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*Beware the Hubris-Nemesis
Complex*

A Concept for Leadership Analysis

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Office of Research and Development,
Central Intelligence Agency*

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Preface

This essay was prepared for a project sponsored by the Office of Research and Development, Central Intelligence Agency, on the decisionmaking of leaders in states that may be obtaining or using weapons of mass destruction. The project was led by John Arquilla and Paul K. Davis. The research was conducted in the International Security and Defense Policy Center of RAND's National Security Research Division.

The "hubris-nemesis complex" was first mentioned in a study on Mexico (Ronfeldt, 1984); it was later elaborated in a study on Fidel Castro (Gonzalez and Ronfeldt, 1986). This essay explicates the concept independently of concerns about specific countries or leaders. An early version co-authored with Yoav Ben-Horin (Ronfeldt and Ben-Horin, 1993) was briefed at a RAND conference on Understanding and Influencing the Decisionmaking of Potential Proliferators, in March 1993.

This essay is the result of a small exploratory project and is far from definitive. It aims to provide a rough sense of what the concept is about and puts a range of hypotheses and observations on the table for consideration. It is hoped that this will generate support for additional work to validate assertions with examples, to develop a theory and methodologies for using the concept to assess adversaries who have the complex, and to model their likely behavior should they become dangerous.

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Summary

In the years ahead, the United States will assuredly find itself in new international crises involving nations or groups that have powerful leaders. In some cases, these leaders may have a special, dangerous mindset that is the result of a “hubris-nemesis complex.”

This complex involves a combination of hubris (a pretension toward an arrogant form of godliness) and nemesis (a vengeful desire to confront, defeat, humiliate, and punish an adversary, especially one that can be accused of hubris). The combination has strange dynamics that may lead to destructive, high-risk behavior. Attempts to deter, compel, or negotiate with a leader who has a hubris-nemesis complex can be ineffectual or even disastrously counterproductive when those attempts are based on concepts better suited to dealing with more normal leaders.

This essay introduces and defines the concept of the hubris-nemesis complex, illustrates it by drawing upon both mythic characters and real personalities, relates it to other psychological phenomena that have been described well in the past, and discusses some challenges that may be faced in recognizing and dealing with the complex in the course of international relations. The essay argues that the complex is relatively common, but often unappreciated, and that we can see it at work in current-day figures such as Fidel Castro, Saddam Hussein, and Slobodan Milosevic—leaders about whom the United States has made serious misjudgments over the years. Thus, while the essay is intended to be conceptual and scholarly, it may have direct significance for understanding and dealing with foreign leaders in future crises and conflicts.

Acknowledgments

I am indebted above all to Konrad Kellen, who first told me about the classic Greek dynamic whereby hubris attracts Nemesis. Yoav Ben-Horin also deserves special praise for the efforts and insights he contributed in our discussions about the hubris-nemesis concept, and for the fact that this draft is based partly on the briefing he helped co-author in 1993 (Ronfeldt and Ben-Horin, 1993). My thanks extend to Ken Watman who, as the formal reviewer, pushed for clarifications and called attention to conceptual and empirical shortcomings that still affect parts of the essay. I am also grateful to Edward Gonzalez for the lengthy comments and useful suggestions that he provided along the way. In addition, this draft has benefited from helpful comments by John Arquilla, Paul Cole, Paul Davis, Alexander George, Don Mankin, Kevin McCarthy, George Rand, William Schwabe, and Jennifer Taw.

1. Hubris and Nemesis Opposed—The Classic Dynamic

This paper introduces a concept for thinking about the mindset of a type of adversary that has been very difficult and sometimes dangerous for the United States to deal with. The concept emerged in connection with a study about Fidel Castro, but it might as well have been a leader like Adolf Hitler, Ayatollah Khomeini, or Saddam Hussein.

It is often said that leaders like these are megalomaniacal, power-hungry, confrontational, vengeful, messianic, grandiose, crazy, etc. The concept of the hubris-nemesis complex offers a way to view such attributes comprehensively. Some concepts—notably about charisma and narcissism—already exist for this purpose. But the concept at hand may offer some insights and advantages.

What is the hubris-nemesis concept? What can an analyst do with it? How can it be developed further? These questions are addressed in this pilot essay. If the concept seems fruitful, additional work should be done to build a theory and methodologies for identifying and analyzing leaders who exhibit the complex.

First, I want to clarify the meaning of hubris and nemesis. The background story is simply this: I once unknowingly misused the word “nemesis.” A wise RAND colleague, Konrad Kellen, said, “No, that’s not correct,” and told me about the classic Greek dynamic whereby hubris must be present to attract Nemesis.¹

In Greek myth and tragedy, *hubris* (or *hybris*) is the pretension to be godlike, and thereby fail to observe the divine equilibrium among god, man, and nature.

- It is “a state of mind in which man thinks more than human thoughts and later translates them into act. It is an offense against the order of the world” (Greene, 1961: 487).
- It is “the arrogant violation of limits set by the gods or by human society” (North, 1966: 6).
- It is “having energy or power and misusing it self-indulgently” (MacDowell, 1976: 21).

¹The term *Nemesis* is used to refer to the ancient Greek goddess and retributions attributed to her. The term *nemesis* is used to refer to the dynamics of retribution in general.

- It is “behavior that was intended gratuitously to inflict dishonour and shame upon others” or “to the values that hold a society together” (Fisher, 1979: 32, 45).

In other words, hubris is the capital sin of pride, and thus the antithesis of two ethics that the Greeks valued highly: *aidos* (humble reverence for law) and *sophrosyne* (self-restraint, a sense of proper limits). Words and phrases like the following—overweening pride; self-glorification; arrogance; insolence; overconfidence in one’s ability and right to do whatever one wants, to the point of disdain the cardinal virtues of life; ignoring other people’s feelings; overstepping boundaries; and impiously defying all who stand in the way—are found in descriptions of people who have hubris.

In Greek literature, hubris often afflicted rulers and conquerors who, though endowed with great leadership abilities, abused their power and authority and challenged the divine balance of nature to gratify their own vanity and ambition. Thus hubris was no common evil: It led people to presume that they were above ordinary laws, if not laws unto themselves—to presume they deserved to exceed the fate and fortune ordained by the gods.

Acts of hubris aroused envy among the gods on Mt. Olympus and angered them to restore justice and equilibrium. Nemesis, the goddess of divine vengeance and retribution, might then descend to destroy the vainglorious pretender, to cut man down to size and restore equilibrium.

Not much is known about Nemesis, and much of that is inconsistent. An ancient creation myth has her issue from a union between Night and Erebus, as one of a set of female spirits and goddesses who are to assure that fate and necessity play strong roles in life. Other early accounts associate her with a personification of moral reverence for law and for the lot that each person is due (by necessity). Thus she is in harmony with *aidos* and *sophrosyne*—in some versions, she is paired with Aidos personified. Still other accounts suggest that she emerged to represent some dark, punishing aspects of Themis, a powerful early goddess, or of Artemis, the later well-known goddess who was both a huntress and a protectress. Finally, there is a myth in which Nemesis gets identified with Leda, in a story about a pursuit and rape by Zeus that leads to the birth of the only daughter he bred on earth: the Helen who becomes Helen of Troy.

There is no easy way to make a coherent, reliable whole from these varying accounts. However, a Jungian analysis uses the myth about Nemesis’s rape by Zeus to show how this beautiful goddess, who is not initially identified with vengefulness, may have evolved into an archetype of retribution:

Here the bride—the original Kore—was called *Nemesis*; the bridegroom and seducer, *Zeus*. Pursued by the god's desire, the goddess transforms herself into various beasts of the earth, sea, and air. In this last mutation, as wild birds of the primeval swamp—she as a goose, he as a swan—the two divinities celebrate their marriage by rape. For this marriage was and remained a rape. The goddess was not to be softened by love; she succumbed to violence and therefore became the eternal avenger—Nemesis. (Kerényi, in Jung and Kerényi, 1969: 122)²

A case may be made that, with this rape, Zeus committed “the most formidable theological gamble” and “the greatest exploit” of his reign. By raping a deity of necessity, he “forced necessity to bring forth beauty”—nearly committing an act of hubris on his part (Calasso, 1994: 127, 137). Hence, it is no wonder that Nemesis becomes the

goddess of the offense that boomerangs back on its perpetrator. . . . Herself the great enemy of hubris, she gave birth to a daughter whose very body was an offense and in so doing provoked the most magnificent unfolding of hubris in all of Greek history: the Trojan war. (Calasso, 1994: 138)

Thus a long cycle of hubris and nemesis, followed by new acts of hubris and nemesis, is set into motion.

Hubris above all is what attracted Nemesis, who then retaliated to humiliate and destroy the pretender, often through terror and devastation. Thus she was an agent of destruction. The battle won, she did not turn to constructive tasks of renewal and redemption—that was for others to do. Yet her behavior was never a matter of pure angry revenge. There were high, righteous purposes behind her acts, for she intervened in human affairs primarily to restore equilibrium when it was badly disturbed, usually by figures who attained excessive power and prosperity. Examples appear in myths about Narcissus, Phaeton, Icarus, and Niobe, though Nemesis's appearance is often allegorical rather than personified. The dynamic is also central in plays by Aeschylus, notably *Agamemnon*, and in histories by Herodotus, notably about Croesus.³

According to the behavior patterns embedded in the logic of myth, people should beware the dynamics linking hubris and Nemesis. While the former

²Jungians take the hubris-nemesis dynamic quite seriously, as seen in Edinger (1992), Henderson (1964), and Jacoby (1990). In contrast, Freudians take the concept of narcissism seriously, based on the myth of Narcissus, but without explicitly noting its hubris-nemesis dynamics. See Section 3 for a discussion of narcissism.

³Sources consulted on hubris and Nemesis include Bell (1991), Calasso (1994), Farnell (1896), Fisher (1976, 1979), Graves (1960), Grene (1961), Hamilton (1969), MacDowell (1976), Morford and Lenardon (1985), and North (1966). Curiously, Joseph Campbell does not make the list. I have scanned many of his writings and found but one spare reference to Nemesis (Campbell, 1968: 16), little worth noting about Narcissus, and nothing explicit about hubris. Fisher's new book (1992) about hubris is said to be definitive, but I have yet to see a copy.

vainly and arrogantly defies proper conduct and balance in human affairs, the latter harshly restores them. In so doing, both have a tendency to get out of control—and both to victimize.

In modern parlance, the ancient terms are rarely used. But the dynamic reverberates in Christian thinking (cf. Pagels, 1993), and remains contemporary in Biblical sayings like “Pride goeth before a fall.” Modern examples of the ancient dynamic often revolve around an “arrogance of power” theme, as in pairing the United States and the Vietnam war, Nixon and Watergate, or the Shah of Iran and the Islamic revolution. Also, the ancient terms have been used by writers trying to explain why “bidding firms infected by hubris simply pay too much for their targets” in corporate bidding wars and takeovers (Roll, 1986: 197), or to warn about signs of hubris rising in the applied natural and social sciences in the United States (Spengler, 1972), or to criticize intellectuals who play Nemesis-like roles against traditional authorities while ignoring that this may open a way for demagogues to gain power (Nisbet, 1972). Indeed, analysts who write about hubris and nemesis are usually trying to warn against something.

2. Hubris and Nemesis Fused—An Extraordinary Dynamic

Consider a leader like Fidel Castro.¹ Which part of the dynamic fits him? He seems to have hubris, and may yet meet his nemesis. But on the other hand, he already thinks and acts like a nemesis—of the United States, which he would accuse of hubris.

This suggests that Castro and other comparable leaders have an extraordinary mindset that transcends the classic dynamic: They fit both parts—they have hubris, and at the same time they want to be the nemesis of an external power that they may accuse of hubris. In other words, they have a “hubris-nemesis complex,”² a special and potentially dangerous mindset that combines hubris (a pretension toward an arrogant form of godliness) and nemesis (a vengeful desire to confront, defeat, humiliate, and punish an adversary that may itself be accused of hubris).

In such leaders, the complex means more than exhibiting hubris and nemesis as separate qualities. The interaction between, and integration of, the two forces appears to result in something more complex, more pathological, than the description of either force may imply at first glance. To be as powerful as their hubris requires, they must be the nemesis of an external power; indeed, it is part of their hubris to be such a nemesis. At the same time, to fulfill the nemesis role against such a power, they must personally possess absolute power at home and expand their power and presence abroad—they must be capable of hubris.

In the classic dynamic, the two forces stand apart, opposing and contradicting each other. In this extraordinary dynamic, the two forces no longer stand apart. They get fused in a single mind. They become compatible contradictions—mutually reinforcing each other in a fusion that, far from destroying the bearer, imparts enormous energy, ambition, dynamism, and thirst for power. The two forces feed on each other such that the stronger one is, the stronger the other becomes.

