. In addition, their in-group bias also helps explain their continuation of US military operations there. This willingness to protect their own groups (in this thesis, it was likely to be the US nation) was based on the perceived threat from Afghanistan. Therefore, Bush’s and Obama’s distrust of others (combined with their in-group bias) are helpful in understanding the Afghanistan war persistence.

The second part of the answer relates to how Bush and Obama managed their decision-making process and shaped the final policy outcome. In each of their decision-making processes, their styles are mainly consistent with the expectations developed based on their LTA trait scores. Therefore, the LTA approach is helpful in understanding how Bush and Obama managed their decision-making processes and shaped policy outcomes. These expectations include their responses to contextual challenges, proactive and interventionist policy orientation, unilateral and risk-taking orientation, control over and involvement in the decision-making process, openness to information, tolerance of divergent voices, willingness to cooperate with like-minded others.
and their focus on group relationships or achieving tasks. Details are presented in Chapter VI and Chapter VII.

**Findings, Contributions and Implications**

The importance of the findings and contributions of this thesis lies in its implication for policy analysis, theory development and practical content analysis.

First, the findings suggest that one LTA personality characteristic – distrust of others – is helpful in understanding the two presidents’ inclination towards continuation of the Afghanistan war. Bush’s and Obama’s willingness to continue this war is consistent with the expectations developed based on the scores of their distrust of others. For Obama, when he focused on withdrawing US military troops from Afghanistan, his scores on distrust of others are at the low level, indicating the relatively low threat he perceived from Afghanistan at that time. In addition, another LTA personality characteristic – in-group bias – also helps explain Bush’s and Obama’s war orientations based on their intentions to protect US national security against the perceived threat from Afghanistan. Their subjective assessments of the threat from Afghanistan correlated with their distrust of others. Therefore, Bush’s and Obama’s in-group bias may be combined with their distrust of others to help explain their war orientations.

This finding enriches the existing scholarship on Afghanistan war persistence by providing an individual-level, personality-based perspective to analyse and improve understanding of the two presidents’ continuation of the Afghanistan war through their subjective assessments of the situation there and potential threats to US national security.

In addition to this personality-based understanding of leaders’ determination to continue the Afghanistan war, Bush’s and Obama’s statements and personality-related perceptions of the threat from Afghanistan conform with current arguments based on the necessity to protect national
security by filling in the gap between objective assessment of the low-threat situation in Afghanistan (for example, Cortright, 2011) and the practical continuation of US military operations in Afghanistan with escalating human, political and economic costs. While objective assessments suggested that it was less necessary to stay in Afghanistan, the two presidents’ subjective interpretation of the situation there argued for the necessity to continue military operations and outweighed the objective assessments. Meanwhile, distrust of others is related to a conflictual orientation, which may add to current arguments based on US geopolitical counterbalance with other great powers by adding personal motivation for using military force rather than diplomatic or economic. However, their low in-group bias or willingness for cooperation indicates a lesser view of geopolitical power competition with emerging powers. Further studies could examine whether Bush and Obama demonstrated continued high vigilance of other countries relating to this geopolitical competition so that they maintained a US military presence in Afghanistan.

This finding has an implication for future studies on war and conflict. Compared to those macro-level studies that focus on institutions and government or realist studies (for example, Mearsheimer, 2001a) that focus on power struggles at a state level, this finding provides a micro-level perspective based on individual psychology and their interaction with contextual information. Recognising that leaders’ choices matter in wars, conflicts and rivalries, this subjective interpretation of presidents’ personal war orientation provides a different understanding of these wars, conflicts and rivalries to studies in the international relations arena. The findings in this thesis help in understanding or even predicting powerful leaders’ inclination to wage or continue a war, thereby providing a different answer to questions such as why wars occur, why conflicts happen and why they are long-lasting.

Second, as reviewed in Chapter III, distrust of others is widely studied and correlated to war. This finding of the causal relationship between distrust of war and war orientation and continuation supports existing scholarship and contributes to this expanding finding that, in all of the seven LTA traits, distrust of others seems to be a particularly important characteristic relating to war (for
example, Schafer and Crichlow, 2010; Foster and Keller, 2014). LTA usually focuses on the causal relationship between personality traits and single decision-making processes and outcomes. This finding contributes to the broader literature by focusing on a set of decisions made across 16 years, indicating the consistent influence of a single personality trait on overall policy orientation and war continuation.

These findings have an implication for theory development. Future studies and research could do more in this direction, not only identifying the correlation between distrust of others and war orientation but also examining the correlation between distrust of others and war continuation, extending the literature on leadership styles and personality effects. Furthermore, studies could apply these findings and the LTA approach to other cases relating to the use of military force (not just war and conflict) to understand more about leaders’ decision-making and policy orientations. Studies on policies (such as defence policy and security policy) might also contribute to existing scholarship on why leaders continue with the same policy even when things go wrong or when the decision-makers have alternatives.

Third, as discussed in Chapter VI and Chapter VII, this thesis found that Bush’s openness to divergent voices was influenced by his conceptual complexity, task focus and the diversity of opinions presented by empowered subordinates (related to his power delegation because of his inexperience in foreign policy decision-making). Even though Obama has a consistently high conceptual complexity, his openness to divergent voices was influenced by his high task focus. In addition, for the other two factors (need for power and public opinion) discussed in Chapter III, case studies did not find enough evidence to identify if they influenced the two presidents’ openness to divergent voices.

This finding indicates more support for Preston’s (2012) findings that leaders’ tolerance of divergent voices is related to their conceptual complexity and their openness to the advisory group is not directly influenced by their experience in foreign policy. However, these findings do not undermine the value of Saunders’ (2017) findings that inexperienced leaders are more likely
to isolate divergent voices from experienced advisors. This thesis found that leaders’ openness to divergent voices in decision-making is based more on their conceptual complexity and can be influenced by their task focus. In addition, this thesis found that leaders’ inexperience could indirectly influence their openness to divergent voices. These leaders delegate policy formulation and implementation processes to subordinates and rely on expert advisors. With limited personal involvement in decision-making, whether they can hear diverse opinions relies on how their subordinates work.

This finding contributes to existing LTA scholarship by revealing some interesting interactions between LTA traits (conceptual complexity, task focus) and between a personality trait (conceptual complexity) and a personal factor (inexperience). The finding reveals that personality impact on one’s openness to divergent voices can be mediated by other factors, suggesting complexities of personalities and political context in which decision-makers have to make decisions. This finding also emphasises the unique role played by each decision-maker in their decision-making and the necessity of analysing individual personality patterns and experiences to improve understanding of the nuances and significant differences in each decision-making case.

