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Roosevelt and the Munich Crisis: Insights from Prospect Theory

Barbara Farnham[1]

The use of prospect theory to explain political decision-making challenges the claim of rational choice theory to provide a more convincing account of this behavior. Because President Roosevelt's decision-making during the Munich crisis manifests a number of phenomena associated with prospect theory, including a change in the decision frame and corresponding preference reversal, risk acceptance to avoid loss, and the operation of certainty effects, it affords an opportunity to view these competing claims in the light of an actual historical case. An analysis of Roosevelt's decision-making behavior during the crisis shows that prospect theory does in fact explain it more satisfactorily than does the theory of rational choice. In addition, the analysis suggests that affect may sometimes play a role in causing decision frames to change and raises questions about Janis and Mann's account of the impact of stress on decision-making.

KEY WORDS: decision-making; prospect theory; rational choice; decisional conflict model; Munich crisis; Roosevelt.

INTRODUCTION

Recently, there have been a number of attempts to use prospect theory to explain political decision-making behavior (e.g., Quattrone & Tversky, 1984 and 1988). Because such efforts challenge the claim of theories of rational choice to provide a more convincing account of similar phenomena (e.g., Bueno de Mesquita, 1981), an attempt to examine these competing models in the light of an historical case should have considerable theoretical interest.

President Franklin D. Roosevelt's decision-making behavior during the Munich crisis in September 1938 provides a suitable vehicle for such an explora-

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tion because it appears to exhibit a number of phenomena associated with prospect theory, such as a change in the framing of the choice problem and corresponding preference reversal, risk acceptance to avoid loss, and the operation of certainty effects. During the course of the crisis, Roosevelt moved from a firm conviction that American intervention was inappropriate to the belief that it was not only desirable, but necessary. At the same time, he became willing to accept at least two risks he had previously desired to avoid: that such intervention might be ineffective or, worse, have an adverse effect on the crisis, and that it might have unfortunate domestic political repercussions.

What is most striking about Roosevelt's reversal of preferences is that it seems to have been a consequence of a change in the way he represented the crisis to himself, or framed it, rather than a response to new information about its implications for the United States.[2] Initially, Roosevelt believed that the European crisis, even should it end in war, did not represent an immediate threat to the United States. In mid-crisis, however, he apparently became convinced that it did pose such a threat, despite the fact that, from an American point of view, the objective situation was unaltered. Roosevelt had in fact come to regard an outcome of war as in some sense a loss for the United States and thus felt impelled to take action to avoid it.

This behavior is puzzling from a rational choice perspective because a preference reversal based on a different representation of the same decision problem clearly violates the expectations of utility theory (Tversky & Kahneman, 1986, p. S523). Prospect theory, on the other hand, by providing "an alternative account of choice under risk" which holds that people are frequently less analytical in making their decisions than expected-utility theory would predict (Kahneman & Tversky, 1979, p. 263), offers the possibility of explaining such behavior.

In addition to illuminating an important episode in American foreign policy, however, the application of prospect theory to the Munich case offers at least three theoretical benefits. For one thing, while several of the predictions of prospect theory have received experimental support, there has been relatively little work demonstrating their applicability to political decision-making. Direct evidence of the ability of prospect theory to explain behavior in an actual political decision-making situation, therefore, could increase confidence in its ecological validity and extend its range (For experimental evidence in general, in addition to the work of Tversky and Kahneman cited below, see Davis & Bobko, 1986, pp. 125–126; Bazerman, 1983, p. 214; Levin et al., 1985, p. 372; and Shapira, 1981, pp. 334, 344–348, 250. For attempts to use prospect theory to illuminate

[2]According to Tversky and Kahneman a decision frame includes the decision-maker's conception of "the acts or options among which [he or she] must choose, the possible outcomes or consequences of these acts, and the contingencies or conditional probabilities associated with a particular choice." Taken together, these elements serve to define the decision problem (Tversky & Kahneman, 1981, p. 453).

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political judgment, see Quattrone & Tversky, 1988 and 1984. On the need to relate psychological theories to decision-making behavior in political settings, see Tetlock, 1985; and Farnham, 1990).

A second benefit of using prospect theory to explain the Munich case is that in suggesting a possible cause of changes in decision frames, it may contribute to an elaboration of the theory itself. Tversky and Kahneman have said relatively little on this subject. Stating only that "the frame that a decision-maker adopts is controlled partly by the formulation of the problem and partly by the norms, habits, and personal characteristics of the decision-maker," they have addressed neither the issue of how a decision problem is formulated in the first place nor the question of what factors might cause that formulation to change spontaneously (Tversky & Kahneman, 1981, p. 453). The Munich case, however, suggests the intriguing possibility that at least some frame changes may be triggered by affect. Apparently, that is, President Roosevelt reframed the European crisis as a matter of direct concern to the United States only after the idea of impending war had become emotionally compeling to him.

Finally, because the Munich crisis ultimately produced considerable stress for Roosevelt, it offers an opportunity to look more closely at Janis and Mann's (1977) decisional conflict model of decision-making. Since the crisis manifested many of the conditions under which that model is expected to apply, its failure to do so raises a question about the model's usefulness for explaining decision-making behavior in political settings.

In the discussion which follows, after first describing Roosevelt's behavior during the Munich crisis, an attempt will be made to compare explanations for it derived from both prospect theory and the theory of rational choice. The implications of this analysis for prospect theory, as well as for decision-making in general, will then be explored.

THE COURSE OF THE MUNICH CRISIS

The Munich crisis began in mid-September 1938 as Great Britain and France sought to cope with German pressure on Czechoslovakia while avoiding war and preserving at least the appearance of honoring their commitments to the latter. The crisis was resolved, however temporarily, with the signing of the Munich agreement on September 30.

The proximate cause of the crisis was the escalation of German Chancellor Adolf Hitler's claims on Czechoslovakia from autonomy for the Sudeten Germans, to which the Czechs had already agreed, to outright cession of the Sudetenland to Germany. Rather than give in to such pressure, Czechoslovakia turned to France and Britain for help. As a consequence of this appeal, Neville Chamberlain, the British prime minister, offered to conduct direct negotiations

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with Hitler (brief descriptions of the Munich crisis may be found in Taylor, 1979, pp. 7–11; Offner, 1969, pp. 259–68; Divine, 1965, pp. 51–55, and 1969, pp. 20–21).

On September 15, Chamberlain met Hitler at Berchtesgaden and heard his demand for the cession of the Sudeten provinces. The British prime minister then undertook to persuade the French, and pressure the Czechs, into agreeing to this ultimatum. Having succeeded in both aims, he met again with Hitler at Godesberg on September 22 only to discover that the Fuehrer was now also requiring the cession of territory in which Germans were a minority and insisting that all transfers be carried out by October 1. In reaction to this development, "British and French public opinion stiffened, and by September 25 it seemed likely that Chamberlain and Edouard Daladier, the French Premier, would fight rather than surrender completely to Hitler" (Divine, 1969, p. 20).

At this point President Roosevelt chose to intervene, first with an appeal to the states involved not to break off negotiations, and then with a message to Hitler alone proposing that the talks be expanded into a conference which would include all interested parties. After a further intervention by Mussolini, Hitler issued invitations to Great Britain, France, and Italy to meet at Munich on September 29 and 30 (Taylor, 1979, pp. 9–10).

The outcome of this conference, as Divine has noted, "marked the climax of appeasement. In return for Hitler's promise not to seek an additional foot of territory in Europe, Britain and France agreed that Germany should occupy the Sudeten area in four stages. . . . The Czechs agreed to the terms on the morning of September 30, and thus became the sacrificial victims of the worldwide demand for peace at any price." At this point, the democracies having found a way to give Hitler what he wanted without putting him to the trouble of fighting for it, the crisis ended (Divine, 1965, p. 54; see also Hull, 1948, pp. 595–596).

ROOSEVELT'S RESPONSE TO THE MUNICH CRISIS

From the perspective of Roosevelt's decision-making behavior, the Munich crisis can be divided into two stages, with the Godesberg meeting serving as the line of demarcation. The first stage, which was characterized by his marked disinclination to intervene in the crisis, extended from September 13 to September 22, coming to a climax with his conversation with British Ambassador Sir Ronald Lindsay on September 19. The second stage began on September 23, when the initial reports of the Godesberg ultimatum reached the president, and ended with the signing of the Munich Agreement on September 30. From an American perspective, the high point of this stage was Roosevelt's dramatic change of policy about intervention in the crisis culminating in his two appeals on September 25 and 27.

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Stage I: September 13–September 22, 1938

During the first phase of the crisis, Roosevelt's assessment of the likelihood of general war fluctuated with the reports he received from Europe. His determination not to intervene, however remained unaltered.

