

CHAPTER ONE

POLITICAL LEADERSHIP AND THE PUZZLE OF FOREIGN POLICY CHANGE AND CONTINUITY

Henry Kissinger once remarked: “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.”¹ It appears to be common sense that the conduct of international affairs cannot be explained without reference to the beliefs of individuals such as Adolf Hitler, Joseph Stalin, Vladimir Lenin, Franklin Roosevelt, Winston Churchill, Mahatma Gandhi, or Mao Zedong. No recent policymaker would try to explain the world today without references to the personal goals and beliefs of such leaders as Vladimir Putin, Hu Jianto, or Muammar Quaddafi. The policymaking community in Washington takes it as an article of faith that whoever the individual is who is the prime minister of Great Britain, the chancellor of Germany, or the king of Saudi Arabia has real repercussions for the United States and the rest of the world. Therefore, it is somewhat ironic that, despite the knowledge of practitioners and the intuition of citizens, leaders matter very little in the discourse of conventional international relations theory.

My firm conviction, however, is that a compelling explanation of international relations cannot dispense with an examination of the leader. He or she must be an integral part of the analysis. The main premise in this book is that the most important aspect of international relations is how leaders represent themselves and their enemies. These representations are the starting point for strategic interactions and the medium by which they determine who they are, what they want, and how they should behave. My argument following from this premise is that leaders *do* matter as agents of change and continuity in the international system.

If there is a group of world leaders who deserve increased attention and investigation, then Mikhail Gorbachev and Kim Il Sung certainly belong to it. These men, for better or worse, truly have made history. From “interdependence” in strategic relations to “reasonable sufficiency” regarding unilateral arms cuts, Gorbachev’s *new thinking* constitutes a break with the Soviet experience of the past and a rejection of much of the theoretical thinking that prevailed for decades within the Soviet decision-making elite. His foreign policy reforms and reorientations were welcomed not only by the people of the United States and its policymakers but by people around the world. Confrontational bloc politics came to an end, and a new era began to emerge.

However, after an initial global euphoria, the world came to realize that some cold war residuals of resistance would remain. One of them was North Korea under the leadership of Kim Il Sung. Kim Il Sung’s story is different from that of Gorbachev. He inaugurated much of North Korea’s political thinking—most important the *juche* ideology of the country’s self sufficiency—at the founding of the republic in 1948.² It was he who persisted in the ideologies of *juche*, Leninism, and Marxism and who made only minor concessions, if any, to alternate ways of political thinking and acting. He also maintained and nurtured the idea of a global revolution. It was he along with a few others, such as Fidel Castro of Cuba, who kept alive the “communist threat,” albeit in a different form.

MIKHAIL GORBACHEV AND KIM IL SUNG

This book is about two leaders who astonished the global scholarly and policymaking community and continue to be fascinating. There are, of course, previous studies that have addressed Mikhail Gorbachev and Kim Il Sung and their respective foreign policies. So, why another book?

First, substantive and important questions about these two leaders have not been satisfactorily answered. Almost a decade ago, six years after the end of the cold war, Soviet specialist Archie Brown argued that “there is still a paucity of political analyses which try to comprehend the evolution of Gorbachev’s thinking.”³ This judgment holds true today. A similar conclusion can be drawn regarding the case of North Korea. Here, too, we can find accounts of the Kim Il Sung era and a man who amazed the political spectator by his tendency to isolate North Korea internationally. However, there also is a paucity of analyses capable of grasping the content and evolution of Kim Il Sung’s thinking and his contribution to the trajectory of North Korea’s foreign policy behavior.

Was Gorbachev’s foreign policy due to a learning process in which he gradually adjusted his beliefs about the political universe and the best means by which to achieve goals in this universe? This is often argued in the literature about the end of the cold war, yet never systematically demonstrated. Why did Kim Il Sung’s foreign policy show more continuity than

change despite increasing political isolation and economic deterioration? Did he fail to engage in any learning processes? Did these leaders learn from their experience or were they foreclosed against them?

On a more general level, the question was formulated two decades ago in a classic study by Llyod Etheredge titled *Can Governments Learn?* Governments learn through the individuals within them, and when they stand at the pinnacle of their respective state hierarchies, as is the case for Gorbachev and Kim Il Sung, it becomes imperative to scrutinize their learning processes. There are many anecdotal assumptions about both leaders, but little systematic evidence. Conclusive answers to these questions are important because they could shed light on agent-centered mechanisms that are either conducive or stifling to processes of international conflict resolution.

Second, Mikhail Gorbachev and Kim Il Sung offer a unique opportunity for making significant theoretical contributions to the study of foreign policy and strategic interaction in world politics. If there is to be greater progress in the discipline, scholars should take greater advantage of studying leaders such as these two. Long ago, Arnold Wolfers argued what makes intuitive sense: namely, that factors external to the actor can become determinants of foreign policy only as they affect the mind, the heart, and the will of the decision-maker.⁴ Nevertheless, individual leaders often remain a residual category in much of international relations theory. This book brings leaders back into the equation by contributing a sophisticated model of foreign policy decision-making. The beliefs and perceptions of leaders are at the core of this model.

Third, ideational variables such as beliefs and perceptions are difficult to assess. Scholars have even argued that they are “unobservable.”⁵ In this book I make two methodological contributions. The first is to apply methods by which these unobservables become observables. The second is to derive preferences from beliefs and to endogenize them in rigorous game-theoretic models. These steps are promising because such models carry positive statements about what ought to happen if foreign policy behavior is indeed related to beliefs. Overall, these substantive, theoretical, and methodological contributions advance the scientific study of ideational variables, whose relevance has been demonstrated most recently since September 11, 2001. Each of these contributions is worth examining in more detail.

