BEYOND THE AMERICAN REACTION: INTEGRATIVE COMPLEXITY OF MIDDLE EASTERN LEADERS DURING THE 9/11CRISIS

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RESUMEN	ABSTRACT
Este trabajo analiza la respuesta psicológica y la complejidad integradora de los líderes de Oriente Medio durante la crisis del 11/9. Se completa así el artículo anterior de este monográfico sobre la respuesta psicológica de los líderes occidentales a la crisis del 11 del 9. La complejidad integradora es el grado en que las personas reconocen la existencia de dimensiones múltiples y, en consecuencia, relacionan entre sí dichas dimensiones. Las comunicaciones públicas de los principales líderes de naciones/organizaciones medio-orientales se codificaron según la complejidad integradora en cinco fases de la crisis. Los resultados indican que, en la mayoría de estos líderes, la complejidad integradora disminuyó después del 11-9 y luego aumento de forma significativa, llegando al máximo en el contra-ataque americano de Afganistán. A pesar de jugar un papel secundario en la crisis, parece que los líderes orientales fueron muy impactados psicológicamente por los hechos provocados por el ataque del 11 septiembre.	To complement previous work on Western leaders' psychological response to the 9/11 crisis, the present study evaluated Middle Eastern leaders' integrative complexity throughout the crisis. Integrative complexity is the degree that persons recognize the validity of multiple dimensions and subsequently relate those dimensions to each other. The public communications of central leaders from nine Middle Eastern nations /organizations were coded for integrative complexity across five different phases of the crisis. Results indicated that, for the majority of Middle Eastern leaders in the study, integrative complexity dropped markedly immediately after 9/11, and then rose steadily, peaking during the U.S. counter-attack on Afghanistan. These results suggest that, despite playing largely peripheral roles in the crisis, Middle Eastern leaders were nonetheless substantially psychologically impacted by the events precipitated by the 9/11 attacks.

A popular refrain from an American song lamenting the 9/11 attacks asks:

"Where were you when the world stopped turning that September day?" Of course, the image of the world ceasing to turn is a hyperbole. But in many ways, with respect to the American world at least, the hyperbole is justifiable. The severe impact that 9/11 has had on the American psyche can be seen in many ways, including a dramatic increase in the number of American political psychology papers on the topic of terrorism.

But on the other side of the world, in a place that has long been far, far away from the minds of many Americans, the international crises started by the 9/11 attacks has *also* had a profound impact –namely, the Middle East. But what exactly is the nature of that psychological impact on Middle Eastern peoples?

This paper specifically addresses the complexity of Middle Eastern leaders' response to the international crisis resulting from the 9/11 terrorist attacks. This topic is potentially fruitful for political psychologists for at least two different reasons. First, unlike in America, in the Middle East, terrorism is much more commonplace. Given the impact that this terrorist attack had on Americans, it is perhaps sobering for Westerners to realize that, in the Middle East, terrorism is often a common part of people's everyday lives. Indeed, King Abdullah II of Jordan expressed this sentiment after the attacks:

> The huge majority of Muslims and Arabs all over the world are shocked and disgusted by what we have witnessed in the United States. But, again, you have to remember that we have been fighting this fight for decades, in Jordan in particular. There's been more Jordanian diplomats that have lost their lives due to international terrorism than Israeli diplomats, and many other countries in the Middle East have had to suffer the same fates. So what we're saying now is, you know, help us fight. Join the fight. This is something that we have been working together with the United States, but maybe with not as much of an understanding by the average person in the street.

Some initial work on the complexity of leaders' statements during the 9/11 crisis has focused primarily on the terrorists themselves or on Western leaders (Suedfeld & Leighton, 2002; Suedfeld, this issue). Studying Middle Eastern leaders' psychological reactions to a terrorist attack on a foreign nation thus provides an interesting complement to this initial work on Western reactions. Americans are responding in many ways to what appears (to them) to be a relatively unusual event; Middle Easterners have been dealing directly with the issue for years.

