

## Images in Conflict: The Case of Ronald Reagan and El Salvador

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International conflict has long been of intrigue to scholars, and numerous explanations have been forwarded in an attempt to understand the causes of conflict. This article seeks to build upon explanations of conflict by focusing upon the psychology of decision-making with regard to the impact cognitive images have upon policymakers as imperfect information-processors. While various studies concerning other aspects of the belief system have provided examples of cognitive techniques for managing information, little attention has been given to systematically analyzing the specific mechanisms. Employing thematic content analysis, this study engages in such an inquiry so as to achieve further understanding of the actual methods by which actors manage information contradictory to their image. Focusing specifically on Ronald Reagan and his image of El Salvador between the years 1980 and 1984, the findings of this study indicate that specific cognitive procedures for managing discordant information do indeed exist, and that information processing may be influenced by multiple images.

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International conflict has long been of intrigue to scholars, and numerous explanations have been forwarded in an attempt to understand the causes of conflict. This article seeks to build upon explanations of conflict by focusing upon the psychology of decision-making with regard to the impact cognitive images have upon policymakers as imperfect information-processors. By examining the procedures used by Ronald Reagan to manage information challenging his image of El Salvador, this study adds to our understanding of the cognitive dynamics involved in individual decision-making and reveals yet another avenue through which conflict may be defused or intensified.

A number of studies examine how images relate to political perceptions, decision-making and behavior (Holsti, 1967; R. Cottam, 1977; M. Cottam, 1989, 1992a; Herrmann, 1984, 1985; Shimko, 1993). However, as of yet, little attention has been given to the cognitive mechanisms whereby actors maintain these images. It has been argued that decision makers are captives of their own beliefs and expectations, and that information concerning other actors is likely to be perceived in a manner consistent with one's image of that actor (Finlay, 1967). Concentrating on how a policymaker organizes, simplifies, and orders his political world view and examining the cognitive techniques through which he manages information about others may lead to an understanding of how information is processed and political

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events judged. By understanding how individuals organize the political universe, "it becomes possible to understand the categories they use to structure their 'objective' reality and how they evaluate information" (M. Cottam, 1985:415). It is further possible to create an analytical framework whereby one can comprehend and explain the role of similar cognitive dynamics in the psychological responses of various actors in an array of different situations.

Moreover, through the study of entrenched images,<sup>1</sup> a greater understanding can be gained of the limitations such images pose. Errors may occur as images screen incoming information, for an individual may judge as inaccurate or ignore indications that a state will not act as an image depicts it should. Such mis-processing of information can lead to the faulty assessment of political events and perhaps even to the implementation of misconceived policies. As Ole Holsti (1967:95) explained in his study of Secretary of State Dulles's image of the enemy, "To the extent that each side undeviatingly interprets new information, even conciliatory gestures, in a manner calculated to preserve the original image of the adversary, they are caught up in a closed system with little prospect of changing the relations between them."

Because the process of organizing and simplifying can result in errors in judging information and political events, images can lead to either harmful or beneficial decisions which in confrontational situations can serve to increase or decrease the level of conflict intensity. Psychologically, once conflict begins to intensify, it is much more likely for an actor to move with the flow of escalation than to stop and back down. As conflict intensifies, it becomes even harder to achieve the accurate communication and shared understandings necessary for de-escalation. However, a greater understanding of images and the cognitive procedures that maintain them may facilitate the resolution of conflict, and perhaps even its avoidance. Indeed, the manner in which individuals process information merits greater study from those interested in averting conflict situations. While various studies have provided examples of cognitive techniques for managing information, a systematic analysis of the specific mechanisms used by actors—in the context of the interaction of multiple images—has yet to be undertaken. It is the intent of this study to engage in such an analysis so as to achieve further understanding of the cognitive dynamics associated with information processing.

### **Background to the Study**

Within the literature of political psychology there has been continued interest in the study of belief systems and the concept of images. It is argued that an actor's total framework for understanding his universe is represented by his belief system (Rokeach, 1960) and that within a belief system exist various images which are based on an actor's subjective knowledge of the world around him (Boulding, 1956; Holsti, 1967). These cognitive images, otherwise known as categories or stereotypes, are subsets within one's belief system which serve as cognitive organizing devices and information filters. Indeed, people can be viewed as "information processors" whose behavior is largely determined by the way in which they select, code, store, and retrieve information from the environment" (Larson, 1985:22). Based on the assumption that the political world is too complex for individuals to comprehend and interpret fully, studies that examine cognitive images contend

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<sup>1</sup> While impediments to image change abound, this does not mean that it does not occur. Repeated exposure to information about attributes and behavior contrary to image-based expectations may contribute to image change. After a period of time, if recollection of consistent behaviors decreases in relation to the recall of inconsistent information, then the individual may reassess his original image of an actor and search for a more appropriate one.

that people are imperfect information processors who are unable to understand all of the information they receive. In response, people construct interpretive cognitive screening mechanisms "to help organize and simplify the environment and to aid in decisions concerning the credibility of incoming information" (M. Cottam, 1985:414; see also Wyer and Srull, 1981). Abstract, yet able to convey a manageable amount of information with little cognitive effort (Rosch, 1978:31), images are specified by an actor's perception of others and their attributes, and expectations about how others will behave under various circumstances (Jervis, 1970). Yet cognitive images are not "right" or "wrong"—they are merely oversimplifications of reality which are not commonly rendered through deliberate choice.<sup>2</sup>

Existing within the structure of a belief system, images must constantly react to the introduction of new information. The impact upon the image can take a number of forms. The image may remain unaffected, the image may be modified by the new information (yet experience no notable change), or the image may undergo fundamental revision. Yet a systematic bias exists in the way individuals process incoming information in that they tend to assess it in light of preexisting images (Cashman, 1993).<sup>3</sup> That is, once actors are categorized according to a particular image, there exists a strong tendency for the perceiver to maintain the original image. While information that conforms to the preexisting image is easily received (Boulding, 1956; Krueger, Rothbart, and Sriram, 1989; M. Cottam, 1992a), a number of techniques are evident whereby an individual is able to preserve an original image in the face of discordant information. An actor may ignore or reject the information (Holsti, 1967; Adams, 1968), discredit its source (Festinger, 1957; Jervis, 1976), reinterpret it in such a way so that it conforms to the original image (Jervis, 1968; Kelman and Baron, 1968), search for additional information that conforms to the preexisting image (Adams, 1968; Nisbett and Ross, 1980), or treat the discordant information as an exception to the norm (Cashman, 1993).

#### *Multiple Images and Their Interaction*

As ideal-type images provide the standard against which incoming information is assessed, it is necessary to identify the original operative images when analyzing the cognitive procedures used by a policymaker to manage new information. While numerous studies have focused on the enemy image (Holsti, 1967; White, 1968; Volkan, 1985; Spillmann and Spillmann, 1991), some attention has been dedicated to examining alternative images. It has been suggested that the most efficient cognitive organization of the international political world includes images of others as enemies, allies, neutrals, dependents, hegemonists, and imperialists (R. Cottam, 1977; Herrmann, 1985). In addition, recent studies have begun to stress the role of the self-image (Markus and Sentis, 1982; Smith, 1984; Backman, 1988; M. Cottam, 1992b) and the interaction effects of more than one image (Herrmann, 1986; M. Cottam, 1992a).

In the present study, examination of the interaction of the enemy image of the Soviet Union, the positive American self-image, and the dependent image of El Salvador provides us with the greatest insight into the cognitive dynamics associated with Reagan's management of information concerning the situation in El Salvador.

