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The Predictable Hazards of Unpredictability: Why Madman Behavior Doesn't Work

President Trump has routinely touted the foreign policy benefits of unpredictability. As candidate Trump complained about the US administration in 2016, "We are totally predictable. We tell everything. We're sending troops? We tell them. We're sending something else? We have a news conference. We have to be unpredictable."[1] Although his comment referred specifically to US strategy toward the Islamic State, Trump's penchant for unpredictability has come to represent a core aspect of his foreign policy approach as president. Whether dealing with allies such as NATO, South Korea, or Afghanistan, or with adversaries such as North Korea, Iran, or China, Trump has often issued extreme demands far outside the range of long-standing US policies and threatened extreme consequences, including conventional and nuclear attack, if other countries do not deliver what we wants. He has reportedly even referred to himself as a "crazy guy."[2]

Trump appears to pursue this unpredictable "madman" approach to foreign policy for two reasons. First, he apparently believes that a reputation for surprising behavior and extreme preferences complicates other countries' ability to anticipate and counter US policies, making these countries less likely to challenge the United States because of uncertainty about how it might respond. Second, Trump appears to believe that by making extreme threats, and in particular by conveying an apparent indifference to the costs of war, he can enhance US bargaining leverage, forcing other countries to adjust their policies in ways that Trump favors.

Numerous commentators have criticized Trump's approach on various grounds.[3] Yet, few have systematically assessed it on its own terms to determine if it does indeed enhance deterrence and improve the US ability to bargain with other countries.[4] This lacuna is somewhat surprising given that classic texts on bargaining, particularly Cold War theories of nuclear brinkmanship, do suggest that the appearance of irrationality can enhance a leader's leverage.[5] So which is it? Do madman tactics—meaning a leader's deliberate attempts to defy the expectations of foreign counterparts, particularly by conveying extreme preferences and/or appearing impervious to the costs of war—ever yield foreign policy success?[6] Or are they all sound and fury, at best signifying nothing and at worst raising the risks of miscalculation, escalation, and conflict?

The historical record, both before Trump's presidency and during it, demonstrates that madman tactics typically fail to strengthen deterrence or generate bargaining leverage for three reasons. First, clearly signaling extreme preferences (e.g., all-or-nothing demands for massive unilateral concessions to the US position) and/or a willingness to bear high costs to the point that it deviates from normal consequence-based decision-making (e.g., threats to start a war that will kill many people on both sides) is actually quite difficult. Target states often fail to receive the message a leader thinks he is sending. Second, even when other countries clearly receive a madman's message (or tweet), they often do not view it as credible for various reasons. Third, even when such demands and threats are deemed credible, they do not necessarily induce the desired behavior from the targeted country, because madmen have a hard time giving believable assurances of behaving in the future. In fact, madman tactics can backfire by making a leader appear impossible to placate and therefore making the target more likely to stand firm or even escalate.

These three challenges—which we call the signaling problem, the credibility problem, and the assurance problem—appear repeatedly in the historical experiences of leaders who have employed madman tactics including US President Richard Nixon and foreign leaders Nikita Khrushchev, Saddam Hussein, and Muammar Gaddafi. Trump's efforts to employ such tactics toward North Korea and Iran reveal a similarly disappointing record, demonstrating that the strategy

works with neither peer competitors nor so-called "rogue states." Unpredictability has been predictably bad as a foreign policy approach, and whoever occupies the White House in January 2021 should implement a course correction.

The Signaling Problem

The madman approach to foreign policy requires leaders to clearly project extreme preferences and cost indifference, but this signaling is often harder than it sounds. The international relations literature documents how difficult it is in general for states to unambiguously convey their intentions to opponents—much less when they are trying to cultivate an aura of unpredictability or irrationality.[7] Targets often do not receive what the signaler believes to be transmitted. What makes this problem even more pernicious is that signalers tend to overestimate an adversary's ability to understand the intended message. So, not only do

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targets fail to understand the signal, but the signaler often fails to realize its message was not received, compounding misunderstanding and distrust.[8]

President Nixon's 1969 attempt to employ madman tactics toward North Vietnam illustrates the signaling problem.[9] Desperate to the end the war, Nixon decided to secretly put certain US nuclear forces on alert, hoping that it would alarm the Soviets enough that they would pressure Hanoi to the negotiating table. As he explained to his campaign adviser H.R. Haldeman in 1968, "I call it the Madman Theory, Bob. I want the North Vietnamese to believe I've reached the point where I might do anything to stop the war."[10]