The Case of Gorbachev

When Mikhail Gorbachev assumed power in March 1985 international politics in general and U.S.-Soviet relations in particular showed few signs that they were about to undergo fundamental change. Several Soviet specialists supported the expectation that there would not be much change in Soviet foreign policy and that confrontational bloc politics would continue. Archie Brown, for example, pointed out that “no far reaching changes in the Soviet

political and economic system or in Soviet foreign policy could be expected.”⁶ Joseph Nye argued that “Gorbachev’s overall approach to foreign policy suggests continuity rather than a radical break with the recent past.”⁷ Similarly, Seweryn Bialer suggested that there “is almost no expectation that the tensions in Soviet-American relations will subside in the foreseeable future.”⁸

Moreover, one year after Gorbachev assumed power in the Kremlin, U.S.-Soviet historian John Lewis Gaddis advanced the thesis that, for all its dangers, the bipolar cold war system had proved remarkably stable and was comparable “in longevity at least, to the great and now wistfully recalled nineteenth-century systems of Bismarck and Metternich.” Gaddis argued further that “unlike those earlier systems, after four decades of existence [the cold war system] shows no perceptible signs of disintegration.”⁹ Yet, contrary to these expectations, over the next few years the cold war system would disintegrate, and scholarly disagreement continues over the sources for its dissolution.

The rational actor premises underlying many of the conventional theories of international relations, and in particular realism as the most prominent theory of security studies, lead us to expect cooperative foreign policy behavior, or policies of accommodation in general, only when cooperation is indeed prudent. Since there was “nothing in Gorbachev’s biography to suggest the personality of a rebel,” he is said to have displayed exactly this response as the Soviet Union found itself in an economic bottleneck.¹⁰ In the 1980s, the U.S. Congress approved the highest defense budget in its history. This action would intensify the arms race, and President Ronald Reagan was about to outspend the Soviet Union. Reagan’s military adviser Richard Perle reaffirmed this view, arguing that “the buildup of American military capabilities contributed mightily to the position of strength that eventually led the Soviet leadership to choose a less bellicose, less menacing approach to international politics.”¹¹ Similarly, scholars have also argued that the only viable option—in fact, the only rational choice for Gorbachev—was to withdraw from the ruinous cold war competition.¹²

The reorientation in Soviet foreign policy, therefore, had nothing to do with any substantive changes in his beliefs as an alternative group of scholars came to argue later. At least initially, Gorbachev indeed showed no signs of a change of heart. He himself recounted later that his “new thinking” was not a “sudden revelation,” and he has rejected any claim to have entered office with a “detailed action plan.”¹³ On the day of his accession, Gorbachev issued his first statement regarding Soviet foreign policy and emphasized continuity as he reiterated the familiar overall framework of Soviet policy: strengthening the socialist community, supporting peoples’ liberation and progressive development in the Third World, and coexisting with the capitalist powers.¹⁴

In this early phase, Gorbachev at times even engaged in harsh anti-U.S. rhetoric. In May 1985, he denounced U.S. “state terrorism” in Nicara-

gua and an “undeclared U.S. war” against Afghanistan. In October, he stated that U.S. imperialists were pursuing a policy of “social revenge” and suppressing national liberation movements. In early 1986, he argued against U.S. policies of “hegemonism” and stated that the nature of imperialism inherent in U.S. foreign policy was aggressive because of its “influential military-industrial complex.”¹⁵

Thus, the scholarly expectation indeed seemed plausible that if Soviet foreign policy were to change at all, it would have nothing to do with a learning process of Gorbachev and everything to do with structural adaptation.¹⁶ Moreover, it was also plausible to argue that any foreign policy would result from the apparent new realities of relative Soviet decline. This expectation was reinforced by many conservative policymakers in the United States who were convinced that the Soviet Union, if it could, would remain committed to the overthrow of capitalism.¹⁷ These views were subsequently carried into the post-cold war era in which scholars continued to reject a belief system explanation and argued that the Soviet reorientation was caused by the economic and military preponderance of the United States.¹⁸

However, the interpretation of an alternative group of scholars *does* ascribe the reorientation in Soviet foreign policy to Gorbachev’s changing beliefs over the course of his tenure. The basis for this argument is summarized by one Soviet specialist arguing that “the notion that the arms race in the 1980s forced the Soviet economy to its knees suffers from the problem that the Soviet economy had been in an even worse state in previous phases of the Soviet empire.”¹⁹ The argument of forced change is also rejected by the Soviet Union’s Director of the Institute for the USA and Canada and Gorbachev adviser Georgi Arbatov. At a 1991 conference sponsored by the Carnegie Council on Ethics and International Affairs in Rome, he argued: “The version about President Reagan’s ‘tough’ policy and intensified arms race being the most important source of perestroika—that it persuaded communists to ‘give up’—is sheer nonsense.”²⁰

Asking the counterfactual question of why Gorbachev’s predecessors Leonid Brezhnev, Yuri Andropov, and Konstantin Chernenko did not act as Gorbachev did when faced with similar external circumstances leaves no other answer than to consider Gorbachev as indispensable. Archie Brown put it well: “Gorbachev was, after all, the fourth Soviet General Secretary . . . to coincide with Reagan’s period in office, but the first to interpret the intensification of the arms race not as a reason for the Soviet Union to step up its military efforts but as an additional reason for seeking a new basis for trust in East-West relations.”²¹

Indeed, while Gorbachev was not a rebel, he was a novelty when he arrived on the political stage. He was a generation younger than Brezhnev and most of his colleagues. He was seventeen years younger than Andropov, nineteen years younger than Chernenko, and thirteen years younger than the average age of the ten surviving and full voting members of the Politburo.

These differences in age may, of course, bring with them distinct political socialization experiences. Janice Stein writes:

Most of the members of Brezhnev's Politburo were born around 1910 and lived through the early revolutionary years. They were young adults during the forced collectivization under Stalin and fully responsible adults during World War II. Their formative experiences were the creation of the Soviet Union, the surprise attack by Hitler's Germany, and the trauma of the "Great Patriotic War."²²

Given these experiences, the development of a competitive attitude and corresponding beliefs toward the political world seems unsurprising. The political socialization of the Gorbachev Politburo, however, occurred under different parameters:

Many of the members of the Politburo under Gorbachev were born around 1930, and their formative political experience was Khrushchev's denunciation of Stalin in 1956. Those who came of political age during this period were heavily influenced by Khrushchev's attempt to liberalize the political process, to free Soviet society of the Stalinist legacy, and to reform Soviet politics. They described themselves as 'children' of the Twentieth Party Congress, and many emerged as colleagues or advisers to Gorbachev in the first few years of his administration. Some of Gorbachev's advisers lived through the 'years of stagnation' in frustrated isolation and were receptive to reform and change.²³