¹For this author, learning about the classic dynamic coincided with preparations for a research project on Fidel Castro.

²I prefer the term “complex” to the term “syndrome,” although the latter might also be used.

The mentality and behavior of a leader under the spell of both forces seem substantially different from those of a leader affected by only one or neither of the two forces. Moreover, a hubris-nemesis complex seems to impart a rationality that differs from an ordinary cost-benefit rationality. A leader inflated with that much grandiosity and vengefulness may not make what are normally regarded as reasonable, pragmatic calculations of interests, goals, benefits, costs, and risks.

Leadership Examples and Attributes

In an early formulation (Gonzalez and Ronfeldt, 1986), the concept helped organize an analysis of Castro and seemed to capture a core of his mindset. It also seemed clear that the complex could be found in other powerful charismatic leaders who, like Castro, arrogate to themselves a mission and a right to pursue retribution against their enemies while imposing totalitarian methods of rule and expanding their power abroad. Who are these exemplars, and what are their attributes?

Attributes of Fidel Castro (Circa 1986)

In the study of Castro, the concept of the complex helped illuminate that he, not to mention other leaders, exhibits a bundle of traits or attributes permeated with fused hubris-nemesis dynamics:

- a destructive-constructive messianism;
- high, moralizing ideals that justify violence;
- a demand for absolute power, loyalty, and attention;
- a fierce sense of struggle that may turn self-sacrificial.

These traits or attributes are presented below as though they could apply to any leader who has a hubris-nemesis complex, although the language is lifted almost verbatim from the report on Castro (Gonzalez and Ronfeldt, 1986). (I use the pronoun “he” and “his” throughout, since up to now all the major examples I have identified are men. This is not to say that only men acquire the complex; it may simply be a function of the fact that men still occupy most formal leadership positions.)

A Destructive-Constructive Messianism. A hubris-nemesis leader believes himself to be—and presents himself as being—a virtual messiah or savior who is on a crusade and has a fate, destiny, or mission that is historic, both timeless and

time-changing in its implications. All is politicized in the name of the mission and the high principles it engages.

Combining constructive with destructive tendencies, he proposes to accomplish monumental projects that will confirm his and his nation's greatness. Such projects, if achieved, may bring material progress, but their purpose goes beyond that. They symbolize the leader's desire to direct vast energies at constructing something awesome that commands widespread respect and honor and enhances people's feelings of pride and dignity, thereby validating his leadership and his conception of his and his nation's abilities. Meanwhile, he seeks to blame and attack the chosen enemy and its imperious ways for his nation's weaknesses and failures to live up to its hopes and capabilities.

High Ideals and a Moralization of Violence. The hubris-nemesis leader offers his followers something great and attractive to love (e.g., the Revolution), and something equally great and attractive to hate (e.g., the United States). Good and evil are defined in stark, absolute, polarizing terms, and the leader may rage against the chosen enemy in those terms. However, he may not treat the enemy as pure evil incarnate. The desire to humiliate and destroy the enemy may derive more from its perceived hubris—the way it exercises power—than from its perceived evilness.

The leader exalts living up to idealized expectations, and related to this, emphasizes the power of ideas. Moral goals and incentives may often prevail over material goals and incentives in his schemes, perhaps especially when it comes to justifying struggle and violence. Violence is rationalized in terms of high ideals not only to validate playing the role of nemesis against the chosen enemy, but perhaps also to deny any personal desires for material gain or glory on the part of the leader.

Absolute Power, Loyalty, and Attention. The hubris-nemesis leader insists on virtually absolute power and loyalty, in ways that combine military discipline and religious devotion. This power is justified as necessary to overcome the weight of past history and control destiny for a high purpose, as well as to meet all external and internal threats.

Such a leader seeks constant attention. The bigger the audience and the larger the stage, the better. He hates to be upstaged or ignored—and if he is ignored, he may brood on how to regain attention. He does not tolerate abandonment by subordinates. And he is intolerant of both domestic and international rivals. Domestic rivals are crushed, especially if they challenge his power or vision. He is more likely to compete than cooperate with his international counterparts, perhaps especially if their behavior also fits the hubris-nemesis mold.

Whether he is dealing with allies or enemies, he refuses to be humbled. But he may appear humble before selected audiences (e.g., religious visitors). Like any successful leader, he is capable of pragmatic behavior (as discussed further below). Yet, he never relents in his ambition for power, or his goal of retribution against the chosen enemy.

A Fierce Sense of Struggle That May Turn Self-Sacrificial. He believes that he can—indeed, must—overcome terrible odds, threats, and obstacles. This reinforces his insistence on total power, and justifies expecting his followers to tolerate hardship, sacrifice, and struggle to achieve the goals he sets.

He thrives on threat-mongering and confrontation, or at least on their rhetoric. Defiance, rage, and vengeance (but not necessarily an all-encompassing hatred) are directed at the chosen enemy in ways that say “the more the enemy attacks us, the stronger we are.” Threats and attacks from the enemy are used to confirm the validity of the hubris-nemesis complex.

He is rarely suicidal in an ordinary sense; indeed, especially when young, he might be able to endure tremendous frustration and suffering before becoming even potentially suicidal. However, he may often seem ready to take risks that may expose him and his followers to a martyr’s death. Under extreme circumstances (e.g., extreme threat perception), he might do something against his chosen enemy that risks “bringing the house down” on top of him, resulting in his death. That risk, if it implies martyrdom and historical glory, may be preferred to surrender or humiliation.

* * * * *

This remains a preliminary explication, indicative of some basic attributes that may be bundled together under the rubric of the hubris-nemesis complex. There is nothing new here about Castro or comparable leaders; it has all been said before. But the concept seems to capture under one umbrella term much that is important about the mindsets of such leaders and about the behavior patterns that worry policymakers who must deal with them.

Array of Examples

Who else belongs on a list of examples? Adolf Hitler, surely. Identifying whom to add should be the result of a careful review of literature about the thoughts and actions, the words and deeds, of candidates for the list, which might end up including not only “bad guys” but also some who are “good guys” from a U.S. perspective. But such a task lay beyond the capabilities of the project on which

this pilot essay is based, so the leaders named tentatively below are drawn from a general familiarity with current events and history, and from discussions with colleagues.

In addition to Castro and Hitler, the list of international figures whose mindsets combine hubris and nemesis appears to include figures like Saddam Hussein, Mohamar Khadafi, Ayatollah Khomeini, and probably Slobodan Milosevic, Kim Il Sung, and Vladimir Zhirinovsky. As for other names that come up, it is not so clear that Vladimir Lenin (not grandiose enough?), Josef Stalin (more a sociopath than a hubris-nemesis type?), or Mao Zedong (not grandiose enough?) had a hubris-nemesis complex—though they often exhibited aspects of the dynamic.

U.S. society is not immune to the rise of figures with a hubris-nemesis complex, or at least some of its tendencies. Names that might be considered include David Duke, Louis Farrakhan, Steven Jobs, Jim Jones, David Koresh, Huey Long, Joseph McCarthy, Malcolm X, Ralph Nader, and Ross Perot.

A list of international exemplars of hubris without much nemesis might include Charles de Gaulle,³ Shah Mohammad Reza Pahlavi (Shah of Iran), Olof Palme, Eva and Juan Peron, and perhaps Manuel Noriega and Ariel Sharon.

The impulses of nemesis without much hubris appear in figures like Mikhail Bakunin, Mahatma Ghandi, Ernesto “Che” Guevara, Ho Chi Minh, Martin Luther, Martin Luther King, Jr., and Saladin. A nemesis list is bound to include many leaders who were not heads of state, since the nemesis role often appears in romantic, intellectual, idealistic, anarchistic, and anti-authority figures who are not suited to heading a government or an army.

While this paper focuses on leaders, at times the complex may be displayed by groups, organizations, and even entire societies. Some cultures, and some social conditions, may be more susceptible than others to hubris-nemesis dynamics. Revenge and retribution impulses are found in all cultures, but they seem especially prevalent in cultures where notions of justice and injustice are closely tied to sensitivities about pride, dignity, honor, and respect (e.g., in Latin America and the Middle East). An example may be the Argentine military when it engaged in a “dirty war” against revolutionaries in the 1970s, and again when it tried to seize the Falkland Islands from Great Britain.

³Yoav Ben-Horin has noted (Ronfeldt and Ben-Horin, 1993) that De Gaulle’s famous statement “I am France” illustrates a form of hubris that partly transcends the self—it is arrogant but also unselfish.

Fictional Archetypes

The hubris-nemesis complex smolders in the figures of Captain Ahab in Herman Melville's *Moby Dick*, and Satan in John Milton's *Paradise Lost*. These fictional archetypes bear mentioning because the design of their characters is so revealing. Of the two, Ahab's character is more thoroughly developed; in him, Melville provides an awesome portrayal of a full-blown hubris-nemesis complex, surely the finest portrayal in all of literature (cf. Ronfeldt, 1990).

Aboard ship, Ahab imposes an "irresistible dictatorship" to go after a superpowerful beast, Moby Dick, that had injured him physically, and in Ahab's view, intellectually and spiritually too. This "grand, ungodly, godlike man" fulminates like a vengeful match for any power in heaven, in hell, or on earth. His consuming pride and rage for revenge against the White Whale blaze in the great speech before his crew where he proclaims, "I will wreak that hate upon him. . . . I'd strike the sun if it insulted me." And while others think him mad, Ahab knows he is but "demoniac"—and that "for this hunt my malady becomes my most desired health." The Whale of course proves to be his nemesis. (Quotes from Chs. 16, 23, 36, 37, 74.)

In another display of the complex, Milton's Satan becomes "the Adversary of God and Man." Once the highest of angels, his "pride and worse ambition" lead him to go to war against his Creator for the control of Heaven. Thus he falls from grace and is cast into Hell, feeling it is "better to reign in Hell than serve in Heaven." There, from a "sense of injured merit," and "with thoughts inflamed of highest designs," he recalls a rumor that God may have created something new called Man. So he escapes from Hell, and sets out to locate Man and take his revenge. (Quotes from Bks. I, II, IV.)

Dark themes of pride, vanity, ambition, power, insolence, disdain, defiance, rage, and retribution pervade *Moby Dick* and *Paradise Lost*. Ahab and Satan have moments of regret and doubt about what they are doing—but these are fleeting moments of self-reflection, before they plunge ahead on their sworn, bitter missions. Because of the insightfulness of these literary creations, both are repeatedly recognized by clinical psychologists, psychiatrists, and psychoanalysts as revealing deep and terrible truths about the dark sides of man's psyche (e.g., Murray, 1955, 1962; Kohut, 1972).

Another literary figure deserves passing mention—and exculpation: Miguel de Cervantes's Don Quixote. Sympathizers have called Fidel Castro a modern Don Quixote; Castro himself has implied as much. And during the Persian Gulf war, an Arab journalist called Saddam Hussein an Arab Don Quixote. To their

charmed sympathizers, Castro and Hussein have a quixotic face. But this ignores their “ahabic” face. Quixote is a vainglorious visionary who wants to challenge disbelievers and avenge wrongs; thus he has moments of hubris as well as nemesis. But he is not afflicted with a hubris-nemesis complex (Ronfeldt, 1990).

A theory and methodology for applying the hubris-nemesis concept must be able to distinguish the Don Quixotes from the Captain Ahabs of the world. Both types can be charismatic and convincing. But whereas the former are often difficult to deal with, the latter are bound to be dangerous and destructive.

A Systematic Complex, with Many Fused Parts and Layers

The hubris-nemesis complex is not just an area on a spectrum midway between those two forces. Nor is it tantamount to a list of attributes about hubris and nemesis as separate dimensions. Such a list can put an analyst on the right track, but the complex involves more than that. Hubris-nemesis leaders seem significantly different from leaders who exhibit only hubris or nemesis. The combination seems to have a compounding effect, manifested particularly in the tremendous physical, intellectual, and emotional energies that a leader seems to gain from having the complex.

Both a Theory and a Temperament

As political scientist Yoav Ben-Horin has observed (Ronfeldt and Ben-Horin, 1993), the complex is “both a theory and a temperament that have been reinforced through years of experiences that confirm the theory and thrill the temperament.” It represents a theory about oneself and the world at large, in that it contains a logic of power, purpose, and history. Hubris-nemesis leaders think in terms of long time horizons, and large material, ideological, cultural, and religious forces—often in ways that defy conventional means-ends logic. At the same time, the complex represents a temperament, in that it seems to be infused with glorious passions, and to entail both emotional and intellectual “highs” that may peak in a crisis, or be triggered or amplified by a crisis.