But the gambit failed to yield leverage over Hanoi. At first, it was not clear even if the Soviets had detected the surreptitious alert.[11] The forces alerted were not selected on the basis of their relevance to a potential attack on Vietnam, but rather because of their ability to escape the notice of the public and US allies—both of whom Nixon knew would disapprove of the measure.[12] Yet, this need for secrecy also obscured Nixon's message. Later interviews of Soviet policymakers reveal that they did realize that the status of some American forces was changing in various locations around the globe, but the Kremlin had no idea why.[13] The Soviets did not change their stance on Vietnam, and Nixon did not gain leverage over Hanoi.[14]

The alert did, however, raise a serious risk of nuclear accidents because it forced US Strategic Air Command to compromise some of its peacetime safety regulations. Several safety lapses resulted, including "a near-accident with a nuclear-armed B-52 bomber on airborne alert."[15] It is not an exaggeration to say that

Nixon's attempt to play the madman significantly increased the chance of an actual nuclear detonation. The episode thus illustrates both the difficulty and the potential danger of trying to signal extreme preferences and cost indifference.

The Credibility Problem

A second problem facing the madman approach is that even when a leader clearly signals extreme preferences or indifference to the costs of war, other states may not view such claims as credible. After all, the leader is, by definition, taking a position outside the bounds of normal behavior. Several different factors can impede the credibility of madman tactics.

> A second problem is that other states may not view such madman claims as credible.

First, leaders' reputations are established early in their tenures, so one cannot simply become a "madman" overnight. Adversaries will see through the act and discount the threats, as they likely did with Nixon. He was known as a shrewd and experienced political operator, so there was little reason for the Soviets to believe that he had suddenly become immune to consequence-based rational decision-making. As one Soviet official remarked, "Mr. Nixon used to exaggerate his intentions regularly. He used alerts and leaks to do this."[16] This is, obviously, less of a problem for Trump, whose extreme preferences on many policy issues pre-date his political career, but many still believed that his views and behavior would moderate when he took office, or at least be restrained by advisors acting as "adults in the room."[17]

Second, leaders face a particularly steep challenge when making credible nuclear threats against adversaries who have the means to retaliate in kind. This conundrum is, after all, at the heart of nuclear brinkmanship, which is premised on the idea that threats to intentionally initiate a nuclear war against a nuclear-armed adversary lack credibility, and that crisis bargaining is therefore about raising the risk that war results from events escalating beyond the ability of leaders to rein them in.[18] Leaders employing a madman strategy have to go an extra step to convince opponents that not only are they activating this general risk of events getting out of control, but also that even if events remain in their control, the leader might be willing to intentionally engage in major escalation. The leader, in essence, is introducing themself as a major source of escalatory danger rather than the external, autonomous factors that might lead to crisis escalation outside a leader's control, such as a rogue commander, a military accident, a miscommunication with the adversary, or some other unintentional miscalculation.

Nikita Khrushchev's threats over Berlin offer a useful illustration of this problem. In 1958, Khrushchev gave the Western powers six months to negotiate a peace treaty with East Germany, after which time he threatened to terminate Western access to Berlin.[19] If they did not agree to his proposal to turn West Berlin into a free city, he threatened war.[20] To enhance his credibility, Khrushchev assiduously worked to develop the image of a madman. He was known to issue drunken threats of nuclear war, including one dinner with the Americans at which he "had made some of the most appalling threats ever made in the nuclear age."[21] Not everyone wrote these threats off as the ravings of an inebriated man. British Foreign Secretary Selwyn Lloyd called Khrushchev "a madman like Hitler capable of anything." And Dulles noted that Khrushchev "was not a coldly calculating person, but rather one who reacted emotionally. He was obviously intoxicated much of the time and could be expected to commit irrational acts."[22]

Yet, Western leaders ultimately dismissed Khrushchev's threats. After meeting with Khrushchev in Moscow, then-Vice President Nixon reported that the Soviet leader frequently pounded the table, became red-faced with bulging veins, and possessed "a repertoire of gestures that a conductor of a brass band would envy." But Nixon concluded that these histrionics were all for show and that "many did not take [Khrushchev] seriously."[23] It was simply impossible to believe Khrushchev would intentionally start a nuclear war over Berlin, especially when the United States held a major (though waning) advantage in the strategic nuclear balance.[24]

