Confrontation Analysis: Prediction, Interpretation or Diagnosis?

Dr Peter Bennett

Operational Research (EOR)
Dept of Health
Skipton House
80 London Road
LONDON SE1 6LH UK*

Abstract

This paper considers whether theories that focus on actors' choices (like both Game Theory and Confrontation Analysis) can successfully provide predictions. Various types of prediction are considered - for example, of individuals versus some wider system; and of actors' behaviour versus the outcome reached. A theory without great predictive power may still have some attractions as a framework for interpreting events. However if it is not predictive in any sense, the danger is that of providing only *post hoc* comfort, allowing any sequence of events to be "explained" in ways that defy genuine test. We suggest that Confrontation Analysis does have some predictive power, though this generally stops short of predicting the eventual outcome of a conflict. In particular, it may be helpful as a diagnostic tool, helping one to test alternative explanations for actors' behaviour and hence going some way toward prognosis. Diagnostic use is illustrated by an attempt to apply Confrontation Analysis during the build-up to the recent war with Iraq.

1. Background

The question of whether any theory of human choice can claim to be predictive is an old one, traditionally linked to fundamental philosophical debates. For example, should the human sciences aspire to resemble the natural sciences? If free will has any meaning, is it compatible with predictability? The present discussion has several roots, the most obvious being Kesten Green's study of prediction (Green, 2002 and this volume). There are also three longer-term influences.

One is exposure to the ideas of Karl Popper. This left me enough of a Popperian to worry about theories that can apparently explain anything, but never quite manage any prediction. Yet in the world of human choices, prediction is genuinely difficult. Might a theory that really did help make sense of events – even if only *post hoc* – still have some value?

A second strand is a series of expositions by the late Michael Nicholson on the logic of prediction. He elegantly pointed to the many different types of prediction, showing that their practicalities warrant careful thought. For example, it is often held that shorter-term prediction is easier than longer-term. Yet this depends on the context. Can we accurately predict how many of us will be alive in 20 years' time? One year would (one hopes) be easier. But our individual survival in 100 years' time looks all too predictable. Then there are differences between individual and aggregate behaviour. To use one of Michael's examples, it is pretty certain that the leaves will fall from the oak tree by November. Yet who could predict when an individual leaf will fall – let alone exactly where? Similar issues may apply to prediction using Game Theory. Does this mean attempting to forecast the choices of key individuals? Or is the claim that certain systems of many individuals - e.g. markets - will settle down into some predictable equilibrium state? An approach may be quite accurate at an "system" level, yet leave each individual unpredictable.

A final influence is a paper written over 15 years ago by Phillip Schrodt. This starts with an exercise in prediction based on a widely-reported international incident. In 1995, the Italian cruise liner *Achille*

* All views expressed here are the sole responsibility of the writer and should not be taken to represent the views of the Department

Lauro had been hijacked by members of the PLO. Following negotiations with the Italian Government, some of the alleged hijackers had been released. But an Egyptian airliner carrying them was then forcibly diverted by the US.[1] From media reports, Schrodt immediately set down a series of predicted consequences of US action, i.e.

> "*Egypt*
>
> Will protest due to violation of sovereignty
> Can't [won't] do much else because of dependence on US aid
> Did not help with the interception (and U.S. should emphasise that)
> This isn't politically very good for Mubarak and will result in protests
>
> *Italy*
>
> Will not extradite hijackers
> There will be additional attacks on Italians
> Will release remainder of PLO [i.e. Abdul-Abbas]
>
> *PLO*
>
> Will protest interception
> Won't do much else [in direct response] because:
>
> (a) Arafat claims this operation wasn't endorsed by PLO
> (b) The hijackers aren't very nice – they are small potatoes and not too respectable to Palestinians generally
>
> Won't try hijacking ships again."
>
> (Schrodt, 1987, p. 90)

These predictions subsequently turned out to have a high degree of accuracy. Yet, Schrodt insists, this was:

> "…. not a particularly brilliant analysis. On the contrary, it is a perfectly ordinary one… Yet it scores well not only on the issue of yes/no questions…. but also in projecting arbitrary future events (Egypt protesting; Mubarak facing political problems; and the later controversial issue of releasing Abdul-Abbas, which wasn't even in the news….). *I know of no formal model in political science that can do anything even remotely close to this*."
>
> (*Op cit*, p.91, italics added)

Reflecting Schrodt's interest in Artificial Intelligence, the rest of his paper concentrates on how the "pattern-matching" abilities implied by such predictions might be replicated. But for "formal" modelling, the italicised quote stands as an intriguing challenge. **What can modelling a "live" situation achieve, over and above that obtainable from intuition or common sense?** To address this, it may first help to disentangle some issues around prediction and its difficulties.