Different formative experiences may have thus led the "Gorbachev generation" to be open to new ways of thinking.²⁴ Although Gorbachev did not arrive with a full-fledged agenda of *new thinking*, some changes could have been expected nevertheless. Scholars point out that Gorbachev had introduced a change of style and that he was a technocrat. Archie Brown illustrated Gorbachev's new style as follows:

[E]very Soviet leader relied . . . on outside specialists, but these experts were generally very conscious of what the leader wanted to hear. A three-stage filtering process meant that, in the first instance, only 'reliable' specialists whose views were unlikely to offer a significant challenge to the conventional wisdom . . . were apt to be consulted; second, their recommendations were mediated by the permanent officials in the Central Committee . . . third, the specialists themselves engaged in self-censorship and—with rare exceptions—did not advocate radical change. . . . [T]his consultative process changed under Gorbachev. He was prepared to listen to a

broader range of specialists with fresh ideas. . . . Especially in the earlier years of his leadership, Gorbachev was prepared to meet directly with specialists from academic institutes . . . and he made it clear that he would actively welcome fresh ideas.²⁵

Gorbachev's arrival on the political stage as a technocrat had far-reaching implications. The Gorbachev era became the heyday of the *institutchki*—the scholars who worked in policy-oriented research institutes—and of political entrepreneurs and epistemic communities, all of which were “unleashed by glasnost.”²⁶ Facing “windows of opportunities,” these actors were of relevance to Soviet security policy as they succeeded in influencing foreign policy with their “recognized expertise and competence” and their authoritative claim to “policy-relevant knowledge” in the security sphere.²⁷

Soviet expert Jeff Checkel has convincingly shown that “institutchiks” in research institutions under the aegis of the Academy of Sciences, the Institute of the World Economy and International Relations (IMEMO), and the Institute for the Study of the USA and Canada (ISKAN) were able to convince Gorbachev through advisers such as Aleksandr Yakovlev and Yevgeniy Primakov that international politics had to be analyzed in such nonclass categories as “interdependence” and that his enemy image of American capitalism had to be changed.

Together these actors contributed to the development and emergence of new ideas and Gorbachev's *new thinking* in the realm of foreign policy.²⁸ This *new thinking* has been described as “a deep, conceptual reassessment of what the US-Soviet relationship ‘was.’” It was “constitutive theorizing at the lay level” through which Gorbachev came to rely on a substantially changed image of the adversary.²⁹ As Soviet scholar Robert Legvold has put it, what Gorbachev had done was “to set aside the holiest of Soviet foreign policy concepts, the notion that the most elemental dynamic of international politics resides in the tension between two historic social orders—socialism and capitalism.”³⁰ Soviet foreign minister Eduard Shevardnadze would later confirm in his memoirs that Gorbachev's “thinking went beyond the boundaries of prescribed norms.”³¹ Through practices such as the revocation of the Brezhnev doctrine, which from the American perspective constituted the conflictual Soviet-American relationship, he invited a gradually emerging redefinition of this relationship between the superpowers and a conflict that seemed like it had become “set in stone.”³²

Scholars attributing the change in Soviet foreign policy to Gorbachev's learning process of Gorbachev also point to his statements. Contrary to those cited earlier about U.S. hegemonism, these are of a fundamentally different nature. In 1986, Gorbachev argued:

Security cannot be built endlessly on the doctrines of containment and deterrence. . . . In the context of relations between the USSR

and the USA, security can only be mutual, and if we take international relations as a whole it can only be universal. . . . In the military sphere we intend to act in such a way as to give nobody grounds for fear . . . about their security.³³

The highest defense spending in the history of the United States under the Reagan administration during the 1980s suggested that the doomsday clock was certainly ticking fast and that it was just a few minutes before midnight. Then suddenly, by 1991, the enduring rivalry between the superpowers had ended, the cold war was history, and people and policymakers around the world came to envision an emerging era marked by cooperation. The conclusion by these scholars is that Gorbachev ended the cold war because he *wanted* to and not because President Reagan outspent the Soviet Union. Gorbachev was an “uncommitted thinker and motivated learner” who changed his beliefs in the course of his tenure and along with it the course of Soviet foreign policy.³⁴ Although this judgment is a widely held claim in the scholarly literature about the end of the cold war, no systematic evidence about its psychological basis has been collected to test it. This omission is regrettable because if mechanisms of change are situated within individual leaders, then it becomes imperative to scrutinize them further to the point where learning is demonstrated to have occurred and not just assumed.

The Case of Kim Il Sung

As the cold war came to an end, scholars contemplated that we might soon miss it.³⁵ The reason for such a counterintuitive feeling is simple: with the move from bipolarity to unipolarity, security threats no longer emanated from the rivalry of two superpowers but rather from the existence of rogue states. Rogue states are said to be security threats because they are driven by hostile intentions and are difficult to deter. Rogue states are, furthermore, suspected of sponsoring or practicing international terrorism and engaging in the acquisition and proliferation of weapons of mass destruction.

While Gorbachev opened up the Soviet Union as he sought new relations with the West, Kim Il Sung amazed the political spectator by his tendency to isolate North Korea.³⁶ Kim Il Sung's formative years occurred under parameters different from those of Gorbachev. It was particularly the Japanese occupation of the Korean peninsula prior to World War II that would prime his personality and his lasting hostility toward Japan and subsequently also toward the United States and South Korea. In his autobiography, Kim Il Sung would remember that “The Japanese, whenever they had a chance, would slander our nation, calling it an ‘inferior nation.’ They claimed, therefore, Japan should ‘protect,’ guide and ‘control’ the Korean nation. . . . The Korean people, even if three of them get together, must unite to fight against the Japanese imperialists.”³⁷

Contrary to Gorbachev, there is much in Kim Il Sung's biography to suggest the personality of a rebel. North Korean specialist Adrian Buzo writes that Kim Il Sung's revolutionary dispositions

emerged from an infusing of elements drawn from [his] early experiences, the times in which he lived, and above all from his experience as an anti-Japanese guerrilla fighter in Manchuria in the 1930s, with the Stalinist model of state-building. For Kim the guerilla years were a profound and protracted experience, covering many years as a young adult under arms in an isolated and forbidding environment. They shaped his perspective of the world and especially shaped his view of the purpose of political power and state-building.³⁸