At the outset, both the president's analysis of the situation and his policy preferences mirrored those of the pre-crisis period. In assessing the worsening climate in Central Europe in the summer of 1938, Roosevelt had exhibited concern about the possibility of war as well as uncertainty about the intentions of the major players owing to contradictory reports from abroad, the conflicting views of members of his administration, and his own suspicions about both the resolve of the British and French and their motives in attempting to involve the United States.[3]

The mixture of uncertainty and concern which underlay the president's diagnosis of the Czech situation in the weeks before the crisis was reflected in his determination not to involve the United States. While sympathetic to the democracies, and frustrated by his inability to discover some positive way to support them, Roosevelt refused to join openly in their attempts to deal with the German threat, notwithstanding the determined efforts of members of his administration, like Ambassador Bullitt, to persuade him to do so.[4]

The onset of the crisis itself brought no dramatic changes in Roosevelt's policy preferences. While his assessment of the likelihood of war during the first stage of the crisis varied according to the news from Europe, his determination to avoid intervening did not.

Initially, Roosevelt believed that there would be no general war because the French and British would not resist Hitler. On September 16 or 17, for example, he advised Secretary of the Interior Harold Ickes that

[3]For a sample of reports from abroad during this period, see "Bullitt to FDR, May 20, 1938," Schewe, 1979, #1180; "Kennedy to Hull, August 31, 1938," United States Department of State, *Foreign Relations of the United States,* (hereafter *FRUS*) 1938, vol. I, pp. 565–566; "William C. Bullitt, Ambassador to France, to Roosevelt, August 31, 1938," Schewe, 1979, #1260; "Roosevelt to Cordell Hull, Secretary of State, August 31, 1938," *Ibid.*, #1259; "William Phillips, Ambassador to Italy, to Roosevelt, September 1, 1938," *Ibid.*, #1263; "Bullitt to Hull, September 12, 1938," *FRUS*, 1938, vol. I, p. 589; and "Kennedy to Hull September 9 and 10, 1938," *Ibid.*, pp. 584–585. The views of various members of the Administration at this time may be found in "Memo from Adolf Berle to the President, September 1, 1938;" Kaufmann, 1963, pp. 662–664; Blum, 1965, pp. 452, 457; Ickes, 1954, pp. 381–382. For Roosevelt's and Morgenthau's suspicions that the British were trying to manipulate the United States, see "Morgenthau Diary," September 1, 1938, vol. 138, pp. 33–55.

[4]See, for example, Bullitt's letter of May 20, 1938 (Bullitt, 1972, pp. 261–262). For evidence of Roosevelt's reluctance to support the democracies openly, see "Press conference, Hyde Park, September 9, 1938, 5:30 P.M.," Schewe, 1979, #1273; Taylor, 1979, pp. 525–526; Blum, 1965, p. 518; Langer and Gleason, 1952, pp. 32–33; and Haight, 1960, pp. 345–348. A detailed discussion of Roosevelt's attitudes and policy preferences during this period may be found in Farnham, 1991, pp. 385–398.

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> Chamberlain is for peace at any price. . . . Czechoslovakia apparently has resisted pressure from England and France to agree to a plebiscite. Lacking a plebiscite, Hitler will move in. . . . Because it will not have submitted to the demands of France and England, Czechoslovakia will be left by these supposed allies to paddle its own canoe. This will mean a swift and brutal war . . . [which] will leave Czechoslovakia dismembered and prostrate. . . . [Then] . . . England and France . . . will "wash the blood from their Judas Iscariot hands. (Ickes, 1954, p. 468)

Given the pusillanimity of the states most concerned, Roosevelt concluded that there was no meanful action he could take. On September 13, for example, he agreed with Hull that it would be best to do nothing at all. Instead, the president confined himself to offering a few minimal gestures of support for the democracies, such as sending the light cruiser Nashville to England in readiness to transport British gold reserves to New York ("Morgenthau Diary," vol. 141, pp. 69, 115. Hull communicated this decision to the French Ambassador on September 14 [Alsop and Kintner, 1940, pp. 7–8; Memorandum of a conversation between Hull and the French Ambassador, *FRUS,* 1938, vol. I, pp. 598–599]. As Assistant Secretary of State Moffat reported in his diary, this decision was reaffirmed on September 16 [Hooker, 1956, pp. 202–203, 205].)

Between September 17 and 19, the president assimilated the bad news from Berchtesgaden and adjusted his expectations about the likelihood of war. On the morning of the 19th, for example, predicting that Czech resistance to Hitler's demands would now force the democracies to fight, Roosevelt repeated to Secretary Morgenthau a recipe for winning a general war in Europe he had outlined to Secretary Ickes on September 17 and expressed the belief that, despite German preponderance in military aviation, the democracies would prevail in an air war (Ickes, 1954, pp. 469–470. Representative of the kind of news about the Berchtesgaden meeting Roosevelt received is Ambassador Kennedy's September 17 account of Chamberlain's statement that Hitler "was perfectly willing to take on a world war" over the principle of self-determination for the Sudeten Germans [Kennedy to Hull, September 17, 1938, *FRUS,* 1938, vol. I, pp. 607–608]. Other reports emphasizing the seriousness of the situation may be found in Kennedy to Hull, September 17, 1938, *FRUS,* 1938, vol. I, pp. 609–12; Wilson to Hull, September 18, 1938, *Ibid.,* pp. 612–614; and Carr to Hull, September 18, 1938, *Ibid.,* pp. 614–615. The nearly unanimous conclusion of these communications was that war was virtually certain to occur unless the democracies acceded to Hitler's demands.).

Convinced that a defensive war based on a blockade offered Britain and France their best chance of vanquishing the Germans, Roosevelt discussed with Morgenthau how best to get this idea across to them. Because of his reservations about the ability of Ambassadors Kennedy and Bullitt to convey his meaning effectively, the president decided to do the job himself, making an appointment with the British ambassador for that evening (Morgenthau Diary, 1938, vol. 141, p. 115. Also in Blum, 1965, pp. 519–520).

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According to Ambassador Lindsay's account of this meeting, Roosevelt declared that while he would like to be of some immediate assistance, "having no illusions as the effect of his previous public statements," he was reluctant to make any pronouncements about the present situation:

> Today he would not dare to express approval of the recommendations put to the Czechoslovak Government. He would [also] be afraid to express disapproval of German aggression lest it might encourage Czechoslovakia to vain resistance. He thus felt unable to do anything and thought at his press conference tomorrow (he has postponed the last two) he would confine himself to refusing to make any comment at all.[5]

What the president really wanted to discuss with the ambassador was the proper strategy for conducting the war he believed the Western powers would soon be forced to fight. Declaring that Great Britain and France "would be beaten if they tried to wage war on classical lines of attack," Roosevelt recommended that they should conduct the war "purely by blockade and in a defensive manner." He also indicated that, within the limits of his domestic constraints, he would give the democracies as much help in such a war as he could.

Clearly then, while the news from Berchtesgaden did lead President Roosevelt to take some sort of action, what is most striking is the type of the action he chose. Roosevelt's heightened expectation of war led him neither to try to avert it, nor to alter his policy of nonintervention in the crisis itself. Instead, he responded to the deteriorating situation in Europe by attempting to bolster the courage of the democracies in the present and guide their strategy in any future struggle. (That this was Roosevelt's purpose in speaking to Lindsay is also Dallek's view [1979, pp. 164–165].)

After the president's meeting with the British ambassador, there followed several days of waiting. Ultimately, the Czechs, having received no support for their position, "accepted flatly and unconditionally the British-French proposal," acceding to virtually all of Hitler's demands. Since Roosevelt's expectation of war had been based on the belief that the Czechs would fight, this development reduced his estimate of its likelihood. The forthcoming meeting of Prime Minister Chamberlain and Hitler at Godesberg would now merely be a matter of arranging the details (Bullitt to Hull, September 21, 1938, *FRUS*, 1938, vol. I, pp. 630–631. According to Dallek, the president was surprised at

[5]"Sir R. Lindsay (Washington) to Viscount Halifax, (Received September 20, 1:40 a.m.)," (Butler and Woodward, 1951, pp. 627–629. On the meeting between Roosevelt and Lindsay, see also Taylor, 1979, pp. 846–848; Lash, 1976, pp. 25–28; Offner, 1969, p. 261; Cole, 1983, p. 300). Other evidence of Roosevelt's disinclination to intervene directly in the crisis even after Berchtesgaden is found in a memorandum of his conversation with a French trade unionist on September 18 or 19 in which he "pointed out that he did not feel the situation warranted any initiative from him. Such an initiative, if not accepted, might make the situation even worse than it was" ("Memorandum by J. Pierrepont Moffat, Chief, Division of European Affairs, Department of State, September 20, 1938," Schewe, 1979, #1289a. Also in *FRUS*, 1938, vol. I, pp. 625–626, and Hooker, 1956, pp. 206–207).

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the Czech decision but felt that there was now "agreement in principle" between the German and Czech governments [Dallek, 1979, p. 165].).

However dramatic the president's conversation with Ambassador Lindsay may appear, therefore, it did not in fact constitute a departure from the policies he had been following all along. Even after Berchtesgaden had greatly increased his assessment of the probability of war, Roosevelt remained reluctant to intervene openly in the crisis.