2. Prediction, Diagnosis and Prognosis

Arguments about the *practicality* of prediction generally stress lack of information. This lack is particularly acute for theories that take choice to be based on thought processes. Actors' thought processes cannot be fully known, whether by other actors or by outside observers. Even in the constrained world of experimental games, there may be no way of stopping players forming their own – perhaps quite idiosyncratic – definitions of their situation. (Without any prompting, A may simply take it for granted that "the point" is to beat B as comprehensively as possible, while B assumes that A and B are a team trying to win as much as possible from the experimenter.)

Though undeniable, these difficulties beg the "in principle" question. Put in game-theoretic terms, would outcomes be predictable if we knew enough about everyone's perceived options and preferences? In most cases, not uniquely so. Many games have multiple solutions, each supportable by coherent arguments. To give a simple example, suppose we could be sure that both sides in some real-life conflict see it just as a game of "Chicken" – with no disagreement as to the choices available, and in no doubt as to each other's preferences. Even then, the model does not predict whether one side or the other will win, or whether they will destroy each other or even compromise by both "swerving".

[1] The hijack itself has recently been in the news again, both through the recent death of a leading hi-jacker in US custody in Iraq, and through the play *The Death of Klinghoffer* which alludes to the killing of a disabled Jewish passenger on the ship

Yet this need not make the model worthless. Though all four outcomes remain possible, a good deal of *behaviour* may be explained, and perhaps even predicted. If the players see the situation that way, one would expect to see attempts to demonstrate binding commitment (the equivalent of throwing the steering wheel away), misrepresentation of preferences ("I'd rather die than back down") and so on. These are the tactics so neatly catalogued by Schelling over 40 years ago, the game model providing a coherent framework (Schelling, 1960).

Rather than demanding prediction of outcomes, it may thus be more productive to think in terms of *conditional* prediction of *behaviour* – or rather, a range of characteristic behaviours. Even our idiosyncratic laboratory game players may be quite predictable in that sense. Suppose we have prior evidence that A wants to "beat" B, while B wants the pair of players to maximise their joint profit. Though the details depend on the game put in front of them, a good deal follows quite logically. In a repeated game without communication, A's initial choices will tend to be at B's expense. Moreover they will simply make no sense relative to B's view of A and B as a team. B is likely to become increasingly angry with A, and attempt to force cooperation by making choices that "punish" him. But from A's perspective, all that has happened is that B has finally learnt how to play the game! Pleasantly surprised by his early "wins", A now sees B behave as he had originally expected. He has no cause for rancour. But for B, the game ends in frustration. Or, to quote from a long-ago Sussex University experiment, "my partner was a bloody fool and very annoying".

Perhaps, then, a sequence of behavioural *and emotional* responses may be quite predictable – *given* the starting information. But this brings us full circle to the original problem. In real life, information about perceptions and thought processes may be exactly what we are most lacking.

This suggests modifying the approach again. Instead of starting from hypotheses about unobservable beliefs, it may be better to start with behaviour that *can* be observed, then use the theory "in reverse" to generate hypotheses about its underlying rationale. This is a *diagnostic* form of modelling. In attempting to analyse a conflict as it unfolds, it seeks something stronger than mere post-hoc "explanation". In itself, such diagnosis remains less ambitious than prediction. But the hypotheses generated can be then used to provide (highly conditional) predictions about future behaviour. Modelling may thus provide some alternative *prognoses*, along with some indicators of which events would favour one alternative over another. The model itself could then be successively updated and refined. Specifically, we suggest that *Confrontation Analysis* can provide an effective vehicle for this approach.

3. Confrontation Analysis

As discussed below, Confrontation Analysis provides the analytical "engine" of *Drama Theory*. It is also a direct development of Analysis of Options, which provided a relatively user-friendly way of building models based on Game Theory. We set the scene by outlining this first, before introducing Drama Theory and then Confrontation Analysis itself.

Analysis of Options

Developed from Game and Metagame Theory, this modelling approach is based on defining binary (yes/no) options and simple preference comparisons (Howard, 1971). The building-blocks of analysis are:

- the key **actors**,
- the **options** open to each,
- the **scenarios or** futures resulting from different combinations of options, and
- comparison of actors' **preferences** for relevant scenarios.