A second reason involves cultural differences. Given the importance of understanding how cultural differences influence politics (e.g., Conway & Clements, under review; Hudson & Sampson, 1999; Renshon & Duckitt, 1997), gauging the psychological reaction of several cultures to an event as large in its ramifications as 9/11 can be a valuable aid to our understanding of political psychology. Indeed, such a contrast not only helps us understand the *Middle Eastern* reaction to 9/11, but it potentially serves as a useful mirror for understanding *Western* –and more specifically, *American*–

reaction to the event. In looking for similarities and differences between Western and Middle Eastern reactions, we may potentially learn more about *both* sets of cultures.

Along these lines, the present study looks at leaders whose populaces, although generally not condoning terrorism, share more common ideology –most notably religious beliefs– with the terrorists than with the victims. (As an analogy, an American audience might imagine how American leaders would react if an American terrorist had deliberately killed 5,000 non-American civilians in the name of dearly-held Western values like individual freedom and democracy). Thus, the present study affords an interesting opportunity to investigate the psychology of public figures' reactions who are caught in between the moral and international imperative of disparaging terrorist attacks against innocent civilians, while simultaneously avoiding supporting an overly "Western" ideology. (Of course, some segments of Islamic ideologues have claimed that terrorism is supported by Islamic ideology; however, many do not). Studying the complexity of leaders under these circumstances can provide a unique window into the psychological processes that underlie such difficult international relations.

Integrative Complexity

The particular psychological construct under scrutiny here is a measurement of the underlying structure of communications widely used in previous political psychology research: Integrative complexity. Integrative complexity involves two components. Differentiation is the recognition of more than one dimension relevant to a particular topic, while integration is the perception of relatedness between these multiple dimensions. It is important to note that integrative complexity is a measurement of the underlying cognitive structure of communications, not the explicit content. One can make an extremely simple *or* extremely complex statement about engaging in war; likewise, one can make an extremely simple *or* extremely complex statement about attempting a peaceful resolution. As such, integrative complexity is not directly dependent upon the nature of the content in international communications. Thus, it provides a potential window "behind the scenes" into the psychological processes that underlie international relations.

Unsurprisingly, then, integrative complexity has a long history in political psychology for helping us understand the nature of international relations. For example, a surprise attack is preceded by a decrease in complexity by political leaders from the attacking –but not the defending– nation. In mutual wars, the complexity of *both* nations' leaders decreases prior to the

onset of the war. On the flip side, the peaceful resolution of an international crisis is preceded by an increase in complexity of the key political leaders on both sides (see Conway, Suedfeld, & Tetlock, 2001, for a review).

With these previous findings in mind, the present study attempted to apply the integrative complexity construct to the leaders of nine Middle Eastern nations/organizations throughout the international crisis instigated by the 9/11 terrorist attacks, covering a time span from pre-9/11 until after the outbreak of the U.S. – led coalition attack on Afghanistan. It was hoped in so doing that we might not only gain a better understanding of integrative complexity in a unique crisis, but also open a window into the psychological processes that went on behind the scenes.

Method

Sources

Communications from political leaders of nine Middle Eastern and North African nations/organizations from July 1998 through April 2002 served as source material. In all cases this included the primary executive of the nation/organization. In three cases, due to a relative lack of available speeches from the primary executive, an average score from multiple political officials was used. The nations and respective leaders were:

(1) Algeria: Abdelaziz Bouteflika.
(2) Egypt: Hosni Mubarak.
(3) Iraq: Saddam Hussein.
(4) Israel: Sharon and Peres.
(5) Jordan: Abdullah II.
(6) Morocco: Mohammed IV.
(7) Palestinian Authority: Yasser Arafat.
(8) Saudi Arabia: Fahd, Abdullah, Saud, Sultan, Shaikh Abdulaziz Al-Ashaikh, Shaikh Salih bin Muhammad Al-Luheidan, and Fawzi Shobokshi.
(9) Turkey: Bülent Ecevit, İsmail Cem, and Ahmet Necdet Sezer.