This finding has an implication for future research on leaders’ tolerance of divergent voices. LTA studies need to pay attention to the interaction between one’s conceptual complexity and other personality, personal or contextual factors to better describe the effect of conceptual complexity on information collection during the decision-making process. Studies may also examine other contextual or personality factors that can influence the impact of specific LTA traits on leaders’ decision-making.

In addition to these main findings, contributions, and implications, there are three other interesting findings that come from the case studies, providing implications for future LTA studies. First, in Chapter V, this thesis found significant differences in trait scores derived from different types (spontaneous and scripted) of verbal material. As discussed in Chapter IV, there is ongoing debate about using scripted or spontaneous material for content analysis. The
majority of LTA studies used spontaneous material and this thesis used spontaneous material for content analysis. The results in Chapter VI and Chapter VII support the validity of using spontaneous material. Most of the trait scores derived from various types of verbal materials reveal stability across time.

Meanwhile, there are some differences in scores derived from verbal material relating to different topics (general foreign policy and the specific Afghanistan topic). However, the amount of collected verbal material relating to the Afghanistan topic is less than ideal. Therefore, whether the differences in trait scores derived from material relating to different topics are related to the total word count of the verbal records analysed remains unclear.

Nonetheless, these results, at least the trait scores derived from foreign policy-related material, add empirical support to trait stability in LTA studies and suggest using spontaneous material for LTA analysis, supporting a more nuanced data collection approach.

Second, most of the personality-based expectations were examined in the two case studies and were confirmed with empirical evidence, reaffirming the effectiveness of applying LTA studies to foreign policy analysis and reiterating the importance of personality and personal influence on state-level actions.

Third, the case studies found some interesting combinations of LTA traits that help better understand Bush’s and Obama’s policies and decision-making (for example, belief in his ability to control events and his distrust of others help explain Bush’s pre-emption doctrine). These may suggest further examination of various trait combinations and their effects during decision-making across different political contexts.

Limitations and Future Research Directions

As mentioned at the beginning of this thesis, this research conducted only a preliminary examination of the link between individual personalities and the
persistence of the Afghanistan war and a preliminary examination of personality-related or contextual-related factors that could have an influence on the effect of one’s conceptual complexity on their tolerance of divergent voices in decision-making. This thesis has clear limitations, and further research could be conducted to provide additional insight into the causal relationships between individual personalities and their continuation of the war. This section discusses four limitations of the thesis and future research directions. These are related to the research scope, theory and findings.

The first limitation relates to the research scope of this thesis. With finite time and resources, this thesis only focused on the protracted US-Afghanistan war during Bush’s and Obama’s presidencies. The Afghanistan war is an example of a protracted war. However, it is just a single case. The two case studies analysed five major decisions and two subsequent policy changes relating to the Afghanistan war. Therefore, the generalisability of these findings (especially the causal relationship between distrust of others and war continuation) beyond Bush’s and Obama’s decision-making in the Afghanistan case needs to be examined using broader research with more cases inside/outside the US and in different political contexts.

For example, one may notice that the Iraq war shared some similarities with the Afghanistan war. These two long wars were two important parts of the US war on terror and they were conducted by Bush and Obama. One may argue that the Iraq war diverted resources from the Afghanistan war. Following this argument, further studies on the decision-making relating to the Iraq war could contribute to existing LTA scholarship on this case (Preston, 2011; Dyson, 2014) and demonstrate more details about decision-makers’ beliefs and perceptions about the Afghanistan war. More importantly, analysing the Iraq war from the personality perspective could enrich our knowledge of Bush’s and Obama’s doctrines, examining the generalisability of findings in this thesis and improving our understanding of broader US policies relating to the war on terror. In addition to analysing war cases, as discussed in the section on implications, these findings and the LTA approach can be applied to broader
and other cases and contexts relating to the use of military force to contribute to the literature on international relations and LTA.

The second limitation concerns the definition of leaders’ experience in foreign policy. One finding of this thesis seeks to address the conflict between Saunders’ (2017) and Preston’s (2012) findings about inexperienced leaders’ tolerance of divergent voices from their experienced advisors. However, as discussed in Chapter III, assessments of experience in foreign policy are slightly different in these two studies. Preston’s assessment of leaders’ experience in foreign policy focuses on their expertise, previous jobs and experience. Saunders not only mentioned expertise but also knowledge, and focused on the experience balance between leaders and their advisors. Leaders such as Bush and Obama were all novices in foreign policy when they were elected. Their first-year management of decision-making processes can be used to address the conflict between Saunders’ (2017) and Preston’s (2012) findings. However, with their learning in office, it would become unclear as to at what time did they become experienced and whether there is any difference in Saunders’ (2017) and Preston’s (2012) assessments of whether these leaders are experienced or not, especially compared to their experienced advisors. Therefore, this research only conducted a preliminary comparison of findings from these two studies and did not engage deeper with issues such as the assessment of leaders’ experience in foreign policy.

Future research could look into the similarities and differences between Saunders’ (2017) and Preston’s (2012) assessments of leaders’ experience with reference to their prior foreign policy experience and the relative experience balance between leaders and their advisers. Furthermore, future research could also look into presidential learning and adaption in office and how the impact of learning over time influences presidential style and policy-making. Building upon the findings of this thesis, future research could endeavour in these ways to contribute to the broader picture of the interaction between individual personalities and different political contexts.
The third limitation concerns the other LTA traits that may have a link with war persistence. As reviewed in Chapter III, there are three LTA traits that indicate leaders’ inclination towards the use of military force. These traits are one’s need for power, in-group bias and distrust of others. Furthermore, a high score on belief in one’s ability to control events indicates a proactive, interventionist and risk-taking orientation. In the case of war, this trait may also be related to leaders’ inclination towards the use of military force.

This research only found a link between individual distrust of others and their willingness to continue the war. This trait is important in the studies of individual war orientations and decisions, as reviewed in Chapter III.

Furthermore, in-group bias is also found to be related to continuation of the war based on the potential threats they perceived and the necessity to protect national security. However, there are two shortcomings in this finding. First, it is always difficult to identify leaders’ groups. This difficulty relates to the way in which this trait is coded. The coding dictionary could not identify the group of the speaker. In this thesis, the US nation may be their group identification but may not be the only one. Therefore, concern for national security only indicates part of the implication of their in-group bias. Second, the two presidents’ views that terrorists and Taliban forces in Afghanistan were preparing to carry out attacks on the US homeland were based on their distrust of others. Therefore, this research did not find an independent link between individual in-group bias and their inclination towards continuation of the war.