Stage II: September 23–September 29, 1938

For President Roosevelt, as for other Americans, the Munich crisis began in earnest on September 23. Primarily as a consequence of the talks between Hitler and Chamberlain at Godesberg on September 22 and 23, expectations of war increased dramatically in Washington and elsewhere (Dallek, 1979, p. 165. For a detailed account of the Godesberg meeting itself, see Taylor, 1979, pp. 806–819).

Ickes has described Roosevelt's initial reaction to the news from Godesberg in his account of a cabinet meeting on the afternoon of September 23 at which the European situation was "canvassed very fully" (Ickes, 1954, pp. 473–474). Opening the meeting with a worst-case analysis of the possible consequences of the latest developments, Secretary Hull declared that there were "undoubtedly" defensive alliances between Italy, Germany, and Japan, and Japan would support Germany and Italy in their bid to dominate Europe while itself trying to gain complete control over Asia. Consequently, in Ickes' words,

> . . . France may soon find itself to be a helpless country lying between an enlarged and strengthened Germany and Italy. England might even be reduced to the status of a third- or fourth-rate power with many of her colonies gone. If this should happen, there might follow attempts on the part of Germany, Italy, and Japan to penetrate South America. This would mean that the United States would have to go to the defense of South America, in which event we would be called upon to defend both the Atlantic and the Pacific seaboards from powerful enemies. (Ickes, 1954, p. 473–474)

Roosevelt, on the other hand, in line with his previously expressed views, was considerably less pessimistic about the democracies' chances, repeating that they should fight a strictly defensive war, and declaring that the British and French would control both the Atlantic Ocean and the Mediterranean and would thus be able to bottle up the Germans and the Italians. For the first time, however, he did express some concern about German preponderance in the air, labeling it "the worst thing about the situation." The meeting closed with the president reading from an analysis of the situation from Ambassador Bullitt just handed to him, which predicted "that Germany might be crossing the [Czech] frontier this morning and that Poland might go across even before morning"

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(Ickes, 1954, p. 473–474; "Memorandum to Roosevelt, September 23, 1938," Schewe, #1294).

Clearly, then, the news of Hitler's unreasonable demands at Godesberg produced an immediate upward revision in Roosevelt's estimate of the likelihood of war in Europe. It did not, however, lead to a change in policy. Although war now seemed imminent, the president still had no thought of intervening to prevent it. According to Ickes' account, as late as the afternoon of September 23, there was "no doubt of the President's desire to avoid any embroilment in European quarrels."[6] That he had decided to intervene in the crisis by at least the afternoon of September 25 is thus a puzzle which must be solved.

The First Intervention

Throughout the day on September 24, bad news poured into the White House. Despite the six-day respite Hitler had generously granted the Czechs, the situation remained menacing.[7] As Ickes reported in his diary, much of Europe was gearing up for war (Ickes, 1954, p. 473. See also Czechoslovak Legation to the Department of State, September 24, 1938, *FRUS,* vol. I, pp. 645–646; Haight, 1960, p. 352).

Moreover, the diplomatic traffic, in emphasizing Hitler's total unreasonableness, left no doubt that responsibility for war would rest solely with him. For example, Kennedy cabled that the British

> have just received Hitler's answers and they are . . . preposterous. Hitler not only wants what everybody was willing to give him but it looks as if he wants a great deal more. . . . Cadogan feels that . . . they have taken every possible opportunity to demonstrate they believed there was some sanity in Hitler and to save the world from the horrible results of war. . . . Hitler's answers prove there is no sanity left in the man. (Kennedy to Hull, Sep-

[6]In fact, the message from Bullitt, which Roosevelt read to the Cabinet, had suggested that he should now act directly with respect to the crisis and referred obliquely to the Ambassador's previous idea of calling an international conference. Roosevelt, however, apparently made no mention of this proposal to his Cabinet. That immediate action was not at the forefront of his thinking on September 23 is also shown by his negative reply to Nicholas Murray Butler's suggestion that he make an appeal to the parties ("Memorandum to Roosevelt, September 23, 1938," "Roosevelt to Nicholas Murray Butler, President, Columbia University, September 23, 1938," Schewe, 1979, #1294, 1295; Ickes, 1954, pp. 473–474.).

[7]On September 24 Ickes reported that, while "the situation still looks threatening," it was "not as critical as the message read by the President yesterday indicated," because "Hitler has given six days for acceptance of his terms by Czechoslovakia." (Ickes, 1954, p. 473). Roosevelt himself had this news by the afternoon of September 23, though not at the time of the Cabinet meeting where he was nevertheless still clearly disinclined to intervene. Moreover, since the clock continued to run and all the news from Europe was bad, it is doubtful that Hitler's gesture greatly reduced the pressure ("Memorandum by Henry M. Kannee, Assistant to Marvin H. Mc Intyre, September 23, 1938," and "Memorandum to Roosevelt, September 23, 1938," Schewe, 1979, #1293, #1294. Note that Schewe reverses the order of these two memoranda. However, it is clear that #1294 was received in time to be read to the Cabinet which met at 2 p.m., whereas #1293 bears the time 4.50 P.).

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tember 24, 1938, *FRUS*, 1938, vol. I, pp. 642–643, received 10 a.m. In a similar vein, see Carr to Hull, September 24, 1938, *Ibid.*, pp. 643–644, received 4:40 p.m.)

Meanwhile, Ambassador Bullitt, certain that the American people would desire "some effort by our Government . . . even though the effort may prove to be a failure," renewed his plea that Roosevelt appeal to the parties to confer at The Hague. Bullitt also thought that the United States should send a representative to such a conference and issue a "strong warning against armies crossing frontiers" (Bullitt to Hull, September 24, 1928, *FRUS*, 1938, vol. I, pp. 641–642. See also Hull, 1948, p. 590).

Despite such entreaties, Roosevelt took no action of any kind on September 24. Apparently, however, he was not unmoved and was beginning to think that some kind of intervention might be desirable. In fact, by the morning of the 25th, the impulse to act had affected even the State Department (Berle, 1973, p. 186; Hooker, 1956, pp. 211–212; Hull, 1948, pp. 590–591; Alsop and Kintner, 1940, p. 9).

By September 25 war clearly seemed imminent, as throughout the day Roosevelt continued to receive reports about both the draconian terms Hitler sought to impose and their complete unacceptability to any of the other parties, which made war a virtual certainty. There was, for example, a "flood" of telegrams from Ambassador Bullitt detailing Hitler's demands and emphasizing their extraordinary harshness. According to Bullitt, the German note to Chamberlain was "totally unacceptable. The terms asked by Hitler are virtually those imposed on a defeated German Army for evacuation of northern France" (Haight, 1960, p. 352; Bullitt to Hull, September 25, 1938, *FRUS*, 1938, vol. I, pp. 648–649, received 11:35 a.m. See also Bullitt to Hull, September 25, 1938, *Ibid.*, pp. 646–648, received 9:15 a.m.; and Bullitt to Hull, September 25, 1938, *Ibid.*, pp. 650–652, received 12:25 p.m.).[8]

While these alarming reports poured in, the planning for an American response initiated in the State Department continued. Berle and Moffat had volunteered to produce the draft of a presidential statement and, after considering and ruling out Bullitt's conference plan, settled on a message which would be, as Berle desired, "not merely an appeal but a definite suggestion that we would use our good offices in a draft leading to the revision of the Versailles Treaty." Hull, while disapproving of the idea of treaty revision as "too dangerous," took the draft

[8]Bullitt's reports were supplemented by a cable from Ambassador Carr transmitting the Czech president's plea to prevent "the assassination of the state" by urging the British and the French not to desert Czechoslovakia. Moreover, the American ambassador to Germany, Horace Wilson, telegraphed later in the day to convey the opinion of the British Ambassador to Germany that unless the British and French managed to pressure the Czechs into accepting the German troops, there would almost certainly be war (Carr to Hull, September 25, 1938, *Ibid.*, pp. 649–650, received at 10:20 a.m.; and Wilson to Hull, September 25, 1938, *Ibid.*, pp. 654–56, received 7 p.m.. See also, Hull, 1948, pp. 590–591).

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statement to the president at six o'clock (Berle, 1973, p. 186, Hooker, 1956, pp. 211–212; Offner, 1969, pp. 262–263 [Offner's account is based on the original Moffat diary]; Haight, 1960, p. 353, Alsop and Kintner, 1940, p. 9).

Clearly by this point Roosevelt wanted to act to affect the crisis. His desire to influence the manner in which a general war in Europe would be fought had been totally supplanted by a determination to prevent it. Henceforth he was completely focused on the imminence of war and the need to end the crisis before it could occur (Hull informed Moffat on the night of the 25th that Roosevelt had gotten such bad telephone reports from both Bullitt and Kennedy that he could no longer keep silent [Hooker, 1956, pp. 212–213; Hull, 1948, pp. 591–592]. On Roosevelt's anxiety to stop the war by this time, see also Morgenthau Diary, vol. 142, p. 342).