These can be put together in a *tableau*, with the various actors' options forming the rows, and scenarios shown as columns of ones and zeros, (or ticks and crosses or some other notation) indicating options taken up or not. After removing infeasible combinations of options, analysis then investigates which scenarios are *stable*, in the sense that anyone who might gain by moving is likely to be deterred by others' possible responses. In other words any available *improvement* is subject to *sanctions*. As with

Game Theory itself, the approach can be extended, e.g. to take account of actors having differing perceptions, or facing decisions in many related areas at once (Bennett, 1995).

Analysis of Options has the key advantage of allowing models to be built up step-by-step. Rather than needing to start with a complete set of options and preferences, we can simply search for improvements and sanctions from some given starting-point. In modelling a "live" situation, with its inevitable uncertainties, even very incomplete assumptions allow some conclusions to be drawn. Nevertheless, experience suggests that many would-be users still find it difficult to apply. Shown a model, people can usually see how it works. The challenge is to fit real cases into the formalism (see e.g. Huxham and Eden, 1990; Mitchell *et al,* 1990). It is often difficult to see what options - or even actors - "should" be included. Trying not to leave anything significant out, the result can be a model with embarrassingly many scenarios, even after making sweeping assumptions about infeasible combinations.

Using software to help manage the combinatorial complexity can make it possible to build larger models, and some packages will automatically generate and display all feasible scenarios. Ingenious ways of assigning preferences - e.g. by "lexicographic" priority (Fraser and Hipel, 1984) - make it technically possible to find the stable scenarios. But this is a mixed blessing. Having a large model can make it difficult to keep track of what all the scenarios actually mean. Sacrificing the original advantage of Analysis of Options - that of proceeding in easy stages - can easily leave one feeling overwhelmed. The danger is that the output only makes sense if one already has a good idea of whatever result the model is meant to illustrate. This is not a good position from which to attempt diagnosis, let alone prediction.

On pragmatic grounds alone then, a more focussed approach would be helpful. Common-sense suggests that not all scenarios are equally important. The need is for guidance as to which ones the analysis should start from. As will be seen, Confrontation Analysis offers precisely this.

Drama Theory

Drama Theory (Howard, 1994, 1997; Bennett and Howard, 1996; Bryant, 1997, 2003) reflects an increasing interest in how conflicts change, rather than just the analysis of fixed games. But these are not treated as separate matters. Rather, dynamics are often driven by the paradoxes encountered in responding to a "given" situation. These typically derive from having to make *unwilling* threats and promises, which one would prefer not to carry out. If rationality means always choosing in accordance with preferences, then rational actors can find themselves in trouble. A purely rational player of "Chicken" loses to an irrational opponent, because (s)he cannot credibly threaten mutual destruction. In "Prisoners' Dilemma", rational players may lose out because they cannot credibly promise to act in the common good. Rationalists "know" that unenforceable promises - including their own - should be ignored. Alas, this knowledge may be to their mutual cost.

Though these paradoxes are illuminated by Game Theory, exploring the alternative metaphor of *drama* has sparked off new thinking.[2] In this model:

- The parties (now termed *characters*), options, scenarios and preferences described before now represent a particular "frame", seen at a particular point.
- Characters interact through a series of *episodes*. Their choices influence the outcome of each particular episode, and also what episodes happen next.
- Within each episode, there is scene-setting, build-up, climax and *dénouement*, a structure repeated on a larger scale for the drama as a whole.
- In the *build-up stage*, characters communicate (by word and deed), each pressing for acceptance of a particular *position*. However they find that their attempts to influence each other *rest on unwilling threats and/or promises*. The emotional temperature rises, leading to....
- ... the *climax* of the episode. At this point, the frames themselves come under pressure. The paradoxes of rationality create specific forms of emotion and preference change, as well as generation of new options, involvement of other characters, etc. The characters then take actions that move them into another episode.