For Khrushchev, the signaling challenge also compounded the credibility challenge. At the onset of the crisis, for example, he had attempted to intimidate Washington through the deployment of R-5M medium-range ballistic missiles to bases near Berlin. But American intelligence largely missed this movement and only realized the full scope of the deployment much later.[25] Failing to register Khrushchev's signals and believing his rhetorical excesses to be largely for show, American leaders ultimately deemed his madman threats incredible. And for all his bluster, Khrushchev ultimately backed down, agreeing to a summit with Eisenhower as a means of resolving the crisis.[26]

Khrushchev tried the madman gambit again with Kennedy, whom he felt was easier to bully due to his relative youth and inexperience.[27] In the leadup to his June 1961 summit with Kennedy in Vienna, Khrushchev threatened to wipe out West Germany and informed Kennedy adviser John McCloy that Kennedy would be the last American president if he started a war. Of the summit itself, Kennedy later reported, "I talked about how a nuclear exchange would kill seventy million people in ten minutes and he just looked at me as if to say, 'So what?'"[28]

Khrushchev soon realized that this approach only strengthened Kennedy's determination, however, so he ordered the creation and testing of the Tsar Bomba, the largest nuclear device ever created.[29] But none of this posturing worked; Khrushchev could not convince the administration that he would

intentionally start a nuclear war that would devastate his own country. Khrushchev also faced signaling challenges due to nuclear scientist Andrei Sakharov's opposition to testing and the long delay between the order to ramp up nuclear tests and the execution of the order, which occurred only in late October. So, by the time the Soviets actually sent the threatening signal, Khrushchev had already decided to drop the issue and wall off West Berlin instead.[30]

Lastly, allies' reactions to madman tactics can also hinder credibility. If a leader wants to act like a madman, he has to either gain the acquiescence of his major allies in his extreme preferences and risky behavior—which is especially difficult if the allies are likely to bear the consequences—or he has to proceed without that approval, in which case allies are likely to try to constrain him when they find out what he is doing. Both dynamics have the potential to undermine the ability to issue threats on the basis of extreme preferences and an indifference toward costs. Bringing the allies into consultation allows them to veto or water down the move, and it also increases the chances of a madman ploy being discovered as a bluff. But not including allies risks them later maneuvering to constrain the madman, which undercuts the threat and potentially damages the strength of the alliance. This dynamic is evident in the Nixon case detailed above, as Nixon was forced to issue only a partial, secretive nuclear alert to avoid spooking American allies. But the secrecy made the alert difficult for the Soviets to detect and interpret.

A similar situation occurred in the aftermath of the Chinese intervention in the Korean War in October 1950, when Truman publicly noted that nuclear weapons had not been ruled out as a potential response. Four days after Truman's remark, British Prime Minister Clement Attlee visited Washington to convince Truman to back away from nuclear threats. Truman eventually promised Attlee that no nuclear strikes would occur without prior consultation with the British.[31] The State Department found Attlee's uninvited visit humiliating, and it quickly rejected Strategic Air Command (SAC) commander Curtis LeMay's request to visit Korea, as it felt his association with American nuclear weapons would make the trip far too provocative.[32] This episode again demonstrates the many challenges to credibly signaling extreme preferences when allies are part of the equation.

The Assurance Problem

The final reason that madman tactics tend to fail is that for a leader's threat to be effective, it must be paired with a credible assurance that the threat will *not* be carried out if the target complies with the associated demand.[33] A leader who appears to have extreme preferences on every issue and to routinely deviate from consequence-based decision-making on all matters—a pattern that former intelligence analyst and Penn State professor Roseanne

McManus calls "dispositional," rather than "situational," madness—is likely to have difficulty convincing opponents that he will suddenly start to behave reasonably and rationally after the target makes concessions or refrains from unwanted behavior.[34] Paradoxically, this sort of leader actually becomes highly predictable: no matter what concessions the target makes or what actions it refrains from taking, the leader can be expected to continue with extreme demands and escalatory threats. Under these circumstances, the target is likely to conclude that concessions will only prompt more outlandish demands and bad behavior in the future, and so the target state may double down rather than concede. The target might even decide to escalate out of a belief that the leader must be confronted sooner rather than later.