<sup>2</sup> While not in the purview of this article, there is recent work that closely examines how images are formed. For a detailed overview refer to Susan Fiske and Shelley Taylor's (1991) discussion of the debate over prototypes versus exemplars as sources of cognitive categorization.

<sup>3</sup> It has been argued that this bias can be conceived of as a defense mechanism that protects an actor from becoming aware of things that would cause him an intolerable amount of anxiety (Gladstone, 1959-60).

These images affect the processing of new information in a number of ways. For example, once an actor is categorized as an enemy, it is assumed to possess the characteristics of the ideal-typical enemy, and information that contradicts such an assessment is either ignored or given very little attention. Similarly, the self-image affects information processing, for in screening information used to make decisions, one is likely to reject or ignore information that challenges one's impression of oneself or those with whom one closely identifies. Likewise, the dependent image influences information processing in that information that conforms to the ideal-typical image is accepted while that which is contradictory is rejected.

Yet not just single images alone, but also the interaction of images, influence the way in which individuals process information. For instance, the self-image interacts with other images, such as the enemy and dependent images, to provide an actor with an interpretive framework for understanding not only one's own behavior, but also the behavior of others (Lewicki, 1984; Carpenter, 1988). In other words, in addition to organizing information about one's self, the self-image also organizes and simplifies information about others, particularly under conditions when drawing inferences about others requires inferences beyond the information provided (Catrambone and Markus, 1987). Indeed, it has been suggested that the interaction of one's own self-image with one's image of others may lead an actor to perceive oneself as the antithesis of those who are opposed and to identify more closely with those with whom one is close (Deutsch and Mackesy, 1985; Fiske and Taylor, 1991).

Such is reflected in the interaction of the enemy image and the self-image where the result is often the portrayal of the enemy in terms of a we-they dichotomy, with the enemy conceived of as "bad" and the actor as "good." That is, the enemy is categorized in negative terms as compared to the polar categorization of oneself in positive terms. Moreover, situations of conflict with an enemy are often rationalized through an externalization of necessity, with the perceived moral intentions of one's self leading to the assessment that the choice between conflict and peace is due totally to the hostile intentions of the enemy (Gladstone, 1959-60; White, 1968). Policymakers typically presume that the behavior of their own state is compelled by circumstance, while the behavior of the opposition is attributed to fundamental character (Larson, 1985). Interaction of the enemy image and self-image further enables an actor gloriously to perceive its actions as helping those who have been intimidated and oppressed by the enemy, rather than going against an innocent and vulnerable population (White, 1968).

Interaction of the dependent image with the self-image often results in the perceiver closely identifying with the dependent. The dependent is seen as inferior to the perceiver's state and is therefore viewed as needing its careful guidance. However, as the dependent is perceived to embrace the same values and objectives as the perceiver's state, not only does the perceiver assume a common perspective with the dependent and sympathize with the dependent's goals as if they were its own, but the two actors tend to describe mutual targets in similar ways (Fiske and Taylor, 1991). When the dependent image and enemy image interact, the level of perceived threat in a situation rises. Alone, a dependent may be a nuisance but is nevertheless considered too inept to pose a significant threat to the perceiver's country. However, when the enemy is perceived to be present in a conflict situation, the level of threat increases dramatically for the enemy is seen as clever and easily capable of misleading the unsuspecting and incompetent dependent.

Once applied to particular actors, these ideal-type images, and their interaction, establish the attributes against which incoming information is assessed. Information that is consistent with one's images is typically accepted, while that which challenges them is resisted through the use of various cognitive techniques. In the

case of Reagan and El Salvador, the images produced highly simplified assessments of political actors, forces, and trends in El Salvador which in turn affected Reagan's assessment of new information.

### Organizing Inquiry

The literature on information processing suggests that specific procedures exist whereby actors maintain images well past initial evidence to the contrary. It is the purpose of this study to search for these procedures so as to illustrate not only that they exist, but also to determine the relative frequency with which they are used.<sup>4</sup> In pursuing such an investigation, the key questions addressed are:

1. With what cognitive procedure(s) do actors respond to information that contradicts their cognitive image?
2. Do particular images cause variation in responses to discordant information?

Focusing specifically upon the case of Reagan and El Salvador, this study is interested in determining what (if any) cognitive procedures are employed by Reagan when faced with information inconsistent with his images concerning El Salvador.<sup>5</sup>

The temporal parameters for the study are set for the years 1981 through 1984. Though Reagan remained in office for an additional term, the issue of U.S.-El Salvadoran policy receded in priority on the U.S. foreign policy agenda following the successful election of the U.S.-supported presidential candidate, Napoleon Duarte (Moreno, 1990). Thus, after 1984, the frequency in which the situation in El Salvador is addressed declines, resulting in a perceptible decrease in primary data from which to draw inferences about Reagan's images and the procedures that maintain them.

### Analytical Framework

In this study, a three-stage analytical framework is employed to examine the cognitive dynamics associated with the maintenance of images. In the first stage, a concise discussion of Reagan's belief system and the images pertinent to his understanding of El Salvador is presented to provide a foundation for the rest of the analysis. While it would certainly be interesting to systematically analyze the images and demonstrate how they are related to his perceptions and policies regarding the situation in El Salvador, such an endeavor is beyond the scope of this article.

<sup>4</sup> Little is evident in the literature on images to suggest precise relationships between discordant information and specific cognitive responses. Indeed, as Deborah Welch Larson (1985) explains, in the real world it is difficult to predict which cognitive mechanism a person will use in any given situation. Thus, rather than attempting to determine the exact conditions under which particular responses occur, the predominant objective of this study is simply to ascertain whether or not the responses do, in fact, exist. However, Ole Holsti (1967) suggests one relationship between discordant information and cognitive responses, in that some strategies, such as discrediting the source of information, are more likely to occur under conditions of limited and ambiguous information while other strategies, such as differentiation, are likely to occur when information is abundant and indisputable. Thus, the study's findings shall be discussed in light of this potential relationship, as well as with regard to all apparent patterns.

<sup>5</sup> In this analysis, the case of Reagan and El Salvador functions as a "crucial case" study in that before searching for the actual procedures used to manage information contradictory to an image, there must be a reasonable expectation that a resolute image does indeed exist. It would be unwise to look for support for the existence of such techniques in a case in which an image was unsteady, and thus not very likely to be maintained. According to Harry Eckstein (1975:118), a crucial case is a "case that must closely fit a theory if one is to have confidence in the theory's validity, or, conversely, must not fit equally well any rule contrary to that proposed." An approach to take when selecting a case for a study is to choose either a "most-likely" case which seems well suited to invalidation (such as Reagan and El Salvador) or a "least-likely" case which seems appropriate for confirmation. Such cases "ought, or ought not, to invalidate or confirm theories if any cases can be expected to do so" (Eckstein, 1975:118).

Therefore, as other scholars have already devoted considerable effort to identifying Reagan's beliefs,<sup>6</sup> this study will apply their authoritative findings to Reagan's statements about El Salvador in order to depict the significant images and the subsequent subimages that emerge from their interaction.

Discordant information is identified in the second stage of the analysis. Such information challenges the subject's image of El Salvador, and is derived from an examination of the historical record. When searching for instances of this information, it is important to keep in mind that it must represent information to which the subject has been exposed. While President Reagan was no doubt exposed to discordant information from a number of governmental sources, it is also likely that he was exposed to daily news sources or that such sources at least included coverage of the events and arguments that challenged Reagan's image of El Salvador. Upon careful selection of discordant information, its meaning is recorded, as well as the approximate time period when it first appeared.