Thus, the drafting of the appeal went forward. Bullitt had suggested that it should include an offer by the president to arbitrate. Hull disliked this idea. (In fact he opposed sending any appeal whatever.) Along with Normal Davis, he was also against the somewhat less extreme step of a tender of good offices (according to Hull, he kept urging the president to go slow, while Welles egged him on [Hull, 1948, pp. 591–592. Hooker, 1956, pp. 212–213; Berle, 1973, pp. 186–187]).

In the end, Roosevelt acceded to these objections, and any hint of mediation was removed from the appeal. According to Moffat, this was done both because of his fear of "untoward domestic effects," and because he believed the notion of good offices to be implicit in the appeal in any case (Berle, 1973, p. 187; Hull, 1948, p. 592; Hooker, 1956, pp. 212–213; Offner, 1969, p. 263).

The president finished revising the final draft by midnight, and it was sent to Hitler, Chamberlain, Daladier, and Czechoslovakian President Edvard Benes at 1 a.m. on September 26. In the message, Roosevelt declared that the "fabric of peace . . . is in immediate danger," and stressed that, while the United States eschewed "political entanglements," it could not escape the consequences of a general war. He, therefore, reminded the parties of their obligation to settle their differences peacefully, and called on them not to break off negotiations (Alsop and Kintner, 1940, p. 10; Offner, 1969, p. 263; Roosevelt to Hitler, September 26, 1938, *FRUS*, 1938, vol. I, pp. 657–658. The responses to Roosevelt's appeal may be found in *Ibid.*, pp. 661–673).

Exactly what did Roosevelt hope to accomplish with this message? Hull, who had serious reservations about the efficacy of such an appeal, has stated that Roosevelt was motivated by the feeling that nothing could be worse than inaction: "The President . . . believed with Bullitt that something should be done, even if it were not successful. He said to me: 'It can't do any harm. It's safe to urge peace until the last moment.' "

Welles, on the other hand, told the French ambassador that the message reflected Roosevelt's attempt to balance his desire to affect the course of the crisis with his concern about possible domestic repercussions. In Haight's words, Welles

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gave Ambassador St. Quentin to understand that "in his first message Roosevelt aimed at bringing the weight of the United States to bear upon the European crisis and at the same time to avoid stirring American isolationist feelings" (Hull, 1948, p. 591; Haight, 1960, p. 356, n. 129). That the president was disposed to be cautious about arousing domestic opinion can also be seen by his refusal to allow Chamberlain's proposed radio address to be broadcast directly to the United States (memorandum of a phone conversation between Welles and Kennedy, September 26, 1938, 1:30 p.m., *FRUS,* 1938, vol. I, pp. 660–661. See also, Hull, 1948, p. 593).

In any case, the day following the president's appeal was marked by considerable anxiety. According to Hull, they "waited almost breathlessly" for the replies, especially Hitler's.

Unfortunately, no word from the Fuehrer was immediately forthcoming. However, Roosevelt received ample evidence of the democracies' continued resolve, as well as numerous expressions of their gratitude for his message and assurances about its positive influence which he found particularly gratifying (Hull, 1948, p. 592. Memorandum of a phone conversation between Welles and Kennedy, September 26, 1938, 1:30 p.m., *Ibid.,* pp. 660–661. For accounts of Allied determination, see Kennedy to Hull, September 26, 1938, *FRUS,* 1938, vol. I, p. 659; Bullitt to Hull, September 26, 1938, *Ibid.,* p. 668. For expressions of appreciation see Kennedy to Hull, September 26, 1938, *Ibid.,* p. 659, received 8:30 a.m.; Bullitt to Hull, September 26, 1938, *Ibid.,* pp. 659–660, received 2 p.m.).

Hitler's answer to the president's message, when it finally arrived, was not nearly so pleasing. In a speech heard in the United States on the afternoon of September 26, the Fuehrer was far from conciliatory, declaring at one point "that if the Czechs did not give the Sudeten Germans immediate freedom, 'we will go and fetch this freedom for ourselves.' " As Ickes described it, Hitler "ranted and raved for over an hour. At times he seemed to be almost incoherent. He shrieked his defiance to the whole world, bragging of the prowess of Germany. . . . War seemed to be inevitable, with every tick of the clock bringing it closer" (Offner, 1969, pp. 263–264; Ickes, 1954, p. 477). For an account of Hitler's intransigence during this period see Taylor, 1979, pp. 870–875).

Moreover, Hitler's formal reply to Roosevelt's message offered no more solace than his speech. Disclaiming all responsibility should further developments lead to war, he recited at length German grievances against the Czechs and ended with the ominous declaration that "the possibilities of arriving at a just settlement by agreement, are . . . exhausted with the proposals of the German memorandum. It does not rest with the German Government, but with the Czechoslovakian Government alone, to decide, whether it wants peace or war." As the president reported to his cabinet on the following day, the tone of Hitler's reply was "truculant and unyielding" (Hitler to Roosevelt, September 26, 1938, *FRUS,* 1938, vol.

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I, pp. 669–672, received 9:14 p.m.. This message was not received in written form in the White House until September 27. However, Assistant Secretary of State George Messersmith phoned the substance of it to Roosevelt on the evening of the 26th ["Adolf Hitler, Chancellor of Germany, to Roosevelt, September 27, 1938," Schewe, 1979, #1302, Berle, 1973, p. 187. Ickes, 1954, p. 478]).

The Second Intervention

On the morning of the 27th, a group of State Department officials met to consider an appropriate response to the latest developments. Berle and Welles were deputized to draft a second message to Hitler, which they did, opting for the path of "boldness" by including in it a call for a conference at The Hague. Just before lunch, Hull and Welles took this draft statement to the President (Berle, 1973, p. 187).

By this time, still more evidence of Hitler's refusal to cooperate had arrived. For example, both Kennedy and Bullitt cabled that the Fuehrer's reception of Chamberlain's latest notes had been "completely and definitely unsatisfactory." In Bullitt's words, Hitler's reply "was the most violent outburst possible; . . . nothing could have been more unhelpful." By way of contrast, moreover, this demonstration of Hitler's intransigence was accompanied by a number of reports of continued expressions of gratitude for the president's message from Great Britain and France (Kennedy to Hull, September 27, 1938, *FRUS*, 1938, vol. I, p. 673, received 7:05 a.m.; Bullitt to Hull, September 27, 1938, *Ibid.*, pp. 673–674, received 9:15 a.m., and pp. 674–675, received 11:10 a.m.. A cable from Ambassador Carr also underlined the unreasonableness of Hitler's demands from the point of view of Czech military security Carr to Hull, September 27, 1938, *Ibid.*, p. 679, received 1:20 p.m.).

The news of Hitler's obduracy and aggressive posturing had two implications for Roosevelt's diagnosis of the crisis. First of all, it underlined the Fuehrer's sole responsibility for the continued slide toward war. Secondly, it increased expectations that war would actually occur unless something happened to prevent it.[9] Apparently the confluence of these two perceptions shaped Roosevelt's decision, at some point during the course of the morning of September 27, to take further action.

[9]Supporting the first point is Welles's statement to Bullitt that any action by the president would be directed solely at Hitler (Memorandum of telephone call between Welles and Bullitt, September 27, 1938, 2:40 p.m., *FRUS*, 1938, vol. I, pp. 675–676). The second point is corroborated by Welles's later statement that on September 27 " 'Information of unquestioned authenticity' had come through that at 2:00 p.m. on the next day, September 28, Hitler would march his armies into Czechoslovakia unless the Godesberg terms were met" (Haight, 1960, p. 355). This account was confirmed by Roosevelt himself when he told Arthur Murray on October 14, 1938, that he had received news on the 27th that Hitler would take action the next day (Murray, 1946, p. 95).

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At the president's lunchtime meeting with Welles and Hull, two proposals discussed earlier in the State Department (a request to other governments to support the American appeal to continue negotiations and a personal appeal to Mussolini) were approved without reservation. However, the third proposal that Roosevelt should call for a conference did not fare quite as well because Hull, "depressed" by the possible dangers which might arise from so bold a step, opposed it. In this he was apparently supported by Roosevelt.

Ultimately, Welles was instructed to ask Bullitt and Kennedy to get Daladier's and Chamberlain's views on the desirability of such a plan. If they approved, the message addressed to Hitler might then suggest a conference at a neutral European capital, although the promise of American participation would be omitted (Berle, 1973, p. 187; Alsop and Kintner, 1940, p. 10).

While Welles made these calls and worked with Berle on redrafting the message from the president to Hitler, Roosevelt met with his cabinet in a special session. He had arranged for them to listen to Chamberlain's speech at 2:00 p.m., and, as he told Arthur Murray two weeks later, it was a moving experience:

> When it was finished I looked round the table and there were tears in the eyes of at least four Members of the Cabinet, and I felt that way myself. I had listened to Hitler on the Monday, and so had most of my Cabinet. The contrast between the two just bit into us—the shouting and violence of Hitler, and the roars, through their teeth, of his audience of 'Krieg, krieg,' and then, the quiet, beautiful statement of Chamberlain's. (Murray, 1946, p. 95. According to Murray, these are Roosevelt's own words as noted at the time by Murray himself. Ickes [1954, p. 477] also gives an account of this emotional episode, and Berle noticed later that day that the president had been "much impressed" with Chamberlain's speech [1973, p. 189].)