For another trait – one’s need for power – this research did not find any significant link between it and war persistence. The need for power has been found to demonstrate a strong indication of war entry (Winter, 2002; 2004; 2007). However, most of Bush’s and Obama’s scores on their need for power are not at the high level compared to the reference group. Whether this trait is related to leaders’ inclination towards the continuation of war remains unclear. Future research could focus on examining these potential links, focusing on leaders who show a consistently high need for power and their continuation of war or conflict or any specific policy using military force.
The fourth limitation concerns limited case material. As discussed in Chapter V, some archival records relating to the Afghanistan war are not declassified, and this thesis does not have direct access to interview those participants in the decision-making process relating to Afghanistan. Some personality-based expectations in Chapter VI and Chapter VII are therefore not examined because of limited case material. Future research could examine more personality-based expectations once more case material has been declassified.

Meanwhile, some topics were not substantively discussed due to limited case material. For example, this thesis did not substantively discuss the use of drones in the Afghanistan war. One may argue that drones were widely used to replace military troops on the ground and the reliance on drone attacks would be an account for Bush’s and Obama’s continuation of the Afghanistan war. However, this statement fails to account for the surge of troops and the delay in the withdrawal plan.

This thesis discussed the use of drones as part of US military strategies in Afghanistan. Drone attacks were criticised for their ineffectiveness, including the limited progress made in the war and civilian casualties caused by the air attacks. As discussed in Chapter VI, Bush’s reliance on drone strikes was found to be related to his belief in his ability to control events and conceptual complexity, underlying its correlation with the quality of decision-making. In addition, the use of drone attacks in Pakistan was also related to norm violation. Future LTA research, with more case study material declassified, could focus on the checkered career of drone strikes in this war, demonstrating more details about the two decision-makers’ beliefs about the costs and benefits of using air attacks in the Afghanistan war, exploring more about the relationship between individual personality characteristics and the quality of decision-making, and discussing whether the overreliance on drone strikes and its limited progress led to the continuation of this long war.

At the beginning of this thesis, there is a review of the terrible costs of the US war in Afghanistan, raising the puzzle of why this war endured for so long.
It is argued that it is important to examine this question from the perspective of the personalities and leadership styles of US Presidents Bush and Obama because of empirical and theoretical necessities. Empirical reflection of war persistence needs to review each major decision from the start of the Afghanistan war. Theoretical findings in foreign policy analysis and political psychology have identified the important role of personality in foreign policy decision-making, where leaders’ personality characteristics influence how they think and behave. Therefore, LTA is expected to provide insights into why and how Bush and Obama continued with US military involvement in Afghanistan. Meanwhile, bringing in LTA to explain the persistence of the Afghanistan war develops this theory by extending the causal relationships between specific LTA personality traits, which are indicative of leaders’ war orientation and their war continuation and investigating interactions between personality traits and a specific contextual factor: public opinion.

Despite the limitations discussed above, findings from this thesis do show that personality and personal decisions are helpful in understanding and explaining key points of this long war. Their distrust of others is important in explaining why Bush and Obama wanted to use or continue US military operations in Afghanistan due to their perceived high threat from that region. Based on this perceived high threat, their in-group bias may also help explain their continuation of the war due to their willingness to protect the US against any further terrorist threats. Their personality characteristics are also helpful in explaining their decision-making styles. Finally, their different responses towards divergent voices from experienced advisors are based on the degree of their conceptual complexity. These responses could also be influenced by their task focus (either low or high). In addition, due to their inexperience in foreign policy, they delegate power delegation to subordinates and rely on expert advisors. They could be closed to divergent opinions if their trusted subordinates did not present them with various viewpoints.

Overall, these findings provide a holistic analysis of Bush’s and Obama’s decision-making relating to the Afghanistan war, supporting the role of
personality in foreign policy analysis, political psychological analysis and broader studies on international relations. This thesis supports the notion that powerful individuals in politics matter. Who they are, what they are like and how they make decisions are important in shaping governmental policy and further influencing global politics.
Appendix 2: Further Comparisons of Different Groups of Trait Scores

Authorship, Topics and Temporal Effects

As discussed in Chapter IV, for concerns about validity issues and to examine the potential variances in Bush’s and Obama’s personality assessments due to authorship, topic and temporal effects, this thesis also collected both spontaneous and scripted verbal records relating to general foreign policy issues (including Afghanistan) and only relating to the specific domain of Afghanistan issues on a yearly basis (except for 2001, verbal records collected are dated from 11 September 2001 to the end of 2001). Therefore, there are in total eight groups of trait scores derived from these datasets.

This section compares trait scores derived from these eight groups. There is an abundance of words for Bush’s and Obama’s verbal records relating to general US foreign policy issues. However, as reviewed in the previous chapter, for some years, the collected spontaneous and scripted verbal records relating to ‘Afghanistan’ have a smaller word count than ideal (especially in 2003, 2006, and 2014, the word count is less than 1,000), and trait scores produced from these materials should be discussed with caution. These trait scores (spontaneous, Afghanistan topic, 2003, 2006, and 2014) are highlighted and are not discussed in this chapter.