Embodying the main objective of the study, the third stage focuses on the examination of the actual cognitive procedures used to maintain images. Having identified information that challenges the image of El Salvador, Reagan's subsequent public statements are analyzed in order to assess the manner in which he deals with potential inconsistencies. Through analysis of Reagan's remarks, this study hopes to find empirical support for the existence of cognitive procedures that serve to maintain cognitive images.

#### *Data Sources*

Two types of data are utilized. The first, which serves as the source from which discordant information is identified, is event data which is obtained through a systematic survey of daily newspapers—the *New York Times* and *The Washington Post*. The second source of data, around which the main part of this study is grounded, is composed of all of Reagan's public statements concerning El Salvador between 1981 and 1984.<sup>7</sup> These statements, which include interviews, press conferences, and speeches, serve as the basis from which inferences regarding the actual procedures employed to maintain cognitive balance are made. They are available through the *Weekly Compilation of Presidential Documents*, which are later bound as part of the *Public Papers of the Presidents* series.

#### *Method*

It is not possible to observe and measure an individual's values, attitudes, and perceptions directly. Rather, they must be inferred from indicators that can be

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<sup>6</sup> As will be discussed later in the study, numerous scholars contend that Reagan possessed a simplistic cognitive map and repeatedly engaged in black-and-white thinking. He is often characterized as maintaining rigid cognitive images. However, Keith Shimko (1991:118) argues that Reagan's belief system was less than consistent, and, in fact, was littered by contradictions. Rather than Reagan being a black-and-white thinker, Shimko contends that "Reagan's world was painted in a hodgepodge that could combine to make black, white, or almost any shade of gray." This potential problem must be addressed, for it is upon the assumption of a strong image that discordant information can be identified. In simplistic terms, for example, it is assumed that Reagan's image of the opposition is as "bad," while discordant information perceives elements of the opposition as "good." Fortunately, all interpretations of Reagan's views about El Salvador to which the author has been exposed point toward Reagan's image as a solid one, and thus, while other beliefs may vary, those relevant to El Salvador do not.

<sup>7</sup> Of the documents available through the *Weekly Compilation of Presidential Documents* in which reference is made to El Salvador, 93 were analyzed—representing the body of statements on the topic actually made by President Reagan. Other documents, such as statements made by Press Secretary Larry Speakes on behalf of the president or communiqués revealing the happenings of presidential meetings, were discarded as they did not meet conditions of data validity.

observed (Holsti, 1969; Shimko, 1991). As is often the case in studies that focus on foreign policy leaders, such indicators are available in the form of communications. Thematic content analysis is an appropriate method to utilize when studying any form of communication (Babbie, 1992), for the goal of content analysis is to present an objective and systematic description of the attributes of communication (Holsti, 1969). Content analysis can be qualitative, relying simply on the presence or absence of a theme as grounds for inference—or formal, employing frequency as an indicator of intensity or motivation. Yet there is no need to make a choice between the two, for they are best used in conjunction with one another. In instances where a subject's beliefs or perceptions are not adequately captured by the precise coding rules of formal content analysis, it is necessary to use qualitative content analysis to provide a more complete interpretation (Shimko, 1991, 1993).

#### *Coding Scheme/Content Categories*

In content analysis, it is extremely important to devise categories that reflect the theoretical and conceptual elements of the phenomenon being examined. In this study, the categories formed must focus on aspects of cognitive procedures that are likely to alter information to fit the original image. They must also be exhaustive and mutually exclusive so as to assure that each recording unit falls into only one cell. The categories used are as follows:

A. *Reinterpret.* New information is reinterpreted so that it complements, rather than contradicts, the previously existing cognitive image. By altering one's interpretation of the importance of an issue, information can be manipulated so as either to support an actor's prior image or to at least no longer appear inconsistent with the potentially challenged element (Kelman and Baron, 1968).<sup>8</sup>

B. *Discredit Source.* The amount of psychological stress caused by an interpersonal disagreement is positively related to the credibility and attractiveness of a communicator (Festinger, 1957). By decreasing the credibility of the communicator and denying the truth or relevance of the information it conveys, the magnitude of discordant information can be reduced and the original image can be upheld.<sup>9</sup>

C. *Search for Additional Information.* Upon receipt of discordant information, an actor may search for more information to support the preexisting image. Bolstering of a subject's image occurs as new elements are introduced *ad hoc* (Adams, 1968). The actor may acknowledge the discordant information to some extent, but will follow up with information about some other matter.<sup>10</sup>

D. *Treat as an Exception.* Discordant information that is considered to be "an exception to the rule" is generally not perceived as important. Thus any apparent contradictions with the original image are considered insignificant. Often, in treating discordant information as an exception, it is differentiated into subcategories between which there is a strong dissociative relationship (Holsti, 1967).<sup>11</sup>

<sup>8</sup> The conceptual structure to be alert for when examining an actor's speech is one that alludes to the discordant information, but follows with an alternative interpretation, such as "Some say . . . but the way I see it . . ." or ". . . is not . . . but rather . . .".

<sup>9</sup> Themes may appear in an actor's statements concerning "enemy propaganda" or "poor misinformed people."

<sup>10</sup> Such a process may be observed when Reagan is faced with discordant information and responds by defending his image. For example, on more than one occasion, when addressing questions concerning reports of widespread political murder by the Salvadoran government, responses are made by Reagan along the lines that ". . . but the government supports democracy" or ". . . yet the government is preparing for elections."

<sup>11</sup> Such a cognitive process is likely to be revealed in statements that attribute the discordant information to "other" groups within the Salvadoran regime rather than to the "government" itself. Key phrases might include ". . . far right-wing actors . . ." or ". . . extremists."

E. *Deny/Ignore*. By denying or ignoring the existence of inconsistent information, contradictory elements are simply not acknowledged and consequently the original image continues to prevail (Adams, 1968).<sup>12</sup>

F. *Accept*. Though it is not expected with an actor who has a strong image (such as Reagan), there is always the chance that discordant information is incorporated into the image, thus altering the original image. When such a process takes place, the discordant information is accepted unconditionally and is in no respect modified.<sup>13</sup>

#### *Recording and Context Units*

In examining the processing of discordant information, the units to be coded must be specified. A recording unit is the smallest body of content within which the appearance of a reference is counted, and the context unit is the largest body of content that may be examined when characterizing a recording unit (Holsti, 1969; Shimko, 1991). While several possible units exist—single words or symbols, characters, grammatical units, themes or items—Holsti (1969:116) asserts that for many purposes, the theme (as a single assertion about some subject) is the most useful unit of content analysis. Indeed, he argues that it is almost indispensable in research on propaganda, attitudes, values, and beliefs. Shimko (1991:50) adds to this reasoning, arguing that "it is because themes are defined as conceptual rather than grammatical entities that they are better suited to the study of belief systems: people think in terms of themes, not paragraphs or sentences." On these grounds, the theme serves as the recording unit in this study.<sup>14</sup> However, a number of difficulties arise when coding themes. Not only is it time-consuming, but boundaries are not as clearly identified as those for other units such as the paragraph or word. Thus, reliability is often severely hampered and must be resolved by strictly defining structural properties of the thematic unit.

In this study, the theme also acts as the context unit. Interested in not only what procedures are used to maintain cognitive balance, but how often they occur, it is best to code every separate appearance of a theme (see Shimko, 1991). If documents are used as the context unit, then no matter how often a theme appears, it is coded only once per document. When themes are the context unit, they are coded each time they appear. However, when utilizing the theme as the context unit, guidelines must be established to determine distinct appearances of a theme. A theme is considered to make a separate appearance when occurrences are separated by comments about other issues or ideas. In documents where the same theme is repeatedly raised, a limit of five codings is set.<sup>15</sup>

<sup>12</sup> Denial may be revealed in statements such as "They are wrong" or "That is incorrect." A much harder process to identify, ignore may be observed when Reagan is directly asked a question and he gives an unrelated answer, or when discordant information "hot off the press" is not addressed.