For the rest of the meeting, "the European situation was the almost exclusive subject of discussion." Informing the cabinet of Hitler's unsatisfactory reply to his first message, Roosevelt raised the possibility of sending a second. He then led a discussion of this idea which, despite the emotion generated by Chamberlain's speech, amounted to a fairly dispassionate appraisal of the various alternatives. The president also reiterated his belief that in the event of war the democracies would be the victors, theorizing that "the French would speedily mop up the Italian colonies in northern Africa and would promptly liquidate Franco in Spain. . . . Italy itself could shortly be driven to the wall and . . . then England, France, Russia, Czechoslovakia, Romania, Yugoslavia, Turkey, and other anti-German countries could concentrate against Germany" (Ickes, *Diary*, vol. II, p. 481). Clearly then, at this point in the crisis Roosevelt was still confident that the democracies could be victorious in a war with Germany.

Sometime during the course of the afternoon on which this cabinet meeting was held, Roosevelt decided that a second message should go to Hitler as soon as possible. As he told Murray,

> I had intended to send a message to Hitler on the Wednesday morning. But on the top of Chamberlain's radio speech came news from our people in Berlin that Hitler was to take

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> action at two o'clock on Wednesday afternoon. So I got down at once about five o'clock to the draft of my message, and Hull came across again from the State Department. By about nine o'clock we had hammered out the message, and Hitler had it with his breakfast. (Murray, 1946, p. 95. Apparently, Roosevelt had decided not to wait to hear the views of Chamberlain and Daladier. In fact, by the time Kennedy called at 5:45 p.m. to relay Chamberlain's opinion, Welles was able to state his belief that the President "will send his message tonight without fail." [Memorandum of a Telephone Conversation between Kennedy and Welles, September 27, 1938, *FRUS,* 1938, vol. I, pp. 679–680])

Following his conversation with Kennedy, Welles took Roosevelt the new draft of the message to Hitler which the whole State Department group had already approved. After dinner, the president met with Welles, Hull, and Berle to work on this draft. There followed a two-hour session which has been graphically depicted by Alsop and Kintner: "The President worked at his littered desk, smoking incessantly and shooting questions at the other three. They sat nervously near him, Berle fidgeting, Hull swearing softly under his breath, and Welles for once almost out of countenance."

A moment of considerable tension occurred when "a report came in that the Germans might march in the night, forcing a war to no purpose. For a moment the President showed real anger." However, as the report was not confirmed, the drafting continued. By 9 p.m. the draft was well enough in hand to allow the secretary of state to go home to bed, and at 9:30 it was signed by the president (Alsop and Kintner, 1940, pp. 10–11. See also Berle, 1973, p. 188, and Murray, 1946, p. 95).

Roosevelt's second message to Hitler was sent at 10:18 p.m. Recalling his earlier emphasis on the peaceful settlement of disputes and the complete lack of justification for any threat of force which might result in general warfare, the president pointed out to the German chancellor that these considerations were even more relevant now that agreement in principle had been reached between Germany and Czechoslovakia. He therefore urged continuation of the negotiations, raising the possibility of widening them to include "all the nations directly interested in the present controversy." While reiterating that the United States had "no political involvements in Europe," Roosevelt nevertheless closed by stating that "the conscience and the impelling desire of the people of my country demand that the voice of their government be raised again and yet again to avert and to avoid war" (Roosevelt to Hitler, September 27, 1938, *FRUS,* 1938, vol. I, pp. 684–685. Farnham [1991, pp. 431–435] analyzes several opposing views of Roosevelt's intentions in sending the second appeal to Hitler and concludes that it was a genuine attempt to prevent war by pressuring Hitler into peaceful settlement of the dispute along the lines which had already been agreed upon.).

The period of anxious waiting for Hitler's reply following the dispatch of this message ended on the morning of the 28th. As Berle dramatically recorded in his diary, Hitler had invited Britain, France, and Italy to discuss the Czech crisis ("The 'break'! Thank God."). Roosevelt was also relieved by the news and

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at 1 p.m. sent his famous two-word message to Prime Minister Chamberlain: "Good Man." (Berle, 1973, p. 188; Hull to Kennedy, September 28, 1938, *FRUS*, 1938, vol. I, p. 688. While the meaning of Roosevelt's message has been debated, most agree with Langer and Gleason that it signaled relief at the continuance of negotiations rather than approval of the policy of appeasement per se. One who disputes this interpretation is Offner. Haight, on the other hand, believes that, at this point, Roosevelt "assumed that Chamberlain still stood with Daladier as an opponent to capitulation. . . . He expected Chamberlain to negotiate at Munich on the basis of 'reason and equity' " [Langer and Gleason, 1952, p. 34; Offner, 1969, p. 269; Haight, 1960, p. 356, n. 132. See also, Haight, 1970, p. 22.]).

Thus, although the terms of the Munich settlement were not made known until September 30, emotionally the crisis ended on September 28 with the announcement of the agreement to meet. In comparison with that achievement the settlement itself seemed almost beside the point. What little concern remained about matters of substance was rapidly engulfed by the universal rejoicing over a procedural victory: Hitler had agreed to a peaceful meeting rather than war as the means of accomplishing his goals. Ironically, in the atmosphere of widespread relief that war had been averted, few seemed to notice that the issue over which it had almost been fought (the conditions under which the Czechs would give up the Sudetenland) had been all but forgotten.

EXPLAINING ROOSEVELT'S BEHAVIOR

During the first stage of the Munich crisis, Roosevelt's attention was focused primarily on the general political and military problems of Europe as they related to American concerns and he seemed only minimally concerned with the crisis per se, contemplating even an outcome of war with some detachment. Moreover, although he was beginning to develop some notion of the crisis' possible consequences for the United States, he still had no sense that he ought to be directly involved in its resolution, viewing overt intervention as a course which involved considerable risk. Nor did Roosevelt alter his policy in this respect even after the news from Berchtesgaden had caused him to believe that war was virtually inevitable.

After Godesberg Roosevelt's attitude changed, but not at once. Initially, although reports of that meeting on September 23 led him to believe that war was imminent, he still had no thought of intervening. Sometime during September 24, and almost certainly by the morning of the 25th, however, his thinking underwent a dramatic change, and he decided to act directly. As Morgenthau reported to his aides early on the morning of the 26th, the president had suddenly

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become "very anxious to get in and stop this war in Europe" (Morgenthau Diary, September 26, 1938, vol. 142, p. 342).

Within less than two days, therefore, Roosevelt's attention had shifted away from the general long-run implications of the European situation for the United States and toward the crisis itself. This shift in focus, moreover, was accompanied by a change in policy from nonintervention to active intervention, its attendant risks notwithstanding. Before Godesberg, the most Roosevelt would do was to advise the democracies about how to fight the prospective war; thereafter, such considerations were overwhelmed by his desire to prevent it. For Roosevelt, *that* had become the central problem and one which he believed required direct action on his part. Such a dramatic shift in preferences obviously requires explanation.

The Rational Choice Explanation

One interpretation of the president's preference reversal might be that it was simply a rational response to new information which altered the subjective expected utility of intervention. However, while one or more changes in the environment—in the value of the outcome of war, for example, or its probability, or the risks of intervention—could conceivably have triggered such a shift, there were in fact no changes in any of these factors sufficient to justify Roosevelt's reversal of preferences.

If, for example, Roosevelt's post-Godesberg belief that an outcome of war would now be a loss had been based on new information about the costs of war to the United States, it would have been rational for him to decide to intervene to prevent war, even if doing so involved some risk. However, the crisis did not provide any new information about the value of the war. No matter how certain or imminent general war in Europe had become after Godesberg, it was in reality no more of a threat to the United States than it had been when it was merely probable. No one imagined for a moment that the United States would be *directly* threatened by war, certainly not Roosevelt who firmly believed that Britain and France would win. Yet despite his unaltered belief that the democracies would emerge victorious, the president behaved as though the prospect of war had become a direct threat to the United States. What is embarrassing to the theory of rational choice is that after Godesberg Roosevelt redefined what was essentially the same objective situation as a loss (The reports Roosevelt received emphasizing the dreadful consequences of war for European civilization might possibly be viewed as new information which changed his valuation of the outcome of war. Such arguments were not new to Roosevelt, however, and he had ignored them when they were made earlier [see, for example, Bullitt's letter of May 20, Bullitt, 1972, pp. 261–262].).

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Not only was there no change in the perceived value of war which could have explained Roosevelt's policy shift, there was also no such alteration in his perception of the risks involved in intervening. Risk assessment can entail calculations both about the probability of the success of an option and about its utility in terms of costs or benefits (McDermott, 1991, p. 10), and Roosevelt evaluated intervention as a risky option on both grounds. That is, he believed that intervening in the crisis might very well be ineffective and, indeed, even make matters worse (see the president's remarks to Ambassador Lindsay and the French trade unionist on September 19), and that intervention could have unfortunate domestic repercussions as well.