McManus argues that the Reagan administration saw Qaddafi as dispositionally deviating from consequence-based decision-making and that the George W. Bush administration also saw Saddam as having disposition- ally extreme preferences.[35] These leaders' "madness" was not, in other words, situational, or tied to specific policy areas or episodes. Rather, it defined their entire approach to foreign policy. In both cases, the United States ultimately decided to escalate rather than concede to these leaders' demands. Under Reagan, the United States launched air strikes against Libya in 1986, including targeting a compound that housed Qaddafi's personal residence; and under Bush, the United States invaded Iraq in 2003 and overthrew Saddam's regime.

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As McManus readily acknowledges, the United States was also much more powerful than these countries, which no doubt played a significant role in the US decision to escalate rather than negotiate. Air strikes and regime change wars are not feasible escalation options for most countries. But the cases do show that at a certain point, being perceived as a total madman can backfire, because true madmen cannot give credible assurances of good behavior in the future. Targets may be especially reticent to make concessions if they believe they might face repeated standoffs with a madman, because doing so early on will harm future bar- gaining leverage.[36] Overall, madman tactics must strike an almost impossible balance—crazy enough to get an opponent's attention, but not so crazy that they lose credibility or provoke escalation rather than concessions.

Trump as a Failed Madman

Trump's madman foreign policy has run into all three of the pitfalls identified above at various points: the signaling problem, the credibility problem, and the

assurance problem. Trump's messaging and motives are often incoherent and unclear, his threats are at times so extreme as to lack credibility, and his antics have likely fostered trepidation and frustration among America's allies and adversaries rather than convinced them of his steely resolve. Opponents have responded with intransigence or even escalation. Trump's dealings with both North Korea and Iran demonstrate these problems, though they are also apparent in other contexts such as trade negotiations with China and disputes with NATO over defense spending.

North Korea

Donald Trump has pursued a quintessential madman approach to dealing with North Korea. He has expressed both extreme preferences by demanding unilateral North Korean denuclearization and a willingness to bear the costs of war by threatening attacks on North Korea that almost certainly would result in the deaths of American service personnel and South Korean civilians on the peninsula. He has

> Trump has pursued a quintessential madman approach to dealing with North Korea.

also emphasized unpredictability, alternating between extremely bellicose threats and highly conciliatory moves. But despite this novel approach to the Korean nuclear problem, Trump has achieved no more than any of his predecessors—and in fact, North Korea's nuclear capabilities have expanded and advanced considerably under his watch.[37]

Upon assuming the presidency, Trump adopted an extremely aggressive posture toward North Korea.[38] He engaged in puerile jabs on Twitter against Kim Jong Un, labeling him a "Rocket Man on a suicide mission."[39] He threatened Pyongyang with "fire and fury like the world has never seen" in an apparently off-the-cuff remark.[40] He gave a speech at the UN in which he threatened to "totally destroy North Korea."[41] Trump also promised that the US military was "locked and loaded" and insinuated that if Kim uttered even "one threat," the United States would initiate military hostilities.[42] Later in the year, Trump publicly deprecated Secretary of State Tillerson's pursuit of a diplomatic solution to the crisis, announcing that Tillerson was "wasting his time."[43]

But in 2018, Trump suddenly altered course. He met with Kim at a summit in Singapore—after which he declared that he and Kim shared a "special bond"[44]—and then followed up in 2019 with a summit in Hanoi, even though no progress was made on the Singapore declaration. The meeting in Hanoi was cut short due to disagreements,[45] but Trump continued his conciliatory tone, participating in an historic DMZ meeting with Kim later in 2019.[46]

Despite these antics, however, Trump has largely failed to achieve his goals. North Korea has not denuclearized, and Pyongyang has resumed testing short-range ballistic missiles, as well as a medium-range submarine-launched ballistic missile, both of which remain highly threatening to North Korea's neighbors. It is true that North Korea has not launched intercontinental-range ballistic missiles (ICBMs) or tested nuclear weapons since 2017, but it is hard to know whether this restraint is a result of Trump's tactics or the fact that North Korea simply does not need to engage in further demonstrations of its arsenal for the time being.[47] Kim's 2019 repudiation of the testing moratorium on the grounds that the United States has not lived up to its commitments suggests that the freeze may have been at least partly designed as a temporary move to secure a meeting with Trump and gauge the likelihood of reciprocal concessions from the United States, rather than a permanent policy change in response to Trump's threats.[48] Regardless, the core issue with North Korea has never been the tests themselves but the hostilities and capabilities that those tests highlight, which have not fundamentally changed.