The complex appears most evident, and most operative, when all its fused faces—hubris and nemesis, theory and temperament—flare. This may shine through, for example, when a hubris-nemesis leader addresses a massive audience about his (therefore, their) grandiose ambitions and hatreds or when he gets into a confrontation where he refuses to compromise and takes risks that seem death-defying to most people, but are accepted by him with a conviction of

survival because he has a long history of confronting and surviving, and of enjoying both the “logic” and the thrill of doing so.⁴

In this vein, hubris-nemesis leaders typically present themselves and their struggles in heroic, mythic terms, and they interpret things in those terms. Thus they may “resort to forms of behavior that purport to deal with ‘realities’ but serve to reinforce mythical perceptions” (Edelman, 1971: 96). They realize Friedrich Nietzsche’s point that “fanatics are picturesque, mankind would rather see gestures than listen to reasons” (*The Anti-Christ*, Sec. 54).

Indeed, the complex is quite Nietzschean. It involves a huge will to power, and revolves around an unusual configuration of beliefs about the nature of social space, time, and action. In brief—more on this appears in Section 3—a hubris-nemesis leader typically views himself as the most important, powerful entity in his spatial horizons, and as able to extend and imprint his identity way beyond his physical location. His time horizon, from past through future, is sweeping, but he yearns for explosive, epitomizing moments (as in crises) when he can move to transform the meaning of past, present, and future and break through to a new time. He has supreme confidence in his strength and ability to change the world through his actions, preferably ones that seem heroic and risky.

This configuration of beliefs about the nature of social space, time, and action transcends—indeed, molds—any particular ideological, philosophical, or other political value orientations a hubris-nemesis leader may hold. Understanding the structure and details of these beliefs may help an analyst understand why, when full-blown, the complex is both more and worse than the sum of its parts. In dealing with such a leader, especially in a crisis, it may be very difficult to disaggregate his complex and find some specific part or point that, if gratified, would ameliorate or appease him for long, making him come to his senses and act “rationally” and “pragmatically” according to ordinary standards. It may be easier to predict than manipulate what a leader with a hubris-nemesis complex will do.

Many hubris-nemesis rulers do endeavor to develop their nations, and their sympathizers often point out how people benefit, for example in areas like education and health. But this should be expected and it is not evidence of goodness on the part of such rulers. They do not act out of goodness per se, but rather to build strong bases for conquering, or at least dominating, space and time as they see it.

⁴I am greatly indebted to Yoav Ben-Horin for these points about theory and temperament.

Variable but Durable over Time

As noted earlier, in this mindset the two forces—hubris and nemesis—seem to feed on each other, so that the stronger the one, the stronger the other. The reverse may also be true; if one force wanes or breaks in the mindset, a similar effect may befall the other. But it may also be the case that a hubris-nemesis leader can pass unchanged through a discouraging setback that damages one of the two forces, if the other one provides enough energy to compensate until circumstances change and the complex as a whole can be revived.

This complex is very resilient. But bad as the complex may be, it may not always be operative. In successful leaders, the complex does not run full-blown, full-time. Political scientist Edward Gonzalez has made the valuable point (e.g., in Gonzalez and Ronfeldt, 1986) that leaders like Fidel Castro can alternate between revolutionary “maximalism” and tactical pragmatism, depending on the situation. The complex may be blatant in moments of provocation or crisis, or when an opportunity arises, or when the leader is finally ready to do something he has been planning. Otherwise, the complex may be muted, and behavior may vary. A leader may even become prudent for awhile, as the complex may be tempered by other concerns—e.g., his assessment of the “correlation of forces.”

An ability to move back and forth between maximalism and pragmatism may be important to the success of a hubris-nemesis leader. A leader or other individual who is constantly locked into full-blown hubris-nemesis dynamics would seem to be likely to burn up or burn out before long. Such dynamics could increase the likelihood of his making mistakes, or creating demands and impositions that alienate his staff and other adherents who work closely with him.

This complex is unlikely to ever disappear in a leader. Moderate, pragmatic behavior may not mean a leader’s complex has diminished other than momentarily—an analyst should be careful about interpreting a turn toward moderation and pragmatism as signifying a demise of the complex. The leader may just be lying low, brooding and plotting. Nonetheless, it may turn out, at least for some figures, that the complex can change shape and diminish over time, notably with age (cf. Post, 1984).

Hubris-Nemesis and Leadership as Separate Dimensions

Remember, this paper is focused mainly on stellar leaders who may have many attributes besides the complex that come into play. Much as the complex may enhance the style, substance, and attractiveness of a leader under appropriate conditions, the complex per se does not make him a leader. Leaders with the

complex still need leadership abilities. The complex does not impart charisma either—it too is a separate quality, although the complex may enhance charisma in a leader who already has it.

Moreover, the complex does not equate with any particular ideology, theology, or philosophy—the examples given above cut across many belief systems, which may serve as masks. The complex does not mean that a leader is a “bad” or “good” person—even though the examples given above are mostly deemed bad for U.S. interests. And the complex does not decide whether a person becomes a public or private figure, or what differences may develop between his public and private faces.⁵ Discriminating the complex from leadership and other qualities is a task for future efforts to build a theory and methodology.

The point should be noted in passing that sometimes a leader or other actor that does not have a hubris-nemesis complex may get drawn into its dynamics temporarily because of some turn in societal or other factors. Leaders in the Middle East often seem at risk in this regard. This point underscores that the dynamics are not just psychological; ultimately, they transcend the individual and involve social conditions that facilitate slipping into a hubris-nemesis mode.

Another point to note in passing is that the complex may occur in people besides leaders. Occasionally it may appear among religious and ideological fanatics, corporate adventurers, terrorists, criminals, juvenile gangsters, and other social misfits. Individuals who have the complex but do not have much going for them in terms of abilities will not get to lead. They end up elsewhere.

Potential Applications of the Concept

The hubris-nemesis concept aims to show that it is possible to define a distinctive set of traits that is substantially different from the sets defined by existing concepts, like those about the authoritarian, the charismatic, and the narcissistic personality.⁶ To what uses may the concept be put if it were developed as an analytic tool? A few uses worth proposing follow.

⁵George Rand advises that public versus private is another important dimension that should be addressed in future work. The leaders discussed here are mostly public persons. In less public persons, the complex may entail somewhat different attributes and effects. This may apply particularly to terrorists who have the complex, but, unlike the leaders discussed here, operate in and from the dark.

⁶The bibliography lists some sources. Adorno et al. (1950) began modern theorizing about the authoritarian personality. While Max Weber initiated theories about charismatic authority, others have used his work to theorize about the charismatic personality (e.g., Willner, 1984). Sigmund Freud is the father of psychoanalysis of narcissism, as discussed in Section 3.

- *Identifying and profiling hubris-nemesis leaders.* A checklist of indicators would be handy and should be developed. It should recognize that the complex depends on a bundle of criteria or attributes. No single attribute indicates someone has the complex.

Care must be taken with the selection and interpretation of some criteria. For example, some leaders who believe they were born for a special mission and destiny in life may be right about themselves (e.g., Castro, Ghandi). So this belief, in and of itself, is not necessarily a sign of hubris—though in combination with other beliefs, it may be.

The checklist might resemble the way diagnostic criteria are presented in the standard-setting psychiatry manual, the *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders* (DSM; the latest edition is the fourth, or DSM-IV). A choice arises whether to delineate separate sets of criteria for each force—hubris and nemesis—or composite criteria that reflect their fusion. It is not clear which is the better choice.

The study on Castro (Gonzalez and Ronfeldt, 1986) proposed four composite criteria: a destructive-constructive messianism; high, moralizing ideals that justify violence; a demand for absolute power, loyalty, and attention; and a fierce sense of struggle that may turn sacrificial. These four were selected because each could be said to involve both hubris and nemesis dimensions; e.g., messianism may reflect a hubris or nemesis quality, or both.

Here, an effort is made to go in the other direction: to propose a list of candidate criteria that are not composite. The first set of criteria gets mainly at the hubris dimension:

- grandiose aspirations (“dreams of glory”), in which monumental greatness is to be achieved by building up one’s regime and society, meanwhile defying if not defeating a powerful opponent that is in the way;
- a grandiosity that has both spiritual and material components, and that involves realizing a special future destiny and overcoming past history;
- expectations and demands for extreme if not absolute power, loyalty, and attentiveness to oneself as the leader, largely because of claims to personify the mission and destiny;
- severe sensitivities about “pride,” “dignity,” “honor,” and “respect,” four words that are often raised by hubris-nemesis leaders when they voice their dreams of future glory and their memories of past insult and injury at the hands of others.

The first two, regarding grandiosity, are essential. The second two, regarding demands for power and sensitivities about dignity, etc., often appear in leaders who do not have a hubris-nemesis complex. Yet, these two appear in extreme forms in all hubris-nemesis leaders of whom I am aware, and thus provide added confirmation of the complex.

A second set of criteria to propose gets mainly at the nemesis dimension:

- a vengeful animosity toward a powerful enemy who is blamed for holding a society back historically, who now stands in the way of its potential for future greatness, and who thus deserves retribution;
- a defiance of that enemy and all others who would put obstacles and challenges in the way;
- an espousal of high, moralizing ideals that justify a readiness to use force and violence to fulfill one's hopes and rectify wrongs blamed on the enemy.

Some criteria may be associated with either the hubris or the nemesis dimension:

- a messianic quest to "save" a society and its people from evils wrought by a vainglorious, oppressive outside power;
- a fierce sense of struggle that involves a propensity for high-profile, high-risk, high-opportunity endeavors; an avowed willingness to sacrifice oneself and others to achieve success in such endeavors; an avowed preference for a glorious death over inglorious submission.

A set of criteria might also affirm that a hubris-nemesis fusion is occurring in a leader's mentality, for the fusion itself may generate some dynamics that do not fall easily under either the hubris or nemesis dimension. Criteria I would posit for consideration are:

- logical justifications that weave both forces into most major thoughts and actions, whether they seem mainly constructive or destructive, about a leader's positive hopes or terrible hatreds;
- an abundant, restless, relentless energy; a consuming dedication to one's cause; an exaltation in one's physical, emotional, and spiritual energies when addressing that cause.

It may be the case that some evidence for the existence of a hubris-nemesis complex lies in the effects a leader has on his audiences, both his followers and opponents. A criterion might be:

- interminable debates as to whether a leader is driven by good or evil, has just goals, has realistic goals, and is just bargaining or bluffing when he threatens actions that seem off the scale.

The existence of such debates may be a part of the dynamics of hubris-nemesis, particularly if the leader in question thrives on them.

In this preliminary phase of concept formulation, it is too soon to say exactly which criteria, and how many, ought to be used to conclude that a leader has a hubris-nemesis complex. Perhaps the criteria proposed above can be collapsed into a shorter list; perhaps some can be eliminated, others added. But this list may help indicate a direction for future research to pursue. The list at least reflects my knowledge of the leaders used earlier as examples.

Note what is kept out of these candidate criteria: A hubris-nemesis leader is not considered crazy or irrational, or as having a mental or personality disorder in the clinical sense. He is not necessarily considered a psychopath or sociopath, though in some cases he may be.⁷ As discussed in the next section, the hubris-nemesis complex is not reducible to a narcissistic or antisocial personality disorder.

A methodology should be developed not only to identify a hubris-nemesis leader, but also to compare such leaders. No two will be entirely alike, even though they may share a set of core attributes. Indeed, a comparative study might be a good next step, partly to help refine the identification of the core attributes, and partly to identify the most important variations and differences that occur. That would help overcome a shortcoming of this essay: the dearth of case examples to back up the many speculative assertions.

A profiling methodology must be able to do more than identify who does and does not have the complex. It must also be able to distinguish hubris-nemesis traits from other sets of traits, like narcissism, authoritarianism, and charisma. There are overlaps among these syndromes, but they are all qualitatively different, as discussed further in Sections 3 and 4. A leader may have one syndrome without having another, at least not to the same degree. For example, President Franklin Roosevelt may be considered charismatic, and the Shah of Iran authoritarian and narcissistic. Yet neither had a hubris-nemesis complex; not enough of the criteria proposed above seem to apply to them.⁸

⁷The terms “psychopath” and “sociopath” are common referents for what is technically considered the “antisocial personality disorder”—see the next section and its footnotes about this.

⁸At this preliminary, speculative stage, it is not clear how many or which criteria would be “enough”—answering such questions will have to wait for further research.