Meanwhile, trait scores derived from Afghanistan-related verbal records dated in other years are only discussed in this appendix in order to examine trait stability across time and justify the choice to use spontaneous verbal records relating to general foreign policy issues in the case studies. As stated here and elsewhere, most of the trait scores derived from the Afghanistan-related verbal records are not suggested to be used in case studies and conclusions made based on these trait scores should be warned of the limitation of word count. With concerns over word count, the average scores presented at the bottom of each table were calculated by aggregating each single trait score instead of simply using the yearly scores presented in these
tables. These average scores were calculated based on enough word counts and are used to examine trait stability across topics. In addition, as previously discussed, there is support for the effectiveness of assessing leadership style based on scripted material. Therefore this thesis chooses to report trait scores derived from scripted records and compare them with trait scores derived from spontaneous records to justify the choice of using spontaneous verbal records in this thesis. Finally, this appendix compares trait scores derived from spontaneous records collected on a yearly basis with trait scores derived from spontaneous records collected during specific time frames to justify the use of spontaneous verbal records (general foreign policy, specific time periods) for profiling in this thesis. All these trait scores are presented in Tables 10 to 13 (for Bush) and Tables 14 to 17 (for Obama) below.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>BACE</th>
<th>PWR</th>
<th>SC</th>
<th>CC</th>
<th>TASK</th>
<th>IGB</th>
<th>DIS</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2001</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(11 September 2001 – 31 December 2001)</td>
<td>0.39* high</td>
<td>0.27 moderate</td>
<td>0.35 low</td>
<td>0.57 moderate</td>
<td>0.58 leans high</td>
<td>0.11* low</td>
<td>0.41* high</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2002</td>
<td>0.52* high</td>
<td>0.45* high</td>
<td>0.58* high</td>
<td>0.59 moderate</td>
<td>0.51 low</td>
<td>0.34* high</td>
<td>0.34* high</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2003</td>
<td>0.40* high</td>
<td>0.20* low</td>
<td>0* low</td>
<td>0.81* high</td>
<td>0* low</td>
<td>0* low</td>
<td>0.40* high</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2004</td>
<td>0.34 leans low</td>
<td>0.38* high</td>
<td>0.50 high</td>
<td>0.75* high</td>
<td>0.50 low</td>
<td>0.11* low</td>
<td>0.23* high</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2005</td>
<td>0.38 high</td>
<td>0.35* high</td>
<td>0.28* low</td>
<td>0.53 leans low</td>
<td>0.71* high</td>
<td>0.11* low</td>
<td>0.13 moderate</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2006</td>
<td>0.25* low</td>
<td>0.32 high</td>
<td>0.36 low</td>
<td>0.86* high</td>
<td>0.51 low</td>
<td>0.17 high</td>
<td>0.22* high</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2007</td>
<td>0.32 low</td>
<td>0.38* high</td>
<td>0.42 moderate</td>
<td>0.70* high</td>
<td>0.48* low</td>
<td>0.29* high</td>
<td>0.21* high</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2008</td>
<td>0.36 leans high</td>
<td>0.27 moderate</td>
<td>0.38 low</td>
<td>0.62 high</td>
<td>0.58 leans high</td>
<td>0.18 high</td>
<td>0.34* high</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Average</td>
<td>0.37 high</td>
<td>0.31 high</td>
<td>0.39 leans low</td>
<td>0.63 high</td>
<td>0.55 moderate</td>
<td>0.16 leans high</td>
<td>0.33* high</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*: At least two standard deviations above or below the mean score.
### Table 11. Bush’s Personality Traits (Scripted, Afghanistan)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>BACE</th>
<th>PWR</th>
<th>SC</th>
<th>CC</th>
<th>TASK</th>
<th>IGB</th>
<th>DIS</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2001</td>
<td>0.42* high</td>
<td>0.32 high</td>
<td>0.25* low</td>
<td>0.49 low</td>
<td>0.45* low</td>
<td>0.15 moderate</td>
<td>0.32* high</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(11 September 2001 – 31 December 2001)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2002</td>
<td>0.44* high</td>
<td>0.33* high</td>
<td>0.21* low</td>
<td>0.58 moderate</td>
<td>0.44* low</td>
<td>0.24* high</td>
<td>0.27* high</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2003</td>
<td>0.38 high</td>
<td>0.55* high</td>
<td>0.03* low</td>
<td>0.65 high</td>
<td>0.40* low</td>
<td>0.29* high</td>
<td>0.10 leans low</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2004</td>
<td>0.45* high</td>
<td>0.43* high</td>
<td>0.18* low</td>
<td>0.53 leans low</td>
<td>0.36* low</td>
<td>0.23* high</td>
<td>0.41* high</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2005</td>
<td>0.38 high</td>
<td>0.50* high</td>
<td>0.43 moderate</td>
<td>0.58 moderate</td>
<td>0.31* low</td>
<td>0.34* high</td>
<td>0.39* high</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2006</td>
<td>0.42* high</td>
<td>0.27 moderate</td>
<td>0.32* low</td>
<td>0.56 moderate</td>
<td>0.43* low</td>
<td>0.15 moderate</td>
<td>0.33* high</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2007</td>
<td>0.37 high</td>
<td>0.30 high</td>
<td>0.23* low</td>
<td>0.65 high</td>
<td>0.47* low</td>
<td>0.21* high</td>
<td>0.39* high</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2008</td>
<td>0.42* high</td>
<td>0.32 high</td>
<td>0.26* low</td>
<td>0.57 moderate</td>
<td>0.45* low</td>
<td>0.30* high</td>
<td>0.33* high</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Average</td>
<td>0.42* high</td>
<td>0.34* high</td>
<td>0.26* low</td>
<td>0.56 moderate</td>
<td>0.42* low</td>
<td>0.22* high</td>
<td>0.34* high</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*: At least two standard deviations above or below the mean score.
Generally, both tables suggest that Bush shows a significantly higher distrust of others on the Afghanistan issue than the mean score of the comparison group by at least two standard deviations (0.21). There are two exceptions. The score on this trait in 2005 in Table 10 (spontaneous, Afghanistan) is 0.13, which is at the moderate level. And the score in 2003 in Table 11 (scripted, Afghanistan) is 0.10, leaning towards being low (0.9). Trait scores in Table 11 suggest that Bush has a strong belief in his ability to control events (0.37), a high power need (0.30, except in 2006, at the moderate level), a low task focus (0.52) and a low self-confidence (0.38, except in 2005, at the moderate level).

On the other hand, the scores in Table 10 suggest more fluctuation in these traits. In both tables, conceptual complexity shows the least stability across time, demonstrating a tendency to increase from the low level (0.52) to the moderate level (0.57) or increase from the moderate level to the high level (0.62) and then decline to the low level, finally, increase to a high level. The most significant difference between the two tables is in-group bias. 6 of the 8 scores in Table 11 are above the mean score by at least three standard deviations (0.21), indicating a high level of in-group bias. However, 3 of the 6 (excluding scores in 2003 and 2006) scores on this trait in Table 10 are below the mean score by at least two standard deviations (0.11), suggesting a lower level.

Comparing trait scores from Table 10 (spontaneous, Afghanistan) and Table 11 (scripted, Afghanistan), it seems that those derived from scripted material are more stable throughout time than those derived from spontaneous material. One reason for this is that, from 2002 to 2008, the numbers of scripted Afghanistan-related verbal records collected are more than the numbers of spontaneous Afghanistan-related verbal records collected (the numbers of both types of verbal records collected in 2003 and 2005 are all small). And each year, the total word count of spontaneous Afghanistan-related material is less than ideal. However, even in 2001, when there were 20,638 words collected for scripted material and 7,745 words for spontaneous material, differences exist between the trait scores on power motivation,
conceptual complexity, task focus and in-group bias. These findings demonstrate differences in trait scores derived from spontaneous and scripted verbal records. Therefore, it should be careful to choose the group of trait scores used to develop expectations.