<sup>13</sup> This "unconditional" requirement of acceptance as a cognitive process is necessary, for other responses, such as "treating discordant information as an exception" or "searching for additional information," often entail acknowledging the information to some extent. For example, by the later years of the study, Reagan acknowledges that political murder is widespread—but (in some cases) he manages such inconsistent information by attributing the acts to right-wing extremists rather than "the government." Indications of acceptance might be reflected in themes such as "I was wrong" or "According to this new information, I now believe . . .".

<sup>14</sup> The theme is also useful as the recording unit since the researcher must use contextual clues within the language of the actor to infer what cognitive response the actor invoked in a particular situation, and to discount his words accordingly. The use of single words, symbols, or characters to denote a response is limiting and potentially misleading, whereas the use of themes allows leeway for the researcher to interpret the actor's statements in order to identify the correct cognitive strategy.

<sup>15</sup> A precedent for such guidelines has been set by Keith Shimko in his study *Images and Arms Control* (Shimko, 1991).

### *System of Enumeration*

This study is interested in determining whether or not certain procedures for maintaining an image occur, and how often they occur. Though other measures of enumeration exist,<sup>16</sup> the frequency system is an appropriate method to use when concerned with presenting how often a content unit appears. While frequency is the most commonly used system of enumeration, it has been argued that the use of frequency is based on the false premise that it is the only valid index of concern, preoccupation, and intensity (Holsti, 1969). However, as this study does not intend to make assertions concerning the relative *value* of the procedures, such a problem is avoided.

### *Data Validity*

Issues of validity are concerned with whether or not the content data utilized actually measures what the study claims it to measure. When using data sets comprised of only public statements, a dilemma arises with regard to "latent" and "manifest" communication. Public statements do not always reflect a subject's true beliefs; instead they may be designed for the unexpressed purpose of persuading, manipulating, or influencing a particular audience (Holsti, 1969). According to Deborah Larson (1988), this problem can be resolved by identifying the audience and the intended purpose of the statements. However, as Keith Shimko (1993) points out, such a solution runs into many obstacles, for the audience and the intended purpose are virtually impossible to determine definitively.

The issue of authorship must also be considered. The data set utilized in this study is composed in part of speeches given by Reagan, but written for him by someone else. Problems of validity are raised, for inferences made concerning Reagan's image of El Salvador may be suspect if they are derived from material prepared by others. Fortunately, this predicament does not pose undue threat to the results of the study, for though Reagan did not write his speeches, he played an active role in their drafting and rewriting. Indeed, he devoted more energy to fine-tuning his speeches than to many of his other duties (Mendelbaum and Talbott, 1984; Shimko, 1993). In addition, Reagan's spontaneous responses in interviews and press conferences do not seem to differ significantly from his prepared statements. Thus, while questions of validity can never be totally overcome, inferences based on the content data may be made with a reasonable degree of confidence.

### *Data Reliability*

Data is considered reliable if not only the same researcher codes data at different times and produces the same results, but also other researchers code the same data and also produce the same results. This is an important quality when attempting

<sup>16</sup> Appearance and intensity systems of enumeration are also commonly employed in content analyses. However, a frequency system is used in this study for though appearance systems have a high degree of reliability due to the coder engaging only in nominal measurement (concerning whether a content unit appears in a document or not), such a system does not enable the analyst to determine the overall number of times a single content unit occurs. This study is attempting to generate empirical support for the assertion that cognitive procedures that manage discordant information do exist. The more often such procedures are observed, the more likely the assertion is true. In other words, the more content units seen to exist, the "tighter the fit" of the study's results.

Intensity systems (as often used in evaluative assertion analysis—see Stuart and Starr, 1981–82) typically measure attributes along some continuum. However, the content units considered in this study—procedures that manage information contrary to an image—are not usefully portrayed in scalar terms.

replication of a study or applying the same coding rules to different subjects. In order to test the reliability of the data, the author performed an intercoder reliability test upon passages of documents in which statements are made by Reagan regarding El Salvador.<sup>17</sup> While some reliability tests focus on documents, this study checks arbitrarily selected portions of documents and applies a precise measure of reliability to the results. This allows the author to determine if identical passages are coded in the same manner. The results of the reliability test indicate that the average proportion of agreement is .81, and the composite reliability coefficient is .90, indicating a fairly high level of reliability.<sup>18</sup>

### Analysis

Having established the theoretical background and organizational guidelines for the study, it is now time to move on to the analysis. Reagan's images of the enemy, self, and dependent as they pertain to El Salvador are examined first. Discordant information is then identified, followed by a systematic search for the actual procedures used to maintain the image of El Salvador.

#### *Reagan: Images, Image Interaction, and El Salvador*

Providing a foundation for this study, the operative images of the enemy, self, and dependent are analyzed with regard to El Salvador, along with their interaction and the subsequent subimages that emerge.

It has been argued that both personally and politically, Reagan is a positive optimistic individualist (Glad, 1989) who idealizes the United States and what he believes it to stand for. Reagan has a strong national self-image, and believes that no country is superior to the United States, for "America is great—because so many different groups are working together, pulling together toward a common goal. The cultural diversity of this . . . country make[s] us both strong and free" (Reagan, 1983b:3). Democracy is a highly held value, enveloping numerous freedoms in which Reagan deeply believes. Reagan extols the virtues of democracy, proclaiming that "[o]ur democracy encompasses many freedoms—freedom of speech, of religion, of assembly, and of so many other liberties that we often take for granted. These are rights that should be shared by all mankind. This union has always patriotically stood up for those freedoms" (Reagan, 1983b:1). Reagan further believes that the United States embodies "democracy, self-determination, economic development, and collective security" (Reagan, 1982:1)—all values that should be enjoyed throughout the world.

Military capabilities are of concern to Reagan for he envisioned the enemy—the Soviet Union—as posing the greatest threat to the United States and to the world. In order to meet the Soviet challenge, Reagan believed that the United States needed to make superiority its goal. He warned of the existence of a "window of vulnerability" (Wills, 1988:397), signifying Soviet superiority over the U.S. buildup of nuclear arsenals. He subsequently undertook a protracted effort to improve U.S. military capabilities (Bell, 1989), asking, "[s]ince when has it been wrong for America to be first in military strength? How is military superiority dangerous?"

<sup>17</sup> The composite reliability formula is as follows:  $N(A)/1 + [(N-1)(A)]$ , where N = the number of coders (2), and A = the average proportion of agreement. In this study, 16 separate passages are analyzed. The formula is adopted from Keith Shimko's *Images and Arms Control* (Shimko, 1991).

<sup>18</sup> Due to space limitations, the actual results of the coder analysis are not here presented. However, they may be obtained through direct inquiry to the author.

(Glad, 1983:47). Indeed, Reagan claimed security to be "the most important function of the Federal Government" (Reagan, 1984a:3).