- *Assessing the behavior of hubris-nemesis leaders in crises and negotiations.* This is important, and will be considered further in Section 3. Hubris-nemesis leaders are likely to behave differently from other types of leaders in crises and negotiations. They may have high risk-taking tendencies in a crisis, and they may be unusually demanding, confrontational, unyielding, and posturing in negotiations. A methodology should help determine what to expect from them, under what conditions. This mindset is not likely to respond to a benevolent “Dr. Spock” approach, or to normal tit-for-tat patterns of bargaining and cooperation.⁹

Analysts who investigate crisis behavior sometimes focus on two questions about an opposing leader: (1) how much risk he is willing to run in doing, or not doing, something dangerous yet opportune, and (2) how strong a force has to be demonstrated to compel him to back down. These are good questions, but they verge on a reductionism implying that a hubris-nemesis leader is like anybody else—that, at his core, he too is ruled by a commonsensical rationality. Thus, if faced with high threats and strong forces, he will revise his calculus—his utility function—of the risks and opportunities; he will get the message, go no further, and maybe retreat and accommodate. This can even be said of Hitler—it just was not applied—and debates still exist as to whether Saddam Hussein would have backed down eventually. This “commonsense” approach to analysis has its place, and the historical record may show that hubris-nemesis leaders are not incorrigible and often do back down or otherwise change course in the face of high risks and poor odds of success for some scheme. An analyst might therefore stick with the commonsense approach on ground that hubris-nemesis mentalities have a high threshold—they just have to be forced to perceive high risks, etc., and then they will respond pragmatically and prudently. But does this not limit the analyst’s understanding? It obscures the point that hubris-nemesis mentalities are not truly “commonsense” mentalities. Hubris-nemesis leaders do not “get the message” the same way that other leaders do; moreover, they can gain energy and strength from a defiant confrontation. The “commonsense” approach calls attention to risk and opportunity assessments as key factors in decisionmaking, even by hubris-nemesis leaders. But a separate analysis of this complex seems advisable to understand why and how it seems to have a propensity for high-profile, high-risk, high-opportunity situations.

- *Spotting potential hubris-nemesis leaders before they gain power.* Most leaders mentioned in this essay are well known. Can a methodology be developed—

⁹Questions to note in passing: What if, in a crisis situation, a leader with a hubris-nemesis complex is not an enemy? What if an ally has the complex? Or someone in our own government?

maybe a checklist of signs from childhood, youth, and early career—for identifying an emerging hubris-nemesis leader, say at an early stage of his career in a foreign government or military, before he reaches top leadership positions or otherwise becomes dangerous? Such figures are rarely shy about letting the world know they exist.

These are not the only theoretical and methodological challenges. Others—e.g., identifying the conditions that activate and deactivate the complex, and that impel a leader to alternate between maximalism and pragmatism—also have to be addressed. But the three noted above are a start.

3. Ideas and Observations from Related Literatures

The hubris-nemesis concept is new, but substantial literatures exist about aspects of it. The task of building a theory and methodologies to advance the concept would benefit from adapting ideas that exist in the professional literatures in three areas in particular:

- Psychoanalysis of pathological and malignant narcissism;
- Epistemology and anthropology about people's "world views," specifically their social space, time, and action orientations;
- Operational codes and rational-actor decision modeling.

Schematically, this implies inquiring into different "layers" of consciousness: a base layer, where narcissism takes root and arises; a middle or cross-cutting layer, where space-time-action orientations affect behavior; and a top layer, where rational decisionmaking is manifested. Better knowledge about each layer could help develop the hubris-nemesis concept.

Some basic literatures about each of these areas are discussed briefly below. The aim is to convey ideas and observations that may be useful for understanding hubris-nemesis dynamics. The section is very hypothetical, speculative, and general in tone. Examples of particular leaders are offered in passing where convenient, but a real effort to apply and verify hypotheses will have to wait for future research.

Pathological and Malignant Narcissism

The psychoanalytic concept of narcissism extends from the myth of Narcissus. This youth had an inflated love for his own beauty—he was filled with "pride so fierce" (Ovid, *Metamorphoses*) that, in a form of hubris, he disdains the advances of admirers, notably the nymph Echo. At the prompting of spurned nymphs, Nemesis descends and makes Narcissus fixate on his reflection in a pond, which

leads him to wither and die. Indeed, this is one of the very few myths where Nemesis actually appears as herself rather than metaphorically.¹

The myth lies distantly behind the seminal paper by Sigmund Freud (1914) that distinguished between primary (post-birth) narcissism, when an infant feels attached to the mother, and secondary (later-in-life) narcissism, when a person realizes that he or she is differentiated from other objects (e.g., people). Freud sketched how secondary narcissism may involve a withdrawal of one's "libido" from other objects, and its investment in (or "cathexis" to) oneself rather than to other objects. Contemporary work by psychiatrists and psychoanalysts like Heinz Kohut and Otto Kernberg has made the concept a mainstay—with new explications added about "pathological" and "malignant" forms of narcissism.

While the myth reflects the classic Greek dynamic where hubris invites Nemesis, modern psychoanalysis concerns both the classic dynamic and, without saying so, the fused dynamic. The analysis of narcissism is dominated by Freudians, but curiously, Jungians have been far more explicit about recognizing the original terms and analyzing the classic dynamics (e.g., Edinger, 1992; Henderson, 1964; Jacoby, 1990).

The literature on pathological and malignant narcissism looks very relevant—more than any other psychological literature—for developing the hubris-nemesis concept. But it is a rocky literature to explore, even for experts:

In the voluminous literature on narcissism, there are probably only two facts on which everyone agrees: first, that the concept of narcissism is one of the most important contributions of psychoanalysis; second, that it is one of the most confusing. (Pulver, 1970, in Morrison, 1986: 91)

Attributes of Narcissism

The literature on pathological narcissism—or "narcissistic personality disturbances," to use the term favored by Kohut (1966, 1972), or "narcisctic personality disorder," the term adopted in the standard-setting DSM—is about individuals afflicted with a "grandiose self" that longs for adulation. This literature is also about how a "grandiose self" may feel connected to other objects (e.g., people) in such a way that those objects are considered extensions of oneself—as "self-objects" or "selfobjects," to use Kohut's terms. This may be manifested through inflated forms of vanity, pride, ambition, self-glorification, and perfectionism (which may alternate with feelings of worthlessness), and

¹Jacoby (1985) contains an illuminating, psychoanalytic discussion of the myth.

through efforts to be domineering and wield omnipotent, invulnerable power and control.²

Pathological narcissism is also about how injuries or wounds to the grandiose self or to “idealized self-objects” may lead to “narcissistic rage.” Feelings of insult, injury, wrong, rejection, shame, envy, and vulnerability turn into expressions of anger, insolence, hate, contempt, revenge, and even dehumanization.³ Such rage is different from healthy, justifiable forms of anger.

The need for revenge, for righting a wrong, for undoing a hurt by whatever means, and a deeply anchored, unrelenting compulsion in the pursuit of all these aims, which gives no rest to those who have suffered a narcissistic injury—these are the characteristic features of narcissistic rage in all its forms and which set it apart from other kinds of aggression. (Kohut, 1972, in Kohut, 1985: 143)

Malignant narcissism is more terrible than this. In an early use of the term, clinical psychologist Henry Murray (1962) analyzed literature on “the personality and career of Satan” to propose “that absolute evil cannot be derived from a mild form of pride, but only from the most extreme form, which I shall call *absolute malignant pride*, or *malignant narcissism*” (Murray, 1962: 529; italics in original).⁴

According to Otto Kernberg (1975, 1984, 1992), the major theorist of malignant narcissism, it consists largely of pathological narcissism compounded by hateful aggression:

In contrast to the ordinary type of narcissistic personality, these patients experience increased self-esteem and confirmation of their grandiosity when they can express aggression toward themselves or others. (Kernberg, 1984: 257)

²In the words of the DSM (1994: 658–661), “The essential feature of Narcissistic Personality Disorder is a pervasive pattern of grandiosity, need for admiration, and lack of empathy that begins by early adulthood and is present in a variety of contexts.” This disorder is indicated by the presence of five (or more) of the following diagnostic criteria: “(1) has a grandiose sense of self-importance . . .; (2) is preoccupied with fantasies of unlimited success, power, brilliance, beauty, or ideal love; (3) believes that he or she is ‘special’ and unique . . .; (4) requires excessive admiration; (5) has a sense of entitlement . . .; (6) is interpersonally exploitative . . .; (7) lacks empathy . . .; (8) is often envious of others or believes that others are envious of him or her; (9) shows arrogant, haughty behaviors or attitudes.” A bit of narcissism is not always bad. Indeed, many successful individuals often exhibit narcissistic traits. “Only when these traits are inflexible, maladaptive, and persisting and cause significant functional impairment or subjective distress do they constitute Narcissistic Personality Disorder” (DSM, 1994: 661). For a comparison of functional and maladaptive variations of a personality trait, see *The Handbook of Psychiatry* (Residents of the UCLA Department of Psychiatry, 1990: 284, Table 15-1); for example, it points out that poise in a normal person may become narcissistic arrogance in an abnormal person.

³What gets emphasized depends on the analyst. Kernberg emphasizes envy more than does Kohut (cf. Jacoby, 1990).

⁴Erich Fromm is said to have been among the first to name malignant narcissism, but I am still tracking that down. Fromm (1973) emphasizes the concept of “malignant aggression,” with Hitler a leading example.

In his view, malignant narcissism combines four pathologies: a narcissistic personality disorder, an “anti-social personality disorder,”⁵ hateful aggression against oneself or others, and paranoia. According to Jerrold Post (1984, 1986, 1991, 1993), a leading analyst of narcissism in political leaders, Kernberg’s formulation may be reduced to looking for a combination of messianic ambition, an absence of social conscience, unconstrained aggressiveness, and paranoia. At the heart of all this is the combination of the narcissistic and antisocial personality disorders.⁶

Two major hubris-nemesis figures, one real and the other fictional, repeatedly appear as examples in these literatures: Adolf Hitler and Captain Ahab. In addition, Post (1991) has applied the concept of malignant narcissism to Saddam Hussein—but not without some controversy⁷—and observed (1984) that many German, Italian, and other terrorists suffered from narcissistic personality disorders.⁸

Psychoanalytic approaches to narcissism have also been used to study leaders who did not have a hubris-nemesis complex, but had marked hubris or nemesis tendencies. Kemal Ataturk and the Shah of Iran are examples. Vamik Volkan (1980)⁹ treats Ataturk as a “reparative” type of narcissistic leader who “strengthens the cohesiveness and stability of his grandiose self by idealizing a group of others whom he then includes in an idealized extension of himself” (139). In contrast, a “destructive” type of narcissistic leader like Hitler attacks others. Marvin Zonis (1991) draws on Kohut’s writings and related literatures on

⁵This disorder is as distinct as the narcissistic one. It is also the disorder that may result in someone being called a psychopath or sociopath. The DSM (1994: 645–650) says, “The essential feature of Antisocial Personality Disorder is a pervasive pattern of disregard for, and violation of, the rights of others that begins in childhood or early adolescence and continues into adulthood.” This pattern, which is commonly referred to as psychopathy and sociopathy, is indicated by the presence of three (or more) of the following: (1) failure to conform to social norms with respect to lawful behaviors . . . ; (2) deceitfulness . . . ; (3) impulsivity or failure to plan ahead; (4) irritability and aggressiveness . . . ; (5) reckless disregard for safety of self or others; (6) consistent irresponsibility . . . ; (7) lack of remorse . . .”

⁶The DSM (1994: 660) observes that individuals who have both antisocial and narcissistic disorders “will share a tendency to be tough-minded, glib, superficial, exploitative, and unempathic. However, Narcissistic Personality Disorder does not necessarily include characteristics of impulsivity, aggression, and deceit. In addition, individuals with Antisocial Personality Disorder may not be as needy of the admiration and envy of others, and persons with Narcissistic Personality Disorder usually lack the history of Conduct Disorder in childhood or criminal behavior in adulthood.” See footnotes 2 and 5 for definitions of the narcissistic and antisocial disorders.

⁷According to a newspaper report, Kernberg was not sure that Saddam Hussein truly fit the profile of a malignant narcissist. According to Omestad (1994: 119), psychiatrist Vamik Volkan (see below) suspects that some of Hussein’s traits reflect not so much malignant narcissism as “the characteristics of Arab nationalism. Volkan says that Post’s diagnosis is probably correct, but cautions that ‘in the Middle East, the culture itself may appear narcissistic.’”

⁸And, one might wonder, what about Idi Amin and “Papa Doc” Duvalier as examples of malignant narcissism? Or at least of antisocial disorders?

⁹Volkan and Itzkowitz (1984) provides the book-length treatment.

the “Icarus complex” (Murray, 1955) and on “phallic narcissism” to analyze the rise and fall of the Shah. The concept of narcissism does not figure in Erik Erikson’s psychoanalytic studies of Martin Luther (Erikson, 1958) and Mahatma Ghandi (Erikson, 1969), but the stories Erikson relates imply that their nemesis-like roles involved narcissistic tendencies—and sometimes in the case of Luther, no small amount of hubris-nemesis tendencies toward the Papacy.