In addition, because of the small numbers of words collected for spontaneous Afghanistan-related verbal records (especially from 2002 to 2008), differences in trait scores in the two tables above do not suggest that trait scores derived from scripted material show more temporal stability than that derived from spontaneous material. Statistically, F-tests conducted indicate trait stability across time in both tables. There are no significant changes in scores in Table 10 (excluding scores in 2003 and 2006). In Table 11, only scores on his distrust of others show significant changes. Therefore, trait scores derived from spontaneous material demonstrate more stability across time.
### Table 12. Bush’s Personality Traits (Spontaneous, Foreign Policy)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>BACE</th>
<th>PWR</th>
<th>SC</th>
<th>CC</th>
<th>TASK</th>
<th>IGB</th>
<th>DIS</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
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<td>2001 (11 September 2001 – 31 December 2001)</td>
<td>0.36*</td>
<td>0.29 high</td>
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<td>0.58 moderate</td>
<td>0.56 moderate</td>
<td>0.12 low</td>
<td>0.33* high</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2002</td>
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<td>0.27 moderate</td>
<td>0.41 leans low</td>
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<td>0.54 leans low</td>
<td>0.13 low</td>
<td>0.23* high</td>
</tr>
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<td>0.33 low</td>
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<td>0.35 low</td>
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<td>0.15 leans high</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2004</td>
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<td>0.39 leans low</td>
<td>0.58 moderate</td>
<td>0.54 leans low</td>
<td>0.13 low</td>
<td>0.23* high</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2005</td>
<td>0.31* low</td>
<td>0.26 moderate</td>
<td>0.40 leans low</td>
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<td>0.52 low</td>
<td>0.15 moderate</td>
<td>0.22* high</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2006</td>
<td>0.31* low</td>
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<td>0.45 moderate</td>
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<td>0.12 low</td>
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<td>0.13 low</td>
<td>0.20 high</td>
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<tr>
<td>2008</td>
<td>0.31* low</td>
<td>0.19* low</td>
<td>0.41 leans low</td>
<td>0.63 high</td>
<td>0.56 moderate</td>
<td>0.15 moderate</td>
<td>0.16 leans high</td>
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<tr>
<td>Average</td>
<td>0.32 low</td>
<td>0.26 moderate</td>
<td>0.41 leans low</td>
<td>0.61 leans high</td>
<td>0.56 moderate</td>
<td>0.13 low</td>
<td>0.22* high</td>
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</table>

*: At least two standard deviations above or below the mean score.
Table 13. Bush’s Personality Traits (Scripted, Foreign Policy)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
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<th>SC</th>
<th>CC</th>
<th>TASK</th>
<th>IGB</th>
<th>DIS</th>
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<td>0.36</td>
<td>0.28</td>
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<td>0.41*</td>
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<td>high</td>
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<tr>
<td>2005</td>
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<td>0.26</td>
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<td>2006</td>
<td>0.29*</td>
<td>0.26</td>
<td>0.20*</td>
<td>0.55</td>
<td>0.41*</td>
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<tr>
<td>2007</td>
<td>0.30*</td>
<td>0.26</td>
<td>0.22*</td>
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<tr>
<td>2008</td>
<td>0.31*</td>
<td>0.25</td>
<td>0.24*</td>
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<tr>
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<td>low</td>
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<td>high</td>
<td>leans low</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Average</td>
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<td>0.27</td>
<td>0.22*</td>
<td>0.55</td>
<td>0.43*</td>
<td>0.20</td>
<td>0.15</td>
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<td>leans high</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*: At least two standard deviations above or below the mean score.
Tables 12 and 13 above present Bush’s trait scores derived from scripted and spontaneous materials across general US foreign policy issues on a yearly basis. Scores derived from spontaneous material present a stable indicator of Bush’s high distrust of others. In Table 12 (spontaneous, foreign policy), scores on Bush’s belief in his ability to control events, self-confidence, conceptual complexity and in-group bias are relatively stable across time. He shows a low belief in his ability to control events (0.33) between 2003 and 2008. Especially from 2004 to 2008, his scores on this trait are lower than the average score by two or three standard deviations (0.31 and 0.29). In 2002, the score on this trait leans towards being low (0.34). Only in 2001, his score on this trait leans towards being high (0.36). His scores on self-confidence are at the moderate level (0.44) in 2001 and 2006. In other years, he shows a relatively low self-confidence (0.41, leaning towards the low level of 0.38). He shows a high conceptual complexity in 2003 (0.61, leaning towards the high level of 0.62) and in his second term in office (0.62). In other years (2001, 2002, and 2004), his conceptual complexity is at the average level. In 2005 and 2008, Bush’s scores on his in-group bias are at the moderate level (0.15). In other years, he scores low on this trait (0.13).

Bush shows a high task focus (0.62) in 2003. In 2002, 2004 and 2005, his scores on this trait are at the low level (0.52) or lean towards being low (0.54). In other years, his scores on this trait are at the moderate level (0.57). His power motivation shows the least stability across time. His score on this trait in 2001 (0.29) leans towards being high. In 2002, 2005 and 2006, his scores on this trait are at the average level (0.27). In 2003, 2004 and 2007, he has a relatively low power motivation (0.25) compared to the average score of the norming group. In 2008, he shows a significantly low power motivation (0.19).

In Table 13 (scripted, foreign policy), scores on Bush’s self-confidence, task focus and in-group bias are relatively stable across time. He shows consistently low scores on self-confidence (0.38) and task focus (0.52). Different from the scores in Table 12 (spontaneous, foreign policy), scores in Table 13 suggest that Bush’s in-group bias is consistently high (0.17).
Differences also exist in scores on conceptual complexity and distrust of others. Bush shows a low conceptual complexity between 2002 and 2004 (0.52). In other years, his conceptual complexity is at the average level (0.57). Bush’s conceptual complexity scores derived from scripted material (no higher than 0.58) are lower than the scores derived from spontaneous material (no lower than 0.58). Another big difference between these two tables is that only 3 of the 8 scores on Bush’s distrust of others in Table 13 are at the high level (0.17). 4 of these 8 scores are at the moderate level (0.13) and only one score (0.10) in 2008 leans towards being low. However, scores on this trait in Table 12 are all above the average score (0.13).