With respect to the latter, not only did he manifest a concern with domestic opinion during his conversation with Ambassador Lindsay, but also prior to the crisis, he acceded to Hull's fears that taking even some quite modest economic steps to deter Germany would be "doing too much" and could "get the American people up on their toes over the European situation" ("Morgenthau Diary," August 31, 1938, vol. 137, pp. 229–230). Moreover, Roosevelt's caution about what Ambassador Bullitt would be allowed to say in a September 4 speech at Pointe de Graves, while not as exaggerated as Hull's wariness, also showed his concern about the impact of his actions in Europe on domestic opinion. Indeed, Hull told Bullitt that the president agreed with him that they both "had gone as far as our people would well understand" (Haight, 1960, p. 345. See also Roosevelt's hostile reaction to French Foreign Minister Bonnet's attempts in early September to get him to intervene, and his public disavowal of any such intention ["Press conference, Hyde Park, September 9, 1938, 5:30 P.M.," Schewe, 1979, #1273: Taylor, 1979, pp. 525–526; Blum, 1965, p. 518; Langer and Gleason, 1952, pp. 32–33; and Haight, 1960, pp. 345–348]).

Both before the crisis and during its first stage, then, Roosevelt clearly believed that intervening involved significant domestic risks, probably because such intervention would have meant taking a public stand. Indeed, Roosevelt was frequently prepared to engage in a good deal of behind the scenes diplomatic activity which seemed risky enough to others (such as his talk with Lindsay), but he was exceedingly cautious about what he did in public. As Hull pointed out, public involvement during the Munich crisis might have stirred up isolationist sentiment in the country, raising fears that the president was embarking on an activist course that would take the United States into war. (Evidence of Roosevelt's habitual caution about taking public positions may be found in the discussion of his decision-making before and during the Nine Power Conference in Brussels in the fall of 1937, in Farnham, 1991, pp. 314–321, and Appendix. An analysis of Roosevelt's attitudes toward American isolationism and domestic opinion before the crisis is in Farnham, Ch. 3).

At the outset, then, Roosevelt considered intervention to be risky because it

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might lead to failure, entail domestic repercussions, or both. Moreover, there is ample support for the idea that he continued to believe this even after he had made the decision to intervene.

With respect to the risk of failure, nothing had occurred at Godesberg which entitled Roosevelt to infer that he could now act more effectively than he might have done earlier. On the one hand, while new evidence that Britain and France were at last willing to resist Hitler might have made American action more palatable to Roosevelt because he no longer needed to feel that the democracies were trying to get the United States to do their dirty work for them, Hitler's response to their firmness provided little reason to hope that United States intervention could now succeed in preventing war. On the other hand, although Roosevelt now thought that Czech agreement to the substance of Hitler's demands had removed any rational basis for waging war, since Godesberg he had had nothing but evidence that the Fuehrer was unreasonable in the extreme. Thus, there was less justification than ever for believing that his appeal could be effective.

Nor had anything changed on the American side of the equation to allow the president to think that he had the means to act more effectively. Certainly, he had no more ammunition than he had possessed before the Godesberg meeting. Nothing that transpired there in any way altered the fact that the United States would not, under any circumstances, actually intervene militarily in the Czech crisis, or even threaten to do so.

Moreover, Roosevelt himself, despite his decision to intervene, seems to have believed that it was still a risky choice in terms of effectiveness. The amount of effort he put into learning whether his second intervention had been successful, as well as the considerable anxiety this issue seemed to cause him, indicates his awareness that the move could well have failed (Farnham, 1991, pp. 435–436). Clearly, the president seems to have been seeking reassurance that the risk he had taken had succeeded. (This calls into question Secretary Hull's assertion that Roosevelt decided to make his first intervention not because he thought it would be successful but because he wanted to do *something* and sending a message would at least do no harm. Of course, once war appeared virtually certain, there is a sense in which nothing the president did could make things worse. However, the evidence suggests that Roosevelt, while continuing to fear that he risked failure, hoped for more.)

Not only did Roosevelt still worry about the risk of failure, however, he also remained concerned about the domestic risks involved in intervening. That he was worried on this score is demonstrated by his acquiescence to Hull's and Davies's reservations during the drafting of his first appeal and supported by the testimony of Moffat and Welles cited earlier. Moreover, during the planning for his second intervention, Roosevelt displayed sensitivity to the possible risks of

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intervening by supporting Hull's wish to omit any mention of American participation in a proposed conference (in retaining the conference idea, however, he also showed willingness to accept some risk).

Finally, not only were there no changes in the risk of intervening sufficient to justify Roosevelt's reversal of preferences, there were also no such changes on the probability side of the equation. While it is possible to imagine that the president's decision to intervene was merely an appropriate reaction to an admittedly accurate diagnosis of the increased likelihood of war, this interpretation is not supported by an examination of the pattern of his responses during the crisis. Rather, the evidence shows that neither of his two shifts toward a heightened expectation of war was accompanied by a change in policy from inaction to intervention.

After Berchtesgaden, when Roosevelt first came to expect war, he seemed quite relaxed about the prospect and reacted, not by trying to prevent it, but by attempting to influence the manner in which it would be fought. Moreover, even the post-Godesberg diagnosis that war was imminent did not immediately move him to act. As late as the afternoon of September 23, he still believed that the democracies could win if they followed his strategic advice, and he manifested neither a sense of immediate threat to American security nor any sign of feeling a need to intervene in the crisis.

Thus, although Roosevelt had clearly assimilated the information that war was imminent, he apparently did not believe that this news indicated the kind of change in the environment which would have warranted an alteration in his policy of nonintervention.[10] An explanation for his behavior must, therefore, be sought elsewhere. One possibility is that, in accordance with the predictions of prospect theory, Roosevelt's reversal of preferences about intervening in the crisis resulted from a change in his framing of the decision problem.

The Prospect Theory Explanation

According to Tversky and Kahneman, the way a decision is framed in part determines how people see the consequences of choice. It is entirely possible for an individual to frame the same decision problem in different ways, and prefer-

[10]The slight increase in the probability of war between the afternoon of the 23rd and the morning of the 25th is insufficient to account for the dramatic reversal in Roosevelt's policy preferences which occurred that day. That small change in probability had a much greater impact on the president's decision-making than rational choice theory would predict. (I am indebted to Eldar Shafir for pointing this out.) Moreover, neither Roosevelt's perception of an increased likelihood of war nor its imminence afforded adequate justification either for the feeling that the United States had become directly threatened or the belief that American action might now be effective in ending the crisis.

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ences between options have been shown to reverse with changes in frame, despite the fact that rational choice theory requires that such preferences should not do so. In other words, the way a problem is perceived can have a significant impact on the treatment of values and probabilities (Tversky and Kahneman, 1981, pp. 453, 457; Kahneman and Tversky, 1982, p. 166).

Furthermore, according to prospect theory, people evaluate prospective outcomes against a neutral reference point, usually the status quo. Outcomes that lie above the reference point are viewed as gains, while those falling below it are seen as losses. The importance of this concept for decision-making theory is that framing an outcome as a loss rather than a gain changes the way people respond to it, even to the point of causing them to reverse their order of preference among equivalent options. In particular, they are likely to be risk-averse when it is a matter of achieving a gain, but risk-acceptant when striving to avert a loss. As Quattrone and Tversky express it, prospect theory implies that "shifts in the reference point induced by the framing of the problem will have predictable effects on people's risk preferences" (Tversky and Kahneman, 1981, p. 454, 1986, p. S258; Quattrone and Tversky, 1988, p. 721).

Roosevelt's behavior during the Munich crisis accords with the expectations of prospect theory in a number of respects. Most importantly, in the aftermath of the meeting at Godesberg, there was at least one major change in his framing of the problem of whether or not to intervene in the Czech crisis which could have led to his preference shift: after Godesberg, Roosevelt suddenly came to view the impending war in Europe as a loss for the United States.

Not that he had previously seen a European war as a gain but, as has been demonstrated repeatedly, neither did the prospect greatly disturb him. By September 25, however, he unquestionably regarded war as a potential catastrophe.[11] Nevertheless, as has just been seen, and this is crucial for the argument, there is not the slightest evidence that Roosevelt actually believed, even then, that such a war would threaten America (except possibly in the sense that all wars are to some extent dangerous). Rather, he had come to view a European war as a loss without having changed his mind about its actual consequences.

Moreover, Roosevelt's increased willingness to intervene in the crisis as a consequence of perceiving war as a loss seems to have been reinforced by another change in his decision frame produced by what Tversky and Kahneman have called the *certainty effect*. This phenomenon manifests itself as a tendency to over-weight outcomes which are considered certain relative to those which are merely probable (Kahneman & Tversky, 1979, p. 265; Tversky & Kahneman,

[11]In terms of prospect theory, Roosevelt's reference point was a European political situation which did not threaten the United States and he believed that even war, while not a desirable outcome, did not constitute such a threat, i.e., it lay above his reference point. After Godesberg, however, having reframed the outcome of war in Europe as a catastrophe, Roosevelt's reference point shifted upward, and he now viewed war as a departure from the status quo in the domain of loss.