Kim Il Sung's background, in contrast to Gorbachev's, appeared to preclude him to alternative modes of thinking. Because he spent his formative years as a guerilla in remote areas, his exposure to the modern world was very limited. Contrary to Gorbachev, he was not surrounded by "intellectuals at his elbow," or any foreign advisers. According to Buzo:

This isolation shaped his intellect by limiting his exposure to outside ideas and moulding the ways in which he conceptualized and dealt with practical problems. Guerilla life instilled in him the habits of self-reliance, perseverance and unremitting struggle, but we may also see in this period the roots of his later attitude of deep suspicion and mistrust towards 'outsiders' and more broadly the diversity and pluralism of the external world. He lived in a predatory, political subculture of force which encouraged in him an outlook that accepted callousness and criminality as a daily reality.³⁹

Indeed, Kim Il Sung did not appear to live according to the title of his multivolume autobiography, *With the Century*. Buzo argues that Kim Il Sung never advanced intellectually beyond the experiences of his early days:

[Kim Il Sung's] weaknesses were . . . significant. They began with Kim's intellect, which was formed under the influence of limited schooling, extended military struggle, and political combat with the oligarchy. As a result, he could not frame effective policies to pursue economic development and modernization, nor was he able to seek advice of those who could. Convinced of the universality of Stalinism, he was not interested in any further refinements or revisions, and his concept of modernity increasingly became frozen in the past.⁴⁰

Indeed, as Buzo adds, "judging by his post-1945 actions, he . . . came to possess the deep conviction that his experience of people and politics in the

guerilla movement held true for people and politics everywhere.”⁴¹ Advice was almost anathema to Kim Il Sung. He was even resistant to advice from the Soviets, as described later by a former Soviet official in Moscow’s Pyongyang embassy: “He would agree with our leaders and give a lot of promises, but afterwards he would pursue the same line, his own line.”⁴²

After Japan was defeated in the Second World War, the occupation ended and the Korean peninsula was partitioned into North and South. The North fell under the auspices of the Soviet Union, which soon installed Kim Il Sung as North Korea’s leader, “a selection that may have been made by Stalin himself.”⁴³ It was also with Soviet approval and support that Kim Il Sung had embarked on an ill-fated attempt to conquer South Korea in 1950.⁴⁴ Documents from the Soviet archives, which were opened to researchers in the 1990s, demonstrate vividly how Kim Il Sung repeatedly implored Stalin and his diplomats to authorize an invasion of the South, at one point telling Soviet embassy officers: “Lately I do not sleep at night, thinking about how to resolve the question of the unification of the whole country. If the matter of the liberation of the people of the southern portion of Korea and the unification of the country is drawn out, then I can lose the trust of the people of Korea.”⁴⁵

Kim Il Sung’s invasion of South Korea was repulsed by the forces of the United States, South Korea, and several other states under the flag of the United Nations. After the armistice that followed the Korean War in 1953, international politics for Kim Il Sung was a continuous revolution against the hostile regimes and forces of the United States, Japan, and South Korea. “Kimist ideology,” Buzo writes, “dictated a resolute confrontation with U.S. imperialism and Japanese militarism and this basic strategy continued, affected neither by the enormous economic power which Japan had acquired nor by the increasingly stable, long-term U.S. political and military commitment to Northeast Asia.”⁴⁶

Indeed, throughout the cold war, North Korea pursued hard-line policies of confrontation, particularly antagonistic toward the United States as *the* imperialist force of the capitalist world, but also against its allies South Korea and Japan and most other “capitalist” states. Highpoints here include: the Korean War in 1950, the attempted raid on the presidential mansion in Seoul in 1968, the seizing of the USS *Pueblo* in the same year, the shooting of a U.S. Navy reconnaissance plane in 1969 and the Nixon–Sato Joint Communiqué in the same year, the attempted assassination of South Korean President Park Chung Hee in 1974, the North Korean attack on American soldiers in 1976 (the Panmunjon axe murders), the North Korean bombing of Rangoon in 1983, and the downing of a South Korean airliner in 1987.

For most of the cold war era, North Korea, as a “fortress of communism,” was able to rely on the Soviet Union for much-needed economic, military, and political support. However, with the breakdown of the Soviet

Union, this support system quickly dried up. The economy of North Korea declined significantly, especially vis-à-vis its security competitors the United States, South Korea, and Japan. In September 1990, Soviet Foreign Minister Shevardnadze informed Pyongyang that Moscow would suspend further large-scale Soviet investments in North Korea and cut military aid sharply.⁴⁷ Soon afterward, the so-called Gorbachev directive, instructed Soviet organizations to curtail military technological cooperation with North Korea.⁴⁸

The Soviet economic withdrawal was accompanied by a discontinuation of political and diplomatic support for Pyongyang and culminated when Gorbachev granted diplomatic recognition to South Korea in 1990.⁴⁹ The political isolation became even more severe as further former communist and socialist partners, especially in Europe, went on the path to democratization and sought alliances with the West. According to one expert on Korean affairs, the events surrounding the end of the cold war resulted in the regime's confrontation with the most severe foreign policy challenges since the 1950s.⁵⁰

These dramatic changes lead to the expectation that Kim Il Sung would engage in a learning process in which he would adjust his beliefs and initiate a redirection in North Korea's external relations. However, given that North Korea's immediate post-cold war era foreign policy was marked by a mixture of less change and more continuity, scholars disagree whether Kim Il Sung changed his beliefs or not.