For Reagan, moral values are an important aspect of his national self-image. Believing that the United States is a moral country, he asserted that "[i]n reaffirming the moral beliefs that began our nation, we strive to make the United States what, we pray to God, it will always be—a beacon of hope to all the persecuted and oppressed of the world" (Reagan, 1984b:1). He linked the inhabitants of the Western Hemisphere to their forebears who "came to this hemisphere seeking a better life for themselves. They came in search of opportunity and, yes, in search of God" (Reagan, 1982:1). Reagan believes in a uniqueness of the Western Hemisphere, and feels it should be unified, arguing that "these two continents, linked by the isthmus of Central America—we worship from North Pole to South Pole the same God. . . . what a power for good we could be with all the resources available to these continents if we help them in achieving what we have achieved here in this land in freedom, economic progress, in standard of living" (Reagan, 1983b:3).

In contrast to the halo he places above the United States, during the period under consideration Reagan perceived the Soviet Union as a diabolic archrival, describing it as an "evil empire." Indeed, his view of international politics as a struggle between democracy and totalitarianism—between right and wrong, good and evil—included a perception of the contemporary totalitarian challenge as emanating from the Soviet Union (Leng, 1984). He extended his revulsion of communism to Soviet leaders, as seen in his comment that "[t]heir statement about morality is that nothing is immoral if it furthers their cause, which means they can resort to lying or stealing or cheating, or even murder if it furthers their cause and that is not immoral" (Glad, 1983:45). Reagan also believed it to be the United States's duty to confront the Soviet challenge in Latin America: "If the communists can start war against the people of El Salvador, then . . . the United States has a legal right and a moral duty to help it to resist it. This is not only in our strategic interest; it is morally right" (Reagan, 1986:13).

As has been argued by numerous scholars, and is reflected in Reagan's comments about the Soviet Union and the United States, Reagan had both a strong image of the Soviet Union as an enemy and a strong national self-image. His image of El Salvador is a close match to the ideal-type dependent image. While Reagan considered El Salvador to be important, he nevertheless viewed it as subordinate and inferior. References depicting El Salvador as the United States' backyard or back door capture this sentiment, such as Reagan's assertion that "Central America is a region of great importance to the United States. And it is so close . . . Central America is America; it's at our doorstep" (Reagan, 1986:11). Yet Reagan's cognitive categorization of El Salvador is more complex than the simple dependent image might convey. Rather, Reagan's image of El Salvador is a result of the interaction of both the enemy and self-images with the dependent image. Indeed, two subsequent subimages seem to emerge, with the interaction of the enemy and dependent images shaping Reagan's perceptions of the opposition, specifically the guerrillas, and the interaction of the self and dependent images serving to characterize the Salvadoran government and the population as a whole. Thus within Reagan's dependent image of El Salvador exist two subimages which importantly shaped his processing of information about the situation in El Salvador.

The interaction of the enemy and dependent images is reflected in Reagan's perception of the goals of the opposition in El Salvador as including the overthrow of the established government and the imposition of a Communist regime in defiance of the will of the Salvadoran people. "There is a war in Central America that is being fueled by the Soviets and the Cubans. They are arming, training,

supplying, and encouraging a war to subjugate another nation to communism, and that nation is El Salvador" (Reagan, 1983b:1). Yet not only is the dependent seen as threatened by the enemy, but, as is often the case with the interaction of enemy and dependent images, the perception of threat is intensified to extend beyond the dependent to the perceiver's country and others. Such is reflected in Reagan's contention that "what we see in El Salvador is an attempt to destabilize the entire region and eventually move chaos and anarchy toward the American border" (Reagan, 1986:12). The objective of the enemy is not only to dominate El Salvador and spread Communist influence throughout the region, but also to ambitiously challenge U.S. power worldwide. Reagan warned about the adversary's desire to "tie down our attention and forces on our own southern border and so limit our capacity to act in more distant places such as Europe, the Persian Gulf, the Indian Ocean, and the Sea of Japan" (Reagan, 1983a:2).

Describing the role of the guerrillas, the interaction of the enemy and dependent images is evident in Reagan's declaration that the "problem is that an aggressive minority has thrown in its lot with the Communists, looking to the Soviets and their own Cuban henchmen to help them pursue political change through violence" (Reagan, 1983a:1). The guerrillas were perceived to be extensively supported by the enemy. "By January 1981 when the guerrillas launched their 'general offensive,' they had acquired an impressive array of modern weapons and supporting equipment never before used in El Salvador by either the insurgents or the military" (U.S. Department of State, 1981:3). Not only the Soviet Union, but also Cuba and Nicaragua, were credited with providing military supplies to the Salvadoran guerrillas (Reagan, 1983a). Yet the Soviet Union in particular was seen as employing "a different kind of weapon: subversion and use of surrogate forces" (Reagan, 1986:12) to surreptitiously undermine the Salvadoran government.

Interaction of Reagan's strong national self-image with the dependent image of El Salvador amplifies the extent to which Reagan perceived the values and interests threatened in El Salvador to be the same values and interests held by the United States. In particular, democratic and economic concerns were perceived to be at stake, as reflected in Reagan's contention that the issue in El Salvador was "our effort to promote democracy and economic well-being in the face of Cuban aggression, aided and abetted by the Soviet Union" (Reagan, 1986:12). Reagan identified the Salvadoran government as the legitimate embodiment of the people, whose values and objectives he believed coincided with those of the United States. Consequently, he drew a moral and political parallel between the Salvadoran government and the U.S. government, laying the blame for the injustices of the Salvadoran conflict on the guerrillas who "kept political and economic progress from being turned into the peace the Salvadoran people so obviously want" (Reagan, 1983a:2).

The interaction of the self and dependent images also intensifies the degree to which Reagan believed that the policies designed and implemented by the United States could solve the Salvadoran problem. Though viewing the Salvadoran government as representing and embodying the goals and positive intentions of the United States, Reagan nevertheless perceived a need for direct assistance by the United States in resolving the conflict situation—for the Salvadoran government possessed inferior capabilities and had less power than the U.S. government. Reagan argued that the "people of El Salvador have proved they want democracy. But if guerrilla violence succeeds, they won't get it" (Reagan, 1983a:1). Thus, Reagan considered it the duty of the United States to bolster the inferior capabilities of the dependent in its struggle to combat the opposition. As he argued (Reagan, 1986:13), "[i]t would be profoundly immoral to let peace-loving friends depending on our help be overwhelmed by brute force if we have any capacity to

prevent it." Yet bigger concerns were also considered, as the United States had to confront the Communist force which, as Reagan put it (1982:4), "stalks the world today and threatens our independence. It is not of our hemisphere but it threatens our hemisphere and has established footholds on American soil for the expansion of its colonialist ambitions."

*Discordant Information: Prominent Themes*

The next step in examining cognitive responses to discordant information is to identify the information itself. Having analyzed Reagan's operative images concerning El Salvador, it is now possible to recognize information that has the potential to challenge his image of El Salvador. Such information portrays the dependent El Salvador, in terms of the subimages of the guerrillas and the government, as other than what Reagan perceives it to be.<sup>19</sup>

Relying upon the historical record as a source of event data, prominent themes<sup>20</sup> of discordant information are derived<sup>21</sup> with the guerrillas depicted as being "good" and the U.S.-supported Salvadoran government (and the U.S.) as being "bad."<sup>22</sup> Information that relays a positive impression of the enemy includes statements that indicate legitimacy, such as "Mexico and France recognize guerrilla-led opposition" (NYT, Aug. 29, 1981:1), or that suggest that the guerrillas fight for a just cause, such as reports that "conditions inside El Salvador, not arms from the Soviet Union and Cuba, are main causes for revolution" (NYT, Feb. 19, 1981:30) and that "insurgency in El Salvador is a result of the Government's own repressiveness" (NYT, April 26, 1983:23). Information that presents the guerrillas as enjoying the support of the Salvadoran people also challenges Reagan's image, such as statements that the "peasants are the backbone of rebel forces" (WP, Jan. 31, 1982:A1) or that the "revolutionaries are highly motivated and have little trouble getting recruits" (NYT, Nov. 30, 1983:31).