Time periods

From the pool of above leaders, communications were chosen from five significant time periods (or *phases*):

(1) *Baseline: Prior to September 11*. Although including speeches dating as far back as 1998, most speeches in this phase occurred in 2001.

(2) *Attack: September 12 - September 15*. This phase captures the immediate aftermath of the terrorist attacks.

(3) *Coalition-building: September 16 - October 6*. During this phase, the U.S. began building a coalition of nations to attack Afghanistan.

(4) *Counterattack: October 7 – November 31*. October 7 marks the first heavy air strikes by Coalition forces in Afghanistan.

(5) *Post-counterattack: After December 1*. In December of 2001, the Taliban was forced to flee into hiding.

Procedure

Selection of materials. Excerpts from statements, interviews, press conferences, and news articles were obtained from the internet, primarily from government and major news media websites. When the statement was in a language other than English, it was only used if available in an English translation.

From each source, up to 10 paragraphs were randomly selected for coding. (If a source had fewer than 10 paragraphs, all paragraphs from that source were used.) Information that might identify the speaker or phase – such as names of persons, nations, or dates– was removed from the remaining paragraphs. These paragraphs were then randomly assembled and scored.

Scoring. Prepared paragraphs were scored by 2 trained coders who had previously achieved a reliability level of at least r = 0.90 with an expert coder (see Baker-Brown, Ballard, Bluck, de Vries, Suedfeld, & Tetlock, 1992, for procedural details of complexity scoring). The score used in primary analyses was an average of the two coders' scores (n = 1,075 paragraphs). Although reliability between the two coders was low by conventional standards (*alpha* = .55), the main pattern of results presented below remained unchanged even if analyzing each coders' ratings separately; therefore, the lack of reliability is not a concern in the present results.

Results

Table 1 presents the means for each nation across all 5 phases, as well as presenting summative means for each nation and each phase.

Initial analyses were performed within a 5 (Phase) X 9 (Nation) ANOVA. These analyses revealed a marginal main effect for Nation (F[8, 1037] = 1.73, p = .088), a main effect for Phase (F[4, 1037] = 3.99, p= .003), and an interaction between the two variables (F[25, 1037] = 2.33, p < .001).
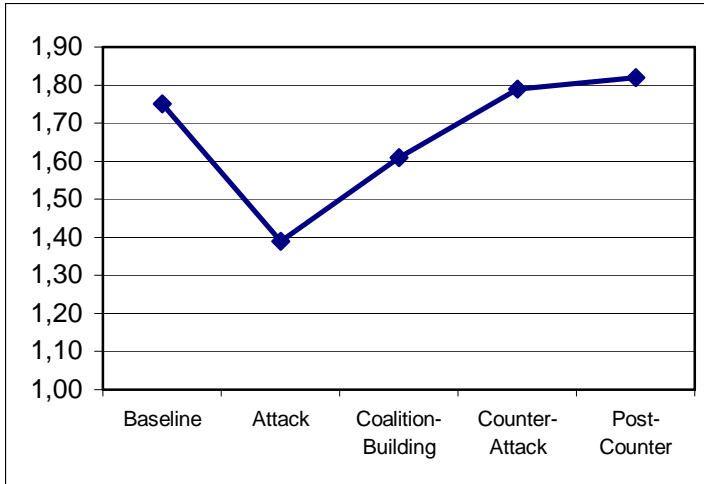
Table I
Integrative Complexity by Nation and Phase

			Phase			
Nation	Baseline	Attack	Coalition-Building	Counter-Attack	Post-Counter	**Nation Total**
Algeria	1.60	--	--	2.13	--	**1.83**
Egypt	1.78	1.44	1.38	1.57	--	**1.60**
Iraq	1.87	1.20	2.04	1.33	1.74	**1.79**
Israel	1.65	1.38	1.21	1.73	--	**1.60**
Jordan	1.93	1.44	1.55	1.89	1.94	**1.78**
P.A.	1.51	1.10*	1.76	1.79	1.38	**1.61**
Morocco	1.91	1.00*	1.79	2.16	1.97	**1.97**
Turkey	--	1.79	1.81	1.50	2.06	**1.80**
Saudi	1.34	1.28	1.78	1.68	--	**1.46**
Frame Total	**1.75**	**1.39**	**1.61**	**1.79**	**1.82**	**1.71**