Finally, Bush’s scores on his belief in his ability to control events in Table 13 show three different levels. Scores in 2001, 2002 and 2005 are above the moderate (0.35) level and indicate Bush’s high belief in his ability to control events. In 2003, the score is at the moderate level. In 2004 and between 2006 and 2008, scores on this trait are below the low level (0.33). Bush’s power motivation is relatively high in 2001 (0.29), 2003 (0.31) and 2004 (0.32) compared to the average score (0.27). In 2002 and between 2005 and 2007, scores on this trait is at the average level. In 2008, he shows a relatively low power motivation (0.25).

When comparing Table 10 (spontaneous, Afghanistan) and Table 11 (scripted, Afghanistan), and Table 12 (spontaneous, foreign policy) and Table 13 (scripted, foreign policy), significant differences in trait scores are found in scores derived from different types of verbal records (scripted and spontaneous). As discussed, scores on Bush’s conceptual complexity and in-group bias show the most significant differences between Tables 12 and 13, and Tables 10 and 11.

Meanwhile, a few scores derived from verbal records relating to different topics also show significant differences in some of the columns in these tables. For example, Bush’s scores on belief in his ability to control events, need for power and in-group bias in Tables 10 and 12 show some significant differences. In Tables 11 and 13, Bush’s scores on his belief in his ability to control events,
distrust of others and his need for power show some significant differences. These differences indicate authorship and topics’ effect on assessments of Bush’s personality characteristics, suggesting that Bush is likely to show some distinct personality characteristics across different contextual factors. Generally, the majority of the scores in these tables are stable across time.

Comparing the scores in 2001 and 2002 from Table 12 (spontaneous, foreign policy) to the scores in two periods in Table 8 (spontaneous, foreign policy, specific time periods): 11 September 2001 to 7 October 2001, and 4 October 2001 to 17 April 2002, slight differences are found in scores on Bush’s belief in his ability to control events, need for power, self-confidence, and task focus. Between 11 September 2001 and 7 October 2001, Bush’s power motivation is at the moderate level (0.28), and his task focus leans towards being low (0.54) while between 11 September 2001 and the end of 2001, his power motivation leans towards being high (0.29) and his task focus is at the moderate level (0.56). These are two slight differences.

Between 4 October 2001 and 17 April 2002, Bush’s score on his belief in his ability to control events leans towards being high (0.36). His power motivation (0.29) is relatively high. His self-confidence (0.42) and his task focus (0.55) are at the average level. In 2002, Bush’s scores on his belief in ability (0.34), self-confidence (0.41) and task focus (0.54) are relatively low and his power motivation is at the moderate level (0.27). These are slight differences, depending on how researchers compare the high and low levels of trait scores. Only the difference in his belief in his ability to control events is more significant than others, suggesting that care needs to be taken in selecting verbal material (type, topic and time period) to assess Bush’s personality characteristics.

In short, because of the significant differences in trait scores derived from spontaneous and scripted verbal records, this thesis uses spontaneous material, and this choice is consistent with most of the LTA studies. Due to concerns about the validity issue relating to impression management, this thesis uses verbal records relating to general foreign policy issues (including
Afghanistan). Finally, because of the slight differences in trait scores derived from verbal records collected on a yearly basis and dated during a specific time period, this thesis uses verbal material dated during the specific period of each decision-making relating to Afghanistan to precisely measure Bush's personality.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>BACE</th>
<th>PWR</th>
<th>SC</th>
<th>CC</th>
<th>TASK</th>
<th>IGB</th>
<th>DIS</th>
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<tr>
<td>2009</td>
<td>0.42*</td>
<td>0.26</td>
<td>0.62*</td>
<td>0.62</td>
<td>0.71*</td>
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<td>0.40*</td>
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<td>0.59*</td>
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*: At least two standard deviations above or below the mean score.
Table 15. Obama’s Personality Traits (Scripted, Afghanistan)

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<td>2015</td>
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<td>0.37*</td>
<td>0.47</td>
<td>0.57</td>
<td>0.44*</td>
<td>0.11*</td>
<td>0.27*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>leans low</td>
<td>high</td>
<td>leans high</td>
<td>moderate</td>
<td>low</td>
<td>low</td>
<td>high</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2016</td>
<td>0.42*</td>
<td>0.48*</td>
<td>0.26*</td>
<td>0.52</td>
<td>0.51</td>
<td>0.29*</td>
<td>0.30*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
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<td>low</td>
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<td>low</td>
<td>high</td>
<td>high</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Average</td>
<td>0.41*</td>
<td>0.32</td>
<td>0.29*</td>
<td>0.56</td>
<td>0.54</td>
<td>0.15</td>
<td>0.16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>high</td>
<td>high</td>
<td>low</td>
<td>moderate</td>
<td>leans low</td>
<td>moderate</td>
<td>leans high</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*: At least two standard deviations above or below the mean score.
There are more differences than similarities between trait scores in Tables 14 (spontaneous, Afghanistan) and 15 (scripted, Afghanistan). For Obama’s belief in his ability to control events, trait scores in Table 15 fluctuate between the high (0.37) and relatively low levels (leaning towards being low, 0.34). High scores are above the average level by more than two standard deviations (0.39). However, in Table 14, scores on this trait are more focused on the high level (0.37) except for the score in 2013 being lower than the average by more than two standard deviations (0.31). Most of the scores on Obama’s need for power in Table 15 reveal his high power motivation (0.30, except in 2012 and 2013), but, in Table 14, there are more indicators of a relatively moderate (0.27) or low power motivation (0.24). Only in 2013, 2015 and 2016 does he score high on this trait (0.30, and in 2013, leaning towards being high with 0.29). While the scores on self-confidence in Table 14 are high (0.50) or leaning towards high (0.47) except in 2011 and 2012, the scores on this trait in Table 15 are at or leaning towards the low level (0.38 and 0.41) except for the year 2015. While in Table 15 most of the scores on conceptual complexity are at the moderate level (0.57), in Table 14, scores on this trait fluctuate between high (0.62) and moderate (0.57) levels.