A negative perception of the U.S.-backed Salvadoran government is often conveyed in reports that the government is responsible for many of the civilian deaths: "Villagers in rebel-controlled northern part of Morazan Province charge that 733

<sup>19</sup> It is important to note that discordant information does not have to be correct information, it simply has to be information that is in contrast to the beliefs that comprise an image. For example, it is not necessary that information indicating that the guerrillas are supported by the peasants be *true*; regardless of whether the information is correct or not, it still challenges Reagan's perception of the guerrillas as posing a threat to the people and his perception of the U.S.-backed junta as supported by the people.

<sup>20</sup> It was decided that it was better to rely upon themes of discordant information rather than any particular incident. For in Reagan's public speeches, he does not respond to specific occurrences unless directly asked about them. The closest he comes to bringing up a specific incident is in his reference to the killing of four American churchwomen, saying, "As you know, an investigation was going forward with regard to an episode that happened before I took office" (CPD, 1981:209). Thus, it would be futile to search for cognitive responses to precise events in Reagan's speeches, such as "suspected government involvement in murder of 28 civilians in Chalatenango" (WP, July, 1981:A16). Instead, discordant information is realized in themes such as "human rights violations by El Salvadoran government" to which Reagan does respond.

<sup>21</sup> In addition to identifying the content of discordant information, the date when it appears in the newspapers is also recorded. As themes of discordant information, rather than particular incidents, are used in examining cognitive responses, the *exact* date when the discordant information appears is not all that important. What is important when searching for cognitive responses in Reagan's public statements is to have a feel for what discordant information is prominent at the time he gives his speech so as to be able to recognize image-maintaining responses. Thus, when information portraying the guerrillas in a positive light is prevalent, a cognitive response to it may be expected—and when human rights violations by the government are reported, a response to them may occur.

<sup>22</sup> Unlike the categories encompassing the different forms of cognitive response, while themes of discordant information are presented as falling into loose groupings, it is not necessary that they be exhaustive or mutually exclusive. Indeed, there is overlap in the discordant information as to the "positiveness" of the guerrillas and the "negativeness" of the U.S.-backed Salvadoran government. The important thing is simply to acquire an idea of what information challenges Reagan's enemy image, and when it is of particular import.

peasants, mostly children, women and old people, were murdered by Government soldiers in December; Human Rights Commission of El Salvador, which works with Roman Catholic Church, puts number at 926" (NYT, Jan. 27, 1982:1); and "Salvadoran country people and refugees tell of brutal violence inflicted by military" (NYT, June 5, 1981:2). Statements made by legitimate organizations also serve as a source of discordant information, such as the Red Cross's contention that it is "ready to pull out of El Salvador because of human rights abuses by armed forces" (WP, July 3, 1983:A1). Much of the discordant information questions the character of the U.S.-supported government, as indicated by charges that "U.S. aid is helping anti-democratic forces" (WP, Feb. 26, 1981:A1) and that the "Salvadoran junta is too repressive to deserve U.S. support" (WP, Sept. 19, 1981:A17).

Due to the interaction of the enemy, self, and dependent images, Reagan's image of El Salvador is as dependent upon beliefs about the "good guy" as it is upon ones about the opposition. In other words, Reagan's original image of El Salvador is contingent upon not only his beliefs about the guerrillas, but also his beliefs about the Salvadoran government. In essence, Reagan suffered not only from an "inherent bad-faith" orientation (see Holsti, 1967; Stuart and Starr, 1981-82), but also from an "inherent good-faith" one. Consequently, in addition to information that presents positive aspects of the guerrillas, that which paints a negative picture of the U.S.-supported junta challenges the expectations promoted by Reagan's original image of El Salvador. Because Reagan closely identifies the Salvadoran government with the U.S., and incorporates what he perceives as American values (democracy, morality) into his understanding of that government, not only does negative information about the Salvadoran government challenge his image of who the opposition is in El Salvador, it also challenges what he sees as the U.S.'s dutiful role of supporting a regime representing "democratic ideals." Similarly, as the guerrillas are perceived as an extension of the enemy, positive information about the guerrillas contradicts Reagan's simplistic notions regarding their attributes as an adversary.

#### *Cognitive Response: Resolving Conflict with the Image*

Armed with an understanding of Reagan's images as they relate to El Salvador, and aware of the nature of the discordant information to which he was likely exposed, Reagan's public comments are examined to determine if, and how, he dealt with the inconsistencies produced as his image of El Salvador was challenged. As seen in Table 1, the findings provide substantial support for the occurrence of "balancing" responses in reaction to discordant information. With the exception of "accept," all of the cognitive responses are found to take place at some point or another. Furthermore, the findings indicate that there is a fairly even distribution of cognitive strategies over time.<sup>23</sup> The cognitive response of "exception" is the only technique substantially out of step with the others. The findings also reveal that both the subimage produced by the interaction of the enemy and dependent images and the one produced by the interaction of the self and dependent images affected the way Reagan processed information.

Examining the four-year period as a whole, the findings reveal that as a cognitive technique, "reinterpret" occurs 20 percent of the time. In response to information portraying the guerrillas as "battling oppressive, government forces in behalf of the silent, suffering people of that tortured country" (CPD, 1982:745), Reagan

<sup>23</sup> This finding supports Deborah Larson's (1985) assertion that in everyday life, it is extremely difficult to determine what specific cognitive strategies will be used by any individual actor in any particular situation.

TABLE 1. Occurrence of cognitive responses

<i>Response</i>	<i>1981</i> ( <i>N=7 doc.</i> )	<i>1982</i> ( <i>N=22 doc.</i> )	<i>1983</i> ( <i>N=29 doc.</i> )	<i>1984</i> ( <i>N=35 doc.</i> )	<i>Total</i> ( <i>N=93 doc.</i> )
Reinterpret	0 ( 0%)	3 (21%)	13 (28%)	2 (10%)	18 (20%)
Discredit	1 (14%)	3 (21%)	9 (19%)	5 (25%)	18 (20%)
Add'l Info.	1 (14%)	6 (43%)	8 (17%)	4 (20%)	19 (21%)
Exception	0 ( 0%)	1 ( 7%)	5 (11%)	3 (25%)	11 (13%)
Deny/Ignore	5 (72%)	1 ( 7%)	12 (26%)	4 (20%)	22 (25%)
Accept	0 ( 0%)	0 ( 0%)	0 ( 0%)	0 ( 0%)	0 ( 0%)
TOTALS	7	14	47	20	88

invokes reinterpretation—as seen in his comments that “the real freedom-fighters of El Salvador [are] the people of that country” (CPD, 1982:745). Reinterpretation is also revealed in Reagan’s statement:

“What we oppose are negotiations that would be used as a cynical device for dividing up power behind the people’s back. We cannot support negotiations which, instead of expanding democracy, try to destroy it; negotiations which would simply distribute power among armed groups without the consent of the people of El Salvador.” (CPD, 1983:375)

Like reinterpretation, “discredit” also occurs 20 percent of the time. By employing the cognitive strategy of discredit, Reagan is able to resolve the challenge to his image of El Salvador by discounting the discordant information at its source. Such is apparent in his contention that those who hold views contrasting with his perception of El Salvador are

“... misinformed. We know that Cuba and the Soviet Union have vast, worldwide disinformation machineries—or machines—in which they can give out misinformation to the media, to organizations and groups and so forth. I’m sure that many of those people, if there are people demonstrating on this issue—I’m sure they’re probably sincere and well-intentioned. But I don’t think that they know the situation.” (CPD, 1984:751)

Similarly, he provides a blanket response to discordant information in his repeated statements that “a determined propaganda campaign has sought to mislead many in Europe and certainly many in the United States as to the true nature of the conflict in El Salvador” (CPD, 1982:214).