* For "Attack" phase for P.A. and Morocco, $\underline{n} < 5$. (For a reliable score, at least 5 paragraphs is typically recommended)

Because main effect differences between nations are less theoretically relevant to the present approach than are differences relevant to phases, subsequent analyses will focus only on the Phase main effect and the inter-action between Phase and Nation. (Nation means can be viewed in Table 1). As can be seen in Figure 1, summing all nine nations together across phases yields a theoretically interpretable pattern. Specifically, complexity drops from baseline to immediately post-9/11, and then gradually rises throughout the rest of the crisis, until returning to approximately baseline levels[1]. Planned comparisons amongst phases suggested that only three comparisons were non-significant: Counter-Attack with Post-Counter phases, and the Baseline phase with each of these latter phases (t's < 1, p's > .34). All the remaining comparisons between phases were significant (t's > 2.3, two-tailed p's < .023).

Figure 1. Complexity of Middle Eastern Leaders by Phase: A Summary

Although many nations conform to this basic pattern across phases, Table 1 reveals that some do not. Of particular note is Iraq. Although Saddam Hussein, like most other leaders, dropped in complexity immediately after 9/11 and then showed a subsequent rise, his complexity sharply dropped off again once the counter-attack commenced.[2] He was one of the few leaders to show a drop once the Afghanistan war began in earnest, and his decrease at that point was the most extreme of any leader. Each drop and rise in complexity that Hussein showed throughout the crisis is significant when correcting for unequal variances, all t's > 2, all p's < .04. (Only the comparison between the last two phases is not significant when not correcting for unequal variances, t[32] = 1.61, p = .118).

Discussion

First and most obviously, these results suggest that, on average, the complexity of Middle Eastern leaders dropped substantially after 9/11, and then gradually rose again to pre-9/11 levels. Why might this be? There are at least two different reasons why complexity scores may change over time (see, e.g., Conway et al, 2001).

Explaining Shifts in Complexity

First, complexity may change over time due to an intentional shift in rhetoric (see, e.g., Tetlock, 1985). There may be some reason why nations'

leaders want to present a particularly hard-line stance on some issue. This may in turn cause complexity to decrease, because taking a hard-line, un-compromising stance is one of the hallmarks of low complexity. ("I will not consider any alternatives" is less complex than "let's consider the valid-ity of multiple alternatives.") So, for example, perhaps the drop in com-plexity immediately after 9/11 occurred because leaders wanted to be sure that they communicated an unequivocal condemnation of the terrorist at-tacks. Later on, however, they may have shifted their communication styles so as to be more accommodating to both U.S. needs and their own Arab constituents (many of whom are ideologically anti-U.S.), discussing both their disapproval of the tragedy and also more complex issues involving the rise of terrorism in Arab lands.

On the other hand, complexity may change over time as the result of psychological pressures that do not reflect an intentional rhetorical shift. (Indeed, the available evidence perhaps favors a more cognitive-based in-terpretation of complexity shifts; see, e.g., Tetlock & Levi, 1996; Suedfeld & Rank, 1976). For example, one model of complexity, the Cognitive Manager Model (Suedfeld, 1992), suggests that stress causes a reduction in complexity (often referred to as "disruptive stress"). Thus, the immediate aftermath of 9/11 may have invoked stress in Middle Eastern leaders – perhaps due to the perceived time pressure in producing an immediate but appropriate public statement. This in turn may have caused a reduction in complexity immediately after 9/11. It could be that later statements were higher in complexity because leaders and their staffs actually had more time to construct them, reducing the stress involved in preparing those later communications – and thus increasing their complexity.