Four points about the rationality, or reasoning, of narcissistic leaders look particularly instructive, for these four tend to be shared by hubris-nemesis leaders. First, a leader’s narcissism, where it is pronounced, is likely to prevail over the ideological or philosophical beliefs that he may espouse:

It is hard to identify the narcissistic personality with any consistent beliefs about the world because his beliefs tend to shift. More than any other personality type, what the narcissistic personality says should be viewed as “calculated for effect.” *The only central and stable field of the narcissist is the centrality of the self. What is good for him is good for his country.* The narcissist does not have any consistent beliefs. (Post, 1993: 110; italics in original)

Second, severely narcissistic leaders are rarely “crazy”—they are often quite functional and rational, although their rationality may be unusual. Kohut adds the important point that in some cases the reasoning capacity may even be “sharpened,” enhancing a leader’s ability to attack an enemy as well as to attract followers:

In [narcissistic rage’s] typical forms there is utter disregard for reasonable limitations and a boundless wish to redress an injury and to obtain revenge. The irrationality of the vengeful attitude becomes even more frightening in view of the fact that—in narcissistic personalities as in the paranoiac—the reasoning capacity, while totally under the domination and in the service of the overriding emotion, is often not only intact but even sharpened. (This dangerous feature of individual psychopathology is the parallel of an equally malignant social phenomenon: the subordination of the rational class of technicians to a paranoid leader and the efficiency—and even brilliance—of their amoral cooperation in carrying out his purposes.) (1972, in Kohut, 1985: 145)

Third, narcissistic grandiosity in a leader—presumptions of “omnipotence and invulnerability”—may incline him to treat crises as opportunities, and to take risks that ordinary, pragmatic leaders would avoid (Post, 1993: 112). This makes the next point all the more important.

Fourth, in a very good overview of the implications for leadership analysis, Post (1993) observes that a narcissistic leader’s behavior may depend on whether his advisers are sycophants who tell him what he wants to hear, or independent

thinkers who perform “healthy selfobject functions” by accurately informing him about political reality even as they shore up his self-esteem (109).

In crisis situations, it will be an especially important factor whether a narcissistic leader is surrounded by sycophants or has selfobject relationships which can assist him in accurately assessing the nature of his adversary, in evaluating the completeness of his plans, and in making mid-course corrections. (Post, 1993: 111–112)

Narcissism and the Hubris-Nemesis Concept

There are strong overlaps between the concepts of pathological and malignant narcissism on the one hand, and the hubris-nemesis concept on the other. This appears especially in the mutual themes of grandiosity and animosity.

The literature on narcissism seems to contain many ideas and observations for developing the hubris-nemesis concept. The literature looks particularly useful for helping draw up checklists of attributes to assess whether a leader or other actor has a hubris-nemesis complex—checklists that analysts could use without necessarily having to be a psychiatrist or psychoanalyst.

The challenge may be less one of figuring out what that literature offers than in clarifying what is distinctive about the hubris-nemesis concept. Could the hubris-nemesis complex be but a type of narcissism? According to one psychiatrist with whom I have spoken, the answer is yes; according to another, no, for there are some significant differences. But this barely begins to address the question.

Perhaps many individuals seized with hubris, or nemesis, or a hubris-nemesis complex, can be diagnosed as having some kind of narcissistic pathology. But there does not seem to be a one-to-one relationship of hubris-nemesis to pathological or malignant narcissism (or to categories like reparative or destructive narcissism, or to disorders like the antisocial personality disorder). That relationship appears to vary. For example, both Saddam Hussein and Castro have a hubris-nemesis complex, but whereas Hussein may be a malignant narcissist, Castro is surely not. Hussein also has far less charisma than Castro. Clarifying these distinctions in an accurate, practical manner is bound to be an important task for the development of the hubris-nemesis concept; it is a shortcoming of this pilot essay that all it can do about this task at this time is highlight its importance.

More to the point, narcissism concepts are grounded on the inner dynamics of individuals—narcissism concepts were originally formulated to help the analyst

focus clinically on a patient's grandiose sense of self and its needs for constant validation. The study of narcissistic psychodynamics often extends beyond the individual level, notably where a writer is studying a major public leader and his relations with, and effects on, his associates and followers. Some writers (e.g., Kohut, Post, Lasch; see Section 4) go still farther, using narcissism as a veritable sociological tool to analyze trends and dispositions in entire societies, especially self-absorbed and wounded ones. Yet, even granting that narcissism cannot be fully studied apart from the context in which it arises, the point remains that it is fundamentally a psychoanalytic and psychiatric concept.

It is not clear that this will be, or should be, the case with the hubris-nemesis concept. It initially focuses the analyst's eye on the behavior of the individual, but it also moves the eye quickly to the outer, societal dynamics. This applies particularly to the nemesis part of the dynamic. There seems to be more to it than narcissistic rage; by itself, that psychoanalytic concept does not fully capture the social and political qualities of nemesis: the righteous anger for retribution that may be justifiable without necessarily being narcissistic.

Indeed, as fielded here, hubris-nemesis is meant to be as much a social and political concept as a psychological one. Political scientist Edward Gonzalez has suggested¹⁰ that the developmental roots of the hubris dimensions of a hubris-nemesis leader may be more personal and psychological than the nemesis dimensions. The hubris dimensions may develop mainly during childhood and youth, as the individual has experiences that nourish a sense of power and invincibility. The nemesis dimension may not get fully formed until later, as the individual begins to move in society and connects to grievances that hunger for retribution. This idea—that hubris may develop before nemesis, and that the latter may depend more on the social context than the former—merits further consideration.

Other reasons for supposing that this complex cannot be reduced to a narcissistic disorder concern people's orientations toward social space and time. The orientations that typify the complex (discussed in the next section) differ from those of the standard narcissist. The latter often combines feelings of inner emptiness with a preoccupation with the present—notwithstanding the dreams of glory that may fill his or her psyche. One social critic who addresses this combination goes so far as to say that “the narcissist has no interest in the future because, in part, he has so little interest in the past” (Lasch, 1979: xvi). In contrast, even if the hubris-nemesis leaders mentioned in this essay can be said to

¹⁰Edward Gonzalez, private memo, April 1993.

have an inner void, it is surely not in the same sense as the typical narcissist. Moreover, these hubris-nemesis leaders seem quite concerned with the past and thoroughly oriented to the future as well as the present.

Against this background, the narcissist is often said to be characterized by a lack of empathy and a difficulty in sustaining loyal relationships. He moves forever from one “selfobject” relationship to the next, as each in turn eventually lets him down. The case with the hubris-nemesis type may be quite different. As clinical psychologist George Rand suggests,¹¹ he may have so much mental energy that he can continually find, even generate, self-objects that prove loyal and long-lasting. He is able, far more than the standard narcissist, to draw on the totality of the environment around him. Indeed, it might be said that while the narcissist depends on finding “selfobjects,” the hubris-nemesis leader virtually creates them as he needs them. But of course these speculations remain to be substantiated and documented.

To close this discussion of narcissism, I would note that one type of symbolism—fire symbolism—looks significant for hubris-nemesis dynamics. The complex seems to have an affinity for such symbolism. It pervades key myths about hubris (e.g., Icarus, Phaeton, Prometheus), and a literary example of the complex (Ahab). And it often arises in the behavior of political actors who are motivated by streaks of vengeance and purification (e.g., the Ku Klux Klan). The frequent appearance of fire symbolism in hubris-nemesis leaders and movements suggests that it may be an indicator of their commitment to radicalism and their proclivity for violence. Perhaps playing with fire in childhood is a sign of a nascent complex.

Curiously, the main literature on narcissism rarely discusses fire symbolism. But it shows up in the concept of the “Icarus complex”—a pathological pattern related to narcissism that is found in people who yearn to play with fire yet are bothered by enuresis (bedwetting), and who manifest ambitions for ascension yet have a fear of falling (Murray, 1955).¹²

Finally, I would note that I have casually conversed with a variety of people about the hubris-nemesis complex, and I am struck by how many feel that the two forces are not necessarily bad. A number noted that a bit of hubris can be good if it raises a person’s goals and motivates pursuing an interesting challenge.

¹¹George Rand, personal e-mail, April 17, 1994.

¹²There is a recent literature on the Icarus complex (e.g., Wiklund, 1979), partly inspired by Murray’s study, but I have not looked at it yet. Also, there is a related concept, the “Samson complex,” that psychologists in the Middle East and Europe once thought would be useful for assessing the mentalities of terrorists (Fried, 1978). Zonis (1991) uses the Icarus-complex concept to analyze the Shah’s rise and fall.

Also, various people have responded that nemesis-like actions may be morally justifiable—they objected to seeing nemesis defined in terms of vengeance, since the real issue may be well-deserved retribution. Perhaps roles endowed with some hubris and nemesis, properly bounded, are more attractive and less dark to many a psyche than I initially thought.

Social Space-Time-Action Orientations

There is a notion in the literature cited above that narcissists' only stable belief is in the centrality of their own self-interests. Narcissistic—and I would add, hubris-nemesis—mentalities are consonant with all manner of ideological and philosophical beliefs, from left to right, secular and religious. But the notion that narcissists have only one stable belief goes too far and is too simple, at least for hubris-nemesis mentalities. Some quite stable patterns appear in the kinds of beliefs that reflect a person's "world view" or "operational code"—the basic, epistemological beliefs that people hold, often quite abstractly, about how the world at large is structured and functions. Notions like the centrality of the self barely begin to convey the richness and complexity of such belief systems.

In my view, a case is waiting to be made—and a theory built—that people's minds function partly in terms of a "layer" of assumptions about the nature of social space, social time, and social action. The orientations that take hold in this epistemological layer strongly affect what people think and do, perhaps because most (all?) of what people think and do must get processed partly in this layer.

This layer might be depicted horizontally, as a midconscious zone lying between the subconscious and conscious layers, or vertically, as cutting across standard categories of layers in the mind or psyche. It is unclear at this time which is the better choice. Figure 1 depicts it as a bit of both—as a layer that stands apart, but also cuts across the well-known categories of id, ego, and superego.

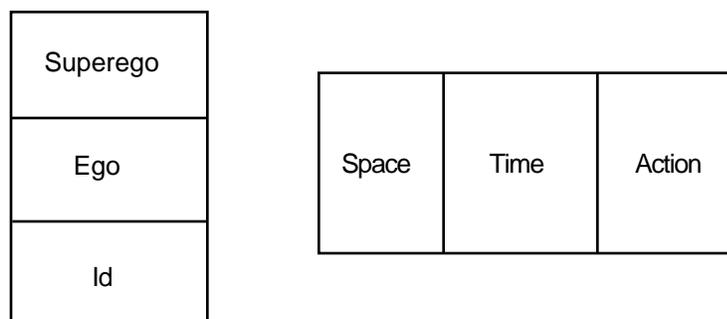


Figure 1—Layers of Consciousness

This is not an entirely new idea. Psychoanalyst Erik Erikson implies something similar in his study of Martin Luther (Erikson, 1958: 214–221) where he discusses different configurations and qualities of “inner space-time” according to whether the superego, the ego, or the id dominates a personality.

We live always in all three space-times; certain alternations of emphases differentiate us from one another. We are all alternately driven [by the id] and conscience-stricken [by the superego] some of the time; but usually we manage to live in a dominant ego space-time, despite the world-image which totalitarian powers of spirit, sword, or dollar may continuously try to impose on us. (Erikson, 1958: 220–221)

While Figure 1 is suggestive, the framework I have in mind is epistemological, cultural, and philosophical as well as psychological. Moreover, the framework depends on making the case that all three dimensions—space, time, and action—are necessary in order for the framework to be sufficient. The many studies that address the first pair—space and time—are instructive but incomplete.

This essay is not the place to develop an extended case for what might be termed “mindframe analysis” or “mindfield analysis,” but a brief exposition is pertinent. If such a framework can be developed, it may improve the assessment and comparison of all manner of mindsets and world views. More to the point for this essay, the hubris-nemesis complex seems to involve a special configuration of space-time-action orientations, and the significance of this stands out best if those orientations are subjected to their own framework.

Dimensions of Mindframe Analysis

Space, time, and action may seem like subjects for metaphysics and the physical sciences, not the social sciences. Indeed, the physical sciences rest on hard-fought concepts of space, time, and momentum. But while few social scientists use such terms, philosopher Sheldon Wolin (1960) helps make the case that “Every political theory that has aimed at a measure of comprehensiveness has adopted some implicit or explicit proposition about ‘time,’ ‘space,’ ‘reality,’ or ‘energy.’”