Trait scores in Table 14 show a high task focus by more than one standard deviation (0.60) above the average level, except for 2015 (0.53, leaning towards being low). However, scores on task focus in Table 15 are at the low (lower than 0.52) or moderate level (0.56) compared to the eleven US Presidents. Only in 2012 is the score on the verge of high (0.60). In Table 15, most of the scores on Obama’s in-group bias are at the average level (0.15) or below the mean score. Only the scores in 2009 and 2016 are higher than the average level by at least two standard deviations (0.19). 6 of the 8 scores on distrust of others in Table 15 are above the mean score (0.13). However, scores on these two traits in Table 14 vary from high to low levels compared to the comparison group. Significant differences exist in trait scores from these two tables, strongly suggesting the necessity to be careful in selecting the type of verbal material used for LTA coding. However, the numbers of both types of verbal records collected are not ideal and the numbers of words collected for
spontaneous records after the year 2010 are far from ideal. Therefore, using verbal records relating to specific Afghanistan issues may not help minimise the effect of impression management.
### Table 16. Obama’s Personality Traits (Spontaneous, Foreign Policy)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>BACE</th>
<th>PWR</th>
<th>SC</th>
<th>CC</th>
<th>TASK</th>
<th>IGB</th>
<th>DIS</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2009</td>
<td>0.38</td>
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<td>0.24</td>
<td>low</td>
<td>0.59*</td>
<td>high</td>
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<tr>
<td>2010</td>
<td>0.39*</td>
<td>high</td>
<td>0.26</td>
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<td>0.62*</td>
<td>high</td>
<td>0.61</td>
</tr>
<tr>
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<td>0.37</td>
<td>high</td>
<td>0.25</td>
<td>leans low</td>
<td>0.64*</td>
<td>high</td>
<td>0.64</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2012</td>
<td>0.42*</td>
<td>high</td>
<td>0.30</td>
<td>high</td>
<td>0.54</td>
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<td>0.62</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2013</td>
<td>0.45*</td>
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<td>0.28</td>
<td>moderate</td>
<td>0.58*</td>
<td>high</td>
<td>0.65</td>
</tr>
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<td>2014</td>
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<td>high</td>
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<td>high</td>
<td>0.64</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2015</td>
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<td>high</td>
<td>0.27</td>
<td>moderate</td>
<td>0.57*</td>
<td>high</td>
<td>0.64</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2016</td>
<td>0.40*</td>
<td>high</td>
<td>0.27</td>
<td>moderate</td>
<td>0.53</td>
<td>high</td>
<td>0.67*</td>
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<tr>
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<td>moderate</td>
<td>0.59*</td>
<td>high</td>
<td>0.63</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*: At least two standard deviations above or below the mean score.
Table 17. Obama’s Personality Traits (Scripted, Foreign Policy)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>BACE</th>
<th>PWR</th>
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<th>CC</th>
<th>TASK</th>
<th>IGB</th>
<th>DIS</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2009</td>
<td>0.33</td>
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<td>0.35</td>
<td>0.57</td>
<td>0.54</td>
<td>0.18</td>
<td>0.06</td>
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<td>low</td>
<td>leans low</td>
<td>low</td>
<td>moderate</td>
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<td>high</td>
<td>low</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2010</td>
<td>0.36</td>
<td>0.25</td>
<td>0.32*</td>
<td>0.58</td>
<td>0.54</td>
<td>0.18</td>
<td>0.07</td>
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<td>moderate</td>
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<td>leans low</td>
<td>high</td>
<td>low</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2011</td>
<td>0.36</td>
<td>0.28</td>
<td>0.35</td>
<td>0.57</td>
<td>0.50</td>
<td>0.20*</td>
<td>0.06</td>
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<tr>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>2012</td>
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<td>0.26</td>
<td>0.35</td>
<td>0.57</td>
<td>0.49</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
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<td>moderate</td>
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<td>low</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2013</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>2014</td>
<td>0.40*</td>
<td>0.29</td>
<td>0.33</td>
<td>0.58</td>
<td>0.52</td>
<td>0.20*</td>
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<tr>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>2015</td>
<td>0.35</td>
<td>0.26</td>
<td>0.36</td>
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<tr>
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<td>moderate</td>
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<td>moderate</td>
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<tr>
<td>2016</td>
<td>0.37</td>
<td>0.28</td>
<td>0.31*</td>
<td>0.62</td>
<td>0.56</td>
<td>0.19*</td>
<td>0.13</td>
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<td>moderate</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Average</td>
<td>0.35</td>
<td>0.26</td>
<td>0.34</td>
<td>0.59</td>
<td>0.53</td>
<td>0.19*</td>
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<td>leans low</td>
<td>high</td>
<td>low</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*: At least two standard deviations above or below the mean score.
Scores in Tables 16 (spontaneous, foreign policy) and 17 (scripted, foreign policy) show significant differences in Obama’s personality characteristics. Scores in Table 16 indicate that Obama has consistently high scores on his belief in his ability to control events (0.37), self-confidence (0.50), conceptual complexity (0.62) and task focus (0.60). Only his scores on conceptual complexity and task focus in 2010 are slightly below the high level but still lean towards being high. Scores in Table 17 indicate that Obama has a consistently low self-confidence (0.38) and a high in-group bias (higher than 0.17).

4 of the 8 scores on power motivation in Table 16 are at the moderate level (0.27). In 2009, Obama’s power motivation is low (0.24). In 2012 and 2014, his power motivation is high (0.30). In 2011, his power motivation is relatively low (0.25). Obama’s scores on his in-group bias are at a low level (0.13) in 2009, 2012, 2013, and 2014. Only one score leans towards being low in 2016 (0.14). In 2011 and 2015, he scores high on this trait (0.17). His score on this trait in 2010 is at the moderate level (0.15). 5 of the 8 scores on his distrust of others are at or lean towards being high (0.17). In 2009 and 2014, Obama shows a moderate level (0.13) of distrust of others. In 2011, his score on this trait is 0.10, leaning towards being low.

In Table 17 (scripted, foreign policy), Obama scores low on his distrust of others (0.09) between 2009 and 2014. Only in 2015 and 2016, his scores on this trait are at the moderate level (0.13). His scores on task focus are at or lean towards being low (0.52) between 2009 and 2014. Only in 2015 and 2016, scores on this trait are at the moderate level (0.56). Obama scores highly on his conceptual complexity in 2013, 2015 and 2016 (0.62). In other years, scores on this trait are at the moderate level (0.57). 4 of his 8 scores on power motivation are at the moderate level. In 2009, 2010 and 2013, scores on these traits are at or lean towards the low level (0.24). In 2014, the score on Obama’s power motivation (0.29) leans towards being high (0.30). 3 of his scores on belief in his ability to control events are lower than the average score. 4 of the 8 scores on this trait are high or lean towards being high. Only in 2015, the score is at the moderate level (0.35).
Comparing the trait scores in Tables 14 (spontaneous, Afghanistan), 15 (scripted, Afghanistan), 16 (spontaneous, foreign policy) and 17 (scripted foreign policy), differences are found in trait scores derived from different types of verbal materials and verbal materials relating to different topics. The majority of trait scores in these tables are stable across time. The differences between trait scores derived from spontaneous and scripted materials are significant, especially in scores on self-confidence, task focus and in-group bias.