[2] However, one can alternatively retain the earlier label of "soft" game theory (Howard, 1990)

- Through successive episodes, the characters reframe their views. *Resolution* occurs when the characters reach an outcome that exhausts *both* rationality and emotion. There are thus no further "pressure points" to trigger another transformation. The ending may not be a happy one, but the characters see no alternative but to accept it

Drama Theory models the interplay of rational choice, emotion and argument. It draws together existing insights – e.g. the work of Elster (1983), Frank (1988) and Varoufakis (1991) - while also offering some novel claims. The fundamental proposition is that positions reliant on unwilling threats or promises create dilemmas. Consciously or otherwise, characters are driven to respond to these. For example, preferences may change so as to make the threat or promise willing, a process accompanied by negative or positive emotions toward the other side. In the longer term, characters tend to re-frame their definitions of the situation to rationalise their actions and new preferences, both to themselves and to each other. Deceit is always an alternative: emotion and preference change can be faked: argumentation may be insincere. However faking is not cost-free, and does not remove the need to examine the logic of genuine change.

The Logic of Confrontation

Within Drama theory, Confrontation Analysis applies at the climax of an episode (Howard, 1999). In concentrating on the relationship between specific scenarios, it also provides a more focussed version of Analysis of Options. *The threats and promises that matter are those supporting or undermining characters' positions.* This concept of position now becomes central to analysis, and warrants some further explanation.[3]

- The term refers to a character's "*public*" position - the future it is trying to convince the others to accept. It will normally consist of demands on the other characters, and some commitments of one's own - "Do A and refrain from B, and I'll do X and Y".
- A position may or may not be *sincere*, in the sense of the character intending to carry out its commitments if the others agree to do their part.
- Positions need not specify values for *all* perceived options ("I'll do X and Y if you do A: but do B or not, as you wish"). In the Northern Ireland conflict, for example, the UK Government has committed to accepting any constitutional arrangement freely agreed. So positions can be compatible without being identical.

A further key element is provided by each character's stated *fallback* – the options it threatens to choose if its position is not accepted.[4] The *threatened future* is the scenario that would result from implementation of everyone's fallback. Like positions, stated fallbacks are by definition "public". As will be illustrated shortly, all these scenarios can be represented using the same tableau format as in Analysis of Options. (The "card table" used by Howard (1999) provides an alternative.)

Confrontation Analysis rests on comparing characters' positions with each other and with the threatened future. (According to context, some other futures may also be significant, e.g. the status quo, or a resolution suggested by a mediator.) It normally assumes that the characters share a common "frame" to the extent of *recognising each other's stated positions and fallbacks* - whether or not they see them as sincere intentions. **It can then be shown that there are six (and only six) dilemmas that might affect any character**. For brevity we set these out in terms of two characters, A and B, though all the discussion generalises to many characters, any of which may act in coalition. For ease of exposition, we take A to be male and B female.

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[3] It should be stressed that Drama Theory sees positions as a *starting point*, not the end-point, of analysis. We agree with Fisher and Ury (1983) on the need to consider the value systems in which they are anchored. Only then can one move from initial diagnosis to prognosis.

[4] This can be related to the game-theoretic notion of a player's security level, and to the BATNA (Best Alternative to a Negotiated Agreement) concept used by Fisher and Ury (*op cit*).

(i) A has a *Cooperation Dilemma* if he has an improvement[5] from his position.

A's problem is whether others will trust him to carry out his part of his position. If A promises that he will not take his improvement, B will "logically" suspect that he is insincere. (Assuming the frame is shared, A also knows that she has cause to distrust him.) This problem is at the heart of "Prisoners' Dilemma", undermining any attempt to reach a common position of cooperation.

(ii) A has a *Deterrence (or Persuasion) Dilemma* if his fallback allows B a scenario she prefers to A's position.

Rather than B being under any pressure to accept A's position, she can do better by letting A carry out his threat and then "making the best of it". In a marital dispute, A might demand of B – "stop seeing C, or I'll institute divorce proceedings". B may not actually want a divorce, but it might leave her outcomes open that she prefers to A's position. A's deterrent is not sufficient to deter.

(iii) A has a *Rejection (or Inducement) Dilemma* if B's position is no worse for him than the threatened future.

If B's position is no worse for A than the threatened future, he will find it difficult to reject it and hold out for his own position. "Chicken" gives both sides this dilemma if each takes the position that the other should give way. Preferring the other's position to the threatened future of a crash makes it difficult to make one's fallback credible.

(iv) A has a *Threat Dilemma* if he has a potential improvement from the threatened future to some other scenario.

Unlike the last case, A's improvement from the threatened future is not B's position, but this is similar in undermining his threat to implement his fallback.

(v) A has a *Positioning Dilemma* if he finds B's position at least as desirable as his own.