As another type of cognitive response to discordant information, Reagan searches for additional information 21 percent of the time. He often draws references to democracy into his rejoinder against information that challenges his view of El Salvador; such can be seen in his statements that “I appreciate the sincere motives of those who point out the faults of our friends and insist on reforms. But El Salvador is trying to build democracy” (CPD, 1983:958) and that “the recent elections there [El Salvador] unmasked the lie that there is popular support for Marxism in that country” (CPD, 1982:446).

As the least frequently used cognitive mechanism, treating information as an exception is utilized only 13 percent of the time. It is possible that the use of exception is limited because it entails a partial realization that the discordant information the actor faces has some truth. For an actor with as rigid an image as Reagan, it is not surprising, then, that the cognitive response incorporating some degree of acceptance of discordant information is not often used. When Reagan does use exception to resolve the cognitive conflict created by such information

and his image of El Salvador, he often differentiates between groups affiliated with the government. Much of the discordant information is about the numerous murders committed by government forces. Reagan counters such information in arguments that "there is a small, violent right-wing as opposed to democracy as are the guerrillas, but they are not part of the government" (CPD, 1984:663) and that "El Salvador . . . is struggling to protect itself from extremists of the right and left" (CPD, 1984:329).

As the most frequently used response, "deny/ignore" is absolute in its rejection of discordant information. It is illuminating that for an actor like Reagan who has a very rigid image, the most strict cognitive process for rejecting information contrary to an image is the one most often employed. Questioned as to how the U.S. can justify supporting governments that violate human rights, Reagan invokes denial as a response, as evidenced in his answer that "well, we're not supporting . . . governments who violate human rights" (CPD, 1983:1645). He similarly rejects the notion that "the guerrillas are some kind of noble freedom fighters. They aren't. They're murderers and terrorists" (CPD, 1983:811).

"Ignore" is a bit more difficult to discern as it is in essence the virtual absence of any sort of recognition of discordant information. Ignore is considered to occur either when the actor is directly asked a question to which he does not reply or when he addresses an issue to which discordant information is relevant, but does not in any way acknowledge the discordant information, even as false information. Such a response is evident in Reagan's reply to a question concerning whether or not Ambassador Hinton's complaints about excesses against human rights in El Salvador by the government were a concern of his also; neither acknowledging nor rationalizing government actions, he responded that "the guerrillas had attacked a village . . . [and] a hundred people were killed. I'd consider that a violation of human rights" (CPD, 1982:175). Ignoring the issue of political murder by the government, he instead discusses political murder by the guerrillas.

On no occasion does this study find Reagan to accept discordant information unconditionally and to modify his image of El Salvador accordingly. Such an empirical finding lends further support to the assertion that for actors with robust images, the tendency to organize information according to images and to reject information that is markedly inconsistent is extremely strong.

Consideration of these processes with regard to their use on a yearly basis permits closer assessment of the impact of discordant information upon Reagan's image of El Salvador over time. The findings suggest that discordant information may have a cumulative influence. As shown in Table 1, out of all the strategies used to maintain balance in 1981, deny/ignore is used 72 percent of the time. Such a result may occur because the challenge to the image by discordant information during the first year of Reagan's administration is relatively mild and easily blocked out. Or, perhaps as Ole Holsti (1967) suggests, the discordant information is limited and ambiguous. Consequently, it can be speculated that in 1981, during the early stage of Reagan's presidency, either information that contradicted his image of El Salvador did not have sufficient strength to require him to invoke cognitive techniques to maintain his image, or the issue of El Salvador simply was not yet a core policy issue,<sup>24</sup> and thus instances of information being filtered and organized by the image were few.

However, there is reason to believe that as time progresses, the stress caused by discordant information builds. As shown in Table 1, in 1982 and 1983 a number

<sup>24</sup> Speculation that in 1981 the conflict in El Salvador was not yet a core issue is based on the observation that in 1981, only seven presidential documents referred to El Salvador, while in the subsequent three years, El Salvador was referred to in over 20 documents per year (see Table 1).

of various strategies were employed to overcome cognitive dissonance, yet there is no readily discernable pattern to suggest the use of any particular strategy over another. Nonetheless, by 1984 it is evident that of all the years under consideration, it is during that year that the cognitive strategy of exception occurs the most frequently—increasing from zero percent in 1981 to 25 percent in 1984.<sup>25</sup> As previously discussed, out of the cognitive procedures examined (excluding accept), exception is the one that entails the greatest recognition of discordant information. Use of exception suggests that as the amount of discordant information increases, the pressure for change in Reagan's image rises to a level where he is compelled to acknowledge inconsistencies in some way. Thus, exception is utilized—modifying the image somewhat, but not totally undermining it.

In this study, discordant information, as well as Reagan's responses, are primarily about El Salvador, rather than the Soviet Union or the United States. Examination of both the historical record and Reagan's comments suggests that the interaction of the enemy and self images with the dependent image produced subimages that affected the processing of new information. Contradictory information and Reagan's responses associated with the interaction of the enemy and dependent images, or enemy/dependent subimage, are largely concerned with the guerrillas. Similarly, inconsistent information and Reagan's comments associated with the interaction of the self and dependent images, or self/dependent subimage, deal mainly with the Salvadoran government.<sup>26</sup> Thus, an interesting question to consider is whether the interaction of particular images is related to variations in an individual's cognitive response to discordant information.

Close examination of the distribution of cognitive techniques indicates that both the subimage created by the interaction of the enemy and dependent images and the subimage resulting from the interaction of the self and dependent images do affect the processing of information about El Salvador—for cognitive techniques are employed to manage information contradictory to each of the subimages. As shown in Table 2, the findings indicate that the subimages have a similar impact upon the processing of information over the four-year period. That is, there is no notable pattern in the distribution of cognitive responses by subimage, suggesting that little variation in Reagan's responses is explained by the greater influence of one image as opposed to the other. Overall, the self/dependent subimage is associated with 40, or 45 percent, of the cognitive responses employed. The enemy/dependent subimage appears to be only slightly stronger and linked to 48, or 55 percent, of the cognitive mechanisms utilized.

Breaking the results down by type of response, the cognitive response to discredit occurs 10 percent of the time in reaction to information that challenges the enemy/dependent subimage as well as the self/dependent one. Similarly, the cognitive technique to deny/ignore takes place 13 percent of the time in the face of information contradicting Reagan's image of the "bad" guy, as well as that challenging his image of the "good" guy. The cognitive strategy of reinterpreting information is utilized 11 percent of the time in response to information contradicting the enemy/dependent subimage, and 9 percent of the time in reaction to information inconsistent with the self/dependent subimage. Similarly, a search for additional information in response to information contradicting the enemy/dependent subimage comprises 13 percent of the cognitive techniques employed

<sup>25</sup> This speculation is based on the observation that out of the four years in which the cognitive strategy of exception is utilized, it occurs most frequently in 1984. This is not the same as saying that in 1984 it is used more than other cognitive procedures.

<sup>26</sup> The impact of the enemy/dependent subimage upon the occurrence of cognitive responses is determined in terms of cognitive responses to information about the guerrillas, while the impact of the self/dependent subimage is reflected in cognitive responses to information about the Salvadoran government.