Although most of these are the traditional categories of metaphysicians, the political theorist does not state his propositions or formulate his concepts in the same manner as a metaphysician. The concern of the theorist has not been with space and time as categories referring to the world of natural phenomena, but to the world of political phenomena; that is to the world of political nature. If he cared to be precise and explicit in these matters, he would write of “political” space, “political” time, and so forth. Admittedly, few if any writers have employed this form of terminology. Rather, the political theorist has used synonyms; instead of political space

he may have written about the city, the state, or the nation; instead of time, he may have referred to history or tradition; instead of energy, he may have spoken about power. (Wolin, 1960: 15–16)

What pertains to each of the three types of orientations—space, time, and action—as the terms are used here?

Social Space Orientations. This refers to basic assumptions and beliefs about the identity and significance of the objects in one’s environment (including oneself), and their connections and relations to each other. Some orientations, the earliest to form in a child, concern what lies concentrically outward from the individual. This means distinctions about one’s self, one’s immediate environment, what lies beyond that one can project into, all the way out to what is recognized as the world at large (cf. Gurvitch, 1971, drawing on Jean Piaget). Moreover, spatial orientations involve distinctions about arenas and realms that different people and societies establish over time—e.g., mine and yours, individual and collective, public and private, sacred and profane, state and market, local and global, etc. Spatial orientations are also about the boundaries, connections, and influences that appear to exist between different spaces.

Spatial orientations may vary according to people’s values. For example, space orientations may be very different in a tribal setting where family kinship ties are of paramount concern, compared with an institutional or market setting where impersonal values and norms hold sway.

Social Time Orientations. This refers to basic assumptions and beliefs about whether time is cyclical/recurrent or linear/progressive, and if the latter, what is the nature of past, present, and future; what are the horizons and linkages; and the continuities and discontinuities, among them.

When people express their goals, visions, ideals, or aspirations, they express value orientations about the past, present, and future. As knowledge sociologist Karl Mannheim argued long ago:

The innermost structure of the mentality of a group can never be as clearly grasped as when we attempt to understand its conception of time in the light of its hopes, yearnings, and purposes. On the basis of these purposes and expectations, a given mentality orders not merely future events, but also the past. . . . This ordering of meaning [by historical time-sense] is, in fact, the most primary element in the comprehension and interpretation of events. (Mannheim, 1936: 209)

Such an ordering, in particular the “idea of the future,” is so important that, according to time-concept historian Fred Polak, “The rise and fall of images

of the future precede or accompany the rise and fall of cultures” (Polak, 1973: 19).¹³

Any good framework about social time must address the distinctions people make and the views they hold about the past, the present, and the future—and many schemes have been proposed for doing so. For example, in a scheme that was prominent years ago for studying a culture’s capacity for revitalization after a period of adversity, anthropologist Anthony Wallace (1961) emphasized (1) the vision of the future—“the goal culture”; (2) the critique of the present—“the existing culture”; and (3) the calendar for changing the present into the future—“the transfer culture.” Later, sociologists like James Davies and Ted Robert Gurr melded such ideas into “relative-deprivation theory,” a body of theory that studied the gaps people perceive between aspirations and expectations in order to explain why people rebel.

In one of the most dense explications about past, present, and future orientations, sociologist Georges Gurvitch (1963, 1964) distinguishes eight kinds of social time, associating each with different historical eras, and different modes of political control and social structure. Of the eight, two are relevant to understanding the hubris-nemesis mindset:

7. . . . I will mention what I shall call *time in advance of itself*. . . . The future becomes present. Such is the time of collective effervescence, of aspiration toward ideals and values, of collective acts of decision and innovation.

8. Finally, as the eighth and last kind I shall point out *explosive time*, which dissolves the present as well as the past in the creation of the future immediately transcended. . . . Such a time is that of collective acts of creation which always play some role in social life but which arise from beneath the surface and become open and dominant during revolutions. . . . When it is real, explosive time places the global and partial social structures before complicated dilemmas, for it carries the maximum risk and demands the maximum effort to overcome it. (Gurvitch, 1963: 178)

Social Action Orientations. This refers to basic assumptions and beliefs that people may hold about whether and how they can change their environment, what instruments and alternatives they have, and what are deemed proper actions. These orientations often concern ends-means relationships in a given situation—implying that action orientations cannot be fully abstracted from social time (ends) and space (situation) orientations. Indeed, one of the most ambitious endeavors to develop a theory about “orientations to action” (Parsons and Shils, 1962)—the theory most likely to come to any social scientist’s mind

¹³Polak (1973: 22) urges, “It is time that the image of the future be introduced into the social sciences as a conceptual tool, adding to their diagnostic powers.”

who sees the phrase—constantly returns to the importance of “future expectations” for the theory.

Yet, this is a distinct realm of psychological, cultural, and other orientations. It is about the energies, abilities, and prospects—in a word, the power—that a person has for altering a situation in space and time. And this sense of power may exist partly independently of one’s space and time orientations. The action orientation gets at differences that may exist, for example, between two radical actors who may share fairly similar hopes about the future and criticisms of the present, but differ over whether and how a “system” can be changed.

Space-Time-Action Combinations. Basic assumptions and beliefs in these three dimensions are found in every mindset and every culture. No mindset or culture can be analyzed properly without inquiring into all three, for all are important. Perhaps “consciousness” does not fully exist unless all three senses—space, time, and action—have developed.¹⁴ Acting like a layer of mental filters and shapers, they may be central to the translation of thought into behavior. They certainly affect how a person assesses what seems to be happening in the world around him or her. This layer probably functions somewhat independently of a person’s philosophical and ideological values, yet it may significantly influence the shape of those values. Moreover, changes in this layer may precede, or occur at the same time as, changes in those avowed values.

Each type of orientation is often studied by itself (e.g., Fraser, 1981; Rifkin, 1987); and where a scholar studies more than one, the usual practice is to study space and time (e.g., Hall, 1959, 1983).¹⁵ Indeed, vast multidisciplinary literatures, including major pieces of theory, exist about each orientation.¹⁶ But while each offers a distinctive way to cut into a psyche, a culture, or a body of knowledge, the three have yet to be combined in a single framework that explicitly engages all three, and their interconnections and interactions.

As proposed here, mindframe analysis looks useful for analyzing and comparing the mindsets of leaders and other persons. It may also be helpful for analyzing

¹⁴The material mentioned earlier from Erikson (1958) implies that the id, ego, and superego each contain some sense of space, time, and action.

¹⁵The practice of putting space and time together in philosophical and social-science frameworks extends from the influence of Immanuel Kant’s *Critique of Pure Reason* (1781).

¹⁶The literature I have seen includes classic works in cultural anthropology (e.g., Edward T. Hall, Florence and Clyde Kluckhohn, Anthony F. C. Wallace), the sociology of knowledge (e.g., Georges Gurvitch, Karl Mannheim), political philosophy (e.g., J. T. Fraser, Sheldon Wolin), child development (e.g., Jean Piaget), and histories about millennialism (e.g., Norman Cohn), religion (e.g., Mircea Eliade), the concept of progress (e.g., J. B. Bury), and the idea of the future (e.g., Fred Polak), as well as the writings of advocates of violent revolution (e.g., Frantz Fanon, Georges Sorel). Some of these are cited in the bibliography.

and comparing general cultures, civilizations, and historical eras, and for understanding the rise of ideas such as progress that involve changes in all three orientations. For example, according to Hall (esp. 1959, 1983; Hall and Hall, 1987), Americans' unique orientations to space and time lie behind why mass production developed earlier and faster here than elsewhere early this century, and why today Americans have so much difficulty doing business in Japan.

Consider two modern ideas: progress and revolution. The former took hold during the Enlightenment in the 18th century, the latter with the French Revolution of 1789 (Bury, 1932). The development of both can be linked to epistemological changes in three areas: (1) Space orientations: The attribution of value to the secular order and material growth apart from the sacred order and divine providence, the expansion of the social and political fields to include masses as well as elites, and a growing belief in the value and equality of the individual, changed people's views of where they fit and what they could do in the world around them. (2) Time orientations: The classical notion of time, that an eternally recurrent cycle governed human affairs, gave way to the Christian concept of time, first proposed by Saint Augustine, in which time consists of unrepeatable moments that extend along a line of progressive development. Past, present, and future became entirely different realms. This reconception meant that men were not locked into eternal, presumably natural, distinctions between rich and poor. The future became a realm of hope and innovation, where an individual might achieve a new history. (3) Action orientations: These changes combined with another new idea—that man could master his affairs and guide his own destiny. The classical idea was relinquished that man must submit to his fate, as preordained by heavenly powers. Without all these basic reorientations, our modern Western ideas of progress, revolution, and politics would be inconceivable and impractical—and in many parts of the world, they still are.

Mindfield Analysis and the Hubris-Nemesis Complex

In a leader with a hubris-nemesis complex, the space-time-action layer is bound to assume an unusual configuration, regardless of the ideological or other value orientations that he may hold. The following description is adapted from a study on Castro (Gonzalez and Ronfeldt, 1986), and will not apply to all hubris-nemesis leaders. But it helps illustrate the many patterns of thought and action that fit under mindframe analysis.

Space Orientation. Leaders with a hubris-nemesis complex see themselves as larger than life, as embodying the revolution, the state, the nation, or other force they represent, as being awesome enough to act on a world stage, as able to

extend and imprint their identity far beyond their physical presence, and as deserving to treat other people and objects as extensions of themselves. Having a strong ego, a hubris-nemesis leader sees himself (narcissistically?) as the most important object in his political horizons—and his horizons are global.

Believing he deserves recognition as a world-class actor, he uses events to project himself onto the world stage, seeking the limelight and commanding attention. He may even wonder whether his country is a good enough stage to deserve his leadership. At the same time, he may lead a visibly unpretentious, nonindulgent personal lifestyle, perhaps avoiding the materialism he may associate with the hubristic decadence of the chosen enemy.

He craves independence, and an independent identity, for himself and his nation. He may try to be everywhere at once, getting into every domain, including indulging in the personal micromanagement of minor issues. He seeks to cross boundaries and break barriers and is intolerant of any built around him.

The objects that matter most are those that affect his power and his struggle against the chosen enemy. He is constantly attentive to external centers, hierarchies, and balances of power. He interprets successes and failures, opportunities and constraints, in terms of large spatial reference factors (e.g., the “system”). He wants to move large pieces (e.g., “the people”) on a large stage.¹⁷

Time Orientation. Many hubris-nemesis leaders have long historical time horizons and a strong sense of the past and the future. But they may also long to create brief, explosive, epitomizing moments (as in crises) when they can try to transform the meaning of past, present, and future and break through to a new kind of time. Indeed, they may believe that the flow of history will create opportunities for them to do this. For them, time is a weapon—to be used patiently, as well as explosively.

In having a cosmic sense of destiny, a sense of being born for some divine mission, a hubris-nemesis leader may believe he is in tune with invincible forces of history, and that he receives his inspiration and knowledge from a special, high plane of philosophy and understanding. In wanting to create a break with his nation’s past, he propounds an alluring, heroic vision of future salvation. In

¹⁷A rapid expansion of spatial horizons may help explain how people become radicals, revolutionaries, or terrorists. This experience may be found in Castro’s youth, when he goes from the confines of a rural home to a Jesuit school in Santiago de Cuba and then to the national university in Havana. The experience may also appear in some U.S. and West European terrorists who came from parochial, middle-class backgrounds, and then moved rapidly into big university environments. Exposure to rapidly expanded spatial horizons surely affects thousands of students without their becoming radicalized; but even so, this kind of experience may be important for analyzing why some individuals become radicalized while others do not.

so doing, he glorifies his past exploits in mythic terms of struggle, sacrifice, and suffering, linking himself to past generations and heroes who shared his dreams.

He believes he has a personal, fated mission to accomplish earthshaking, revolutionary, even apocalyptic changes that assure his place in history. He gets people to believe he is destined for greatness. The long-term vision of the future may seem constructive and benevolent, but it depends on wreaking a great deal of vengeance and destruction in order to create a dramatic breakthrough to a new kind of time. This time sense may be expressed (especially in his youth) in terms of making an abrupt leap to create a new kind of future time. Or (especially later in his life) it may make him concede a need for long-term struggle in which the new future emerges incrementally from the present. Meanwhile, on a daily basis, a hubris-nemesis leader may regularly keep people waiting around the office or at gatherings until long after the scheduled time for his appearance.

Action Orientation. The hubris-nemesis complex is action-oriented; it engages a powerful need to take measures to dominate and change things, and not just talk about them. Many hubris-nemesis leaders have an extreme confidence in their ability to shape events and change the world through their personal actions. They have an inflated will to power, a sense of omnipotence and invulnerability, that encourages risk-taking. They see themselves as embodying the standards of archetypal, action-oriented heroes who can change destiny.