A might have some reason not to accept B's position: for example he may not believe her to be sincere, or he may see her position as desirable but unrealistic. But his lack of a clear preference for his own position will make B's harder to resist, particularly as she will be able to use arguments that he would normally support.

(vi) Finally, A has a *Trust Dilemma* if B can improve by moving away from A's position

A's position is undermined by his knowledge that even if B agreed to it, she could do better by reneging. This is again exemplified by the Prisoners' Dilemma: if A proposes mutual cooperation, his own preferences give him a cooperation dilemma, while B's present him with a trust dilemma.

Though nomenclature has varied, the intention has been to name each of these dilemmas for what it makes difficult: the cooperation dilemma makes it difficult to cooperate, and so on.

4. Diagnosis and Prognosis

Drama Theory goes on to provide theorems about the development of the drama over a series of episodes. Here, our main concern is with Confrontation Analysis as applied at a specific point in time, as a way of understanding characters' behaviour and tactics. In this context, the six dilemmas have characteristic sets of responses. In each case, the fundamental alternative is to *change position*, or seek to *reinforce* it. Either path will call for need emotion and/or rational argument to make the change

[5] Strictly, the dilemma exists if A has a *potential* improvement from his position, i.e. a move that would leave A at least as well off as before. The smallest change in preference might therefore convert it into an actual improvement. The distinction between potential and actual improvements does not always matter in practice, but is important in establishing the theorems of Drama Theory.

credible. For example, the following are recognisable ways of reinforcing a position in the face of specific dilemmas.

A character faced with a *Cooperation Dilemma* needs to find ways of convincing the others that his position is sincere. He is likely to display positive emotions that may (or may not) signal a more permanent change in preferences, to the point where the temptation to defect disappears. Alongside this, there will be rational arguments seeking to persuade (others and possibly himself) that there really are good reasons to prefer cooperation – e.g. by invoking longer-term benefits. He can appeal to principles of honour and honesty, or be more pragmatic – "I know that if I cheat you now, you'll have the opportunity for revenge. So I won't do it." All such arguments aim to resolve one's own cooperation dilemma and other characters' trust dilemmas.

Someone faced with a *Deterrence Dilemma* needs to make his or her position more palatable to other characters, and/or to make the threatened future worse. Into the first category come familiar tactics such as "giving the other side a way out, avoiding humiliation, putting a "yes-able" proposition, and so on. The other path leads to an increasing severity of threat, ending (perhaps literally) in "bloody murder". This escalation may be "justified" by demonising the opponent. In some cases, a character will try to take both paths at once. Logically, there is no incompatibility between making one outcome more desirable and another less so, but the psychology can be highly problematic. It requires insistence that a deal is possible (with rational arguments around mutual benefit), while at the same time vilifying the other side in order to underpin more extreme threats. At best, this is a difficult combination.

Rejection and Threat Dilemmas pose a rather different set of problems. There may be no doubt about the threatened future being damaging enough: the question is whether one would actually carry out the threat. (The ultimate form of this dilemma is seen in the concept of Mutually Assured Destruction.) So the relevant tactics seek to establish credibility of intent. The undesirability of the threatened future may be denied ("Better dead than red!"). The dominant emotional message here will be *anger* toward the recipient. This too has tactical value, suggesting that you might just be mad enough to carry out threat. But the emotion may still be genuine. The position can also be bolstered via commitments to third parties or internal stakeholders. "If we give way on this, we give way on everything." "Even if we agreed, our members would never stand for it." Sunk costs may surface: "We have already sacrificed too much for a change of course now." Finally, one's hands may be tied completely: "We would have no option" (e.g. the Launch-on-Warning system that can't be turned off).

The response in any specific case will depend on a host of factors, involving social context as well as individual psychology. For example, a culture of "my word is my bond" will make cooperation / trust dilemmas easier to resolve. However, the analysis can help determine what to look for. Given positions and fallbacks, the dilemmas provide a "toolkit" to help understand the problems faced by each character. This will help to understand current behaviour and to identify further ways in which the characters may try to overcome their difficulties.