Iraq

Interestingly, although the statements of most leaders after 9/11 tended to be U.S.-friendly in content, there was one clear exception to this rule: Saddam Hussein's communications after 9/11 unsurprisingly emanated a decidedly anti-American flavor. However, in spite of the very different nature of the content of Hussein's speech after 9/11, he, too, shows a drop in complexity. This suggests that perhaps the complexity drop of Middle Eastern leaders immediately after 9/11 represents more of a psychological stressor (such as a time constraint) than an intentional shift in content or rhetorical style. Of course, this is by no means conclusive, as such shifts can potentially be explained by intentional changes in rhetoric as well. At the very least, though, it highlights the point that integrative complexity is

independent of the particular content of the statements, and is a measurement of the underlying structure of those statements.

Also interestingly, unlike most other leaders, Hussein's complexity went *down* substantially at the beginning of the coalition attack on Afghanistan. There may be multiple reasons for his deviation from the overall tendency. Perhaps it increased his stress level more than other leaders because he feared that he may himself be in greater personal danger –that maybe (as in fact turned out to be the case) he may also come under a military assault by a U.S.– led coalition. Or it could be indicative of a much stronger negative emotional response to the attack for ideological or other reasons.

Hussein's sharp decrease at the time of the counterattack also contrasts markedly with Bush, who showed a substantial rise after the counterattack had begun (see Suedfeld, this issue). Suedfeld speculated that this rise may result from a confidence that, once the military attack was underway, victory was likely. Thus, for Bush, the beginning of the war on Afghanistan may have signaled an end to his primary stressors. For Hussein, however, the counterattack may have on the contrary *increased* his strain by pointing to what he perceived was a potential attack on –and probable defeat of– his own regime.

Concluding Thoughts

Like any study, this study has its limitations. Interrater reliability was lower than is typical in integrative complexity studies. Further, we could not find an extensive set of materials for all leaders during all the phases under consideration (including, in two cases, relying on fewer than the typically recommended amount of paragraphs; see Table I).

However, at a broad level, these results at the very least suggest that the 9/11 attacks psychologically affected Middle Eastern leaders, even those not particularly involved in the attacks. This is especially interesting in light of evidence suggesting that often, unlike primary leaders, peripheral leaders in an international crisis exhibit little or no decrease in complexity prior to a coming conflict (Suedfeld, Tetlock, & Ramirez, 1977; Wallace, Suedfeld, & Thachuk, 1993). In contrast, the present results suggest that Middle Eastern leaders, despite for the most part not being directly involved, were substantially psychologically affected by the crisis.

These results also provide an interesting complement to work on Western leaders during this same crisis (Suedfeld, this issue). Often, a nation's reaction to an event is best understood in the larger context of the international reaction to which it is inevitably linked; so too the Western reaction

may be illuminated by considering both its similarities and differences to the Middle Eastern psychological response. On the one hand, in both Middle Eastern and Western leaders, there was a tendency for the complexity of public statements to decrease immediately after 9/11. Thus, it may be that cross-cultural differences between Western and Middle Eastern leaders were –at least for a time, and in some measure– cognitively overridden by the shared cognitive strain that 9/11 produced. On the other hand, a more specific comparison between Bush and Hussein suggests, too, that sharp differences exist. When the counterattack began, Bush increased, while Hussein decreased, in complexity. Considering the two together thus provides a more comprehensive picture of both American and Iraqi perceptions of the crisis.

The present results reinforce, yet again, the wide applicability of studying political leaders' complexity as a way of capturing international crises. Given that terrorism has taken on a greater importance in an increasingly growing segment of the world, this may be an important lesson towards understanding what appear to be inevitable future terrorism-related political crises.

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Footnotes

1. This same basic pattern also occurred when looking within each type of communication separately, suggesting that it cannot be accounted for by an uneven distribution of communication types across phases.

2. Saddam Hussein's lone obtained "attack" communication did not have a definitive date; it is clear, however, that it was given between September 13 and September 16. While this leaves open the possibility that this communication could be included in the "coalition-building" category (which begins on September 16), we chose not to do so for two reasons: (1) It is more probable that it occurred in the "attack" phase, and (2) it is certain that the communication preceded other communications in the "coalition-building" frame; thus, even if it did occur on September 16, it still captures the temporal progression of the complexity of his communications.

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