Focusing on different topics, trait scores derived from spontaneous verbal records relating to general foreign policy issues and the specific Afghanistan issue show a significant difference in in-group bias. Trait scores derived from scripted material relating to these two topics show more differences in Obama's belief in his ability to control events, his need for power, in-group bias and his distrust of others. When comparing the columns in Tables 16 and 9 (spontaneous, foreign policy, specific time periods), only a few differences are found. The most significant one is that Obama's score on his distrust of others from 10 September 2010 to 1 May 2011 is at the moderate level, but in 2010, the score in Table 16 leans towards being high. Another significant difference is in scores on his power motivation from 20 January 2011 to 22 June 2011 and in 2011. Based on these findings and concerns about validity issues, this thesis uses spontaneous material relating to foreign policy issues (including Afghanistan) and is careful about the time frame of these data collections.

Overall, in the examinations of Bush’s and Obama’s trait score stability across different types of verbal records, this project found significant differences between Bush’s and Obama’s trait scores derived from spontaneous and scripted verbal materials. Trait scores derived from scripted and spontaneous foreign policy-related verbal materials show significant differences in Bush’s conceptual complexity, task focus, distrust of others and in-group bias. The majority of trait scores derived from scripted and spontaneous materials relating to foreign policy issues show stability across time. Trait scores derived from spontaneous and scripted Afghanistan-related verbal materials show some most significant differences in Bush’s self-confidence, in-group bias, task focus and conceptual complexity. And trait
scores derived from spontaneous Afghanistan-related verbal records (excluding scores in 2003 and 2006) show more stability across time than trait scores derived from scripted Afghanistan-related verbal records. Comparing the averages scores between all these groups, the average trait scores derived from verbal records relating to different topics show relatively fewer differences, mainly in Bush’s belief in his ability to control events, need for power, distrust of others and in-group bias.

For Obama, when using scripted and spontaneous Afghanistan-related materials, major differences are found in scores on his need for power, self-confidence, conceptual complexity, task focus, and in-group bias. Because of the limited data collection relating to the specific Afghanistan topic, it is hard to say whether trait scores derived from scripted material show more stability across time. Statistically, the results of F-tests suggest that scores in both tables show stability across time and scores derived from spontaneous material show more stability (excluding scores in 2014). When using verbal materials relating to foreign policy, major significant differences are found in self-confidence, distrust of others, need for power, in-group bias and task focus. Some scores on his belief in his ability to control events and conceptual complexity also show differences. Trait scores derived from both types of material show stability across time and trait scores derived from spontaneous material show more temporal stability. Comparing the average scores of these groups, differences in trait scores derived from different topics and more specific time periods are fewer and relatively slighter than differences in trait scores derived from scripted and spontaneous materials.

These differences indicate that Bush and Obama exhibit distinct personality characteristics in spontaneous and scripted materials. And the differences in their trait scores derived from these materials are different, indicating that personality differences are not only related to the types of verbal material used but also affected by individual differences. The differences in trait scores relating to different topics and more specific time periods are fewer and relatively slighter than the differences in trait scores derived from spontaneous and scripted materials. Meanwhile, the word count of documents
collected relating to Afghanistan in some years is quite small and it cannot be
 guaranteed that there is any influence from this small word amount on the
 results of the comparisons. Overall, the majority of these trait scores indicate
 stability across time.

 Comparing the trait scores from Tables 12 (Bush, spontaneous, foreign
 policy) and 16 (Obama, spontaneous, foreign policy) with existing findings
 about the personalities of Bush and Obama, there are some shared findings
 and differences. Dyson (2014) measured Bush’s belief in his ability to control
 events and conceptual complexity on a yearly basis from 2001 to 2006. On
 general foreign policy issues (non-Iraq), Bush has consistently low scores on
 the belief in his ability to control events and conceptual complexity. However,
 trait scores in Table 12 show that Bush has a relatively high belief in his ability
to control events in 2001 (from 11 September 2001 to the end of 2001) and his
 conceptual complexity fluctuate between high and moderate levels from 2001
to 2008 (from 0.58 to 0.65). These differences may be explained by the
different norming groups used in this thesis and Dyson’s research. The scores
 on Bush’s belief in his ability to control events are the same (0.36) in this thesis
 and Dyson’s work. Meanwhile, Dyson found that Bush’s scores on conceptual
 complexity fluctuate between 0.56 and 0.61. These scores belong to the high
 and moderate levels when compared to the norming group used in this thesis.
 Therefore, the trait scores on Bush’s belief in his ability to control events and
 his conceptual complexity in Table 12 are consistent with Dyson’s findings.

 In addition, this thesis only finds that the overall score of Bush’s power
 motivation is 0.26, which is below the average score of the norming group
 (0.27). He also has a low in-group bias (0.13), a relatively low self-confidence
 (0.41) and a relatively high conceptual complexity (0.61). This thesis finds that
 the overall score of Bush’s task focus is at the moderate level (0.56). Preston
 (2011) found that Bush has a relatively low need for power, a low task focus
 and a low conceptual complexity compared to a norming group of 230 world
 leaders. However, Preston did not provide the numeric data and the type of
 verbal records he used. At least, the results in Table 12 obtain some support
from Dyson’s work and may be consistent with Preston’s findings about Bush’s need for power.

Winter (2011) found that Obama has a high power motive and his achievement motive is at the average level (moderate task focus). These are different from the findings in this thesis. However, Winter used Obama’s inaugural address, therefore the differences in these trait scores may be explained by the differences in verbal sources. In addition, Greenstein (2009; 2011) described Obama as a leader with a complex cognitive style, which supports the findings about his consistently high conceptual complexity in Table 16.

To minimise the effects of authorship, impression management, and temporal stability on personality assessments, this thesis uses trait scores (Tables 8 and 9 presented in Chapter V) derived from spontaneous material (foreign policy issues, specific time periods) to develop LTA-based expectations. As analysed in Chapters VI and VII, for most of the expectations examined (though not all expectations were examined with enough empirical evidence), empirical evidence in case studies found consistency between Bush’s and Obama’s leadership styles and decision-making relating to the Afghanistan war and their personality-based expectations. In this thesis, the consistency found between LTA-based expectations and Bush’s and Obama’s policy orientation and management of decision-making supports the use of spontaneous verbal records for personality assessments with concerns about the validity issues, and the findings also suggest that a careful selection of verbal records that focuses on specific topics and time periods may be helpful in creating personality portraits of leaders and developing expectations relating to their decision-making and leadership styles.
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