5. A Small Experiment

Somewhat in the spirit of Schrodt's paper, we attempted an informal test of Confrontation Analysis by analysing a widely-reported situation – in this case the negotiations leading up (as we now know) to the 2003 invasion of Iraq. Modelling was done intermittently over a few days in late January 2003. At least ostensibly, negotiations were still continuing, with the US and UK governments seeking a further UN resolution authorising the use of force. It was unclear whether this diplomatic effort would succeed, or whether war would ensue with or without UN backing. The analysis did not benefit from any specific knowledge of the nations, personalities or events in question: inputs were obtained entirely from media reportage and speculation. However all results were set down at the time rather than with hindsight. The aim was to test four questions:

- **Can Confrontation Analysis be applied in real time**, in a reasonably straightforward way?
- **Does it help generate (non-obvious) alternative insights?**
- **Do these still appear reasonable after the event?**
- **How much might such a method help with prognosis / prediction?**

Boxes 1 and 2 set out the analysis *exactly as filed at the time*. Section 6 then offers some brief commentary on the above questions.

Box 1: "A rough model of the Iraq Crisis"

Key Scenarios – positions and fallbacks

		Saddam Pos'n	US (UN) Pos'n	US/UN Fallback	US Threat	US Unilat	Saddam Cheats
Saddam	Fully Comply		√		X	-	
	Defy			√	-	-	√
	"Do enough"	√			-	-	
US (+UK)	Launch attack	X	X	√	√	√	X
UN / waverers	Support US	X	√	√	-	-	-

Definitions

Scenarios are in usual notation: √ for option taken, X for not taken, - for "whether taken or not": Saddam's three options are defined so as to be mutually exclusive. The option "do enough" implies a level of partial compliance deliberately left vaguely-defined at this point (discussed further below). "UN / waverers" refer to countries (and the UN hierarchy) unsympathetic to Saddam but unsure whether to support US-led military action.

Notes on Preferences:

Assume Saddam prefers US threat to US/UN fallback – would much rather be attacked by "imperialist enemy with no mandate", maximising Arab/Muslim outrage.

US has some preference for UN approval (partly due to UK influence on this), but not decisively. UK greatly prefers UN-approved attack to US+UK only (but not enough to break the coalition with US).

Saddam would prefer to stop disarmament (or rearm) if military pressure were removed.

Problems for US (and ostensible UN) position

(a) Saddam might prefer military defeat – i.e. US/UN fallback - to accepting the US position. It might be better for him to bring the Middle East down in flames around him rather than give in. Then US/UN has a **deterrence / persuasion** dilemma. (Note that this argument would apply more strongly to a US/UK attack without UN support.)

(b) Saddam might believe US is bluffing (threat dilemma), though this seems unlikely given how keen the US appears to be on attacking.

(c) Perhaps more plausibly, Saddam might believe US is bent on attacking anyway – that the US prefers unilateral military action to the stated US/UN position and will find a pretext to attack however much Saddam disarms (scenario "US Unilat"). The US then has a **cooperation** dilemma if it really wants to attain its stated position.

(d) UN "waverers" might desert – be prepared to accept Saddam's position with some form of "enough" disarmament, rather than support a war. If so, Saddam's position presents them with an inducement dilemma.

(e) Both the US/UN position and Saddam's position are also subject to further **cooperation / trust dilemmas**. There will always be a temptation for Saddam to defect from any level of compliance as soon as the pressure is off, and to revert to defiance (scenario "Saddam cheats")

Box 2: Implications of the Model

The US threat ("attack alone if necessary, in the absence of full compliance") is a double threat - both against Saddam and against the waverers. Essentially it addresses their inducement dilemma (d) – even if they do not want a war, most "waverers" would rather see one sanctioned by the UN than not. So by making it clear that they will attack anyway, the US places would-be defectors in a difficult position. By failing to support the US, they risk the future of the whole "world order" (UN, NATO, EU Common Foreign Policy….). They also risk losing any influence / gain over post-Saddam reconstruction. There appears to be a sub-game of "chicken" going on here, but with the US having less to lose. And, of course, all the "waverers" are vulnerable to US economic pressure, which it may be prepared to use quite ruthlessly.

Plausibly the UK stance is also driven by the attempt to tie in US action to the UN – but through "rational argument / persuasion" rather than threat of non-support. An interesting choice of tactics – would the US have been prepared to go it alone even without the UK? The UK Government seems to have believed so.

US / UK tactics and rhetoric show a deep ambiguity in aim – is it to disarm Saddam or to topple him? Saddam could treat his own people just as badly without having Weapons of Mass Destruction!