Emphasizing the changes in North Korean foreign policy toward pragmatism, some scholars argue that economic deterioration and political isolation had a significant impact on Kim Il Sung. More specifically, they argue that Kim Il Sung did engage in a learning process in response to changes in the international system, and, furthermore, that North Korea's foreign policy behavior after the end of the cold war is due to Kim Il Sung's altered beliefs.⁵¹ Exemplary here is that North Korea conceded and signed a twenty-five-article Agreement on Reconciliation, Non-aggression, and Exchanges and Cooperation (the "Basic Agreement") with South Korea, signed the "Agreed Framework" with the United States, and, in the economic realm, created a free economic trading zone (FETZ).⁵²

Another group of scholars highlight the continuity in North Korean foreign policy behavior. These scholars question the sincerity of any changes that did occur in the post-cold war period and argue that departures toward pragmatism are unstable at best. They also contend that while there was some change in North Korea's foreign policy behavior, it also demonstrated continuity as it became delinquent in meeting its International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) obligations, threatened to withdraw from the Nuclear Non-proliferation Treaty (NPT), and engaged in the reprocessing of plutonium, leading to the dramatic nuclear crisis before Kim Il Sung's unexpected death in 1994.⁵³ The conclusion of these North Korea specialists is that the beliefs of Kim Il Sung have not been affected and that any post-cold war behavior represents merely a coerced adaptation to a changing environment.⁵⁴

Indeed, Kim Il Sung's hostile beliefs toward the United States appeared to remain unchanged. As late as 1993, the regime republished a volume titled *The U.S. Imperialists Started the Korean War*. Kim Il Sung acknowledged the changing realities at the end of the cold war, but argued that "the old forces which tried to dominate the world by means of its strength . . . still remain." Kim Il Sung further argued that "the imperialists, with a monopoly of modern mass media, pour out torrents of reactionary ideas and culture as well as distorted information to meet their own needs and interests. They suppress the people's voice of justice, deliberately mislead public opinion, invent lies, embellish their antipopular societies and fan aggression and war."⁵⁵

Scholars rejecting a belief system explanation for the (few) changes in North Korea's foreign policy behavior since the end of the cold war also remind us that, despite the dramatic changes in North Korea's position in the international system and unlike other former socialist states, North Korea remained socialist. Indeed, even after the demise of the entire socialist bloc, to the amazement of many international observers, Kim Il Sung continued to forecast the ultimate victory of the socialist revolution against the "imperialists" led by the United States. In 1993, he argued:

The present revolutionary situation is grave and complex, but the future of the revolution is bright and our cause shall emerge victorious. Although the imperialists are putting on a show of power, the contradictions and corruption inherent in imperialism are becoming aggravated with the passage of time, and the downfall of imperialism and the victory of socialism are an inexorable law of history. The imperialists cannot dampen our people's belief in socialism. . . . We have the strength to defend and bring honour to socialism and to accomplish the revolution.⁵⁶

Thus, it appears indeed plausible that Kim Il Sung did not engage in any learning process. However, as in the case of Gorbachev, there is no systematic evidence for such a conclusion. Because continuity is the flipside of change, the scrutinizing of Kim Il Sung's beliefs is just as important as in the case of Gorbachev. Did Kim Il Sung really resist engaging in learning processes in the face of global change? Because (too) much writing on Kim Il Sung is based on anecdotal evidence, North Korean specialist David Kang thus argues that further "serious study must . . . be focused on what available evidence there is regarding the *mindset* of the North Korean leadership."⁵⁷

The Puzzles of Learning and Rationality

The Soviet Union and North Korea are paradigmatic examples for change and continuity in the international system. The scholarly literature in both cases raised interesting research puzzles that recur more generally within the

literature on foreign policy decision-making and political psychology: Do individuals *learn* from experience? If so, what do they learn? Furthermore, is learning related to foreign policy behavior and the strategic interactions between states? One of the main goals in this book is to derive more conclusive answers to these questions based on systematic evidence.

Related to questions about beliefs, learning, and its impact on a state's foreign policy are questions about the rationality of a leader's foreign policy strategies. Conventionally, Gorbachev's policies at the end of the cold war are characterized as rational while Kim Il Sung's belligerence and his continuation on the status quo path, despite North Korea's increasing political isolation and economic deterioration, are characterized as "irrational."⁵⁸ I argue that this conventional wisdom is doubly wrong, built both on flawed observations and mistaken logic.

Empirically, in much of conventional international relations discourse, states and their leaders are said to react rationally to the reward and punishment contingencies in the international environment. To what extent these contingencies shifted has been the subject of scholarly debate. Some realist scholars have pointed to the absolute decline of the Soviet economy, referencing the high cost of financing Moscow's external empire and rising defense expenditures in relation to the Soviet state budget and its GNP.⁵⁹ However, others have argued that the reward and punishment contingencies remained more or less unchanged. The Soviet economy had grown at rates above 5 percent until 1970. It then dropped to 2.6 percent at the end of the decade and reached only 2.7 percent in the first part of the 1980s. However, the recession of the Soviet economy was part of a global trend that did not spare the United States. The latter reached growth levels of 4 percent in the 1960s, dropped then to a rate of 2.7 in the 1970s, and then even further to 2.6 in the 1980s.⁶⁰ The logic of change by economic pressure is also rejected by Gorbachev himself. In his memoirs he writes:

The assumption that the Soviet Union is in a "hopeless position" and that it is necessary just to press harder to squeeze out everything the US wants is . . . profoundly [mistaken]. In real politics there can be no wishful thinking. If the Soviet Union, when it was much weaker than now, was in a position to meet all the challenges that it faced, then indeed only a blind person would be unable to see that our capacity to maintain strong defenses and simultaneously resolve social and other tasks has enormously increased.⁶¹

In the end, the economic burden certainly weighed heavier on the Soviet Union than on the United States. However, with equal certainty it can also be said that the reward and punishment contingencies did not change to an extent that would lead anyone to expect the monumental changes in Soviet foreign policy that Gorbachev did engage in.⁶² After all,

the end of the cold war did come as a surprise. Gorbachev's enormous unilateral concessions indeed present an anomaly for the prevailing theoretical views at the time where superpowers are described as being "engaged in a never-ending struggle to improve or preserve their relative power positions."⁶³ From this perspective, his behavior toward the U.S. seems "irrational."⁶⁴ This strengthens the assumption that Gorbachev and his beliefs were indispensable regarding the changes in Soviet foreign policy.⁶⁵

A different economic scenario applies to North Korea. Its growth rates relative to the growth rates of security competitors such as the United States, South Korea, and Japan declined significantly. In 1990, it experienced a *negative* growth rate of -3.7 percent. Even worse were the years 1991 and 1992 when negative growth rates of -5.2 and -7.6 percent were recorded. During the same time the United States achieved modest, yet positive growth rates averaging slightly over 1 percent between 1990 and 1993. The Japanese economy oscillated at growth rates between 3 and 5 percent between the mid-1980s and the early 1990s, while the South Korean economy flourished at a growth rate of 5.4 percent between 1985 and 1990 and 9 percent between 1990 and 1995.⁶⁶ In the case of North Korea, the reward and punishment contingencies changed dramatically, but a corresponding change in its foreign policy behavior to compensate for relative losses remained more or less absent.