That said, Trump did take on a significant challenge: to dismantle, or at least halt the expansion of, a nuclear arsenal that Pyongyang has been seeking and developing for decades and views as a central component of its national and regime security. So, North Korea was never likely to give up its arsenal, especially in the rapid and unilateral manner Trump envisioned. But Trump's failure to win any meaningful concessions reinforces that madman tactics do not confer any special leverage in such situations, for the three reasons we outlined above.

First, Trump's goals have been opaque, especially his definition of "complete and verifiable denuclearization," which he apparently jettisoned after the Singapore summit. Confusion was likely only heightened by his dramatic swing from war threats to amorous statements.[49]

Second, besides signaling problems, Trump has also faced credibility problems. It was implausible that Trump would risk war with a nuclear adversary over missile tests that had been occurring for years, especially since that adversary could kill many Americans on the peninsula or even potentially on the west coast of the United States. The credibility of the threat was also undermined by Trump's advisers' attempts to moderate his rhetoric as well as resistance from allies such as Germany and South Korea. For example, during a visit to Seoul ahead of Trump's November 2017 trip to Asia, Secretary of Defense James Mattis emphasized that the US goal "is not war."[50] This comment echoed the sentiments of Secretary of State Rex Tillerson, who two months prior emphasized that there was no "imminent threat" of war and that the United States still hoped for negotiations.[51] At the same time, US allies were working to prevent an escalatory spiral, and it was South Korean diplomats who orchestrated the Singapore summit, likely in an attempt to prevent war from breaking out in their region.[52]

Finally, while it is impossible to prove conclusively, Kim likely feared that making concessions to Trump would only lead to greater demands, and ones to which Kim would then have to respond from a weaker position. Trump's erraticism means that Kim has had no reason to believe his regime would be safe from US attack or pressure after relinquishing his nuclear arsenal.[53] Thus, Kim likely concluded that it was safer to retain his nuclear weapons as a guarantee against regime change.[54]

Iran

Trump has pursued similarly aggressive tactics against Iran, displaying both extreme preferences for unilateral adjustments in Iranian foreign policy without any US concessions, as well as a seeming indifference to the possibility of another large-scale war in the Middle East that could kill Americans, destabilize allies, and disrupt the flow of oil. Virtually from day one of his presidency, Trump criticized the Obama-era Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA). After much bellicose rhetoric, he withdrew in May 2018, even though Iran was certified as being in compliance and many of his advisors, including Defense Secretary James Mattis, reportedly favored staying in.[55]

Decrying continued Iranian support for proxies in Syria and Iraq as well as Iran's continued pursuit of its ballistic missile program, Trump then launched a "maximum pressure" campaign of harsh sanctions that starved Iran of financing and significantly damaged its economy.[56] Later that summer, when Iran's president warned of the dangers of going to war, Trump tweeted directly back at him, "NEVER, EVER THREATEN THE UNITED STATES AGAIN OR YOU WILL SUFFER CONSEQUENCES THE LIKES OF WHICH FEW THROUGHOUT HISTORY HAVE EVER SUFFERED BEFORE!"[57]

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Trump escalated matters further in January 2020, ordering the killing of Iranian Quds Force commander Qassem Soleimani through a US drone strike on Iraqi soil. Trump initially justified the Soleimani killing as response to Iranian-backed militia attacks on the US embassy in Iraq and a means of stopping imminent plotting to kill Americans. Days later, however, Secretary of State Pompeo outlined "a bigger strategy" behind the move: "President Trump and those of us in his national security team are re-establishing deterrence," Pompeo argued in a speech at Stanford. "Your adversary must understand not only that you have the capacity to impose cost but that you're in fact willing to do so."[58] Since that time, Trump has continued to needle Iran,

including by ordering the US Navy to "shoot down and destroy" Iranian ships harassing US military vessels, though the Pentagon later walked back the threat.[59]

Ultimately, however, Trump's madman approach to Iran has not yielded foreign policy success—if anything, the opposite is true. First, precipitous US withdrawal from the JCPOA has not led Iran to negotiate a better deal encompassing a larger range of issues. Rather, Iran has gradually rolled back its nuclear commitments under the agreement and shortened its breakout time, while conceding nothing with respect to its ballistic missile program or support for regional proxies.