- If the aim is to topple him, he has no possible rationale to disarm first! Bringing in the moral case for removing him exacerbates this problem. Strategically, it simply makes dilemma (c) above worse.
- Apart from some very half-hearted attempts to make "surrender" more palatable - e.g. offer of safe haven if Saddam were to leave Iraq - there has been remarkably little effort to remove this dilemma. This suggests that US - and the UK even more so - are prisoners of their own rhetoric (if Saddam is the devil, we can't make him promises!) and/or that they are not unduly worried by the dilemma.
- The tactic for coping with this ambiguity in aim can be summarised as "making him an offer he can't accept". That is, demand disarmament in such a way that it can always be shown (or claimed) that it has failed - so "justifying" an attack to remove Saddam.
- This tactic is placed in jeopardy, however, by Saddam's manipulation of "middle way" options around partial disarmament. Rather than just playing for time, as has been suggested, these seem designed to be "enough" to split the waverers from their joint position with the US. So Saddam would still face destruction, but in circumstances most damaging to US long-term interests, and to those of Saddam's other "enemies" in the Middle East.

Will the waverers nevertheless come around enough to maintain support (or at least not veto) the US position? Rational self-interest probably says "yes". But problems with domestic opinion would be great, and also exchanges with US have involved real anger. So they might actually come to prefer the US (and UK) to go without their blessing – "not in our name either!". There is anger is on both sides – indeed the US administration may by now feel that it would rather fight without the need for "reluctant and unreliable allies" whose support would be costly to obtain. This may be roughly what their view would have been anyway, had it not been for UK arguments.

If the US and UK do attack without other allies, the UK might expect some reward for being the US's only loyal ally. But it will be a big loser in terms of its perceived role as a champion of international order, a bridge between the US and Europe, and so on. Even within the US, the UK preoccupation with the UN would be seen as having wasted time and energy on a strategy that failed to deliver.

Box 2 (continued)

On the question of why Saddam has not done more to comply unambiguously with the UN resolution, this model leaves open four possible answers:

- He may believe that US would attack anyway.
- Conversely, he may believe that there is some version of partial compliance that will be "enough" to satisfy the US, as on previous occasions. If so, he appears to be mistaken this time.
- Or he may believe that "partial compliance" will at least be "enough" to split the international community, *and* he would rather face a US/UK attack than give in.
- Finally, he may actually be proposing to comply at the last possible moment (Saddam seems to enjoy games of "chicken"). But even if he does, is there any way in which he could convince the US that this time he really means it?

A final "wild card" is that Saddam may *really* have Weapons of Mass Destruction operational, and be able to use them on invading forces (or Israel?). Most probable would be chemical weapons. Note that he cannot overtly threaten the use of such weapons while denying that he has any! But issuing of protective kit etc to his own troops might be intended as an implicit threat. If so, the US seems entirely undeterred.

6. Commentary

The key concern here is whether such analysis can add to the insights available from (the same author's) commonsense or intuition. In this spirit, we deal briefly with each of the questions set at the start of this section:

Can Confrontation Analysis be applied in real time?

In this case at least, the answer appears to be an unambiguous "yes". The advantages of starting with publicly-available information about positions and fallbacks seem clear.

Does it help generate (non-obvious) alternative insights?

Insights are to some extent in the eye of the beholder: it is also difficult to judge how much would have been achieved without the model. Nevertheless the process of drawing it up did "force" the author to question assumptions and make them more explicit – usually a benefit. Despite its simplicity, the model itself threw up some key points that had not previously been perceived so clearly – e.g. about the ambiguity in the US/UK position, and about the possible reasons for Saddam's "partial compliance".

Do these still appear reasonable after the event?

Again, this seems to warrant a fairly clear "yes". There is nothing that looks embarrassingly wrong – unlike a good deal of other commentary and speculation produced at the time. Over a year on, most of the dilemmas identified in the model (and the tactics used in response to them) look at least as plausible as they did. There are some omissions. The possibility of there being no weapons of mass destruction (and of US determination to invade anyway) is covered, but would have warranted more weight. The suggested explanation for Saddam's tactics remains as coherent as any the author has seen, though the full truth may never be known.

How much might such a method help with prognosis / prediction?

This is inevitably the most challenging question. There are some key points on which the analysis offered no predictions, in the main on issues that would have required "inside knowledge" to answer. There is no unambiguous forecast of "UN resolution or not" or indeed "war or not". The analysis can be criticised for excessive caution and a wish to cover all possibilities. These defects could perhaps have been remedied with more work. In summary, then, Confrontation Analysis will not provide all the answers. But it can at least help in asking the right questions.

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