This is surprising to conventional international relations theory. Robert Jervis, for example, has argued that since small states lack the resources of great powers, they also lack a "margin of time and error" in their responses to occurrences in the international environment. The international environment, therefore, dictates that leaders of small states be "closely attuned" to it.⁶⁷ As in the Soviet case, Kim Il Sung and his beliefs appear to be indispensable in order to account this time for continuity and not change.

Previous arguments about Gorbachev and Kim Il Sung are also built on mistaken logic. The way the analysis is often framed—"Are leaders rational or not?"—has contributed to the emergence of the mistaken wisdom about both leaders. The problem is compounded by making judgments deductively—not from the perspective of the actor but from that of the observer. This fallacy was articulated decades ago by one of the most prominent traditional scholars of international politics. As a classical realist, Hans Morgenthau never expected a rational theory to describe the actual course of foreign policy. Instead he expected the "contingent elements of personality, prejudice, and subjective preference, and all of the weaknesses of intellect and will which flesh is heir to . . . to deflect foreign policies from their rational course."⁶⁸ Ironically and unfortunately, the neorealist scholarship following Morgenthau departed rather significantly from his insights as considerations of such ideational variables were excluded until very recently.⁶⁹

In one sense, my book might be understood as a study that goes "back to the roots" of realist international relations theory. It does so, however, equipped with a sophisticated tool-kit capable of scientifically investigating the

factors mentioned by Morgenthau. I argue that leaders act within the context of their simplified subjective representations of reality. Subjective representations necessarily lead decision-makers to deviate from the normative assumptions of rational choice models.⁷⁰ This is not to say that people's actions are irrational, just that their actions are context-dependent: "Policy makers may act rationally, but only within the context of their simplified *subjective representations* of reality."⁷¹ Policymakers, in other words, are not irrational, but are guided by "bounded rationality" and it is within these empirical boundaries that we have to judge rationality.⁷² Determining accurately the bounded rationality of leaders is important for creating a better understanding of the dynamics of conflict management and resolution. It is, for example, "easy" to argue that Kim Il Sung is "crazy." However, it is much more valuable to try to come to an enlightened understanding of *why* he does what he does.

THE DECISION-MAKING APPROACH

International relations theorists often argue that a foreign policy explanation with a focus on such concepts as "beliefs" and "learning" lacks parsimony and is inherently difficult to be operationalized.⁷³ Implicit is the prescription that researchers should refrain from such endeavors and work within analytic frameworks that contain a few clearly identifiable key concepts.⁷⁴ Such prescriptions are not justified. The eagerness for parsimony is a diversion from the areas in which much of the relevant political explanatory action does occur—namely, from deliberative and purposeful actors.⁷⁵ Moreover, world politics (and, by extension, foreign policy) is complex and we might, therefore, question the applicability of conventional international relations theorizing to the universe of foreign policy cases that call for an explanation.

In this book, I argue that refusing to theorize about the impact of ideational variables on politics is not justified. To consider actors as amorphous entities and to rob them of any consciousness is equivalent to denying the sociopsychological character of politics.⁷⁶ Such an understanding of international interactions is impoverished and can only be enriched by an effort to develop a better understanding of the agents of political action. With this book I intend to apply a psychological theory to the study of foreign policy decision-making in the context of strategic interactions.

This application begins with a simple insight noted by Lake and Powell: students of international relations are typically interested in explaining the decisions and choices of actors, conceptualized as "strategic; that is each actor's ability to further its ends depends on how other actors behave," and, therefore, an actor must try to anticipate what the other actors will do. Lake and Powell note further that "outcomes ranging from the foreign policies of individual states to international phenomena such as war or cooperation cannot be understood apart from the strategic choices actors make and the interaction of those choices."⁷⁷

Such an understanding of international politics makes game theory an appropriate vehicle to analyze international interactions because strategic choices are at center stage here. However, game theory's prevalent method of deriving preferences by assumptions is insufficient because it leads to an abstraction away from the reality the actors actually perceive. It is important to recognize that a proper modeling of games between players (actors) requires the researcher to enter the mind of the actors and ask how actors represent themselves and others. These representations are the result of a cognitive process that calls on the researcher to problematize and theorize actors preferences, their beliefs, and perceptions.

The scholarly focus on beliefs and perceptions may be considered an outgrowth of Snyder, Bruck, and Sapin's seminal decision-making approach to foreign policy analysis.⁷⁸ Their argument was directed against undue emphases on the balance of power and external circumstances at the exclusion of individual features of the decision-maker. According to Snyder and his associates, individual cognitions influence to a large degree a decision-maker's "definition of the situation" which, in turn, delivers "the key to the explanation of why the state behaves the way it does."⁷⁹

Similar to Snyder, Bruck, and Sapin, Harold and Margaret Sprout argued that factors external to the decision-maker attain their relative relevance through a cognitive process of perception.⁸⁰ These perceptions can also be "conceived as a sort of matrix . . . which limits the execution of undertakings."⁸¹ These were understood as concrete strategies, decisions, and intentions. The Sprouts suggested that understanding foreign policy outputs (which they associated with the analysis of power capabilities within an interstate system) without reference to foreign policy undertakings was misguided. They write: "Explanations of achievement and estimations of capabilities for achievement invariably and necessarily presuppose antecedent undertakings or assumptions regarding undertakings."⁸²

To explain undertakings, that is, foreign policy behavior, it is necessary to look at the individuals who are at the pinnacle of the decision-making apparatus. More important, one needs to examine the "psychological climate" of these individuals, which distorts their perceptions of the surrounding environment. Some years later, influenced by Snyder and his colleagues and building on the Sprouts' work, Brecher, Steinberg, and Stein developed an input-process-output model in which the process was marked by the decision-makers' interpretations and perceptions of the external environment.⁸³ Brecher and his associates labeled this stage of the model the "psychological environment" in which information is filtered through an "attitudinal prism" considered to have considerable impact on the foreign policy behavior of any given state.