This is reflected in an enormous, relentless appetite for personal power, and in an exalted sense of man's (especially his own) ability to master fate. A hubris-nemesis leader would rather rewrite the rules of the game than follow existing rules that are not to his advantage. He must lead in order to prevail; he cannot follow or take other people's decisions for granted. He thrives on the politics of personal deeds that, in his view, set examples for others. He may want to strengthen the institutions around him, but at the same time he may act as though institutions per se are unsuited to leading the way he wants to go. He may regard institutions as being more constraint- than opportunity-oriented, and therefore as inherently lacking the energy and vision he embodies and can impart.

In actions toward the chosen enemy, he thrives on defiance and confrontation—but he is strategic and not suicidal about this. And he regards compromise and accommodation as signs of weakness—though he is not above tactical retreats and concessions. He may exaggerate any sign of threat from the chosen enemy, and prefers military and paramilitary instruments to political and diplomatic

ones. The use of force and violence, when he deems it necessary, will be seen as clean and pure.

Various Combinations Possible. It may be possible to distinguish different types of hubris-nemesis leaders according to whether they are primarily space-, time-, or action-oriented. For example, a leader with a millennialist time orientation and a “megalomacho” desire to project himself into global spaces may be more likely to pose an inhumane nuclear threat than, say, a leader whose action-orientation is framed by a belief that he can achieve his goals by means of a long strategic struggle that includes confrontation but ends in negotiations.

Hubris-nemesis leaders with a strongly millennialist frame of mind may be particularly dangerous. The possession and potential use of weapons of “holy terror” may be attractive to a millennialist, since having and considering using such weapons may enable him to believe he can magnify his power and presence on the world stage and break through to a new time (cf. Rapoport, 1988). Millenarian myths may give him and his followers a sense of invulnerability, which may encourage dangerous, risky behavior (Edelman, 1971: 125).

Operational Codes and Decision Modeling

For the hubris-nemesis concept to be useful for policy analysis, it should be amenable to modeling. I turn briefly to an important stream of research about the analysis and modeling of opponents that is relevant. The two bodies of work considered here—the first on “operational codes,” the second on “opponent decision modeling”—originated mainly at RAND.

The concept of the operational code was first explicated in a well-known 1969 article by political scientist Alexander George, based on long-neglected work by Nathan Leites in the 1950s (George, 1969, 1979, 1987). The purpose behind the code was to identify the general beliefs about the nature of history, politics, conflict, and action that an opponent might hold. Indeed, studying opponents was a key purpose.

George distinguished between the “philosophical” (or epistemological) and the “instrumental” beliefs that enter into an operational code, and used that distinction to delineate the code’s structure. The methodology thus includes a dense series of questions about the philosophical beliefs that an actor may hold regarding (1) the essential nature of political life, political harmony and conflict, and one’s opponents; (2) the ability to be optimistic or pessimistic about the future and about the realizability of one’s values and aspirations; (3) the

predictability of the future; (4) the degree of control that one may have over historical developments and trends; and (5) the role of chance in human affairs.¹⁸

These philosophical beliefs are related to each other, and to a separate set of instrumental beliefs about means-end relationships. An actor's instrumental beliefs concern his deliberations regarding how best to (1) select goals and objectives for action, (2) pursue them effectively, (3) control for risks, (4) identify the best timing, and (5) evaluate the utilities of different means.¹⁹

Thus the methodology gets at "a particularly significant portion of the actor's entire set of beliefs about political life"—but not all the beliefs he or she may hold (George, 1969: 170). Moreover, the construct presumes that an opponent operates with limited rationality and has limited information for defining the situation and determining what to do. Thus, knowing an opponent's operational code

does *not* provide a simple key to explanation and prediction; but it can help the researcher and the policy planner to "bound" the alternative ways in which the subject may perceive different types of situations and approach the task of making a rational assessment of alternative courses of action (George, 1969: 172–173).

The operational-code construct is attractive because it probes deeply into an opponent's belief system. For a trained analyst, the code may "serve as a useful 'bridge' or 'link' to psychodynamic interpretations of unconscious dimensions of belief systems and their role in behavior under different conditions." Yet one does not have to be a psychoanalyst; the code can "be investigated without reference to psychoanalytic hypotheses" (George, 1969: 169).

The construct is additionally appealing to this writer because its epistemological and instrumental categories aim at identifying a subject's spatial, temporal, and action orientations. Indeed, Leites's and George's five epistemological categories parallel the five categories of questions identified in the 1950s by anthropologists Clyde and Florence Kluckhohn for understanding people's "value orientations"

¹⁸A fuller text of the questions is: "1. What is the 'essential' nature of political life? Is the political universe essentially one of harmony or conflict? What is the fundamental character of one's political opponents? . . . 2. What are the prospects for the eventual realization of one's fundamental political values and aspirations? Can one be optimistic, or must one be pessimistic on this score; and in what respects the one and/or the other? . . . 3. Is the political future predictable? In what sense and to what extent? . . . 4. How much 'control' or 'mastery' can one have over historical development? What is one's role in 'moving' and 'shaping' history in the desired direction? . . . 5. What is the role of 'chance' in human affairs and in historical development?" (George, 1969: passim)

¹⁹A fuller text of the questions is: "1. What is the best approach for selecting goals or objectives for political action? . . . 2. How are the goals of action pursued most effectively? . . . 3. How are the risks of political action calculated, controlled, and accepted? . . . 4. What is the best 'timing' of action to advance one's interests? . . . 5. What is the utility and role of different means for advancing one's interests?" (George, 1969: passim)

(cf. Kluckhohn, 1963). Thus the operational-code construct is rooted as much in anthropology and epistemology as in psychology.

Furthermore, the construct is instructive for trying to bridge distinctions between ideological and pragmatic forms of behavior. It allows decisionmakers who are motivated by ideology to hold philosophical and instrumental beliefs that “may sharpen reality testing and encourage a pragmatic and opportunistic foreign policy even though the ideology itself has a rigid, messianic character” (George, 1987: 14–15).

For decades, the operational-code construct has attracted theorists at research centers, who have developed it further and produced illuminating applications (some references are in George, 1979, 1987). Moreover, the construct has helped to heighten interest in modeling belief systems as a whole, and raised concerns about issues like risk aversion and risk acceptance, judgment under uncertainty, control of the initiative in a crisis, strategy optimizing, and calculations about expected utilities. But despite this success in the academic world and some influence on foreign-leadership profiling techniques in the U.S. government, the operational-code approach remains difficult for real-time policy applications.

Today, a new approach to opponent decision modeling is being developed at RAND that builds on the operational-code approach, yet is more geared to crisis and other real-time policy applications. In the new approach, John Arquilla and Paul Davis (Davis and Arquilla, 1991a,b) advise that defense planners and policymakers facing an opponent in a crisis should have at hand at least two and preferably multiple models of that opponent’s “rationality” and likely behavior. Each model should represent a different type of “bounded rationality” and reflect the different risk and opportunity assessments that may attend each rationality.

In the major test case to date, the methodology was used to model Saddam Hussein in the period just before and during the Persian Gulf war. In this case, a Model 1 was designed that treated him as a “pragmatic leader.” A Model 2 treated him as a “visionary conqueror,” portraying as rational and predictable a mentality that is often deemed crazy and unpredictable. The two models were associated with variations in a checklist of attributes that included the following: degrees of power-hunger, sensitivity to others’ power, ambition, aggressiveness, contempt for others, sense of vulnerability, propensity for risk-taking, opportunism, flexibility, pragmatism, concern for reputation, etc.²⁰

²⁰ The full list of attributes is: —Ruthless, power-focused; emphasizes *realpolitik*; —Ambitious; —“Responsive”; seeks easy opportunistic gains; —Impatiently goal seeking; likely to seek initiative; —Strategically aggressive with nonincremental attitudes; —Contemptuous of other Arab leaders;

This decision-modeling methodology reportedly worked well in the case of Saddam Hussein during the Gulf war. And in my view, it did so partly because the subject had a hubris-nemesis complex. This allowed for dramatic differences to be posited between Models 1 and 2 and meant that Model 2 would prevail.

The current RAND approach, as applied to Saddam Hussein, treats Models 1 and 2 as distinctive alternatives. Model 1 corresponds to an ordinary, cautious, pragmatic type of rationality. Model 2 reflects hubris-nemesis attributes, and begins to correspond to the complex.²¹ Nonetheless, the model's ingredients—the list of coded attributes, and the weighting scheme for risk assessment—seem to be more about the hubris than the nemesis dimension.

The fact that Hussein is a hubris-nemesis leader explains why Model 2 correlates with this complex. The next case may not have such a leader, and the modeling will be adjusted accordingly. But to the extent that hubris-nemesis actors may figure in future modeling challenges, two suggestions might be worth attending to.

First, the attribute list could be improved and made more rigorous. A better list of attributes about the hubris-nemesis complex might be refined from the literatures on narcissism, space-time-action orientations, and operational codes. The latter's distinction between philosophical and instrumental sets of beliefs seems worth retaining in this newest generation of decision modeling.

Second, attention might be given to melding Models 1 and 2 into a dynamic hybrid. The reason would be to engage the possibility that an opponent may alternate between the hubris-nemesis and the pragmatic modes. This would require identifying conditions that tend to activate and deactivate each mode in a hubris-nemesis leader, or that may cause a leader who does not have a hubris-nemesis complex to slip temporarily into this mode.

Although culture is often said to make a difference in shaping the mindsets of leaders, the RAND researchers (Davis and Arquilla, 1991a) maintain that there is no such thing as an "Arab mind" or a "Latin mind" to model. Nonetheless, this essay contends that there is a "hubris-nemesis mind"—and the better we learn to model it, the better we will be able to cope with it and its variants next time.

—Contemptuous of U.S. will and staying power; —Financially strapped and frustrated; —Capable of reversing himself strategically; flexible (not suicidal); —Clever and calculating (not hip shooter); —Pragmatic and once-burned, now cautious; —Still risk taking in some situations; —Grandiosely ambitious; —Paranoid tendencies with some basis; —Concerned with reputation and legitimacy in Arab and Islamic worlds; —Concerned only about being respected for his power; —Sensitive to *potential* U.S. power not immediately present." (Davis and Arquilla, 1991b: 14)

²¹Model 2 also has attributes that correspond to pathological and malignant narcissism.

4. Looking to the Past—And the Future

Whether in persons, institutions, nations, or other actors, the hubris-nemesis complex has played a significant role in history. Leaders and other actors caught in its dynamics crop up intermittently, often to major effect (like Hitler); and it would seem a fair guess that they will continue to do so.

Such statements bother social theorists who believe that mankind's history is driven far less by subjective conditions than by objective, material, and structural conditions. They caution that "psycho-history" and "psycho-biography" are of limited value, and want concepts like the hubris-nemesis complex to be nested in a convincing discussion of the degree to which psychological and other subjective conditions matter in the first place.

Analysts who accept the significance of psychological and related approaches to leadership analysis also caution about the pitfalls and shortcomings. George (1979: 104–119) in particular has explicated the methodological issues that must be faced in doing case studies of how belief systems affect decisional choices. And a recent critique of psychological profiling techniques at the Central Intelligence Agency (Omestad, 1994) lays out the pros and cons, and ups and downs, of its efforts to provide U.S. officials with timely assessments of foreign leaders. The bottom line is to improve the techniques, not abandon them.

This exploratory essay cannot do much about these critiques and challenges, except to acknowledge their existence. The aim here is limited to proposing the hubris-nemesis concept, identifying some implications, and elucidating some next steps for elaborating a theory and methodology for making practical use of the concept.

Since past experiences and current trends imply that adversaries and other actors in the grip of the complex will appear in the future, it behooves policymakers and analysts to take heed and ascertain how, where, when, why, and especially in whom the complex may appear. It is an open question whether the incidence of the hubris-nemesis complex has risen or fallen historically. But surely this chaotic, perilous, post-Cold War world will breed new iterations of this mindset, for there are many conditions—objective and subjective—fueling the dynamics of grandiosity and animosity in many places around the world.

Hubris-Nemesis, Narcissism, and Megalothymia in History

Similar points may be made about pathological and malignant narcissism. Indeed, psychoanalysts and psychiatrists have used the narcissism concept to help explain some major episodes in history. Thus Kohut asks

what historical circumstances will provoke a large part of the nation (like the Germans under the Nazis) to develop increased narcissistic vulnerability and become susceptible, on the one hand, to undertake a supra-individual, nationally organized vendetta of merciless persecution, genocide, war, and destruction and, on the other hand, a vision of total control over the world? (Kohut, 1969–70, in Kohut, 1985: 63)

The historical theme is reiterated in Volman's (1980) analysis of the "reparative" leadership of Atatürk, who appears "like the typical charismatic leader, at a time of crisis for his countrymen who were suffering from extreme narcissistic injury" (141). Post (1986) combines the concept of narcissism with sociology's concept of charismatic authority to explain how "the [mirror-hungry] charismatic leader comes to the psychological rescue of the ideal-hungry followers" in a process that may result in a religious cult, a terrorist group, or "powerful transforming social movements" like the one led by Ayatollah Khomeini (684, 687). Fromm (1973) and Jacoby (1985) make similar points about malignant aggression and narcissistic rage, and their manifestations in entire societies.