Second, Iran retaliated for the Soleimani killing by lobbing ballistic missiles at bases housing US service personnel in Iraq. These strikes did not kill any Americans, though more than two dozen later received Purple Hearts for injuries sustained during the bombardment. The Commander of US Central Command defended the administration's approach to Congress in March, arguing, "We have re-established a rough form of deterrence, what I would call contested deterrence with Iran," but the convoluted turn of phrase did not exactly suggest a resounding strategic success in the region.[60] Although it is true that, by late spring 2020, Iran had dialed down some of its most provocative regional behavior, particularly in the Gulf and Iraq, many observers attributed these choices to the regime's need to focus on the pandemic and on worsening economic and political conditions within Iran.[61]

The key point is that Trump's approach has not, in fact, "re-established deterrence" toward Iran and, if anything, has decreased the US ability to change the aspects of regime behavior it does not like—a predictable outcome for the three reasons highlighted above. First, Trump's exact goals have remained vague. It is obvious that he seeks an end to Iranian proxy warfare, for example, but it is likely difficult for Tehran to determine just how much it must concede before Trump is appeased—will he accept a reduction in support to proxies rather than a complete cessation, or will he ultimately be satisfied only with the destruction of the regime itself? Trump has been long on bellicose tweets but short on specific demands.

Second, Trump's strategy toward Iran has at times lacked credibility, making it hard to discern which of his threats are real and which are bluffs. Although he has followed through on some threats, such as pulling out of the JCPOA, and has engaged in the surprise strike on Soleimani, Trump has also shied away from other opportunities to seriously escalate. For example, the day after the post-Soleimani Iranian ballistic missile attacks, Trump clearly looked for an off-ramp, declaring that "Iran appears to be standing down, which is a good thing for all parties concerned." He also adopted a more conciliatory tone, stating that "the fact that we have this great military and equipment … does not mean we have to use it."[62] Trump's aversion to escalation with Iran is also apparent in other episodes. In an unrelated June 2019 incident involving an Iranian

shootdown of an American drone, for example, Trump ordered a retaliatory strike against Iran only to abort the operation at the last minute.[63] He also chose not to retaliate militarily after a suspected Iranian strike on Saudi oil fields in Abqaiq on September 14, 2019 (though much about the attack itself remains murky).[64]

More generally, Trump's frequently expressed desire to avoid fighting more wars in the Middle East, epitomized by his agonizing efforts to withdraw US forces from Syria, also undercut the notion that he was truly indifferent to the costs of a major conflict with Iran. And the credibility of Trump's threats has been further damaged by the vociferous condemnation of American behavior by European allies.[65] It is fine for the United States to claim it wants a better deal, but Iran likely knows that one will not happen without support from the other signatories to the JCPOA.

Finally, the assurance problem has crippled Trump's efforts to force Iran to the bargaining table. His withdrawal from the JCPOA despite Iranian compliance—and recent demands that Iran continue to comply, despite US abrogation—makes it hard to see why Iran would ever agree to any future deal he tried to negotiate.[66] If it does, it can expect only to be met with greater demands in the future, which it will then be in a weaker position to resist. Iran, like North Korea, likely has concluded instead that negotiating from a position of strength—nuclear strength—is the best move against a US president who seems incapable of negotiating in good faith. Unpredictability has yielded predictably little leverage and has even backfired.

> Unpredictability has yielded predictably little leverage and has even backfired.

Conclusions and Implications

Madman behavior contains inherent limitations as an approach to foreign policy and rarely, if ever, generates success. Providing clear signaling while acting erratically is exceedingly difficult. Credibly backing up wild threats is just as challenging, especially when a country must also take allied preferences into account. And finally, truly extreme demands can actually give adversaries a reason to stand firm or even escalate, because madmen have trouble providing credible assurances that they will stick to any bargain they negotiate. Both historical and present-day cases illustrate these dynamics. They also show that efforts to employ madman tactics can generate distinct dangers of their own, as happened with Nixon's 1969 nuclear alert.

Given this record, leaders have far more to lose than gain by embracing a madman approach. If Trump is re-elected, he would do well to moderate his

behavior if he wants to see any real foreign policy progress. If Biden wins the presidency, he should make it a top priority to reset countries' expectations of US behavior. This does not mean caving to the demands of countries with which the United States has very legitimate differences of view, such as North Korea and Iran, but it does mean behaving with a consistency, moderation, and reasonableness that will make US diplomacy and negotiations more likely to bear fruit. Based on the historical and contemporary evidence, madman behavior does not work.

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