The shortcoming that these and similar approaches shared was that they fell short in measuring many of the concepts and variables they identified as having strong impacts on foreign policy. However, psychological research

on foreign policy decision-making continued with milestones set by Axelrod's *Structure of Decision* and Jervis's *Perception and Misperception in International Politics*.⁸⁴ Both works illustrate how expectations and beliefs produce interpretations and distortions that, in turn, have profound effects on the actions of states. Concepts and variables were clearly linked and standards of measurement were developed. An increased confidence in psychological approaches to the study of foreign policy and a parallel occurrence of discomfort with traditional paths of inquiry led Robert Jervis to the conclusion that "it is often impossible to explain crucial decisions and policies without reference to the decision-makers' beliefs about the world and their images of others."⁸⁵

Belief systems became increasingly important when the cognitive revolution in psychology replaced the behavioral revolution in political science by the 1980s.⁸⁶ Henceforth, the individual was not considered a "passive agent who merely responds to environmental stimuli." He or she was seen instead as a selective agent responding to and actively shaping his or her environment—a "problem solver" who aims to make sense of a complex environment and derive alternatives for decisions.⁸⁷ It is, therefore, no longer adequate to black-box the policymaking process and limit its study to action-outcome covariations. It is instead necessary to study what or how leaders think about events in their environment and how this thinking changes over time—that is, what they *believe* and whether they *learn* over the course of their strategic interactions.

The theoretical contribution of this book, therefore, is to expand further the "menu for choice" for international relations theorists.⁸⁸ What is needed are rigorous approaches to the study of decision-making in strategic contexts that illuminate how individual leaders represent themselves and others over time and how these changing or unchanging *subjective* representations lead to decisions that generate change or continuity in the international system.

BELIEFS AND STRATEGIC INTERACTION

In recent years, international relations scholars have increasingly acknowledged the relevance of the individual leader and the role of ideational variables such as perceptions and beliefs.⁸⁹ However, so far they have failed to incorporate them fruitfully into their research programs. A systematic *demonstration* of their importance remains absent and we are thus reminded of James Rosenau's classic criticism that "to identify factors is not to trace their influence."⁹⁰ Yet, it is the latter on which we should and must concentrate our efforts if the goal is to move beyond assumptions of leaders' beliefs and learning processes.

One important reason why individuals as agents of change and continuity remain undertheorized in the discourse of international relations theory can be found in a lack of rigorous methods that would enable the *scientific study* of

the link between ideational variables and strategic interactions. Indeed, the task of tracing the impact of ideational variables beyond a state's foreign policy decisions to systemic interaction processes is a daunting one involving the solution to some major methodological problems. Ideational approaches to the study of foreign policy in general and psychological approaches in particular have often been criticized for advancing underspecified models lacking rigorous conceptualization and operationalization.⁹¹ It is also this lack that has hindered previous investigations of Gorbachev's and Kim Il Sung's beliefs and learning patterns from moving beyond relatively anecdotal evidence.

Any further worthwhile investigation of these or any other cases, one scholar writes, "requires formidable tools."⁹² In this book, I use newly developed methods of textual analysis in combination with sequential game theory to examine and analyze the beliefs of Gorbachev and Kim Il Sung, their learning patterns, and, ultimately, their impact on change and continuity in the strategic interactions of the Soviet Union and North Korea in the international system. It is only through an application of rigorous scientific methods that we can assert with confidence and certainty our intuition—namely, that leaders, their beliefs, and subjective perceptions *do* matter in explaining the strategic interactions between states and the ensuing course of international relations at the end of the cold war.

Discerning Beliefs and Learning Patterns of Leaders

In the past, researchers have been handicapped in their efforts to systematically discern the beliefs of leaders. These are intangible and scholars have argued that they are "unobservable."⁹³ Similarly, the concept of learning is "difficult to define, isolate, measure, and apply empirically."⁹⁴ The methods employed in this book are capable of making observable these "unobservables" and systematically measuring learning processes. Thus, one methodological contribution is to advance the scientific study of ideational variables—a necessity that is increasingly acknowledged by representatives of all paradigms within the international relations discourse.⁹⁵

I address this necessity by employing measurement innovations that have been developed and refined in several pilot studies.⁹⁶ I use operational code analysis as a method for determining Gorbachev's and Kim Il Sung's beliefs and subjective perceptions.⁹⁷ When applied over time, operational code analysis makes it possible to detect learning patterns of leaders as a result of their changing beliefs. By employing operational code analysis, this book follows in the tradition of other recent studies.⁹⁸ Yet it is distinctive and progressive in using a quantitative method of content analysis, namely, the Verbs in Context System (VICS), applied to the public statements of leaders through an automated content analysis program called Profiler+.

This system was developed in an effort to provide researchers engaged in content analysis with a systematic and replicable method of textual analysis.

Previous studies have underlined the validity of the method and led to further examinations of world leaders such as Fidel Castro, Vladimir Putin, Tony Blair, Jacques Chirac, Theodore Roosevelt, Woodrow Wilson, Lyndon Johnson, Bill Clinton, Mao Zedong, Deng Xiaoping, Yitzhak Rabin, and Shimon Peres.⁹⁹ The development of the Profiler+ software has made it possible to subject large quantities of a leader's public statements to automated content analysis and simultaneously ensure 100 percent coding reliability.

The details of these procedures are discussed in the next chapter. Here it is important to recognize that the results of these methods are quantitative data on leaders' beliefs and, thus, it becomes possible to systematically compare and contrast the beliefs of leaders to each other and identify changes in a single leader's beliefs over time as a result of learning. Analyzing leaders' beliefs and learning patterns through procedures of content analysis also involves problems, and these must be acknowledged and discussed.

