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# Advisers and Aggregation in Foreign Policy Decision-Making

**Abstract:** Do advisers affect foreign policy and, if so, how? Recent scholarship on elite decision-making prioritizes leaders and the institutions that surround them, rather than the dispositions of advisers themselves. We argue that despite the hierarchical nature of foreign policy decision-making, advisers' predispositions towards the use of force shape state behavior through participation in deliberations. We test our argument by introducing an original dataset of 2,881 foreign policy deliberations between US presidents and their advisers from 1947 to 1988. Applying a novel machine

learning approach to estimate the hawkishness of 1,073 Cold War-era foreign policy decision-makers, we show that adviser-level hawkishness has consistently large effects on foreign policy decisions. Conflictual policy choices grow more likely as hawks increasingly dominate the debate, even when accounting for leader dispositions. These results enrich our understanding of international conflict by demonstrating that advisers' dispositions, which aggregate via deliberation, systematically shape foreign policy.

**Joshua D. Kertzer** is Professor of Government and Director of Graduate Studies at Harvard University. His research specializes in the intersection of international security, political psychology, foreign policy, and public opinion. He is the author of *Resolve in International Politics* (Princeton University Press, 2016) and *Abstraction in Experimental Design: Testing the Tradeoffs* (Cambridge University Press, 2023), and of articles in journals such as *American Journal of Political Science*, *Annual Review of Political Science*, *British Journal of Political Science*, *Conflict Management and Peace Science*, *Foreign Affairs*, *International Organization*, *International Studies Quarterly*, *Journal of Conflict Resolution*, *Journal of Politics*, and *World Politics*. His work has received a variety of recognitions, including the International Studies Association's Karl Deutsch Award, the International Society of Political Psychology's Alexander George and Jim Sidanius awards, and the American Political Science Association's Merze Tate and Kenneth N. Waltz awards.