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1986, pp. S263–S270; Fischoff, 1983, p. 144). Since, after Godesberg, Roosevelt viewed war as a virtual certainty, the certainty effect made the outcome of war seem considerably worse than it had when it was merely probable. His growing conviction that war was inevitable, that is, exacerbated his perception of it as a loss.

Moreover, the certainty effect may have combined with the so-called *pseudo-certainty effect* to reinforce Roosevelt's sense that war would be a disaster. That is, people tend to treat extremely likely but uncertain outcomes as though they were certain. Thus, as the probability of war rose after Godesberg, Roosevelt may first have converted it into a certainty in line with the pseudo-certainty effect and then overweighted it because of the certainty effect (Tversky & Kahneman, 1986, p. S268).

The impact of Roosevelt's frame change, reinforced by the certainty effect, was to transform what had been merely a potential problem for American foreign policy into a serious loss which was certain to occur. Furthermore, because this reframing caused Roosevelt to view the crisis from a different point of reference, it could also have been responsible for the reversal of preferences which led him to favor intervention in the crisis over inaction, despite the fact that the threat to the United States had not actually increased. As Jervis points out, "losses which are quite certain will be avoided even if they are relatively slight" (Jervis, 1989, p. 6).

As has been noted, framing effects on decision-making behavior occur when the same alternatives are evaluated in relationship to different points of reference. One way in which this may operate is that "the framing of an action sometimes affects the actual experience of its outcomes" (Tversky & Kahneman, 1981, p. 458). Accordingly, framing the decision problem posed by the European crisis so that the outcome of war seemed like the United States' loss, rather than merely that of others, could have changed the way in which Roosevelt experienced the consequences of nonintervention, which in turn altered his evaluation of the alternatives for dealing with the crisis. Thus the president came to prefer acting to halt the crisis before it ended in war to the passive stance he had adopted when he regarded war as the loss of others. In a way, now that he viewed the impending war as in some sense a loss for the United States, Roosevelt was no longer evaluating the alternatives as merely an observer, but as a sort of participant.[12] By reframing the war as a loss for the United States, he had also reframed the crisis as an American crisis.

[12]This interpretation is supported by the fact that, from this point forward, Roosevelt's behavior exhibited all the characteristics which, according to Raymond Cohen (1979, pp. 4, 24), identify a decision-maker who has perceived a threat. The consequent change in the president's behavior also accords with Hermann's (1972, p. 208) finding during a crisis simulation of differences in perception and behavior between participants and observers.

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Moreover, as prospect theory predicts, in deciding to act to avert the war which he now viewed as a loss, Roosevelt became risk-acceptant. That is, he showed a willingness to incur the two risks he had previously avoided: the chance that his intervention might be ineffective, or even have an adverse impact on the crisis, and the danger that such action might provoke "untoward domestic effects."

Finally, a prospect theory explanation of Roosevelt's behavior is supported by his apparently complete lack of awareness that he was framing the crisis differently. At no time did the president link his decision to intervene in the crisis to a change in his feelings about the significance of war; he seems not to have noticed that they had changed, let alone to recall that, only days before, he had not thought a European war such a calamity that he wished to intervene to prevent it. This lack of recognition accords with Tversky and Kahneman's observation that "decision-makers are not normally aware of the potential effects of different decision frames on their preferences." (Roosevelt's behavior is also in line with their perception that, unless a conscious effort is made, a decision-maker may not be able to anticipate how he or she will feel about a future experience [Tversky & Kahneman, 1981, p. 457–458. See also, Kahneman & Tversky, 1984, pp. 349–350].)

Accounting for the Frame Change: The Role of Affect

If Roosevelt did not initially consider war in Europe to be a serious threat to the United States, why did he come to view it as such after Godesberg? What caused him to change his reference point so that he now counted that outcome a loss?

Unfortunately, prospect theory itself does not offer many clues about what causes decision frames to change. Nor do the various laboratory experiments on framing shed much light on this question. The experimenter alone manipulates the frame, providing subjects with both its initial and its altered version, the differences between the two being purely cognitive.

The Munich case, however, suggests that in the real world something more than cognition may at times be involved. It would appear, that is, that the frame change Roosevelt underwent in the midst of the crisis was triggered by the strong emotions he experienced in the aftermath of the Godesberg meeting. In other words, he seems to have reframed the crisis as a matter of direct concern to the United States only after the idea of impending war had become emotionally compelling to him.

This hypothesis is supported by several considerations. First of all, from a purely cognitive perspective, Roosevelt's reframing of the problem posed by the

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crisis is puzzling. As has already been shown, the cognition that war was virtually certain to occur was not by itself sufficient to provoke either a perception of threat or the desire to intervene.

Second, the period in which the frame change occurred was unquestionably a time of great emotion as Americans observed Europe's headlong rush toward war. Writing on September 30, Ickes testified to the common experience:

> The war scare in Europe has occupied all minds during the last few days practically to the exclusion of everything else. With troops rushing to their respective borders in France, Germany, Czechoslovakia, Hungary, and Poland; with France preparing to evacuate Paris and boxing up the treasures of the Louvre and the priceless glass of Chartres Cathedral for transport to areas where they might be safe from German shells and bombs; with England concentrating its fleet at strategic points in the Baltic and the Mediterranean, with Mussolini rattling his sabre; it seemed that war was only a matter of hours. (Ickes, 1954, vol. II, pp. 476–477)[13]

Finally, and perhaps most significantly, in the brief period between the initial reports from Godesberg and his decision to intervene, Roosevelt received numerous affect-laden communications, many of them from Bullitt and Kennedy who, emotionally at least, had already adopted the perspective of the parties to the crisis.

Before Godesberg Roosevelt, unlike his two ambassadors, had tended not to dwell on the disastrous immediate consequences of a general European war. Rather, as his remarks to Ambassador Lindsay suggest, he was thinking in a general way about the eventual implications for the United States should an unappeasable and aggressive Hitler prove successful in Europe. This difference in focus may account for the fact that, in contrast to the emotional response of Bullitt and Kennedy, Roosevelt's attitude toward the anticipated conflict was curiously detached. Initially, the idea of impending war seems to have lacked emotional reality for him.

This sense of detachment, as well as his continued refusal to intervene despite the imminence of war (both of which Roosevelt exhibited as late as the afternoon of September 23), contrasts quite dramatically with the anxiety, about stopping the impending war, that Morgenthau described to his staff early on the 26th (and which Roosevelt must, therefore, have shown at least by the 25th). Thus, the president's shift in preferences was not the culmination of a gradual process of reevaluation. Rather, it was an immediate response to a sudden change

[13]An indication of the strength of the emotional impact of the Munich crisis in the United States is that it seems to have been a major contributor to the panic generated by Orson Welles's contemporary radio drama about an invasion from Mars. As Heywood Broun noted at the time, "I doubt if anything of the sort would have happened four or five months ago. The course of world history has affected national psychology. Jitters have come home to roost. We have just gone through a laboratory demonstration of the fact that the peace of Munich hangs over our heads, like a thundercloud" (Klass, 1988, p. 1. See also, Cantril, 1940, pp. 159–161).

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in mood most probably induced by the emotionally charged communications he was receiving from Europe.

In fact, from 23rd to the 25th of September, Roosevelt was bombarded with increasingly dramatic messages which, among other things, predicted a war which would spell the end of European civilization, underlined Hitler's brutality and intransigence, graphically described Chamberlain's growing pessimism, conveyed the heart-rending pleas of the Czechs for help, and, from Ambassador Bullitt in particular, urged in the strongest possible terms American action to avoid the tragedy. Not only must these messages have had a considerable emotional impact of their own, but also their effect was probably magnified by the highly stressful atmosphere produced by the continuing crisis.

It appears that these communications served primarily to focus Roosevelt's attention on the dreadful consequences of the impending conflict, making it emotionally real to him. Thus, by September 25, the President not only *believed* that war was bound to occur unless steps were taken to prevent it, he had also begun to *feel* that it would be so terrible that he himself had to stop it.

Strong emotion, then, was apparently behind Roosevelt's transformation from a detached observer of someone else's crisis to a sort of participant. In the language of prospect theory: as the president became increasingly affected by the emotional impact of the news from Europe, he began to experience the prospect of war as a loss. This in turn led him to understand the choice of whether or not to intervene in a fundamentally different way, and, as a consequence, to want to prevent the war rather than merely to advise others on how to fight it.

This process continued as on the 25th itself, already desiring to act, Roosevelt underwent another day of great emotional tension which finally culminated in his decision to intervene. Even after he made that choice, however, the psychological pressure continued to build. September 26 began as a day of anxious waiting for Hitler's response to the president's message and ended with disappointment at his violent speech and unyielding reply. That Roosevelt's feelings had by this time become very much engaged indeed is shown both by his own account of his emotional reaction to Chamberlain's speech during the September 27 cabinet meeting and by reports of the tension which characterized the drafting session for his second appeal, particularly his display of anger at the news that Hitler might be preparing to march immediately. Clearly, outrage at Hitler's behavior and great sympathy for the democracies had joined Roosevelt's already considerable anxiety about the consequences of war.