Problems of Content Analysis and Solutions

The principal sources for the study of beliefs are the public statements of political leaders: their speeches, press conferences, and interviews—predominantly on the subject of foreign policy for the time period under consideration. These statements must of course be treated with great caution as they may contain manipulative rhetoric and factual misinformation. It is important to exclude statements that are propagandistic in nature (whether in a positive or negative sense) and to include statements that are judged to reflect a leaders' actual foreign policy dispositions. Here I have relied upon the judgments of Soviet and North Korean area specialists who have become familiar with the context of Soviet and North Korean foreign policymaking over many years.¹⁰⁰ With an eye to themes that are repeated in the same mode on different occasions, they become an invaluable source for the “at-a-distance” determination of what a leader is thinking and believing during any given stage of his administration.¹⁰¹

Another issue is whether public or private material is likely to produce the most accurate assessments of leaders' beliefs and foreign policy dispositions.¹⁰² The sample of statements in this study falls into the category of public material. There are simply fewer private statements than public ones and sampling private statements would undermine the desirable procedure of random sampling. However, the use of public material for “at-a-distance” assessment techniques has been criticized for not truly capturing internally held beliefs of leaders.¹⁰³ I contend that this critique is often somewhat inflated. The operational code research program does not necessarily claim that public statements capture the private beliefs and worldviews of leaders. Instead, it aims to analyze and determine *publicly* articulated beliefs that the leader is convinced are important at a given moment in time and see if they influence a state's behavior.¹⁰⁴

Researchers engaged with one or another form of content analysis of political leaders' public statements are also often confronted with the "ghostwriter" criticism. This criticism addresses the fact that public statements, although made by the leader, are often prepared by teams of speechwriters operating behind the scenes. This process does not mean that these speeches or other forms of public statements cannot be taken as indicators of a leader's beliefs and policy preferences. Both Gorbachev and Kim Il Sung provided their writers with clear directives on the content of the statements that were to become official. Statements reached the public only after the leaders had reviewed and agreed to the content and rhetoric of the material.¹⁰⁵ We can, therefore, assert with some confidence that these public statements reflect the two leaders' beliefs.

As is the case for most methods of empirical inquiry, the procedures of content analyses are certainly not flawless. However, if the assumption that individual leaders matter is taken seriously, researchers *must* try to enter the minds of these leaders. Leaders will not subject themselves to psychological analysis in a laboratory setting. By engaging in careful sampling procedures and showing an awareness of the difficulties noted earlier, content analysis becomes an invaluable tool for studying *The World in Their Minds*.¹⁰⁶

Endogenizing Beliefs and Learning Patterns in Game-Theoretic Models

Whereas making beliefs and learning patterns observable is the first methodological task in this book, the second task is to systematically trace their influence on behavioral dynamics, especially strategic interaction. I shall utilize Steven Brams's *Theory of Moves* (TOM) as a method to assess the relative viability of a belief system explanation for the trajectory of Soviet and North Korean behavior.¹⁰⁷ This game-theoretic model is especially promising for the questions at hand, because it carries positive statements about what *ought* to be expected over time if decisions are indeed influenced by beliefs and learning patterns.

Past game-theoretic studies have been criticized on various grounds. Indeed, one can sometimes not help feeling that game theory models have become popular not because they capture adequately the most important dynamics of international politics, but because they are methodologically intriguing and lend themselves to interesting manipulations and experiments of counterfactual reasoning.¹⁰⁸ Researchers have also cautioned against theoretical remedies, such as endogenizing ideational variables. Although there have been interesting attempts to investigate such questions within a game-theoretic approach to interaction, they argue that "game theory was not designed for this task and so its relevant conceptual repertoire is relatively underdeveloped."¹⁰⁹ Scholars such as Robert Jervis and Deborah Larson argue that international relations and, by extension, foreign policies, are complex human *social* phenomena and can therefore not be understood through an economic lens such as game theory.¹¹⁰

A related criticism addresses the often employed assumption of substantive rationality in game-theoretic approaches. Terry Moe argues that models built on unrealistic assumptions are by definition inappropriate models for understanding the world.¹¹¹ Still another criticism is that game-theoretic approaches have ignored various factors that influence a state's foreign policy. Among these are bureaucratic infighting, domestic politics, national character, and individual personalities.¹¹² Individual personalities are especially important when these individuals stand at the pinnacle of the decision-making process.¹¹³

Much of the criticism against a game theory approach is the result of its adherence to deductive reasoning from a priori assumptions. Theorists working in this genre argue that it is sufficient to predict outcomes based on players acting "as if" they were substantively rational. Preferences are simply derived from assumptions.¹¹⁴ Jervis summarizes the case against such theorizing, stating that it is not justifiable that "actor's values, preferences beliefs, and definition of self are exogenous to the [game-theoretic] model." He further adds: "By taking preferences as given we beg what may be the most important question on how they were formed. . . . Economic theory treats tastes and preferences as exogenous. Analysis is therefore facilitated, but at the cost of drawing attention away from areas that may contain much of the explanatory 'action' in which we are interested."¹¹⁵

Because both Mikhail Gorbachev and Kim Il Sung constitute ultimate decision units in their respective political systems, attention to their beliefs becomes indispensable.¹¹⁶ A focus on beliefs also answers the call for a social analysis since it considers human complexities. The valid criticism of game theory as "austere," in other words, does not necessarily lead to a discarding of the entire approach. Instead it should be understood as a challenge, which calls for an incorporation of the complexities of decision-making into the models.¹¹⁷ Games must adequately capture the strategic situation from the vantage point of the actors. This includes preferences that are not simply assumed, but unambiguously derived from a rigorous theory.¹¹⁸

In this book, I derive preferences from beliefs and subsequently specify these preferences as a game-theoretic model. I thus move beyond traditional game theory analyses, which *passively* represent the situation between two actors. My analysis *actively* constructs their situation and thereby bridges the gap between psychological research on learning and microeconomic research on strategic choice.¹¹⁹

OUTLINE OF THE BOOK

The chapters in this book are organized into three major parts. Part I consists of this chapter and the next. Chapter 1 has laid out the overview and the contributions of this book while chapter 2 presents the theoretical core. Here I devise a theory of foreign policy decision-making, in which I endogenize

preferences within a rigorous game-theoretic model. Part II presents the empirical cases of political leadership and foreign policy dynamics. Chapters 3 and 4 deal with Gorbachev and Soviet foreign policy behavior. Chapters 5 and 6 address Kim Il Sung and North Korean foreign policy behavior. The central question in these case studies is whether the foreign policies of these countries correspond with the implications set forth by a learning analysis of each leader's beliefs. Part III presents the implications of the study. In chapter 7, I review the current crisis in U.S.-North Korean relations and engage in a discussion of the policy implications provided by the end of the cold war for managing and resolving this conflict.