These professionals are not reducing history to psychology. They are using narcissism to illuminate some dynamics of human nature and society that may be approached from many different angles and levels, from individual and group through institutional and national. The ancient Greeks did much the same with their myths about hubris, Nemesis, and related concepts.

A related approach appears in political scientist Francis Fukuyama's (1992) study of how three basic forces in human nature—desire, reason, and *thymos* (see below)—have affected philosophy and behavior ever since the ancient Greeks called attention to the three. Fukuyama says nothing about narcissism or hubris-nemesis per se. But parallels are evident, especially when he contrasts *thymos* (a concept about having a sense of self-worth, and demanding that others recognize it) with what he terms *megalothymia* (an inflated desire to be recognized as superior) and *isothymia* (a fanatical desire to be recognized as equal).¹

¹Similar ideas were once raised by Rollo May (1969) regarding "the daimonic" in personality and history. In Ch. 5, he defines it as "any natural function that has the power to take over the whole person," and as "the urge in every being to assert itself, affirm itself, perpetuate and increase itself." Using ancient Greek writings—e.g., "Eros is a daimon"—he discusses how the daimonic includes positive and negative, divine and diabolical elements, and can be used for both good and evil, both

According to Fukuyama, these forces lie at the core of humanity's progress and its predicaments from a philosophical viewpoint:

The terrible consequence of modernity was the effort of its creators Hobbes and Locke to strip man of his evaluative powers in the name of physical security and material accumulation. Nietzsche's well-known doctrine of the "will to power" can be understood as the effort to reassert the primacy of *thymos* as against desire and reason, and to undo the damage that modern liberalism had done to man's pride and self-assertiveness.

. . . this "third part" [*thymos*] of the soul has been a central concern of the philosophical tradition that stretches from Plato to Nietzsche. It suggests a very different reading of the historical process, not as the story of the unfolding of modern natural science or the logic of economic development, but rather as the emergence, growth, and eventual decline of *megalothymia*. Indeed, the modern economic world could only emerge after desire had been liberated, so to speak, at the expense of *thymos*. The historical process that begins with the master's bloody battle ends in some sense with the modern *bourgeois* inhabitant of contemporary liberal democracies, who pursues material gain rather than glory.

. . . The desire for glory that for Machiavelli was so normal a part of the human makeup—that inordinate striving to be better than others, to make as many people as possible recognize one's superiority—is no longer an acceptable way to describe one's personal goals. It is in fact a characteristic we attribute to people that we don't like, those tyrants who have risen among us like Hitler, Stalin, or Saddam Hussein. *Megalothymia* . . . lives on under a variety of guises in day-to-day life. . . . But in terms of what we say about ourselves, it has been ethically vanquished in the modern world. (Fukuyama, 1992: 189–190)

Like narcissism and hubris, *megalothymia* is "morally ambiguous"—too much is bad, but a bit may be good, even essential, for energizing a person, nation, civilization, or system of organization like feudalism or capitalism, and inspiring it to defend itself from other peoples, nations, civilizations, or systems that have a bad case of *megalothymia* (315). According to Fukuyama, it played a role in many past campaigns for glorious political and religious conquests, and helped foster the rise of nationalism and imperialism.²

Liberal democracy was designed in the 18th and 19th centuries in part to purge *megalothymia* from politics while leaving room for *thymos*. Today, other outlets

creative and destructive endeavors. In his view, people no longer talk about the daimonic because recognizing it "constitutes a profound blow to our narcissism." He notes that in some leaders, the daimonic is so strong it gives way to hubris.

²Also see Hirschman (1977) for a pioneering analysis of how and why the historical shift from absolutism to capitalism required a shift in what people valued—away from passions for glory, and toward the pursuit of mundane interests.

(e.g., sports, entertainment) are sanctioned for people to display *megalothymia*. But what about the future? According to Fukuyama,

Liberal democracy could, in the long run, be subverted internally either by an excess of *megalothymia*, or by an excess of *isothymia*—that is, the fanatical desire for equal recognition. It is my intuition that it is the former that will constitute the greater threat to democracy in the end. (314)

Much the same may be said about narcissism or hubris-nemesis and the future of democracy.³ Fukuyama's approach provides a further reminder that what looks through one lens like a psychological process looks through other lenses like philosophical, epistemological, cultural, and social processes. Each lens, or discipline, offers a differently angled view of the nature of society and humanity.

I observe this partly to show that the hubris-nemesis concept has company—it is but one of several efforts to get at much the same thing. It would be a mistake to treat the hubris-nemesis concept as being only psychological. It is partly psychological, and it may be easy to treat it as such. But it has sociological, epistemological, philosophical, mythological, and cultural dimensions as well. What ultimately energizes the dynamics of hubris and nemesis—or narcissism, or *megalothymia*—at the highest levels of a society is not a leader's mentality, but what is going on in the society at large that makes his mentality appealing.

Although the hubris-nemesis concept and its companions—narcissism, *megalothymia*, and charisma—intersect and overlap, the overlap is not complete. The concepts are not substitutes for each other; each gets at something a little different. Thus, as discussed earlier, a leader or other actor may be characterized by one of these qualities but not another, at least not to the same degree.

Where Hubris-Nemesis Adversaries May Appear Next

Where are adversaries with a hubris-nemesis complex likely to show up next to challenge U.S. interests? A few preliminary observations are included here, but better answers will have to await future research.

One answer is that future hubris-nemesis leaders will come from the usual place: the realm of the state, as heads of governments and militaries. This seems more likely in the undemocratic and less developed nations of the world than in the advanced democratic nations, for the latter have many institutional safeguards against the rise of such leaders to positions of power and authority. North Korea

³Lasch (1979) criticizes American society along these lines.

may be a case in point—a dangerous one given its reputed possession of nuclear weapons.

Hubris-nemesis leaders may also continue appearing at the head of lesser state entities, such as intelligence, police, and paramilitary units in some particularly strife-torn countries (e.g., South Africa?). In many parts of the world, bitter tribal and ethnic conflicts seem to be breeding grounds for hubris-nemesis mentalities (e.g., the Balkans).

The main concern of U.S. policy must be with heads of state who may have the complex and are clearly our adversaries. But another concern for U.S. policy may be to avoid building up a leader who appears benign or manageable in dealings with the United States, but who has this pathology and may therefore eventually create problems for U.S. interests, perhaps by turning against the United States or by going after an “enemy” of his and demanding U.S. support.⁴

A second realm where hubris-nemesis actors may appear is the realm of the market, with its increasingly global enterprises and its enormous flows of capital and critical technologies. This is not a realm where U.S. policymakers would normally guard against hubris-nemesis leaders, for open competitive market systems, like open competitive political systems, tend to weed out such actors. Indeed, the market has long been a realm of hubris more than of nemesis-like behavior. But hubris-nemesis dynamics have occasionally appeared in the vindictive words and actions of some U.S. or Japanese business competitors. And what about U.S. or foreign business actors who have wanted to “get” IBM or General Motors, or conduct BCCI-type operations, or allow the illicit provision of nuclear or other dangerous technologies? Such actors may be rare, and only a few may have been motivated by anti-U.S. hubris-nemesis dynamics. But the global market is not immune to them, and perhaps this is a realm to be watched more closely in the future.

A third realm where some hubris-nemesis actors may arise is civil society in its various forms. Policymakers and analysts do not normally pay much attention to this realm. Its actors have long seemed weak, even irrelevant, compared with actors from the realms of states and markets. But the information revolution is slowly working some surprises in this regard, for it appears to be strengthening civil-society actors relative to state and market actors. It is having this effect in

⁴Saddam Hussein is an example, but the case of the Shah of Iran might also be heeded. While the Shah was much more a case of hubris than hubris-nemesis, Zoni’s (1991) analysis is instructive: “The United States contributed, perhaps in decisive ways, to make the Shah into the tyrant he became. It fostered his grandiosity by building his rule economically and militarily. It did the same psychologically by allowing the Shah to use it and its presidents as selfobjects.” (260)

part because the new information and communications technologies enable numerous small, highly dispersed actors to connect to form vast transnational networks and coordinate joint actions.

The cutting-edge of this phenomenon is being defined by a new generation of advocacy groups and movements—notably in the areas of environment, peace, human-rights, and other social issues—who increasingly identify with ideas for constructing a “global civil society” that can counter the power of state and market actors (cf. Ronfeldt, 1992, 1993). There appear to be constraints on the rise of hubris-nemesis leaders among such groups, but surprises are possible among the most radical ones.

Bigger surprises may come from what might be termed “uncivil society”—from smugglers, criminal mafias, revolutionaries, terrorists, millenialists, cultists, and even gangs who claim to be motivated by something higher than self-interest. These actors too are increasingly operating in transnational information-age networks. Some are able to penetrate government, military, and business organizations. Some may even have covert government, military, or corporate backers. And some may be interested in the proliferation of weapons of mass destruction.

While it seems advisable to beware of hubris-nemesis leaders who may arise from realms not previously watched for such a pathology, the incidence of hubris-nemesis leaders may be driven mainly by the nature of conflict and war. This topic should be left for follow-on research, but I would note one point here: The world appears to be headed into a period of major peacefulness in relations among the major powers, with endemic instability, conflict, and war around the peripheries.⁵ At the same time, the United States is not well prepared for a new mode of low-intensity, societal-level conflict that is beginning to emerge—what we would term “netwar” (Arquilla and Ronfeldt, 1993). This new mode may be increasingly used by foreign (nonstate?) adversaries against the United States. And in some instances, it may be attractive to a hubris-nemesis leader who aims to operate slowly and covertly to weaken his chosen enemy.

* * * * *

This can be a terrible complex. And to close, it might make sense to warn about North Korea and nuclear weapons in the hands of a hubris-nemesis leader—or

⁵Sources for this bald conclusion include Arquilla and Ronfeldt (1993), Fuller (1994), Huntington (1993), Ronfeldt (1993), Toffler and Toffler (1993), and Van Creveld (1991).

perhaps a scenario in which Cuba collapses into civil war, and Fidel Castro can get his hands on some other type of weapons of mass destruction.

But I choose to close this essay on an upbeat note: The dynamics of hubris-nemesis can be avoided through wise leadership. They are not inevitable even when they may seem expectable.

A case in point as of this writing (July 1994) is Mexico, where events in Chiapas recently threatened to result in an insurgency that might have acquired all the trappings of a traditional Latin American insurgency: army versus peasants and indians; the wealthy landed elites versus the poor; an authoritarian central government versus grass-roots groups; a growing influence for military, security, and police forces, etc.—all fraught with overtones of wounded dignity and self-righteous rage on all sides. But this did not happen.

The Mexican army deserves some of the credit, for as I wrote when I first warned about the complex (Ronfeldt, 1984: 29–31):

The Mexican army has avoided the hubris that has driven other Latin American militaries to assume power, and it has not played the role of Nemesis in dealing with perceived threats and evils. . . . So long as the modern Mexican military avoids both hubris and nemesis, it is likely to help maintain the “equilibrium” (to use General Galván’s word) that lies at the core of Mexico’s stability and security. In general the military has a good record in this regard. . . . So long as these patterns remain ingrained within the military, the prospects for hubris and nemesis will depend mainly on the behavior of the civilian authorities—in particular on their not creating political troubles because of their own hubris, and then calling on the army to rescue them and crack heads in vengeance.

Credit for avoiding the traditional dynamics also owes to local and transnational nongovernmental organizations and their networks—all the dozens, perhaps hundreds, of peace, human-rights, indigenous-rights, church, and other activist groups from Mexico, Canada, the United States, and elsewhere—that suddenly swooped into Chiapas and Mexico City and effectively clamored (including on fax and electronic mail circuits) for a cease-fire, negotiations, and a democratic resolution.

Yet, perhaps the main credit is owed to Mexico’s President Carlos Salinas de Gortari, to the negotiator he named to head the Commission on Peace and Reconciliation, Manuel Camacho Solis, and to leadership of the Zapatista National Liberation Army, notably “Subcommander Marcos.” All three demonstrated leadership qualities that broke remarkably with the traditional dynamics of insurgency and unexpectedly set new standards for constructive behavior that avoided a spiral into hubris-nemesis dynamics. Such a spiral is

always possible where personal and cultural sensitivities about pride, honor, and dignity can give way, if injured, to passions for revenge and retribution.

Mexico should prove much the better and prouder for this. And it is to be hoped that it can stay on this course, since the post-Chiapas struggle there is far from over.

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