It may also be that Roosevelt's awareness of the imminence of war added to his emotional distress in several ways. For one thing, the imminence of a threatening event may generate greater emotion and stress than certainty alone. During the Munich crisis, the war which had seemed certain after Berchtesgaden, after Godesberg appeared imminent as well. While that was not in itself sufficient to cause Roosevelt to reverse preferences about intervening, it may well have

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Table I. Roosevelt's Beliefs and Preferences during the Munich Crisis

Time	Reference Point	Frame of Choice Problem	Attitude to Risk	Preference
Pre-crisis War not expected	No threat to U.S. from Europe	Crisis (including outcome of war) = within status quo	Averse	Do not intervene
9/16 Berchtesgaden War expected Allies → win	"	"	"	"
9/23 Godesberg War = certain War = imminent Allies → win	"	"	"	"
		FRAME CHANGE		
9/24–25 Affect-laden reports War = certain War = imminent Allies → win	"	War = loss	Acceptant	Intervene #1
9/27 Hitler rebuff War = certain War = imminent Allies → win	"	"	"	Intervene #2

exacerbated the effect of the emotions which did. That is, imminence increased the salience of war by making clear that the war which seemed certain to occur would do so now rather than later. Not only might this awareness have heightened the painful emotions that Roosevelt was already feeling, it could also have intensified his stress by adding the pressure of time (Janis and Mann, 1977, pp. 54, 59; I am indebted to Alexander George for pointing out that imminence may have a different impact on a decision-maker's assessment of threat than does certainty).

In any event, there is considerable empirical evidence pointing to the experience of strong emotion as the crucial element in Roosevelt's post-Godesberg change of frame and subsequent reversal of preferences. Moreover, the idea that such emotion can mediate cognitive change has received ample theoretical support in the literature dealing with the relationship between cognition and affect. As Hoffman has pointed out, "cognitive psychologists often view affect as providing the motivating force for initiating cognitive processes" (Hoffman, 1986, p. 260; for Hoffman's view of the ways in which affect may influence information processing, see pp. 245–246).

Any account of what Roosevelt experienced after Godesberg, however, is incomplete without an awareness that the reverse process can occur as well. That

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is, a change of frame can affect the emotions felt by the decision-maker. In fact, Tversky and Kahneman themselves usually speak of changes in emotional response as the *outcome* of frame changes, rather than their cause (Tversky & Kahneman, 1981, p. 458; Kahneman & Tversky, 1984, pp. 341–350).

Clearly, this process could also have occurred in the Munich case. That is, framing the crisis as in some sense Roosevelt's own could have intensified the emotional involvement which caused the frame to change to begin with. This, in turn, could have had the effect of reinforcing the new frame in which an outcome of war was seen as a loss (It is a commonly held view that a decision-maker's personal experience of a crisis generates considerable emotion and stress. Morgan, for example, defines a national security crisis "as a severe threat to important values which, for the decision maker, means an increase in emotional intensity. . . ." Morgan, 1977, p. 168; see also, Holsti, 1972 and 1971; Holsti and George, 1975).

Again, the literature on the relationship between cognition and affect affords solid backing for the idea that changes in cognition can result in changes in affect. Indeed, as Hoffman observes, "the dominant approach to affect" has long been one "in which feelings are the consequences of cognitive appraisal" (Hoffman, 1986, p. 24).

Moreover, evidence that the causal connection between affect and cognition runs in *both* directions has recently led a number of scholars to conclude that, as appears to have been the case during the Munich crisis, these processes are mutually reinforcing. Thus, with respect to "the dynamic interplay between cognitive and affective/motivational processes as they unfold in natural situations," Sorrentino and Higgins argue that,

> motivation and cognition are, in fact, inseparable. . . . [I]t is not simply that cognition leads to motivation and motivation leads to cognition. Rather, each is a property or facet of the other. They are *synergistic* in that they operate together to produce combined effects. (Sorrentino and Higgins, 1986, pp. 12, 8. The relationship between cognition and affect is, of course, the subject of a long-standing controversy, about which there is as yet no consensus. For opposing views on this issue, see Zajonc, 1980; and Lazarus, 1982.)

Thus, the news from Godesberg may have touched off a rather complex interaction between affect and cognition, the effect of which was to transform Roosevelt from a somewhat detached observer of the crisis into a kind of participant. He had come to feel that war would be a loss, not only for Europe but for the United States as well, and, in this sense, the crisis had moved, at least in emotional terms, from being someone else's crisis to being in some sense his own. As a consequence of this change in frame, the president reversed his preferences and chose to intervene directly in the crisis.

A final question about the role of affect in Roosevelt's decision-making behavior during the Munich crisis concerns its implications for Janis and Mann's decisional conflict model of decision-making. Clearly, Roosevelt was subject to

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a number of the variables they cite as leading to biased information processing, such as significant negative emotion and time pressure, and he apparently also experienced considerable stress. Moreover, these factors had an important impact on his cognitive processes, causing him to redefine the choice problem and change his preferences.

What may be embarrassing for the decisional-conflict model, however, is that not only does it not predict this particular kind of response to stress, but also Roosevelt did not otherwise react to stress in the ways that it does predict. Contrary to the expectations of the model, there is not the slightest indication that the need to make a painful decision was itself the source of Roosevelt's negative emotion and stress. Nor did he show the least disposition toward defensive avoidance (Janis, 1959; Janis & Mann, 1977, pp. 57–58, 73–74). Moreover, there is no evidence that the stress experienced by the president resulted in the kind of biased information processing and cognitive rigidity predicted by the decisional-conflict model. Apart from helping to trigger the change of frame, stress does not appear to have impaired Roosevelt's ability to process information in a fairly rational manner (for a discussion of this point, see Farnham, 1991, pp. 459–466).

Janis and Mann, of course, might explain this anomaly by asserting that, while Roosevelt's stress was sufficient to result in "vigilant information processing," it was not great enough to cause impaired processing (Janis & Mann, 1977, pp. 50–52). Nevertheless, the president's behavior in this period at least raises a question about how much stress is enough. If a decision-maker can experience a degree of stress sufficient to trigger an unacknowledged frame change which then motivates him to act in a way he had previously thought unwise and yet leaves the general quality of his information processing unaffected, just how much stress is actually required to activate the pattern Janis and Mann predict? (This question is all the more compelling because it cannot be answered by pointing to individual differences in tolerance for stress. However high Roosevelt's tolerance for stress may have been, he was clearly subject to it on this occasion. For other criticisms of the usefulness of this model in explaining crisis behavior, see Morgan, 1977, pp. 177–179; and Levi & Tetlock, 1980)

CONCLUSION

This study has sought to evaluate the competing claims of prospect theory and rational choice theory to explain political decision-making in the light of an actual historical case. In applying the predictions of both theories to Franklin D. Roosevelt's decision-making during the Munich crisis, the study makes it clear that prospect theory provides a more satisfactory explanation of his behavior at that time than does the theory of rational choice.

In particular, the evidence uncovered by a detailed analysis of Roosevelt's

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decision-making behavior shows that his reversal of preferences about the desirability of American intervention in the crisis was not the result of a reassessment of the expected utility of intervening on the basis of new information. Rather, in the midst of the crisis, despite the fact that the objective situation had not changed materially from an American point of view, Roosevelt suddenly reframed the outcome of war as a loss and became anxious to prevent it, even to the point of incurring risks he had previously judged unacceptable. Such behavior cannot be accommodated within the framework of the theory of rational choice.

With respect to the theoretical significance of these findings, at the very least they support the demand of prospect theory to be acknowledged as a legitimate alternative for explaining decision-making behavior in the political context. They also show that in some cases it may be able to account for behavior which is puzzling for theories of rational choice.

Moreover, analyzing Roosevelt's decision-making behavior in the light of the predictions of prospect theory points to at least one area in which the theory would benefit from elaboration. That is to say, the finding that Roosevelt's change of frame was apparently triggered by strong emotion suggests a need for further research into the causes of frame changes, particularly with regard to the role of affect.

Finally, while supporting the idea that crisis-generated stress can affect decision-making in a number of areas, such as the cognitive appraisal of the decision-making problem and the evaluation and selection of alternatives, this study raises a question about Janis and Mann's account of the effects of stress. If Roosevelt experienced a level of stress sufficient to cause him to redefine the decision problem and reverse his policy preferences, why did the rest of his decision-making behavior not also manifest the kind of cognitive impairment under conditions of high stress predicted by the decisional-conflict model? If that model is to be of use in explaining political decision-making behavior, surely it requires clarification in this area.

The attempt to apply prospect theory to an historical case has thus had theoretical benefits in several areas. Not only has it suggested a possible direction for advancing the theory itself, it has also provoked some interesting questions about alternative explanations of decision-making behavior.

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