TABLE 2. Image interaction and the occurrence of cognitive responses

Response	Subimage	1981 (N=7 doc.)	1982 (N=22 doc.)	1983 (N=29 doc.)	1984 (N=35 doc.)	Total (N=93 doc.)
Reinterpret	E/D	0 ( 0%)	0 ( 0%)	8 (17%)	2 (10%)	10 (11%)
	S/D	0 ( 0%)	3 (21%)	5 (11%)	0 ( 0%)	8 ( 9%)
Discredit	E/D	1 (14%)	2 (14%)	4 ( 9%)	2 (10%)	9 (10%)
	S/D	0 ( 0%)	1 ( 7%)	5 (11%)	3 (15%)	9 (10%)
Add'l Info.	E/D	0 ( 0%)	2 (14%)	6 (13%)	3 (15%)	11 (13%)
	S/D	1 (14%)	4 (29%)	2 ( 4%)	1 ( 5%)	8 ( 9%)
Exception	E/D	0 ( 0%)	1 ( 7%)	1 ( 2%)	5 (25%)	7 ( 8%)
	S/D	0 ( 0%)	0 ( 0%)	4 ( 9%)	0 ( 0%)	4 ( 5%)
Deny/Ignore	E/D	4 (57%)	1 ( 7%)	5 (11%)	1 ( 5%)	11 (13%)
	S/D	1 (14%)	0 ( 0%)	7 (15%)	3 (15%)	11 (13%)
Accept	E/D	0 ( 0%)	0 ( 0%)	0 ( 0%)	0 ( 0%)	0 ( 0%)
	S/D	0 ( 0%)	0 ( 0%)	0 ( 0%)	0 ( 0%)	0 ( 0%)
TOTALS		7	14	47	20	88

Subimage E/D = Interaction of the enemy and dependent images  
 Subimage S/D = Interaction of the self and dependent images

overall, with such a response occurring 9 percent of the time in reaction to information challenging the self/dependent subimage. Exception is utilized to manage information contradicting the self/dependent subimage 5 percent of the time, with the interaction of the enemy and dependent images linked to the use of exception 8 percent of the time.

The subimages also seem to hold up equally well across time. For the years 1981 through 1982, the subimage resulting from the interaction of the enemy and dependent images is related to 11, or 52 percent, of the cognitive techniques employed over the two-year period. The subimage stemming from the interaction of the self and dependent images is associated with 10, or 48 percent, of the cognitive responses. Between 1983 and 1984, the enemy/dependent subimage is related to 37, or 55 percent, of the cognitive responses occurring. The self/dependent subimage is associated with 30, or 45 percent, of the procedures utilized.

### Conclusion

No other study has explicitly examined, in the context of multiple images, the specific cognitive procedures utilized by individuals to manage discordant information. By providing empirical support for the existence of these techniques, this study has contributed to the growth of our knowledge and understanding of the cognitive dynamics of information processing. Not only do the results of the analysis indicate that identifiable cognitive techniques exist, they also suggest that discordant information has a cumulative effect upon the tendency of the individual to maintain original images. That is, with the passage of time, the pressure for image change applied by discordant information builds and may be linked to an increased proclivity on the part of the individual to modify images. Moreover, the findings indicate that the use of the particular cognitive techniques of deny/ignore and exception is linked to conditions of information availability. Deny/ignore appears to be frequently utilized when information that challenges the original

image is limited or ambiguous, while the procedure of exception is most often employed in the face of an abundance of discordant information.

The results of this study also suggest that information processing may be influenced by multiple images and the interaction of images. While previous works have identified several potential images as affecting the management of information, few have considered the effects of the interaction of multiple images on information processing and image maintenance. This study has expanded upon the idea of image interaction, and, through examination of the historical record and Reagan's comments, has pointed to the guerrilla forces and Salvadoran government as subimage manifestations resulting from the interaction of the enemy and dependent images, and the self and dependent images, respectively. Thus, as the interaction of images may result in complex subimages, the simplicity of the enemy, self, and dependent images is called into question.

Overall, the results of this study are compatible with theories concerning cognitive images, and support cognitive interpretations of decision-making as opposed to rational ones. Thus, in addition to enlarging knowledge of the cognitive dynamics of information processing, the findings of this study have implications for our understanding of decision-making, particularly in conflict situations. Because individuals tend to categorize others in terms of particular images, and to manage information so as to maintain the original images, the ability of policymakers to effectively deal with potential conflict situations is constrained. An inability to compare new information with one's own image of another inhibits an actor's ability to meet the challenges of a situation innovatively, and to respond to previously unforeseen obstacles. Consequently, adherence to rigid images reduces the likelihood that even genuine attempts to resolve issues will be successful. Constrained by a set image, an actor is unable to take into account changes within another actor, and is thus unable to respond in a manner more appropriate to a changing relationship. If an actor maintains an image that incorrectly portrays an enemy or dependent as threatening and uncompromising, then it is unlikely that peaceful resolution of the conflict will follow. In either scenario, successful policy and international stability are threatened as rigid cognitive images, such as Reagan's images of El Salvador, invite confusion as to when one should deal with another through diplomacy or run the risk of confrontation (Glad, 1989). Consequently, it is possible that images may lead to the initiation, intensification, and even escalation of conflict situations.

Yet perhaps by having delved more deeply into the particularities of the actual procedures used to maintain images, this study has facilitated a fuller understanding of these techniques which will eventually lead to the development of methods whereby images can be "broken down." Because images are not real, but are representations of an imagined reality, they cannot be assessed as objectively "correct" or as distorting the "truth." Consequently, as Daniel Frei (1986) notes, to improve the effects of regarding others through an image, it is more than a question of unmasking certain features of perception about another as false. Rather, it is a question of enhancing mutual understanding as to why others perceive the world in a specific fashion. Such would mean that an actor would refrain from exaggerating another's intentions and capabilities, could recognize the extent to which one's own actions provoke and threaten others (rather than placing all the blame on others), and would realize that both sides have needs and goals that are compatible and mutually dependent (see Gladstone, 1959-60). It could further entail the intake of careful and differentiated information about the history, achievements, norms, and lifestyles of others (Spillmann and Spillmann, 1991). The flexibility and tolerance accompanying a psychological orientation that does not continuously disregard information challenging one's original image, but

Total  
(N=93 doc.)

10 (11%)  
8 (9%)  
9 (10%)  
9 (10%)  
11 (13%)  
9 (9%)  
8 (8%)  
4 (5%)  
11 (13%)  
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is open to changing perspectives and interpretations, is more likely to lead to cooperative arrangements between actors and consequently to a more peaceful global order.

In closing, the hope is offered that by examining cognitive procedures, this study has increased awareness of actors' tendencies to maintain images, and that such a deeper understanding will lead to avoidance of unnecessary involvement in, or escalation of, conflict. If nothing else, one message stressed by this study is how important it is that an actor's image of others be based on perceptions that reflect careful consideration of the evidence and that are open to changing situations. Otherwise, as Ralph White (1968:247) declared, an actor is likely to simply "latch onto one interpretation, choosing it not primarily on the basis of evidence—he cannot do so because he has not taken the time to examine the evidence—but rather on the basis of what he wants to believe or what he already believes. Therefore . . . intolerance of ambiguity is unequivocally bad. It leads to misperception, to self-delusion, and sometimes to disaster." In today's complex world, rigid images perilously color an actor's perception of reality, and may unfortunately lead to unnecessary conflict with others. By having analyzed the methods through which an actor manages discordant information, this study hopes to bring about a greater understanding of situations everywhere in which actors tenaciously hold on to original images of others even in the face of evidence that suggests otherwise.

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